

# **A Trajectory of Competing Narratives: The Turkish Media Debate Ergenekon**

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The term *Ergenekon* is widely used as a catchall for what is often called the most important legal process in Turkish history, in which two high-ranking former generals, many retired military officers, and some well-known public figures were arrested and charged in 2008 with attempting to overthrow the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) by a military coup. Technically, the proceedings involve a “case against the infringement of article 313 of the Turkish Penal Code: establishment of a criminal organization.”<sup>1</sup> *Ergenekon* also refers to a shadowy “organization,” a state within the state of Turkey, often referred to as the “deep state.” In this essay I focus mostly on the trajectory of the name *Ergenekon* in the Turkish media, rather than on the intricacies of the case, and provide some descriptive background about the nature of the case for non-Turkish readers.

The history of the deep state in Turkey starts with the foundation of the modern republic. Although references to the deep state date back to earlier periods, in this essay I examine its coverage in the Turkish media during the past decade. *Ergenekon* was conceptualized, defined, and redefined by the media; it was brought to public attention by the media, not by state officials, the police, politicians, inspectors, or members of the organization. My main intent in this essay is not to redefine *Ergenekon* yet again but to analyze the meaning of *Ergenekon*, how that meaning is continually defined and rede-

1. H. Akin Unver, “Turkey’s ‘Deep-State’ and the Ergenekon Conundrum,” *Middle East Institute Policy Brief*, no. 23 (April 2009): 2.

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fined by the media, and how the facts related to Ergenekon are interpreted by the media.

Specifically, I attempt to answer the following questions: How had the media dealt with Ergenekon before the term was confirmed by state officials and Turkish courts? How different was the media reaction to the term *Ergenekon* or how had they presented it to their audiences before *Ergenekon* was accepted officially? What were the first reactions of the media when state officials used the term for the first time? What were the reactions of different media groups to the Ergenekon organization as portrayed by the Turkish courts? Because the Ergenekon issue has brought different ideological camps face to face, these questions are critical if we are to understand the fault lines not only in the Turkish media but in Turkish society and politics. However, this essay is limited to the media reaction to Ergenekon up to the date when the indictment of Ergenekon was submitted to the court in July 2008.

I do not attempt a comprehensive analysis of Turkish media organizations. Instead I focus on specific groups because of their high interest in the Ergenekon case and the fact that their ideological stances as part of the Turkish press are well known. Among the newspapers used as data sources for this essay are *Hurriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Vatan*, *Sabah*, *Taraf*, *Yeni Safak*, *Zaman*, and others. *Hurriyet*, *Milliyet*, and *Vatan* may be described as secular or Kemalist media.<sup>2</sup> Although those newspapers, especially the daily *Milliyet*, host some liberal columnists, all of them are known as secularist and Kemalist. *Taraf* and *Sabah* are characterized as liberal oriented. They employ liberal columnists but also leftist and conservative writers. However, nearly all of the columnists are of liberal orientation, and this group is more homogeneous when compared to the first group with regard to their political tendencies. A third group is composed mainly of *Zaman* and *Yeni Safak* and is called Islamist even though they also host liberal columnists.

### ***Ergenekon* before the Ergenekon Investigation**

There is no exact answer to the question as to what the first activity of Ergenekon was or when it started. The term *Ergenekon* was first used in 1997

2. Kemalist, as a term, means ardent supporter of the revolutions of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey.

by the writer and political analyst Erol Mutercimler (who was later detained during an Ergenekon operation conducted in July 2008 but released a few days later). In an interview with the nationalist daily *Aydınlık* on 5 January 1997, he defined Ergenekon as a “Gladio-type”<sup>3</sup> gang hidden within the state, and argued that “it is above the General Staff, the MİT [national intelligence organization] and the prime minister.” It counts among its adherents heads of police departments and businessmen.<sup>4</sup> This 1997 interview was given in the context of the Susurluk incident, a traffic accident in which a criminal wanted by police for many murders and the deputy chief of the Istanbul police department were both killed and a parliamentary deputy was injured on 3 November 1996. All three were in the same vehicle.

Mutercimler reiterated his arguments in a documentary film directed by Can Dunder titled “40 Minutes.”<sup>5</sup> The documentary, broadcast on 7 January 1997, was about the deep state and its activities in Turkey. Like the interview in *Aydınlık*, the film accused rightist groups and individuals of being involved in underground business during Turkey’s recent past by introducing four rightist militants — Abdullah Catli, Mehmet Ali Agca, Haluk Kirci, and Oral Celik — as main figures of the deep state, or Ergenekon. The film noted that “all these activities are managed by the NMP [Nationalist Movement Party]” and quoted from a 1978 report written by prosecutor Dogan Oz. According to the documentary, another proof of Ergenekon’s rightist dimension was its foreign connections. Mutercimler said that he had heard the name of the organization from retired general Memduh Unluturk, who was the commander of the Ziverbey Villa in which counter guerrilla movements were first revealed. Unluturk told him that Ergenekon “was founded with the support of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon after the 27 May coup” staged against the Democratic Party in 1960, with the aim of restoring a secular and Kemalist regime. This connection suggested that Ergenekon was a rightist and statist organization in the context of the Cold War. In short, Ergenekon was, according to Mutercimler’s and Dunder’s accounts, a rightist movement nested within the state institutions.

3. Gladio is the common name of anticommunist underground networks established in all NATO countries during the Cold War.

4. Kamil Maman, “Ergenekon Is above General Staff, MİT,” *Today’s Zaman*, 7 July 2008.

5. Can Dunder, “40 Minutes,” Show TV, 7 January 1997. For the text (Turkish) of this documentary, see [www.candundar.com.tr/index.php?Did=5983](http://www.candundar.com.tr/index.php?Did=5983), accessed 14 April 2009.

The name "Ergenekon" was again brought to the public attention by Fikri Saglar, a member of the Kemalist and secular Republican People's Party (RPP) and a member of the Turkish Parliament's Susurluk Inquiry Committee. He gave a 2000 press conference in which he argued that "all actor-unknown murders [in Turkey] were executed by the Ergenekon organization," whose members were trained in Panama by the CIA.<sup>6</sup> For Saglar, Ergenekon was an organization nested within the state and was some kind of militant body committing all "actor-unknown" murders, such as that of Semsî Denizler, secretary-general of the Turk Labor Trade Union and chairman of the Mining Labor Trade Union. A few months later, Can Atakli, a *Sabah* columnist, wrote that Ergenekon was "a secret organization operating under the control of the state."<sup>7</sup> He repeated two main arguments: that Ergenekon was the main organization behind the Susurluk incident and that it was established as a reaction to the Soviet threat during the Cold War.

The portrait of Ergenekon drawn by predominantly secular and Kemalist writers in the second half of the 1990s has three distinctive features. First, Ergenekon was equated with those who were involved with the Susurluk incident. Because it was thought of in the context of the Susurluk incident, Ergenekon was essentially depicted as an "armed gang" within the state.<sup>8</sup> Second, there was uncertainty about the founding date of Ergenekon, but nearly all writers agreed that it was first established with the support of the United States in the context of the Cold War. Third, all analysts, columnists, writers, and journalists depicted it as a gang committing murders. Some journalists even accused Ergenekon of having killed such popular leftist figures as Ugur Mumcu, Denizler, and Ahmet Taner Kislali.

Secular writers and journalists were dominant in discussions about Ergenekon until Taha Kivanc (an alias used by Fehmi Kuru), one of the important columnists in the Islamic media, mentioned in his column of 30

6. "Ergenekon Committed the Killings," *Zaman*, 18 January 2000; "Perpetrators of Susurluk Are Known," *Hurriyet*, 17 January 2000. Fikri Saglar also published a book titled "Code Name Is Susurluk" in 1998. See Fikri Saglar and Emin Ozgonul, *Kod Adi Susurluk* (Istanbul: Boyut Kitapları, 1998).

7. Can Atakli, "Allah Won't Remove Demirel from Power," *Sabah*, 27 June 2000.

8. Cetin Altan, "Is the Perspective of Secret Service Changing?" *Sabah*, 21 January 2000. For criticism of Altan's depiction of Ergenekon as an "armed gang," see Ayse G. Tunceroglu, "Hezbollah or Ergenekon," *Turkiye*, 24 January 2000.

April 2001 a report dated 29 October 1999 with the title "Ergenekon: The Project for Analysis-Reconstruction, Management and Development."<sup>9</sup> However, Kivanc did not disclose the author of this secret report allegedly prepared by the Ergenekon network. Kivanc focused on financial activities of Ergenekon and its endeavors to bring Turkish money held in foreign banks back to Turkey with the help of some Turkish hackers. The importance of the article, however, was that for the first time it described a document of Ergenekon. Kivanc wrote a more comprehensive article regarding the 1999 report a day later and quoted some passages.<sup>10</sup> According to those passages, Ergenekon had a Kemalist side and some influence on civil society. Almost two weeks later, Faruk Mercan, a columnist for the Islamist newspaper *Zaman*, connected Kivanc's Ergenekon with that of Mutercimler and Dundar.<sup>11</sup> He reiterated the argument made previously and depicted Ergenekon as a "militant body" within the state.

In the midst of those discussions, an article titled "Civil Ergenekon" by Harun Odabasi was published on 12 May 2001 in *Aksiyon*, a weekly news-magazine of the Islamist Gulen movement.<sup>12</sup> Odabasi accused Dundar of not citing the leftist wing of Ergenekon in his documentary and book, which is an extended version of the documentary and was coauthored by Celal Kazdagli.<sup>13</sup> Odabasi also noted the new role of Ergenekon after the Cold War and argued that it created a new enemy to justify its continued existence. According to Odabasi, the new enemy was Islamist groups. Ergenekon had reorganized itself in collaboration with Kemalist civil society organizations to combat anti-Kemalist factions. In Odabasi's article, the 28 February 1997 coup staged against the Islamist Welfare Party was presented as the most important activity of the post-Cold War Ergenekon gang.

The picture painted by Islamist writers and journalists was different from the picture of Ergenekon of the second part of the 1990s and had three distinctive features. First, Ergenekon was not a rightist organization controlled by rightist militants who killed leftist writers and journalists but was essen-

9. Taha Kivanc, "Are the Dreams Real?" *Yeni Safak*, 30 April 2001.

10. Taha Kivanc, "Do Not Think It Is Raving," *Yeni Safak*, 1 May 2001.

11. Faruk Mercan, "Was the Demirag's Organization Ergenekon?" *Zaman*, 12 May 2001.

12. Harun Odabasi, "Civil Ergenekon," *Aksiyon*, 12 May 2006.

13. Can Dundar and Celal Kazdagli, *Ergenekon: A State within a State* (Ankara: Imge, 1997).

tially a secular and Kemalist structure. Second, it was reorganized during the 1990s into an organization to defend the regime against Islamist and anti-Kemalist movements. Third, Ergenekon not only was a militarist gang within the state but had extensions functioning at the civil society level.

In conclusion, there were two different entities before the start of the Ergenekon investigation: On the one hand Mutercimler, Dundar, and Saglar had discussed Ergenekon in the context of the Susurluk incident and depicted it as an armed gang within the state. On the other hand, Koru and Odabasi had freed Ergenekon from the Susurluk incident and portrayed it as a wider organization ranging from armed gangs to civil society associations.

### **The Re-emergence of Media Attention to the Ergenekon**

A gunman named Alparslan Arslan entered the Council of State building on 17 May 2006, killed council member Mustafa Yucel Ozbilgin, and injured four other members. A week later, the prominent newspaper *Hurriyet* published an article titled "Ergenekon Structure" by Toygun Atilla.<sup>14</sup> According to the article, retired lieutenant Muzaffer Tekin, allegedly a key figure behind the Council of State attack, "has strong relations with those who are important figures of Ergenekon." This article, published after a five-year break, triggered broader media interest in the organization.<sup>15</sup> A highly controversial argument about Ergenekon's true nature was voiced by Bulent Orakoglu, who was a senior intelligence officer during the 28 February coup, in an interview in *Radikal*, a secular and liberal newspaper. Orakoglu claimed that "Ergenekon carried out the 28 February [1997] coup."<sup>16</sup> Thus, secular and Kemalist groups were included within Ergenekon by an official for the first time.

14. Toygun Atilla, "The Organization of Ergenekon," *Hurriyet*, 24 May 2006.

15. See, for example, Taha Kivanc, "Ergenekon," *Yeni Safak*, 26 May 2006; "The Hand of Ergenekon," *Star*, 26 May 2006; Ibrahim Sarp, "Ergenekon Reality with All Its Aspects," *Star*, 26 May 2006; Ibrahim Sarp, "Ergenekon Reality 2," *Star*, 27 May 2006; Ibrahim Sarp, "Image Problem of the Organization," *Star*, 28 May 2006; Fatih Polat, "Ergenekon," *Evrensel*, 31 May 2006; Ali Bayramoglu, "What Is Ergenekon, Where Is It?" *Yeni Safak*, 1 May 2006; Nazlı Ilıcak, "Ergenekon," *Takvim*, 1 May 2006.

16. For the interview with Bulent Orakoglu, see Nese Duzel, "Mumcu Found Apo's Contact within the State," *Radikal*, 29 May 2006.

This re-emergence of Ergenekon in the media after five years was short lived, and it faded away within two weeks. During this brief period, although the mainstream media again depicted Ergenekon as an "armed gang within the state" by referencing the Council of State attack, there were in fact two Ergenekons in the media's coverage. The secular and Kemalist press focused on ganglike formations within the state, while the Islamist press pointed to the fact that Ergenekon restructured itself in the late 1990s and had expanded into secular civil society associations. In the secular and Kemalist media, some columnists presented Ergenekon as an offshoot of the Susurluk gang,<sup>17</sup> and some news reports connected the perpetrators of the Council of State attack with those connected with the Susurluk incident.<sup>18</sup> They supported their argument with quotes from the book written by Dunder and Kazdagli. Because the book depicted Ergenekon as an extension of rightist and nationalist counter-guerilla movements in the 1970s, the secular media again revived rightist names such as Catli and Sedat Peker.<sup>19</sup>

Some secular columnists also attempted to link the Council of State attack to Islamists by insisting that it was an assault meant to protest the ban against wearing the turban and Islamic clothing in public spheres.<sup>20</sup> Ertugrul Ozkok, editor-in-chief of *Hurriyet*, called the Council of State attack "the September 11 of the Turkish Republic" by referencing the 11 September 2001 attacks against the World Trade Center by al Qaeda, known as an "Islamist terrorist" organization. For him, "one of the secular regime's most basic and fundamental legs, the justice system, was hit in its very heart."<sup>21</sup> He later renewed his argument by saying that "if one of a country's most critical courts is attacked, resulting in the death of a judge at that court who had signed off on a decision involving religion, this is an event of historical importance. That's why I will continue to view last week's event as Turkey's September 11."<sup>22</sup> In short,

17. Can Dunder, "Is It Ergenekon?" *Milliyet*, 25 May 2006; Derya Sazak, "The Anatomy of Killing," *Milliyet*, 30 May 2006.

18. "The Susurluk Is Implicated in the Attack against the Council of State," *Radikal*, 23 May 2007; "All Clear about the Gang except Its Name," *Radikal*, 24 May 2007; "Susurluk again," *Star*, 24 May 2006.

19. Toygun Atilla, "The Organization of Ergenekon," *Hurriyet*, 24 May 2005; "Wherever Veli Kucuk Is, Former-Captain Muzaffer Tekin Is There Too," *Hurriyet*, 23 May 2006.

20. Melih Asik, "Back to the Council of State," *Milliyet*, 15 July 2006.

21. Ertugrul Ozkok, "The September 11 of the Republic," *Hurriyet*, 18 May 2006.

22. Ertugrul Ozkok, "Meeting at the Reasonable," *Hurriyet*, 25 May 2006; Ertugrul Ozkok, "Now the Deepest Conspiracy," *Hurriyet*, 31 May 2006.

the Council of State attack was the affair of rightist militants according to some secular and Kemalist columnists.

The Islamist press differentiated itself from the secular and Kemalist press by developing two different interpretations of Ergenekon. First, it strongly advocated that Ergenekon was not only an armed gang but also included members from academia, media, business, and civil society associations.<sup>23</sup> The Islamist press based this argument on an article by Asli Aydintasbas in *Sabah*.<sup>24</sup> According to this article, Ergenekon had a constitution in which there were rules and aims for the civil dimension of the organization. Second, the Islamist press also emphasized a secular dimension of Ergenekon by relating it to the 28 February 1997 coup. The interview with Orakoglu in *Radikal* was used by columnists and writers to reinforce their arguments.<sup>25</sup> For those columnists and writers, this connection made it possible to argue that the Council of State attack was a part of a wider project aimed at destabilizing Turkey and creating permissive conditions to stage a coup against the ruling Islamic party.<sup>26</sup> They strongly rejected secular and Kemalist arguments that it was an assault driven by an Islamic impetus.

Nearly a year later, Ergenekon was again on the media agenda, and its frequency has increased day by day. However, it was not the main topic in the media in the latter half of 2007 and was discussed only in the context of operations conducted against armed gangs by the police. Nevertheless, the media were more interested in Ergenekon than before, and terms such as "Ergenekon operasyonu" (operation),<sup>27</sup> "Ergenekon soruşturması" (investigation),<sup>28</sup> and "Ergenekon davası" (trial)<sup>29</sup> were mentioned in the writings of journalists and columnists alike in January 2008. Even though there was a

23. Hakan Cagrı, "The Target of the Investigation Is Ergenekon," *Aksiyon*, 29 May 2006.

24. Asli Aydintasbas, "The Constitution of Ergenekon," *Sabah*, 26 May 2006; Asli Aydintasbas, "The Constitution of Ergenekon 2," *Sabah*, 27 May 2006. For the reflection of this report in the Islamist press, see "Ergenekon Also Had a Constitution," *Zaman*, 27 May 2006; "Here Is the Secret Constitution of the Deep State," *haber7.com*, 26 May 2006.

25. Huseyin Gulerce, "The Expert Speaks," *Zaman*, 2 June 2006.

26. Cagrı, "The Target of the Investigation Is Ergenekon"; İsmail Kucukkaya, "How I See," *Aksam*, 3 June 2006; Mustafa Unal, "The Big Conspiracy," *Zaman*, 4 June 2006.

27. The term was used for the first time in an article in *Hurriyet*. See "Ergun Poyraz under Pressure for Being the Man of the Army," *Hurriyet*, 15 January 2008.

28. *Hurriyet* itself first used the term later. See Mumtazer Turkone, "Gang Culture," *Zaman*, 25 January 2008.

29. Yasin Aktay, "The Law of Convicts," *Yeni Safak*, 28 January 2008.



consensus in the media that there were armed gangs within the state, it was possible again to identify two essentially different conceptions of Ergenekon in the Turkish media's coverage.

The confiscation of twenty-seven hand grenades in a slum house during a police raid in Umraniye, Istanbul, on 12 June 2007 was a turning point, and there is a consensus that the Ergenekon investigation was started after that event.<sup>30</sup> The police arrested Mehmet Demirtas, the owner of the house, and his nephew Ali Yigit during the operation. After they alleged that Oktay Yildirim, a noncommissioned officer, brought the grenades to their house, the police arrested him too. The interrogation of those three figures by the police revealed a "web of relations" among former army officers.<sup>31</sup> Taken into custody after the statements of detainees was retired lieutenant Tekin, whose name had already come to public attention because he had been taken into custody during the investigation of the Council of State attack but later released. Tekin was an important figure, not only because he had close relations with some people whose names were associated with gangs, but because his title connected the investigation with the military. The other figure who was taken into custody was retired noncommissioned officer Mahmut Ozturk, who had taken Tekin to the hospital after he attempted suicide following the Council of State attack.<sup>32</sup>

During these operations, the police confiscated the computers of Yildirim and Tekin. In these computers the police discovered some encrypted files that included plans of an organization named Ergenekon.<sup>33</sup> The police organized a raid on 26 June 2007 on a house in Eskisehir belonging to Fikret Emek, who had retired from the Special Forces Command in 2004, and seized a Kanas weapon, Kalashnikovs, hand grenades, TNT explosives, and many documents.<sup>34</sup> The mainstream media depicted Ergenekon in the con-

30. Samil Tayyar, "I Am Disclosing," *Star*, 28 November 2008.

31. "What Kind of Deep Relations under the Shadow of Bombs?" *Milliyet*, 16 June 2007; "A Handbook for the New Breed of Gangs," *Milliyet*, 22 June 2007.

32. "A New Military Officer under Custody," *Radikal*, 21 June 2007; "The Circle Is Narrowing," *Aksam*, 21 June 2007.

33. "The Claim That the Trace of Ergenekon Was Found," *Milliyet*, 18 June 2007; "Tekin ve Yıldırımın bilgisayarları inceleniyor," *Zaman*, 19 June 2007.

34. "Curious Connections between Retired Army Members," *Today's Zaman*, 28 June 2007; "The Scandal about the Major after the Captain," *Milliyet*, 27 June 2007.

text of those two operations as an “armed gang” set up by former army officials aiming to “save the country.” Some columnists and journalists related Ergenekon to the Susurluk incident by focusing on the detainees’ relations with “Susurluk hero” Veli Kucuk.<sup>35</sup> The Supreme Court of Appeals’ decision to approve former deputy Sedat Bucak’s sentence regarding his involvement in the Susurluk incident on the same date made it easy to connect the 2007 operations with Susurluk.<sup>36</sup>

The gap in treatment of the subject between the secular and the Islamist media was in its narrowest phase after the operations. Although it did not give up the claims that Ergenekon was the offshoot of Susurluk and nationalist gangs, the Kemalist and secular media partly accepted that Ergenekon could be an organization conducting its activities at the civil society level with some civil actors.<sup>37</sup> The insistence on Ergenekon’s connection with the figures in the Susurluk incident was the main argument that differentiated the secular media from their Islamist counterparts. Some columnists argued that new gangs whose names had come to public notice with police operations were groups that *emerged* from the Susurluk gang and counter guerrilla groups established to fight against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party—Kurdish militants conducting a war against the Turkish army in southeastern Turkey since 1984.<sup>38</sup> The discovery of a new gang named Vatansever Gucler (the Patriotic Forces) just after the two operations made it possible to connect Ergenekon with nationalist movements and argue that it was supported by some important people and state institutions.<sup>39</sup>

The Islamist media agreed with the arguments of the secular press, but they highlighted strongly the coup-supporting nature of Ergenekon and its civil extensions.<sup>40</sup> The Islamist press believed that those gangs were a part of

35. Derya Sazak, “The Questions about the Council of State Attack,” *Milliyet*, 22 June 2007; Ekrem Dumanli, “While Turkey Is Losing Its Charisma,” *Today’s Zaman*, 21 June 2007; “Veli Kucuk Again,” *Radikal*, 19 June 2006; “Susurluk Perpetrators Are on the Stage Again,” *Zaman*, 19 June 2007; Perihan Magden, “Long Live the Country, Long Live Benefits Pouring,” *Radikal*, 4 October 2006.

36. “The Punishment for Susurluk Confirmed,” *Hurriyet*, 22 June 2007.

37. Saygi Ozturk, “The Deep State Busted!” *Tempo*, 10 August 2007.

38. Derya Sazak, “The Kaldırım Gang,” *Milliyet*, 21 June 2007.

39. “Now a Patriotic Gang,” *Radikal*, 4 June 2007; Mehmet Ali Birand, “Let’s Get Rid of the State Gangs . . .,” *Hurriyet*, 6 July 2007; Derya Sazak, “The Track of the Sack,” *Milliyet*, 28 July 2007.

40. Taha Kivanc, “When ‘Ergenekon’ Is Mentioned . . .,” *Yeni Safak*, 22 June 2007.

a wider campaign aimed to overthrow the ruling Islamic government by destabilizing Turkey. They justified their argument by pointing out the connection between the captured arsenal in Umraniye and the grenade attacks at the secularist *Cumhuriyet* newspaper's office in 2006.<sup>41</sup> Islamist writers focused also on the connection between the Council of State attack and the people who were taken into custody after the Umraniye operations to strengthen their arguments. For them, the links were enough to accuse the gangs of being part of a wider campaign against the ruling Islamist party. Since their campaign was against an Islamic party, Ergenekon was not a rightist or Islamist organization but a secular one.

### The First Ergenekon Operation and the Media

As a part of the Ergenekon investigation, the police detained thirty-nine people, including former army officers, lawyers, and journalists, in an *operation* called Ergenekon on 23 January 2008.<sup>42</sup> Among the detainees were such well-known individuals as retired major generals Kucuk and Kemal Kerincsiz, who had filed countless suits against Turkish liberal writers and intellectuals; Sami Hostan, a key figure in the Susurluk investigation; and Fikri Karadag, president of the National Forces Society (Kuvayi Milliye), known for a ceremony in which its members undertake to kill and be willing to die for the cause. They were accused of being behind many assassinations and other illegal activities in the recent past. According to reports in the press, the Ergenekon network was also behind the Council of State attack, the slaying of famous Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in 2007, the murder of Italian priest Father Andrea Santoro in 2006, and several bomb attacks on the offices of *Cumhuriyet*. It was also reportedly plotting to kill Nobel Prize-winning novelist Orhan Pamuk.<sup>43</sup>

Before the first operation was conducted, some important changes had taken place in the landscape of the media. In November 2007, a new newspa-

41. Huseyin Gulerce, "So Turkey Is under the Control of Gangs?" *Zaman*, 21 June 2007; Nazli Ilıcak, "Retired Military Men Are on Duty," *Takvim*, 28 July 2007; Nazli Ilıcak, "Is the Council of State Attack the Job of a Gang?" *Takvim*, 29 July 2007.

42. "An Operation against Ergenekon at Dawn," *Hurriyet*, 23 January 2008.

43. "Assassination of Pamuk Worth 2 Million Turkish Liras," *Hurriyet*, 24 January 2008.

per, *Taraf*, was established by some liberal and liberal-leaning leftist writers who aggressively opposed the interference of the Turkish military in civilian affairs. Soon thereafter, Sabah-atv media group was sold to Calik Holding, known for its close relations with the ruling JDP. Those changes were important because both *Taraf* and Sabah-atv became principal proponents of the Ergenekon investigation in the media. *Taraf* especially grounded its arguments on its opposition to any military interference or involvement in the civilian sphere and to organizations that aimed to change the composition of parliament using undemocratic methods. Although there were some differences between the two camps, Islamist newspapers gained new supporters among liberal groups with a focus on Ergenekon.

Allegations against the Ergenekon network narrowed the gap between descriptions of its activities in different media groups. However, the secular media's emphasis on the Susurluk connection was as strong as before. Dunder wrote two articles in which he quoted phrases from his book to connect a tradition dating from counter guerrilla movements to the Susurluk incident and eventually to Ergenekon.<sup>44</sup> He compared Zekeriya Oz, the chief prosecutor of the Ergenekon investigation, with Dogan Oz, who wrote a report about counter guerrilla movements in the late 1970s and was murdered two months after issuing it. For Dunder, "the aim of the Ergenekon network is to create a chaotic situation for a coup through assassinations" against public figures as counter guerrillas had done before the September 1980 coup. In contrast, some secular columnists criticized those who referred to the detainees of Ergenekon as neonationalist (*ulusalci*) by arguing that it was wrong to associate the names of Republican intellectuals with killers and coup-lovers.<sup>45</sup> In general, however, there was relative silence among secular columnists about the Ergenekon operation.

In an interview with *Taraf*, Murat Belge, a left-leaning activist, academic, and columnist, argued that "the year 2009 would have been a year of blood-

44. Can Dunder, "Ergenekon," *Milliyet*, 28 January 2008; Can Dunder, "Second Oz," *Milliyet*, 29 January 2008.

45. Melih Asik, "Talk on Turban," *Milliyet*, 29 January 2008; Melih Asik, "Made to Wear a Turban," *Milliyet*, 30 January 2008; Melih Asik, "Talk of the Chin under the Turban," *Milliyet*, 31 January 2008. For a critical article against the operation, see Yilmaz Ozdil, "Three in one . . .," *Hurriyet*, 25 January 2006.

shed if the Ergenekon network had managed to stage a coup.” According to Belge, Republican rallies held in Ankara, Izmir, Istanbul, and other Anatolian cities against the JDP government in 2007 were organized by civil society associations established by retired generals in the Ergenekon network.<sup>46</sup> After *Taraf* claimed that the coup attempt of Ergenekon in collaboration with civil society associations had collapsed, *Sabah* published a news report illustrating a “six-phase plan” devised to prepare conditions for a “2009 coup.”<sup>47</sup> Both newspapers featured information about the civil dimension of preparations for a possible 2009 coup while secular newspapers, *Hurriyet* and *Milliyet*, published those allegations in only a few sentences. Liberal writers also presented Ergenekon as a “coup-maker organization” and linked it with the “coup tradition” of Turkey, which had experienced “three and a half coups” in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997 (the 1997 event is called a half coup by liberal writers).<sup>48</sup>

The depiction of Ergenekon as a “coup-maker organization” in collaboration with civil society associations was common among Islamist newspapers, columnists, and writers.<sup>49</sup> Like liberal-inclined writers, Islamist columnists accused the secular media of preferring “to be silent in the face of Gladio-like gangs”<sup>50</sup> and linked Ergenekon with the status quo regime by leaving its nationalist and rightist roots aside.<sup>51</sup> For them, “the deciphering of the Ergenekon terrorist organization showed that for many years the status quo had done everything to maintain its power and that it would continue to do so.” However, the Islamist columnists differentiated themselves from their liberal counterparts by intentionally insisting on calling the Ergenekon gang the “Ergenekon Terror Organization.”<sup>52</sup> One can identify three characteris-

46. Murat Belge, interview with Nese Duzel, “An Apocalyptic Blood-Bath Would Have Taken Place before the Potential Coup in 2009,” *Taraf*, 28 and 29 January 2008.

47. “Who Would Have Staged the Coup?” *Taraf*, 25 January 2008; “Six-Phased Coup,” *Sabah*, 28 January 2008.

48. Ahmet Altan, “The Dizziness of the Deep State,” *Taraf*, 25 January 2008; Hasan Cemal, “Chasing Also Needed within the State!” *Milliyet*, 29 January 2008.

49. Ekrem Dumanli, “The Coup in 2009,” *Zaman*, 29 January 2008; Samil Tayyar, “Why Is the Year 2009 Chosen to Plan a Coup?” *Star*, 28 January 2008.

50. Ekrem Dumanli, “All Eyes on the Judiciary in the Gang Trial,” *Zaman*, 24 January 2008; Tamer Korkmaz, “Quiet, Quiet, Quiet Now: Mum Is the Word!” *Yeni Safak*, 27 January 2008.

51. Mehmet Kamis, “Status Quo,” *Zaman*, 2 February 2008.

52. Huseyin Gulerce, “Either Gangs or Democracy,” *Zaman*, 25 January 2008; Huseyin Gulerce, “The Armed Forces and Gangs . . .,” *Zaman*, 1 February 2008.

tics of the Islamic media in their treatment of Ergenekon during the first operation. First, the Islamic press sustained its claim that Ergenekon was a product of the late 1990s and that it had no strong relations with rightist movements in the 1970s and the Susurluk incident. Second, the Islamists writers criticized the secular media because of their silence on Ergenekon operations and accused secular writers of previously ignoring the left wing of armed gangs. Last, the Islamist press used the term "Ergenekon Terror Organization" to underline the importance of the situation.

### **A New Operation and the Emergence of Discontents in the Secular Media**

On 21 March 2008, the Turkish police detained eleven persons from "the leftist pillar of neonationalism" as part of an investigation into the Ergenekon network. The detainees included famous writers, academics, and politicians, all of whom were known as fierce critics of the JDP government. Among them were İlhan Selçuk, writer and columnist for the secular newspaper *Cumhuriyet*; Dogu Perincek, head of the Turkish Workers' Party, which had won less than 1 percent of votes in the general elections in 2007; and former İstanbul University rector Kemal Alemdaroglu. Those well-known names ended the silence of secular columnists about Ergenekon and triggered a skeptical and critical stance regarding the investigation. They accused Ergenekon operations of crushing opponents of the JDP government. Main opposition RPP leader Deniz Baykal described the investigation as a tool for the ruling JDP "to put pressure on the country's respected" figures and "construct its own deep state."<sup>53</sup>

The widening of the gap between the media groups' approaches toward Ergenekon was the most important result of the March operation. While Islamist and liberal media presented the operation as a "deepening of the investigation," the secular media saw it as an effort to silence "civilian opponents" of the ruling party. Dunder argued that the March operation aimed not to get rid of the deep state but to eliminate "civilian opposition" branded with

53. "Baykal: AKP Establishes Its Own Deep State," *Sabah*, 22 March 2008; "The Deep State of AKP," *Cumhuriyet*, 22 March 2008; "AKP Establishes Its Deep State," *Milliyet*, 22 March 2008.

the name Ergenekon.<sup>54</sup> He argued that the Ergenekon investigation was not a judicial process but rather a political action, because it was some kind of revenge stemming from the closure case filed against the JDP on 24 March 2008. The closure case was filed by the Constitutional Court, one of the main guardians for the secular regime, on the grounds that the JDP had become "the center of activities contrary to the principle of secularism." This kind of depiction of Ergenekon was important because it not only ended the minimal support of secular groups for the Ergenekon investigation but also caused strong opposition from Kemalist and secular writers.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, some secular and Kemalist columnists called the Ergenekon investigation part of a wider "counterrevolution" by the ruling party, conducted against "those who do not betray the Republican revolution and refuse to surrender."<sup>56</sup> They grounded their arguments on the arrest of Selcuk in an "ostentatious" dawn raid and presented it as a sign of "coming dark days" for secular and Kemalist thinkers in Turkey.<sup>57</sup> For example, Tufan Turenc, a columnist for *Hurriyet*, compared the operation with the McCarthy period in the United States, in which everyone was potentially guilty, and concluded that the latest arrests were the result of a McCarthy mentality in Turkey.<sup>58</sup>

Although all liberal-oriented columnists criticized the manner of Selcuk's interrogation, some of them saw his detention as a sign of the seriousness of the investigation.<sup>59</sup> According to Ahmet Altan, a well-known novelist and columnist for *Taraf*, this detention showed that the Ergenekon investigation "would touch those who were thought of as untouchables."<sup>60</sup> Yet most lib-

54. Can Dunder, "Golden Shoot," *Milliyet*, 22 March 2008.

55. Can Dunder, "Vice Versa: Everyone Take a Step Backward!" *Milliyet*, 27 March 2008.

56. Bekir Coskun, "Your Turn Will Come . . .," *Hurriyet*, 22 March 2008; Ertugrul Ozkok, "What if Ilhan Selcuk Speaks?" *Hurriyet*, 22 March 2008; Mustafa Balbay, "Is It 'Clean Hands' or the Cleansing of anti-AKP Groups?" *Cumhuriyet*, 24 March 2008; Mustafa Balbay, "Show-down with the Republic," *Cumhuriyet*, 23 March 2008.

57. Bekir Coskun, "Great Plain Tree . . .," *Hurriyet*, 23 March 2008; Melih Asik, "At Ilhan Selcuk's home . . .," *Milliyet*, 24 March 2008; Yalcin Bayer, "Fear of Ilhan Selcuk," *Hurriyet*, 22 March 2008; Mehmet Y. Yilmaz, "If You Are Not a Supporter of AKP You Are a Supporter of the Coup," *Hurriyet*, 29 March 2008.

58. Tufan Turenc, "The McCarthys of Our Age," *Hurriyet*, 22 March 2008.

59. Mehmet Barlas, "If Only We Had Not Arrested Him," *Sabah*, 23 March 2008; Hasan Cemal, "A Sunday Article for Ilhan Selcuk . . .," *Milliyet*, 23 March 2008; Taha Akyol, "Time for Moderation," *Milliyet*, 24 March 2008; Emre Akoz, "Do You Think Ergenekon Was Made Up of Two Triggersmen?" *Sabah*, 22 March 2008; Ismet Berkan, "Small-Big Ergenekons," *Radikal*, 22 March 2008.

60. Ahmet Altan, "This Does Not End Here . . .," *Taraf*, 23 March 2008.

eral writers argued that the closure case was a reaction to the Ergenekon operations, rather than the other way around.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, some leftist columnists, similar to secular writers, presented the latest arrests as a "counterreaction" against the closure case.<sup>62</sup> However, all of them differentiated themselves from their secular counterparts by taking the side of the Ergenekon investigation and calling the closure case a "judicial coup" aiming to prevent the probe.<sup>63</sup> Etyen Mahcupyan, an Armenian columnist and intellectual, described the "attempt to close the JDP" as "the last resort" of those who were members of the Ergenekon organization. For him, with the latest arrests by the government showed it would not "give up easily."<sup>64</sup>

However, the gap between liberal and Islamist writers was at its narrowest phase. The Islamist press and columnists based their approaches on three pillars. First, although some Islamist columnists, like their liberal counterparts, criticized the way in which Selcuk's interrogation was carried out, nearly all depicted him as someone who was related to coup scenarios.<sup>65</sup> Second, they connected the closure case with the Ergenekon operations. For them, the closure case was filed to derail the investigation by those who had close relations with the Ergenekon gang, because a copy of an indictment bill against the JDP was found on the computer of one of those arrested during the Ergenekon operation.<sup>66</sup> Third, the Islamist media accused their secular and Kemalist counterparts of darkening and distorting information about the Ergenekon investigation. For example, Ekrem Dumanli, editor-in-chief of *Zaman*, argued that the secular media harbored ill motives and aimed to distort the investigation and the relevant facts. For him, those who had strongly supported the unmasking of the Susurluk gang chose to hide information related to the Ergenekon investigation.<sup>67</sup>

After the March 2008 operation, the landscape of the media became clearer. The Dogan Media Group, the biggest media conglomerate in Turkey,

61. Cengiz Candar, "Let's Not Miss the Main Point," *Referans*, 25 March 2008.

62. Murat Belge, "Democracy of Being a Democrat," *Radikal*, 25 March 2008; Murat Belge, "Reconciliation: Where Is It?" *Radikal*, 29 March 2008.

63. Seyfettin Gursel, Eser Karakas, and Cengiz Candar, "The AK Party Should Not Defend Itself before the Court," *Taraf*, 24 March 2008.

64. Etyen Mahcupyan, "Duel," *Today's Zaman*, 28 March 2008.

65. Taha Kivanc, "Once I Become Betrayed," *Yeni Safak*, 24 March 2008; Nuh Gonultas, "For Those Who Do Not Know, 9 March Junta and Ilhan Selcuk . . .," *Bugun*, 23 March 2008.

66. Tamer Korkmaz, "The Question Mr. Ilhan Has to Answer . . .," *Yeni Safak*, 24 March 2008.

67. Ekrem Dumanli, "Brief Notes on Breaking Points," *Zaman*, 31 March 2008.



with its leading newspapers *Hurriyet*, *Milliyet*, and *Vatan* and television networks, took a critical stance against the Ergenekon investigation by grounding its discourse on a criticism of the detention of “respectable people.” Liberal and liberal-aligned leftist dailies *Taraf*, *Sabah*, *Referans*, and partly *Radikal* (*Radikal* is owned by Dogan Media Group but has a liberal leftist editor-in-chief) continued to support the investigation even though they criticized the method of Selcuk’s interrogation. The Islamist media, *Zaman* and *Yeni Safak*, strongly supported the investigation and criticized the Dogan Media Group on the grounds that it had ignored the facts about the Ergenekon probe. Other newspapers that have relatively low circulation in Turkey took various positions. For example, the daily *Vakit*, an Islamist newspaper, was one of the most ardent supporters of the March operation.<sup>68</sup> *Star* and *Bugun*, both of which have both liberal-aligned writers and Islamist columnists, supported the operation with some reservations about the manner of how Selcuk was treated. This distinction is important because those newspapers maintained their position on the Ergenekon investigation until the time of this writing (spring 2009).

### The Operation for “Big Fishes”: Generals under Arrest

On 1 July 2008, the police arrested twenty-four persons under the Ergenekon investigation, including two retired generals, a businessman, and a newspaper columnist. Retired general Sener Eruygur, the former head of the gendarmerie forces; retired general Hursit Tolon; Ankara Chamber of Commerce chairman Sinan Aygun; and journalist Mustafa Balbay were among those detained. The arrest of two high-ranking former generals linked the investigation with alleged coup attempts against the JDP government by a secular and nationalist cabal. The newsweekly *Nokta* had published lengthy excerpts from a diary allegedly written by Admiral Ozden Ornek, former Navy Forces commander, in March 2007. According to the Ornek diary, Aytac Yalman, the commander of the army, Ornek, and Ibrahim Firtina, an air force general, together with Eruygur had planned two separate coups with the code names Sarikiz (Blonde Girl) and Ayisigi (Moonlight) against the JDP government in

68. Hasan Sarikaya, “The Deep State That Was Wanted Has Been Found: Ergenekon,” *Vakit*, 22 March 2008.

2004. Although *Nokta* was closed for three days by its owner after a police raid, the discussions of the coup attempts revealed in those excerpts had continued in the rest of the Turkish press until the two generals were arrested.

After the July operation, the secular and Kemalist media focused on the arrest of civilians such as Balbay and Aygun, while liberal and Islamist newspapers highlighted the detention of the two high-ranking former generals. Some columnists in *Hurriyet* argued that the investigation had turned into ideological revenge or a "witch hunt" as in the McCarthy period by pointing out that all detainees were opponents of the JDP government.<sup>69</sup> For secular columnists, Balbay and Aygun were arrested during the operation simply because of their commitment to the Turkish Republican revolution led by Atatürk in the 1920s.<sup>70</sup> This argument was supported with news stories that sought to make a case that the country was moving away from the principles of the Kemalist revolution. The front pages of *Hurriyet*, *Milliyet*, and *Vatan* were full of so-called evidence about the JDP government turning Turkey into an Islamic state. In a stark expression of this line of publishing, *Cumhuriyet* presented the arrests as a clear example of the return of Islamic rule.<sup>71</sup> Second, some secular and Kemalist columnists argued that the memoirs uncovered by *Nokta* did not belong to Ornek and that the claims about coup attempts were just a conspiracy theory.<sup>72</sup> Last, secular and Kemalist writers accused the public prosecutors carrying out the investigation of not submitting the indictment for nearly one year even though many people had been arrested under the Ergenekon investigation.<sup>73</sup> For them, the case of Kuddusi

69. Cüneyt Arcayürek, "The Soldiers of Mustafa Kemal: The Day Will Come," *Cumhuriyet*, 2 July 2008; Ertuğrul Özkök, "Hang Me, Then the Country Will Be Saved," *Hurriyet*, 3 July 2008; Tufan Türenc, "Canım sikiliyor," *Hurriyet*, 2 July 2008; Melih Asik, "Perch on Everywhere . . .," *Milliyet*, 2 July 2008; Can Dundar, "An Inquiry Named 'Perch on Everywhere,'" *Milliyet*, 2 July 2008; Cengiz Mengi, "A Gloomy Day . . .," *Vatan*, 2 July 2008; Can Atakli, "Ergenekon Will Suffer Most," *Vatan*, 2 July 2008; Tufan Türenc, "AKP Transformed Turkey into a Society of Fear," *Hurriyet*, 4 July 2008; Bekir Coşkun, "Look Carefully . . .," *Hurriyet*, 8 July 2008; Oktay Eksi, "Picture," *Hurriyet*, 11 July 2008.

70. Melih Asik, "A Journalist's Attention!" *Milliyet*, 3 July 2008; Yılmaz Özdiş, "Sinan Aygun," *Hurriyet*, 3 July 2008; Yılmaz Özdiş, "Balbay," *Hurriyet*, 4 July 2008.

71. Andrew Finkel, "News Editor Bites Government," *Today's Zaman*, 6 July 2008.

72. "As I Said Again and Again, I Have Nothing to Do with the Diaries," *Hurriyet*, 8 July 2008; Mehmet Y. Yılmaz, "Let's Design Some Conspiracy Theory," *Hurriyet*, 10 July 2008; Bekir Coşkun, "A Model General . . .," *Hurriyet*, 10 July 2008.

73. Türker Alkan, "Closet Facism," *Radikal*, 2 July 2008; Ruhat Mengi, "A Law Scandal," *Vatan*, 2 July 2008; Melih Asik, "Clean Hands," *Milliyet*, 9 July 2008; Özdemir İnce, "The Mood and

Okkir, who was arrested in June 2007 and died in detention, was important because he lost his life without knowing what he was guilty of.

Among critics of the recent Ergenekon investigation, Dunder wrote an article titled "Our Ergenekon" differentiating the recent articles from those he described in his 1997 book. He argued there is no similarity between the two Ergenekons, because the first one was supported by Washington in the context of the fight against communism while the recent one was started by neonationalists who "are against cooperation with the US and advocate partnership with Russia."<sup>74</sup> Dunder compared the two Ergenekons according to their degree of acceptability by public opinion and concluded that the most recent Ergenekon had no popular support while there was a consensus about the divulgence of the Susurluk gang of the first Ergenekon. This is not just a simple comparison; it implies that the Ergenekon under investigation is neither Dunder's Ergenekon nor the real one. For secular and Kemalist writers, there is no longer a connection between the Ergenekon revealed by the Susurluk accident and the Ergenekon under investigation.

Liberal columnists rejected the accusations of secular columnists that Turkey had become a "police state" or "fear empire." For them, "being a general, being a well-known public figure or being respected by some does not keep a person from committing a crime against democracy" and therefore, the two latest operations were not signs of a police state but important steps toward the democratization of the political system.<sup>75</sup> Mahcupyan accused "the statist media" of extending "open support for those seeking to stage a coup" and politicizing "the judiciary." According to him, the statist media's attempt to present the situation as a conflict between the judicial regime that had filed a closure case against the JPD and the government that initiated the Ergenekon investigation against the regime was not right because the picture was really clear and it was one about "dealing with those who are trying to close a party that did not commit any crime and a network which

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Behavior of Murat Belge," *Hurriyet*, 11 July 2008; Mehmet Y. Yilmaz, "Human Rights Are Necessary for All," *Hurriyet*, 4 July 2008.

74. Can Dunder, "Our Ergenekon," *Milliyet*, 10 July 2008.

75. Cengiz Candar, "Walking Up with Ergenekon in Turkey," *Referans*, 2 July 2008; Hasan Cemal, "Democracy Is Not Possible without Doing away with the Idea of 'the Savior Military!'" *Milliyet*, 2 July 2008; Taha Akyol, "Ergenekon and Law," *Milliyet*, 10 July 2008.

for years sponsored murders to accomplish a coup.”<sup>76</sup> In short, liberal columnists agreed that statist, secular, and Kemalist media were seeking to topple the investigation.<sup>77</sup> Liberal writers also presented the arrest of two important generals as an improvement in democratic standards in Turkey, because the detention of top generals had been an unprecedented event in the history of the country, which had experienced several previous military coups.<sup>78</sup>

The arguments of the Islamist columnists concerning the arrests were very similar to those of their liberal counterparts. They took the threat of a coup very seriously and saw the discontent of the secular media with the investigation as proof that the Ergenekon-related groups were an integral part of the plot. The detention of top generals was presented in the Islamic media as a “groundbreaking” event because “those who were long considered untouchable were finally ‘touched’” in the context of the investigation.<sup>79</sup> For Islamic writers, the case was a turning point because it showed that it would no longer be easy for generals to engage in illegal activities. Islamist columnists also criticized those who treated the Ergenekon gang as an insignificant matter and accused openly the Dogan Media Group and the leadership of the Republican People’s Party by asking why they were “trying to blacken, cover and divert the investigation.”<sup>80</sup> As part of those accusations, Koru criticized Dundar’s attempt to separate the Susurluk gang from the Ergenekon investigation.<sup>81</sup> According to Koru, the reason behind Dundar’s behavior was that he was a columnist in the Dogan Media Group.

76. Etyen Mahcupyan, “Illegitimate Solidarity,” *Today’s Zaman*, 11 July 2008.

77. Murat Belge, “How the Media Itself Hits Deadlines,” *Taraf*, 11 July 2008; Gulay Gokturk, “Ergenekon and Being a Supporter,” *Bugun*, 6 July 2008; Ali Bayramoglu, “You Will Be Ashamed One Day . . .,” *Yeni Safak*, 5 July 2008.

78. İsmet Berkan, “A Basic Assessment,” *Radikal*, 3 July 2008; Ahmet Altan, “The Tremble under the Base,” *Taraf*, 2 July 2008; Ali Bayramoglu, “The Generals Brought before the Law and the Three Aspects of Watershed . . .,” *Yeni Safak*, 2 July 2008.

79. Huseyin Gulerce, “Those Who Provoke the Military Are in Panic Now . . .,” *Zaman*, 3 July 2008; Ekrem Dumanli, “Last Exit before Ergenekon,” *Zaman*, 7 July 2008.

80. Huseyin Gulerce, “Who Is Part of Ergenekon’s Media Leg?” *Today’s Zaman*, 10 July 2008. For similar arguments of a liberal-aligned columnist, see Emre Aköz, “Ergenekon’s Media,” *Sabah*, 6 July 2008.

81. Fehmi Koru, “Not Different from Each Other . . .,” *Yeni Safak*, 11 July 2008.

### Finally Indictment, but the Same Arguments

Turkish prosecutors investigating the Ergenekon network submitted their indictment to the court on 14 July 2008. The 2,455-page indictment accused the suspects of forming, belonging to, and helping a "terror organization" aiming to overthrow the JDP government. Among the allegations were

- membership in an armed terrorist group,
- aiding and abetting an armed terrorist organization,
- attempting to destroy the government or to block it from performing its duties,
- inciting people to rebel against the Republic of Turkey,
- being in possession of explosives, using them, and inciting others to commit these crimes,
- inciting others to stage the Council of State attack and a hand grenade attack at *Cumhuriyet's* office,
- acquiring secret documents on national security,
- recording personal data,
- encouraging soldiers to disobey superiors,
- openly provoking hatred and hostility, and
- other similar crimes.<sup>82</sup>

However, since the indictment related to suspects arrested before the July operation, it did not include the allegations about two former top generals arrested on 1 July.

The indictment received wide coverage in the Turkish press but caused no change in the perceptions of different media groups. Secular and Kemalist columnists maintained their criticism of the Ergenekon investigation, and some secular columnists saw the indictment as a document full of "empty words" despite great expectations.<sup>83</sup> For them, expectations about the

82. "Ergenekon Unveiled: Gang Charged with Terror, Subversion," *Today's Zaman*, 15 July 2008.

83. Rahmi Turan, "The Mountain Is Labor!" *Hurriyet*, 17 July 2008; Bekir Coskun, "Who Kisses Us? . . .," *Hurriyet*, 15 July 2008; Yilmaz Ozdil, "Interesting," *Hurriyet*, 15 June 2008; Gungor Mengi, "Disappointment," *Vatan*, 16 June 2008; Yilmaz Ozdul, "Indictment . . .," *Hurriyet*, 31 June 2008.

Ergenekon investigation had come to public attention because of coverage on the front pages of the partisan media of the JDP government. The term “partisan media” was often used by secular and Kemalist columnists to describe newspapers that strongly supported the Ergenekon investigation. They also accused the liberal, leftist *Taraf* of being “partisan” because it was allegedly funded by groups related to the government and the Islamic Gulen movement.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, secular columnists expressed their doubts about such things as the reliability of secret witnesses and alleged confessions set forth in the indictment, the danger that the investigation would turn into a knot that couldn’t be untied, and the possibility that the investigation might be manipulated by the partisan media’s disinformation campaign.<sup>85</sup> For them, the fact that the indictment made no reference to Ornek’s memoirs uncovered by *Nokta* was the main evidence of the disinformation campaign conducted by the partisan media.

Before the indictment was announced, the *Star* claimed to have uncovered a twenty-two-article action plan titled “Urgent and Synchronized Reaction Warning.”<sup>86</sup> According to the *Star*, the plan was devised by the opponents of the Ergenekon investigation to lessen the importance of the indictment and was sent to certain columnists, academics, strategy experts, legislators, and retired bureaucrats. These columnists would be encouraged to use such stereotypical expressions as “the indictment is full of empty words,” “the mountains were in labor and a ridiculous mouse was born,” “the indictment is a revenge for the closure case filed against the JDP,” “the chief prosecutor of the investigation is the prime minister of the JDP government,” “the prosecutor is inspired by the JDP government,” and “everything is under investigation” (*her-yere-kon*, a motto created from the name “Ergenekon”). With those formulations, the public would be convinced that respected figures were arrested with no justified basis.

84. Mehmet Y. Yilmaz, “Hoca Efendi Should Also Consider These Points,” *Hurriyet*, 23 June 2008; Serdar Akinan, “Why Cannot Taraf Be Objective?” *Aksam*, 23 June 2008; Oray Egin, “Brotherhood of the Movement and Taraf,” *Aksam*, 26 June 2008.

85. Ertugrul Ozkok, “Are They Looking for You Too?” *Hurriyet*, 15 June 2008; Gungor Mengi, “Wait for the Court,” *Vatan*, 15 June 2008; Gungor Mengi, “Secret Witnesses,” *Vatan*, 17 June 2008; Melih Asik, “There Is a Coup on the Shelf!” *Milliyet*, 15 July 2008; Melih Asik, “Careful about the Proof!” *Milliyet*, 16 July 2008; Melih Asik, “Mysterious Witness!” *Milliyet*, 22 July 2008; Ruhat Mengi, “Ergenekon Indictment Is Prepared for Those Who Demand!” *Vatan*, 24 June 2008.

86. “22 Article Plan to Misrepresent the Ergenekon Indictment,” *Star*, 14 July 2008.

Both liberal columnists and their Islamist counterparts used this twenty-two-article action plan to accuse the secular media of being a part of the plot.<sup>87</sup> Some Islamist and liberal columnists accused the Dogan Media Group of acting as a spokesman for the Ergenekon gang and the RPP, whose leader declared himself the lawyer of Ergenekon,<sup>88</sup> while some liberal writers in *Taraf* argued that some columnists of the Dogan Media Group “defended wholeheartedly” the Ergenekon gang and lied intentionally about the investigation.<sup>89</sup> Ali Bulac, a well-known Islamic scholar and columnist, argued that some persons and groups in the media would continue to “manipulate the process” to influence the public and the judiciary “by making their own interpretations of the legal texts, imposing these upon society and seeking to execute their rivals.”<sup>90</sup> In contrast to the secular and Kemalist media, the Islamist and liberal camp presented the indictment with splendid terms such as “a historical phase in Turkish history,” a “turning point,” and “a new phase for Turkish democracy.”<sup>91</sup>

As a result, the Ergenekon issue divided the media into two camps and provided grounds for a tug of war between them. Secular and Kemalist media insistently chose to underestimate the importance of the Ergenekon investigation and present it as an attempt to silence the critics of the JDP government, while liberal, liberal-aligned leftist, and Islamist media groups and columnists described the investigation as an opportunity for the normalization of Turkish politics and the eradication of ganglike formations within the state. The camps of the media accused one another of being “partisan.” Secular and Kemalist media outlets argued that their counterparts adopted a pro-government publishing policy, whereas the latter charged the former of acting like the “advocate” of the Ergenekon gang. The polarization caused a

87. Tamer Korkmaz, “Here Is the Ergenekon Indictment . . .,” *Yeni Safak*, 15 July 2008; Mustafa Unal, “Do Not Lessen the Importance!” *Zaman*, 16 July 2008; Tamer Korkmaz, “Do Not Insist Master, I Cannot Come . . .,” *Yeni Safak*, 18 July 2008.

88. Taha Kivanc, “Partisanship Blinds You,” *Yeni Safak*, 19 July 2008; Emre Akoz, “Why Is the ‘Friendly Media’ in a Rush?” *Sabah*, 18 July 2008; Emre Akoz, “How Do You Recognize a Friend of Ergenekon?” *Sabah*, 22 July 2008.

89. Ahmet Altan, “Lies of Hurriyet . . .,” *Taraf*, 23 July 2008; Murat Belge, “Whose Friend?” *Taraf*, 15 July 2008.

90. Ali Bulac, “The Ergenekon Trial!” *Zaman*, 16 June 2008.

91. Ali Bayramoglu, “The Thing That Is as Important as the Indictment . . .,” *Yeni Safak*, 15 July 2008; Ekrem Dumanli, “Countering Chaos before the Law,” *Zaman*, 15 July 2008.

deadlock in which facts had no chance to change perceptions of the different media groups, and such facts as the new arrests, the uncovering of more grenades, and even a second, additional indictment submitted to the court in March 2009 did not change anything.

### Conclusion

The Turkish media are composed of different groups spanning the political spectrum. The ideological cleavages are especially acute in the case of secularist media versus their Islamist counterparts, both of which act to define secularist and Islamist culture in Turkey, the main social division, especially in the past two decades. That being the case, the Turkish media from the outset have never had a uniform perspective about what Ergenekon was.<sup>92</sup> There were two different accounts of Ergenekon that were discussed in the media even before the investigation had officially started. The first one was the Kemalist and secularist media's Ergenekon, which was depicted as an armed gang composed mostly of rightist militants within the state. The second one was the Islamist media's Ergenekon, which was presented as a more overarching organization ranging from armed gangs to "secular" civil society associations.

From the outset of the Ergenekon coverage in the Turkish press, the Susurluk incident served as the main line of division separating the Islamist media and the secular media. According to secular authors, the deep state in Turkey is a ganglike formation inspired by the counter guerrilla movement in the 1970s, and the Susurluk gang was a typical example of gangs within the state. As a result they set themselves against the Ergenekon investigation when it began to move away from the Susurluk incident. For the Islamist media, the deep state in Turkey is the status quo, which constructed itself on secular and Kemalist ideology, and the Susurluk incident was just the tip of iceberg. That's why Islamist columnists strongly supported the Ergenekon investigation.

The Islamist writers' arguments about Ergenekon overlapped with those

92. Ali Balci, "Turkish Media, Ergenekon and Antoganism," *Anlayış*, no. 73 (June 2009): 62–3.



of the liberal writers, but the gap between Islamists and secularists about Ergenekon remained. This congruence between Islamist and liberal writers became evident after the confiscation of twenty-seven hand grenades in a slum in June 2007. Liberal-leftist writers joined this camp, although there are many leftist writers in the Turkish media who are against the Ergenekon investigation.

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