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**Grey Wolves and Night Wolves:  
Comparing Turkish and Russian Diaspora Instrumentalisation**

*Master Thesis*

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1. The author affirms that she wrote this thesis entirely on her own, utilizing only the materials and publications specified.
2. The author declares that all sources and publications consulted have been appropriately credited.
3. The author affirms that the thesis was not utilized to acquire a different or similar degree.

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## References

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### **Abstract**

The Turkish and Russian diasporas residing in the West have both been the subject of suspicions and fears, been framed as extremists or as foreign agents. Such accusations are vastly overstated but are rooted in elements of truth. The purpose of the present research is to analyse Russian and Turkish diasporas in Germany, establish to what extent, how and why they are the targets of instrumentalisation by Russian and Turkish governments, and compare the Russian and Turkish cases in terms of nature, scope, and outcome. Using the principal-agent model for theorizing the delegation of authority, government-diaspora relations are examined in terms of diaspora policies, laws and institutions; political activities, attitudes and extremism; criminal networks, intelligence activities and extraterritorial repression.

The analysis showed significant differences between the two cases. Turkey has established a great network of loyal institutions and movements in the diaspora, which socializes diaspora members into nationalist Turkish pro-AKP ideology and instrumentalises them into protesting, lobbying, voting, or into repressing political opponents. Russia has a weaker network and exerts less influence on its diaspora, but has still achieved success in instrumentalising diaspora communities for the sake of undermining Western institutions, primarily through disinformation, as well as for the purpose of advancing state interests by illicit means.

**Keywords:** Russia, Turkey, Germany, Diaspora, nationalism, repression, Grey Wolves

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## Introduction

In popular mentality, immigrant minority populations are often viewed with suspicion, as an intrusive “Other” with possible allegiances, values and goals that are in conflict with the majority population of a country. Such anxieties quickly lead to unfounded xenophobia or racism, fears of immigrants representing a “fifth column” loyal to foreign actors, and a polarised society. At the same time, it is undeniable that certain immigrant diaspora communities, particularly those residing in Europe, have become attractive targets for the governments of their countries of origin, who for various reasons perceive these diasporas as valuable tools to advance their policy goals. Their value may be primarily financial, as diaspora remittances represent a significant part of GDP for a number of countries, or it may be political, as potential voters, lobbyists, influence actors. Diasporas may also prove valuable in intelligence or security matters. Increasingly, some countries with large diasporas have begun to develop concrete policies to attempt to mobilise and instrumentalise these communities for their benefit.

The widespread animosity towards middle eastern and central African refugees, particularly in the context of the 2015 refugee crisis, has been well documented and researched; though while there are well-founded fears of Islamist extremists within this community, it is not the instrumentalisation of these diasporas by their countries of origin that is considered a risk. However, two important communities that have seized public attention and anxiety in Europe and attracted accusations of acting as proxies for their countries of origin have been the Turkish and the Russian diasporas.

In the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a number of pro-Russian demonstrations took place in Germany, gathering from hundreds to more than a thousand people,

in parallel with much larger pro-Ukrainian solidarity demonstrations. Organised with the proclaimed goal of drawing attention to the increased hostility towards Russians in the West or, as the Kremlin names it, “Russophobia,” the gatherings have displayed a collection of conflicting pro-Russian symbols including Imperial Russian as well as Soviet flags and colours, and the infamous Z which has become an icon of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. While these gatherings have included certain domestic Western European far-left elements in the name of opposing Western imperialism (particularly on the larger Victory Day demonstrations on May 9) and some genuinely sought to protest perceived discrimination, the vast majority of attendees were members of the Russian or Russian-speaking diaspora and sought to display their support for and loyalty towards Putin’s government, nationalist politics and the ongoing military action.

Similarly, in the context of the 2016 failed coup attempt on the Turkish government, a number of large demonstrations took place in Germany in support of Erdoğan and his AKP party, the largest of which gathered tens of thousands of people in support of the Turkish government and its agenda (DW, 2016). In 2017, European-Turkish relations reached a low, when Ankara sought to organise large rallies among the diaspora in Western Europe, campaigning for change in the Turkish constitutional referendum which would transform the parliamentary democracy into an executive presidential system, secure Erdoğan’s continued position and enhance his power. Large pro-Erdoğan campaign events and demonstrations took place across Europe, often countered by similarly sized anti-Erdoğan and pro-Kurdish protests, gathering sometimes tens of thousands of people on both sides (France 24, 2017). Ankara’s efforts bore fruit: the Turkish diaspora supported the constitutional changes by a greater margin than the domestic electorate (Koinova & Tsourapas, 2018).

Turkey and Russia share some significant traits: They are both governed by authoritarian



governments using nationalism, conservatism and religion as mobilising forces to ensure their continued rule. Both countries have large diaspora communities, notably in Europe. Both Putin and Erdoğan's governments have developed instrumental relationships with various far-right organisations both domestically and in the diaspora, even when the politics and aims of these groups at times have conflicted with government policy. And finally, both Turkish and Russian diaspora groups in Europe have increasingly become the target of securitising rhetoric in Western discourse, accused of holding values that are incompatible with the European projects they are supposed to integrate into, of being instrumentalised to further the policy goals of Russian and Turkish governments and, in some cases, to commit violence on their behalf.

There have been numerous headlines and reports connecting Russian and Turkish diaspora groups to militant nationalism and to dangerous activism on behalf of their governments of origin. Far-right organisations such as the Russian "Night Wolves" or the Turkish "Grey Wolves" have dominated European headlines as security threats and foreign policy tools of the Russian and Turkish regimes on European soil. Russian and Turkish attempts to mobilise their diaspora have been widely reported on. As a result, the diasporas have been viewed with suspicion.

The Turkish minority has been plagued by discrimination, racism and Islamophobia, which has resulted in the alienation of many German and European Turks, pushing them towards a strong Turkish nationalism. The ultranationalist "Grey Wolves" movement has become infamous in Europe for its size, reach, and violent behaviour, and are being described as Erdoğan's foot soldiers abroad. They have engaged in a number of violent attacks on their political opponents, particularly against Kurds. They were banned in France and might be so in Germany as well, reportedly control a large network across Europe, and members have been

found within political parties as well as the police force.

The pro-Russian, pro-Putin “Night Wolves” biker gang regularly organises a European “tour” ending in Berlin to commemorate WW2, which consistently makes headlines. Russians in Germany are accused of supporting the AfD and other German far-right parties and are sometimes viewed with suspicion and described in a securitising manner, portraying them as in danger of radicalisation and Russian manipulation. In the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there have indeed been large pro-Russian demonstrations of support for Russian military action, though often under the banner of protests against “Russophobia” and anti-Russian discrimination. Indeed, particularly in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there has been a strong rise in discrimination and hateful incidents targeting Russian speakers, as well as attacks upon Russian-run businesses and organisations in Germany (Jethon, 2022).

Lastly, both pro-Russian and pro-Turkish extremist nationalist groups including the Night Wolves and Grey Wolves have served as foreign fighters in places like Chechnya, Ukraine and Syria, are often deeply connected with organised crime, and are considered a security threat by EU governments.

While focusing on the case of Germany as the host country of significant Turkish and Russian diasporas, this thesis intends to: (a) Examine Russian and Turkish diaspora policies in their legal and institutional context; (b) Examine political activities, attitudes and extremism in the Russian and Turkish diasporas; (c) Examine criminal networks, intelligence activities and extraterritorial repression in the Russian and Turkish diasporas.

The research will be guided by the following questions: To what extent, how and why are Turkey and Russia seeking the political instrumentalisation of their diaspora as a tool to further their policy goals? How do these efforts compare in terms of nature, scope and outcomes?

In the following section, I will outline the theoretical framework beginning with a discussion regarding case selection, followed by the methodological and conceptual frameworks, and the contextual framework of Turkish and Russian diasporas. This will be followed by a three-part analysis consisting of (a) Turkish and Russian diaspora policies in their legal and institutional context, (b) political activities, attitudes and extremism in the diasporas, and (c) criminal networks, intelligence activities and extraterritorial repression in the diasporas. I will then discuss the analysis in light of theory, in order to respond to the research questions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Case Selection**

There are many commonalities between Russia and Turkey, which means that the two states lend themselves well to a comparative analysis of similar cases. First, Russia and Turkey share a significantly and comparably sized diaspora community in Western Europe. Secondly, both Russia and Turkey are governed by authoritarian strongman governments utilising nationalism, conservatism and religion as mobilising forces to uphold their rule. Third, both Moscow and Ankara often have conflicting interests and difficult relations with the West and the EU (though this is true in much greater magnitude for Moscow). Fourth, both the Turkish and Russian diaspora populations in Western Europe have increasingly been the focus of a securitising discourse, particularly since the rise of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes for the Turkish diaspora and rising antagonism against Russia and Russians due to the Putin Regime's conflict in Ukraine and previous conflicts.

Another matter is the categorisation of who should be included when conceptualising a

Russian or Turkish diaspora. A great number of Russian speakers - and the majority of those treated in this paper - have only a tenuous link to the Russian Federation itself or to actual Russian ethnicity in terms of heritage and ancestry. Russia Germans (not to be confused with Russian Germans) form the greatest share of the Russian community in Germany, but are in actuality ethnic Germans whose ancestors had established communities in Imperial Russia over the past centuries. The shared experience of the Soviet experiment and the successes of russification has created a large community of people who may not necessarily be ethnic Russians, but share much history, language and culture.

A great number of those categorised as Turks, on the other hand, are in reality Kurds, Alevis, Assyrians, etc. Turkey's officially wide conceptualisation of what it means to be Turkish often aims to encompass these identities, while host countries such as Germany or France do not classify residents based on ethnicity, making it difficult to clearly determine those demographics in the diaspora. However, these questions of identity appear very salient in Ankara's relationship with its diaspora, particularly its Kurdish elements.

Now, to address the restriction of the analysis on the diasporas residing in Germany. Considering that both Russia and Turkey aim at exerting their influence over their former European imperial borders, it would be enticing to focus the comparison on the Turkish and Russian diasporas residing in these territories. However, a number of factors narrow down the possibilities of choice: in the interest of analytical validity, variation in contexts must be minimised.

First, Russia's relationship with former Soviet states and their Russian or Russian-speaking populations is not easily comparable to Turkey's relationship with former Ottoman states and peoples. The memory of the Soviet Union is much fresher than that of the

Ottoman Empire; shared identity and history across the post-Soviet space is therefore sometimes much stronger, but relationships are also often more fraught and embittered by recent history.

Former Soviet and Eastern Bloc states have complex and varied attitudes towards Moscow: while the Baltic states, Poland and Czech Republic are very hostile towards Russia, widely considered to be their historical oppressor and enemy, this cannot be said to the same extent for states such as the members of the Eurasian Economic Union, or even to a lesser degree for Georgia, despite the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 and Russian support of separatism. Turkey's relationship with its former European subjects is not as tainted by recent history, with recent generations less preoccupied by their Ottoman past which ended more than a century ago (with the exceptions of Armenia and Greece, who share a highly antagonistic relationship with Turkey).

Second, in the interest of reducing variability states must be selected with comparably sized Turkish and Russian diasporas. Ethnic Turks number the most in Bulgaria, where there may be as many as 750,000, and in North Macedonia, where there are up to 200,000; in other former Ottoman territories they number in the thousands or hundreds. Together, the number of Turks in the Balkans is comparatively sized to the approximately one million ethnic Russians in the Baltic countries. A comparison between the Balkans and the Baltics could therefore be done in this regard. However, as mentioned above, Turkish relations with Balkan countries are very different from Russia's relation with the Baltics, considering recent history; all three Baltic countries have antagonistic relations with the Russian government, while relations between Balkan states and Turkey are varied but overall - with the exception of Greece - rather friendly.

Finally, other factors should be minimised, for instance comparisons across member states and non-member states of EU, NATO, former USSR and other alliances which could

complicate the comparison. Comparisons across multiple countries have therefore been avoided in favour of studying the case of Russian and Turkish diaspora groups in the same country in detail, with as many variables remaining the same as possible. Narrowing down the study to the specific case of Russian and Turkish diaspora groups in Germany is also ideal given that the country hosts both the largest Turkish diaspora in Europe and the largest Russian-speaking diaspora in Western Europe (excluding the post-Soviet states).

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to examine and compare the Russian and Turkish governments' policies targeting their Western European diaspora populations. In particular, the focus is on establishing whether and to what extent Moscow and Ankara have used nationalism as a tool to instrumentalise diaspora groups for the purpose of Russian and Turkish policy goals. The primary focus will be on the German case study, while additional relevant data and examples from other countries in Europe may occasionally be included to further support and strengthen the argument. The main research method in this thesis is a comparison between the two cases of Russian and Turkish policy towards their diaspora in Germany.

Despite widespread use of case studies, there is no consensus in social sciences as to the proper definition of a case nor of a case study (Levy, 2008). John Gerring explains the case as “a spatially and temporally delimited phenomenon of theoretical significance” (2017, pp. 27). He further defines a case study as “an intensive study of a single case or a small number of cases which draws on observational data and promises to shed light on a larger population of cases” (ibid.). He writes that a case study must be highly focused, observational (non-experimental), oftentimes holistic (gathering a variety of different types of observational data), and generally

follows a form of multilevel inference (evidence is drawn from different levels of analysis).

Robert Yin defines the case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003). His definition continues: “the case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (ibid., pp. 13-14).

Jack Levy (2008) lists five case study research designs: comparable-case (most-similar or most-different), process tracing, crucial case (most-likely, least-likely), and deviant case designs (empirical anomalies, with the focus on explaining why the case deviates from expectations, improve theory & generate new hypotheses). In the previous section I outlined the numerous similar factors in the Russian and Turkish cases. These cases lend themselves to a most-similar type of analysis, in which the focus falls on researching the differences or similarities in outcomes.

Gerring (2017) states that the goal of a case study is not only to explain the case(s) that are analysed, but also to shed some light on a larger number of cases: while the intention is to look at the specific factors in the case it needs to be possible to put the study into a larger context examining the same dynamics elsewhere. However, it is not the goal to assert the cases to be representative of a larger situation. The analysis of the dynamics of Russian and Turkish diaspora politics and instrumentalisation efforts may shed light on the different actors and processes may be involved, which may serve as basis for similar research on other diasporas in

the world, however it is not the goal nor possible to assert the cases to be representative of other diaspora relations worldwide, nor of Russian or Turkish diasporas elsewhere.

Yin (2003) outlines five crucial components of a case study research design: research questions (in the context of case studies, the most applicable questions are those concerning the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a phenomenon), propositions/hypotheses (unless in the case of exploratory research), units of analysis (derived from the research questions), the logic linking data to propositions (also irrelevant in the case of exploratory research), and the criteria for interpreting the findings. With regards to case selection and units of analysis, Yin writes that researchers should draw from literature and strive to make them similar to those previously studied by others. Furthermore, units must be bound in time and it must be specified where boundaries lie in regard to location or individuals included or excluded.

The current study will be exploratory in nature, and does not seek to test any specific theories or hypotheses, nor to identify concrete causal mechanisms. Instead, it will seek to uncover the processes and variables involved in the question of Russian and Turkish diaspora policies and instrumentalisation, and generate hypotheses about the nature of these processes. As such, there will be no need for propositions or logic linking to data as in Yin’s outline, solely research questions, units of analysis and criteria for interpreting the findings. Nevertheless, Yin emphasises that even in exploratory research, the starting points should be statements about (a) what is to be explored, (b) the purpose of the exploration and (c) the criteria by which the exploration will be judged successful.

Exploratory case studies are intended to identify one or more hypotheses to the research questions (Gerring, 2017). What is to be explored is the political instrumentalization of Turkish and Russian diasporas in Europe by their home governments. The research questions guiding this



study will be (1) how Turkish and Russian diasporas are politically instrumentalized by Ankara and Moscow, and (2) what the outcomes of such instrumentalisation have been. The analysis will draw from Principal-Agent theory to model and explain the relationship between diasporas and home governments.

The cases analysed will be the Turkish and Russian (specifically Russia German) diasporas in Germany. Units of analysis will be the diaspora policies of Ankara and Moscow, political activities and attitudes of diaspora members, and the political instrumentalization of Russian and Turkish diasporas. The analysis will be divided into three parts with differing focus; each part will analyse a different dimension of Moscow and Ankara's diaspora politics, evaluate the extent of diaspora instrumentalization, and the outcomes.

The purpose of the exploration is to uncover the tools and mechanisms used by governments to instrumentalise their diaspora, whether religion, ultranationalism or criminal networks, and the factors that influence the relative success or failure of such instrumentalisation attempts. This exploration will be judged successful if it achieves at uncovering any such variables at play by means of comparison. The case study will focus on the present time, while including data from the past decades, in which these diaspora relations have taken shape. It will focus on the specific case of Germany, while including relevant supporting examples from elsewhere in Europe. Finally, given that both Turkish and Russian conceptions of "diaspora" are often intentionally broad and sometimes vague, this research will not restrict its analysis to citizens or ethnic Turks and Russians. It will include all those who may, depending on context, both be included and excluded by Russian and Turkish conceptions of diaspora - based on past borders, language, ethnicity or more.

In order to analyse the particular relationships between home governments and diasporas,

this paper will use the lens provided by the Principal-Agent model of theorising about proxy relationships. This model was originally conceived as a way of analysing official bureaucratic, business or institutional relationships and why powerful actors often delegate authority to others, despite often divergent interests. The model has also been used within the fields of international relations, conflict and security studies to examine proxy relationships in illicit or violent contexts, such as between state actors and non-state armed actors.

Given that the purpose of this thesis is to examine how the Turkish and Russian governments attempt to utilise their diasporas in Europe and Germany as proxy agents to further their own interests, the Principal-Agent model is well suited as an analytical lens in this case. This lens will be used to examine how the governments act as principals and seek to use diaspora elements as agents to act on their behalf. It will also use existing P-A theory to look at the factors involved in whether the diaspora agents choose to act in their interest or that of their state principal, the way in which their principals seek to incite them into becoming willing agents, and why in certain cases the relationship does not bear fruits.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### ***Principal - Agent Model***

The agency theory, principal-agent model, problem or theory, emerged into popularity in the 1970s to theorise about the logic of delegation of authority and proxy relationships; it was originally developed within the study of organisations and bureaucracies. Agency theory seeks to model and describe situations in which a principal delegates authority to an agent to represent

them and act on their behalf and in their interest (Lupia, 2015).

Delegation is the process by which a principal offers a “conditional grant of authority” to an agent to act on their behalf (Byman & Kreps, 2010). It is not enough for actors such as non-governmental organisations to act consistently with the goals of a state, for example, as there has not been a process of delegation of authority from the state to the organisation. However, when international organisations such as the World Bank are charged by its member states to distribute aid on their behalf, it is an explicit delegation of their authority to the organisation, which allocates and distributes resources as provided by agreed-upon policies. Delegation can take various forms: a “policy implementation” type of delegation empowers agents to implement projects agreed-upon by principals, while in cases of adjudicative delegation agents are given the authority to resolve disputes between principals (Bradley & Kelley, 2008).

Byman and Kreps (2010, pp. 3-6) list the following five factors as possible motivations for a principal to give up some agency over outcomes by delegating to an agent: First, an agent may have a comparative advantage due to their placement or specialisation and may provide expertise and capabilities that the principal is unable to provide or unwilling to develop themselves. For example, local agents are often used because they are in a desired location, have privileged experience, access and insight into a particular context, and may hold greater legitimacy.

Second, delegating agency over may function as a signal of the credibility of the principal’s commitments, as it makes it more difficult for the principal to back out of a pledge to pursue higher benefits. An example of this would be in the case of independent investigations into controversial issues, when a principal charges an agent with the authority to investigate and attribute fault and responsibility, even if the conclusions of the investigation may run counter to

the interests of the principal.

Third, delegating authority to an agent may serve to ensure that policies are applied consistently with the principal's preferences over the longer term, even when the principal's power may wane and others rise in place. An illustration of this has played out prominently in US politics the last years, particularly during the Trump presidency, when the president installed conservative federal judges across the country and three Supreme Court judges, who all have lifetime tenure and will thus influence the laws in a manner aligned with Donald Trump's ideology long after the end of his mandate.

The fourth possible motivation departs from the prevalent assumption of rational choice: the driver is ideological. Here, the choice to delegate does not stem from a desire to reduce transaction costs and increase efficiency, but from a desire to make symbolic commitments to actors with shared ideas and identities.

The final motivation for the delegation of authority is that it provides the principal with plausible deniability. This is commonly observed in hybrid warfare in this age, such as the Russian use of separatist militants in Ukraine to ignite civil conflict on the behalf of Moscow in 2014. The motivation of plausible deniability is the most notable difference between licit and illicit form of delegation.

However, agents do not always have the same interests as their principal: this difference between their own interests and those of their principal is described as *agency loss*, and may impede the formation principal-agent relationship or lead to betrayal of the principal's interests by the agent (Lupia, 2015). The principal-agent dilemma is often written about in the context of government, when elected officials have incentives to act in their own interest rather than as agents of their electorate principals. Incentives to betray the principals are even higher when the

officials are unelected, since the officials have no need to gain the electorate's support, they may work more freely in the interest of their own position as opposed to the principals they are to represent (Investopedia, 2021). However, the principal-agent dilemma may also arise out of imperfect information on the side of the agent, which is then unable to effectively work in the principal's interests.

The principal-agent analysis is most often applied to the analysis of licit bureaucratic institutions and national or international organisations, with the goal of improving governance, cooperation and efficiency. The majority of its applications to licit relationships examines why a government would delegate authority to agents who may have divergent interests or lower levels of efficiency, despite the costs that delegation entails, instead of performing the work itself (Grant & Keohane, 2005; Milner, 2006). However, the model has also been used to analyse unofficial, illicit and conflict-related relationships - such as in the cases of state-sponsored proxy warfare or terrorism, where state principals recruit agents to commit violence (overtly or covertly on behalf of the principal). The study of illicit relationships, naturally, has the opposite goal from the study of licit relationships: it aims to understand and unveil vulnerabilities in these relationships in order to better counter or prevent such situations (Byman & Kreps, 2010; Hovil & Werker, 2005).

The study of state sponsorship of rebels and insurgent groups have been an important use of the principal-agent model to the fields of political science, international relations and security studies, as illustrated by the following works of research.

Salehyan (2010) examined the decision to delegate conflicts to rebels through the lens of principal-agent theory, finding that while delegating conflict enables states to avoid the costs of warfare, such a decision is risky due to the difficulty of selecting appropriate agents and of

maintaining control over them. Salehyan, Gleditsch & Cunningham (2011) analysed factors determining external support for insurgent groups from a principal-agent perspective, finding external support to be influenced by the characteristics of the insurgent groups as well as by the linkages between these groups and actors abroad; specifically, they found that external support is more likely for moderately strong groups, in the presence of transnational constituencies, international rivalries, and when the government receives foreign support. Salehyan, Siroky and Wood (2014) also used the principal-agent perspective to examine wartime atrocities, arguing that foreign funding for rebels may reduce incentives to respect civilian rights; they also argue that if the insurrection is supported by a single principal and not multiple principals, the characteristics of this principal influence the actions of the agent.

Milos Popovic (2015) researched the conditions under which rebel-agents defied the orders or turned against their sponsor-principals, arguing that the decentralisation of insurrectionist movements makes them less accountable to their sponsors and cannot commit to acting in the principal's interests due to weak central leadership and dispersed decision-making. Popovic (2017) also researched inter-rebel alliances and argued that the presence of foreign principals is likely to encourage the formation of alliances, especially when different rebels share a principal; principals may demand cooperation from their agents and credibly threaten non-compliance. Hauter (2019) used the distinction between intervention and delegation made by Salehyan in his 2010 paper in order to complicate the distinction between civil and interstate war, introducing a new category to the typology of armed conflict: the delegated interstate conflict. Hoekstra (2019) used the principal-agent perspective to examine the effectiveness of U.S. support for the Nicaraguan Contras fighting the Sandinista government during the 1980s, finding that U.S. support was significantly undermined by the inconsistency of the level of aid

awarded to the insurgents, which led to a collapse of the insurgency campaign.

In the context of this research, we will identify the Turkish and the Russian governments as the principals and the Turkish and Russian diasporas in Germany (and Western Europe) as possible agents. In practice, diaspora agents could include individuals such as politicians, business leaders or those in some way favourably placed, various diaspora organisations and associations whether politically, culturally, religiously or economically oriented, militant movements, or greater sections of the diaspora community.

I argue that diaspora elements may serve as valuable agents to their home governments in different manners and for different reasons. On one level, members of the diaspora may be useful agents because of their local legitimacy and ability to influence the politics of their countries of residence through participation or infiltration, lobbying, voting, protesting or more. On another level, diaspora agents may be ideally placed to have insight into the members of their community, which would provide them with a wide capacity to reach and observe their community and enable extra-territorial repression.

These attributes relate to several of the motivational factors as outlined by Byman and Kreps (2010). First is the comparative advantage of the agent due to their placement or specialisation - diaspora agents may have local knowledge, legitimacy or may be politically or economically well placed. They also relate to the fourth motivation, ideology, in that Ankara and Moscow may seek to form commitments with diaspora actors that are ideologically compatible with at least some of their goals, such as particular religious, political or identity groups, sometimes with the aim of using these agents to enforce extra-territorial repression upon ideological dissidents. The motivation of plausible deniability is also crucial in the selection of agents of influence, or agents of repression and violence, as has been seen in the aggression and

intimidation of diaspora-based dissidents.

### ***Diaspora Studies***

The term *diaspora* originates from the Ancient Greek *diaspeirein*, meaning “dispersion” or “scattering of seeds,” referring primarily to city-state colonisation practices of the times (Aydin, 2016; Pföstl, 2013). It is composed of the prefix *dia-*, indicating motion across all directions, and the verb *speiro*, meaning “to sow” (Merriam-Webster). Historically, the term was used to designate the forcefully dispersed communities of Jews outside of ancient Palestine, and it still carries the connotation of a banished or exiled people. It also progressively became a description for any community settled outside their ancestral homelands, such as Greek, Armenian or Arab groups, or to designate religious minorities in Europe (Aydin, 2016; Pföstl, 2013).

Beginning in the 1970s, the term underwent a broadening of definition. The classical understanding is expressed by Sheffer’s (1986) three criteria for a diaspora: a distinctive collective identity across different locations in the world, internal organisation, and symbolic or real ties to the homeland. Today, the understanding of the concept is much wider - encompassing immigrants, refugees, ethnic minorities, expatriates and displaced communities.

Robin Cohen (1997; as cited in Aydin, 2016) distinguishes five types of diaspora: victim diaspora (such as Armenians or Jews, or more recently Syrians, Afghans, etc.), labour diaspora (such as most Turks in the West), trade diaspora (in the past, oftentimes Jews or Greeks), imperial diaspora (such as Russians across the former USSR, or ethnic Germans across former Imperial Germany), and cultural or deterritorialized diaspora - where patterns of migration are no



longer unidirectional, are caused by a sequences of different causes over time, and where new centres of belonging or “homelands” can emerge.

Aydin (2016) lists four further distinguishing features: dispersion (of a group beyond their territory of origin), retrospection (tying and identifying the group with its country or territory of origin), community spirit (emanating from collective experiences of exclusion or discrimination in the host country) and extraterritoriality (meaning that the group’s collective identity is no longer necessarily tied to a specific territory, whether their current location or their place of origin).

This view is in line with the definition used by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Glossary, which describes a diaspora as “[m]igrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background. They maintain links with their homelands, and to each other, based on a shared sense of history, identity, or mutual experiences in the destination country” (IOM, 2019: 49).

Academic interest in diasporas has significantly increased over the past decades. Diaspora groups have grown from being considered marginalised victims or problem communities with difficulties to adapt and integrate, to becoming prominent non-state actors with institutions behaving in ways often similar to interest or lobby organisations, and which are courted and affect policy both in their home and host countries (Mencutek & Baser, 2018).

In terms of security, diasporas are sometimes depicted as actors who support armed groups in their homelands or global terrorist networks, or alternatively as peacemakers in conflicts. Mencutek & Baser describe a triadic relationship among diasporas, the context in which they reside, and the context they (or their ancestors) originate from (ibid.). They illustrate

an asymmetrical relationship between the homeland and the diaspora, depending on the political, economic and social context in the homeland, the strength of which is one of the main determinants of diaspora mobilisation, which they explain as “a diaspora’s engagement with homeland politics from afar while at the same time engaging with host country actors to pursue a certain agenda in relation to their homeland” (ibid.).

In his book *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, Robin Cohen divides the evolution of diaspora studies into four general phases of understanding the concept: (a) the classical diaspora, restricted to Jewish and occasionally Greek expatriates, (b) a more expanded and varied concept of diaspora, (c) social constructionist critiques of diaspora and (d) the consolidation phase (2008, p.1-2).

The first phase, focused on Jews and Greeks, lasted in this form until the 1960s and 1970s, when increasingly the term was broadened to refer to the dispersion of Africans, Armenians, the Irish and sometimes the Palestinians, still bound by a past of trauma and victimhood. The second phase, from the 1980s onward, encompassed all different categories of people with varied historical narratives, experiences, identities and relationships with their homelands.

The third phase, from the mid-1990s, was a critique by social constructionists and postmodernists seeking to deconstruct the concepts of ‘homeland’ and ‘ethnic/religious community’; these critics argued that identities have become deterritorialized and constructed in contextual ways, and concepts of diaspora had to be reordered in response. The fourth phase of consolidation set in at the turn of the century, partially accommodating social constructivist critiques but defending the concept of diaspora from being emptied of its analytical and descriptive power, and reaffirming the importance of the homeland as a powerful concept for

diaspora members.

From a policy perspective, ‘diaspora policy’ or ‘diaspora engagement policy’ refers to policy aiming at establishing and strengthening the capabilities of diaspora actors (Aydin, 2016). The IOM lists four primary roles of diaspora policy: an enabling role (enabling diaspora development through the simplification of bureaucracy, permitting dual citizenship, etc.), an inclusionary role (recognising and including the diaspora community), a partnership role (collaboration between host/home countries and various levels of government with the diaspora and supporting diaspora initiatives) and a catalytic role (to promote institutional change to create favourable interest in diasporas) (Ionescu, 2006).

In his paper on diaspora engagement policies, Gamlen explains them as the “transnationalization of governmentality” and identifies three higher-level roles of diaspora engagement policy: (a) “capacity building policies, aimed at discursively producing a state-centric ‘transnational national society,’ and developing a set of corresponding state institutions,” (b) “extending rights to the diaspora, thus playing a role that befits a legitimate sovereign,” and (c) “extracting obligations from the diaspora, based on the premise that emigrants owe loyalty to this legitimate sovereign” (2006, 5-6).

Diasporas have served many roles in their relationships with their home countries in different contexts, be it as diplomatic agents, agents of development, supporting actors in civil or international conflicts, and more. Since the advent of the internet in particular, diaspora communities have had facilitated access to the people, politics, events and culture in their home countries, which has enabled a far greater level of interaction than in the past. However, the concept of a country actively actively engaging with its diaspora is a relatively recent development, and not one pursued in all cases.

A central question in the studies of diaspora relations is why certain states seek to engage their diaspora while others do not. Addressing this topic, Koinova and Tsourapas (2018) outline a cluster of utilitarian, identity-based, governance and socio-spatial perspectives on the relationships between sending states and their diasporas.

A *utilitarian* perspective considers the diaspora as a source of material power, through the prospect of remittances by workers abroad, which serves to stave off domestic poverty and unemployment. Diasporas may also serve causes of philanthropy, tourism, and may provide professional expertise. Furthermore, diasporas can be instrumentalized to serve the sending states' policy goals, for instance through lobbying, protesting, and other political activities.

An *identity-based* perspective considers the diaspora as a source of symbolic power, and the connection with the diaspora serves to create an "imagined community" as conceptualised by Benedict Anderson. In view of this goal, sending states therefore invest in providing education for the diaspora to learn their language, history and culture, sponsored travel to the homeland, provide religious instruction and services and organise or encourage cultural events. Through this perspective, the diaspora is constructed and awakened by the means of nationalist mobilisation.

A *governance* perspective examines the way sending states may govern their diasporas through bilateral treaties and international organisations, or through their own embassies or government-controlled NGO's, whether it be to support, monitor or control their communities abroad.

A *socio-spatial* perspective to the question considers the dynamics and variety within these attempts at governance depending on where they are positioned. Within a sending state, different institutions and actors may have divergent interests and are often self-interested in their

engagement with diasporas. On the other hand, different diaspora groups may be targeted differently, according to economic and (geo)political considerations: wealthy and politically powerful diasporas in the West may take priority in some instances, while generally less influential but strategically placed diasporas elsewhere may hold more significance in other instances.

Diaspora-centred development is a rising area of research in an era when policy-makers seek to encourage diasporas to engage in development in the developing world. Remittances have become a crucial source of income and economic activity for a number of countries. In 2020, as a proportion of GDP, the top recipients of remittances were Tonga with 39% and Kyrgyz Republic with 31.3%. In Europe, Kosovo is top ranking with 18.6%, then Moldova (15.7%), Georgia (13.3%) and Armenia (10.5%) (World Bank, 2022).

The role of diasporas in the context of violent conflict has been quite widely researched. During periods of international conflict, home governments often seek to activate diaspora populations to lobby the cause of their homeland to international media and their host governments, to facilitate the collection and transfer of resources and aid, and to provide much needed human capital, including as volunteer fighters in direct combat.

Hasić and Karabegović (2020) tell the story of how during the Bosnian war in the 1990s, elements of the Bosnian diaspora formed BOSNET, an online epistemic community that shared a belief about the independence of their country and collected, shared and spread information about the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More recently, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan saw an important mobilisation of the sizeable Armenian diaspora, as political actors, lobbyists, activists and protesters in their host countries as well as volunteers joining the conflict in a combatant or supporting role (Safi & McKernan, 2020).

The same has been taking place in the Ukrainian context. As early as after the 2014 Euromaidan protests deposing pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich which resulted in the Russian annexation of Crimea and participation in the pro-Russian insurrection in the Donbas, the Ukrainian diaspora organised to pursue humanitarian relief efforts, pressuring foreign governments and disseminating information (Krasynska, 2015; Cipko, 2016) This intensified during the 2022 Russian invasion, with many diaspora members joining the combat and relief efforts.

The Jewish diaspora, in particular the American Jewish community, represent perhaps the most engaged diaspora community in relation to their Israeli 'homeland' with continued high levels of support, connection and political mobilisation, in particular since the 1967 Six Day War, which promoted extraordinary solidarity across international Jewry (Saxe & Boxer, 2012).

Until recently, the Turkish understanding of the concept of 'diaspora' was primarily negatively associated with the Armenian diaspora (particularly strong in France and the US) and their international lobbying efforts for the recognition of the Armenian genocide, despite the existence of a number of Turkish communities beyond Turkish border since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the inception of the modern Turkish nation-state in the 1920s (Öktem, 2014). Many of these communities were ignored or eyed with suspicion for most of the history of the country. However, with the growth of the Turkish expatriate community in number as well as in economic and political significance, and with the growth of Turkey's ambitions and soft power capabilities, Ankara's perspective on its diaspora has shifted (Öktem, 2014).

According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the global Turkish diaspora citizen population presently numbers more than 6.5 million individuals, of whom 5.5 million reside in Western Europe. Germany is the Western European country with the highest Turkish population

with about 1.3 million Turkish citizens, after which France comes in second place with about 460,000 Turkish citizens (Destatis, 2022; Daily Sabah, 2018).

However, the number of people of Turkish descent or ethnicity who do not hold Turkish citizenship is several magnitudes higher, with estimates for Germany reaching 7 million, exceeding one million in France and two million in the Netherlands (Zestos & Cooke, 2020, p.22; Gallard & Nguyen, 2020; Daily Sabah, 2021). Accurate estimates are impossible, given that numbers will vary depending on the definition used for “diaspora” and because countries such as France, Germany and the Netherlands do not collect data on ethnicity. The greater part of this diaspora is composed of ethnic Turks, however significant minorities are also represented such as Turkish Kurds, Alevis and others.

By Moscow, the diaspora is primarily conceived as the Russian-speaking population that was living in various parts of the Soviet Union and found themselves as minority populations in newly established states after the union’s fall. Many of these migrated to the Russian Federation in the following decades, but some remained and formed important minority populations mainly in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Uzbekistan, but also in current EU member Baltic states such as Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania.

In Germany, the number of people holding Russian citizenship was just over 235,000 in 2020, representing 2.2% of the foreign population (Destatis, 2022). However, estimates of the Russian-speaking population span from slightly more than two million up to six million people (Loshkin, 2020). Of those, between three and four million people belong to the minority group of Russia Germans, also known as *Russlanddeutsche* or *Aussiedler*: ethnic Germans whose ancestors had migrated to the east over the past centuries, who lived in the Eastern Bloc for the past generations and migrated to Germany in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Panagiotidis, 2017).

The rest of the diaspora consists of ethnic Russians or Russian speakers from other parts of the former USSR, many of whom had moved to the former East Germany and who remained after German reunification, including a significant community of Russian Jews.

## **Contextual Framework**

### ***Turkey***

Turkey, geographically separating Europe from the Middle East and Africa, has always played an important role for Europe. The Ottoman Empire at its peak encompassed large parts of the Balkans and Eastern Europe for centuries, famously besieging the city of Vienna in 1683, and left important cultural and religious marks, as well as minority communities in the territories it once ruled. The Ottoman Empire also shared strong ties and trade relations with Germany, and both were allies in the Central Powers coalition during WWI.

It is therefore not strange that large-scale migration from Turkey to Western Europe began, through various bilateral agreements but most importantly through the 1961 West German-Turkish recruitment agreement. Other agreements were signed with Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands in 1964, with France in 1965 and Australia in 1967 (YTB, 2022). Great numbers of largely unskilled Turkish citizens from rural areas migrated to Germany and other European countries as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers; Yugoslav *Gastarbeiter* were another important source of labour and were known by the same term).

These working programs, born out of severe labour shortages coupled with strong post-war economic growth, were meant to be temporary. At the time, the Turkish government expected their return in the short run and had no concrete diaspora policy; Ankara's engagement



with its emigrants was primarily focused on facilitating the flow of remittances (Mencutek & Baser, 2018). One of the first exceptions to this was the provision of imams to the diaspora communities by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) from 1971 onwards. In the late 1970s, perceptions of migrant workers by Turkish politicians began to change, as it became apparent that the majority of these *Gastarbeiter* would not come home and that the increasing flow of foreign currency through remittances actually made it more advantageous for Turkey that they remain abroad (Aydin, 2014).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Turkish government began to build the institutional framework necessary to develop closer relations with its diaspora. The 1982 constitution featured for the first time an article concerning emigrant affairs, which stipulated that the state can take the necessary measures to ensure family unity, educational and cultural needs, and the social security of its diaspora, as well as to reinforce their ties with the home country or to assist their return home (Aydin, 2014). For the first time, Ankara also allowed for Turkish nationals to hold dual citizenship (ibid.). In the 1990s the term ‘Euro-Turks’ (*Avrupa Türkleri*) arose in Turkish, reflecting the widespread recognition in Turkey of the fact that the Turkish diaspora had found permanent residence in Europe (ibid.). Ankara also made it easier for Turks to give up their citizenship while retaining a number of rights with the introduction of the “Blue Card” in 2004, which an generous extension of the scope of rights with the passage of the Turkish Citizenship Law No. 5901 in 2009 (Aydin & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020)

The 1980 military coup also pushed Ankara to consider its diaspora through a political lens. This period saw a flow of political exiles and asylum seekers, seeking refuge from repression, insecurity and instability in Turkey. These included many leftists and communists, some ultranationalists, as well as Alevi and Kurdish activists, some of whom established a strong

diaspora presence and organised with European political groupings to support the Kurdish minority cause and oppose the military coup (ibid.). The Turkish government in turn began to politically mobilise its diaspora to promote the “national interests” of Turkey in Europe by influencing the politics of host countries against Ankara’s “enemies” - particularly radical left-wing groups and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). They encouraged the establishment of pro-government diaspora organisations (“coordination committees”) gathering conservative, religious, nationalist and ultranationalist groups, in order to push for Turkish interests in Europe and in particular to thwart the political activities of the PKK and other far-left opposition groups (ibid.).

The Turkish far right can be traced back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th Century, following the end of the First World War. The empire had been shrinking for a generation already, incapable of controlling revolts and independence movements in nations across its territory. Out of this disintegration rose the nationalist Young Turks movement, who took power in 1908 and oversaw the brutal oppression of non-Turkish minorities whose loyalties to the Ottomans were questioned, culminating in the Armenian and Assyrian genocides (Beratungsstelle Extremismus, 2020). The collapse of the empire left a number of Turks and Turkish related peoples residing in newly independent states in the Balkans and in Central Asia, under non-Turkish rule. Pan-Turkism, also known as Turanism, was the concept that the Turkish people was intimately related to other peoples tracing their origin from the same area in Central Asia, and its ideological prerogative was that union between these Turkic peoples should be striven for; the nature and shape of this union ranging from loose cooperation and solidarity between Turkic-origin peoples to a unified Turkish state including the Caucasus, the Volga-Ural region, the Crimea, Western and Central Asia (Pekesen, 2019).

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) is the most important Turkish ultranationalist party, established in the late 1960s. Its unofficial militant or youth wing is a movement referred to as the “Idealist Hearths,” (*Ülkü Ocakları*) also referred to as the “Grey Wolves” (*Bozkurtlar*) or simply “Idealists” (*Ülkücü*). The MHP and Idealist movement are difficult to neatly pin down ideologically but draw from Kemalism, pan-Turkic/Turanist ideology, Islam, fascism and more, while avoiding explicit totalitarianism (Yavuz, 2002). Their ideological foundations claim a uniquely Turkish alternative to communism, capitalism and fascism, while drawing strongly from the latter two systems (ibid.). Members of the Grey Wolves often deny its political nature, claiming it to be a cultural and educational foundation, as its official name suggests: ‘Idealist Clubs Educational and Cultural Foundation’ (*Ülkü Ocakları Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı*). In reality, it was one of the main nationalist terrorist organisations between 1976 and 1980, engaging in a great number of killing and were even tied to the 1981 failed assassination attempt of Pope John Paul II (Bale, 1991; Blitz, 2015). Banned after the 1980 coup, many of these extremists fled the country and formed diaspora networks in Europe, before arising again in Turkey in the 1990s with a newly established transnational network when the ban was lifted.

In the following decade, the Grey Wolves participated in the Nagorno-Karabakh War, both Chechen Wars, were involved in a coup attempt in Azerbaijan, and took part in the conflict against the PKK in southeastern Turkey (Beratungsstelle Extremismus, 2020). During this time, the previously secularist party took upon itself an increasingly Islamic character. In 1992, a schism within the party regarding the prominence of Islam within its doctrine led to the creation of the Great Unity Party (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*, or BBP), which took a more decisively Islamist line. Today, the MHP has fully embraced the entwining of Islam and Turkishness in an ideological turn called the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” and have increasingly cast their struggle

in terms of a religious war, while insisting on the secularism of institutions and pursuing a distinctly Turkish supremacist agenda, not one informed by Islamic equality and solidarity as is the case for most Islamists. The MHP has now become a close ally and supporter of the ruling AKP in Turkey.

After serving as a popular mayor of Istanbul and being shortly imprisoned for reciting a controversial Islamist poem, Erdoğan founded the AKP in 2001 and rose to power as Prime Minister in 2003 on a broadly populist-nationalist platform, moderating his more radical politics of the past. He has remained in power since, first as Prime Minister and now as President. Under his tenure the government embraced a “neo-Ottoman” narrative and foreign policy, influenced by Sunni Islamist and pan-Turkic ideology, seeking to frame Turkey as the heir to the Ottoman Empire, as a central and strong power with influence far beyond its borders. Under AKP rule and as Turkey’s economic power grew, so did Ankara’s confidence in international politics, which became particularly salient in the manner in which they approached Europe and the European Turkish diaspora. While the diaspora was previously seen primarily as a remittance machine, as Turkish strength grew the diaspora was increasingly seen as a source of influence abroad, a reason for Ankara to get involved in politics abroad, as well as a potential source of political strength in elections. In 2014, the Turkish government allowed Turkish citizens abroad to vote in embassies and consulates, facilitating the participation of over three million Turkish citizens in the diaspora - the third largest voter constituency after Istanbul and Ankara and an important target for political mobilisation (Cornell, 2017).

As tensions with the Kurdish minority deepened, after the AKP temporarily lost its parliamentary majority in 2015 and particularly since the failed July 2016 coup attempt, the AKP allied with the far-right MHP to secure their grasp on power, while official rhetoric has taken

increasingly nationalist tones (Arkilic, 2021). The coup attempt also marked a transition to greater authoritarianism: former Erdoğan ally, the Islamist cleric Fethullah Gülen and his followers were held responsible for masterminding the coup attempt. Nation-wide persecution followed, targeting not only those with suspected ties to Gülen, but targeting many activists, critical academics and journalists as well as the pro-Kurdish opposition People's Democratic Party (HDP), thereby assuring the government's control (Houtkamp & de Bruijne, 2021; Yildirim-Sungur & Schwarz, 2021). More than 100,000 public officials were suspended or fired, almost 50,000 were arrested and all Gülenist institutions were shut down in Turkey. Even in the diaspora, many Gülen supporters felt the persecution, faced threats, intimidation and even extradition or kidnapping (ibid.; Colborne & Edwards, 2018).

In 2017, a constitutional referendum was held, transforming Turkey from a parliamentary into an executive presidential system. These changes, brought forward by the AKP and MHP, greatly empowered Erdoğan. The referendum was also an important period for the diaspora, which was particularly courted by Ankara - in attempts to mobilise the diaspora vote, large rallies and campaign events were organised in Europe featuring leading members of government. This caused deep rifts between Turkey and European countries who perceived the constitutional changes as anti-democratic and authoritarian. Ultimately, the diaspora vote was significantly more supportive of Erdoğan's constitutional changes vote than the domestic Turkish electorate (59.46% vs. 51.18%), despite a much lower turnout (44.60% vs. 87,45% according to official numbers) (Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey, 2017).

### ***Russia***

Just as the modern Turkish state has inherited the legacy of its imperial past, in the form

of cultural imprints and minority populations scattered across the part of the world it once ruled, the modern Russian state is difficult to disentangle from its Soviet and imperial past. As Russian was the lingua franca of the Soviet Union, there are between 153 and 258 million speakers worldwide, 100 million more than the entire population of the Russian Federation (Koyfman, 2021). The Russian diaspora is estimated at around 25 million people, about half of which reside in formerly Soviet countries. These diaspora communities have increasingly grown in prominence and gained recognition for their roles in the domestic affairs of their homes in Western and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and North America (Nikolko & Carment, 2017).

It was only in the 1990s that the term ‘diaspora’ became commonly used to describe the about 25 million ethnic Russians scattered across the 15 post-Soviet successor states and beyond, and it remains ill-defined (Kolstø 1995: 4–6; Harmon-Donovan, 2015). Kolstø (1995, 1996) argues that the term ‘Russian diaspora’ can refer to any group with ties to the multi-ethnic Russian federation, while Harmon-Donovan further argues that the term can refer not only to ethnic Russians, but to any Russian-speaking immigrant with a background from the former Soviet Union (2015, pp.12). Bloch (2012) observes that post-Soviet diaspora members often view themselves as ‘Russian’ or as having a Russian background, embracing a broader identity concept of ‘Russianness’ even if they have no connection to Russia proper.

Scholars identify between three and six waves of Russian emigration, which have been widely analysed. Conservative scholars divide the emigration into three waves: (1) forced emigration connected to WWI, the Russian Revolution and the Civil War, (2) forced emigration due to WWII and (3) emigration for economic reasons after 1989 (Skibo, 2021). Post-2010 emigration is identified as a fourth wave, motivated primarily by political reasons. Savoskul (2021; in Skibo, 2021) distinguishes five intermediary stages in the place of the third and the

fourth waves: (1) a build-up of migration in 1983-1989 (90,000), (2) an emigration peak in 1990-1999 (around one million), (3) a levelling off in 2000-2005 (312,000), (4) a decrease in scale in 2006-2011 (80,000) and (5) a consolidation of new trends in 2012-2014 (105,000) (ibid.). The Atlantic Council identifies six waves of migration overall: (1) Jewish emigration in 1881-1914; (2) White exodus in 1918-1922, (3) WWII in 1941-1945, (4) Soviet Jewish emigration in 1970-1980, (5) economic migration in 1989-1999, and (6) the ‘Putin’ exodus caused primarily by political reasons from 2000 until today.

Skibo (2021) argues that there is a new wave of politically motivated emigration from Russia that has taken place in recent years, with 15,000 annual asylum requests by Russian citizens in the EU, a number expected to rise. Scholars identify three major politically motivated migrants: (1) Refugees and asylum seekers, (2) political emigrants and (3) atmospheric emigrants. The latter is a fairly new phenomenon stemming not directly from persecution or political pressure, but from dissatisfaction, apathy and hopelessness about the general deterioration of the country, its alienation from the west, increasing authoritarianism, lack of rule of law, etc (ibid.).

The estimates given about the size of the Russian diaspora, number of people of Russian or Soviet origin, or Russian speakers in Germany varies between two and six million, depending on precisely what is counted and the definitions used. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, around 2.5 million *Aussiedler* emigrated to Germany from the former USSR (Panagiotidis, 2017). These migrants were Russia Germans or *Russlanddeutsche*, the descendants of ethnic Germans who had settled in imperial Russia, had found themselves in the Soviet Union, and were now entitled to claim their German citizenship according to German law. 673,000 of these came from Kazakhstan and 584,000 from Russia; many also came from the non-Soviet former

Eastern Bloc, in particular from Poland and Romania (Brauer, 2022).

The *Aussiedler* had been invited to settle in Russia by the Russian Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries, in hopes of bringing modernisation to the army, by the import of German officers, and then to bring innovation and skill to industry at large and other domains (BPD, 2018). These settlers enjoyed a so-called ‘colonist privilege’ of greater political, economical and cultural status up until the First World War and the October Revolution. With Soviet rule came the loss of privilege and the rise of repression, which reached its peak in reaction to the rise of the Nazis and the brutal invasion of Eastern Europe. In retaliation, ethnic Germans were the targets of widespread killing and deportation to Central Asia and Siberia. First in 1964 were the *Russlanddeutsche* at least partly rehabilitated within Soviet society, while Germanness remained heavily discriminated against, and it was not until the mid-1980s that all restrictions placed on them were lifted (ibid.).

Because of their historical path, Russia Germans resist easy classification. While living in the eastern bloc, they were considered a minority group and often suffered discrimination and retribution due to their association with Nazism, racism German imperialism and the brutality inflicted upon Soviets during the war. As a consequence of this marginalisation, they often cherished and idealised the German identity, heritage and traditions they had inherited from their ancestors. At the same time, opportunities to learn German in the Soviet Union were limited and discouraged: German schools were banned since WWII and the only opportunity for the newer generations to learn was generally in the family or at church (Pfetsch, 1999). As such, only the oldest generations had proper knowledge of German, while the younger generations spoke almost exclusively Russian, and despite discrimination were in practice highly assimilated Soviet citizens.



In post-war Germany, the relocation of ethnic German resettlers had been a strong objective of all post-war (west) German governments, but in particular the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), who engaged in a very strong relationship with the emigrants driven by the conservative notion of citizenship by descent (Goerres et al., 2020). In accordance with this conceptualisation, Russia Germans were not regarded as immigrants, but rather as ethnic Germans returning to their historical home (ibid., Joppke, 2005). German Chancellor and CDU politician Helmut Kohl underlined the party's commitment and cemented Russia Germans' feelings of gratitude by making very clear statements about the unrestricted welcome of resettlers since the late 1980s. In turn, in 2004 at least 73% of naturalised citizens from the former USSR showed an intention to vote for the CDU (Wüst, 2004).

Over the course of the 1990s, however, the increased inflow of Russia Germans and an increasingly critical public opinion on immigration led the Kohl government to moderate its policy of unrestricted welcome. An annual ceiling of 226,000 resettlers was introduced in 1992 (400,000 arrived in 1990 alone), making it more difficult for ethnic Germans from non-Soviet countries to claim resettler status; in 1998, under the new Social Democrat-Green coalition, much stricter language tests were introduced for immigrants seeking naturalisation, which largely stemmed the flow of people (Wüst, 2004).

Upon arrival in Germany in the 1990s, many Russia Germans who had expected a warm embrace into the motherland and great economic improvement faced a complicated reality. German society had evolved significantly away from the cultural values, traditions and attitudes held by their German settler ancestors when they were disconnected from Western German society, values which Russia Germans had cherished as is common for oppressed minority groups. As opposed to the deeply religious, conservative, family-oriented and traditional German

culture they held in high regard, the society they were to integrate into was a progressive liberal democracy which had put great effort in distancing itself from this same past and culture.

Integration was also difficult because as previously noted, the majority of *Russlanddeutsche* were highly assimilated into Russian-Soviet society and often knew little German. A 1995 survey among Russia German immigrants found that 63% stated “very good” speaking capability and 56% stated “very good” writing skills in Russian, while only 7% and 6% answered the same regarding German language (Pfetsch, 1999).

Their hope for a bright future was further complicated by the fact that most Soviet-born migrants did not bring much capital and were not competitive on the labour market, with many ending up economically marginalised or unemployed. This was despite the fact that the Russia Germans had a higher level of education in comparison with the average Russian: many were teachers, technicians and otherwise qualified workers before coming to Germany (ibid.). Upon arrival, the newcomers were not given any legal or material privileges other than a six month long free German language course, and were placed by the German government in distinct communities around Germany, which led to a considerable concentration of Russia Germans in these communities. This was also a consequence of their strong family ties: the majority of Russia Germans migrated to join family in Germany, and chose to settle in the same communities where their relatives and friends lived.

Culturally and linguistically foreign to the country they arrived in, *Russlanddeutsche* were hardly embraced as long-lost brethren by Germans at large, who had difficulty to perceive these Russian-speaking immigrants from the USSR as anything but Russians. As such, despite embracing their German identity in the Soviet Union, many Russia Germans began to connect more closely with their Russian identity after arriving in Germany and finding themselves a

minority group in their promised homeland.

Over the course of a generation, the integration of these communities has reached greater success; the new generation is growing up into a model example of integration. However, today there are still a number of communities, villages and neighbourhoods in Germany, mostly populated by older generations of Russia Germans, in which exclusively Russian is spoken and integration has largely been unsuccessful. *Russaki* is the term that has emerged to refer to these bubbles, illustrating that while they may not be Russian, but are also no longer truly German (Hertel, 2020).

## Analysis

### Legal Framework, Institutions & Diaspora Policy

#### *Turkish Diaspora Policy & Legal Framework*

The Turkish Constitution, adopted in 1982, states that “The State shall take the necessary measures to ensure family unity, the education of the children, the cultural needs, and the social security of Turkish citizens working abroad, and to safeguard their ties with the home country and to help them on their return home” (Turkish Const. Section X “On Social Security Rights,” §62, 2017). It also defines a Turk as anyone bound to the Turkish state through citizenship, and the child of a Turkish father or mother (*ibid.*, §66). The Turkish Citizenship Law No. 5901, passed in 2009, also explicitly underlines descent, stating that a child born to a Turkish parent is a Turkish citizen - while allowing for the gain of citizenship through naturalisation or marriage, and for the first time allowed for dual citizenship (2009). As such, the Turkish legal framework focuses on descent and bond through citizenship and avoids the inclusion of other bonds based on language, religion or ethnicity. Turkish constitutional law does not define the term “diaspora” nor provide for a conception of Turkishness beyond citizenship ties.

Current Turkish foreign policy has often taken a much broader perspective, giving rights to and taking responsibility for not only Turkish citizens, but a much broader diaspora community. There are many other laws and regulations in the Turkish legal framework that consider the terms “Turk” and “descent” in manners very different from the constitution and citizenship law, referring for instance to “aliens of Turkish descent,” people “of Turkish descent and bound to Turkish culture,” “fellow descendants” and more (Yaldız, 2020).

The civic conception of the Turkish diaspora, disconnected from religion, language and

ethnicity, is the legal standard and official rhetoric of the Turkish government. However, this conception is not the one that has shaped Turkish diaspora policy, with both official institutions and diaspora associations being characterised by much more exclusionary politics.

Turkish diaspora policy begun with an overall negative attitude towards emigrants by the Turkish government, who considered them to be uncultivated ‘peasants’ or ‘remittance machines,’ since most of the Turkish diaspora was composed of *Gastarbeiter* in Western Europe (Arkilic, 2021a). Ankara promoted this system of temporary guest workers in order to reduce domestic unemployment and because of the benefits of remittances into Turkey from Turkish workers in Western Europe. The only institutions in existence to govern the diaspora at this time were concerned with facilitating the flow of remittances into Turkey, or to govern religious life to limit radicalisation through the Diyanet, the State Directorate for Religious Affairs.

In the 1980s, the military coup and following years of military rule from 1980 to 1983 caused a significant number of dissidents - right-wing, left-wing and separatist/minority activists - to go into exile. In turn, Ankara became increasingly concerned with limiting the activity of dissident groups abroad, and characterised diaspora organisations as either pro-government or dissident (Şenay, 2013). Turkish secular nationalist organisations were considered allies, while any leftist, Kurdish or Alevi organisation as well as any religious organisation other than the Diyanet (such as the Millî Görüş) were considered enemies and placed under state surveillance (ibid.). While there were some attempts to engage with the diaspora during these years, political and economic instability in Turkey weakened these efforts and outreach was mostly limited to Diyanet imams and the facilitation of remittances.

It was only with the electoral victory of the AKP and the beginning of Erdoğan’s rule that diaspora outreach reached a significant level. During the early period of AKP rule, Turkey

became one of the fastest-growing economies of the world, with an annual growth rate of 7.5% (Arkilic, 2021a). At the same time, the flow of remittances sent from the diaspora declined significantly in importance over these years, and the diaspora became less of an economic advantage for Ankara. With Turkey's growing power and status and the increasing importance of Turkish-based business, however, the diaspora could serve as a political power and a source of agents abroad, instead of a source of foreign currency. With this aim, Ankara began to form strong ties with Turks residing abroad and to institutionalise their diaspora policy. This period saw the formation of many of the diaspora-related Turkish state institutions, as well as important diaspora-based institutions.

During the initial period of AKP rule, the term "diaspora" was for the first time officially taken in use to refer to the Turkish community, the official perspective being that anyone from Turkey, regardless of religion or ethnicity, is a member of the Turkish diaspora (Öktem, 2014). This was while the AKP was making commitments to bringing the country closer to the liberal norms and values of the EU, and passed a number of constitutional and judicial reforms to fulfil EU membership criteria (Arkilic, 2021a; Mencuttek & Baser, 2018). During this period, Ankara asked its European diaspora to act as a lobby in favour of Turkish EU membership and to reflect the "contemporary, democratic and modern Turkey" in their countries of residence (Mügge, 2011, p.27).

An even broader conception of the term was brought forward in 2012 by then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who said: "We need to recognise the most extensive scope. Not a diaspora which only encompasses our citizens, I mean, those who are Turkish citizens and have migrated: Bosnians, Albanians, Pakistanis, Somalians, Palestinians... We have to recognise their populations there, abroad as a part of our diaspora. Even an hour that they spent together with us

makes them a part of our diaspora” (Yaldız, 2020). He called on Turkish representatives around the world to open their doors to all those who were once Ottoman subjects, even to engage with the Armenia diaspora (Khachatourian, 2012). Meeting representatives of Armenian, Greek, Assyrian, Chaldean, Bulgarian and Jewish institutions in Turkey, he stated “we are determined to eliminate the concept of minority from social life. You are constitutive children of these lands. You did not come from elsewhere, and you will not go elsewhere” (Agos, 2015).

As such, according to Turkish policy on one hand there are no minorities, only Turks - while on the other hand, the concept of the Turkish diaspora may cover Turkish citizens as defined by the constitution, blue card holders who have renounced their citizenship, fellow descendants (of Turkish descent), related communities (from Bosnians to Somalis), international students, “Ottoman residues” and even the Muslim community as a whole (Yaldız, 2020). This concept is not new: from pan-Islamism to pan-Ottomanism and pan-Turkism, these ideologies have long held importance in Turkey but not before the rise of the AKP have they been expressed in this degree and in those terms (Tziarras, 2019). The most generous conceptions of what constitutes the diaspora (“Ottoman residues” or the Muslim world) are of course so vague as to be practically unusable as foreign policy tools, since they do not refer to a concrete community. However, they enable the Turkish government to be able to shape the definition according to their needs and increase Turkish influence by assigning Ankara a role and responsibility in the governance of any community abroad that may be of political importance.

According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry (2022), supporting the Turkish community in Western Europe (around 5.5 million of the 6.5 million diaspora) is a foreign policy priority. It insists that integration is a “two-lane process” and that Turkish immigrants should “actively participate in the social, economic, cultural and political life of host countries while maintaining

their ties to their motherland.” It states that discrimination, xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia are in the increase and directly affects the Turkish community. It notes that Turkey appoints Turkish language educators and religious officers in cooperation with host countries, and provides free legal assistance to Turkish citizens living abroad. Finally, it expresses Turkish interest in the custody affairs and expectation that Turkish children in official custody are placed in “families that accord with their own culture and values.”

Mencutek & Baser (2018), drawing from a typology developed by Francesco Ragazzi, systematically examined various dimensions of the diaspora policies adopted by Turkey after 2003, dividing them into the categories of religious/cultural policies, social/economic policies, citizenship policies, bureaucratic control policies, symbolic policies and institutional policies.

With regard to religious/cultural policies, Ankara organised cultural centres, language courses as well as educational programs and trips to Turkey. The state also offered scholarship programmes and free education in public Turkish universities for the children of emigrants. This aimed at promoting Turkish language and culture to the diaspora community and form deeper ties with the newer generations of the diaspora. They also assumed responsibility for the religious instruction and governance of the diaspora directly through the Diyanet, and indirectly through nominally independent European Turkish-Islamic structures such as the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DİTİB) umbrella organisations and the Islamist Millî Görüş movement.

With regard to social/economic policies, Ankara invested in supporting and developing the entrepreneurial activities of the Turkish diaspora by broad consultation through state agencies, the establishment of the state-affiliated World Turk Labour Council to collaborate economically with the diaspora, and developing various strategies to increase the economic



contribution of citizens abroad. Ankara has made great efforts in connecting with the business community of the Turkish diaspora.

With regard to citizenship policies, Ankara extended access to citizenship and expanded the rights granted to former citizens. In 2004, the “blue card” certifying Turkish national origin was given to those emigrants who naturalised as citizens of their host countries and renounced their Turkish citizenship. In the years since, blue card holders have been granted social security rights, pension rights, and most other rights granted to Turkish citizens except the right to vote and to state employment (though in practice many rights are not implemented). Ankara also passed new legislation in 2012 to allow for the organisation of voting for Turkish elections abroad, instead of obligating Turks to travel to Turkey; the Turkish diaspora was able to vote from abroad for the first time in the 2014 presidential elections. There has also been a push to include more diaspora representatives in the Turkish parliament, of which there are a number in various parties.

With regard to symbolic policies, Turkey facilitates and finances many activities and events targeting and featuring the diaspora community, including conferences and panels, cultural events and celebrations of significant holidays and dates. However, the researchers note that such events are often exclusively targeting and featuring pro-government groups and communities, and funding is distributed selectively.

With regard to institutional policies, since rising to power the AKP has reinvigorated diplomatic institutions such as consulates and embassies. They have improved consulate services, facilitated bureaucratic procedures and increased interaction and cooperation between diaspora associations and embassies. The researchers quote a migration expert and leader of a German diaspora association: “instead of citizens going to the consulates, right now consuls visit

the citizens, visit associations, and participate in their activities,” (ibid., 2018, pp.95).

Furthermore, following the trend of other migrant-sending states, in 2010 Ankara established a new state agency to function as a reference point for diaspora affairs: the Presidency of Turks Abroad and Kin Communities. The agency was established on a broad conception of diaspora encompassing three categories: (former) citizens abroad, ethnic kin and co-ethnic communities, and students.

However, the established diaspora institutions have been criticised for employing a selective approach to their engagement with the diaspora community and of neglecting the cultural and political differences within. The development of diaspora programs and the selective state collaboration with, and empowerment of, specific diaspora movements followed a much narrower conception of Turkishness, excluding those who do not fall under or ascribe to the AKP’s conceptualisation of a Turk. Those diaspora members who fall outside this sphere reported to be actively isolated from activities by Turkish representatives. Many diaspora members interviewed by the researchers suggested that these AKP-led diaspora mobilisation policies aimed primarily at counterbalancing Kurdish dissident influence over European political circles, rather than to improve diaspora affairs for all (Mencutek & Baser, 2018, p.95-96).

At the same time, in the name of liberalism and civil society, the AKP also rehabilitated and empowered the Islamist Millî Görüş and Gülen Movements (until the Erdoğan-Gülen split and crackdown in 2016), which resulted in increased cooperation between Islamist diaspora groups and Turkish state institutions (Arkilic, 2021a, Bruce, 2020). Turkish diaspora engagement policies have indeed selectively favoured Sunni Islamic groups and replaced the Kemalist secular conception of Turkish nationhood with a Sunni and neo-Ottoman narrative and foreign policy agenda across its former territories (Arkilic, 2021a).

In Germany, as well as more broadly in Europe, the current evolution of Turkish diaspora policy has been met with suspicion and scepticism. German politicians are often concerned by the threat of an “externally controlled penetration” of German society by Turkey and the spectre of a “fifth column” or “Trojan horse” of Erdoğan loyalists within the German population, while already being suspicious of the existing transnational connections of the Turkish diaspora (Aydin, 2014). According to Aydin, these attitudes towards transnational communities and fears of “fifth columns” hinder the constructive engagement with the Turkish diaspora by host state institutions and civil society.

However, the problem persists that the manner in which Turkey engages with its diaspora and take up their cause in Germany is through the promotion of conservative social values and a religious collective identity that contributes to the fragmentation of this diaspora, while arousing the scepticism of German political leaders and causing friction in Turkish-German relations (Aydin, 2014). Aydin argues that the increasing interest of Ankara in the Turkish diaspora in Germany is not economic, but part of a political strategy aiming to “build up and strengthen diaspora organisations and extend their scope of action” (ibid.). The cooperation with Ankara in raising the social status and political participation should be welcomed according to the author, but only insofar that the diaspora’s autonomy and cohesion is respected (ibid.). Evidence suggests that this is not the case: Ankara’s diaspora network is united by nationalist-Islamist ideology, lobbies for Turkish policies, marginalises minorities and sometimes serves to target dissidents.

### *Turkish Diaspora Institutions*

**The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB).** The YTB is a governmental body established in 2010 that serves to coordinate the activities of the diaspora community and foster ties between diaspora and Turkey, including related or “kin” communities, in addition to coordinating a scholarship program and facilitating studies in Turkey (YTB, 2022a). It also organises programs aimed at teaching diaspora youth the Turkish language, and carries out various research and training activities in coordination with different institutions, organisations and NGOs. As opposed to the previously existing General Directorate of Foreign Affairs and Services for Workers Abroad, the YTB was under direct executive control and has become the main institution for the Turkish state’s relation with the diaspora (Aydin & Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020).

The term ‘related communities’ or *akraba topluluklar* is sometimes replaced with ‘brother/sister communities’ or *kardeş topluluklar*, and designates those peoples who may not be identified or do not self-identify as Turks through citizenship or ethnicity, but are considered to be tied to Turkey through culture and history. It is the policy of the Turkish government to develop close ties to these communities. As stated on the YTB website, “our country is working to re-establish intensive and warm relations with our brotherly and kindred communities with whom we have been separated in the historical process, moved to distant geographies, and lived under the same roof at certain periods of history. Turkey continues its efforts to re-establish forgotten common values with a people-oriented approach towards the cognates, co-religionists, cognates and compatriots with a human-oriented approach” (YTB, 2022b).

**Diyanet, UIP & DİTİB.** The *Diyanet*, or the State Directorate for Religious Affairs, is an old institution created in 1924 by Atatürk to administrate and exercise control over religious affairs, sermons and education (Heinrich, 2018). Since the start of guest worker programs in the 1960s, the Turkish state has sought to ensure central control over the religious life of its diaspora. In 1984, the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DİTİB) was established to function as an umbrella organisation of Turkish Islamic associations in Europe. While nominally autonomous, the DİTİB is in practice under the control of the Diyanet, which thereby controls thousands of DİTİB mosques across Europe today, including about 900 in Germany, 200 in France, 150 in the Netherlands, 60 in Belgium and Austria, 40 in Switzerland, 30 in Denmark and at least nine in Sweden.

During the first decades of migration, Turkish and European governments shared a fear of Islamist radicalisation, which is why an agreement was reached on the deployment of Turkish imams to European mosques through the Diyanet, which would help ensure that radical Islamism would not proliferate in the Turkish diaspora (Cornell, 2017).

An initial issue with the deployment of these religious officials abroad was the failure to take into account the local contexts of the foreign countries they are sent to, as many of the officials sent do not speak the local language well and have little knowledge of the country they are sent to (Bruce, 2020). Aware of these shortcomings and the low levels of local legitimacy of these imams, in 2006 Ankara launched the International Divinity Programme (*Uluslararası İlahiyat Programı*, UIP) which aimed at facilitating the study of Islamic theology at Turkish educational institutions for diaspora Turks, thereby educating diaspora members to act as state-sanctioned religious officials in their own communities. The Diyanet explains the reason behind the program in two points: first, there is “the problem of maintaining and passing on

religion, language, and culture – the basic components of our civilisation – [that] comes to the fore with the integration our citizens living abroad,” an second is the mission to “enrich” the countries hosting diaspora Turks by providing “correct and authentic religious education for young generations” (Bruce, 2020).

The program is designed for diaspora members who are citizens of their host countries and have fulfilled their high school education abroad, provides them with a scholarship and facilitates further employment as diaspora imams for the Diyanet. Indeed, it actually refuses applicants who are Turkish citizens and graduates of Turkish high schools, and naturalisation as a Turkish citizen may lead to loss of the scholarship. In this way, Ankara ensures a source of loyal religious authority with the contextual local knowledge and skills required to be effective religious officials as well as agents of the state. It counts hundreds of students every year, with roughly half of the students coming from Germany.

The Diyanet has begun to favour using the term “our people” (*insanımız*) over “our citizens” (*vatandaşlarımız*) indicating a recognition of the fact that the diaspora is broad and may include non-citizens and other ethnicities (Bruce, 2020). However, the UIP is specifically designed as a program for Turkish Muslims in the diaspora, and does not include Muslims of other ethnicities. This is not done in any official measure, but the fact that the program is exclusively in Turkish and promoted through the network of the Diyanet and DİTİB, in practice excludes Kurdish or other communities.

In the more recent decades, Western European authorities have been wary of Turkish imams being sent to serve the diaspora, which they perceive as interference in domestic affairs. While the Diyanet previously served to combat Islamist radicalisation, since Erdoğan’s rise the institution has increasingly served to support the AKP’s ideology and policy, taking a

Islamist-nationalist line reflecting the Turkish governing coalition. In Germany, DİTİB imams have been accused of calling on worshippers to pray for a Turkish military victory against Kurds in Afrin (Fuchs, 2018).

As noted, the Islamist Milli Görüş movement, one of the major religious movements among the diaspora, was previously at odds with the Turkish government and treated as a challenger of the authority and legitimacy of the Turkish state. In the past decade, however, they have largely aligned with the AKP and they collaborate with the Diyanet: their former European chairman entered Turkish parliament as a member of the AKP in 2015 (Cornell, 2017). Meanwhile, Diyanet imams have also been involved in espionage and monitoring of Turkish citizens abroad, particularly of those suspected of ties to Kurdish nationalism or Gülenism, which may endanger the safety of these individuals when returning to Turkish territory, where arrests have often awaited (Winter, 2017).

**Union of International Democrats.** In 2004, under the direction of Erdoğan, the Union of European Turkish Democrats (UETD) was established in Cologne, Germany, as an umbrella organisation of Turkish associations across Europe, in practice gathering those loyal to the AKP (Cornell, 2017). At their 2018 general assembly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the name was changed to the Union of International Democrats (UID). Today, the UID has branches in 17 different countries, but their presence is strongest in Germany, where their seat lies (UID, 2022). The main purposes of the UID are listed as follows on their website: combating racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism; supporting young people with a migration background; urbanisation and integration; recognition of the right to dual citizenship; recognition of Islam as an official religion; the right to vote in local election; promotion of the participation of migrants;

multiculturalism in government offices, state institutions and bureaucracy; bilingual education (ibid.). The UID also has sub-organisations for women, youth and academics, organising events, conferences as well as cultural trips for diaspora members, visiting significant locations in the former Ottoman Empire (Alkan, 2019).

The UID is not formally affiliated with any political party, but has functioned as a lobby organisation for the AKP in Europe. It has been organising visits and campaign events by AKP politicians and affiliated figures in Europe and has been organising protests in Ankara's interests. Cases have also emerged of UID officials threatening and informing on Gülen supporters to the AKP, and of photographing participants at events relating to the Armenian genocide or opposition to the Turkish government in Switzerland, Germany and elsewhere (Swissinfo, 2017; Kenez, 2021). Since 2021, the leader of the UID has been Köksal Kuş, who is also a known Grey Wolves activist.

**Millî Görüş.** Millî Görüş is a religious-political movement that emerged in the early 1970s, after the publication of a manifesto of the same name by Turkish politician Necmettin Erbakan, who was notoriously anti-secular and anti-western. It inspired a number of Islamist political parties including the Virtue Party, found unconstitutional and banned in 2011 for violating Turkey's secular values. As a successor, claiming reformism and to abandon an Islamist agenda, Erdoğan's AKP grew out of the Virtue Party and the Millî Görüş movement.

Among the millions of Turkish origin workers abroad, who included many early Islamist activists who fled military rule, Millî Görüş rose to significant popularity. While organising in the diaspora began in the 1970s and organised structures appeared in the 1980s, it was in 1995 that the Islamic Community Millî Görüş (IGMG) was established in Cologne, as an umbrella for



Millî Görüş organisations across the world. Today, the IGMG is the most important Islamist organisation in Germany and perhaps the most important within the Turkish diaspora community, as well as an important civil society actor (DW, 2003). It gathers associations for youth, education, sports, culture, students and women. According to their website, they have 2,500 branches worldwide and in most European countries, 20,000 employees and 170,000 members, run 640 Mosques - 324 of which are in Germany - and service a community of more than 500,000 (IGMG, 2022). The German domestic intelligence agency estimates the number of actual followers at only 10,000 people (Verfassungsschutz, 2021)

Millî Görüş has historically been hostile towards the Turkish state, rejecting its secular Kemalist foundations, and was in turn considered dangerous by the pre-AKP Turkish governments. Since Erdoğan's rise to power, the movement has been rehabilitated and has largely aligned itself with the agenda of the AKP, lobbying with other Turkish-Islamic diaspora groups for the policy goals of Ankara. As mentioned previously, the former European chairman of Millî Görüş was elected as an AKP MP in 2015 (Cornell, 2017). The German branch in particular has become intimately associated with the Diyanet and Ankara. Through the YTB, they receive financial support from the Turkish government for their operations, the same imams are working both in Diyanet and Millî Görüş-run mosques, and the president of the Diyanet has featured at events organised by Millî Görüş (Frank, 2018). Essentially, with the politicisation of Islam by the current Turkish government, there is no longer need for great division between the Islamist movement and government institutions like the Diyanet.

Because the political Islamism of Millî Görüş was deemed unconstitutional the IGMG was for many years under observation by the German domestic intelligence agency. Since 2014-2015, however, the head of the Verfassungsschutz has publicly been questioned whether

this is necessary, for a lack of evidence of anti-democratic activities, and surveillance efforts have been greatly reduced (Dernbach, 2015).

**Grey Wolves.** Sympathisers of the far-right movement that emerged from the “Idealist Youth” (*Ülkücü Gençlik*), the youth wing of the Turkish MHP, usually call themselves “Idealists” (*Ülkücüler*) but are also known as the “Grey Wolves” (*Bozkurtlar*). As the militant wing of the pan-Turkist party, it has found fertile ground across the world from Azerbaijan and Xinjiang to Germany and France. However, the Grey Wolves are not a cohesive institution and the movement takes various forms in different countries. While the Azerbaijani affiliate is reportedly highly independent, the Cyprus branch is under much more direct control of the Turkish Grey Wolves (Counter Extremism Project). In Germany, Idealists are a greatly varied network of hundreds businesses, organisations and individuals, including the infamous Osmanen Germania biker gang, banned in 2018 for a number of violent crimes (Özçelik, 2021).

There is no official representative organisation for Turkish idealists in Europe, supporters organising instead under thousands of local clubs and associations under the umbrella of broad national organisations. In Germany, the estimation of the number of Grey Wolves lies between 10,000 and 18,500 and growing (Baumgärtner & Diehl, 2014; Bozay, 2017). They are assembled under three main organisations: the Federation of Turkish-Democrats Idealists' Associations (ADÜTDF), the Union of Turkish-Islamic Cultural Associations in Europe (ATİB) and the Association of Turkish Cultural Associations in Europe (ATB) (Müller, 2021). However, the three associations share close ties, and are not competitors - members freely attend the events of each other's groups (Bozay, 2017).

The ADÜTDF, also often known simply as Türk Federayson, was established in 1978 in

Frankfurt am Main, as a foreign affiliate of the MHP. It is the main representative umbrella organisation of Turkish Idealist associations in Germany, gathering at least 160 organisations and 7000 members (Verfassungsschutz, 2020). It is highly active in local politics and dialogues, as well as in local community projects, youth groups, etc (Feist & Klar, 2015). As the first and most important Idealist organisation in Germany, it has long been associated with violence, including many murders of political opponents in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, an effort has been made to make them seem more presentable, while reinforcing their ties to Turkey. For example, former ADÜTDF Chairman Cemal Çetin was subsequently elected MP of the MHP, and was part of the Turkish delegation at the NATO summit in July 2018, where he was photographed shaking hands with then-Chancellor Angela Merkel (Siefert, 2018).

Not to be confused with the ATİB Union, which is the Austrian equivalent of the German DİTİB, ATİB split from the ADÜTDF in 1987, gathering the more religiously oriented wing of Turkish Idealists in Germany. They claim a desire to distance the movement from the politics of Turkey with which they could no longer identify, while remaining adherent to the nationalist-Islamist ideology of the Idealist movement. Indeed they show greater autonomy and no direct dependence upon individuals or parties from Turkey, but close ties remain and high level meetings have taken place (Verfassungsschutz, 2020). ATİB is based in Cologne and claims to represent 123 associations, while domestic intelligence estimates around 20 associations and 2,300 members, though some sources claim many more (Feist & Klar, 2015).

They provide their own Imams and religious teachers to affiliated mosques, while also receiving Diyanet imams (Verfassungsschutz, 2020). ATİB's founder Musa Serdar Çelebi was previously the president of the ADÜTDF; he was also named as the individual who financed and armed the would-be assassin of Pope John Paul II in 1981, though he was ultimately acquitted

for lack of evidence (Sendker & Panning, 2021; Dobbs, 1986). ATİB are also a founding and leading member of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, one of the most influential Muslim organisations in Germany, which is often consulted by the government and is politically involved (Schindler, 2020).

The ATB was established in Frankfurt Am Main in 1992 as the German branch of the Turkish “Great Union Party” (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*, BBP). The BBP is a more religiously oriented offshoot of the MHP, and as such the ATB is similar to the ATİB in its greater focus on religious nationalism. The ATB is the smallest and least important of the three Idealist umbrella organisations, gathering only around 20 associations and an unknown number of members (Feist & Klar, 2015).

**Parties.** Two small German political parties have been established to represent the interest of the Turkish diaspora, working on one hand to mobilise the diaspora and shape public opinion, and acting on the other hand as a bridge between the diaspora and their host country (Göğüş, 2018). The Alliance for Innovation & Justice (*Bündnis für Innovation & Gerechtigkeit*, BIG) was established in 2010. While the party states to be completely independent from the AKP, there are a number of clear ties to the Turkish establishment. Nevzat Yalcintas, co-founder of the AKP and a highly regarded figure in Turkish politics, personally travelled to Berlin to campaign for BIG in local elections, and many leading figures of the party were previously high-ranking members of the UID (Popp, 2011). The party has campaigned on homophobia, the protection of children from “sexualisation in schools,” and more concretely calls for the permission of double citizenship, more generous family reunification policies, and the right for (non-EU) foreigners to vote in communal elections - a significant point, since the

majority of Turks in Germany currently cannot vote. It has also sought to attract other immigrant voters and boast of members from 21 different countries (Lachmann, 2011). It has a small presence in local governance.

The second party is the Alliance of German Democrats, which was established directly after the 2016 German parliamentary resolution recognising the Armenian genocide. Shortly after, party head Ramazan Akbaş sought to challenge the resolution at the German Constitutional Court, which was rejected, after which Akbaş took the matter to the European Court of Justice. On social media, Akbaş has also expressed enthusiastic support for the Grey Wolves, nationalism and adoration of Erdoğan, while disparaging or even calling for violence against Kurdish and Armenian political opponents (ANF News, 2021). It has been electorally unsuccessful.

### ***Russian Diaspora Policy & Legal Framework***

Mikhail Suslov, Russian historian and the University of Copenhagen, argues that the Russian political elite has never developed a consolidated and straightforward understanding of the Russian-speaking diaspora, who are perceived alternatively as saviours or traitors of Russia (2017). He identifies four stages of Russian diaspora policy from the early 1990s to the present, with an evolving understanding of Russian “compatriots abroad.”

Right after the fall of the USSR, roughly from 1991 to 1997 was a period of revanchist irredentism of the far right and Soviet revivalists in parliament, in powerful opposition to President Yeltsyn. This red-brown alliance constructed the category of ‘compatriots abroad’ in an inclusive imperial way, with the aim of using victimised Russian speakers in the ‘near abroad’

as a way to rebuild Soviet influence. This strategy and rhetoric was first used in the context of the Transnistria conflict, in which Russian forces were involved in support of Transnistrian independence from Moldova, in the name of defending Russian residents.

The decisive period for the formation of Russian compatriot policies was between 1998 and 2003, when Vladimir Putin rose to become prime minister and president. During this time, the importance of protecting Russians in the ‘near abroad’ was somewhat downplayed in favour of a more liberal and global approach, seeking to construct a business-oriented network based on, in Putin’s words, the principles of mutually beneficial partnership in economy and culture (Kremlin, 2001).

Between 2004 and 2011, the diaspora policy was further institutionalised and centralised under the administration of the president and the influence of Kremlin ideologue Vladimir Surkov, empowered by the establishment of the *Russkiy Mir* foundation and the *Rossotrudnichestvo* agency, and impacted by the Russian leadership’s more defensive-aggressive position after the 2004 Ukrainian “Orange Revolution.” Suslov argues that Russia’s compatriot policy shifted to suppress the elements of equal partnership to increasingly serve as a soft power instrument against the West (2017). Furthermore, a 2010 amendment to the federal law on compatriots emphasised for the first time the compatriots’ historical, cultural, ethnic and spiritual bonds with Russia, thereby turning away from an imperial, citizenship-bound conception of compatriots while introducing a more ethno-cultural conception. Significantly, this change had the effect of excluding descendants from Central Asia, despite their Soviet heritage.

Finally, between 2012 and 2016 - and in particular since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ensuing war in east Ukraine - a sharp conservative and nationalist turn significantly affected diaspora policy. It evolved to become aligned with the nation-state policy of “hardening

of the borders” while mobilising the Russian diaspora in the ‘near abroad,’ which contributed critically to the annexation of Crimea and pro-Russian insurgency in the Donbas. It is also during this period that the concept of the “Russian World” comes to the forefront as a distinctive civilisation with a territorial grounding, in opposition to the West. As such, Suslov argues, for Moscow the importance of the diaspora in the “far abroad” is giving way to the diaspora in the “near abroad,” even with tendencies of hostility towards the former group who “fled” Russia as opposed to the latter group, who were unjustly separated from their motherland (2020). The overarching goal during this phase is the reunification of the “Russian world” and the instrumentalisation of the diaspora in the near abroad to reassert Russia’s global influence.

Similarly to the way Turkey sometimes refers broadly to its diaspora of “kin communities,” Russia often uses the term “compatriots,” which includes not only Russian citizens abroad, but also former Soviet citizens and residents, Russian-origin immigrants from the Soviet Union or the Russian Federation, descendants of compatriots or even foreign citizens who admire Russian culture and language. The difference is the manner in which Moscow has enshrined the concept into law, and defining it broadly but precisely, while it is only visible in Turkish rhetoric and policy, but not in law.

As defined by the 1999 Federal Act No. 99-FZ on State policy respecting Russian citizens abroad, amended multiple times since, the term “compatriot” (in Russian *sootechestvennik* or “together with fatherland”) offers a much broader conception of belonging than categories of citizenship or ethnicity (Kremlin, 2022). Indeed, according to the law, the concept of compatriots may be so broad as to include anyone with either Russian or Soviet ancestry and who identify with Russian culture, or people who simply choose to make a connection with the Russian federation. The law defines compatriots as:

“persons born in one state, residing or having resided in it and possessing features of common language, history, cultural heritage, traditions and customs, as well as descendants of these persons in the direct descending line; citizens of the Russian Federation who permanently reside outside the territory of the Russian Federation; persons and their descendants residing outside the territory of the Russian Federation and belonging, as a rule, to the peoples historically residing in the Russian Federation, as well as persons who have made a free choice in favour of a spiritual, cultural and legal connection with the Russian Federation, whose relatives in direct ascending line previously resided in the Russian Federation, including: persons who were citizens of the USSR, resided in the states that were part of the USSR, obtained citizenship of these states, or became stateless persons; descendants (emigrants) from the Russian state, the Russian Republic, the RSFSR, the USSR, and the Russian Federation, who had the appropriate citizenship and became citizens of a foreign state or stateless persons.”

The recognition of someone’s belonging to compatriots, according to the law, “*is an act of their self-identification supported by public or professional activities aimed at preserving the Russian language and native languages of peoples of the Russian Federation, development of Russian culture abroad, strengthening friendly relations of states where compatriots reside with the Russian Federation, support for public associations of compatriots and protection of compatriot rights or other evidence of compatriot rights.*”

This broad conception of belonging thereby places Russian citizens in line with people who have no actual legal connection to the Russian Federation; it constructs a form of connection and belonging that is based on personal affiliation to the Russian group and culture,



which is particularly highlighted by the inclusion of “persons who have made a free choice in favour of a [...] connection with the Russian Federation” through an act of “self-identification” (ibid.). Russian law gives Moscow the responsibility to protect the rights not only of citizens or ethnic Russians living abroad, but also peoples of other ethnicities and backgrounds who fall under the category of compatriots.

This formulation enables the Russian Federation to pursue what has been described as a policy of “external homeland nationalism” (Smith, 2020), by which populations beyond Russian borders and who do not hold Russian citizenship have been courted by Moscow as compatriots. These communities have sometimes been offered Russian passports and financial support in order to obtain goodwill and loyalty, which in return provides Moscow with legal justification to extend their protection, support and legitimate authority in defence of these compatriots.

The general provisions of the 2016 Russian Foreign Policy Concept state a central objective of Russia’s foreign policy to be “to ensure comprehensive, effective protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots residing abroad, including within various international frameworks” (MID, 2016). Article 45 states that the objectives of Russian foreign policy include:

“to protect rights and legitimate interests of compatriots living abroad subject to international law and international treaties concluded by the Russian Federation, while recognising the significant contribution by compatriots to preserving and promoting the Russian language and culture;” and “to further the consolidation of compatriots living abroad so as to enable them to better realise their rights in the countries of residence, and to facilitate the preservation of the Russian diaspora’s identity and its ties with the historical homeland, as well as voluntary relocation of compatriots to the Russian

Federation” (ibid.).

An additional objective is “to promote the learning and wider use of the Russian language as an integral part of the global culture and as an instrument of international and inter-ethnic communication, to sustain and develop the network of Russian educational institutions abroad, and to support foreign branches and representative offices of Russian educational institutions” (ibid.). Finally, the 2000 National Security Concept states that Russian foreign policy must be aimed at “protecting the lawful rights and interests of Russian citizens abroad, particularly with the use of political, economic and other measures for these purposes” (MID, 2000).

In June 2021, two laws were submitted to the State Duma of the Russian Federation, to be implemented in 2022 (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 2022). The first is draft law No. 1191989-7 “On repatriation to the Russian Federation,” introduced by state deputy Konstantin Zatulin, which aims at determining the conditions and procedure for the return of compatriots abroad for permanent residence in the Russian Federation in the order of repatriation (Duma, 2021a).

The law provides compatriots with a right to return to their “historic homeland” and simplifies procedures. It states that it aims to support compatriots abroad by protecting their interests, preventing their assimilation and preserving their Russian identity, primarily in “states whose laws and practices create problems for [...] the national rights and interests of Russian compatriots” (Duma, 2021a; Darieva & Gieseemann, 2021). It provides two criteria to secure the right to repatriation to Russia: compliance with the definition of compatriot as specified in paragraph 3 of Article 1 of the Federal Law “On State Policy of the Russian Federation in Relation to Compatriots Abroad,” and usage of Russian language, though previously stricter language criteria have been removed (Duma, 2021a).

It amends this law by introducing a new definition of “compatriot,” according to which

compatriots are people who belong to nations historically living on Russian territory and those whose direct ancestors were born or lived in the Russian Federation, thereby taking into account the generation of compatriots who did not have Soviet citizenship, but also including those territories who were part of the pre-Soviet Russian Empire (which would include modern Finland, for example). It further outlines the procedures, rights and obligations involved in the process of seeking repatriation.

The second law, submitted by President Putin, is draft law No. 49269-8 “On Citizenship of the Russian Federation” (Duma, 2021b). It aims at ensuring the consistent implementation of the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2019-2025 and greatly simplifies the requirements for acquiring Russian citizenship for those communities falling under the definition of compatriots. It primarily aims at facilitating the granting of citizenship to people who already live in Russia, but bears implications for compatriots abroad as well.

According to the law, any citizens of the former USSR and their descendants, or those with close relatives who are Russian citizens are entitled to simplified procedures for acquiring citizenship. Furthermore, direct descendants of residents of the Russian Empire or of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, are also granted simplified procedures, in addition to being exempt from any Russian language proficiency stipulations.

This broadening of the concept of compatriot would potentially expand the number of people who could be eligible for citizenship to tens of millions of people. The law also empowers the President to provide by decree simplified acquisition of Russian citizenship for certain communities (specifically naming citizens of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Kazakhstan), “not only for humanitarian purposes but also for any other purposes” (Duma, 2021b).

### *Russian Diaspora Institutions*

The following are a list of the most notable groups and institutions that have played a role in Russian policy toward its diaspora in Germany. It is not exhaustive: other associations have been short-lived or insignificant, are not specifically diaspora-oriented, or have remained largely political. Many Russian-oriented, artistic, cultural, research or educational institutions have remained independent from Moscow, and in particular since the Russian invasion of Ukraine have taken distance or kept a low profile.

The German-Russian forum, which strived for inter-societal dialogue and organised youth exchanges, has extensively collaborated with the Russian government in the past but denounced the Russian invasion and have currently frozen their activities (Deutsch-Russischen Forums, 2022). Religious officials from the Russian Orthodox Church in Germany have struggled with the situation: Archbishop Tikhon of Berlin and Germany, does not distance himself from the Moscow Patriarchate he serves under and appeared next to the Russian ambassador during WWII commemorations, but at the same time called to help Ukrainian refugees and has avoided commenting on politics (Buch, 2022; Lüdeke, 2022). Meanwhile, the major institutions and organisations representing Russia Germans in Germany emphasise their independence from Moscow (Dornblüth & Franke, 2018).

**Russkiy Mir.** An important institution dealing with diaspora affairs is the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Russian World), a GONGO that assists the Kremlin in developing its diaspora policy and is engaged in public diplomacy. It is a joint project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

and the Ministry of Education and Science, and operates hundreds of Russian centres around the world, of which 34 in the EU and five in Germany, which hosts the highest number of Russian centres after Ukraine (Russkiy Mir, 2022). Its primary task is the financing of projects abroad: the official objectives of the foundation are the promotion of Russian language instruction, showcase Russian culture, art and history to the world, and reconnect the Russian diaspora with their homeland by establishing strong ties, supporting cultural programs and exchanges, as well as repatriation (Sencerman, 2018). At the time of writing, reports indicate that the foundation has been added to an EU blacklist that will be implemented soon, in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Rettman, 2022).

**Rossotrudnichestvo.** Another important institution is the *Rossotrudnichestvo* or the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Cultural Cooperation, which was established in 2008 by then President Dmitry Medvedev as a way to advance Russia's interests. It operates under the jurisdiction of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This agency is primarily responsible for the administration of foreign aid and cultural exchange and mainly operates in the Commonwealth of Independent States (encompassing Eastern European and Asian post-Soviet states), but holds offices and is active across Europe as well (RWP, 2022). It serves at the point of coordination for regional and local-level Compatriot Coordination Councils, is tasked with defending compatriot interests and with a broad range of public diplomacy initiatives (Williams, 2020).

**All-Germany Coordination Council of Compatriots.** The All-Germany Coordination Council of Compatriots (OKC) was established by diaspora members at a

compatriot conference in Nuremberg in 2007, in response to the appeal by the Russian government and with its support. It is organised under the umbrella of the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad, which has chapters in most countries of the world and serves to represent diaspora members in Russia (MID, 2009). According to their regulations, the OKC aims to represent the interests of compatriots and Russian speakers to German and Russian institutions, support and promote Russian culture and language, and facilitate joint projects with Russian civil society (ibid.). It has subdivisions and assets in most federal states in Germany and gathers educational, cultural, professional, youth and veteran associations (Calugher, 2019).

Notably, its responsibilities also include regular communications with the Russian “Governmental Commission on Affairs of Compatriots abroad, the Department for Work with Compatriots of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, and other interested state, political and public structures of the Russian Federation, Moscow and regions of Russian Federation, and also with public institutions of the Russian Federation in Germany (OKC, 2010). Other important services provided by the OKC are the facilitation of repatriation to Russia, and the provision of legal advice in Germany.

While the OKC generally avoids expressing itself on politically sensitive topics, has been running a very active news site named *Russkoe Pole*, which exclusively publishes information and content in support of Moscow and its foreign policy. It was noted for sharing disinformation in the Lisa F. Case, while the Deputy Chair, Vera Tatarnikova, has criticised a “negative information background” and “instances of Russophobia” in the German media (Stratievski, 2018).

**Die Einheit - Attempted political party.** Established in 2013 in Cologne as Aussiedler and Migrants Party Germany – EINHEIT (“Aussiedler und Migranten Partei Deutschland – EINHEIT”). They participated in local and regional elections in 2014 and 2016, but did not receive enough votes to achieve a mandate (Goble, 2015). It has since stopped activities, while not being officially dissolved. The chairman of the party, Dmitry Rempel, has stated that “it is possible to say that we support Russia’s position on many issues – Ukraine, opposition to the rewriting of history, and opposition to the growth of nationalist attitudes here in Europe. Here we are allies and ready to support Russia in these areas” (Vankov, 2015). He further added that the party does not expect financial help from Russia, as this would be regarded as interference by German authorities, but that it is closely linked with Russian businessmen and social movements. Rempel has regularly appeared in Russian media, parliament and political debates, acting as a representative of the diaspora in Germany. The party had a broad agenda and advocated for the abolition of temporary employment firms, the facilitation of family reunification, the abolition of sex education in primary grades and the obligatory study of the history of German immigrants in the school curriculum.

## **Political Activities, Attitudes & Diaspora Extremism**

### ***Elections in the Turkish Diaspora***

The extension of the right to vote in Turkish elections from abroad was first granted to the diaspora for the 2014 presidential elections, before which citizens abroad had to travel to Turkey to participate. Examining the behaviour of Turkish diaspora members as early as 2003, before they obtained the right to vote, Østergaard-Nielsen argues that Turkish diaspora members who at that time travelled to Turkey to vote primarily did so for religious and nationalist parties (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Sevi et al. (2019) further argue that it is therefore likely that the ruling nationalist-Islamist AKP party extended the emigrant voting rights with the expectation that it would benefit them and their allies with votes; the over three million Turkish citizens in the diaspora represents the third largest voter constituency after Istanbul and Ankara, and is therefore serves the AKP to facilitate their vote, given their voting record (Sevi et al., 2019; Cornell, 2017).

A public opinion survey of around 2500 members of Turkish diaspora communities in France, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands was performed between 2019 and 2020 (Hoffman, Makovsky & Werz, 2020). For the overall results, there is a margin of error of 2%, while for the German sample the margin of error is 2.9%. Of the Turkish citizens in the survey who were eligible to vote (65% of the total sample), 56% stated that they voted in the 2018 Turkish elections, while 39% said they did not, with an insignificant 2% variation among the four countries. In comparison, participation rates in Turkey are consistently high, with turnout



rarely lower than 80% (Gumuscu, 2019).

Of those who voted in the diaspora, 51% voted for the AKP while 30% voted for the CHP and 10% for the HDP (Hoffman, Makovsky & Werz, 2020). However, the results varied significantly by country, with the AKP reaching 64% in Austria while the CHP won with 39% over the AKP's 37% in France. Overall, Erdoğan and the AKP were more popular in Germany and Austria than in France and the Netherlands, where the diaspora includes a greater number of Kurds, is more educated and generally more liberal. The researchers note that while the ultranationalist MHP and its breakaway nationalist İyi Party have the support of more than 20% of the Turkish population, they are represented by less than half of this in this survey, marking a significant departure from the Turkish context and challenges the widespread attention garnered by the Grey Wolves in Europe.

Sevi et al. (2019) also examined turnout and vote choice among the three million strong Turkish voting diaspora in Turkish elections from 2014 to 2018, of which about half of the electorate lives in Germany. They found that while turnout in the diaspora is low it tends to strongly favour the AKP but also the pro-Kurdish HDP, which only holds around 11.7% of the domestic Turkish vote.

During the 2018 Turkish parliamentary election, there were 1,436,629 eligible voters residing in Germany, of whom 46.03% participated in the election, 10% less than the self-reported participation rates in the survey by Hoffman, Makovsky & Werz (2020). 55.69% of voters in Germany voted for the AKP, 14.78% for the pro-Kurdish HDP and 15.55% for the pro-Kurdish CHP (Sevi et al., 2019). The ultra-nationalist MHP and its splinter İyi Party received 8.39 and 3.35% respectively. The voter turnout was similar or lower in most of Europe, except for Belgium (53.84%), Austria (50.05%) and Switzerland (51.37%).

Adar (2020) performed a study examining voting behaviour in more detail. He found that for the majority of diaspora supporters of the AKP and Erdoğan in Germany, there are both emotional and material factors involved. He argues that socioeconomic changes and improvements in the quality of state institutions both in Turkey and in Germany have improved the image of the Turkish government. He further underlines the feeling of pride of a “strong Turkey” as a significant factor behind diaspora support for the AKP. Another significant factor is the fear of loss of social and political achievements.

Examining voting behaviour of the diaspora in Turkish elections, Adar found that the political participation of Turkish voters in Germany increased significantly since first allowed to participate from abroad: 18.93% voted in the 2014 presidential elections, 33.40% voted in the June 2015 Parliamentary elections, 39.80% voted in the November 2015 parliamentary elections, 45.84% voted in the 2017 constitutional referendum and 45.70% voted in the June 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections. In all three parliamentary elections, both the AKP and the HDP performed better in Germany than in Turkey. During the 2015 parliamentary elections, the AKP benefited strongly from the diaspora vote, which granted the party three additional seats in parliament (pp. 19).

Adar argues that, because Ankara’s interest in the diaspora is tied to foreign and domestic policy ambitions, the Turkish government will likely stick by its current diaspora policy, particularly since in the context of the current Turkish economic crisis, remittances from the diaspora could regain in importance (ibid.). He concludes that it is of crucial importance to distinguish between Turkish government efforts to instrumentalise their diaspora for their own policy goals on one side, and the legitimate demands of migrants for their interests to be accounted for and to enable their political participation and equality.

### *Political Attitudes & Extremism in the Turkish Diaspora*

Turks in Europe began to seriously participate in local and national politics in the 2000s and have since become important players. In 2001 in France, only four Turks had been elected as municipal councillors; in 2008 this number had risen to 107 and by 2020 it had doubled again (Arkilic, 2020a; Hurriyet, 2014). According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, in Germany there are currently three members of the European Parliament, 16 members of the German Federal Parliament, 48 members of State Parliament and 423 members of Municipality Councils who are of Turkish descent (MFA, 2022). Aydan Özoğuz became the first German minister of Turkish descent in 2009 and Cem Özdemir, also Turkish, was the co-chair of the German Green Party between 2008 and 2018. Özdemir and Özoğuz and have not refrained from criticising the Turkish government; both were among the 11 Turkish-German MPs supporting the 2016 German parliamentary motion recognising the Armenian genocide (Arkilic, 2020a). In response, Erdoğan denounced the politicians as traitors whose blood should be tested to see “what kind of Turks they are,” and an inundation of death threats led the MPs to be placed under police protection (Brady, 2016).

However, there are other Turkish-European politicians who have been found to have extensive links to the powers in Ankara, or to Turkish ultranationalism. The most famous case has been Mehmet Kaplan, a Swedish Green Party politician who became Minister for Housing in 2014, was forced to resign in 2016 when it was revealed that he had connections to leaders of the Swedish sections of the Grey Wolves, the Islamist Millî Görüş and other extremist organisations and regularly met with AKP representatives (Henley, 2016; Jönsson, Lundström & Dahlin,

2016). There has been a significant effort by Idealist diaspora members to participate in local German politics, which has led to situations such as the rejection by a local integration council of a resolution against the Grey Wolves, or the exposure of a 14-year-long CDU member for being an active member of the far-right group. Turkish-German CDU politician and MP Serap Güler, close to leading CDU politician Armin Laschet, while not accused of ultranationalism, caused public anger by participating in a number of events featuring, or organised by the Idealist-affiliated diaspora actors (Stoldt, 2012). Idealist-sympathising politicians usually distance themselves from the use of violence: their purpose is to influence German politics on topics such as the Armenian genocide or German policy towards the PKK, and thereby strengthen Turkish nationalism.

As the Turkish-origin voting bloc in Europe has increased, Ankara has also sought to mobilise the diaspora so that it can, as an electoral force, reward or punish European leaders according to the desires of the Turkish government as well support the AKP domestically (Cornell, 2017; Houtkamp & de Bruijne, 2021). While the diaspora turnout is low, it favours Erdoğan significantly and has helped him secure victories at the 2017 referendum and other important votes. (ibid.). The UID, the AKP-aligned umbrella organisation of Turkish diaspora groups, has been instrumental in organising large rallies with tens of thousands of European Turks, featuring leading AKP politicians. These rallies have often been met with opposition rallies in response, and a number of them were cancelled or condemned by various European countries, leading to diplomatic incidents when attempts were made by Turkish officials to violate the bans (Deutsche Welle, 2017, Arkilic, 2021).

As previously mentioned, a public opinion survey of around 2500 Turkish diaspora members in France, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands was done between 2019 and 2020

(Hoffman, Makovsky & Werz, 2020). The majority of respondents (1,064) were from Germany while there were around 400 respondents each from France, Austria and the Netherlands, accounting for the greater size of the Turkish-German diaspora. Around 6% of respondents primarily self-identified as Kurds, while 72% of respondents identified primarily as Turks and very few respondents identifying primarily as a member of their country of residence - with only the French diaspora having a significant minority identifying primarily as French. Around 60% were born in Turkey, and respondents had lived in their current country for an average of 27.5 years. 43% of respondents held only Turkish citizenship, while 33% held only host country citizenship and 22% held dual citizenship.

Respondents felt strongly about the importance of their Turkish or German identity, the importance of maintaining tradition and passing them on to the new generation, and slightly less strongly about their religion. Rating the importance of these issues on a scale of 1 to 10, respondents overall rated their significance at 8.7, 8.57 and 7.84, respectively. The importance of their host country identity was rated lowest at 5.92 overall and 5.37 in Germany. Religion was deemed more important in Germany (8.23) and in Austria (8.59) than in the Netherlands (7.92) and France (6.20).

Overall, the research showed the Turkish diaspora to lean toward European centre-left politicians, with the popular outliers being Angela Merkel (assumedly because of her pro-refugee stance and long working relationship with Erdoğan) and Turkish-born Tunahan Kuzu from the Denk party, a Dutch pro-immigrant party led by Turkish-Dutch politicians. The leftward sympathies are more easily explained by its minority-friendly and pro-immigrant stances than by its social progressiveness, given the overall more conservative attitudes of respondents. When asked which European political party most respects their community, however, up to half of

respondents either declined to answer or answered “none”; in Germany, the combination of “no answer” and “none” reached 49%, with only France higher at 51%. When asked to what extent they agreed that they feel politically represented in their country, the average score was 4.09 out of 10 (4.18 in Germany); the rate of self-reported political participation in their country was 3.96 (3.12 in Germany).

Respondents also felt that relations between their host country and Turkey affected the way the diaspora was treated, with an average weight of 7.35; German Turks felt this strongest, with a weight of 7.91. All respondents agree that their host country should be more supportive of Turkey and Turkish interests, with a weight of 7.64 (7.72 in Germany and 8.51 in Austria). Most respondents were happy to live where they were (weight of 7.68) and fewer would be happier living in Turkey (5.57). The study also found that 68% of German-based respondents planned on staying in the future while 24.4% expressed a desire to return to Turkey in the future. It is notable that the portion of the German Turkish diaspora desiring to return to Turkey is slightly higher than in the three other countries.

Asked about their favorability toward various Turkish political figures, respondents’s attitudes towards Erdoğan were polarised with a favorability score of 5.46. Asked to what degree they agreed that he cares about the welfare of Turks in their current country, respondents agreed with a weight of 5.32 out of 10. The researchers noted that the level of Kurdishness and of education tended to negatively correlate with support for the Turkish president. He was also favoured by older respondents as opposed to younger ones. Meanwhile, about half of the Kurdish respondents stated favourable attitudes toward PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.

The majority of respondents agreed with Erdoğan’s statement that Turks in Europe should “integrate but not assimilate” (weight of 6.63/10) while a smaller majority agreed that it is

important for the Turkish diaspora to defend Turkey's policies. However, very few reported feeling pressured either by their community (weight of 2.04) or by the Turkish government (weight of 1.78) to support Turkish government policies; in Germany specifically, these numbers fall to 1.97 and 1.72 respectively.

According to research on the Turkish diaspora in Germany by Goerres, Spies & Mayer (2018), the vast majority of dual citizens (78%) and even more diaspora members with German citizenship (84%) were opposed to the 2017 constitutional referendum. This is significant because the Turkish diaspora overall were in favour of the constitutional referendum (51%), in particular Turkish citizens living in Germany (63%).

Strong feelings of alienation remain, in particular in Germany and Austria, and a very low self-reported rate of political participation. Diaspora members feel politically unrepresented, but vote for centre-left parties because of their positive attitude towards minorities and immigrants. Erdoğan himself is a highly polarising figure in the diaspora and is least popular among the younger generations, more educated classes and ethnic Kurds. There is a widespread sense of patriotism towards Turkey and a feeling of responsibility to defend their country, policies and culture; meanwhile the survey shows no significant pressure on diaspora members to support Turkish government policies, whether by their community or by Ankara. It is also noteworthy that diaspora members with German citizenship are better integrated, more politically active in Germany and are significantly less positive towards Erdoğan than those who do not.

As has been established time upon time, political alienation and feelings of discrimination are a vector for radicalisation. The Turkish far-right landscape in the diaspora spans from Islamism (mainly represented by Millî Görüş, though its qualification as extremist is

questioned) to pan-Turkic nationalism (mainly represented by the Grey Wolves/Idealists). However, the dominant trend is a blend of nationalism and Islamism: Millî Görüş is a Turkish-specific Islamism movement, while the Idealists blend Islam with ethnic nationalism (though some strands of Idealism and Turkish ultranationalism are more secular), and both are closely tied to the ideological project led by Erdoğan.

Estimates about the membership of the Grey Wolves in Germany vary between 11,000 and 18,500 and growing, spread over the three umbrella organisations of the ADÜTDF, ATIB and ATB (Baumgärtner & Diehl, 2014; Bozay, 2017). According to Bozay, the number of members is more than three times larger than the far-right German National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) (Bozay, 2017). In comparison, the right-wing populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has a membership of around 34,800 (Statista, 2022). The right-wing extremist scene in the Turkish diaspora is broader than simply the Grey Wolves, however, while it is also fluid, with many movements connected to each other ideologically and in practice, across the spectrum from Islamism to ethnic ultranationalism. Associated with the Grey Wolves are also the now banned ultranationalist Idealist-oriented biker gangs and “rock clubs” Osmanen Germania, Turkos MC and Turan, who have been involved in the organisation or protection of Turkish nationalist protests (Bozay & Mangitay, 2017). Such associations are often ephemeral, members circulating between short-lived clubs that reappear under new forms and structures.

The topic of Turkish extremism in Europe is one that enjoys wide consensus across the European Union: blamed for sedition, violence and hate speech, there have been calls and measures to curtail or ban the Grey Wolves movement in particular in many countries, and Millî Görüş has long been under surveillance by German domestic intelligence. Things were different in the past: it is only with the rise of the AKP that these movements have gone from dissident



actors to becoming aligned with authorities in Ankara. Furthermore, the relationship between Turkish right-wing extremists and the German political elite was not always as antagonistic: then leader of the CSU Franz-Joseph Strauß had friendly relations with MHP leader Türkes, and the establishment of the ADÜTDF in 1978 was actively facilitated by leading members of the CDU/CSU, who were attracted by the virulent anticommunism of the Grey Wolves (Feist & Klar, 2015). Only two years later, Turkish communist Celalettin Kesim was murdered in the streets of Berlin by Idealists.

There has for decades been a decisive will to make the Idealists politically influential in German politics. As far back as in 1996, MHP leader Türkes called upon his followers in Germany to join the CDU, in order to increase their influence. A prominent example is Zafer Topak, who was expelled from the party in 2017 for being an active Grey Wolves activist (Dangeleit, 2021). He had been a member of the CDU since 2001, held leading local positions and was a member of the local integration council, and his Idealist affiliations had been reported in the media for many years (Feist & Klar, 2015). Topak claimed that that there remained a great number of active Idealist activists in the party who were not expelled, and that he has been told by party superiors that there would be no conflict between his membership in the CDU and his involvement in the Grey Wolves, as long as the latter remained discreet (Dangeleit, 2021). There have been a number of cases of Idealist activists in other parties, such as the SDP or the Greens, as well as within the police and military.

Since the alignment between the AKP and the MHP, the Idealists have also increasingly been introduced into Ankara-controlled institutions. The pro-AKP European lobby organisation UID, which is particularly active in Germany, has been led since January 2021 by Köksal Kuş, a Grey Wolves activist (Pfahler, 2021). Similarly, there are Idealists working as functionaries

within the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DİTİB), which controls thousands of mosques across Europe and at least 600 in Germany (Elger, 2022). Since long before its alignment with the AKP, however, there have been deep and well-documented ties between the Idealists and the Turkish state intelligence, the MIT, including documented collaboration with Idealists in Germany (Dangeleit, 2021). The main point of reference remains the conflict between the state and the PKK.

Grey Wolves have been vocal, visible and aggressive: members have been involved in violent attacks upon Armenians in France and Kurdish protesters in Austria, and many acts of intimidation and threats. Following a number of anti-Armenian demonstrations, incitement of violence, the defacement of Armenian genocide memorial and the organisation of combat training camps, the Grey Wolves were banned in France in November 2020 (Keddie, 2020). In Austria, the hand gesture used by the Grey Wolves was banned in 2019 under the 2014 Symbol Act, which also bans symbols associated with ISIS, al-Qaeda, the Croatian Ustaša and the PKK, among others (Kiyagan, 2019). The European Parliament has several times adopted reports recommending that the movement be labelled as a terrorist organisation and be banned.

According to German domestic intelligence, Idealist organisations are keen to convey a public image of moderateness, and cultivate their extremist views chiefly internally. The associations organise social and cultural activities, serve the community and work with the youth. The radicalism becomes visible in more unorganised contexts, such as targeted harassment, propaganda and racism on social media, street violence against political opponents, clashes during protests or vandalism (Verfassungsschutz, 2021). Generally, older generations are more politically oriented, participate in local politics and run the “respectable” institutions while it is the younger generations that engage in street-level protests, intimidation (online and

physical) and violence against opponents. According to domestic intelligence, the Turkish Idealist scene is widely unstructured or organised in transitory organisations, but “shows an almost completely unconditional loyalty with the Turkish state and its current leadership” (ibid.).

### *Elections in the Russian Diaspora*

The previously mentioned research by Goerres, Spies & Mayer (2018) from the University of Duisburg-Essen, who surveyed 500 Turkish Germans and 500 Russia Germans for interviews on their political attitudes and voting behaviour, led to four main findings concerning Russia Germans. First was the fact that in German elections, Russia German electoral participation is lower than both the Turkish German population (58% and 64% respectively) and the population at large (76.2%), despite the general higher level of education of Russia Germans that would usually correlate with greater political participation. Second was the fact that a plurality of Russia Germans (27%) support the CDU/CSU. Third, after the CDU/CSU, the preferred choice for Russia Germans (21%, as opposed to 9.24% among the general population) is Die Linke (the Left), the successor party to the ruling party of the former German Democratic Republic, which has sought positive relations with Russia. Finally, while Russia Germans vote for the AfD at a higher rate than the overall population, this difference is not very significant (15% among Russia Germans compared to 12.64% overall). Indeed, Goerres stated himself in an interview that the notion of the AfD being the party of Russia Germans was a “classic media hype” (Beitzer, 2018). A final noteworthy finding from the survey was that 60% of Russia Germans supported while 40% opposed the actions of the Russian government in the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

As a point of comparison, according to survey data on voting intent from 2001 and 2002, 73% of German citizens from the former USSR supported the CDU/CSU and 42% supported the SPD (Wüst, 2003).

Hansen & Olsen (2020) used the same data to argue that while Russia Germans voted for the AfD in relatively large numbers when compared to the overall population, the main predictor of preference for the AfD was not political ideology, but simply hostility towards economic and political refugees. Traditionally, Russia Germans have shown a very high level of support for the CDU because of the party's past efforts of repatriating the Aussiedler community, conflicting with the expectation of immigrant voters preferring left-wing parties (Bird, Saalfeld & Wüst, 2011). There has been a significant decline in loyalty to the CDU over time and there are indications that this trend is accelerating; whether the changes favour the AfD or die Linke is uncertain.

Goerres et al. (2018) noted that there were certain visible actions during the 2017 Bundestag elections that sought to directly target Russia Germans. The CDU introduced a party network for resettlers within the party as well as a rise in pension payments for resettlers who had begun paying into the German system late in their working lives. Die Linke included in their program the wish to end sanctions on Russia tied to the Crimean annexation. The AfD included these same aims in their program, and as the only German party consistently and visibly sought to target Russia Germans with a campaign of Russian-language election posters and social media campaigns in Russian, and translated the entire program into Russian. They also nominated six Russia German candidates and specifically avoided referring to them as immigrants, stating that they be considered ethnic Germans.

According to a Washington Post analysis of data from the Russian Central Electoral

Commission, the levels of support for Putin surged in the 2018 Russian election among citizens voting in NATO member countries, with a total of 129,231 votes cast for Putin, an increase of 47% from the 87,681 votes he obtained in the previous 2012 election (Troianovski & Bodner, 2018). The western rise in the pro-Putin vote is about double the rate in the overall elections, which saw an increase by about 24% in the Pro-Putin vote since 2012. Germany saw one of the greatest surges in popularity for Putin, where the vote for Putin increased by 153% from 10,883 votes in 2012, (representing 51% of votes in Germany), to 27,503 in 2018 (82% of votes). Even greater surges were seen in Denmark (202%), Turkey (193%), Spain (187%) and Italy (170%), though the electorates are much smaller.

The Russian opposition movement campaigned for a boycott of the 2018 elections and the anti-Putin section of the western diaspora largely stayed at home, while the pro-Putin vote was energised by the perceived ‘Russophobia’ of the West and the efforts by the Kremlin to mobilise their supporters abroad (ibid.). In Germany, it appears that a comprehensive campaign was organised by the embassy and diaspora organisations (Russian and Russian-Jewish) to mobilise and facilitate the vote, including by organising transport to the polls from far away areas. This campaign was a resounding success and many voters participated in the elections for the first time since emigrating.

### ***Political Attitudes & Extremism in the Russian Diaspora***

The Russia German community in Germany has been largely considered apolitical until relatively recently. Between 1.5 and 2.4 million Russia Germans and their descendants are entitled to vote in Germany, making them the biggest group of immigrant voters in Germany

today (while there are around 3 million Turks, only around half are German citizens) (Goerres et al., 2020). Many among this diaspora felt abandoned by the German state after arrival, with little support for their integration and development as a community. Little attention was given to these communities by mainstream political parties, which left a space to be filled.

Since 2015, much attention has been given to the supposedly strong support for the far right, anti-immigrant AfD party among the Russian diaspora. It is certainly true that there has been a stream of xenophobia, islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment among the Russian-speaking community in Germany, which has been instrumentalised by Moscow to increase uncertainty and undermine the German government. Disinformation campaigns have been Moscow's main tool in this instrumentalisation

Among parts of the Russia German community, a sentiment of injustice has spread. Observing the influx of mostly middle-eastern refugees, obtaining state aid and support, and in the context of tensions regarding the behaviour of many migrants toward societal standard and women in particular, many resettlers hold that resettlers received much less support upon arrival and that the level of generosity, support and ease of immigration for refugees is unfair.

Since the 2000s, the Russia German population in Germany has been the target of recruiting by German right-wing extremists such as the NPD, which formed a Russia German-specific working group to try and establish a new voter base (Rank, 2011). Because of the race perspective of the NPD, the recruitment of Russia Germans is acceptable, given that despite their Russian background and language, their blood and ancestry is German and they thus fall into the category of the German "Volk." The inclusion of Russia Germans has not not unanimous, however, as prevailing xenophobic views often portrayed Russia Germans as foreigners rather than belonging to the German people, and the subject of their inclusion

generated much debate in the German right-wing extremist scene (Clemens, 2016).

The large majority of Russia Germans have integrated very successfully within Germany, and their politics do not differ much from mainstream German opinion. There is a minority of Russia Germans who did not successfully integrate - instead establishing closed, isolated communities in which only Russian is spoken and where Russian media dominates. These communities, which are numerous but represent a small fraction of the Russia German community as a whole, are particularly susceptible to manipulation and instrumentalisation. They have been specifically targeted both by the Russian government as well as by Russian-friendly political parties such as the extremist NPD and the right-wing populist AfD.

The 2015 refugee crisis, which saw hundreds of thousands of people migrating to Germany which has recorded more than a million of asylum seekers, of which around 800,000 Syrians, resulted in an increase in right-wing radicalisation among the German population, including Russia Germans. Driven by conservative values that underline the importance of the nation, secure borders, family values and religion, many Russia Germans strongly opposed the German refugee policy and were driven away from the CDU towards further right parties. This trend was further accelerated by direct intervention from Moscow, when disinformation relating to the Lisa F. case was spread targeting Russia Germans. This showed the potential of the mobilisation of these groups: targets of disinformation by the Kremlin, the vocal protests were the focus of German public attention for weeks.

The AfD invested much effort in reaching out to Russia Germans in particular, producing promotional material and campaign ads in Russian, which were widely ridiculed among Russian speakers for their faulty language (Frumkina & Stöber, 2021). The AfD also features a number of candidates of Russia German background, and has been described as the “new favourite party

of the resettlers” because the party obtained its best results in areas with a high concentration of Russia Germans.

Anti-immigrant sentiment has been used not only by the AfD, but also by the previously mentioned small and currently inactive political party called “Die Einheit” (The Union). The party newspaper is published only in Russian, and is focused less on the strengthening of rights of the Russia German community, and more on criticising the refugee policy of the German government, including accusing authorities of cover-up in the Lisa F. Case. Einheit is led by Russia German Dimitri Rempel, who has visited post-annexation Crimea, openly aligned with Russian foreign policy, appeared in Russian media with dubious claims such as 500,000 Russia Germans wanting to return to Russia from Germany, a claimed denied vehemently by Russia-German representative organisations (Frumkina & Stöber, 2021). Such media statements have in turn reached many particularly older Russia Germans in Germany, who often exclusively consume Russian state media. There has been no evidence of direct influence and financing of the party by Russia.

Incidentally, the central party office in Baden-Württemberg was once registered at the same address as the *Russlanddeutsche Wölfe MC*, (Russia German Wolves), which was an attempt to establish a Russia German chapter of the Russian Night Wolves MC, the Kremlin-friendly biker club that has taken the headlines during its repeated European tours in honour of WWII (Heinrich, 2016). The leader of *Russlanddeutsche Wölfe MC* is Dmitri Zaiser, a Russian reservist who also served in the German Bundeswehr. A photo posted to the club’s facebook shows Zaiser in the company of Night Wolves leader Alexander Zaldostanov, also known as “the Surgeon” (Schmidt, 2016). Zaiser is also the leader of *Systema Security Center Akademie*, a combat sport club registered at the same address, which is part of a network of



Russian combat sport clubs across Europe which the German foreign intelligence service says has close ties to Russian intelligence, and may serve as spaces for recruiting (Heinrich, 2016). Notably, Dmitri Zaiser also has been the target of a lawsuit for the establishment of an impersonating website and social media profile in the name of the *Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland*, the Russia German interest organisation of which he had been a member (Schmidt, 2016). While the real LmDR is by no means politically aligned with Moscow, these fake websites in their name were then used to propagate pro-Russian information as well as to promote Zaiser's bike club and combat academy (ibid.).

Skazks & Bogнар, in a 2021 analysis commissioned by the European Parliament, explored the impact of disinformation originated or amplified from abroad targeting minorities in the EU through a combination of desk research and stakeholder interviews. They found that the Russian-speaking diaspora in Estonia, Latvia and Germany “has been targeted by Kremlin-backed disinformation and propaganda for decades,” which aims at depicting EU member states as weak and polarised in contrast to a strong, prosperous Russia protecting its citizens living abroad. Disinformation campaigns targeting the Russian-speaking diaspora in the EU aim to sow distrust towards the government and foster an opposition between Russian identity and that of the host country, thereby trying to undermine social cohesion.

Much of the information campaigns targeting the Russian diaspora offered them an image of the EU and its member states as ‘Russophobic,’ featuring exaggerated and distorted personal stories of discrimination. One case, in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, was the allegation that authorities in Berlin took a child of a Russian couple into state care in ‘revenge’ for Navalny, brutalising the father in the process. Another case occurred in March 2022, , a video clip was widely shared on social media showing a crying woman claiming that Ukrainian

refugees had beaten to death a Russian volunteer at a home for asylum seekers; the story never happened, and the woman had been duped by a propagandist (Mudge, 2022).

The case particularly gained traction when it was reshared by Alina Lipp, a half Russian, half German influencer reporting for Russian state media from Donetsk (ibid.). With 180,000 subscribers on Telegram, Lipp, who was previously an engaged activist with the Green party, has become one of a number of western individuals working to do media work for Russia. Notably, there are indications that her path from environmental activism to wartime propagandist was mediated through the German anti-vaccination movement, the *Querdenker*. Indeed, vaccine opposition has become co-opted into the information war waged by Moscow, with the same online conspiracy communities also being strong propagators of pro-Russian disinformation, from QAnon to the New World Order (Kayali & Scott, 2022).

A particularly significant case was the infamous ‘Lisa F. Case,’ in which a 13-year-old Russia German girl lied about being abducted and raped by migrants (Skazks & Bognar, 2021; Schaubert, 2018). The case was seized upon by Russian state station Channel One, RT and other media networks, who interviewed the family and accused German authorities of being unwilling to investigate the crime, even after the girl had confessed to lying. The Russian government also escalated the situation, with Sergei Lavrov accusing German authorities of “covering up reality” and referring to the girl as “our Lisa” (Hall, 2016).

This situation was a way to use xenophobia, existing anxieties and feelings of discrimination and distrust toward the German government to further undermine cohesion. It mobilised both the Russia German community and its intersections with the far right, with a cousin of the girl holding a speech at a neo-nazi protest, accusing the police of lying. The case, fuelled by Moscow, sparked large anti-migrant and anti-government protests among the Russia

German community, together with the NPD and anti-Islam Pegida movement, in front of the chancellery and in front of asylum-seekers' homes (McGuinness, 2016).

A 2017 report by the European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights similarly concluded that the anti-migrant angle is used in disinformation and propaganda spread by the Kremlin because “[t]he topic of migration is suitable to disrupt European unity and shake EU citizens’ confidence in European institutions. Russia’s national interest is the dissolution of the EU, [...] the Putin-regime thus uses its propaganda media to support the narratives of pro-Russian, anti-EU populist political forces” (Juhász & Szicherle, 2017, p. 4). Playing on anti-immigrant sentiments, Moscow has sought to mobilise the Russian-speaking community in Germany to the far right, who share with the Kremlin a desire to weaken the EU and the perceived liberal elites. Russian flags and symbols are common sights at anti-migrant and far right protests in Germany; the Berlin district of Marzahn-Hellersdorf where the family of Lisa F. Lives is notoriously a far-right stronghold.

Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, at least 701 anti-Russian and 592 anti-Ukrainian politically motivated crimes were committed in Germany, ranging from insults and threats to attempted arson on a Russian Orthodox Church and a Russian-German school, or the burning of a Ukrainian refugee family’s car; the German Interior Ministry warned that some of the reports could be the result of Russian disinformation networks (DW, 2022). While most of these incidents are likely to be real, they do not seem to have been orchestrated in an organised manner and are quite natural consequences of the actively ongoing war.

## **Crime, Intelligence & Extraterritorial repression**

### ***Crime, Intelligence & Repression in the Turkish Diaspora***

Opponents living in the diaspora have become targeted in the highly securitised Turkish political environment. In her study, partly based on interviews with Turkish refugees arriving after the 2016 failed coup attempt, Namadova (2020) outlines five main “tools and methods of deterrence” that have been used by the Turkish state to exert coercive power over their diaspora groups: (1) Abduction and Extradition as Deterrence Mechanism; (2) Instrumentalisation of Turkish State-Initiated Institutions as the Tools of Repression; (3) Non-State Actors, Diaspora Management by the Turkish state; (4) Proxy deterrence: Families Used as ‘Hostages’ of the Turkish State; (5) Surveillance, Monitoring, Psychological Repression and Fear. The state mobilises and instrumentalises non-state actors and diaspora agents, as well as a wide array of tools and methods to exercise coercive power abroad. These human rights violations, she argues, aim to protect the stability of the regime and strengthen its power while creating a feeling that there is no safety from the authoritarian state.

Particularly Kurdish nationalists and Gülenist supporters have been branded as enemies of the state and as terrorists, and have been targeted using the diaspora at large, diaspora-based organisations, extremist organisations and state pressure (Cornell, 2017). In the post-coup purge of Gülenists and in the war against Kurdish separatists, the Turkish state used the National Intelligence Organisation (MIT), state-controlled institutions and government-controlled organisations and various pro-AKP diaspora associations to spy on, target and threaten diaspora members (Öztürk & Taş, 2020). The MIT is reported to have employed 800 operatives and 6,000

informants in Western Europe. At the same time, Turkey is requesting the extradition of dissidents abroad, accusing them of being PKK or Gülenist terrorists.

There have been multiple cases of DİTİB imams spying on followers of the Gülen movement on instructions from the Diyanet. In a German case, in which charges were ultimately dropped due to insufficient evidence and because a number of suspects fled Germany, the prosecutors said that “defendants believed that they had to fear significant repression by government agencies in Turkey if they had refused to implement the mission of Diyanet” (DW, 2017). The DİTİB admitted that some of its imams had surveilled suspected Gülenists at the behest of the Turkish government, and the German federal government cut all funding and collaboration with the institution (Winter, 2017b; DW, 2018).

In 2017, the President of the Swiss UID branch was caught filming and systematically photographing the faces of all those attending a seminar held by Can Dündar, Erdoğan critic and Editor-in-Chief of the Turkish *Cumhuriyet* newspaper (Skinner, 2017a). A similar case took place shortly after, at a seminar on the topic of the Armenian genocide at the University of Zurich (Skinner, 2017b). These incidents led to public uproar, a diplomatic crisis and the start of criminal investigations over foreign intelligence activities on Swiss soil and over indications that Turkish nationals and Swiss citizens of Turkish origin have been subject to physical aggression and economic boycott (Swissinfo, 2017). In 2017 in Sweden, the regional UID president Özer Eken was found to have pressured a local Gülenist sympathiser to spy on his peers for the Turkish government, threatening him with the arrest of his wife, who was in Turkey at the time (Öhman, 2017; Kenez, 2021).

In the summer of 2021, German police found a “hit list” of 55 dissident Turkish journalists and activists who had fled Turkey for Germany in the past decade of increasing

repression. Many dissidents have found refuge in Germany and elsewhere, but repression has followed. Turkish journalist Erk Acarer had fled to Germany in 2017, having multiple arrest warrants against himself for his articles and social media posts, charged with publishing classified information on state security and intelligence activities (DW, 2021). However, in July 2021 he found a threatening message in his yard in Berlin, and days later he was assaulted and subject to an attack with “fists and knives” by a group of people outside his apartment. In 2020, Abdullah Bozkur, who was previously involved in a Gülen-affiliated newspaper and now runs a critical media outlet in Sweden, was attacked by a group of men outside of his home who had previously threatened him (CPJ, 2020). “I think this attack was targeted and is part of an intimidation campaign against exiled Turkish journalists with the clear message that we should stop speaking up against the Turkish government,” Bozkurt said (ibid.). Also in Sweden, in June 2022 dissident journalist Ahmet Dönmez was assaulted by two men in front of his six-year-old daughter, who left him unconscious on the street with a fractured skull and posted taunting photos of the scene on social media later that day (Nordhausen, 2022). The assault came after Dönmez had reported extensively on the Turkish government’s corruption and ties to organised crime.

The most damning indications of Turkish involvement and extraterritorial repression came in the 2021 confession video series by Turkish mafia boss and whistleblower Sedat Peker, a self-described Pan-Turkist and Turanist. In the videos, he accused numerous people in Erdoğan’s inner circles, current and former officials and other prominent figures in severe crimes such as killings, drugs and arms trafficking. Peker also implicated himself in the crimes, claiming to want to expose the Turkish ‘deep state’ and the intimate ways in which the government is tied to organised crime (Keddie & Uras, 2021). Peker himself appeared as a

fervent AKP-supporter, organising and appearing in pro-government demonstrations for several years before Ankara turned on him, raiding his house and ordering his arrest, accusing him of defrauding the U.S. government of \$132 million (Ahval, 2021). He had fled the country weeks before, allegedly having been informed by Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, ultimately ending up in the Dubai luxury hotel from which he would make his YouTube series.

Peker reportedly grew up in Munich and spent considerable time in Germany, which also surfaced in the confessions. In his ninth video, he alleged that Metin Külünk, Erdoğan confidant and AKP politician, asked him to deliver illegal money to certain Turkish community clubs in Germany. Peker described how he had “bags” full of illegal cash transported to Germany and how he would leave money in his car to be picked up, especially around election times.

While Peker did not explicitly state which organisations were on the receiving end, much has pointed towards the now banned “Osmanen Germania BC” group. Alternately described as a Turkish nationalist boxing or bike gang, the Idealist-affiliated Osmanen Germania was established in 2014 in Hessen, Germany. It grew to become a group of around 2,500 members with around 20 chapters in Germany and more chapters both in Austria and Switzerland. It was banned in 2018 by German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, for its involvement in murder, drugs, violence, blackmail, trafficking, forced prostitution and other crimes; several leading figures of the gang faced years of prison time (Welt, 2019).

German intelligence services already suspected close ties between Külünk and Osmanen Germania as well as generally between the AKP government and Turkish organised crime in the diaspora; Peke’s accusations strengthened this suspicion (Güsten, 2021). In 2016, German intelligence tapped phone conversations of Metin Külünk, through which it became clear that he was acting as the de-facto leader of the German UID, organising actions of the group in

Germany, encouraging “punitive” measures against Kurds and other opponents, and personally keeping Erdoğan informed (ibid.; ZDF, 2017). Külünk gave explicit instructions to "hit Kurds over the head with sticks" while filming, so that the videos could be used by the state as a "deterrent" against dissidents (Winter, 2017c).

Police also tapped the phone calls of Mehmet Bağcı, Külünk’s main contact and former president of Osmanen Germania, in which he spoke of blackmailing Turkish-origin business owners, his close contacts with the Turkish secret intelligence and about violent confrontation with PKK supporters (Feyder, 2017). According to German police, Bağcı promised Külünk that he would fight “terrorists” in Germany on behalf of Turkey (Winter, 2017).

Külünk was also observed by police personally handing Bağcı two envelopes in Berlin, believed to be full of money, shortly before calling Erdoğan to organise the protests against the Armenian genocide resolution passed by the German parliament in 2016, when Turkish-origin MPs who voted in favour received hundreds of death threats and were accused by Erdoğan of supporting terrorism (ibid.; Brady, 2016). In another tapped conversation, he urged Yılmaz İlkay Arin, the former UID head in Mannheim, Germany, to use Osmanen Germania to punish comedian Jan Böhmermann for his “defamatory poem” about Erdoğan; Böhmermann was put under police protection and spent weeks outside the country (Winter, 2017c). Arin himself encouraged other Turks in Germany to arm themselves, promising that he could facilitate “clean” weapons; according to police, he purchased 10 handguns in June 2016.

Finally, the Grey Wolves have been tied in numerous instances of violence against political opponents, usually not guided by higher powers but out of their ultranationalist convictions and hatred towards Kurds, Armenians and political opponents. In Dortmund in May 2020, an Idealist sympathiser murdered a 41-year-old Kurdish man with dwarfism (ANF News,



2020). During the Nagorno-Karabakh war, the Armenian embassy in Berlin was firebombed, Armenian churchgoers in Hannover were threatened and had to perform service with police protection, and numerous Armenian diaspora members received a threatening letter stating “we stand by our brothers from Azerbaijan and we will not allow infidel dogs of Armenia to live in peace in Germany,” and further: “We know you, we know where your children are, day and night” (Dangeleit, 2021). In June 2020 in Vienna, hundreds of Grey Wolves supporters attacked a protest by Turkish and Kurdish left-wing women’s organisations, and the next day attacked the left-wing autonomous center EKH, using stones, metal rods, fireworks and threatening activists with knives (Der Standard, 2020).

### ***Crime, Intelligence & Repression in the Russian Diaspora***

Beyond extremism, Russian-based organised crime (RBOC) is a powerful force on the European continent, particularly in Germany; they are responsible for around one-third of the heroin on the European market and the majority of weapons imported into Europe (Galeotti, 2017). In 2016, the head of Germany’s Federal Criminal Police Office stated that the Russian mafia had gained a major foothold in Germany and have “potential to cause enormous damage” (DW, 2016). Up to 10 percent of inmates in German prisons are Russian speakers, he said, making it a great recruitment ground; German criminal police estimate that between 20,000 and 40,000 individuals in Germany likely have ties to Russian crime networks. Besides London and New York, Berlin is a crucial Western nexus for these networks, functioning as a primary smuggling hub from Russia to the West.

According to Mark Galeotti, a leading expert on Russian organised crime, these networks

have elevated themselves above street crime today; they are operating on a more strategic level, offering networks and resources and facilitating crime for smaller groups. In his words, “these *vory* are the business partners of local groups: selling them heroin from Afghanistan, laundering their money through Russia’s still-murky financial system, providing weapons and occasionally someone who knows how to use them (Galeotti, 2018, pp. 183). There is a widespread conception of a RBOC group as a tight-knit, rigid and hierarchical structure, with a godfather or thief in law on the top; Galeotti argues that this is a misconception, and describes it instead as “a flexible, networked criminal phenomenon that embraces a wide range of businesses (both licit and illicit), practices and even nationalities” (ibid., pp. 184). RBOC is networked and diffuse, and those involved may not be ethnic Russians or even Russian-speaking; many members would be Chechen, Georgian or Armenian for instance, and different nationalities commonly work together.

However, these crime groups remain deeply connected to Russia - the ‘Russian-based’ element pointing to the fact that they retain a strong stake in the country while operating abroad, whether it be family members, assets, a dependence on moving goods through Russian territory, or the core part of their network (ibid., pp. 250) This means that they are exposed to the Kremlin, from who they may enjoy a degree of protection, but who also holds leverage over them; they may thus be instrumentalised by the Russian security apparatus for the purpose of state security aims. This does not hold true for all Russian organised crime - other Russian or Russian-speaking groups may not be similarly exposed, having transferred all their families, members and assets out of Russia (ibid.).

As such, in Germany and Europe generally, there has been evidence that RBOC groups have conducted surveillance or been used as couriers for Russian state services, both to transport

material and individuals, given the criminal groups' expertise in discreet trafficking and smuggling. Galeotti explains that publicly available details on these types of cases are rare, as investigations are kept under wraps; but the consensus within the European security and law enforcement community is that there has been a significant increase in the use of criminals abroad to further Moscow's foreign policy goals (Galeotti, 2019).

Galeotti describes an example from 2010, when a Russian spy who had been arrested in Cyprus and been released under bail and surveillance, tracelessly disappeared with the help of RBOG elements in the service of the Kremlin (Galeotti, 2017). In 2011, Russian security services seem to have engaged RBOC elements to assassinate two Chechens with Russian citizenship in Istanbul, who were suspected of involvement in the January 2011 suicide bombing at Moscow's Domodedovo airport, which left 37 people dead (Berg, 2010; Galeotti, 2019). Another Chechen militant who was killed in Turkey in 2015 likewise was assassinated by a Russian suspect involved in organised crime (Galeotti, 2019). Furthermore, there are fears that RBOC are used to establish listening stations and staging posts for Russian intelligence: a series of properties close to strategic ports, bases and airfields in Germany and in the Nordic countries have been purchased by individuals with ties to RBOC but have only been sporadically occupied, which has raised suspicions that these purchases were made on behalf of Russian intelligence services.

However, according to Galeotti, the main activities for which the Kremlin employs RBOC tend to involve either intelligence missions or the generation of 'black cash' untraceable to the Russian state which can be used to fund certain things covertly, such as political figures or media outlets abroad (ibid.). There has been evidence of RBOC being used to launder the operational funds of Russian intelligence agencies. There has been other evidence from Estonia,

according to which crime groups were allowed to smuggle goods across the Russian border in exchange for conducting surveillance on certain areas and individuals of interest to Moscow, and a tax on their profits.

Individuals in the Russian-Chechen diaspora have repeatedly been targeted by extraterritorial repression. Many of these individuals arrived in Western Europe with their families as refugees after having been involved in the Chechen independence movement and Russian-Chechen conflict or having worked as journalists or activists. However, they tend to have been targeted directly by intelligence services, either the Russians or more often those under the control of Ramzan Kadyrov, Putin ally and head of the Chechen Republic. The most famous case is the 2019 assassination of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, a Georgian citizen of Chechen origin and veteran of the second Chechen war against Russia (Bellingcat, 2020). The killer was not a diaspora member, but a Russian citizen with a criminal history who travelled from Moscow to commit the murder. Evidence shows that the murderer was acting with the full support and on the orders of the Russian FSB.

In June 2022, a Russian citizen of Chechen origin and resident of Germany for several years went on trial in Munich, accused of planning the assassination of the Chechen dissident Mokhammad Abdurakhmanov on behalf of Kadyrov's regime (Röhmel, 2022). Identified as Valid D., according to the indictment the man had arrived in Germany in 2003, unsuccessfully applied for asylum but had been allowed to reside in the country, since he could not be deported to Russia. Notably, he had previously served as an informant for the German intelligence services (Baumgärtner et al., 2022).

Prosecutors believed the killing was aimed at frightening the intended victim's elder brother Tumso Abdurakhmanov, a well-known Chechen independence activist living in Sweden

(Reuters, 2022). The previous year in Sweden, the elder brother himself successfully defended himself against an apparent assassination attempt by a man wielding a hammer (Hauer, 2020). The attack was premeditated: the victim had been tricked by a honeypot trap by a woman who had started a relationship with him in order to provide the attacker entry into the apartment. In a video filmed immediately after the attack, Abdurakhmanov questioned his injured attacker about who had sent him and where he came from: the man responded “from Moscow” and said “they have my mother” (Hauer, 2020).

The head of German domestic intelligence has suggested that the assassination of dissidents such as Khangoshvili or Abdurakhmanov are intended to have a deterrent effect on the diaspora, while the head of foreign intelligence described extraterritorial assassinations in Germany as part of Russia’s and Chechnya’s foreign policy (Freedom House, 2022).

## Discussion

### Legal Framework, Institutions & Diaspora Policy

The Turkish legal system does not recognise minorities, only a civic Turkish identity and citizenship. There is also no legal concept of diaspora, while at the same time, Turkey has extended a number of rights to ex-citizens, and made diaspora mobilisation an essential part of its foreign policy. While in some measures the concept of diaspora is very broad and inclusive regardless of ethnicity, language and religion, in practice it targets Turkish-speaking, Sunni diaspora members while excluding those diaspora communities that do not fit within the ideological framework of the AKP.

After obtaining power, the AKP discovered the important political potential of Turkey's diaspora. In order to govern, coordinate and mobilise this community, Turkey has created and co-opted a powerful network of institutions. Its alliance with the MHP and the rehabilitation of Milli Görüş have been very beneficial, increasing Ankara's influence over the extensive networks in the diaspora. There have been attempts at establishing political parties loyal to Ankara, with limited success. Of particular interest is the Idealist network, which is very influential among the youth; through its various associations, it socialises and mobilises the younger generations into Turkish ultranationalism. Other, more legitimate associations are the civil society organisations such as the UID, which also serve to mobilise the diaspora into action, as well as to influence the host government. These structures are under direct influence of Ankara, while acting as independent minority interest groups; they are strongly politicised and the Turkish government is effectively at the table when host country authorities are dialoguing or

negotiating with these institutions. They also provide important spaces, services and opportunities for the communities they target, and foster the development of greater ties between diaspora and home government. The AKP has also reinvigorated their institutions, which are much more active in reaching out to diaspora associations and participating in projects. Under the AKP, there has also been a diffusion of the borders between different institutions or movements, such as between the Milli Görüş and the Diyanet, or between Idealists and the UID. Three of the four largest Turkish-Islamic organisations in Germany - the Diyanet, Milli Görüş and the Grey Wolves - are intimately cooperating with Ankara to further their shared goals in the diaspora. Meanwhile, despite declarations that they seek to reach the wider diaspora with Anatolian roots, Ankara does not attempt to include politically dissident or minority diaspora communities, and its diaspora institutions pursue an exclusionary nationalist-Islamist ideology.

From a PA perspective, it emerges that in the Turkish case, the principal (Ankara) has made great efforts to establish agents in its diaspora. It has sought to use both state institutions targeting the diaspora, as well as closely aligned or directly controlled diaspora-based organisations, to mobilise certain sections of the diaspora community into politically powerful associations. These associations, representing different facets of the pro-Erdoğan political spectrum, function as agents of the Turkish government: they defend and lobby for Ankara's policies in the face of local and national authorities while seeking to extend their influence over the diaspora, socialising and mobilising the community into the ideology preached by the Turkish government and actively marginalise those who do not fit into this political project. The diaspora-based proxies have the benefit of being nominally independent, local political actors who may deny direct allegiance to or support from Ankara, which provides Turkey with a comparative advantage and plausible deniability as opposed to direct involvement by their own

means, which would be politically unacceptable.

In the wake of the disintegration of the USSR, a strong Russian-speaking diaspora community found itself beyond Russian borders, and a large Russia German community established itself in Germany. The Russian legal framework provides a generous conception of the diaspora, whose physical and cultural protection and support is legally entrenched, and are provided with a number of rights facilitating the acquisition of Russian citizenship or repatriation. Similar to Turkey, Russia has also sought to establish representative organisations for their “compatriot” communities abroad, creating a network of councils that are supported by and report directly to the Russian government and its government-organised NGOs, such as Russkyi Mir and Rossotrudnichestvo, as well as an attempt at a political party.

There have been attempts to engage with, and to mobilise the diaspora through the creation of institutions by or for the diaspora, which serve as soft power sources may act as lobbyists and as representatives both of diaspora communities and of the Russian government. However, their significance and influence has been much less far-reaching than in Turkey’s case, mostly confined to the propagation of Russian culture and language abroad. Russia’s main focus is currently on the diaspora in the “near abroad” such as in Ukraine, not the diaspora in Germany or the West; it is this “near abroad” that Moscow seeks to control, while there is little influence Moscow could wield over German politics through diaspora actors. Legal framework is very generous with the concept of compatriot, including mostly everyone remotely connected to Russia through lineage or culture, is clearly laid out in the law and which ascribes to Russia a number of responsibilities for their physical and cultural well-being.

From a PA perspective, it emerges that the principal (Moscow) has similarly pursued a policy of establishing proxy agents in the diaspora, mainly in the form of compatriot associations



functioning in a centralised directly tied to Moscow, that gather numerous different Russian-oriented groups and organisations. However, these agents have not been very influential and have not been greatly instrumentalised, primarily functioning as channels of communication, to promote Russian culture and language, and to support repatriation efforts. There may be different reasons for this: Moscow's focus is on the diaspora in the "near abroad" rather than in the "far abroad," and the interests of the diaspora community in Germany may generally diverge too much from those of the Kremlin, since a much greater proportion of the diaspora holds German than Russian citizenship. In this light, the relaxation of citizenship rules by Moscow may also serve the purpose of aligning the interests of Russia and the diaspora, thereby increasing the incentive to act as agents to support the policies and goals of the Kremlin.

### **Political Activities, Attitudes & Diaspora Extremism**

Politically, the Turkish diaspora is very divided: around half are strongly supportive of Erdoğan. There is a political polarisation between on one hand, diaspora members with Turkish or German citizenship, and on the other hand between ethnic Turks and minorities, such as Kurds. The Turkish government has used supposedly independent diaspora associations to politically mobilise the diaspora and organise campaign events in light of Turkish elections, or to protest and lobby the German government in the interests of Turkish policy goals. Ankara has also taken measures to facilitate voting procedures from abroad. Given the size of the diaspora electorate, and the fact that active voters in the diaspora favour Erdoğan and the AKP, these efforts have successfully bolstered the government in Ankara with an extra margin of supportive votes. Data shows that the diaspora community is largely grateful to be able to feel pride in their

country again for being a powerful actor on the world stage, for more active and efficient engagement with the diaspora by Ankara, and to have a government that actively and vocally defends its interests. Accordingly, they also feel a responsibility to defend their government's stance and policies when challenged by their host country.

While the MHP performs less well electorally in the diaspora than domestically, the Grey Wolves have served Turkish policy in other ways, most notably in order to physically oppose, intimidate and attack political opponents in the streets, and to socialise young diaspora members into ultranationalist ideology and loyalty toward the Turkish state, alienating them in the process from their host country and society. There has also been a concerted effort by Idealists to participate in domestic politics, which has been successful, particularly on the local level. This has enabled them to use their positions to influence German politics and discourse when they intersect with Turkish interests, such as in the cases of the Armenian Genocide or the PKK, thereby strengthening Turkish nationalism and making Ankara's voice heard on all political levels within German political structures. Other diaspora institutions and movements have similarly sought to present themselves as legitimate and achieved a certain political influence, collaborating with local and federal government institutions, while being intimately tied to the Turkish regime. This also serves to counter the small number of high-profile Turkish-origin politicians in the country who openly denounce Ankara's policies.

From a PA perspective, it emerges that Turkish diaspora agents have been utilised to mobilise the diaspora communities under their influence in Ankara's interest, for the purposes of Turkish elections, public protests and lobbying, thereby supporting the rule of Erdoğan. A significant section of the diaspora may not be strongly supportive of Erdoğan's politics and ideology, but are grateful that his rule has restored a sense of pride and power to the Turkish

world, and therefore perceive their interests as aligned with the Turkish state. Furthermore, agents have become involved and influential in German political structures, if not at the highest levels, and use their positions to ensure the representation of their principal's interests and goals. This has served to oppose, wherever possible, the spread of views or passing of policies that run counter to the interests of Ankara.

The Russian diaspora in Germany remains largely apolitical, if conservative, and well-integrated - though with certain pockets of communities where integration has essentially failed, where mostly Russian state media is consumed and exclusively Russian is spoken. The German far right has made great efforts to recruit among this potentially influential voting bloc, with only minor success. However, there is a section of the diaspora, largely overlapping with the pockets of low integration, which are on one hand strongly opposed to the immigration policies pursued by the German government, and on the other are highly susceptible to misinformation. These communities have been targeted by Russia in an information campaign, supported and mobilised with the help of the few pro-Russian diaspora institutions and radical political groups, into vocal protest campaigns that deeply marked the national conversation and escalated to diplomatic spats between Berlin and Moscow. Despite being based on falsehood, this has enabled Moscow to present itself as a legitimate defender of the interests of its compatriots and to further politically undermine the German government and its support base among the Russian diaspora.

From a PA perspective, it emerges that while not naturally inclined to mobilise for the sake of Moscow's interests, there is potential for influential agents in the diaspora, with certain predispositions, which may be "activated" to through channels of disinformation, for the sake of undermining their host government. While it may only advance the interests of the principal in

minor ways, it is also a mechanism that requires very little investment, for a significant result. Such measures also further polarise the Russian diaspora and politicises them, increasing their potential as agents.

### **Crime, Intelligence & Extraterritorial Repression**

Political opponents of Erdoğan's Turkey are regularly targets of extraterritorial repression. In particular, targets have included Turkish diaspora members active in German politics who are critical of Ankara's politics, critical journalists, Kurdish dissident activists and Turkish communists. Targets in the diaspora have been the victims of harassment campaigns and threats of violence on social media, in person, as well as violent physical attacks. Such acts of repression are generally tied to Grey Wolves activists; to what extent such attacks are the result of direct orders from Ankara is unverifiable. More likely is that the Ankara-aligned ultranationalist ideology permeating the Idealist movement, which emphasises the enemy figures of the Kurd and the communist while glorifying violence, quite naturally leads young sympathisers to seek to repress their political opponents. However, Idealists in the diaspora enjoy the full political, as well as material support of the Turkish government and security structures, and also perform targeted actions as ordered by Ankara.

These security structures have also extensively collaborated with Turkish organised crime structures to target, threaten and collect intelligence on dissidents in the diaspora, and to support facets of Turkish diaspora policy through illegal means, such as the smuggling of money. Their organised crime structures lean heavily towards Turkish ultranationalist ideology and blend into the Idealist movement. There are also ties to Turkish diaspora associations like the UID, whose

leaders and members have been documented to be facilitating the financing of extremist Idealist organisations through organised crime, calling for violence and trafficking weapons, and conducting intelligence activities on diaspora members. UID leaders as well as Turkish religious officials and members of other diaspora structures have been documented spying on dissidents in their communities for the AKP, while diaspora members have been threatened or blackmailed, through local proxies, to collaborate with Turkish authorities. Family members residing in Turkey represent a common point of leverage to pressure diaspora members to work in Ankara's interests.

From a PA perspective, it emerges that Turkish security structures extensively use diaspora agents, particularly the Grey Wolves or organised crime structures, for the purpose of extraterritorial repression and intelligence activities. Already socialised into the Turkish nationalism serving the Turkish government, these diaspora members are often willing perpetrators, having already embraced a worldview framing opponents of the current ruling government as their political enemies deserving of violence. Organised crime is also used as an agent to finance, coordinate and support the activities of other diaspora agents by illicit means. This has resulted in a climate of fear and anxiety among those diaspora communities framed as enemies of the Turkish state, and the reality that the repressive arm of Ankara can reach anywhere.

Russia's efforts of extraterritorial repression has almost exclusively taken the form of high-profile assassinations of notable individuals perceived as traitors to Moscow, and diaspora proxies have generally not been used for this purpose, in favour of agents being sent from Russia specifically for that purpose. As an extension of Russian repression is the repression of Chechen dissidents in the diaspora by Chechen head Kadyrov and his regime, which acts with significant

autonomy from Moscow. Attempts on the lives of Chechen dissidents tied to Grozny have been more numerous than instances tied to Moscow and have more commonly involved diaspora members as proxies. In the Chechen case, there have been instances of individuals blackmailed or threatened into obedience, using family members in Chechnya as leverage. Chechen repression serves to dissuade diaspora opponents from engaging in political activity against the regime from abroad. Russian repression is generally less interested in the repression of foreign-based dissidents, but does target particularly high-profile dissidents and “traitors.” Russian-based organised crime, while maintaining a very low profile, is a powerful actor in the diaspora able to provide various services with a high degree of expertise. Given their deep connections to Russia, Moscow holds great leverage over these criminal networks and employ them for various illicit purposes such as intelligence work, smuggling or money laundering.

From a PA perspective, it emerges that there are two different principals with different priorities, Moscow and Grozny, engaging with different diaspora agents in different ways. Moscow’s interest does not lie in extraterritorial repression, but rather intelligence activities against Western governments and the support of the Russian government by illicit means. Moscow’s best agents are therefore elements of Russian-based organised crime, who possess the needed contacts and expertise to work in Moscow’s interest from abroad. Grozny’s interest lies in the safekeeping of Kadyrov’s rule over Chechnya, acting in itself as a proxy for Russian authority, and in discouraging the vocal dissident activity abroad through repression. The greater involvement of diaspora agents in repression in the Chechen than in the Russian case may be due to the inferior capabilities of the Chechen regime to project its power abroad, in addition to the benefits of plausible deniability.

## Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine the instrumentalisation of the diaspora communities of Turkey and Russia, in particular (a) Russian and Turkish diaspora policies in their legal and institutional context, (b) the political activities, attitudes and extremism in the Russian and Turkish diasporas, and (c) criminal networks, intelligence activities and extraterritorial repression in the Russian and Turkish diasporas. This research sought to investigate to what extent, how and why Turkey and Russia are seeking the political instrumentalisation of their diaspora, and how these efforts compare in terms of nature, scope and outcomes.

I have established that the Turkish diaspora community in Germany has been politically instrumentalised through their socialisation and mobilisation into diaspora movements and institutions, which serve as the proxy agents of the Turkish government. This has resulted in the exclusion and marginalisation of undesired parts of the diaspora, the suspicion of the German government, the radicalisation of diaspora elements, and the establishment of an influential network of proxy agents that may exert influence over German domestic politics and reinforce the stability of the Turkish government.

I have established that through the diaspora movements and institutions serving as Ankara's proxies, diaspora communities have been mobilised for the purposes of Turkish elections, public protests and lobbying, in support of Erdoğan's rule. Diaspora elements have also been instrumentalised to participate in and exert influence over German politics, in the interests of Ankara.

On the other hand, there has been little political instrumentalisation of the Russian

diaspora by means of the Russian diaspora institutions, though the structures exist and the potential remains. Legally, Russia assumes the cultural and physical protection of its “compatriots,” defined in broad cultural-ethnic terms, has sought to mobilise a repatriation effort and has used diaspora institutions for this purpose.

I have established that minor sections of the Russian diaspora have been, through misinformation, instrumentalised into opposing and undermining the German government. Russia has sought to incite them into anti-establishment politics and conspiracy movements, which tend to be more favourable toward Moscow and be very hostile toward the German government, NATO and the EU.

Finally, I have established that Turkey has instrumentalised various parts of its diaspora for the sake of intelligence operations, the illicit financing of diaspora groups, and for the extraterritorial repression of dissidents - particularly by the Grey Wolves. Moscow has not engaged in a comparable scale of extraterritorial repression, but has instrumentalised certain criminal parts of its diaspora to perform illicit work. Grozny, acting independently but loyal to Moscow, has instrumentalised diaspora members for the purpose of repressing dissidents abroad to a much greater degree. The outcome has been that the Turkish and Chechen, and to a much lesser degree Russian diasporas, are feeling unsafe and are dissuaded from engaging in dissident activities against their home governments.



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