To better perceive the essential quality of Turkish diaspora nationalism, by which I mean identification with Turkey and attachment to it, one should first attempt to consider the history and present characteristics of this diaspora and see in what ways it differs from other diasporas (Clifford 1994; Safran 1999; Sheffer 2003). Further, one should analyse the self-perceptions of the Turkish diaspora, how it is considered in its homeland and how it is regarded in the host countries. Some research on these issues already exists, although it is not always conclusive.

Before discussing these and other issues, it may be useful to formulate some definition as to what people make up the Turkish diasporas, past and present. The problem of Turkish identity in this and other contexts has been debated by Turks and others and the conclusions have changed somewhat over time. The most common definition emphasizes ethnic origins, combined with tradition and language (Halman 1980; Güzel 2002). Intuitively following this definition, practically everyone in the Ottoman empire knew who was a Turk and who was not. Muslim Turks occupied most government positions as well as almost all the commanding military ones. Generally speaking, few ethnic Turks migrated from the empire and those who did hardly ever formed organized groups and committees. Moreover, the Ottomans increasingly considered also Turkic peoples outside the borders of the empire, but ethnically, linguistically and religiously close, as Turks and, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, near the empire’s end, attempted to get their support to bolster the empire in what was later called the Pan-Turk movement, based on a clearly formulated Pan-Turk ideology.

As we shall see, Pan-Turkism made more headway ideologically than operationally. As an expression of nationalism, to be analysed later, it had rivals, most particularly two other ideologies of

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the late Ottoman empire, namely, Ottomanism and Islamism (or Pan-Islamism).

The former, which came first, held that all the peoples of the empire, irrespective of ethnicity and religion, had to band together patriotically to save the empire from the destructive designs of its enemies. The basic approach was to appeal to all ethnic groups within the empire to leave aside their own nationalist ambitions and help preserve the empire. The latter, developing somewhat later, declared that Islam was the main unifying force capable of saving the empire from disintegration. It appealed, in Pan-Islamic terms, to Muslims within and without the empire, to support it in every way (Landau 1994). These ideologies and others issued messages of various nationalist content, emphasizing those elements which best suited their objectives.

Pan-Turkism (Landau 1995) concerns us more than other nationalist ideologies in the late Ottoman empire because it was largely initiated and fostered by and in Turkic communities outside the empire, i.e. in the diaspora. The reason was simple: many in the diaspora were discriminated against, even persecuted (or so considered themselves) by non-Turkic governments, chiefly in Tsarist Russia, China, Iran, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia (Macháček 2006). The Russian empire was a prime case for stimulating the writing and disseminating of nationalist Pan-Turk propaganda, due to harsh rule and pressures on ethnic minorities, on the one hand, and Pan-Slav propaganda, of which the Pan-Turk was almost a mirror image, on the other hand.

Especially active in propagating a Pan-Turk ideology in Russia, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were the Tatars and the Azerbaijanis (in that order of perseverance), very probably two of the most educated Turkic groups there. Several illustrations will suffice. Activists published books, edited newspapers in Russian and the local languages, set up discussion groups, and the like. Such a one was Ismail Gasprinsky (Gasparalı), a Tatar (1851–1914), who advocated a secular type of Pan-Turk nationalism under the slogan of “unity in language, thought and action”. His newspaper, Terciman, founded in 1883, preached this brand of nationalism in a lingua franca he himself had invented, comprising common elements of several Turkic languages. A younger relative of Gasprinsky’s, a Tatar named Yusuf Akcura (Akcuraoğlu) (1876–1935), wrote a long programmatic article, published in 1904 in the Cairene journal Türk. The article was influential in propagating the call for