

# Organised Crime in Europe

## Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond

Edited by

Cyrille Fijnaut

*Professor of Criminal Law and Criminology, Tilburg University,  
The Netherlands*

and

Letizia Paoli

*Senior Research Fellow, Department of Criminology,  
Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law, Freiburg, Germany*

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## The Turkish Mafia and the State

*Frank Bovenkerk and Yücel Yeşilgöz*

### 1. The Susurluk Incident

It happened on the evening of Sunday, 3 November 1996. Late-night television viewers in Turkey saw their programme interrupted by a line of text appearing under the picture. It was shocking news. Three people were killed in a traffic accident near the town of Susurluk in western Turkey and a fourth injured. Ever since the advent of commercial television, people in Turkey had grown accustomed to this kind of *shock news*. Every night there were sensational interruptions especially inserted to boost viewing ratings. In retrospect most of them were pretty insignificant. The people who died in this particular accident were police chief Huseyin Kocadag, a man by the name of Mehmet Ozbay and Ms Yonca Yucel. The injured man was Sedat Bucak, a member of Parliament from the province of Urfa in the southeast of the country and known as the commander of an army of village guards set up to protect that region from the PKK, the violent separatist movement of Kurds. A couple of pistols, machine guns and a set of silencers were found in the wreckage of the car. Half an hour later a new line of information appeared on the screen: the deceased 'Mehmet Ozbay' was really Abdullah Catli. His name will not mean much to Turks under the age of 30, but the older generation certainly knows him. In the 1970s, Catli was the vice-chairman of the national organisation of *ulkucu* (literally idealists) better known abroad as the Grey Wolves. He has been wanted by the Turkish authorities since 1978 as the suspect in a number of murders, one of them involving seven students. He was also wanted by Interpol, because he had been arrested by the French and Swiss police as a heroin dealer, but escaped from a Swiss prison in 1990. The woman who died in the crash was his girlfriend.

There was soon more information about the other people in the car. Police chief Kocadag was one of the most important founders of the special units at the police force and was now the director of the Police Academy in Istanbul. These special units were set up in 1985 under the command of the General Board of Directors of the Police. Alongside the army and the militia of village guards, they combated the PKK. It was generally assumed that their members were recruited from MHP circles, the ultra-right-wing political party that protected the *ulkucu*, or Grey Wolves. These units were expanded in 1993 and came to resemble what they were under Tansu Çiller, who was Prime Minister. It was an odd combination of people, the four passengers in this car.

### *Organised Crime in Europe*

Everyone in Turkey was shocked. On 5 November, the headline in *Hurriyet*, the country's largest daily paper, read, 'The state is aware of corrupt relations'. According to the paper, Catli had played a key role as a Grey Wolf and *agent provocateur* in the coup of 12 September 1980; he had organised the escape of Agca, the man suspected of the murder of the editor-in-chief of a major daily paper and a later assault on the Pope. Ever since the incident in Susurluk, references were made on television and in the newspapers to the recently published report of the Turkish Secret Service, which had not always been taken that seriously until then, but whose contents now rang true. According to the weekly *Aydinlik* of 22 September 1996, the report stated:

A criminal organisation has been set up within the police force in such a way as to give the impression that the people involved are combating the PKK and Dev-Sol [an ultra-Marxist movement]. The group largely consists of former *ulkucu* and concentrates on crimes such as intimidation, robbery, extortion, smuggling drugs and homicide. The group is under the direct command of the General Chief of Police Mehmet Agar. The members of this group have been provided with 'police' identity papers and 'green [i.e. diplomatic] passports'. The members of the group give the impression of being active in combating terrorists, but in reality they are active in smuggling drugs to Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary and Azerbaijan.

The press and politicians kept pressing for more information. Newspaper columnists in particular lived up to their typically Turkish reputation of always wanting to know more. Mahir Kaynak, a former secret service staff member often consulted by the media on events of this kind, stated 'This chance occurrence proves the claims I have been making for years.<sup>1</sup> There are two wings in the state. One of them is visible; this group is of the opinion that the Kurdish problem cannot be solved via the model of the constitutional state. This is why we have set up this second and illegal organisation' (*Milliyet*, 7 November 1996). The political opposition wanted to pose questions in Parliament but the cabinet would not comment. Agar, still general chief of police at the time of the events described in the Secret Service report and Minister of the Interior in 1996, was discredited the most but continued to act as if the whole matter was insignificant (*Milliyet*, 6 November 1996). To this day the most important agency of the Turkish state, the National Security Council (known

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<sup>1</sup> Mahir Kaynak was an MIT agent, and at the same time a lecturer at the University of Ankara. He was well informed on what was going on in left-wing circles in the 1970s and involved in preparing a left-wing coup. After the army ultimatum, these groups were brought to justice and at the courtroom session of one group, the Madanoglu trial, Kaynak had to *come clean*. He was later appointed professor at Gazi University in Ankara.



as the MGK from the Turkish acronym), which includes the chiefs of staff of all the army units, the President, the Prime Minister and several ministers, studied all the important state issues, has never had the Susurluk issue on its agenda. Agar had no intention of drawing any political consequences since ‘we never did anything that made us lose face’ (*Milliyet*, 8 November 1996).

However, since there was no end to the troublesome questions, something had to be done. Prime Minister Çiller had no choice but to take concrete steps, and to her great regret she made a sacrifice and asked Mehmet Agar to step down. He was nonetheless cordially thanked for his efforts by his own party chairman. On 22 December 1996, all the leaders of the political parties represented in Parliament were invited by President Süleyman Demirel to a meeting to discuss the Susurluk accident. They met for five and a half hours, and a 73-page report was drawn up. Necmettin Erbakan, the new Prime Minister, set the tone by noting:

The situation is more serious than we think and the public knows. There are military men, police officers, politicians and mafia people involved. Events have taken place that are not known to the public. We now know the names of 58 people involved in these shady matters, and have been able to locate 47 of them. Ten of these 47 people have been murdered or are at any rate no longer alive. Some of the more important of these 58 names are: Mehmet Agar, Sedat Bucak, Korkut Eken, Huseyin Baybaşin, Ali Yasak, Abdullah Catli (deceased), Haluk Kirci, Tarik Umit (disappeared), O. Lutfu Topal (murdered). [*Milliyet*, 24 December 1996]

At the same meeting Mrs Çiller, the Vice-Premier, responded to an earlier statement by her political opponent Ecevit, who had declared, ‘I first discovered this illegal organisation in 1974 when I was Prime Minister. During my second term as Prime Minister I asked the military Chief of Staff to terminate this organisation. But it did not come to an end. Later Çiller used this very same organisation for her own dirty business’ (*Yeni Yuzyil*, 5 December 1996). Vice-Premier Çiller responded by saying, ‘I was a secondary school pupil when Mr Ecevit, opposition leader in Parliament at the time, revealed the existence of a counter-guerrilla, a kind a ‘state gang’. Similar claims are now being made. Mr Ecevit later served as Prime Minister twice. I investigated what Ecevit did about this. Nothing.’<sup>2</sup>

The people of Turkey were appalled by these revelations. Starting on 1 February 1997, millions of people there put all their lights out every evening at nine for one minute to protest the widespread corruption and abuse of power in political and official circles, and the gesture was supported by artists, journalists, trade union-

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<sup>2</sup> This information about her age cannot be accurate. By the 1970s, Tansu Çiller had already got her university degree.

ists, politicians and businessmen alike. Two skyscrapers at the Sabanci Centre in Istanbul, the property of one of the country's biggest businessmen, were totally dark for a minute every evening starting on 1 February. Many radio and television broadcasting stations informed the audience at a certain moment that it was time to put off the lights, 'one minute without light to lead the country out of the darkness for good' (*NRC-Handelsblad*, 3 February 1997).

In January 1997, Parliament appointed a nine-man committee to investigate the Susurluk crash and leave no stone unturned. Mehmet Elkatmis, a religious Muslim, was appointed chairman and his political leader Erbakan said militantly, 'If we come across a gang (*cete*), we will wipe it out' (*Hürriyet*, 3 December 1996). The committee took more than three months to examine a good 100,000 relevant documents and accounts of interviews with 57 people at hearings. For our book on the Turkish mafia, we interviewed the chairman of the committee just before it published its final 300-page report on 3 April 1997 and another 2,500 pages of hearings (Bovenkerk and Yeşilgöz, 1998: 223-6). On the basis of this interview and the newspaper accounts of what Elkatmis said, we know that the committee was not able to go nearly as far as it intended at the start, or as far as Erbakan's statements suggested. The committee would have liked to be able to find out much more about the role of the unlawful, 'non-existent' secret organisation of the gendarmerie, the so-called JITEM. However, the chairman told us that the PKK was ultimately the villain because it was dealing in drugs, thus voicing the official government standpoint.

One of the most sensational committee findings was that the annual turnover of the drug trade was USD 50 billion, which was more than the total Turkish state budget of USD 48 billion! This figure might look more precise than it actually is, but it does give an indication of the dimensions of the drug trade. One of the problems the committee came up against was that individuals' financial information could not be examined because of the existing bank secrecy. Committee member Saglar regretted that this prevented the committee from gaining insight into how the profits from the drug trade were distributed. Another drawback for the committee was that the ex-head of the National Security Service at the time, Teoman Koman, and the head of the gendarmerie refused to appear before the committee (*Hürriyet*, 3 January 1997).

The problem of organised crime in Turkey is linked to the national state in a unique way. Susurluk is generally known in Turkey as proof of the existence of cooperation ties linking the state and the underworld. It is hard for Europeans or Americans to understand how a state gang like the one exposed after Susurluk is still essentially tolerated. Eight years later, we can now conclude that all the parties involved have been acquitted and cleared of criminal charges. Agar has been elected to Parliament again and Bucak was released because, as the court stated in June 2003, 'his clan has a long history and in the revolts of the Kurds, for example in

1925, his clan chose the side of the state.’ A short excursion into the history of the Turkish state might help make this easier to understand.

## **2. The Turkish State System**

In theory, Turkey has the agencies and rules and regulations of a democracy, but in reality there is only a limited form of democracy, a political system with ‘the state’ as the centre of power – though in Turkey the state is not a collective term for the political parties and the government. In theory, the state includes the entire institutional power apparatus. In practice though, it pertains to the National Security Council founded in 1960 by the troops responsible for the first military coup that year. In Turkey, Parliament, the political associations, some of the press and everything we envision as part of a modern democracy only functions within the space the National Security Council allows for it. We need to explain how this system came into being and how it works before we can present the rise of Turkish mafia politics in the proper perspective.

The Republic of Turkey that was proclaimed on 29 October 1923 in Ankara is not the result of a social and economic revolution from the bottom up, it is the product of a social and cultural reform enforced from the top down that came into being within an authoritarian political structure. It was a grand effort to modernise the country in one fell swoop and there is no doubt that this reform jump-started the modern economic development, equal rights for women, and the secularisation of the country. The ideological foundation for the reforms, Kemalism (named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk), was derived from fascism in general and the doctrines of Benito Mussolini in particular. Kemalism still constitutes the ideological basis for the state and as such, it is kept outside the political discussion. This ideology is strongly nationalistic and centres on a striving to cultivate unity among the various peoples and cultures that remained in Turkey after the Ottoman Empire. The Turks and their culture served as the basis for the unity the country aspired to. Kemalism is populist in the sense that class, religious and ethnic differences are overlooked, and organisations based upon them are not permitted to exist. It is statist to the extent that economic reforms are led by the state from above. Kemalism stands for a secular state, which does not necessarily mean church and state are separate, as is usually the case in modern societies, it simply means religion is subordinate to the state. The government pays all the expenses, the salaries of the imams, the construction of the mosques and so forth, for the one approved school of Islam, the Sunnite school.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This means that by paying taxes, a third of the population of Turkey, the Alawites, subsidise a branch of Islam that they do not belong to.

The authoritarian Turkish model is a unifying one. Based on equality as the point of departure, its aim is to turn all the people of the country into Turks. One of the ways this unity is created is by constantly citing new enemies who threaten the integrity of the Turkish nation. The internal enemies include Armenians, Kurds, communists and Muslim fundamentalists, and the external enemies are all the countries of the world, at any rate potentially, since 'the only friends Turks have are other Turks' (Yeşilgöz, 1995: 179-93).

The first military coup took place on 27 May 1960 and put an end to the Menderes government, which had been confronted with a great deal of political opposition, some of it originating in the Prime Minister's own Democratic Party, and had increasingly responded in an authoritarian fashion. The Kemalist system was for the first time essentially challenged by left-wing parties and movements in the 1960s when – under the influence of student movements in Germany, the United States and France – the country witnessed a lively intellectual debate. Small radical groups broke away in 1970 to engage in a battle with the state in the form of armed propaganda: terrorism, an urban guerrilla, and attacks. The response was the political mobilisation of ultra-right movements.

One of the strong men of the 1960 coup was Alparslan Türkeş, an officer in the Turkish army. In 1965 he converted an existing political party into an outright fascist group with a surprisingly nationalistic and reactionary party programme for the post-World War Two period – the MHP or Nationalist Action Party. A paramilitary organisation of *idealists* (*ulkücü*) called Grey Wolves was set up in these same circles, and they were to serve as storm troopers against left-wing groups.

For the military leaders, the political divisiveness resulting from the economic difficulties in the late 1960s and the growing anti-Americanism among left-wing intellectuals was ample reason to submit an ultimatum to the government on 12 March 1971 with the order to reform the country's politics in keeping with the spirit of Atatürk. Martial law was declared, and it was to last for two and a half years. The left-wing movement was purged and many of its militants went underground because there was no protection for them under the various right-wing regimes of the National Front, which the Nationalist Action Party was part of. The security service and police force had ties with the MHP, and consequently more or less gave the Grey Wolves free rein.

In the 1970s the Grey Wolves began a veritable reign of terror and shot and killed many people who had nothing to do with the violent side of the left-wing opposition: students, teachers, trade union leaders, booksellers and politicians. It was an extremely unequal battle since the ultra-right wing obviously had the support of the state. Via deliberate provocation the MHP stimulated clashes between the various segments of the population and reinforced the hatred of minorities.

The 1970s were plagued by severe economic setbacks and as a result of the destabilisation the decade culminated in a chaos that pushed the country to the verge of civil war. The left-wing movement started the violence and a ferocious battle

with the ultra-right groups erupted. There are various theories about the fighting. Prominent Turkey expert Feroz Ahmad does not exclude the possibility that the chaos was deliberately created by the military leaders to serve as an excuse for a new coup (Ahmad, 1993: 176).

Throughout this entire period, the underworld was smuggling arms into the country for right- as well as left-wing organisations, and heroin was being smuggled abroad to pay for these purchases, as has since been revealed by investigative reporter Ugur Mumcu (1995). To give an impression of the size of the trade and the profits the smugglers must have been making, the following illegal arms were confiscated from 1980 to 1984: 638,000 revolvers, 4,000 submachine guns, 48,000 rifles, 7,000 machine guns, 26 rocket launchers and one mortar (Ali Birand, 1984: 320).

On 12 September 1980, there was another military coup. Led by Kenan Evren, the junta did its best to present itself as the enforcer of law and order, and in an effort to do so systematically referred to suspects who had played a role in the growing violence as terrorists. People from the extreme right wing also disappeared into prison, be it not for as long. A number of them felt misunderstood in their patriotism, leading in turn to the formation of private violent gangs, such as those engaged in loansharking.

The major problem of the 1980s was the Kurdish issue, once again a typical product of the enemy theories the Kemalist state invented for itself. The Turks had always more or less looked down on the Kurds as a backward people and up until well into the 1960s, the state successfully implemented its assimilation policy. But by the end of the decade Kurds in the cities began to connect with the left-wing movement and a Kurdish consciousness grew that was based in part on an awareness that southeast Turkey had been deliberately kept underdeveloped. In the course of the 1970s, this Kurdish consciousness increased as part of the battle between the right and left wings. Immediately after the 1980 coup, the Kurds were subjected to measures designed to suppress their emancipation movement. A number of these measures now make a bizarre impression, and essentially can only be comprehended in the framework of the ideology described above. Even in private conversations, it was prohibited for Kurds to speak their own language since it might 'weaken their national feelings'. The PKK, the most radical Kurdish movement, was the only one to survive the repression. All Kurdish opposition that rejected violence as an instrument was effectively oppressed. In 1978 the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan was able to escape to Syria. The complete Kurdish population was behind him, and today his movement, the PKK, still has the mass support of all Kurds. It is a totalitarian movement with a virtually religious culture of leadership and violence. Ocalan initially operated on the basis of an almost quaint revolutionary model that seemed to be rooted in the romantic period of the Third World revolution of the 1960s. He deliberately addressed the poorest and least educated youngsters in the villages and cities and stimulated their revolutionary potential by advising them

not to go to school. The movement was inspired by the PLO and launched its own guerrilla warfare in 1984, the Kurdish intifada. It lasted until the leader, Ocalan, was arrested on 15 February 1999 at the Greek Embassy in Kenya, where he had fled to. In 2003, after a self-proclaimed truce, the new PKK leaders announced that the armed struggle was to be resumed.

### **3. The Relation between the State and Organised Crime: The 1970s**

It is no longer easy to separate crime and politics in Turkey. Representatives of the Turkish state claim the PKK funds its activities by engaging in the heroin trade and in extortion, which is why they ask foreign police forces to help them combat this form of crime. Representatives of the PKK say in turn that it is the Turkish state itself that is active in the drug trade and puts its own bands of assassins on their trail and is thus working towards the downfall of the constitutional state itself. What we are dealing with here are essentially political positions, but each of the parties in the conflict defines the conduct of the other as *criminal*. In themselves, these disputes are outside the scope of criminology and of this book. It should be noted though that the both PKK and the Turkish state, or at any rate parts of them, are involved in the drug trade and in extortion and murder. It does not particularly interest us whether they organise the drug trade themselves or indirectly profit from it via extortion or donations from drug dealers. What we are interested in is that by engaging in these activities, they enter the field of organised crime.

The unusual thing about the Turkish case is the unique relationship between organised crime and the state (see also Green and Ward, 2004: 100-4). In principle, the state and the underworld are antagonists. Organised crime can be defined as gangs that threaten the two major state monopolies, the right to levy taxes and the right to use violence. The traditional mafia of southern Italy organises the economy by means of alternative taxation in the form of protection rackets (Gambetta, 1993). The gangs of St. Petersburg and other cities in the former Soviet Union supply private violence to regulate the new market (Volkov, 2002; Varese, 2001). This produces a form of predatory crime: organised crime penetrates the legal economy and the political system by corrupting officials or using other counter-strategies against the authorities – see all the western European examples in this book and any book at all on organised crime in the United States or Canada – or goes beyond national borders and operates transnationally (see, for example, Lyman and Potter, 1997; Beare, 1996; Williams and Vlassis, 2001). This form of organised crime flourishes in countries with a weak state apparatus such as Colombia, or in various parts of Africa (Thoumi, 1995; Cilliers and Dietrich, 2002).

There are also more and more references to consensual crime in criminology literature, with the state summoning the help of organised crime to carry out political assignments. This is the case if political opponents are eliminated: consider, for

example, President Kennedy's request to the mob in Chicago to get rid of Fidel Castro.<sup>4</sup> Or if the underworld helps preserve law and order in situations where the police or armed forces are deemed incapable of doing so. This was the case in Japan in 1960 when President Eisenhower was about to pay a state visit (which he never did). On the request of the Japanese state, yakuza member Kinosuke Oke, 'Tokyo's Al Capone', was put in charge of keeping him safe (Kaplan and Dubro, 2003). Or if criminal gangs are used to help commit the war crime of ethnic cleansing, as was done by the Serbs in the warfare in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo (Judah, 1997). It is also not uncommon for oppositional political movements to use organised crime to get funds to conduct their insurgent struggle, as in Lebanon, Ireland, Sri Lanka and numerous other countries (Naylor, 2002). The direct or indirect involvement of the Kurdish PKK in smuggling drugs and nowadays also trafficking in people in southeast Turkey is a good example of this.

What is unique about Turkey however is how a state that is in itself a strong one is covertly creating its own underworld. The state gangs are helpful in fighting the Kurdish separatists and donate funds to the secret national treasury to pay for a war that was never actually declared. And it is unique that the discovery of these state gangs does not lead to the perpetrators being brought to court and punished; it leads instead to a veneration of heroism on behalf of the state ideology.

In the political analysis of this phenomenon, authors usually go back to the year 1952. The secret organisation of the state was later to be known by various names: the counter-guerrilla, the special war division of the army, and more recently, Gladio, which came to the fore in Italy at the end of the 1980s as the name of a secret and illegal NATO organisation (Zürcher, 1993). Turkey joined NATO on 4 April 1952, and Seferberlik Tetkik Kurulu, later called Gladio, was founded in September that year (Celik, 1995: 29-32; Muller, 1991; Parlar, 1996: 55).<sup>5</sup> It is clear from various sources that all this was done on orders from the United States, as is also confirmed in a publication by the former chief of the department in question (Aykol, 1990: 43-67). In 1994 there was also the confirmation of the Chief of Staff of

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<sup>4</sup> See Chambliss (1999) for a lengthy list of political murders ordered by American security services.

<sup>5</sup> But Zürcher (1993) gives a different date. As he notes in his book, another organisation that seems to have played a role in the oppression of the left wing is the secretive counter-guerrilla, an underground organisation of right-wing civilians paid and equipped by the army. The counter-guerrilla was founded in 1959 with United States support to organise the opposition in the event of a communist takeover. Its existence was not made public until 20 years later (in the 1980s organisations of this kind in other NATO countries, such as Gladio in Italy, got a great deal of publicity). Zürcher's source is not known. But if we look at all the information, the existence of such an organisation in Turkey cannot be excluded.



the Turkish Army, who said the organisation would be active against the enemies in the event of war (*Milliyet*, 5 and 6 September 1992). To fully understand the Turkish tradition of state gangs, however, we need to go further back in the history of the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman ruler Sultan Selim III, who ruled at the end of the eighteenth century, is usually recalled as a progressive politician and a romantic poet. As one of his less renowned achievements, in 1792 he founded an illegal committee that was to make decisions on all the important matters (Parlar, 1996). The secret service would not be founded until almost a century later, and the committee was essentially a secret personal army to protect the sultan, since he had already been repeatedly attacked in those turbulent days of the war against Russia and Austria (Parlar, 1996: 17-28).<sup>6</sup> The committee operated covertly in such a way that even the empire's second in command, the Grand Vizier, was kept in the dark. Historian Suat Parlar refers to an 'illegal' secret organisation that operated outside the official armed bodies (the police and the army) (Parlar, 1996: 9-13).

A tradition was thus established and all the sultans after Selim set up their own protection agencies. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the tradition was broken in the sense that organisations of this type were no longer directly under the authority of the sultan; they were now under the control of the army, and more specifically of certain high army officers. This became the new tradition, and when Turkey became a republic in 1923, the president, an army man himself, became the actual commander-in-chief of this secret unit.

On the eve of World War I, the group of officers who had come together at the turn of the century to form the last government of the Ottoman Empire, the Committee for Unity and Progress, organised the equivalent of a special unit, the *Teskilat-i-Mahsusa* under the leadership of Enver Pasha. This unit was directly under the authority of the Ministry of War. According to the American historian Philip Stoddard, who researched this organisation for his PhD dissertation in 1963, in addition to prominent army officers, the organisation's members were also intellectuals such as doctors, engineers and journalists (Stoddard, 1963). The rest were people from various ethnic minorities who, although they did have a sinister past, were nonetheless reliable for the organisation. They were 'of dubious origins, but there were no doubts about their loyalty' (Stoddard, 1963: 58a). In his memoirs,

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<sup>6</sup> Parlar (1996) and Ozkan (1996) both note that the first Turkish secret service was founded on the recommendation of the English ambassador Startfort Canning and the first head of the organisation was a foreigner, Civinis Efendi, who had been in the service of the Russian Czarina Catherine the Great. After stealing her diamonds, he fled to the Ottoman Empire, travelled to Anatolia as a rich Italian tourist and pretended to serve various functions, for example as imam. According to these sources, Civinis also worked for others besides the Ottoman Empire.



Husamettin Erturk, one of the former heads of Teskilat-i-Mahsusa, gave numerous examples of criminals who were members of the organisation (Tansu, 1964). In 1913 serious criminals were even given a special amnesty if they went to the front with Teskilat-i-Mahsusa.

The former commander presented these men as patriots who fought for a sacred cause, for their fatherland. They were deployed in the Balkan War to defend the Ottoman Empire from external enemies (including Libya, which was occupied by Italy), and retain the Suez Canal. They also went to battle against internal enemies said to be endangering 'the unity of the Ottoman Empire'. The Teskilat-i-Mahsusa played a role in the mass murder of Armenians in 1915 and 1916 and the aggression against religious minorities in the previous years. It is clear that prominent Turkish politicians were also active in the organisation from the fact that the members included Kemal Pasha, the first president of Turkey, and Celal Bayar, the third one (Stoddard, 1963: 175).

At the end of the First World War, there was a debate at the Parliament of the Ottoman Empire (Osmanli Meclisi Mebusani) about this organisation, which had since become notorious. The organisation was abolished at the time of the debate but Erturk, the leader, felt there was still a need for something of the kind: in 1918 the Umum Alem Islam Ihtilal Teskilati (Organisation of the Worldwide Islamic Revolt) was set up and had its first meeting in Berlin. After the war, the British rulers refused to give these allies of the Germans a chance, and the movement had no choice but to continue in secret.

Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) was able to keep this group well under control (Ozkan, 1996: 59-62). In 1921 he founded a new secret group, Mudafaa-i Milliye (National Defence). Erturk, the former head of Teskilat-i-Mahsusa, was appointed to organise this group, which was later to become the national police force. Mustafa Kemal had also set up his own espionage agency in 1920, consisting solely of military men (Ozkan, 1996: 80). The agency was given a new name in 1927, Milli Amele Hizmeti (MAH), the uncurbed predecessor of contemporary secret service.

The organisation then remained in oblivion until the 1970s, when the Army Chief of Staff made a request to Prime Minister Ecevit for extra funding for special military troops. It turned out to be the Ozel Harp Dairesi (Special War Division) he wanted the funding for. The Prime Minister was surprised, 'Up until then I had never heard of any such organisation when I was Prime Minister or Minister (he had served in various Cabinets) or party chairman,' Ecevit was later quoted as saying (*Milliyet*, 28 November 1990). The Prime Minister ordered the organisation terminated, but it became clear later, and certainly nowadays after Susurluk, that the military men did not feel obliged to obey this political decision. There are still special units and secret gangs. The former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Mrs Çiller, even stated shortly after the Susurluk

car accident that the Turkish state cannot do without the defensive force of these gangs, and that their members are national heroes.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4. Links with the Classic Mafia**

In another contribution in this volume we present a historical picture of the classic underworld, which does not in itself have any institutional ties with the state. It is about social rebels in the countryside (*eskiya*) and neighbourhood potentates who went through life as urban knights (*kabadayi*). They made a living extorting money from small shopkeepers and market vendors, organising gambling, and smuggling liquor, American cigarettes and gold over the borders. In the course of the 1970s this group developed into fathers (*baba*) of mafia families who earned a fortune in international smuggling. They were initially arms dealers and sold to right- and left-wing groups who fought their battles on the streets. The flamboyant Dundar Kilić came to symbolise this period. He obeyed the old code of honour and refused to have anything to do with drugs. Kilić and his family wanted nothing more than to gain the respect of the Turkish bourgeoisie and was known as a philanthropist. He was a typical transition leader. Others however did not have his scruples about getting into the heroin trade.

In 1974 an American group of journalists from *Newsday* wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning book called *The Heroin Trail* with an excellent description of the routes Turkish smugglers were using in those days. Heroin still came from the opium province of Afyon in Anatolia at the time. Nowadays there is strict supervision and opium is solely cultivated there for the pharmaceutical industry, so smugglers import it to Turkey and Europe from Afghanistan through Iran.

Less than four months after the coup in Turkey on 12 September 1980, an underworld meeting was organised in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, that was to drastically change the nature and the system of the international drug trade. The man in charge of the meeting was Oflu Ismail from the Black Sea coastal region, the home of the Lazes, a people with a long tradition in manufacturing arms. He was the up-and-coming man of the underworld, and stayed on top until he was locked up in 1987 in an Italian prison where he remains today. Kurdish smugglers were excluded from the meeting, but Canturk, one of their big bosses (liquidated in 1984), heard so much about it that he was later able to give the secret service some very exact information. It is through him that we know the men who did attend the meeting intended to plan the drug trade more efficiently. They divided Europe among themselves (Yalcin, 1996: 198-9).

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<sup>7</sup> See also for Mrs Çiller's *special bureau* Dundar and Kazdagili, op. cit.

We compared the names of the *baba* cited by the unknown American author in 1971 with the list of names in Sofia and later police records. There is no great overlap. The world of Turkish smugglers is more changeable than for example the mafia families in American cities. In general, or so we have noted in our research, police departments in Europe are still easily tempted to assume the existence of large pyramidal family structures. But the smuggling itself does not adhere to these structures, and it might be more accurate to speak of cooperating cells, which often consist of family members who can totally trust each other. It is hard for the police to tell exactly who is in charge. The business is kept tightly shut and it is impossible to see from outside who is the boss. The clothes of the poor guest worker are worn as a cover.

This development would have been inconceivable without the emigration of millions of Turkish guest workers to Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and other countries in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. In retrospect, it is clear that the migrants also included serious criminals looking for a good place to settle and set up bases for what was still mainly the heroin trade at the time. Police investigations in various countries have produced evidence that entire families in destination countries supplement their incomes by investing in the smuggling business. What is more, to a certain extent the Turkish and Kurdish communities in several western European cities came to depend on the income from smuggling and the heroin trade in the 1980s and 1990s. The close-knit Turkish communities also provide protection for people who are on the run.

A 1980 report of the Turkish secret service noted: 'According to our information, drugs are leaving our country and arms are coming in. But smuggling is a taboo subject and since we know that some military and civil customs officials are involved, the secret service could not conduct adequate investigations on the topic' (Eymur, 1991: 134-5). This was the first admission contacts had been established between the old underworld and secret organisations of the state. In the 1970s, during a large-scale police operation in Istanbul, the secret service mentioned Sükrü Balcı, who was a police chief himself, but was suspected of smuggling arms in from Bulgaria. Not only did his arrest not harm his career, he even ended up at a higher rank. This is one of the first times that the impression is given that a man was not individually bribed, but was actually acting on state orders.

After the 1980 coup, international drug smuggling seems to have been controlled by the Turkish army. For our book, we had the opportunity to discuss this issue at length with the well-known Kurdish mafia boss Huseyin Baybaşin, now serving a life sentence at a maximum security prison in the Netherlands. Baybaşin might seem like an unreliable source, but it is striking that all the information he gave us (and the interviews were carried out before the Susurluk incident) confirm what we have found out from other sources.

In 1982 Baybaşin travelled to Europe for the first time to help set up the smuggling network. The days were past when the chain of corruption solely consisted of

police officials and people from the secret service. According to Baybaşın, who gave us a lengthy interview, the government itself was now involved organising Turks residing in western Europe with funds drawn from the international heroin trade. For Baybaşın, the most important representative of the Turkish state controlling the drug business was Sükrü Balcı, who was then the chief of police in Istanbul.

Sükrü Balcı came to talk to us himself. Our money was coming in[to Turkey] from the Netherlands and Germany via the İşbank, but was not officially going on the books there. We went to our man at the bank and he would give us the money. The same was done at the Pamuk Bank. I didn't even realise that it was the state itself that was organising the whole thing, but after certain business dealings we were told that the money was for the development of the state. After every single transaction, certainly half the money would go to the state. To us it was like a tax in exchange for the all round protection we were getting. If the money was confiscated or we were arrested, our government contacts would come and pick us up and say we were working for the state. Even in Europe, they were still protecting us. When I made my second trip to Europe that year, I saw with my own eyes that all the consulates were in the business. At every consulate, there was a staff member officially assigned to found cultural centres and Turkish schools for example, and we would donate money for them. The *Türk Kültür Derneği* [Turkish Cultural Association] was completely funded by money from the drug trade. There was not a penny coming from Turkey itself. In all the European capitals, these officials would hold meetings and posters would be made to promote Turkey (Bovenkerk and Yeşilgöz, 1998: 273-4).

## **5. Newest Developments**

In the late 1990s, the international heroin trade became a less important source of revenue for the Turkish underworld, as other drugs, in particular cocaine and ecstasy, became popular among European youth. We spoke to a Turkish smuggler in Amsterdam who told us, 'Heroin is out of fashion for good. People don't use it any more. Let's say you bring in a couple of kilogrammes, and your whole profit amounts to no more than a few thousand euros. And you are running the risk of ten years in prison!' Nowadays sizeable amounts of ecstasy are being smuggled into Turkey from abroad and then supplied to consumers in countries in the Arab world. The new business is smuggling people, Turkey is a big transit country for illegal migrants. A confidential report of the Illegal Migration and Refugee Affairs Agency in Ankara (2001) gives an impression of the size of this flow. A total of 29,426 illegal migrants were apprehended in Turkey in 1998, in 1999 this rose to 47,529, in 2000 it rose again to 94,514, and in the first nine months of 2001 the number of arrested undocumented migrants was 100,053. At the moment, the largest

numbers of migrants are from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and various countries in Africa. The average price for transportation to Europe is € 5,000. It is less dangerous for smugglers, the prison sentences are shorter, and they can more easily neutralise the criminality of their acts by stating they are helping people in need. And there is some truth to it! Faruk Akinbingol describes the system in detail in his book (Akinbingol, 2003). There is enormous pressure to leave the country. In 2001 A & G Research Bureau organised a survey among no fewer than 100,000 people in Turkey. When asked whether they would like to live abroad, 23 per cent said yes, as did 43.5 per cent in the poverty-stricken region of eastern Turkey where Kurds live. Akinbingol also notes that smugglers actively recruit their clients in Turkey's poorer villages. There is enough of a demand in western Europe for cheap illegal workers and the demand is now linked to the supply by a new underworld of Turkish and Kurdish entrepreneurs who set up temporary job agencies. Even more than drug smugglers, people smugglers work in a chain structure of independent cells. If one cell is taken out of the chain, police and justice departments are not apt to get any further. For example, things went dramatically wrong in 1999 when a lorry filled with illegal Chinese immigrants that had been chartered by a Turkish entrepreneur arrived in Dover, England, with the corpses of 58 people who had died from suffocation.

Before concluding, it is important to consider the extent to which the Turkish state is still involved in organised crime after the parliamentary investigations of 1997. According to Fikri Saglar, member of the commission and member of CHP (Republican People's Party) nothing much has changed since then:

We have not been able to retrieve the full truth as a result of political and bureaucratic repression and the fact that witnesses have not appeared or have given incomplete evidence. The report simply cannot be complete. (Saglar and Ozgonul, 1998: 376-98)

According to Saglar and Ozgonul (1998: 335), a first indication that links had not been severed was the scandal that involved the notorious ex-Grey Wolf and mafia boss Alaattin Cakici. Cakici was arrested in 1999 in France as he had allegedly threatened potential buyers of a Turkish bank (*Turk Ticaret Bankasi*) on the telephone! They were told they should not purchase the bank as there were other candidates. This criminal, who was wanted by Interpol, turned out to have had contact with cabinet ministers in Turkey. After his extradition, Cakici did spend some time in prison, but it was not long before this idealist (*ulkucu*) was released. On the day of his final arrest, 3 May 2004, Cakici escaped to Italy on a visa given to him at the Italian consulate. He was going to do business for the Besiktas football club there. The question still remains, though, as to whether the state is actually involved in smuggling people. It has become more difficult to neutralise state intervention. As long as a campaign was being waged against the Kurdish PKK, the

state could afford to take a lot of chances. Funding was needed and the state was in danger. The people who played an active role did not feel guilty because they were serving sacred state aims. After the arrest of PKK leader Öcalan however, when the PKK stopped its armed struggle, the matter was no longer as simple. Devlet Bahçeli, the new right-wing MHP leader of the Grey Wolves, made every effort to improve their image. And in part, his efforts were quite successful. People in the party who were involved with the underworld were removed from their positions – at any rate there is now no evidence of any such ties.

We would like to close though with a small challenge: in 1974, if Ecevit did not know that state gangs existed, then Erdogan, the present-day religious prime minister is certainly unaware of them. Kemalist circles distrust religious ones far too much for revealing their secret pacts with the underworld to them. And, if not even the Turkish prime minister is aware of the shady exchanges, then how could we know?

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