

# Turkey's Ergenekon Imbroglia and Academia's Apathy<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** *The Gladio Scandal in Europe and, more recently, Turkey's Ergenekon trials highlight the importance of hidden power networks behind the façade of parliamentary democracy. Dubbed as "deep state" in the Turkish context, the phenomenon suffers from a scarcity of scholarly analyses. This paper demonstrates the lack of academic interest in this complex issue in Europe, and Turkey in particular. After reviewing the central currents in the academic literature on the Turkish deep state, it offers an analysis of the Ergenekon affair in continuity with Turkey's recent past.*

**A**t the heart of civil-military relations lies a pervasive problem: "Who will guard the guardians?" This two-millennium-old question warns us against the risk of agent-opportunism, which is the alleged case par excellence in contemporary Turkey. In July 2008, former generals and active duty officers were charged with running a covert terrorist organization, Ergenekon, and inciting an armed insurgency aimed at bringing down the government of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party). At the end of the five-year trial, the court acquitted only 21 out of some 275 defendants and handed down harsh sentences to the rest.

From the very outset of the investigation, Turkish newspapers filled thousands of pages with descriptions of the indictments, painting the Ergenekon affair as an enthralling thriller; yet, it is important to note that news about the state's ties to the criminal underworld is far from a novel event. The prosecution has been viewed as a blow against the long-established Turkish *derin devlet* (deep state), a widely used term referring to parallel state operations and a hidden power network outside established state hierarchies. Such subversions imply

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that conspiratorial coalitions, composed of high-level figures of intelligence services, military, judiciary, business, and mafia, operate within (if not above) the political system.

Recently, the term “deep state” has been borrowed by several international scholars to analyze non-Turkish contexts, as well. In his analysis of Britain's role in the Iraq War, Anthony Barnett, for instance, questions whether there is “a UK ‘deep state.’”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in *The Road to 9/11*, Peter Dale Scott examines the “American deep state,” which is presented as a world of terrorism, oil, drug trafficking, and arms trade behind the facade of liberal democracy. Scott observes a parallel power structure responsible for setting the agenda of the American government.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, utilizing Hans Morgenthau's conception of the “dual state,” Ola Tunander locates the deep state vis-à-vis the democratic state and views it as not just a parallel state, but rather a political formation that exerts control over the latter.<sup>4</sup>

Despite such references to the deep state in European and American academic circles, the term appears to have attracted much less interest within Turkish academia. This article primarily deals with the lack of academic interest on the Ergenekon affair as a manifestation of the Turkish deep state. As Ergenekon is considered to be part of the stay-behind networks in Western Europe, popularly named as Gladio, the article first treats the trajectory of studies on stay-behind terrorism and points to the scarcity of scholarly work in European academia. Thereafter, it focuses on the Turkish case, while reviewing the main currents of the Ergenekon affair within Turkish studies and, finally, highlights the importance of investigating the subject in its historical continuity with Turkey's recent past.

### The Inert State of the Stay-Behind Studies

Founded in April 1949 as a transatlantic military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) institutionalized American influence in European security policy in the Cold War context, and as its first Secretary-General Lord Ismay formulated, the organization aimed to “keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down.”<sup>5</sup> Keeping the Russians out, or known formally as the United States' (US) containment policy, involved the use of several political, economic, and military instruments to counter the Soviet Union's intentions to extend its influence over Europe. One of those measures of retaliation was the institution of the Gladio program, which saw the formation of clandestine stay-behind networks in NATO countries, as well as in neu-

tral countries such as Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, and Austria. Accordingly, more than a dozen secret militias funded, trained, and armed by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) constituted a covert stay-behind network throughout Europe to operate against any Soviet expansion.<sup>6</sup>

The stay-behind scandal first broke in 1990, when Judge Felice Casson of Venice discovered that the explosives used in a 1972 car-bombing had come from arm caches kept for Italy's Gladio. The most controversial aspect, however, was the allegation that despite the absence of any Soviet assaults, these paramilitary forces had been mobilized to hinder domestic leftist groups to prevent communists from gaining power in government, business, and society at large.<sup>7</sup> The European Parliament's (EP) resolution on Operation Gladio, passed on November 22, 1990, remarked that these "military secret services (or uncontrolled branches thereof) were involved in serious cases of terrorism and crime as evidenced by, various judicial inquiries" and "may have interfered illegally in the internal political affairs of Member States." The resolution pointed out that these clandestine networks "operated [...] completely outside the law since they are not subject to any parliamentary control and frequently those holding the highest government and constitutional posts are kept in the dark as to these matters."<sup>8</sup> The EP also called the parliaments of member states to investigate these paramilitary organizations. However, only Italy, Belgium, and Switzerland pursued parliamentary investigations in this regard. With the exception of an Italian parliamentary report in 2000,<sup>9</sup> since then the Gladio story has otherwise practically disappeared from public scrutiny.

The initial, yet short-lived, curiosity after the revelation of the Gladio story led to a vast amount of journalistic accounts in different European languages.<sup>10</sup> One of the early accounts is an outstanding three-part BBC documentary, *Gladio*, which was originally aired in 1992. Directed by Allan Francovich, it provided insight to Gladio-linked false flag terrorism in Cold War Europe with special reference to the "Strategy of Tension," the anti-leftist terror campaign in Italy during the 1970s. Nevertheless, the Gladio affair did not hold the media's attention for very long, and one had to wait even longer for scholarly treatment of the subject.

That silence, however, was broken in 2005, when Swiss academic Daniele Ganser published "NATO's Secret Armies"<sup>11</sup> and reinvigorated the discussion on the Gladio affair. Although his conclusions are found to be too ambitious given the sources and evidence available,<sup>12</sup> Ganser has offered the most comprehensive analysis thus far by examining the stay-behind organizations country-by-country. Unlike studies focusing on individual countries, Ganser's work was an important contribution by expanding the scope of analysis to a more inclusive, general picture of Cold War Europe as a whole.

Opposition deputies  
Mehmet Haberal  
and Mustafa Balbay  
join the Turkish  
Parliament following  
their release from  
prison.

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At the end of the same year, when Greek writer Kleanthis Grivas wrote an article titled “Terrorism in Post-War Europe” and accused the Greek stay-behind Sheepskin of numerous assassinations and atrocities in the past, the US Department of State felt the need to make a statement. On January 20, 2006, it published a communiqué that confirmed the establishment of stay-behind forces to organize paramilitary resistance against a possible Soviet invasion. Yet, it denied allegations of US involvement in Gladio-linked strikes against European civilians and criticized Ganser’s and Grivas’s use of Soviet sources - some of which were deemed by the State Department to be forgeries: “Those researching the ‘stay behind’ networks need to be more discriminating in evaluating the trustworthiness of their source material.”<sup>13</sup>

In the same period, strikingly similar to Ganser’s findings, Ola Tunander from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) underlined the importance of US security concerns in the formation and operation of the Gladio networks, which he also viewed as part of the “the deep state.”<sup>14</sup> Tunander argues that there is a formal state apparatus acting within the constitutional framework while there is also a “security state” that controls the former and defines the limits of democracy according to the interests of the hegemonic powers. This hidden state hierarchy attempts to secure political life through terror and anarchy and prioritizes security concerns over those of democracy. In Tunander’s approach, the United States established a dual state system in Cold War European countries and the informal security hierarchy acted in several cases, “as in France and Greece in the 1960s, Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, Portugal in the 1970s,

and Sweden in the 1980s – by carrying out or preparing for ‘military coups’ in order to overthrow or contain dissident governments or to influence the policies of such governments.”<sup>15</sup>

As a recent scholarly contribution to studies on the stay-behind phenomenon, the *Journal of Strategic Studies* devoted a special section titled “Preparing for a Soviet Occupation: The Strategy of ‘Stay-Behind.’”<sup>16</sup> The volume, edited by prominent scholars Leopoldo Nuti and Olav Riste, covered stay-behinds in France, Italy, Norway, and the Netherlands. In comparison to Ganser’s book, it takes a more reserved approach by limiting American involvement to some informal relations and takes the issue of Gladio-linked domestic terrorism more cautiously, albeit not denying its possibility.

Overall, in contrast to other international political scandals, Operation Gladio seems to have attracted surprisingly little attention within political and academic circles. Any simple search on the net would demonstrate that even former US President Bill Clinton’s sexual affair with intern Monica Lewinsky has been subject to more intense (direct or indirect) academic studies. While one can read articles titled as “Monica Lewinsky’s Contribution to Political Science” or “Sex, Politics, and Public Opinion: What Political Scientists Really Learned from the Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal,”<sup>17</sup> the Gladio scandal seems to have offered little food for thought for political scientists. In this context, if one also takes into account the lack of sufficient evidence and the impossibility of acquiring archival records, the issue seems to remain limited to the realm of conspiracy theories and narratives. However, when the Ergenekon scandal broke in 2007, it re-enlived the debate on the Gladio affair.

## Writing on Ergenekon: Apathy on Campus

Turkey is making tremendous strides in increasing its share of academic publishing worldwide. With regard to the social sciences, Turkey’s political agenda provides researchers an open laboratory through which to observe and analyze the implications of the country’s long-term issues ranging from the Kurdish question to urbanization. This hyperactive environment also has its share of adverse effects, as many issues receive either superficial academic interest or none at all. For instance, the recent Ergenekon and Sledgehammer indictments, which include many cases of coup attempts, witch hunts, and illegal formations within the state, have reverberated throughout the media and society, but still not in academia. In a country that went through a military intervention nearly every decade since its transition to a multiparty system in 1946, no allegation of a suspected coup-plotting is too far-fetched, but the information overload in the indictments turned the subsequent revelations of coup plans into an ordinary event.

Another reason for academic apathy is the scientific orthodoxy, imposed by political and military bodies, which demands that academics remain loyal to the state and its ideology.<sup>18</sup> This intolerant atmosphere does not allow for academic debate on various subjects considered sensitive or taboo. As a recent example, Ümit Cizre's edited work on the Turkish security sector, the first almanac on defense and security in Turkey, was directly criticized by Chief of General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt for being part of a campaign against the Turkish Armed Forces. According to Büyükanıt, the focus on "scientific confession and objection instead of a culture of obedience," as indicated in the preface, was sufficient proof.<sup>19</sup> In this climate, social scientists in Turkey have refrained from studying the country's most sensitive and urgent problems to a great extent. Therefore, Turkey's macro-problems may have nearly never been discussed within a scientific framework, while the marginal utility of academic publication remained limited in contrast to its growth in quantity. This is also true when it comes to the subject of the deep state.

Neither the existence of clandestine networks in Turkey is novel, nor the name Ergenekon. While there were a few early efforts to conceptualize the term "deep state," as in Ahmet Özcan's 1996 work,<sup>20</sup> the first time Ergenekon, an ultranationalist network, appeared in the media was actually ten years prior to the Ergenekon operation on January 5, 1997, when the daily *Aydinlik* published an interview with retired commander Erol Mütercimler. "Defining it as a gang simplifies Ergenekon. [...] The organization sees itself above the Parliament and the law," he argued.<sup>21</sup> The same year, Can Dündar and Celal Kazdağlı published *Ergenekon*, in which Mütercimler quoted a retired general: "It is above the General Staff, the National Intelligence Agency and the Prime Minister. There are generals, heads of police departments, and businessmen in this organization."<sup>22</sup> That book, written as a documentary text, relegated the network as some ultra-nationalist right-wing snipers working with Turkish Intelligence and security forces. However, according to the recent indictments, those agents were just the tip of the iceberg and part of a larger network able to utilize different ideological segments of society for their own goals. In 2008, prosecutor Zekeriya Öz prepared the first indictment and situated Ergenekon as an ultranationalist, clandestine organization composed of civilian, military and security bodies aiming to lay the groundwork for a coup to overthrow the AK Party government. In time, that indictment followed several others and, in total, the trial amounted to 23 indictments charging 275 suspects.

The first comprehensive academic analysis on the subject was Akın Ünver's "Turkey's 'Deep State' and the Ergenekon Conundrum," which provides "an introduction and overview to a non-Turkish audience" and contextualizes the phenomenon within the militarist polity of Turkey.<sup>23</sup> Yet, it was Gareth Jenkins, who gained more recognition and brought the debate to both the national



and international levels. Jenkins's provocative study places the trials "between fact and fantasy" and perceives Ergenekon as a step "towards an authoritarian one-party state."<sup>24</sup> These initial works have been followed by subsequent articles<sup>25</sup> and conferences<sup>26</sup> of considerable value to the treatment of the deep state. More recently, the journal *Middle East Critique* devoted a comprehensive special issue and provided the first edited volume devoted solely to this topic.<sup>27</sup> Studies in this edition, "The Ergenekon Counter-Terrorism Investigation in Turkey: Representations and Implications," rely primarily on discourse analysis and explore the dynamics of subject formation in recent political re-alignments around the Ergenekon affair.

Overall, despite the significance and complexity of the topic, little scholarly work has been produced.

One can relate this scarcity to the politically sensitive nature of the topic, which also narrows the possible plurality of critical voices on the deep state phenomenon. The following section provides critical insights into the present academic literature on the Ergenekon case, in particular, and the Turkish deep state, in general.

**There is a formal state apparatus acting within the constitutional framework while there is also a "security state" that controls the former and defines the limits of democracy**

## The Question of Neutrality

The debate on the Ergenekon affair has suffered from political polarization between contending forces, as several researchers have pointed out.<sup>28</sup> In Ian Lesser's terms, the Ergenekon trials have become a "cause célèbre"<sup>29</sup> in this clash. While liberals celebrated the Ergenekon trials as a dramatic step towards democratic consolidation and a blow against the military tutelage over Turkish politics, secular nationalists believe the AK Party government was using the trials for its own goal of eliminating its secular opponents. In this conception, the trials were a case of revenge and retaliation after the AK Party narrowly survived the lawsuit at the Constitutional Court seeking its closure.

Due to the sensitivity of this subject, many writings in this growing literature show two general tendencies: (1) They either reflect a polarized approach and fail to maintain a critically neutral stance; or, (2) quite to the contrary, they are analyses from a "safe distance," i.e., examining the subject secondary to some other phenomena instead of delving into it as a primary focus.

With regard to the first tendency, the image of academics as credible scientists, elevated and detached from the masses, and producing value-free knowledge



Metin Feyzioğlu,  
President of Turkey's  
Bar Associations  
Union, briefs  
reporters about  
their efforts to  
secure retrial  
for hundreds of  
military officers.

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is long dead. Values may guide how any scientific inquiry is conducted. In polarized issues like the Ergenekon affair, it can be more difficult to transcend the immediate situation and stay neutral towards the phenomena. In the Turkish case, this polarization sometimes manifests itself to the extent that opponents of the Ergenekon investigation reduce the whole allegations to a conspiracy theory, while its proponents mobilize it as a means of explaining all past misdeeds.<sup>30</sup>

Each side accuses the other of politicizing the Ergenekon investigation, yet relies upon and flags only those arguments favoring their opinion. This may reflect a “confirmation bias,”<sup>31</sup> in which people tend to use sources affirming their pre-existing ideas and attitudes and interpret complex situations as supporting their own positions. For Jenkins, the overload of materials and lengthy indictments of the Ergenekon investigation have “dissuaded most people from even attempting to read it all” and this gave way to “a tendency by the investigation’s admirers and detractors inside Turkey and abroad to evaluate it according to their own political prejudices and preexisting worldviews rather than the merits, or otherwise, of the case itself.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, those who have read it may also reach totally different conclusions. For instance, on the one hand, Jenkins himself, who analyzes the first indictment, finds it “elusive” in its conclusions and endemic to “contradictions and irrationalities.”<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, Fatih Demiröz and Naim Kapucu, who carried out a content analysis of the indictment, do not hesitate in defining Ergenekon as a terrorist organization.<sup>34</sup>



## **The reason for academic apathy is the scientific orthodoxy, imposed by political and military bodies, which demands that academics remain loyal to the state and its ideology**

As a further example, one can compare Serdar Kaya and Yaprak Gürsoy's articles, which reflect opposing positions on the relationship between the Ergenekon affair and Turkish democratization. Kaya describes the Ergenekon phenomenon as a re-manifestation of "Unionism," the rationale of the Turkish deep state, by which he refers to militarist nationalism that justifies illegal activities for the survival of the state.<sup>35</sup> The author makes the bold claim that Ergenekon trials refer to the "end of the deep state" as the title of the article suggests. For Kaya, the public demands for further democratization and the Ergenekon trials exposing the deep state are "two processes that mutually reinforce one another in Turkey."<sup>36</sup> In contrast, Yaprak Gürsoy reduces the Ergenekon case to a cause of polarization and claims that it threatens the democratization process by polarizing the country and deepening the cleavage between the Islamists and the secularists.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, according to Gürsoy, this polarization is "not conducive to democratic consolidation" because it makes agreement among political elites more difficult and erodes the public's mutual trust, concluding that "the positive findings associated with Ergenekon disappear once the negative consequences of the case are analyzed."<sup>38</sup>

In terms of the second tendency, the sensitivity of the subject leads to the disproportionate share of descriptive works within Ergenekon studies. Instead of examining the phenomenon of the deep state directly, they mostly rely on discourse analysis to focus on particular representations of Ergenekon, in the media, for instance.<sup>39</sup> Leaving aside one's own methodological preferences, possible reasons for the lack of direct focus on the subject are the scarcity of reliable sources, the complexity of the issue at stake, the vast amount of related indictments and documents, the motive to stay away from ongoing controversy and polarization, or the probability of being easily labeled as *yandaş* (pro-AK Party) or *Ergenekoncu* (pro-Ergenekon).

These studies place the Ergenekon case as a mere fault line in Turkish political and social landscapes and recognize its implications in different settings. Ali Balcı, for instance, examines "the trajectory of the name Ergenekon in the Turkish media"<sup>40</sup> and describes the coverage of this phenomenon over the last decade. In order "to understand the fault lines" in contemporary Turkey, Balcı illustrates how the media presented the Ergenekon network even before the investigation and reacted to the subsequent judicial developments.<sup>41</sup> As another

er example, İbrahim Efe and Murat Yeşiltaş compare competing narratives of the Ergenekon case in two Istanbul based English language newspapers and examine how stereotypes and intergroup biases have been maintained in their representations of the trial.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Tuncay Kardaş also investigates how political cartoons in Zaman and Cumhuriyet, representing the two opposite discourses on the Ergenekon affair.<sup>43</sup> Daniella Kuzmanov's article follows the same path, as well. Kuzmanov takes the case of the deceased Türkan Saylan, a dedicated educator and an Ergenekon suspect, and locates the Ergenekon affair as a "nodal point" mirroring the power plays around it.<sup>44</sup> These studies, while portraying the re-alignments in Turkish politics and offering discursive constructions of Ergenekon by opposing poles, do not contribute much to our understanding of the deep state.

## Contingency vs. Institutionalism

Those studies which tend to offer an analytical perspective to Ergenekon itself basically fall into two categories: (1) The contingency approach - explaining the Ergenekon affair only through the immediate situation and as a war of attrition between the AK Party and the secular establishment; and, (2) the historical institutionalist - approach dating the roots of the deep state back to the late Ottoman Empire.

In the contingency approach, the Ergenekon case has been commonly described as more than mere legal developments targeting illegal networks in the civilian and military bureaucracy, and instead as a tug of war between the rising AK Party and the Kemalist secular establishment, which has deposed four elected governments in Turkish political history. The mass arrests, the allegations about fabricated or secret evidence, anonymous witnesses, and prolonged detentions strengthened the belief that the AK Party made use of the trial to silence the opposition. In this case, Ergenekon is considered a fault line demarcating the sides of contemporary Turkish politics. While Berna Uzun relates it to "an abyss of mistrust between the Turkish military and AKP,"<sup>45</sup> Yaprak Gürsoy and Ersel Aydınli highlight the clash between hardliners and softliners within the military. Gürsoy points out that "hardliners might perceive the changes as a threat to the corporate interests and autonomy of the military."<sup>46</sup> Aydınli, moreover, states that the softliners not only blocked the coup attempts, but also the Ergenekon operation itself was made possible by their "informal and formal cooperation [...] apparent in their failure to react negatively to the arrests of retired and serving officers, and their willingness to remain respectful of the judicial process."<sup>47</sup>

Too much contingency implies that the Ergenekon investigation is a novel development, mostly in reaction to the AK Party's closure case in the Constitu-

tional Court and further facilitated by the divide within the military. While political uses of any action are always a possibility, this reckoning can shadow the exposure of the deep state and risks turning Ergenekon into an “AK Party affair” and detaching it from its historical course. Leaving the subsequent military interventions aside, the illegal networks within the state have been on the agenda of recent Turkish politics since the Susurluk Scandal of November 1996, when a car accident revealed the secret connections between a high-ranking police chief, a politician, and an assassin. In 2005, two undercover army officers were caught red-handed in the bombing of a Kurdish-owned bookshop in the southeastern province of Şemdinli. Moreover, in 2006, before the launch of the Ergenekon investigation, organized crime networks became a hot topic yet again. The police investigations discovered fourteen illegal cell-type formations that included active-duty army and police officers, as well as members of the mafia. These ultranationalist networks held the common belief that “armed organization is necessary to save the country under the threat of an Islamist government and EU imperialism.”<sup>48</sup> The Atabey Gang also inspired a sensational debate when it faced charges for conspiracy to carry out a coup d’état. During the police raid of the house of an Atabey suspect, the police not only captured explosive materials, but also uncovered a plot to assassinate Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, including maps of the Prime Minister’s house and the road used by his convoy. The military condemned the event, but acknowledged the existence of such cell-type guerrilla networks under the Special Forces Command.<sup>49</sup> Overall, the Ergenekon case did not emerge all of a sudden and the deep state has been part of a default agenda in Turkish politics.<sup>50</sup>

While the contingency approach elaborates upon immediate causes, the historical institutionalist approach takes an alternative route and traces the deep state back more than a century. This tendency is indeed part of a trend within Turkish studies that locates the Turkish Republic as a continuation of the late Ottoman Empire.<sup>51</sup> In line with the “path dependency,” the core premise of historical institutionalism, Ergenekon here turns into the continuum of an old institution of ideology. Serdar Kaya, for instance, points as “the genesis of the Turkish deep state” the formation of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP- İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti), which assumed power in the last decade of the Ottoman state and was famous



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for its clandestine activities through its armed wings, such as the Fedaiin of 1905 and the Special Organization (Teşkilat-i Mahsusa) of 1913.<sup>52</sup> For Kaya, this historical connection is so strong that the Ergenekon affair leads him to ask whether “Unionism [is] alive and well?”<sup>53</sup> Some studies on the Turkish deep state add an international dynamic and also refer to the Gladio network as one of its determinants.<sup>54</sup>

While historical approaches are expected to contribute to the contextualization of the Ergenekon affair, studies historicizing and dating the Ergenekon phenomenon back to the period of the CUP have had the rather adverse effect of de-contextualizing and mystifying it. On the one hand, the lack of sufficient archival records makes it difficult to establish the historical continuity from the Ottoman period to the present by relying on anecdotal snapshots in Turkish politics alone. In this way, it is then assumed that the intra-state networks have been resurrected from a century ago. As one observer formulates it: “In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Unionism surfaced in Turkey once again.”<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, transforming the concept of the deep state into an ideology mystifies and detaches it from the power plays of realpolitik. While offering important meta-narratives like “deep state” or “Gladio terror,” these approaches tie into the Ergenekon affair through abstraction. Instead, one could analyze the alleged coup plots and their practicalities by examining coups in Turkey’s recent past.

### Re-locating the Ergenekon Affair

The Ergenekon phenomenon can be best understood in its continuity with Turkey’s fourth military intervention in 1997. The February 28 Process, as it is called, ended neither after the downfall of the Welfare-True Path coalition government on June 20, 1997 nor the dissolution of the Welfare Party by the Turkish Constitutional Court on February 21, 1998 for being the hub of anti-secular activities.

A more common fallacy is the argument that the February 28 Process ended with the AK Party’s coming to power in 2002. As the Welfare’s offspring, the AK Party’s electoral victory only five years after the heydays of the intervention made some generals to believe that the February 28 Process did not succeed in its objective. This belief then led to subsequent coup attempts, as former Commander of Naval Forces Özden Örnek’s diaries (used in the second Ergenekon indictment) later revealed.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, one may conclude that the Ergenekon affair aimed to complete the half-finished February 28 Process. The



divide between the hardliners and softliners within the military that facilitated the road to the Ergenekon investigation makes sense in this context.

Tracing the February 28 Process enables us to more easily trace the Ergenekon affair in terms of its structure and tactics. That military intervention was a “post-modern coup,” as its spokesperson General Çevik Bir called it in an off-record meeting with high-ranking officers in June 1997: “We successfully came to the end of this process without using guns, but by creating sensitivity in civil society and media against the danger of reactionaryism, [and] evoking sensitivity at the highest body of the state like the National Security Council. This historic event is not a coup d’état. It is a democratic postmodern coup in which civil society took part.”<sup>57</sup> The war of attrition that took down the Erbakan-led government indeed had several unarmed players, basically including the judiciary, the media, the academia, women’s associations, and trade unions.

Beside the use of civilian forces, the army also founded a military unit, the West Working Group (BÇG - Batı Çalışma Grubu), for intelligence, recording and investigation. The unit not only initiated a witch-hunt that terrorized society and labeled many as Islamists or separatists, but also engaged in operational activities as part of its psychological warfare to mobilize the secular sentiments, as exemplified in the sudden appearance of Ajzmemdis, a marginal subset of the Nurcu community, and several cinci hoca scandals, especially the story of Ali Kalkancı, who was arrested at the end of 1996 based on the statements of his young female follower Fadime Şahin.

The fourth military intervention seems to have served as a textbook example for other ambitious generals. The “Analysis” (Analiz) and the “Lobby” (Lobi) documents seized from the homes of Ergenekon suspects (and available as parts of the second Ergenekon indictment), which include instruction manuals and reports to improve the organization, provide deeper insight into the mindset of its alleged members and show how closely influenced they were by the February 28 coup in their reliance on civilian elements. In those documents, the maximum use of civilians, apart from filling the ranks of military personnel, is to provide more effective power in its operations within the public sphere. “Ergenekon needs non-governmental organizations to be established by it directly. This is because non-governmental organizations [NGO] are regarded by both the foreign and the local public as organizations fulfilling a sacred humanitarian mission,” the Analysis reads.<sup>58</sup> Benefiting from the respected status of NGOs, the aim here is to influence and direct global public opinion.

The Lobby document offers critical information as to why the founding of NGOs along the Ergenekon line is of the utmost importance for the future of the organization. Firstly, these NGOs could help re-organize Turkish youth in line with Kemalism. Otherwise, the document states, Kemalism may be

viewed as supported only by members of the Turkish military. Secondly, this can enable a civilian counter movement to the foreign-based NGOs operating in Turkey. Thirdly, any political authority encountering this civilian resistance would be forced to cooperate with them.<sup>59</sup>

In line with this strategy, Turkey witnessed a dramatic rise in the number of anti-EU and anti-AK Party organizations in the last decade. Despite their appearance in civilian garb, most of these NGOs were actually founded or run by former soldiers.<sup>60</sup> The Republic Rallies, peaceful mass demonstrations in April and May 2007 organized in defense of secularism, included several figures from Ergenekon demonstrated how elements within civil society could be used to maintain and increase political tension. The e-memorandum to block the presidential election in the midst of the rallies could now rely on public discontent.

In addition to the use of civilian elements for the coup plots, the second indictment also points to the foundation of the “Republican Working Group” (CÇG – Cumhuriyet Çalışma Grubu) by Şener Uygur within the General Command of the Gendarmerie. Apparently named after the BÇG, this unit was accused of blackmailing several people, organizations, and businessmen throughout Turkey, as well as of setting up the National Unity Movement Platform as part of its civil society operations.<sup>61</sup> In addition, crimes attributed to Ergenekon, such as the assassination of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, Italian Bishop Santoro, or the armed assault on the State Council suggest that the remnants of Gladio employed its power and networks to prepare a fertile ground for a military intervention.<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

Are the Ergenekon trials the legacy of McCarthy like system or an opportunity to confront the covert networks within the state? Whether they are pushing us toward civil dictatorship or democratic consolidation, the Ergenekon trials are a benchmark of Turkish politics in any case.

As Mehtap Söyler also points, “the deep state has been a nonissue in Turkish academia.”<sup>63</sup> Unlike what academia’s apathy might suggest, the Ergenekon case can indeed offer deeper insight into how Turkish politics operates and deserves more academic attention. The Ergenekon and the political and social context maintaining such formations can lead us to undertake further analyses of Turkish nationalism and secularism, as well as the militarist influence evident in both. In order to achieve that and delve directly into the power mechanisms in Turkey, researchers need to detach themselves from the polarized context and hold a critically neutral stance. Only in such a manner, can studies on Ergene-

kon contribute to the greater literature on civil-military relations and democratic consolidation. At the continental level, the Ergenekon trials shed light upon how stay-behind networks operated in Western Europe and may reen-liven the Gladio debate as part of studies of the history of Cold War Europe. ■

## Endnotes

1. I owe special thanks to Salim Çevik and Ahmet Kuru for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this article.
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30. This polarization in approaches is evident especially in Turkish journalistic books. In journalistic accounts of the Ergenekon affair, the fallacy of anecdotal evidence is more common, i.e. the authors may overlook the vast amount of complex data in favor of their direct experience or hearsay. For instance, see Şamil Tayyar, *Operasyon Ergenekon: Gizli Belgelerde Karanlık İlişkiler* (Istanbul: TİMAŞ, 2012); İlhan Selçuk, *Ergenekon Mergenekon* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet, 2010).
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37. Yaprak Gürsoy, *Turkish Public Attitudes Toward the Military and Ergenekon: Consequences for the Consolidation of Democracy* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Working Papers, 2012), p. 17.
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47. Aydınli, "Ergenekon, New Pacts," p. 234.
48. Ufuk Türkyılmaz, "11 derin hücre daha var," *Akşam* (Istanbul), June 2, 2006.
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50. In marked difference to the previous cases, the Ergenekon investigation was initially launched through the tacit cooperation of military, executive and judicial bodies. In legal terms, however, two reforms initiated by the AK Party were of significance in clearing the way for the relative success of the Ergenekon investigation in contrast to previous cases against illegal networks: Firstly, the specially authorized courts established upon the adoption of Articles 250 and 251 of the Code on Criminal Procedure (CMK) in June 2005 have been able to investigate crimes of terrorism and secondly, by an amendment of article 250 in June 2009, they were also empowered to investigate military personnel accused of attempts to topple the government in peacetime. These courts were able to investigate nine separate coup plots from its beginning.
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