

## 4 Grey Wolves in the Netherlands

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Grey Wolves is the name used since the end of the 1960s for the paramilitary youth movement of the MHP (Nationalistic Action Party), Turkey's extreme nationalistic political party. In Turkey the MHP has now become the third largest party in the country in terms of electoral support, and it also has an organised following among Turks in the Netherlands. At the end of the 1990s there was a fierce discussion in the Dutch media concerning to what extent the Grey Wolves here form an obstacle to the integration of Turkish migrants in Dutch society. Since then the commotion caused by this topic has subsided somewhat. This chapter will deal with the supposed extremist and racist character of the Grey Wolves. Its central question is: To what extent does the Grey Wolf phenomenon exist today in the Netherlands?

### 4.1 Introduction

Research conducted at Amsterdam schools in 2005 shows that not only Moroccan young people but also Turkish youth in the Netherlands (be it to a lesser degree) are expressing anti-Western ideas more often now than in the past.<sup>1</sup> Over a year later, the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding; NCTB) spoke of his concern about the radicalisation of Turkish young people in the Netherlands in particular.<sup>2</sup> This raises the question whether such a strong anti-Western attitude among Turkish youth, and the religious radicalisation that has been observed among some of them, coincide with growing support for Turkish nationalistic views. Or is there an increasing tendency among Turkish-Dutch youth to allow their Turkish identity to be replaced by an identity with the Islamic community?

The last time Turkish nationalism received extensive news coverage in the Netherlands was in 1997 with the publication of the controversial book *Grijze Wolven* (Grey Wolves) by the authors Stella Braam and Mehmet Ülger.<sup>3</sup> Since then little has been heard on the topic, although at certain opportune moments so-called Grey Wolves do reappear, mainly in the written news media. In the publications of the *Onderzoeksgroep Turks extreem-rechts* (Turkish Extreme-Right Research Group), Grey Wolves are linked almost without exception to both extremism and racism. Several times in recent years, questions have been raised in the Lower House of parliament about possible misconduct by Grey Wolves, and slogans and signs of Grey Wolves have been spotted at recent Turkish protest marches in the Netherlands against the Kurdish PKK.

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<sup>1</sup> Study by the City of Amsterdam / Eva Klooster, *Interculturele verhoudingen op Amsterdamse scholen in het voortgezet onderwijs en middelbaar beroepsonderwijs* (Intercultural relations at Amsterdam secondary schools), Amsterdam, 25 May 2005. Discussed in *NRC Handelsblad* 2 July 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Samenvatting Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme (Summary of the Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands) September 2006, *Kamerstukken II* (Official Reports of the House of Representatives of the States General) 2006/07, 29 754, no. 87.

<sup>3</sup> S. Braam & M. Ülger, *Grijze Wolven: een zoektocht naar Turks extreem-rechts* (Grey Wolves: a search for the Turkish extreme right). Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar 1997. A fifth, expanded reprint was published in 2004.

The following research is basically an inventory that looks at the problem in general terms. By studying the available literature, supplemented by other sources (especially reports in daily and weekly news publications and magazines) as well as a few conversations with experts,<sup>4</sup> we will address the following research questions: Who are the Grey Wolves? How are they organised? In what ways and in connection with what kinds of incidents has attention been paid to the Grey Wolves in the Netherlands in the news media in recent years (2003-August 2008)? To what extent can the activities and the ideology of the Grey Wolves be characterised as extremist and racist? In order to answer these questions, a brief historical introduction and a short look at the situation in Turkey are in order.

## 4.2 History and ideology in a nutshell

One of the problems involved in reporting on and researching the Grey Wolves is that it is not entirely clear who this name refers to. Their origin is perhaps the least problematic: the name Grey Wolves was given to paramilitary youth groups at the end of the 1960s who were allied with the ultranationalistic *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (MHP, or the Nationalistic Action Party). Grey Wolves refer to an animal that occupies a prominent place in ancient Turkish mythology as the mother, guardian and saviour of the Turkish people. The first leader of the MHP, who took charge after the party was founded in 1969, was a former Turkish army colonel, Alparslan Türkeş – "the great leader" according to many of his followers. Türkeş was the spokesman of the group of soldiers who staged a coup in 1960 and governed Turkey for 15 months. Besides being a fierce defender of the grandeur of the Turkish nation, Türkeş was also an outspoken anti-communist. By the end of the 1970s Turkey had become extremely politicised, with widespread political unrest and street violence that resulted in thousands of deaths. Groups of armed Grey Wolves marched and demonstrated through the streets and clashed with left-wing opponents. There were bombings, bank robberies and kidnappings.<sup>5</sup> Political opponents portrayed the MHP as a fascist party, something that the party itself has always sharply denied. Although the party did not maintain any official ties with the Grey Wolves, it did sponsor summer camps for them at which sports and commando training (and firearms, according to opponents) were available. Indoctrination into the ideology of the party by Türkeş and other MHP heavyweights was also on the programme. Besides the street-fighting youth militias there were also other groups responsible for the political violence in Turkey during those years: the so-called *Idealists* (*ülküçüler* in Turkish),<sup>6</sup> who were allied with the MHP and organised in diverse cultural and social organisations, as well as extreme nationalistic trade unions. In 1980 the street violence resulted in a military coup. All political parties were forbidden and the activities of the Grey Wolves and other militias decreased noticeably.

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<sup>4</sup> Conversations have been carried out with three persons: Miriam Geerse (Free University, Amsterdam), Harm van Zuthem (Inspraak Orgaan Turken, or Turkish Forum) and Ahmet Azdural (idem).

<sup>5</sup> For an impression of the turbulent political situation in Turkey after the Second World War, see E.J. Zürcher, *Turkey, a modern history*. London: Tauris & Co 1998.

<sup>6</sup> The ultimate ideal (*ülkü*), which "can only be nourished by blood, heroism, sacrifice and national hatred," is the unification of all the Turkish peoples in the land of the ancestors.

In the ideology of the MHP, nationalism and Pan-Turkism play a prominent role. Pan-Turkism strives for the cultural and political solidarity of all peoples of Turkish lineage.<sup>7</sup> According to some, the "Turkish world" covers an area that extends from the eastern Mediterranean Sea region to Xinjiang, China, and from the Volga in Russia to southern Anatolia. Pan-Turkism, which emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Turkish diaspora, can be seen as a reaction to the collapse of the Ottoman empire in the first decades of the previous century. Commentators and historians of Pan-Turkism have shown that the ideology accommodates a high measure of diversity and expresses itself in a whole range of forms: from aggressive nationalism and the struggle for political unity to the mutual involvement of the "Turkish" peoples socially, culturally and economically.<sup>8</sup> Writers and schools of thought can be found within Pan-Turkism which link the reputed common origin of all "Turkish peoples" to a superiority of the Turkish race, yet in Turkey such racial or racist ideas are not limited to Pan-Turkish ideology.<sup>9</sup> Landau states that in the 1970s, Trke had distanced himself from racial theorists in the world of Pan-Turkism.<sup>10</sup> Partly due to the influence of the MHP, Pan-Turkish ideals (although in a more moderate form) have become a permanent aspect of the foreign policy of the Turkish republic. Pan-Turkists today are mainly interested in strengthening cultural and economic ties between Turkey and new "Turkish" states such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tadzjikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus.

Under the leadership of Trke, the MHP was a small, radical, but also influential party. When the parliamentary elections were held in the 1970s, the MHP won only a few percent of the votes,<sup>11</sup> but after re-establishment,<sup>12</sup> mainly in the 1990s, electoral support grew. In 1995 the party won 8% of the votes, still under the 10% electoral threshold. In the 1999 elections the party won 18%. Until 2002 the MHP was part of a coalition government under the leadership of the social-democrat Blent Ecevit. The sharp contrasts between the radical left and the radical right in Turkish politics and society were then superseded for the most part. In the 2007 parliamentary elections the MHP won 14.3% of the votes, making it the third largest party in the Turkish parliament after the governing AK party (the moderate Islamic Party for Justice and Development of

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<sup>7</sup> See J.M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey: a study of irredentism*. London: Hurst & Company 1981. For a detailed discussion of pan-Turkism in Dutch: M.T. Geerse, *Turkse idealen op Nederlandse bodem: een kwalitatief onderzoek onder lkc's ('idealisten') in Nederland* (Turkish ideals on Dutch soil: a qualitative investigation of lkcler ("idealists") in the Netherlands). Doctoral dissertation, Department of Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Utrecht University 1998. See chapter 5 in particular.

<sup>8</sup> Besides Geerse, *Turkse idealen op Nederlandse bodem*, also see J.M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey*, and J.M. Landau, *Exploring Ottoman and Turkish history*. London: Hurst & Company 2004. Part 1 of the latter book ("Ideologies") contains many interesting comments about pan-Turkism.

<sup>9</sup> In recent years in Turkey there has been a noticeable increase in the number of articles and speeches with an anti-Semitic and racist flavour, especially within the religious / Islamic media. See for instance: <<http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=turkey&ID=SP90005>>.

<sup>10</sup> J.M. Landau, "Atsz and Trke: a note on the history of Pan-Turkism in Turkey," in: J.M. Landau, *Exploring Ottoman and Turkish history*, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> In the 1973 elections the MHP won 3.4% of the votes, and in the 1976 parliamentary elections it won 6.4%.

<sup>12</sup> In 1983 the party was re-established under the name Muhafazakar Parti (Conservative Party). In 1985 the name was changed to Milliyeti alıma Partisi (MCP, Nationalistic Unity Party) and in 1992 it was given its old name again, MHP.

Prime Minister Erdogan, which has the absolute majority in parliament) and the CHP (the Republican People's Party, the party that represents the secular and republican establishment). After the death of Türkeş in 1997, the MHP fell under the leadership of Devlet Bahçeli, who has a more moderate image than his predecessor. In a biographical essay, Landau describes Türkeş as a radical politician who was realist enough to learn from past mistakes, and as an outspoken and fierce nationalist who managed to keep "his" party within the democratic system during the second half of the eighties and the nineties without departing from his own principles.<sup>13</sup> Foreign journalists in Turkey today characterise the present MHP anywhere from centre-right to ultranationalistic. In terms of nationalistic or patriotic rhetoric, other political parties in Turkey have little to learn from the MHP. But for many observers, as well as for many Turkish citizens, the MHP is still a party with a violent and therefore contaminated past, a past from which the party leadership has never officially distanced itself.

#### 4.3 Organisational formation in the Netherlands

Since the early 1970s there have been organisations and societies of Turkish migrants in the Netherlands that have also called themselves *ülküçüler*. On 16 December 1995 in The Hague, the inaugural meeting was held of the *Hollanda Türk Federasyon*, the "Turkish Federation of the Netherlands" (TFN), otherwise known as the Turkish Federation. With a broad, neutral-sounding set of objectives, the Federation presented itself at that point as a new and independent organisation. For observers, however, it was a continuation of an older federation of Turkish-nationalistic *ülküçü* societies, the Federation of Turkish Societies in the Netherlands (HTDF – *Hollanda Türk Dernekleri Federasyonu*), which had collapsed in the 1980s.<sup>14</sup> Since it was founded, the TFN has organised the occasional congress or youth congress at which MHP heavyweights from Turkey put in an appearance and give a speech. The late Alparslan Türkeş, former leader of the MHP, is known to have visited the Netherlands four or five times. At the seventh TFN congress, held on 20 May 2007 in De Vechtsebanen in Utrecht, MHP chairman Devlet Bahçeli was the guest of honour. According to observers, a few hundred visitors were present at that gathering.<sup>15</sup> Officially there are a few dozen local organisations affiliated with the TFN, from cultural centres and youth clubs to coffee houses and a few mosques, spread out across the whole country. From conversations with my informants, however, I have the impression that behind these affiliated organisations there are quite a few "sleeping organisations." The postal address and national headquarters of the TFN is in Amsterdam-Zeeburg, in a complex where other Turkish organisations are housed. In her study, Geerse has shown that *ülküçüler* see themselves, and label themselves, as Turk, Turkist or Grey Wolf as well as *ülküçü*, including the ideals bound up with this term. They will not promote themselves as Grey Wolves in public because that designation has had a bad reputation in the Netherlands

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<sup>13</sup> J.M. Landau, "Alparslan Türkeş, a colonel turned politician," in: J.M. Landau, *Exploring Ottoman and Turkish history*, pp. 189-208.

<sup>14</sup> See M.T. Geerse, "Grijze Wolven in Nederland: het verplaatste nationalisme van een Turkse diasporagemeenschap" (Grey Wolves in the Netherlands: The displaced nationalism of a Turkish diaspora community), *Migrantenstudies* 1999, pp. 191-207.

<sup>15</sup> See the press release from the Research Group on the Turkish Extreme Right at: <<http://www.xs4all.nl/~afa/comite/artikel/artikel149.html>>.

since the 1990s. Much of the confusion about the existence of Grey Wolves in the Netherlands has to do with this attitude. What is regarded as a proud, revolutionary nickname behind closed doors or backstage by ülkücüler – and perhaps by nationalistic Turks in general – is denied or refuted frontstage or in public. There one presents oneself as "politically neutral."<sup>16</sup> The confusion also works the other way round: only a fraction of all the members of organisations affiliated with the TFN will be confirmed "idealists" or followers of the MHP. But by being members of or associating with those organisations, they run the risk of being called Grey Wolves.

#### 4.4 Public perception

It is striking how differently the Grey Wolves are written about in the sparse Dutch literature in which they are discussed. The most consistent as well as the most detailed descriptions are the articles, brochures and internet publications issued by the Research Group on the Turkish Extreme Right.<sup>17</sup> There the TFN is invariably described as an "umbrella organisation" of the extremely nationalistic MHP in Turkey, and Grey Wolves are referred to unambiguously as extremists. In older publications of the Research Group, Grey Wolves are often held responsible for confrontations that took place in the Netherlands during the 1980s and 1990s among Turks themselves, confrontations at which a number of people were killed or wounded.<sup>18</sup> A letter that the Research Group sent to the executive council of the city of Beverwijk dated 11 February 2008, in response to an alleged gathering of Grey Wolves, provides a typical example of the Research Group's more recent approach. "The Grey Wolves of the MHP," writes the Research Group in its letter:

"are an extremely nationalistic movement with fascist tendencies that has open connections with the criminal element in Turkey and Europe. Because of their nationalistic views, Grey Wolves are strongly opposed to the integration of Dutch people of Turkish origin and Turkish migrants, since they see this as an unacceptable undermining of their Turkish identity. In addition, these Turkish nationalists have a very intolerant attitude towards anyone who disagrees with them and towards ethnic and religious minority groups from Turkey. Such people are to be opposed (sometimes with violent means) because in the eyes of the Grey Wolves they pose a serious danger to the unity of the Turkish people."

So claims the Research Group, which in recent years has mainly been calling attention to municipal subsidies being paid to Grey Wolf organisations and to gatherings at which reputed Grey Wolf musicians perform. Since April 2008 the Research Group has suspended most of its other activities. "The reason for limiting and later terminating our work," writes the Research Group in a press release, "is the sense that it [the Research

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<sup>16</sup> See for example the Declaration of the Turkish Federation of the Netherlands in the book by Braam and Ülger, *Grijze Wolven* (Grey Wolves), appendix 2.

<sup>17</sup> Almost all the publications of the Research Group on the Turkish Extreme Right can be found at <[www.xs4all.nl/~afa/comite/index.html](http://www.xs4all.nl/~afa/comite/index.html)>.

<sup>18</sup> See for example the brochures *Stop de Grijze Wolven!* (Stop the Grey Wolves!) and *De Hollandse Leeuw en de Grijze Wolf* (The Dutch Lion and the Grey Wolf), issued by the Research Group in 1997 and 2000. To what extent this had to do with political violence, criminal violence or violence of some other kind cannot be established without further investigation.

Group] has investigated all the facets of extreme Turkish nationalism in the Netherlands – as far as it is able – and has also published exhaustively on this subject."<sup>19</sup>

Other literature about Grey Wolves in the Netherlands – besides reports from daily and weekly news sources – is somewhat older. In a richly illustrated history of Turkey published in 2002, which includes a chapter on Turks in the Low Countries, reference is made to the recent facelift that Grey Wolves have undergone.<sup>20</sup> Although the MHP for many years has been a strong supporter of a secular form of government in Turkey, the great leader Türkeş expressly incorporated Islam into the party's ideology in the last decade before his death. Because of this, many Grey Wolves in Western Europe have ended up in religious organisations, according to the authors. Geerse also shows that religiosity is not at odds with sympathy for the ülkücü ideology. She concludes: '(Turkish) young people who grow up in the Netherlands often mention their faith and the faith of their parents in the same breath with their sympathy for the ülkücü ideology.'<sup>21</sup> Geerse's anthropological study of a Grey Wolf organisation in Utrecht is the only academic treatment of this movement I know of in the Dutch language. By holding interviews and attending meetings, she managed to shed light on the world of ülkücüler. Geerse attempted to avoid "stigmatising terms such as fascism and extremism," and she describes the ülkücü movement as a transnational network. Ülkücüler constitute a minority of a minority in the Netherlands; they do not focus their attention on the Netherlands but on Turkey and the Turkish nation. The ülkücü way of thinking involves displaced nationalism, "long-distance nationalism."<sup>22</sup> Like observers of Turkey and Turkish domestic politics, Geerse has found that the nationalistic character of the ülkücüler is most evident in their view on the position of the Kurds, yet in this respect their standpoint has a great deal in common with that of many other (non-Kurdish) Turks. They oppose every form of Kurdish separatism and do this by consistently emphasising that Kurds do not have their own culture and are no different from Turks in terms of ethnicity and race. "After talking back and forth a bit about the Kurds, they make statements like 'They just want a piece of Turkey, and of course we'd never permit that' and 'We were here first, it's that simple, and we're not going to give Turkey up'."<sup>23</sup>

Two other books about the Grey Wolves in the Netherlands, also somewhat older, are less reflective and caused quite a stir at the time of publication. The first is the investigative report *Grijze Wolven*<sup>24</sup> (Grey Wolves), by Stella Braam and Mehmet Ülger, which does not differ sharply in terms of tone and content from the publications of the Research Group on the Turkish Extreme Right. Braam and Ülger see the Grey Wolves primarily as a group that strongly opposes the integration of Turks in Dutch society, a group that "is working behind the scenes to establish a 'Turkish state'

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<sup>19</sup> See: <<http://www.xs4all.nl/~afa/comite/artikel/print/artikel153.html>>

<sup>20</sup> René Bakker, Luc Vervloet & Antoon Gailly, *Geschiedenis van Turkije* (History of Turkey). Amsterdam: Bulaaq 2002, chapter 10, "Turken in de Lage Landen" (Turks in the Low Countries).

<sup>21</sup> M.T. Geerse, *Turkse idealen op Nederlandse bodem* (Turkish ideals on Dutch soil).

<sup>22</sup> A term coined by Benedict Anderson. See: B. Anderson, *Long-distance nationalism: world capitalism and the rise of identity politics*. Wertheim lecture, Amsterdam, Centre for Asian Studies 1992.

<sup>23</sup> M.T. Geerse, *Turkse idealen op Nederlandse bodem* (Turkish ideals on Dutch soil), chapter 9.7, summary, p.126.

<sup>24</sup> S. Braam & M. Ülger, *Grijze Wolven*.

within the Netherlands. "The report attracted a great deal of attention when it was published in 1997 because the authors felt compelled to go into hiding for several weeks after having received threats, which may or may not have been serious. Especially the "suggestive tone" of the book and the "flimsy basis for the charges" gave rise to the requisite criticism.<sup>25</sup> The book did result in a political investigation and search warrants for the offices of the TFN (in the year 2000). The Amsterdam municipal district of Zeeburg broke all ties with the TFN and with the neighbourhood organisations that were affiliated with the federation.<sup>26</sup>

The Grey Wolves also occupy a prominent place in the book *De maffia van Turkije*<sup>27</sup> (The Turkish Mafia), by criminologists Frank Bovenkerk and Yücel Yeşilgöz. The authors describe the interrelationship between politics and crime in Turkey and try, following the report of the *Enquêtecommissie Opsporingsmethoden*<sup>28</sup> (Parliamentary Investigative Committee on Investigation Methods), to expose Turkish-Dutch organised crime as part of a European network. In Amsterdam in particular (according to the authors) there are ülkücüler working in cooperation with a Turkish underworld (whereas in Arnhem the heroine trade is said Kurdish migrants are more in control). In hotels, restaurants and cafés in Amsterdam's Mercatorbuurt, which were frequented by ülkücüler, a thriving drug trade was said to have taken place in the 1980s and the early 1990s.

Less alarming than these two books are the annual reports of the General Intelligence and Security Service (Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst; AIVD). These reports pay little attention to the supposed threat of the Grey Wolves in the Netherlands. Only the AIVD annual report of 2003 mentions the fact that the TFN initiated few activities, if any, due to lack of money.<sup>29</sup> In the AIVD annual reports for 2004 through 2007, Grey Wolves and the TFN are no longer mentioned and only radical Islamic networks within the Turkish and Kurdish Turkish communities in the Netherlands are discussed.

#### 4.5 Grey Wolves in the news media, 2003-2008

This section will focus on the ways in which Grey Wolves caught the attention of the Dutch news media from 2003 through August 2008, and on what kinds of incidents were involved. An inventory was taken of the digital clipping archive of the Anne Frank House, an archive that contains news reports in the daily and weekly printed news media on racism, discrimination and related topics. The inventory resulted in a few dozen reports that are being grouped here for the sake of clarity.

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<sup>25</sup> Criticism of the book by Braam and Ülger can be found in Mohamed el-Fers and Chris Nibbering, *Hoe gevaarlijk zijn de Turken: onderzocht en besproken* (How dangerous are the Turks: researched and discussed). Amsterdam: Türkebi 1998.

<sup>26</sup> See the article "Linkse organisatie Doorbraak beschuldigt Turkse clubs" (Left-wing organisation "Breakthrough" accuses Turkish clubs), *Het Parool* 3 March 2008.

<sup>27</sup> F. Bovenkerk & Y. Yeşilgöz, *De maffia van Turkije* (The Turkish Mafia). Amsterdam: Meulenhoff 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Enquêtecommissie Opsporingsmethoden: Autochtone, allochtone en buitenlandse criminele groepen (bijlage VIII) (Parliamentary Investigative Committee on Investigation Methods, Appendix VIII, Native Dutch, ethnic minority and foreign criminal groups). *Kamerstukken II* 1995/96, 24 072, no. 17, pp. 106-109.

<sup>29</sup> *Jaarverslag AIVD 2003* (AIVD Annual Report for 2003). Den Haag: Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst 2004, p. 54.

#### 4.5.1 Threats

The number of threats or perceived threats involving Grey Wolves that are reported in the daily and weekly printed media was small for the researched period and can be counted on the fingers of one hand. On 16 March 2006 at Erasmus University in Rotterdam an academic congress on the Armenian genocide was disrupted.<sup>30</sup> About 400 people took part in the congress. Twelve young hecklers, who according to the newspaper were "shaved bald, with long moustaches and dressed in black jackets," interrupted the gathering by shouting, screaming, handing out pamphlets and making Grey Wolf gestures<sup>31</sup> with their fists. In 2008 the National Expertise Centre for Discrimination (Landelijk Expertise Centrum Discriminatie; LECD) of the Public Prosecution Service studied the possible discriminatory content of these gestures. Just making the gesture is not punishable, according to the LECD. Witnesses at the aforementioned incident reported that two of the youths had firearms. Police officers in bullet-proof vests had to put an end to the uproar at the Rotterdam university. The Grey Wolf sign and Grey Wolf flags<sup>32</sup> were also spotted by the media at a few demonstrations, especially demonstrations against the PKK, the Kurdish separatist movement, in the second half of October 2007. The struggle between the Turkish army and the PKK had flared up earlier that month on the border between Turkey and Iraq, which had repercussions in the Netherlands in the form of tension and scuffles between Turks and Kurds. A survey article in *NRC Handelsblad* on this issue (31 October 2007) makes reference to fights in Doetinchem between about ten Turks and Kurds, and two attempts to set fire to the building of the Arnhem Kurdish Association. Windows in the buildings of Kurdish clubs in The Hague were also smashed.<sup>33</sup> In The Hague, the banner of an advertising plane was confiscated on which the Grey Wolf slogan was written in Turkish, which translates as: "Martyrs never die. Indivisible fatherland." In Deventer, Utrecht, Amsterdam, Haarlem and Dordrecht, a few hundred Turkish-Dutch people took part in anti-PKK demonstrations. The largest demonstration was on 28 October 2007 in Utrecht and drew an estimated 1,000 - 1,500 participants. Whether all the incidents mentioned above were organised by TFN-affiliated organisations or persons is unclear, and perhaps even improbable. When it comes to antagonism between the Kurds and the Turks, approximately 80% of the Turks in the Netherlands are strongly opposed to any form of Kurdish separatism.

#### 4.5.2 Meetings

Grey Wolf meetings are regularly covered in local and regional newspapers, in most cases in response to counter-protests that are usually started by the Research Group on the Turkish Extreme Right mentioned earlier. For the period under investigation here, the Turkish Federation organised two congresses, in 2004 and 2007. At both gatherings MHP leader Bahçeli was present as a guest of honour and speaker. In 2005 a 'youth encounter' was organised in Utrecht. Other than this, the TFN has not organised any

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<sup>30</sup> Reported in *AD/Rotterdams Dagblad* 23 March 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Thumb, ring finger and middle finger touching at the tips, index finger and little finger raised, creating a wolf's head. In the LECD Newsletter (no. 2008-2) there was a discussion of the extent to which making this gesture should be punishable.

<sup>32</sup> A red flag with not one half moon and star, like the Turkish flag, but three half moons with stars.

<sup>33</sup> See the article "Turkse nationalisten roeren zich" (Turkish nationalists rise in revolt), *De Fabel van de illegaal* 2008, no. 89/90, pp. 89-90.

visibly political events. In recent years the Research Group has also protested a number of times annually against cultural events at which Grey Wolf musicians from Germany and Turkey were said to have performed. This included folkloric minstrel music as well as pop, rap and marching music by Turkish-speaking bands who weave a nationalistic message into the text of several of their numbers.<sup>34</sup> Some gatherings are popular and attract a great many young visitors: a so-called Nevruz gathering on 23 March 2008 at the Aladdin party centre in Beverwijk, where a number of popular bands and singers performed, attracted almost two thousand visitors. The lyrics sung by the singers and bands that performed there are more distinctly nationalistic than racist in character: the Turkish nation, identity and flag are glorified, the late great leader Alparslan Türkeş is honoured ("overcome by smouldering grief"), war is declared on Kurdish separatism, et cetera. Usually the Research Group's protest against such gatherings is ignored by hall owners or local authorities, giving them a high ritual content. A letter is sent to the municipal executive of the city in which the event is to take place, asking that action be taken to prevent criminal displays and remarks during the gathering. The organisers stress that this is not a Grey Wolf event but a "cultural gathering." Questions are sometimes asked at city council meetings, and an article may appear in the local newspaper. Almost without exception no other steps are taken. It has never been established that expressions in violation of the criminal prohibitions on hate speech were observed at any of the political or cultural-political gatherings of the Grey Wolves.

#### 4.5.3 *The question of subsidies*

A third subject in which Grey Wolves have been featured more than once in the news is the subsidising of their organisations. As reported earlier, in 2000 the Amsterdam municipal district of Zeeburg broke all financial ties with the TFN and the other Turkish organisations housed in the complex on the Zeeburgerdijk. But in 2006 the district did give the organisations that manage the building a financial guarantee intended to safeguard the facilities in the complex, which are used by many local Turkish residents. The Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool* reported that otherwise the complex would have to be put up for sale because of mismanagement.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the Turkish Social Cultural Centre, also housed in the building, received another loan from the district of 35,000 euros in 2006, for which representatives of the district were later questioned. Over the past five years, Amsterdam has not been the only city in which the subsidising of Grey Wolf organisations has led to questions being raised in the city council. In 2004 the Minister for Immigration and Integration was even interrogated on the subject by the CDA.<sup>36</sup> The minister replied that it is up to the municipal authorities to see that municipal subsidies are spent lawfully and appropriately. However, she did say that cities with questions about the nature of a particular organisation wishing to be considered for a subsidy can obtain information from the AIVD. I have not been able to discover whether any cities have taken advantage of this offer.

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<sup>34</sup> In the brochure entitled *Nationalisme en Turkse muziek* (Nationalism and Turkish music) *Alert*, March 2007, the Research Group on the Turkish Extreme Right provides an overview of known Turkish nationalistic musicians.

<sup>35</sup> See *Het Parool* 3 April 2008.

<sup>36</sup> This concerned questions from MP Sterk (CDA), *Aanhangsel Handelingen II* 2003/04, no. 1710.

#### 4.5.4 Controversy over the Armenian genocide

In 2006 Grey Wolves became a general topic of discussion in scores of articles on the debate raging in the Netherlands over the Armenian genocide of 1915. In the run-up to the elections for the Lower House of parliament, two candidate MPs of Turkish origin, one from the CDA and the other from the PvdA, were removed from the candidate lists because they refused to acknowledge that this genocide had taken place. This denial, which also represents the official position of the Turkish government and is endorsed by the vast majority of Turks in the Netherlands, is fiercely defended and professed in Turkish nationalistic circles. Because they thought the two candidates had been silenced, a few dozen nationalistic Turkish students with tape over their mouths protested at the party offices of the PvdA and the CDA in Amsterdam and The Hague. It would take us too far afield to summarise the content of the political debate in the Netherlands as reported in the media. One noteworthy fact, however, is that in one of the articles on this subject, the newspaper *Trouw* mentioned an earlier visit by Prime Minister Balkenende to a Grey Wolf organisation in The Hague.<sup>37</sup> This concerned a visit to the Turkish Islamic Cultural Foundation of The Hague, an organisation affiliated with the TFN in the Schilderswijk district.<sup>38</sup> The author of the article suggested that the CDA, more than any other political party, seeks electoral support from among nationalistic Turks. Interestingly, in the same newspaper, Coskun Çörüz, a CDA MP of Turkish descent, clearly and unambiguously acknowledged the Armenian genocide of 1915. Çörüz, who has been linked with the activities of pan-Turkish organisations several times in the past,<sup>39</sup> is eager to discuss this topic within the Turkish community.

#### 4.5.5 Participating in elections

One more category of reports in the media involving Grey Wolves has to do with the participation of alleged Grey Wolf candidates in elections. These are Turkish politicians on lists of candidates of Dutch political parties who are somehow connected (or can be connected) with the Turkish Federation or one of their affiliated organisations. According to the Research Group on the Turkish Extreme Right, which has tried to bring reports of this practice to the attention of the news media, albeit with little success, there were ten candidates in the city council elections of 7 March 2006 "who maintain ties with the Grey Wolves." So-called Grey Wolf candidates were elected in two Amsterdam submunicipal councils; for this reason the Research Group speaks of "feeble results" for the Grey Wolves in the elections. One might question the Research Group's way of working: some candidates have the appellation "Grey Wolf" thrust upon them with little hesitation because they are or once were members of an organisation allied with the Turkish Federation. In any case, this manner of reasoning is based on the premise that all the TFN affiliated organisations and persons are equally "infected." The suggestion is also implied that Grey Wolves "infiltrate" and can never change their views.

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<sup>37</sup> *Trouw* 28 October 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Also see a brief report of this visit in *Trouw* 4 June 2004.

<sup>39</sup> See for instance the article *SOTA en Coskun Çörüz* (SOTA and Coskun Çörüz) in the brochure *Pan-Turkisme in de polder: grijze Wolven in Nederland 2000-2004* (Pan-Turkism in the polder: Grey Wolves in the Netherlands, 2000-2004). Utrecht / Amsterdam: Fok / Alert 2004, p. 12 ff.

#### 4.5.6 Criminality

Finally, Grey Wolves also crop up in a number of newspaper reports on criminal or punishable offences. A few examples: a stabbing that had taken place on De Brink, a public square in Deventer, on 14 October 2006, was, according to media coverage a few months later of the trial in Zwolle, a "confrontation between followers of the PKK and Grey Wolves."<sup>40</sup> *Vrij Nederland*, a weekly news magazine, reported in 2008 in a story about a new crown witness in the case against Willem Holleeder, a Dutch criminal, that an Amsterdam police interpreter was allegedly corrupt. The suspect was "the son of a Turk who was maintaining ties with the Grey Wolves," the weekly explained.<sup>41</sup> In view of the commotion that was caused ten years ago by Bovenkerk and Yeşilgöz with their aforementioned book on the Turkish mafia, it is perhaps striking that there have not been more reports of this kind.

#### 4.6 A few observations

After looking more closely at the reporting on Grey Wolves in the Dutch newspapers over the last five years, a number of cautious comments can be made. First of all, the number of reports is strikingly small. Grey Wolves look more and more like a ghost from the past. The electoral successes of the MHP in Turkey have not resulted in more Turkish Federation activities. Just the opposite. There are indications that the Turkish Federation is not in good financial shape, and interest in the TFN congresses that are organised at regular intervals has declined noticeably in recent years. One cause might be that Turks in the Netherlands are less oriented towards politics in Turkey than they once were. Another might be that the MHP in Turkey (and by extension the TFN in the Netherlands) play less of a central role in the political differences in that country. The big debate in Turkish politics today has to do with whether Turkey should remain a strict secular state. The moderate Islamic AK party of Prime Minister Erdogan, which now has an absolute majority in parliament, is tinkering with the roots of this secular state, according to opponents. In this debate on Turkish identity, the MHP is taking a moderate position without wanting to let go of the secular state idea. Furthermore, after the death of its great leader Türkeş in 1997 and the imprisonment of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the MHP is sailing in less radical waters. The new "great leader" Bahçeli is much more moderate than his predecessor.

None of this alters the fact that, in all probability, there is a rich breeding ground among Turkish young people in the Netherlands for virulent nationalistic ideas or pan-Turkish ideals (the two are not always the same, by the way; pan-Turkism can also focus on international cooperation). Conversations with informants<sup>42</sup> confirm me in my opinion that Turkish nationalism among young Turkish Dutch people and Dutch Turks is certainly not dead and may even have quite a future. At universities and colleges, at Dutch-Turkish sites where Turkish is used as language and in chat boxes on the internet, thoroughly radical ideas are being spotted, ideas that are not only religiously inspired but also nationalistic in tone. No proper study of this phenomenon has been done,

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<sup>40</sup> *De Stentor* 12 January 2007.

<sup>41</sup> *Vrij Nederland* 14 April 2008.

<sup>42</sup> See note 4.

however.<sup>43</sup> A report in *NRC Handelsblad* of 3 October 2006 mentions a nationalistic Turkish group known as Ayyildiz (named after the Turkish flag) that hijacks Dutch and Kurdish-Dutch websites.

The striking thing is that neither the TFN nor Grey Wolves are serving as the vehicle of rising nationalism among the Turkish youth of the Netherlands. In the few incidents summarised in section 4.5.1, in which newspaper journalists claimed to have detected Grey Wolf involvement, there are even questions as to whether these were really Grey Wolves in the sense of MHP or TFN followers. The chance is considerable that interrupting an academic congress at Erasmus University in 2006, for example, was the work of an independent group of nationalistic Turkish students rather than the work of Grey Wolves, persons who are somehow connected with the Turkish Federation. Nevertheless, the fact that they make use of Grey Wolf symbols in their demonstrations may only mean that they are well aware of the power of the symbol. An anonymous spokesperson from the organisation mentioned in the previous paragraph, Ayyildiz, told the newspaper that "naturally they are nationalistic," but that they maintain no ties with the Grey Wolves or the Turkish secret service.<sup>44</sup>

One last comment: Grey Wolves are politically less leprous than they were a decade ago. Ten years ago, when Braam and Ülger published their book *Grijze Wolven*, half of the Netherlands saw Turkish youth slipping en masse into "total non-integration," as the authors called it on the back flap of their book. Today, Grey Wolves are receiving visitors from even the highest level in the person of the Prime Minister. Such a visit is at least a striking signal, even if its only aim was to send the unambiguous message that political tension and nightmares are very fashion-sensitive.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter an attempt was made to come to grips with a number of questions. Who are the Grey Wolves? How are they organised? How do they come to the attention of the media. To what extent can the activities and ideology of Grey Wolves be called extremist and racist? In the past, answering the first question always led to misunderstandings, not least of all because followers of the MHP in Turkey and the affiliated Turkish Federation in the Netherlands always went to a great deal of trouble to avoid being labelled as such in public. As noted, in the past the Turkish Federation often presented itself as politically neutral, although in fact it maintained close ties with the MHP, and invariably invited representatives of this party to its congresses as guests of honour. Since the end of the seventies, "ülküçüler" and "Grey Wolves" have become general appellations for followers of the MHP's extreme nationalistic ideology – with the added note that within the last decade the MHP has adapted and revised some aspects

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<sup>43</sup> The only study of the political preferences of Turkish students that I am aware of is by Ahmet Bulut, student of Policy, Communication and organisation at Amsterdam's Free University. By means of an online questionnaire (not very reliable), he gauged the political preferences of Dutch students (vocational schools, higher professional schools and universities) with a Turkish background. This questionnaire revealed that the MHP has a relatively large following among them (18.5%). See: <[http://www.academicrepublic.com/dissertations/nederlandse\\_students\\_van\\_turkse\\_afkomst\\_kort.pdf](http://www.academicrepublic.com/dissertations/nederlandse_students_van_turkse_afkomst_kort.pdf)>

<sup>44</sup> See *NRC Handelsblad* 3 October 2006.

of its radical image. Research has indicated that the Dutch media have shown less interest in Grey Wolves during the last five years. That may mean that extreme nationalistic ideas are not as popular among Turks as they were before. It may also mean, however, that the Turkish Federation and the organisations affiliated with it are not quite the vehicle for radical nationalistic ideas among Turks in the Netherlands that they had been in the past. There are signs that the latter possibility is indeed the case, but no research has yet been carried out. For this reason further investigation into the extent to which Turkish nationalistic views prevail among Turkish young people in the Netherlands is certainly desirable. Finally, the Grey Wolf ideology can best be characterised as nationalistic or – certainly by Dutch standards – extreme-nationalistic. But once again: it is less extreme than it used to be. It is much more difficult to substantiate the accusation that the ideology of the Grey Wolves incites racial hatred. In the past, Grey Wolves were often accused of intimidating, fighting with and threatening Kurds, Alevis and left-wing political opponents – in the Netherlands as well. Today such incidents occur only sporadically, and there are no indications that racism is involved.