

Narratives of Maritime Sovereignty: The Mavi Vatan Doctrine**THEODOR SKARVELIS¹****Abstract**

Amid escalating regional instability, the Eastern Mediterranean has emerged as a geopolitical flashpoint, where doctrines of sovereignty and maritime strategy are reshaping the region. This paper investigates Türkiye's *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland) doctrine as a case study of identity-driven geopolitics, where the evolving nature of regional security is marked by multipolarity and contested legality. Developed by Turkish admirals, *Mavi Vatan* projects a maritime geostrategic vision that challenges prevailing international norms, such as UNCLOS, and responds to a growing sense of Türkiye's regional encirclement. This paper utilises the theoretical framework of critical geopolitics, draws on ten interviews with Turkish Professors, and conducts discourse analysis informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) principles to examine the narratives that underpin *Mavi Vatan*. It examines the doctrine's key narrative strands: the reconstruction of Turkish national identity, the portrayal of Türkiye as a maritime nation, and narratives of historical legacy. Although Blue Homeland is not formally adopted, it has influenced Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP), as seen in the 2019 Turkish-Libyan Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The political and economic context is also provided to explain the doctrine's rise.

These narratives are situated in the broader Eastern Mediterranean, where diplomatic norms and multilateral trust are increasingly eroded. This paper argues that *Mavi Vatan* exemplifies how emerging regional powers resort to identity-driven doctrines to assert sovereignty, build domestic consensus, and legitimise regional assertiveness. In doing so, Türkiye simultaneously solidifies its claims in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean. By unpacking *Mavi Vatan*'s symbolic, historical, political, economic and ideological underpinnings, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between identity and geopolitics in Turkish maritime strategy. Drawing on interviews with key academics and secondary sources, contrasting narratives have

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emerged regarding *Mavi Vatan*'s historical roots and the politics of identity. The study acknowledges certain limitations, including the reliance on qualitative analysis and a limited number of interviews. Nonetheless, the research bridged theoretical insights with empirical analysis, resulting in a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in Türkiye's maritime ambitions and identity-driven geopolitics.

Keywords

Blue Homeland, Maritime Geopolitics, Eastern Mediterranean, Turkish Foreign Policy

Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean's importance is timeless, as it connects Europe, Asia and Africa. Throughout history, countless battles have been fought to control it. Empires such as the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman reigned supreme in the region. Historically, disputes between states concerned mainly territorial issues, with land sovereignty at stake. However, with the rise of technology and global connectivity, new maritime interstate problems emerged over the control of marine resources and trade routes. To address these differences, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted in 1982, introducing new maritime concepts, including the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Before UNCLOS, territorial waters were defined as three nautical miles from the shore based on the cannon shot rule.²

A prime example of maritime disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean is the Greco-Turkish conflict in the Aegean Sea. The differences range from the role of the Greek islands near the Turkish mainland in the drawing of the maritime boundary to the ownership of certain islets. Each country claims overlapping maritime spaces, with Türkiye not being a signatory to UNCLOS and selectively evoking international customary law. Turkish maritime claims are unofficially based on the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, which means Blue Homeland. This doctrine was developed by admirals of the

² Joanna Mossop, 'Maritime Security and the Law of the Sea' in Ruxandra-Laura Boşilcă et al. (eds), Routledge *Handbook of Maritime Security* (London: Routledge, 2022), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003001324_90.

Turkish Navy, most prominently the retired Admiral Cem Gürdeniz and retired Admiral Cihat Yaycı.

This naval dogma holds that Türkiye requires a strong navy to safeguard its national interests and assert its rights in international waters. For Ankara, the mainland coastline determines the EEZ (not the islands, as per Greece and UNCLOS). Ankara believes it is entitled to a larger EEZ because it has the longest Mediterranean coastline (2820 km) and does not want to be ‘encircled’ by Greek territorial waters.³ *Mavi Vatan*, although not officially part of the Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) and absent from any foreign policy paper of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, has significantly influenced Turkish political and military circles. This is evident by President Erdoğan’s open endorsement, underscoring the doctrine’s weight in TFP.⁴ Concurrently, Gürdeniz and Yaycı give regular TV interviews, write articles, books and showcase the Blue Homeland map in the Turkish media:

Map 1: The Map of ‘*Mavi Vatan*’⁵

³ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *The Breadth of Territorial Waters*, , available at <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-breadth-of-territorial-waters.en.mfa> (last accessed 26 February 2026).

⁴ Alexandros Diakopoulos et al., *Behind Turkey’s ‘Blue Homeland’ Doctrine*, (ekathimerini.com, 19 June 2023), available at <https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/1213618/behind-turkeys-blue-homeland-dctrine/> (last accessed 28 July 2025).

⁵ Elif Erkeç, ‘Reflections of Türkiye-Greece Tension in the Sea of Islands on the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Security Complex’ (2023) *BRIQ Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly*, Vol. 4 (2), 24. <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/89599> 40.



The fact that Blue Homeland is not an official policy and that the Turkish claims are not recognised renders the doctrine a narrative seeking legitimacy both within and outside Türkiye. Understanding this narrative helps clarify the contemporary significance of maritime spaces and how states seek to exert influence over them. At the same time, the doctrine showcases the increasing competition and tensions among regional powers in the Eastern Mediterranean. This study aims to explore how *Mavi Vatan* was created by analysing its narratives of historical background and the politics of identity it attempts to develop to gain legitimacy and prominence.

In English literature, the Turkish perspective is often overlooked, making it crucial to examine the case from the other side, especially the Turkish academic perspective, which remains largely unexplored. By combining existing research with new insights from interviews with Turkish academics, the paper fills gaps in the literature. It deepens scholarly understanding of this complex geopolitical phenomenon by examining its historical background(s) and the frequently overlooked politics of identity. This doctrine is a prime example of how states try to legitimise their claims and actions. Identity-based maritime doctrines, such as the Blue Homeland, challenge

the established order and complicate the search for legality, legitimacy, and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, making their analysis crucial to understanding the new era of TFP.

Hence, the research questions are: How do competing historical narratives construct and legitimise the Blue Homeland doctrine? Two main narratives were detected, one from the doctrine's creators and the other from the interviewed academics. Secondly, how did the domestic political transformation (as of 2016) and the regional hydrocarbon competition create the conditions for *Mavi Vatan's* unofficial promotion as a state-influenced doctrine? The political events after the July 2016 failed coup attempt explain this shift. Lastly, which identity narrative surrounds the doctrine, and what role does it play? To what extent does *Mavi Vatan* function as an identity-driven tool of elite statecraft? The *Vatan* concept and its consequences on the doctrine are explored.

1. Research Design

The research follows a qualitative methodology based on a literature review, including primary and secondary analyses, evaluations, and the synthesis of the existing published bibliography. The primary data were collected through 10 semi-structured interviews with key academics in Türkiye, conducted as part of my master's thesis and my internship as an Academic Assistant at Istanbul Kültür University. Even though most participants had no concerns about anonymity, their names are not disclosed, and all participants are pseudonymised for security reasons, according to the Research Ethics Review Committee of the University of Groningen.

A. Theoretical Framework

Discourse analysis informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) principles is used to explore *Mavi Vatan's* narrative construction and the socio-cultural dimensions of the politics of identity. This method was chosen for its multidisciplinary scope and for the complex interplay it reveals between text, social opinion, power, society, and

culture.⁶ Moreover, critical geopolitics is the theoretical framework employed to deconstruct the doctrine, since it essentially constitutes a maritime geopolitical plan. The prevalent theories in IR are realism, constructivism, and liberalism. In geopolitics, classical geopolitics remains the best-known. It has influenced numerous geopolitical strategies despite the rise in popularity of critical geopolitics in the last two decades. Therefore, this section explains why critical geopolitics was selected and why it best aligns with the research goals.

Most research on *Mavi Vatan* employs realist theories, particularly structural and neoclassical realism. Realism assumes the nation-state is the primary international relations (IR) actor, acting as a unified entity guided by rational decision-makers pursuing national interests within an anarchic international system. Kenneth Waltz's structural realism (1979) shifted focus from human nature to systemic structure, arguing that the anarchic international system constrains all states' behaviour based on material capabilities. However, this approach overlooks endogenous factors critical to understanding Blue Homeland.⁷

Theoretically, classical geopolitics aligns with realism.⁸ Classical geopoliticians, based on their spatial generalisations, articulated their understanding of 'how the world works' and employed a historical perspective to justify their country's foreign policy. They primarily focused on land and sea power classifications, core-periphery models, and the rise and fall of states. The most prominent example is Halford Mackinder's influential concept, the "Heartland".⁹ Another example is Nicholas Spykman's "Rimland," which expands on Mackinder's heartland thesis.¹⁰ Also, Alfred Thayer Mahan's ideas have been used to analyse the Blue Homeland. He was a United

⁶ Teun A. van Dijk, 'Discourse and Manipulation' (2006) *Discourse & Society*, Vol. 17(3), 359, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060250>.

⁷ Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Berkeley: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), <https://www.abebooks.com/9780201083491/Theory-international-politics-Addison-Wesley-series-0201083493/plp>.

⁸ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, (3rd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://academic.oup.com/book/28414/42>.

⁹ Harold J. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History (1904)' (2004) *The Geographical Journal*, Vol.170 (4), 298, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3451460>.

¹⁰ Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944),

https://books.google.gr/books?id=YpWDAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=el&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

States Navy officer and historian who developed a geopolitical plan to expand the USA's sphere of influence. He advocated for a 'sea power doctrine,' emphasising the importance of overseas naval bases, and stressed that commercial and naval expansionism were crucial elements of a great power.¹¹

Contrary to realism, constructivism treats national interests as socially constructed by agents themselves, emphasising the actors' significance within their social and environmental contexts. Truth and reality only exist as social constructs shaped by human awareness. As Alexander Wendt famously stated in his 1992 article, 'Anarchy is what states make of it'.¹² He further elaborated in his book 'Social Theory of International Politics':

Neorealists see the structure of the international system as a distribution of material capabilities because they approach their subject with a materialist lens; Neoliberals see it as capabilities plus institutions because they have added to the material base an institutional superstructure; and constructivists see it as a distribution of ideas because they have an idealist ontology.¹³

Constructivists deny the existence of a linguistically constructed social reality and thus cannot explain the origins of these constructions. However, in critical geopolitics, human constructions of identity are treated as intermediate variables between social reality and actor behaviour. Ontological Security Theory, developed by Steele (2008) and Mitzen (2006), complements constructivism by explaining how states construct and maintain stable identities to manage existential anxiety.¹⁴ This framework recognises that states require coherent identities to function psychologically and institutionally. In the Turkish context, *Mavi Vatan* functions not merely as a 'territorial' claim but as an identity-stabilisation mechanism, particularly following the

¹¹ Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, Cambridge Library Collection - Naval and Military History (first published 1890, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511783289>.

¹² Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', (1992) *International Organization* Vol.46(2), 391, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858>.

¹³ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612183> 5.

¹⁴ Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London: Routledge, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203018200>; Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma', (2006) *European Journal of International Relations* Vol.12 (3) 341, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346>.

destabilising 2016 coup attempt. Concurrently, securitisation theory, articulated by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, illuminates how maritime disputes transition from routine policy issues into existential threats requiring extraordinary state action. According to Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), securitising moves (rhetoric, institutional claims, threat narratives) elevate specific issues to existential national concerns.¹⁵ Applied to *Mavi Vatan*, this framework explains how maritime boundaries are transformed into sacred national interests, rendering naval preparedness and assertive foreign policy as imperatives.

Liberal theories are the least used in the Blue Homeland context. The main reason is that Türkiye sees international institutions as Western-dominated (Altan). International Law, alongside international organisations, extends the global system's scope beyond states alone, facilitating common goals such as addressing climate change, fostering diplomacy among nations, and ensuring that all member states have a voice in global affairs. Secondly, the free trade proliferation and capitalism establish an open, market-based international economic system. This system promotes trade between nations, reducing conflict likelihood, as war would disrupt trade benefits.¹⁶ Nonetheless, critical geopolitics regards the absence of identity as a significant weakness of liberalism. Meanwhile, Türkiye is an increasingly autocratic state and is not a signatory state of UNCLOS. Thus, a liberal analysis is inapposite, as *Mavi Vatan* violates international standards and opposes UNCLOS.

Critical geopolitics, established by Dalby and Ó Tuathail, shifts the focus from geography's direct impact on IR to the examination of whose geographical narratives dominate and whose interests they serve.¹⁷ Rather than treating geography as a neutral force, it interrogates how geopolitical imaginaries, particularly maps and spatial conceptualisations, shape political action. This approach is indebted to Foucault's

¹⁵ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Pub, 1998). <https://dokumen.pub/security-a-new-framework-for-analysis-9781685853808.html>.

¹⁶ Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, 'The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order' (1999) *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25 (2), 179 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/review-of-international-studies/article/abs/nature-and-sources-of-liberal-international-order/085D7A99C0C9EFB5F96BE9B096DD9548>.

¹⁷ Joanne Sharp, 'Critical Geopolitics', in Audrey Kobayashi (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Second Edition)*, (Oxford: Elsevier, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102295-5.10457-3>, 45.

insight that power and knowledge are intertwined. As with the doctrine's map, great significance is given to the imaginaries created by maps that determine future political action. Geopolitics is no longer a one-dimensional, linear field.¹⁸ Critical geopolitics examine the use of geography within the discourses of geopolitical imaginaries, visions, and geostrategies by states and global players.¹⁹

Moreover, the constructed connection between maritime spaces and identity influences collective memory and neo-nationalism.²⁰ This involves the symbolic significance of maritime territories and the historical narratives associated with *Mavi Vatan*. This theory challenges the international scene's spatialisation by governments.²¹ Spatialisation considerations delve into the implications of asserting sovereignty over maritime spaces. To continue, critical geopolitics deposes West-centrism, rendering it suitable for studying non-Western geopolitical doctrines.²² *Mavi Vatan* is a characteristic doctrine of the Turkish geopolitical culture. Critical theorists have extensively examined how geopolitical knowledge is produced within elite circles, including academia and the military. The goal is not just to illustrate the elites' opinions, but mainly to discern their differences and contradictions and to trace the power struggle between the elite circles and their diversity.²³

The theoretical framework is operationalised in the analysis by examining how competing historical narratives employ geopolitical imaginaries to legitimise maritime expansion. It helps explain how the post-2016 coup context created ontological insecurity that elevated Eurasianist identity within the military institutions, how hydrocarbon competition materialises maritime claims into concrete economic imperatives and how the *Vatan* concept securitises maritime spaces by invoking sacred

¹⁸ Gearóid O'Tuathail, 'Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society' (1999) *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 22 (2–3), 107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402399908437756>.

¹⁹ Basil Germond, 'The Geopolitical Dimension of Maritime Security' (2015) *Marine Policy*, Vol. 54, 137, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2014.12.013> 138.

²⁰ Merje Kuus, Joanne Sharp, Klaus Dodds, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics* (New York: Routledge, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315612874>, 29.

²¹ O'Tuathail (no 18) 52.

²² Zhiding Hu and Dadao Lu, 'Re-Interpretation of the Classical Geopolitical Theories in a Critical Geopolitical Perspective' (2016) *Journal of Geographical Sciences*, Vol. 26 (12), 1769, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11442-016-1357-1>.

²³ Merje Kuus, 'Critical Geopolitics', in Renée Marlin-Bennett and Robert Allen Denmark (eds.), *The International Studies Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.137> 12.

homeland symbolism that transcends legal-rational discourse. Critical geopolitics provides the overarching lens for deconstructing whose spatial knowledge dominates Turkish policy discourse, while ontological security theory and securitisation theory explain the mechanisms through which contested doctrines gain traction during periods of identity crisis and political restructuring.

B. Methodological Considerations

This research utilises a qualitative approach, involving CDA informed analysis of academic literature, articles, and books, as well as interviews with key experts. This provides a deeper understanding of the Blue Homeland from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The primary data are collected through semi-structured interviews with key academics in Türkiye. The literature entails both white and grey sources. The CDA method entails analysing discourse in papers to study the mechanisms of power conduct and the reproduction of domination, abuse of power, and inequality in societies.²⁴

Regarding the interviews, purposive sampling was initially adopted, a technique in which participants suitable for answering the research questions are purposively selected. This sampling method guided the data generation and analysis, which is an essential aspect of CDA, as it allows the collection, coding, and initial data analysis before further data collection and analysis are undertaken.²⁵ Despite this approach, data analysis of the purposive sample generated codes related to history, identity, and TFP. Hence, the literature review guided the purposive selection of academics based in Türkiye who specialise in the above domains. The participants have written research articles and books about TFP and *Mavi Vatan*.

It is important to note that the selection process also included convenience sampling, as snowballing was used at a later stage. This means that some academics connected me with some of their colleagues. In light of that, the danger of gatekeeping

²⁴Petar Kurecic, 'Identity and Discourse in Critical Geopolitics: A Framework for Analysis,' (Conference Paper, Society & Technology, CROSB, 2015), <https://www.bib.irb.hr:8443/794654> 9.

²⁵ Claire Willey-Sthapit et al., 'Discursive Decisions: Signposts to Guide the Use of Critical Discourse Analysis in Social Work' (2022) *Qualitative Social Work*, Vol. 21 (1), 129, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020979050> 136.

is stressed. The sample size is ten academics. Given the research timeframe, the length of the interviews, and the time I was stationed in Türkiye (March 2024 – June 2024), the sample size is adequate for sufficient data collection. Collecting and analysing additional data would not yield further information on the topic, given the limitations, and no new codes were subsequently created.²⁶ All interviewees are practising professors. Nonetheless, they come from different academic backgrounds, from IR to political science and International Law. The diversity of the sample is also ensured by the fact that they teach at varying Universities in Türkiye. Interviews were conducted in the greater Istanbul area.

Furthermore, some universities were private, while others were public. Some of the professors participate concurrently in different Turkish think tanks²⁷ that are backed by rival political parties; consequently, the participants could be influenced by this. It must be emphasised that other voices, such as the military and political parties, were not included in the interview sample. Although attempts were made to contact such institutions, such as the Naval Academy, no response was received. The participants were approached via email, and the interviews were conducted face-to-face in Istanbul, except for two, which were conducted via Zoom due to distance and time constraints.

Even though most participants had no concerns about anonymity, their names are not disclosed, and all participants are pseudonymised for security reasons. The initial draft of the interview guide was submitted to the Research Ethics Review Committee of the University of Groningen, and after minor revisions, approval was granted. Semi-structured interviews, which fall between unstructured and structured interviews, were used to collect qualitative data. This data collection method enabled the researcher to follow a set of fixed questions or prompts and further probe beyond the approved questions. The interviews were conducted in English from March to May of 2024, and each lasted approximately 40 minutes. The interviews began with a ‘briefing’ containing general study information. Their expertise was crucial in shaping the direction of the conversation. For instance, the interview started with an open-ended

²⁶ After the fifth interview.

²⁷ The universities and think tanks’ names are not disclosed to ensure anonymity.

question that initiated the conversation. At least two questions were asked for each theme to each participant; depending on their expertise, additional questions followed.

The interviews' recordings, both virtual and in-person, were transcribed before data analysis commenced. All the recordings were audio. During the interviews, notes were taken to detect the most essential notions and parts, to ensure the most accurate representation of the participant's responses. Windows Media Player was used to play the audio recordings while transcribing them manually. Transcription was initially performed manually for security and anonymity. The recordings were deleted one week after each interview. Afterwards, the manual transcriptions were entered into Microsoft Word, and the data were analysed to determine codes and themes. The data were analysed using CDA. The CDA follows an 'abductive' approach, continually refining theoretical concepts to achieve a more precise understanding of the empirical world. As Wodak (2004) puts it: 'a constant movement back and forth between theory and empirical data is necessary'.²⁸

The CDA analysis involved identifying words, ideas, or phrases in the transcripts, including constructs of interest; investigating how they are expressed; and examining how the exact phrase or idea is presented across different texts.²⁹ Specifically, the analysis included multiple stages of coding, conducted in conjunction with taking memos and initial notes from the interviews. Even before coding the data, some emerging themes emerged during the interview transcription. Data coding was the first step, involving assigning labels that were typically descriptive and similar to the data. This coding process commenced with line-by-line coding of the first transcripts.

It is important to clarify the scope of CDA application in this study. While full CDA as developed by Fairclough and van Dijk would include detailed micro-level linguistic analysis (syntax, transitivity, modality),³⁰ this study focuses primarily on

²⁸ Ruth Wodak, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', in Giampietro Gobo & al., (eds) *Qualitative Research Practice* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2004), https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608191_200.

²⁹ James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (2nd edn., New York: Routledge, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203005675>.

³⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), <https://www.routledge.com/Analysing-Discourse-Textual-Analysis-for-Social-Research/Fairclough/p/book/9780415258937>; van Dijk, (no 6).

thematic discourse analysis of narrative structures and power relations informed by CDA principles. The analysis emphasises how competing narratives are constructed, and how geopolitical knowledge production occurs within elite institutional contexts. This approach aligns with critical geopolitics, which adapts CDA's focus on power-knowledge relations while prioritising geopolitical narrative analysis over linguistic microanalysis.

Core categories were identified to reduce the codes and proceed beyond the descriptive phase until no new codes emerged. Subsequently, it was discovered that the additional data generated, especially from the last three interviews, aligned with the existing codes. Although the latest participants' data (7-10) did not yield new themes, they identified new relationships among them. Finally, thematic coding was conducted by organising the codes into four higher-level themes that emerged from the data concerning the existing units. It is emphasised that memo-writing is the stage between coding and drafting the analysis. These memos, comprising a coding memo and the interview's notebook, included decisions such as merging, renaming, categorising and creating a code.

Below you see two data analysis examples. Codes are created in the form of Word comments. An across-case analysis is conducted by applying the same question and theme (Historical Background in the given examples) to each interview and exploring similarities, common notions, and differences. In the comment section, I also include notes taken during the interviews; therefore, some comments are labelled as 'Interview notebook'. At the same time, memos were written to articulate common ideas, codes, and differing opinions. An example is provided below:

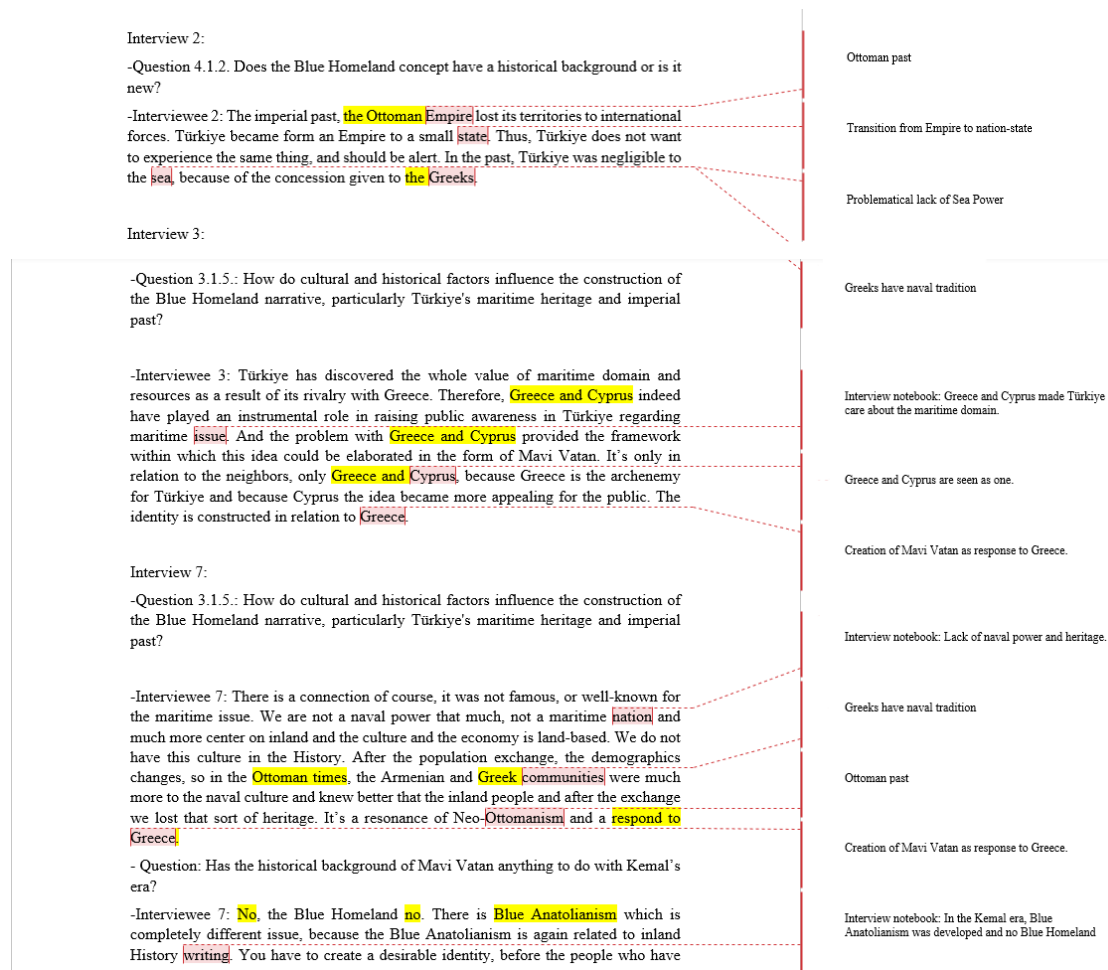


Figure 1: Data analysis example

Memo example:

Date: 05-05-2024

Theme: Historical Background

Codes: Ottoman past, Greek naval tradition, Turkish lack of naval tradition

For Türkiye, the loss of the Aegean islands and the transition to a nation-state were considerable shocks. The Ottomans depended on the naval culture of the minorities, especially the Greeks, for their Sea capabilities. Thus, the new Turkish Republic had no Seapower and was consequently confined to its land borders.

C. Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Firstly, reflexivity involves reflecting on how the researcher's position influences the research process. A fundamental CDA theoretical assumption is that researchers cannot entirely detach themselves from social discourse to achieve an objective view.³¹ To address this, memos examined how personal and professional experiences rendered certain discourses more appealing, while acknowledging that others may be concealed. Given the extensive nature of the doctrine, this study may not examine all its aspects with equal depth. Data availability constraints, particularly regarding sensitive geopolitical issues and national security matters, may limit the analysis depth. Another limitation was that participants who were members of the military or political parties were not interviewed, as noted above. Additionally, the results might be influenced by the study's temporal context, as geopolitical dynamics are subject to change.

The Turkish language poses another challenge, as I lack sufficient knowledge, which may lead to misinterpretation or the loss of nuance in translation. Consequently, only English-language literature is examined, thereby limiting the study's scope, as most Turkish researchers publish in Turkish. This is also why interviews were held to counter this limitation. As a Greek researcher studying *Mavi Vatan*, a sensitive issue between Greece and Türkiye, I strive to maintain critical distance and objectivity in my analysis despite the inherent challenges.

Ethical considerations are paramount when discussing sensitive geopolitical subjects. Before the interviews, all participants obtained consent forms to ensure they understood the research's purpose and their rights. To continue, the interview data were processed solely for research purposes. The participant's anonymity and confidentiality are protected by removing identifying information from interview transcripts and ensuring safe data storage. Sensitive personal data is minimised and pseudonymised during transcription, with risks mitigated through strict security protocols. Participation

³¹ S. Hall, 'Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse' in Margaret Wetherell et al. (eds) , *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (London: Sage in association with The Open University, 2001), http://www.library.mmu.ac.uk/secure/index.php?cat_file=&filename=y_220a0002_hall_foucault.pdf.

in interviews was voluntary. At the same time, recognising and respecting cultural differences was essential, particularly in diverse contexts between Türkiye and Greece.

2 Narratives of Historical Backgrounds

To better understand the Blue Homeland doctrine, its legitimacy, and the maritime identity it promotes, the historical background must be studied to identify the circumstances and timing of its creation. Two distinct narratives exist regarding *Mavi Vatan*'s historical origins. The former is the narrative promoted by the doctrine's creators, particularly retired Admiral Cem Gürdeniz, as evidenced by his writings and interviews. For this reason, it is described as the 'official' one. The known creators of the doctrine are retired Admirals Cem Gürdeniz and Cihat Yaycı, who have published numerous works that have contributed to the Blue Homeland's growing popularity within the Turkish navy. Gürdeniz, the 'father' of the doctrine, was the Director of the Plan and Policy Division of the Turkish Naval Forces Command Headquarters back in 2006.³² Cihat Yaycı drew the map.³³ Additionally, Admiral Soner Polat, who died in 2019, was a notable advocate and wrote a book dedicated to this concept.³⁴

The latter narrative is sceptical towards the 'official', though it does not oppose Blue Homeland's broader ideas, such as the need for a stronger navy and maritime influence. Consequently, it is mentioned as the 'sceptic' narration. The prominent supporters of the second narration are Turkish academics who view the admirals promoting *Mavi Vatan* as opportunists. The common ground between the historical narratives lies in the Ottoman past as a starting point, especially in the late years of the empire, when the lack of a strong navy proved disastrous. The main difference concerns Kemal's era connection to the Blue Homeland. On the one hand, the 'official' narrative is presented by the Turkish Navy, which asserts that Kemal is the spiritual father of the

³² Zenonas Tziarras, *Turkish Foreign Policy: The Lausanne Syndrome in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-030-90746-4_62.

³³ See Map 1.

³⁴ Aurélien Denizeau, 'Mavi Vatan, 'the Blue Homeland': The Origins, Influences and Limits of an Ambitious Doctrine for Turkey' (2021) *IFRI-Institut Français Des Relations Internationales*, Études de l'Ifri. <https://www.ifri.org/en/studies/mavi-vatan-blue-homeland-origins-influences-and-limits-ambitious-doctrine-turkey> 7.

Blue Homeland. On the other hand, the ‘sceptic’ historical perspective is showcased, which sees no immediate connection between the two, as the interviewees confirm.

A. ‘Official’ Narrative

According to the ‘official’ narrative by the doctrine’s creators, Blue Homeland is the naval version of the *Misak-ı Millî* or National Pact.³⁵ The National Pact was the map created by the last Ottoman Parliament in 1920, drawing the borders of the areas where the ‘Ottoman Muslim majority’ lived.³⁶ This was the goal of Türkiye’s political independence. *Mavi Vatan* is also characterised as the natural sea extension of *Ana Vatan*, the Motherland. The *Ana Vatan* map, issued in 1927, celebrated the new Republic of Türkiye and its founding principles. However, it included territories that were not, and still are not, part of Türkiye, such as Cyprus, the Aegean islands, and Western Thrace, while it excluded the Hatay region, which is now integrated. This map closely resembles the National Pact map. The map is decorated with a portrait of the Republic of Türkiye’s founding father, Atatürk.³⁷

³⁵ Denizeau (no 34) 16.

³⁶ Hasan Kosebalaban, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10496593> 49.

³⁷ Atatürk means father of Turks, a name given to Mustafa Kemal.



Map 2: The Map of ‘Ana Vatan’ 1927³⁸

Atatürk is also declared the Blue Homeland’s founding father,³⁹ although he never used the term. The central assertion is that Atatürk sought to establish a Turkish naval policy. Indeed, Atatürk promoted the ‘*Deniz sevgisi*’, meaning love of the sea.⁴⁰ He understood the significance of a formidable navy and what a lack of it meant, due to the disastrous losses he witnessed during ten years of unstoppable wars, from the Italo-Turkish War (1911-1912) to the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), when he was a military officer. In his speeches, he declared the necessity of Türkiye becoming a maritime power to defend Anatolia and build a great fleet. Nonetheless, this ambition did not materialise due to Türkiye’s dire internal situation at the time. The limited funds, the hostile relations with potential naval suppliers, the international maritime disarmament under the Washington Treaty of 1922, and the demilitarisation

³⁸ Sûd Kitaphane-Yi, ‘Map of Ana Vatan: Turkey’, image, Library of Congress, Washington, (2021), available at <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g7431f.ct003172/> (last accessed 23 July 2025).

³⁹ Tefik Kadan, ‘The Formulation of the Blue Homeland Doctrine’, (2021) *BRIQ Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly*, Vol. 2(1), 36, <https://briqjournal.com/en/the-formulation-the-blue-homeland-doctrine> 38.

⁴⁰ Serhat Süha Çubukçuoğlu, 1st ed. *Turkey’s Naval Activism: Maritime Geopolitics and the Blue Homeland Concept*, (Abu Dhabi: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-37204-9>.

requirements of the Turkish Straits rendered the dream of becoming a maritime power nearly impossible.⁴¹ These were the primary reasons for selecting a coastal defensive fleet over a costly surface fleet.

A turning point for Turkish maritime policy was the Montreux Convention of 1936. This convention allowed Türkiye to refortify the Dardanelles Strait, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus Strait, thereby denying access to warships during wartime while permitting merchant ships free passage.⁴² At the same time, Greece expanded its territorial waters from 3 miles to 6 miles without any challenge from Türkiye. The Convention ensured the Turkish connection between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Furthermore, the Convention enhanced naval security against Greece and Russia. After Kemal Atatürk's death, İsmet İnönü led the country through the Second World War until 1950. Türkiye, alongside Greece, joined NATO in 1952 to provide security against the Soviet Union.⁴³ According to the admirals, NATO strategy limited Türkiye's maritime responsibilities to the Black Sea, while Greece was assigned to cover the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁴ As a result, Turkish interests were excessively harmed in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean because Türkiye was preoccupied with the Black Sea against the Soviet Union.

Moreover, Türkiye reoriented itself towards the Eastern Mediterranean from the 1960s onwards, due to the Cyprus Issue. The creators of *Mavi Vatan* were young scholars at the Naval Academy when the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 occurred after the coup of Nicos Sampson, which resulted in the occupation of 36% of the island by the Turkish forces. This affected them profoundly, and, according to their account, the Turkish invasion signalled Türkiye's determination to secure its maritime rights. In 1983, Türkiye created the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' ('TRNC'), which is only recognised by Türkiye.⁴⁵ Cyprus is described as '*Yavru Vatan*', meaning Baby

⁴¹ Serhat Güvenç and Dilek Barlas, 'Atatürk's Navy: Determinants of Turkish Naval Policy, 1923-38', (2003) *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 26(1), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390308559306>.

⁴² Ayla Göl, 'A Short Summary of Turkish Foreign Policy: 1923-1939', (1993) *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, Vol. 48(1), 57 <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/ausbf/article/43214> 66.

⁴³ Hakan Yapar, 'Turkey's Strategic Shift: From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland and Beyond', (2021) *Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos* https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2021/DIEEEE040_2021_HAKYAP_Turquia_ENG.pdf 3.

⁴⁴ Çubukçuoğlu (no 40) 81.

⁴⁵ Kosebalaban (no 36) 106.

Homeland and is regarded as the precursor of the *Mavi Vatan*. The Turkish logic behind the invasion, aside from the Turkish community's future, was an aversion to Enosis (Union) and fears of a Greek naval encirclement. Gürdeniz supports the view that *Mavi Vatan* and *Yavru Vatan* are part of *Anavatan*.

Following the Soviet Union's dissolution and the end of the Cold War, Türkiye focused exclusively on the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean in the maritime domain. The admirals identify themselves as Kemalists and claim that *Mavi Vatan* is a continuation of Kemal's defensive strategy culture in the naval domain. Firstly, Gürdeniz views the Greek extension of territorial waters from 6 to 12 nm as a form of the Sévres at sea.⁴⁶ Consequently, he claims that Türkiye's casus belli against Greece in 1995,⁴⁷ regarding the extension of the territorial waters, constitutes a central point of the Blue Homeland. Greece's aim to extend its territorial waters to 12 nm (nautical miles) would effectively eliminate Türkiye's claim to any continental shelf in the Aegean.

Secondly, the 1996 Imia⁴⁸ crisis is characterised as the Blue Homeland's forerunner. In this crisis, a dispute arose over the ownership of two rocky islets. The quarrel over sovereignty led to bitter exchanges between Athens and Ankara, a build-up of military forces around the disputed areas, and a diplomatic intervention by the USA to defuse tensions between the two NATO allies.⁴⁹ This crisis demonstrated that Türkiye attaches equal importance to Greece, including to islets such as Imia. At the time, all *Mavi Vatan's* creators were active members of the Turkish Navy. Thirdly, in 1997, the white paper 'Towards Blue Waters' was issued, the first official Turkish naval strategy. It is regarded as a continuation of the Kemalist strategic culture and the basis of the Blue Homeland.⁵⁰ As Prof. Abdul mentioned, 'Before *Mavi Vatan*, another strategy existed, but it didn't gain the same traction. It was too generic and had no

⁴⁶ Cem Gürdeniz, *The Map of Seville and the Plot to Cut Turkey off from the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas United World International*, 17 September 2020, available at <https://uwidata.com/13877-the-map-of-seville-and-the-plot-to-cut-turkey-off-from-the-aegean-and-mediterranean-seas/> (last accessed 23 July 2025).

⁴⁷ Greece ratified UNCLOS in 1995.

⁴⁸ *Kardak* in Turkish.

⁴⁹ William Hale *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2000*. 2nd edn., Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1024490> 196.

⁵⁰ Çubukçuoğlu (no 40) 123.

catchy name like *Mavi Vatan*'. The main objectives of this document were to establish a deep-sea navy and to develop power-projection capabilities.

Therefore, this military narration, rather than simply asserting a connection to Atatürk, constructs historical continuity through strategic genealogy by characterising *Mavi Vatan* as the 'natural sea extension' of territorial concepts from the 1920s. The doctrine's creators align their 21st-century maritime claims with Türkiye's founding nationalist project. It seeks to legitimise the naval dogma by invoking the illustrious Kemalist era and Türkiye's military confrontations, such as the invasion of Cyprus and the Imia crisis. It also grounds contested contemporary claims in foundational legitimacy and positions maritime expansion as a defensive necessity rather than revisionism.

B. 'Sceptic' Narrative

On the other hand, there is another historical perspective that rejects *Mavi Vatan*'s Kemalist roots and the admirals' rhetoric. The academic, more moderate narrative focuses mainly on the period before 2006 and the immediate causes that led to this doctrine. Initially, this narration recognises the Turkish shock at the loss of the Aegean islands and the transition from Empire to nation-state. Prof. Deniz noted, 'There is a historical experience gained from what happened during the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. During the process of becoming a nation-state, the maritime domain is seen as one of the main problematic areas'. In this context, the lack of a Turkish maritime tradition is emphasised, and the fact that the Ottoman Empire's naval tradition derives from other seafaring peoples, especially the Greeks. Prof. Altan claimed, 'In the past, Türkiye was negligible to the sea because of the concession given to the Greeks'. The past refers to the Ottoman era and the granting of 'privileges' in trade rights to the Greek people by the Sultans.

In the context of the Kemalist era, Blue Anatolianism is discussed rather than Blue Homeland, which is a distinct concept. This narrative outright rejects any connection between the era of Atatürk and *Mavi Vatan*. Prof. Izem said: 'It has nothing to do with Blue Homeland', when referring to the Kemal era. In contrast, Blue Anatolia

(*Mavi Anadolu*) constructs Turkish identity based on Anatolia's geographical inheritance rather than the Seas.⁵¹ According to Prof. Izem, 'It's like going deeper into the Homeland and looking for historical dimension and layers of identity'. In the Blue Anatolian narratives, the Turkish people and lands are bearers of diverse cultures and civilisations, including European ones. Blue Anatolianism was a political and cultural concept of the 1930s aimed at promoting a common Turkish identity rooted in Anatolia. Blue Anatolianism, as a theory of territorial nationalism, rests on geographical inheritance.⁵² *Mavi Anadolu* deepens the Homeland notion, while *Mavi Vatan* extends it towards the Seas. Prof. Izem adds that Blue Homeland 'it's a resonance of Neo-Ottomanism'.

Regarding the triggering events of the near past, the most decisive event was the Seville Map of 2003. Juan Luis Suárez de Vivero and Juan Carlos Rodríguez Mateos, professors of human geography at the University of Seville, published an article titled 'Maritime Europe and EU Enlargement: A Geopolitical Perspective' at the request of the European Union (EU).⁵³ This article featured a map depicting the Turkish EEZ confined in the Antalya Gulf, known as the Seville Map. This work aimed to facilitate maritime spatial planning in preparation for the EU's 2007 enlargement. The EU ratified UNCLOS in 1998, making it mandatory for new members to accept it.⁵⁴ Although not legally binding, this map delineated the EEZs of EU members; it supported Greek and Cypriot maritime pretensions by creating an EEZ border between Greece and the RoC. According to Prof. Abdul, 'This forced Türkiye to react'. The reaction was the Blue Homeland.⁵⁵

According to the 'sceptic' narrative, the second most decisive event leading to the doctrine's creation was the Republic of Cyprus's rejection of the Annan plan, the

⁵¹ Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and Elif Gençkal Eroler, 'Spatial Constructions of Homeland in Turkish National Identity: Exclusion and Inclusion of Europe', (2023) *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, Vol. 20 (77), 17, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/uidergisi/issue/75495/1233978> 24.

⁵² Daniş Mehmet Fahri, 'The Blue Anatolian Ideal as a Theory of Territorial Nationalism', (2023) *Recent Period Turkish Studies*, Vol. 1 (44), 213, <https://iupress.istanbul.edu.tr/en/journal/rpts/article/topragabagli-bir-milliyetcilik-teorisi-olarak-mavi-anadolu-ideali> 44.

⁵³ Erkeç (no 5) 40.

⁵⁴ Çubukçuoğlu (no 40) 147.

⁵⁵ Mehmet Bardakçı, 'Turkey and the Major Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis from the 2010s to the 2020s', (2022) *Comparative Southeast European Studies*, Vol. 70 (3), 516, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/soeu-2021-0071/html> 521.

Cypriot EEZ declaration, and Cyprus's subsequent EU accession in 2004. Firstly, Cyprus signed an EEZ treaty with Egypt in 2003, and the following year it declared its EEZ.⁵⁶ In general, Türkiye denies Cyprus's EEZ and the RoC's existence, referring to it as the Greek-Cypriot Administration. In the context of bi-communal negotiations to resolve the Cyprus Issue, the Annan Plan emerged in 2004 from talks between the representatives of the two communities (Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots) mediated by then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.⁵⁷ The logic behind the plan was that the Cyprus Issue would be resolved firstly and then Cyprus would join the EU as a unified island. This would open the road for Türkiye's accession.

The Annan Plan, which entailed a bizonal, bicomunal Federation, was rejected by 75.38% of Greek Cypriots in a referendum.⁵⁸ Despite the Annan plan's rejection by the Greek-Cypriots, Cyprus joined the EU, while Türkiye's accession was stalled. This was perceived as a betrayal by Türkiye, underscoring the deep-rooted tensions in the region.⁵⁹ Gürdeniz and the Turkish military were against the plan since it entailed the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Cyprus. From their perspective, Türkiye was yielding to the EU's commands, and they needed to protect the Turkish maritime rights.⁶⁰ As a result, the Annan plan and the Cypriot EEZ declaration were supplementary factors that led to *Mavi Vatan*. As Prof. Abdul mentioned: 'the problem with Greece and Cyprus provided the framework within which this idea could be elaborated in the form of *Mavi Vatan*'. According to the 'sceptic' narrative, the Seville Map, the Annan plan, and the Cypriot EEZ led to the Blue Homeland.

However, the 'sceptic' academics add to their narration the Turkish EEZ in the Black Sea, which is the only official part of the Blue Homeland and internationally recognised. It is essential to mention that although *Mavi Vatan* is not an official doctrine, the maritime boundaries it predicts in the Black Sea are de jure. As Prof. Aytekin said: 'The Blue Homeland is official only in the Black Sea'. Türkiye is the only Black Sea

⁵⁶ Fuat Aksu and Helin Sarı Ertem, *Analyzing Foreign Policy Crises in Turkey: Conceptual, Theoretical and Practical Discussions*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=151771472>.

⁵⁷ Hale (no 49) 198.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Kosebalaban (no 36) 159.

⁶⁰ Denizeau (no 34) 16.

coastal state that has not ratified UNCLOS. Nevertheless, it has delimited its maritime boundaries with all the neighbouring countries. In 1973, 1978, and 1987, Türkiye and the Soviet Union agreed on their boundary for the territorial sea, continental shelf, and EEZ.⁶¹ After the dissolution of the USSR, Georgia, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine confirmed the validity of the USSR-Türkiye maritime boundary delimitations. In 1997, Türkiye and Bulgaria also agreed upon their boundary. It is asserted that the Black Sea is a more stable neighbourhood than the Eastern Mediterranean and where there is low friction over maritime boundaries between the countries.

Notably, the Black Sea's EEZs are not so politicised, contrary to the Aegean's case. For Prof. Aytekin, 'the biggest problem in the Mediterranean is the lack of trust between Greece and Türkiye'. The Turkish Black Sea EEZ implements specific UNCLOS provisions, including Articles 56–57, which govern the extent and rights of coastal states within EEZs. Türkiye's core complaint is UNCLOS Article 121, which grants continental shelf and EEZ rights to islands. This 'problem' does not exist in the Black Sea to the extent it does in the Eastern Mediterranean, because the Black Sea has only a few islands near the coast, which do not significantly alter the EEZs. Thus, *Mavi Vatan* focuses solely on the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The 'sceptic' narrative, while emphasising recent events (the 2003 Seville Map, Cyprus's 2004 EU accession), operates within its own logic. Prof. Ekrem described the admirals as follows: 'They are Eurasianist, Euro-sceptic, anti-globalist, Western-sceptic [...] claiming extensive territorial waters or larger sea areas fits into the narrative'. Both Gürdeniz and Yayci are Eurasianist Kemalists.⁶² This ideology shapes their view of history and Türkiye's place in the world. The respondents viewed the 'official' narrative as an attempt by the doctrine's creators to draw on history to gain legitimacy and common consent. They see them as opportunists aspiring to pursue a political career. Academic dismissal of the admirals as 'opportunists' might reflect professional competition within Türkiye's policy establishment. The 'sceptic' narrative reframes maritime expansion as pragmatic statecraft rather than as part of a nationalist ideology, a positioning that may make such claims more acceptable to international audiences.

⁶¹ Çubukçuoğlu (no 40) 100.

⁶² Tziarras (no 32) 64.

Critically, both narratives converge on core claims. Firstly, they agree on the strengthening of Türkiye's maritime position, that external actors (Greece, Cyprus) have challenged Turkish maritime interests, and that naval expansion is justified. The narratives diverge not on whether *Mavi Vatan* is necessary, but on whether its framing serves additional ideological functions. This convergence suggests that the binary between 'official' and 'sceptic' may obscure a deeper consensus about maritime revisionism, with disagreement focused primarily on rhetorical legitimation rather than the doctrine itself.

The different narratives reflect asymmetrical power relations within Turkish policy discourse. The 'official' narrative, backed by military institutional authority and incorporated into naval strategy documents, circulates through official and unofficial channels. The other narrative is confined to a few academics and reaches more limited audiences. This institutional asymmetry means that the 'official' narrative's version of historical truth has greater practical consequences for policy formation, regardless of empirical accuracy. Understanding *Mavi Vatan*, therefore, requires examining not only which historical claims are made but also which institutional actors possess the authority to make claims prevalent. It is essential to note that the binary obscures hybrid positions while exemplifying competing historical claims.

Finally, when researching the *Mavi Vatan's* history, two divergent narratives emerged. In most cases, the first 'official' narrative is presented by the doctrine's founders and has a military background. Concurrently, a second, less well-known narrative emerged from the interviews about Blue Homeland's history. This 'sceptic' narration has an academic background. All the respondents view the 'official' narrative as an attempt by the doctrine's creators to draw on history to gain legitimacy and common consent. Nonetheless, both narratives accept that Turkish maritime strengthening is necessary; the divergence concerns how to justify expansion in acceptable ways. Consequently, *Mavi Vatan* has not one but two historical narratives, depending on the interests one maintains.

3 Context of *Mavi Vatan*'s Ascension

A. Domestic Political Context

Before examining the politics of identity, the events that led to *Mavi Vatan*'s rise should be analysed to understand its ascension better. Domestic politics played a crucial role, particularly after the failed July 15, 2016, coup attempt. Initially, Erdoğan accused the Gülenists of instigating the coup attempt. Gülenists are followers of Fethullah Gülen, who was an Islamist scholar self-exiled in Pennsylvania, and had built a strong network in education and finance.⁶³ They were former allies of Erdoğan's political party, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party), and in 2013, the rupture followed the AKP's closure of Gülen's preparatory schools.⁶⁴ The coup attempt gave Erdoğan emergency powers, and he seized the opportunity to target all opposition.

Erdoğan targeted the Turkish military, purging approximately 81% of the top officers (1,524 out of 1,886) and 24,339 members of all the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), including non-commissioned officers and civil servants. However, only 8,651 military members participated according to official sources.⁶⁵ The government dismissed the Kemalist personnel and the so-called 'Atlanticist', who are pro-Western and pro-NATO, from the Turkish military, paving the way for the Eurasianists, who are anti-Western, pro-Russian and pro-China.⁶⁶ The Eurasianists are fervent proponents of *Mavi Vatan* and wanted to include it on the defence agenda.⁶⁷ The new National Defence University, which replaced the prestigious war academies, introduced examination systems that gave the government direct control over officer selection and advancement.⁶⁸

⁶³ Aslı Bâli, *Turkey's Cyclical Coups*, Dissent Magazine, 12 August 2016, available at https://dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/turkey-coup-countercoup-akp-erdogan-gulenist-purges/ (last accessed 26 February 2026).

⁶⁴ Bâli, (no 63).

⁶⁵ Levent Kenez, *Erdogan Dismissed 81 Pct of Top Turkish Military Officers Following Controversial Coup Attempt in 2016*, Nordic Monitor, 16 July 2024, available at <https://nordicmonitor.com/2024/07/erdogan-purged-81-of-top-turkish-military-officials-following-controversial-coup-attempt-in-2016/> (last accessed 26 February 2026).

⁶⁶ Edoardo Lavezzo, 'Limits of a Competitive Authoritarianism in Security Policies: Interpreting Türkiye's Approach towards the EU' (2025) *Filozofija i Društvo*, Vol. 36(2), 479, <https://doi.org/10.2298/FID2502479L> 487.

⁶⁷ Denizeau (no 34) 20.

⁶⁸ Murat Ülgül and Sertif Demir, 'Keeping the Soldiers at Bay: Coup-Proofing Strategies in Turkey' (2020) *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 27 (3), 138, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12518> 147.

Erdoğan's government was intent on restructuring the military, prioritising political loyalty over professional merit and strategic expertise. As ontological security theory predicts, the crisis following the coup attempt created conditions where *Mavi Vatan* could function as an identity-stabilisation factor. The purge of Atlanticist officers and ascension of Eurasianists represents the institutional restructuring through which securitised narratives gain policy traction by replacing one coherent identity framework (Western-oriented) with another (Eurasianist-nationalist) to restore the state's ontological security.

The failed coup also created the political conditions that resulted in a nationalist turn in Turkish domestic politics, through the formation of an alliance between the AKP and the MHP, Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*), formally known as the 'People's Alliance' (*Cumhur İttifakı*), which has governed to this day since 2018. To explain how this political alliance came to be, the 2015 elections must be examined. In the June election, the AKP lost its parliamentary majority for the first time, and Bahçeli (MHP leader) refused to form a coalition with the AKP.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, in the November election, the MHP suffered electoral losses. These results provide the basis for future realignment. In 2016, Bahçeli faced a leadership challenge from Akşener, a former Minister (1996-1997), but an electoral body prevented the vote on Bahçeli's replacement from taking place, some say with governmental interference.⁷⁰

Akşener and the dissidents were expelled from the MHP and founded the Good Party (*İYİ Partisi*) in October 2017.⁷¹ Therefore, the MHP's position made an alliance with the AKP increasingly necessary for the party's survival. Bahçeli openly supported the April 2017 constitutional referendum that transformed Türkiye's parliamentary system into a presidency with sweeping executive powers.⁷² The new system required

⁶⁹ Atilla Yeşilada, *Is the AKP–MHP Alliance Reaching a Breaking Point? A Structural Analysis of Turkey's Ruling Bloc* (*P.A.Turkey*, 9 November 2025), available at <https://www.paturkey.com/news/2025/is-the-akp-mhp-alliance-reaching-a-breaking-point-a-structural-analysis-of-turkeys-ruling-bloc-25137/> (last accessed 26 February 2026).

⁷⁰ Ercan Gurses and Seda Sezer, *Turkish Nationalist Party Expels Leadership Challenger*, World Reuters, 8 September 2016, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkish-nationalist-party-expels-leadership-challenger-idUSKCN11E1SH/> (last accessed 26 February 2026).

⁷¹ Demir Murat Seyrek, *New Hope for Turkey's Opposition?*, Deutsche Welle, 25 October 2017, available at <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-new-political-party-gives-life-to-turkeys-opposition/a-41111859> (last accessed 26 February 2026).

⁷² Sibel Oktay, *Turkey's Phantom Coalition: The AKP-MHP Partnership and Turkish Foreign Policy*, APSA MENA POLITICS, 18 November 2020, available at <https://apsamena.org/2020/11/18/turkeys->

both a presidential and parliamentary mandate. In the June 2018 election, Erdoğan surpassed 50% of the vote and became president under the new system, only because he had joined a coalition with the MHP in February 2018, forming the People's Alliance.⁷³ The ruling coalition is not a traditional one, since the MHP lacks veto power over foreign policy decisions.⁷⁴

Instead, the partnership functions as an electoral and ideological alignment that permits Erdoğan to appropriate nationalist rhetoric and policies while maintaining executive control over their implementation. This alliance materialises nationalist discourse at the state level, creating what securitisation theory identifies as 'audience acceptance',⁷⁵ meaning that the MHP's nationalist base provides domestic legitimacy for the doctrine's maritime assertiveness that might otherwise appear revisionist. The People's Alliance represents not only a political coalition but also the structural embedding of securitised identity politics into governance.

In parallel, EU-Turkish relations worsened after the failed coup, owing to further democratic backsliding in Türkiye, especially under the new presidential system.⁷⁶ Concurrently, the collapse of the Turkish-Kurdish peace process in 2015 resulted in renewed violence from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Turkish military invasions in Syria against the People's Defence Units (YPG), further souring the relationship with the EU and making a potential alliance with the anti-Kurdish MHP easier.⁷⁷ Additionally, Türkiye during the same period exploited migration and used the refugee crisis as a negotiation weapon against the EU.⁷⁸ The above diminished Türkiye's EU integration prospects, increased anti-Western rhetoric, and hence forced a return to a nationalist and security-focused positioning.

phantom-coalition-the-akp-mhp-partnership-and-turkish-foreign-policy/ (last accessed 26 February 2026).

⁷³ Ziya Öniş, 'Turkey's New Presidential Regime: Fragility, Resilience, Reversibility', (2023) *Reflektif Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 4(1), 159, <https://doi.org/10.47613/reflektif.2023.98> 160.

⁷⁴ Oktay (no 72).

⁷⁵ Ori Wertman and Christian Kaunert, *The Audience in Securitization Theory*, The Institute for National Security Studies, (2022), available at https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/the-audience-in-securitization-theory/ (last accessed 26 February 2026).

⁷⁶ Lavezzo (no 66).

⁷⁷ Yeşilada, (no 69).

⁷⁸ Lavezzo (no 66) 490.

B. Hydrocarbon Competition Context

On the other hand, while the ideological restructuring of the Turkish army and government paved the way for *Mavi Vatan*'s adoption, the Turkish economic interests played an equally important role. Firstly, Türkiye's economy began its dramatic decline in the mid-2010s. The Turkish lira's depreciation, chronic inflation, declining foreign investment, the country's reliance on imported energy and rising energy import costs rendered hydrocarbon exploration an economic imperative. Energy security constitutes one of the doctrine's goals and is essential for Türkiye's economy and geopolitical vision. In 2022, Türkiye imported all the natural gas it consumed, 91% of its oil products, and 77% of its coal, with Russia being its primary trade partner.⁷⁹ In 2020, the biggest gas reserve was found in the Sakarya field in the Black Sea, but even in the best-case scenario, it is projected to cover only 30% of Türkiye's future demand.⁸⁰

As a result, the Eastern Mediterranean's hydrocarbons are equally crucial for energy security. In 2015, ENI discovered an 850 bcm (billion cubic meters) natural gas reserve in Egypt's Zohr field, while Israel's Leviathan contains approximately 620 bcm and Cyprus' Aphrodite field around 130 bcm.⁸¹ Beyond the Aphrodite field, Türkiye also claimed the reserves discovered in the Cypriot Calypso and Glaucus fields in 2019 by ExxonMobil, which amount to 142-227 bcm.⁸² The central narrative of *Mavi Vatan*'s supporters is that these hydrocarbons rightfully belong to the Turkish people and will resolve economic issues by ensuring affordable energy and autarky (Altan). Furthermore, another strategy calls for transforming Türkiye into an energy hub,

⁷⁹ Francesco Siccardi, *Understanding the Energy Drivers of Turkey's Foreign Policy*, Carnegie Europe, (2024), available at <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2024/02/28/understanding-energy-drivers-of-turkey-s-foreign-policy-pub-91733> (last accessed 26 February 2026) 4.

⁸⁰ Mustafa Enes Esen, *Coal, Oil, Gas, and Nuclear: Risks in Turkey's Growing Energy Demands*, Washington Institute, 22 October 2025, available at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/coal-oil-gas-and-nuclear-risks-turkeys-growing-energy-demands> (last accessed 26 February 2026).

⁸¹ Sina Kısacık, 'Existing and Prospective Central Paradigms of Eastern Mediterranean Energy Geopolitics in The 21st Century: Do / Will All the Related Parties Seek for Collaborations or Confrontations?', in Hasret Çomak, Burak Şakir Şeker, Mehlika Özlem Ultan (eds), *Global Maritime Geopolitics* (London: Transnational Press London, 2022), <https://www.ceeol.com/search/chapter-detail?id=1026150> 233.

⁸² Ozay Mehmet and Vedat Yorucu, *Modern Geopolitics of Eastern Mediterranean Hydrocarbons in an Age of Energy Transformation* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43585-1_75.

transporting gas from the Zohr, Leviathan, and Aphrodite fields and integrating it into European markets via the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC).

However, the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), initiated by Egypt and joined by Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine in 2019, isolated Türkiye diplomatically and excluded it from regional development projects.⁸³ The Turkish response was the signing of two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) later that year, one on maritime delimitation and the other on security, a concrete expression of *Mavi Vatan* in policy. This served as a response to the Greece-Egypt cooperation and as a legitimising tool in Ankara's presence in Libya and its claims to Eastern Mediterranean resources. From a critical geopolitics perspective, the EMGF's exclusion of Türkiye demonstrates how geopolitical imaginaries like maps of gas fields and pipeline routes, become marginalisation instruments. The Turkish-Libyan MoU represents a counter-imaginary that challenges the Western-backed energy architecture by redrawing maritime boundaries through bilateral assertion rather than multilateral consensus.

Overall, the events following the failed coup served as catalysts for Türkiye's strategic orientation. The purge of 'Atlanticist' officers created space for Eurasianist and nationalist voices to dominate the military. The AKP-MHP alliance provided political cover for increasingly assertive foreign policies that departed from the EU-integration framework of the 2000s. The regional hydrocarbon competition, Türkiye's economic crisis, energy dependency, and exclusion from regional resource frameworks made the doctrine's unofficial adoption an imperative for asserting sovereignty in the Eastern Mediterranean. Prof. Ekrem noted: 'Eurasianists and nationalists became quite influential in the government circles after the attempted coup; it was an opportune time to push for it [*Mavi Vatan*]'. Others added that this geopolitical discourse was used for the natural resources (Izem). The doctrine's creators and later the government utilised the Vatan concept to popularise it.

⁸³ Valeria Talbot, *The Scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean: Energy and Geopolitics* (Milan: Ledizioni, 2021), https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/isp_i_report_the_scramble_for_the_eastern_mediterranean_web.pdf.

4. Blue Homeland's Politics of Identity

Blue Homeland is primarily associated with maritime jurisdictions and security matters, while identity is often overlooked. In the literature, there is little work on *Mavi Vatan's* identity perspective. However, extensive discourse and a bibliography on the Vatan concept are available, primarily in Turkish. As Wendt indicated, interests derive from identities. A state's identity regarding others shapes its interests.⁸⁴ Therefore, understanding a state's identity is crucial to understanding its interests. Wendt's constructivism posits that collective identities play a vital role in shaping foreign policy, which, in turn, expresses a state's identity and its constructed interests.⁸⁵ Although not an official naval dogma, it has undoubtedly affected Turkish foreign policy. *Mavi Vatan's* influence on the internal domain is even more challenging to research. The data collected from the interviews proved critical for uncovering the politics of identity surrounding this relatively new concept. Some interviewees conducted extensive research and wrote extensively about the *Vatan* concept.

Consequently, the deeper meanings of the word '*Vatan*' and the wider concept must be explained. Secondly, the influence of the Bleu Homeland doctrine on TFP and Türkiye's international posture is analysed. Last but not least, the attempt at national identity-building is showcased, and its resonance is recorded. The 'politics of identity' in *Mavi Vatan's* context refers to how the *Vatan* concept shapes national identity and informs foreign policy decisions. This is a significant aspect, reflecting the complex interplay between foreign policy, maritime sovereignty and national identity.

A. The Concept of Vatan

The *Vatan* concept has many ramifications. However, the internal notions must be unveiled for in-depth comprehension. In Turkish and Arabic, *Vatan* does not simply

⁸⁴ Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics' (1992) *International Organization*, Vol. 46 (2), 391, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858>.

⁸⁵ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/social-theory-of-international-politics/0346E6FDC74FECEF6D2CDD7EFB003CF2>.

mean Homeland; it also carries a sacred dimension.⁸⁶ According to Prof. Aytekin, the notion is above ethnicity, language or religion: ‘*Vatan* is a Holy place to live in. It is the living space of the people, not only the Turks but also others; it’s inclusive’. It also contains patriotic sentiments, as Prof. Altan noted for *Vatan*: ‘You must die for your land; millions have died before for this land in the past’. In contrast, a minority of interviewees introduced a more statist dimension by referring to the entire sovereign country of Türkiye as *Vatan*. Moreover, everyone agreed that the term attracts the Turkish mindset (*Izem*). In securitisation terms, the *Vatan* concept transforms routine maritime policy into an existential issue requiring extreme measures. By invoking its sacred dimension, policy elites elevate EEZ disputes from technical legal matters to civilisational survival questions, thereby justifying actions that deviate from international norms like UNCLOS. This sacred framing is what enables maritime claims to bypass rational cost-benefit calculations and enter the realm of non-negotiable identity imperatives.

Today, the *Vatan* concept remains a significant symbol in Turkish culture and can be traced throughout Turkish history. However, the meaning of *Vatan* is not fixed; it changes with perceptions of national interest, shaped by signals and responses from both domestic and foreign actors.⁸⁷ For example, the Islamic *Vatan* is not territorialised. In contrast, modern Turkish *Vatan* is characterised by clearly defined territorial boundaries.⁸⁸ *Vatan*’s notion gained significant prominence during the late Ottoman period in response to the empire’s disintegration and the rise of nationalism. This concept was employed to rally the populace to preserve the remaining territories amidst external and internal threats (wars and rebellions).⁸⁹ The initial goal was to create a common Ottoman identity, which failed. As Prof. Yusuf noted: ‘Basically, it was created when non-Muslims were included in the Ottoman army to serve as soldiers’.

Following the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923, *Vatan* became the cornerstone of the new national identity. Atatürk embedded the concept deeply into

⁸⁶ B. Özkan, *From the Abode of Islam to the Turkish Vatan: The Making of a National Homeland in Turkey* (New Heaven, CO: Yale University Press, 2012), <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300172010/from-the-abode-of-islam-to-the-turkish-vatan/> 2.

⁸⁷ Çubukçuoğlu (no 40) 202.

⁸⁸ Özkan (no 86) 4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 51-53.

Türkiye's political and cultural ethos. This time, the intention again aligned with the previous case: to create a common identity centred on Turkish nationalism. The concept of a unified Turkish *Vatan* was used to eliminate differences between the Anatolian populations. Republican reforms were groundbreaking in linking Turkish identity with territoriality. The formation of the secular Turkish nation-state replaced allegiance to the sultan and religion with loyalty to the homeland. This shift was revolutionary as it detached the nation from Islam and God, as a community of believers, and from the Ottoman sultan as loyal subjects, connecting it instead to the *Vatan*.⁹⁰ This continuity from the Ottoman legacy to the Republican era reflects *Vatan*'s enduring significance in shaping Türkiye's collective identity and national unity.

Prof. Izem supported the above statements: 'The first idea of *Vatan* was in the last period of the Ottomans before the Empire dissolved. Nonetheless, she further explained: 'There were three visions during the disruption of the Empire, the one to enlarge the territories based on Islam (Pan-Islamism), as Abdul Hamid tried, the Pan-Turkish one where you have Central Asian roots and expand upon it, and then the Blue Anatolianism'. Blue Anatolianism's *Vatan*, as mentioned before, was the one to prevail. In modern-day Türkiye, the concept has expanded further. The best-known 'expansion' was the *Yavru Vatan*, or 'Baby Homeland,' referring to Cyprus in the early 1950s and the need to unite with *Anavatan* Türkiye.⁹¹ This means that not only the Greeks but also the Turks sought the union of Cyprus with their country, though it was conceptualised differently under *Yavru Vatan*.

Depending on historical realities, the *Vatan* has undergone significant changes in Turkish political discourses. On the same path, almost 50 years later, a new ramification of *Vatan* was created, the Blue Homeland for the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean. *Mavi Vatan* is the 'extension at sea and seabed of our homeland'.⁹² Prof. Ekrem explained: 'In Turkish, we refer to Türkiye as *Anavatan* and Cyprus as *Yavru Vatan*. *Mavi Vatan* nicely fits into this nationalist narrative'. It is essential to note that although four professors describe the *Vatan* concept as a nationalist narrative, they

⁹⁰ Ibid, 4-5.

⁹¹ Ibid, 194.

⁹² Cem Gürdeniz, *What Is the Blue Homeland in the 21st Century?*, United World International, 31 July 2020, available at <https://uwidata.com/12952-what-is-the-blue-homeland-in-the-21st-century/> (last accessed 28 July 2025).

all argue that it is defensive. Consequently, they believe that all branches of Vatan are defensive and protect the concept of Homeland, including the Blue Homeland, which is regarded as a defence of the Turkish maritime domain. Nevertheless, all the interviewees recognised that political leaders frequently invoke the term *Vatan* to rally public support and justify policies, particularly those related to national security and foreign policy. By emphasising the homeland, politicians aim to foster resilience and resistance to perceived external threats, thereby reinforcing the narrative of a nation under siege. Prof. Yusuf remarked that: ‘the strategic use of *Vatan* promotes national unity in defence of the shared territory’. It is used to bolster the legitimacy of government policies, both domestically and abroad.

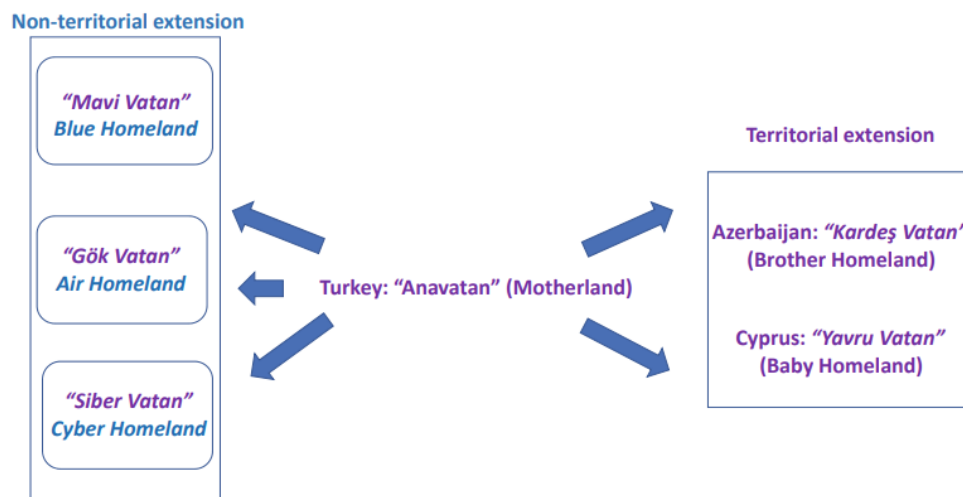


Figure 2: The wider ‘*Anavatan*’ concept⁹³

B. Mavi Vatan and Turkish Domestic Identity

In the domestic context, the concept was featured on national television and various debate programs after the failed coup d’etat, particularly from 2016 to 2020, indicating an intention to reach domestic audiences. Prof. Defne said: ‘It is unclear to what extent the general public is engaged in promoting this concept. It appears to be a

⁹³ Çubukçuoğlu (no 40) 219.

topic of discussion primarily within academic and political circles rather than among the wider public'. What is more, Prof. Izem added: 'In TRT, they shot a documentary on Blue Homeland'. The public was 'bombarded' by a media campaign from *Mavi Vatan* supporters, which increased public awareness on Türkiye's maritime issues. A prominent figure in these debates was Cem Gürdeniz, who promoted his doctrine, as evidenced by his social media posts and numerous interviews.⁹⁴ Some of the interviewees described the concept as a 'great public relations tool' (Abdul) and a 'good propaganda tool' (Aytekin).

The doctrine's primary goal is to make maritime policies more appealing to the Turkish public. Its creators wish to reconstruct the Turkish identity. All the interviewees expressed surprise that the potential of the Turkish maritime domain has not been realised, despite Türkiye being surrounded by seas (Ezel). The doctrine tries to introduce a Turkish naval identity and redefine Türkiye's position in the world as a naval nation. Prof. Izem observed: 'It tries to create a naval culture, which we lack because we are traditionally inland people'. In the Ottoman Empire, the Greeks had the naval heritage, now it is high time for the Turks to establish their own (Yusuf). All participants agreed that the concept aims to forge a bond with the seas and to persuade the Turkish public that the maritime boundary is as important as the land boundary. For instance, Prof. Altan argued: 'For Vatan now is not only the land but also the sea, it's a national issue [...] you must die for it, it creates the feeling of possession and attachment'.

Mavi Vatan is regarded as a government and state-controlled media narrative. Prof. Izem stated, 'The government tries to inculcate this idea, but I don't think it's successful'. Indeed, most interviewees agree that public resonance is limited and that identity construction remains incomplete. Specifically, Prof. Ekrem's public survey found that more than 70% of participants had never heard of *Mavi Vatan*. Still, they could understand it was associated with the sea. Concurrently, Prof. Abdul declared: 'Everything related to the sea is described as *Mavi Vatan* [...] the term has become trivialised'. This is considered dangerous because the doctrine's primary goal has lost

⁹⁴ Aydınlik, *Cem Gürdeniz: Eurasian Alliance is Necessary*, 21 September 2020, available at <https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/haber/cem-gurdeniz-avasya-ittifaki-zorunlu-218862>, (last accessed 28 July 2025).

its substance. Others argue that the Turkish public is not particularly concerned with naval issues, owing to more immediate problems. The most frequently mentioned problems affecting daily life are inflation, the cost of living, and the Syrian Issue (Ezel and Izem). Prof. Ezel believes that only the attentive public who follows TFP knows the topic.

Blue Homeland is understudied within Turkish academia. Prof. Yusuf underlined, ‘This is a military concept, not academic’. At the same time, Prof. Izem admitted: ‘I wanted to write an article on Blue Homeland, they said just two or three paragraphs, these independent academic people [...] they were not curious,’ when referring to conferences and seminars she participated in. On the other hand, a different approach suggests that the doctrine’s topics are overstudied within academic discourse but not under this term (Defne). Another common opinion is the lack of institutionalisation and cultural identity (Deniz). Despite their differences, they all agree that Türkiye should be more involved with its maritime affairs.

From 2021 onwards, even though *Mavi Vatan* is not in the top current affairs in Turkish media and government, a new education system called ‘Century of Türkiye’ was approved in May 2024. According to this model, *Mavi Vatan’s* maps will be included in the geography lesson, and the Turkish struggle for its legal and geographical rights in the Aegean, which is named ‘Sea of the Islands’, will be taught.⁹⁵ In the tenth-grade geography class, the reasons Türkiye has not signed UNCLOS and the historical ties with the TRNC will be presented. Admirals commented on this, declaring that a new generation is emerging with a *Mavi Vatan* consciousness. While interviewing Prof. Izem, this topic arose, and she argued: ‘The school discourse is important to inculcate ideas to future generations; this (identity) is under construction’. This new curriculum represents an institutional embedding previously absent and establishes a new basis for the development of *Mavi Vatan’s* politics of identity.

Ontological security theory showcases why curriculum institutionalisation matters. States produce coherent identities across generations through socialisation

⁹⁵ Manolis Kostidis, ‘Blue Homeland Doctrine Planted in Turkish Schools’, *eKathimerini*, 28 December 2024, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/foreign-policy/1239830/blue-homeland-doctrine-planted-in-turkish-schools/> (last accessed 28 July 2025).

mechanisms that transform contested claims into naturalised truths. The curriculum functions as a between elite securitising discourse and mass identity internalisation. It also reconciles the doctrine's present limitations with its future ambitions. While current mass mobilisation remains weak, systematic generational indoctrination ensures long-term identity transformation and continuation of maritime claims. *Mavi Vatan* is no longer a convenient narrative to boost the government's popularity; it is becoming a long-term identity project.

C. Mavi Vatan and Turkish Foreign Identity

In the international domain, representations of threats and dangers to *Vatan* significantly influenced TFP and shaped perceptions of what constitutes the national interest. The politics of identity increasingly affects foreign policy formulation, whether through religious and nationalist identities or through political leaders who must respond to the growing influence of new social groups.⁹⁶ Blue Homeland is a naval doctrine within Turkish geopolitical dogma. These dogmas assume that Türkiye's location in a strategically crucial region dictates its foreign policy and security decisions.⁹⁷ Türkiye is described as a 'central' state that serves as the nexus of three continents, acting as both a connector and a divider between regions. The *Mavi Vatan* version claims that Türkiye is the nexus of three Seas and has the longest coastline in the region. This warrants a larger territorial sea, which must be protected at all costs.

Although not officially adopted by the Foreign Ministry, 'Blue Homeland is a Turkish reaction to Greek and Cypriot maximalist approaches in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, according to Prof. Altan. Meanwhile, Prof. Abdul mentioned: 'Greece is the archenemy for Türkiye, and because of the Cyprus issue, it's more appealing for the public to support such actions [...] *Mavi Vatan* is territorialising the Sea, it faces the Sea as being a piece of land'. The creators of the doctrine sought to foster a naval culture not only among the Turkish people but also among the Turkish

⁹⁶ Sabri Ciftci, 'Social Identity and Attitudes Toward Foreign Policy: Evidence from a Youth Survey in Turkey' (2013) *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 45(1), 25, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2920374 29.

⁹⁷ Pinar Bilgin, 'Turkey's 'Geopolitics Dogma'', in Stefano Guzzini (ed.), *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 10.1017/CBO9781139225809.010154.

state as a whole. Except for TFP, the doctrine aims to build a strong Turkish navy by constructing new warships in Türkiye. The increased maritime capabilities are a recurring theme in the interviews and the admiral's rhetoric. Blue Homeland has influenced TFP, mainly during 2016-2020, after the attempted coup. The most transparent case of *Mavi Vatan* in TFP was the Turkish-Libyan Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on maritime boundaries and the EEZ, which was drafted by former Chief of Staff of the Turkish Navy, Yayci, one of the doctrine's leading theorists.⁹⁸ It was the first time that someone from the Turkish Navy had affected the TFP to such an extent. During this period, TPAO dramatically increased unauthorised gas prospecting, often accompanied by warships, in areas also claimed by Greece and Cyprus.⁹⁹

In the military domain, increased naval presence was underlined in contested areas, and naval exercises took place, with the biggest named '*Mavi Vatan*' in 2019, leading to tensions with Greece and Cyprus over the EEZs' and continental shelf's delineation.¹⁰⁰ The doctrine was utilised from 2016 to 2020 to target Greece and make a statement on the international stage (Ekrem). Interestingly, rising commissions were recorded in the military-industrial complex, including the production of new drones, missiles, and sonar systems, as well as the air carrier TCG Anadolu, commissioned in 2023, while a new aircraft carrier is under construction.¹⁰¹ This connects with Prof. Ezel's comments: '*Mavi Vatan* expresses an aspiration to develop maritime capabilities in the military domain'.

Nevertheless, there are objections to *Mavi Vatan's* actual level of influence within the TFP. All participants agreed on Türkiye's potential and need to become powerful at sea, irrespective of this doctrine. Some respondents observed that the government would follow its naval policies regardless (Ezel). It is speculated that Erdoğan used the Blue Homeland rhetoric to advance a neo-Ottomanist agenda in Africa, particularly in Libya. That is why Prof. Abdul accused Erdoğan of using the

⁹⁸ Anthony Deriziotis, 'The 'Blue Homeland' and Erdoğan's Rhetoric: State Doctrine or Populist Narrative?', in Janković Slobodan (ed.), *Convergence and Confrontation: The Balkans and the Middle East in the 21st Century*, (Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Economics, 2021), http://doi.fil.bg.ac.rs/volume.php?pt=eb_book&y=2021&issue=iipe_conv_conf-2021&i=1 21.

⁹⁹ Siccardi, (no 79) 21).

¹⁰⁰ Çubukçuoğlu (no 40) 245.

¹⁰¹ Çubukçuoğlu (no 40) 224.

concept for personal ambitions. After 2020, he explained: ‘The Blue Homeland advocates have lost their grip around the party [...] this idea doesn’t serve Erdoğan’s political interest anymore’. Additionally, Prof. Ekrem gave an interesting viewpoint: ‘There was an intentional ambiguity from the Foreign Ministry, especially about not officially acknowledging *Mavi Vatan*’. The above illustrates a hybrid Turkish maritime strategy using the Blue Homeland map. Prof. Aytekin claimed: ‘*Mavi Vatan* is used as a bargaining map for negotiations with Greece [...] it’s not official because it undermines others’ rights [...] you will be seen as an irredentist’. Consequently, Türkiye does not recognise *Mavi Vatan*’s map officially, since the international community would see Türkiye as a revisionist country.

To conclude, the politics of identity plays a crucial yet unexplored role in the discourse surrounding Blue Homeland. While geopolitical discussions often focus on maritime jurisdiction and security issues, the identity dimensions of *Mavi Vatan* have been largely overlooked. *Vatan*’s deeper meanings emphasise the importance of national identity and of *Mavi Vatan* for Türkiye. Although unofficial, the doctrine’s influence on TFP is undeniable, as it has driven assertive maritime claims and strategic alliances. However, its impact on domestic national identity is less straightforward; it appears to be currently under construction, with ambitious future aims. The Turkish government follows a strategy designed to foster long-term identity transformation while preserving diplomatic flexibility.

5. Conclusions

This study has showcased the Blue Homeland doctrine as a contemporary example of how states construct maritime sovereignty narratives to legitimise maritime and territorial claims and transform national identity. Through analysis of competing historical narratives, the context of the doctrine’s rise, and the politics of identity politics, several key findings emerge regarding Türkiye’s attempt to establish itself as a legitimate maritime power in the Eastern Mediterranean. This research analysed the doctrine through critical geopolitics and CDA. This methodology proved crucial for exploring the interplay among *Mavi Vatan*, its narratives, and the attempted identity construction that has unofficially affected TFP.

The main contribution is the alternative voices revealed in the interviews, which offer a different perspective on the doctrine. Usually, the doctrine is presented solely through the ideas of the concept's creators, which are described as 'formal' in this study, since these ideas are the most prevalent in the literature. Conversely, the 'sceptic' narrative, predominantly advanced by academic observers, detects the doctrine's creation as a reactive policy response to specific geopolitical developments in the 2000s, particularly the Seville Map, the Annan Plan, and Cyprus's EEZ declaration. This perspective views the historical connections as post-hoc legitimisation efforts rather than genuine continuity with Türkiye's maritime heritage. However, Blue Homeland was placed on the agenda 10 years after its creation, owing to the post-2016 conjuncture, comprising the army's restructuring, shifting political alliances, economic constraints, and diplomatic isolation.

Concerning the politics of identity, the *Vatan's* meaning was clarified. The research revealed that *Mavi Vatan's* 'foreign identity' is more developed, as it has substantially affected TFP. However, the internal national identity seems to be currently under construction. A new national 'maritime' Turkish identity appears to be under development, with the introduction of an education system designed to educate younger generations about Turkish maritime claims. The 'Century of Türkiye' curriculum represents the mechanism through which the doctrine overcomes its current lack of mass public resonance by targeting future generations who will internalise these maritime claims as foundational national truths. This institutionalisation ensures the continuity of Turkish naval claims. It signals Blue Homeland's de facto adoption as a generational identity project rather than an immediate political mobilisation tool.

While Türkiye has successfully elevated maritime issues in regional discourse and demonstrated naval capabilities, the doctrine's failure to secure international recognition suggests that historical legitimacy cannot be asserted; it must be earned through consistent policy implementation and diplomatic engagement. The doctrine's future trajectory will likely depend on the Turkish state's official adoption, the ability to secure support from all political parties, or the successful implementation of the claims through other means. As regional tensions continue and the Eastern

Mediterranean's energy resources become increasingly important, *Mavi Vatan* will remain a critical factor in regional stability and maritime affairs.

The discourse surrounding Blue Homeland and its identity perspectives has not yet ended; it will remain an essential component of Türkiye's geopolitical strategy. Its implementation and influence in formal policy will depend on situational interests, (geo)political and/or economic, regardless of the ruling political party(ies). The doctrine's framing of maritime expansion as a defensive necessity rather than a revisionist ambition increases its legitimacy. Its current unofficial status, but de facto implementation, protects Türkiye diplomatically and preserves the *fait accompli*. Unfortunately, *Mavi Vatan* will remain a structural source of tension with Greece, Cyprus, and potentially other actors. Currently, a *Mavi Vatan*-driven confrontation is unlikely to escalate into a full-scale conflict unless it is linked to other factors, such as energy competition, which can amplify this dynamic.

The connection between doctrine and economic interests suggests that the regional stability hinges on whether energy disputes are managed through multilateral mechanisms or through unilateral assertions of maritime claims. Equally important is the doctrine's impact on NATO's cohesion. Turkish assertiveness, framed through the doctrine, creates tensions with Greece, a NATO ally, and with broader Western preferences for a rules-based order, such as UNCLOS. NATO's cohesion will depend on reconciling Türkiye's maritime assertiveness with the interests of allied states.

The existence of competing narratives underscores the doctrine's contested legitimacy and highlights the challenges states face in constructing new geopolitical narratives in the modern era. Moreover, the provided context highlighted the importance of conjuncture in the doctrine's rise within government circles, while the identity factor is crucial to its longevity and continuity. *Mavi Vatan* is not only a nationalist rhetoric but also a geopolitical discourse that shapes how Turkish institutions, decision-makers, and the public understand maritime sovereignty, national identity, and Türkiye's regional role. Further research is needed. Similar studies could examine other branches of *Vatan*, such as the *Gök Vatan* or the *Yavru Vatan*, to uncover new dimensions of Turkish nationalism and geopolitical ambitions, and how these are legitimised. Finally, analysis of international responses to the doctrine could illuminate

its effectiveness as a tool of regional influence projection. This study opens the way for future research to unravel the narratives of Türkiye's identity-driven geopolitics.

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