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Where is Turkey heading?

Abstract

This article elaborates the political situation in Turkey in general and particularly the era of Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP; the Justice and Development Party). The article is based on observations, an assessment of the specialist and general media and the analyses of experts and academic staff. It commences with an analysis of the perspectives of the current government in terms of ideology, performance, strategy and tactics, and additionally tries to understand the phenomena which lie beyond the success. It also provides some insight into the coup d'état of July 2016 and the referendum on constitutional change held in April 2017, as well as the extremely tense political and social atmosphere in Turkey which lay behind both events and which has been, in turn, influenced by them. Secondly, the article seeks to estimate where Turkey is likely to be heading in the next decade. The author concludes that the path is either radicalisation or normalisation and that, while there are several important actors who will be influential in deciding which is to be taken, it is clear that the current position is not a sustainable one.

Keywords: *Turkey, AKP, secularism, constitutional change, coup d'état*

Introduction

Turkey is located in a problematic geography, which is why it is not easy to understand political developments as well as it is in western countries. It is known that this geography continually creates conflict and disagreement. Therefore, the classic division of right and left in politics is not a meaningful characterisation for Turkey. Political competition in Turkey is, in the present era, increasingly characterised by a contest between 'conservative globalists' and 'defensive nationalists' and the political environment is marked by the conspicuous absence of European-style left-of-centre parties. There are, to be fair, left-wing political parties, including socialist and communist ones, but their influence on political life is extremely limited.

The term 'conservative globalism' signifies an unusual synthesis of liberal and conservative elements. It signifies a favourable attitude towards engagement with global markets, democratisation reforms and progress towards EU membership. At the same time, it involves a defence of traditional values as well as appeals to the conservative instincts of large swathes of voters, in the process cutting across traditional class divisions. The combination of a progressive and modernist vision with a conservative face and support for traditional values has provided the AKP with a considerable edge over its rivals and has brought considerable success in consecutive general elections (Öniş, 2009).

It is particularly crucial that the modern Turkish Republic emerged out of the crucible of war by the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and other republicans. The main character of the republic was secular, modern and pro-western. Republicans had turn their face to the west and the contemporary world. In the 1920s and 1930s, the new Turkish Republic crushed successive rebellions in the south-east of the country. These rebellions were based on ethnicity and religion and stemmed from elements which did not want to accept the new order, especially its secularism, and even though republicans realised many reforms in the political, social and economic arena. From the establishment of the republic up until the goverment of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP; the Justice and Development Party), this secular and pluralist structure is what has characterised Turkish politics and its democratic institutions.

The process of learning, 2002-2007

When the AKP was founded in 2001, few people would have predicted its success since the tradition of political parties was typically important and, at that point, there was no chance for a new political party or movement. There are plenty of examples in the recent political history of Turkey.

AKP represented a mixed bag of interests. Its supporters ranged from hard-core Islamists to more traditional religious societies; Islamist modernisers and socially conservative businessman; secular reformist and Islamist kurds; liberals and some socialists. When Erdoğan became Mayor of İstanbul, he was particularly effective and efficient among Islamist groups.

The AKP's surprise triumph in the 2002 election owed much to Erdoğan's formidable power of oratory and organisation. In this election, the party gained two-thirds of all parliamentary seats on the basis of a 34.3 per cent share of total votes. AKP seems to have played a role in bringing together conservative local and national sentiments with those having developmentalist and globalist objectives. The AKP leadership is also aware that a muslim democratic identity does not help to resolve problems of legitimacy and security within the system; and that, on the contrary, it exacerbates them (Dağı, 2006).

The recovery programme set up by Kemal Derviş, Vice-President of the World Bank, after the 2001 economic crisis was implemented and realised both economic and political stabilisation in the following years. At this time, Erdoğan got the chance to restore relations with the EU: the 2001 terrorist attack on the US also helped persuade the west that a democratically elected, mild-mannered AKP was worth supporting.

Erdoğan's populist rhetoric and ambitious social agenda, that quickly produced housing, health care and education, delivered a positive climate among supporters; while allowing women to wear headscarves greatly pleased traditional Turks.

According to economic and political analysts, the party's core constituency of pious Muslims and Islamist ideologues, at 20-30 per cent of the electorate, is matched by a similar sized but less committed group constituted from among conservative nationalists and business leaders. AKP has shown great skill at keeping both groups together and happy.

In the process of moving to the centre, AKP has tried to maintain its traditional Islamist core but has also tried to widen its electoral base to include broad segments of Turkish society which are conservative or religious in their orientation but have not been part of hard-line Islamist politics. This broad-based character of the party is clearly projected from the electoral map that emerged after the November 2002 and March 2004 elections; these marked a sharp contrast with the early versions of Islamist politics in Turkey which was, primarily, a regional, inner Anatolian phenomenon.

It is fair to say that, in terms of its moderate politics and its broad-based appeal, the current profile of the AKP resembles more the Menderes-style Democratic Party of the 1950s, or the Özal-style Motherland Party of the 1980s, than the more narrowly-situated Welfare Party led by Erbakan in the mid-1990s (Öniş, 2004).

The AKP has had a very positive performance from the emergence of the party up to the presidential election held in 2007. This process was both a beginning and a learning period for the AKP. In this period, the party succeeded in establishing a very positive co-operation at home and abroad, especially with the EU. The most successful aspect that an Islam-centric party moved to the centre of the political field, something which had never been seen before. The party gained in confidence through this process and the next step was for it to stand on its own two feet.

During this period, the most prominent alliance was with the Gülen movement. In particular, the educated young people who belong to the Gülen movement made it easier for the AKP to attain success. The party was also able to realise very important reforms and continuing performance, akin to a bicycle rider who would fall down were s/he to stop pedalling.

In fact, the AKP was, ironically, able to expand its electoral base in the months leading up to the general election in 2007. There are a number of factors associated with this. Vast segments of the Turkish electorate displayed their resentment at top-down interventionism in the democratic political process. It is also possible that this could be interpreted as a sign of the growing maturity of Turkish democracy on the path to democratic consolidation. The AKP also sought positive engagement with the Kurds and promised to resolve the Kurdish conflict. Lastly, the importance of leadership and the ability to learn and adapt to changing environments could be identified as yet another critical contributory element.

The AKP was characterised by its adaptability and pragmatism, whereas the main opposition parties were characterised by in-built resilience and their strong ideological bias (Öniş, 2009). Looking back, a much more appropriate strategy in the heavily-polarised political environment of Turkey would have been to push an overall reform and democratisation agenda as part of a revitalised Europeanisation and reform process, with the issue of religious freedom being presented as part of this broader package.

Standing on one's own two feet: the process of gaining confidence, 2007-2010

The period after the presidential election represented a new step for the AKP due to having much greater confidence and experience as well as a good reputation, all of which had been gained from the elections it had fought hitherto.

The AKP, as a new force in Turkish politics, capitalised on failures among conventional political parties. In particular, it managed to represent itself to wide segments of Turkish society as a progressive force that could come to terms with the positive aspects of economic globalisation, based on active participation and competition in the global market. At the same time, the AKP's approach involved a serious concern with social justice issues involving both the distribution of material benefits as well as the extension of individual rights and freedoms. Compared to its rivals, the Party appeared to be reformist; in certain respects, it appeared to be more of a European-style social democratic party based on its concern with issues of social justice, its commitment to multiculturalism and the extension of religious freedom, and its concern to see progress with Turkey's EU membership application (Öniş, 2004).

The discourse and politics of the AKP as regards human rights can, therefore, be understood in the context of the permanent insecurity experienced in its encounters with the secularist establishment. In these circumstances, the AKP has developed a three-layered strategy: first, adopt the language of human rights and democracy as a discursive shield; second, mobilise popular support as a form of democratic legitimacy; and, third, build a liberal-democratic coalition with modern/secular sectors that recognise the AKP as a legitimate political actor. This may well be regarded as the instrumentalisation of human rights in daily politics rather than the internalisation of them. Yet, it may also be argued that instrumentalisation, through the recognition of the utility of human rights in self-preservation, may also lead to their institutionalisation (Dağı, 2006).

At a deeper level, any analysis of the AKP's electoral success must also take into account its Islamist roots in the sense that the Party, whilst presenting itself as a new political movement with a claim to the very centre of Turkish politics, attracted the active support of small and medium-sized business units, notably in the rising Anatolian cities and collected under the umbrella organisation MÜSİAD (Independent Industrialists and Business Leaders Association) (Öniş, 2004).

According to the 2007 general election result, more than 60 per cent of the Islamic bourgeoisie, or the so-called Anatolian Tigers, supported the AKP in the newly-developing cities such as Gaziantep, Kayseri, Kahramanmaraş and Konya. In contrast in the metropolitan cities, such as Ankara and İstanbul, AKP was the leading party but took less than 50 per cent of the vote.

Another positive factor in the AKP's success was the performance of local governments. The broad evidence suggests that municipalities run by Islamist political parties were more efficient. Islamists, and more recently the AKP with its Islamist roots, displayed a high degree of mobilisation at local level and also capitalised on the dense networks of informal relations that helped to mobilise the local community in addressing problems of poverty and deprivation.

A parallel factor that also helped in this respect was Turkey's deepening relations with the European Union. Islamists in Turkey increasingly recognised that promoting relations with the EU would be to their advantage in the sense that it would help to protect themselves against the hyper-secularism of the state elites and would create a congenial environment for the promotion of religious freedoms.

The AKP leadership also foresaw the purely economic benefits of Turkey's closer integration with the EU. Not surprisingly, therefore, the AKP established itself as a vocal and active member of the pro-EU coalition in Turkey, a coalition in which civil society organisations led by the key business communities, such as the representative of big business in Turkey, TÜSİAD (The Turkish Industrialists and Business Leaders Association), and MÜSİAD are also key elements. In retrospect, it is fair to say that the learning process that the Islamists have gone through during the past few decades has been far more rapid and profound than that of their counterparts in mainstream parties such as the Republican People's Party (CHP; Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) (Öniş; 2004).

Despite Islamism in Turkey, as elsewhere in the middle east, being traditionally constructed and legitimated by strong anti-western sentiment, the AKP realised very close relations and co-operation with EU from the beginning. Turkey was even highlighted as a model country for the middle east.

According to AKP supporters, the leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is presented as leading Turkey from a dark era of Kemalist faithlessness into a bright Islamic future. As the AKP has risen, however, the story gets darker. Early in his career, Erdoğan made the telling remark, that he was later to regret:

> Democracy is like a train; you get off once you have reached your destination.

The AKP and its leader are attempting to reshape not only society along Islamic lines but also public service, the military service and the judicial system as well. The AKP leadership has eroded the military and managed to reconfigure its hierarchy by placing its own people at the top.

According to Dani Rodrik, who is a well-known Turkish economics professor at Harvard, Erdoğan was, in his early years, not sufficiently secure in power. In 2008, his party barely escaped closure thanks to a very narrow constitutional court decision. The first five years or so of his coming to power were years of transition, away from the secular elites and towards the AKP-Gülenist alliance. During the transition, Erdoğan naturally sought allies among liberals and the west. However, beyond that, the transition opened up the space for political discussion and debate in ways that had long escaped the country. The old guard's power was weakening, while Erdoğan had not yet consolidated his power. The former could not put a lid on the new developments while the latter was not yet strong enough to crush all potential opposition (Rodrik, 2017).

Rodrik goes on to ask if Turkey is heading towards greater democracy or an authoritarian regime. In fact, this is a very real question because it is hard to say that the current direction is leading towards genuine democracy.

One of the discussions related to the AKP concerns the identity of the Party. There are various definitions in this regard as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has underlined that the AKP is not a 'religion centric' political party but also 'conservative and democrat', just like Christian Democrat parties in the west. The secularist opposition, however, directed not only by the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party, but also by the military and some civil sectors, see the AKP as a pro-Islamic

movement with a secret agenda to undo the Kemalist/secularist reforms (Dağı, 2006).

This discussion continues today. The journalist Nuray Mert, who was working for the daily *Cumhuriyet*, supported the JDP during the transition period. Mert now says:

> The AKP cheated us at the beginning saying that they were not Islamist but conservative democrat; but today they confess that they are Islamist.

Furthermore, she undertakes some self-criticism, commenting that the opposition party and others had claimed that the AKP was engaged in *takiye* (which means deception); today, she says, we realise that they were right (Mert, 2017). In fresh discussions, many leftists, intellectuals and even Islamists repeat the claim that engaging in deception is one of the instruments of the AKP. In this discussion there are various opinions such as that of one Islamist intellectual, Cihangir İslam, who says:

> AKP is not an Islamist party, it is a conservative, bonapartist, jacobin, authoritarian and machiavellian party. It is not concerned with human rights, justice, rule of law. It is only a carrier of the global capitalist system. (Göktaş, 2017)

In this process, one of the strategies of the AKP was to assume the ability to control the media, the military, the police and the judicial system together with its Gülenist allies. The aim was to resolve the insecure atmosphere in the media and public service in its favour. In these years, they allowed Gülenist supporters to penetrate the public service. From 2008 to 2013, the AKP raised the pressure and the media concocted a series of fictitious conspiracies and plots against republican officers, police and judges. They ran sensational show trials targeting military officers, journalists, NGOs, professors and Kurdish politicians. These fed Erdoğan's fear of being toppled and also eliminated the remaining vestiges of the secularist regime from the military and civilian bureaucracy. In this period, a huge number of military staff and public servants were sentenced and stayed in prison for several years. Some seven years later they were acquitted by the court, and most people recognise their innocence, but the Gülenist supporters had played a trick on the army and the state which Erdoğan first learned from and then repeated.

During this process – the *Ergenekon* trial and the trial arising from the rumoured *Operation Sledgehammer* – liberals and socialists supported the goverment, showing sympathy with the accusations that the military favoured a *coup d'etat* towards the state and the elected goverment. The prestige of the army in the public service decreased from top to bottom. Some journalists identified this approach by liberals as a slow suicide.

The AKP has destroyed all of the military's prestige and social importance in the name of the struggle against military domination. In particular, Gülenist supporters and the liberal media accused the military of taking action against civilians. The trials not only focused on the rumoured *coup d'etat* but also on spying, bombing mosques, etc. and even engaging in sexual abuse. The aim was to discredit the military and, after many incredible trials, it seems that it has been able to achieve its aims, with the aid of Gülenist supporters and liberals.

The main reason for this approach was that the military is widely conceived as the most important guardian of the Kemalist Republic and secularism; the result of which is that it has no tolerance of fundamentalism in its own ranks. Consequently, the AKP came to see the military as a barrier which needed to be taken down.

Instruments – strategy and rhetoric

We have looked already at two of the main characteristics of the AKP: its pragmatism and the concept of *takiye*; the next characteristics or strategy, explored further below, are represented by the introduction of clientelist relations and populism.

When the AKP was curtailing powers in the mid-2000s, the EU welcomed these reforms not knowing that the real goal was to open the way for the political Islamisation of Turkey. In fact, the AKP never really cared about the EU nor really did it want it.

Clientelism

One of the important strategy tools for the AKP is clientelism. In order to combat poverty and broaden the electoral base, the Party has used this particularly efficiently.

The legal and institutional foundations of neoliberal economic and social policies had been in place since the 1980s and their intense implementation started in the 1990s. However, they took a great leap from the beginning of the 2000s. This leap, in which public resources were rapidly liquidated, collapsed the social state whose structure was already weak and further limited the functions of the state in terms of security, justice and infrastructure services. The application of clientelism – the use of public resources for political purposes – eased the social acceptance of political power and policies becoming gradually more authoritarian during this transformation process (Çuhadar, 2017).

During the 2007 election, many AKP politicians referred to the implementation of clientelism and sought to find ways to turn this into votes via any kind of offer of services. In fact they were able to succeed because many AKP supporters conceived that 'AKP is with me through thick and thin.' These developments highlight the transformation of power within the public discourse to the culture of targeted charitable support.

It is a recent discussion in neoliberalism that the state should reduce its socioeconomic burden via downsizing its responsibilities towards its citizens. A part of this package is the replacement of social policy instruments with social assistance, implemented via institutions and foundations instead of the state. In other words, the state transfers its responsibities to private institutions, creating some advantages and exemptions within the tax system for such institutions and companies so that both parties mutually benefit and deliver some possibilities for alleviating the difficulties faced by poor people. The system of food banks is one such instrument. This creates two crucial problem: the first being the role of the state because, in this approach, the state is transferring its responsibility to the private sector; the second is the creation of clientelist relations between the state and the delivery companies and institutions.

The Party was able to capitalise on its systematic efforts to help the poor with improved local government services and a variety of schemes involving the targeting of the poor through both formal and informal channels. Admittedly, its approach to redistribution was in line with the spirit of neoliberalism in the sense that charity-based redistribution was emphasised more than state-based forms. In summary, however, such implementation consistently leads to social assistance being politicised and used as a tool of political abuse.

Clientelist relations were implemented in three layers: the first is the individual layer, in which food banks were used in the so-called government struggle against poverty; the second layer was implemented at local goverment level, with pro-AKP business leaders supported by the use of tender exercises, albeit on a relatively small scale; and the third, and large-scale, layer was termed the 'pool', where the AKP created a financial pool in which business leaders invested and, for this service, they benefited in the way of large-scale public construction projects: airports, tunnels, bridges, motorways, etc. Meanwhile, this group of business leaders controls more than two-thirds of media and television, with the other duty of this group being to broadcast pro-government messages in the media in the propagandising and engineering of society.

At the same time, the implementation of all these policies saw the suffering of the working class or, in other words, wage earners. Some tens of thousands lost their jobs; the number of subcontracted workers rose from 400 000 to two million; while the unemployment rate exceeded ten per cent. Furthermore, some social rights, such as the right to work, the right to association and collective bargaining, the right to strike, etc. have been forgotten. Precarious work has become the main characteristic of employment for a large majority of the Turkish working class. Less than ten per cent are union members, benefiting from a collective agreement; the rest live in the conditions of wild-west capitalism. In total, 65 per cent of the wage-earning population of Turkey consists of precarious workers. Professor Boratav, a very distinguished economist, comments that the distribution of income has negatively affected the working class during the AKP era. Both real wages and class consciousness have been eroded. Meanehile, all social assistance covered by the tax base has increased the burden on wage-earners (Boratav, 2017). Consequently, private debt – especially consumer credit and credit card debts – have rocketed.

In sum, this period has seen the introduction of flexibilisation and precariousness, based on an individualised labour relations; while this has been coincident with de-unionisation to the point at which unionism and collective bargaining has become purely symbolic.

There is no doubt that the middle class has been dissolved; within fifteen years a relatively large segment of the middle class has become attached to the bottom, living under or around the poverty line. In the place of this dissolved class, the AKP has created a new Islamist bourgeoisie.

Populist rhetoric

One of the key elements in understanding the AKP is its populism. The Party and its leader have used this instrument particularly heavily: always trying to touch peo-

ple's hearts and reach out to them; speaking as they do, in ordinary dialogue; creating confidence in the electorate with Erdoğan identifying himself as an ordinary person from among the people. At the start of almost every public speech, the leader aggrandises the people with 'My people, my governer, my mayor, my villager, my sisters in headscarves.' He is always empathising and seeking to convince people that they are important so that they consider him 'one of us'. He always raises the Islamic brotherhood and tries to consolidate all muslims, whereever they live, never missing the opportunity to show the four-finger symbol – the *rabia* – the symbol of the Muslim Brotherhood which played a crucial role during the Arab Spring in Egypt. Furthermore, when he talks about others, he tries to insult and demonise republicans who are, according to Erdoğan, alcoholics, moderns, educated people. And he despises them.

In fact, there is a very close correlation between the educational level of the electorate and the likelihood of being AKP supporters. In this context, the recently former minister of energy, Taner Yıldız, confessed that, when the level of education of the electorate rises, the number of AKP supporters decreases (Yıldız, 2013). Consequently, it is apparent that a large number of AKP supporters are from under-educated backgrounds; and that very few educated people support the AKP. This is why it has been so easy to convince the mass of people.

Islamic discourse was the main method for this, and it continues to be so: Erdoğan establishes solutions from the Koran with a view to replacing the juridical system with shari'a or other Islamic structures. He does not care about the legal system or secularism, the important thing is what the Koran says.

At a panel held on International Women's Day in 2008, Erdoğan commented:

> What is the social state? You will find poor and stranded ones on the road, and you will raise your hand. This is the state. That's why if my governor and my mayor come across poor people and serve them with coal, do not think it as charity. It's a disgrace. (*Hürriyet*, 2008)

This rhetoric targets the consolidation of the electorate as much as broadening it. In this process, many populist implementations have been realised such as 'grandmother pay' where grandparents looking after grandchildren are eligible for a regular salary payment. At the same time, mayors or governors let out official cars to people having wedding ceremonies, etc. This kind of examples of populism are so widespread.

In the rhetoric, the leader always pays respect to people and underlines the national will and the ballot box. In this sense, what they have implemented is a result of the request of the people and the legacy of what they have done. Additionally, reminders are issued to the people that Turkey is surrounded by enemies and that the solution for this problem is unity and the defeat of domestic or international enemies. This is why people frequently hear that 'My nation stands upright and undivided', implying the defeat of all opponents whether internal or external.

The latterly close relations with the EU have been replaced with tensioned ones. The rhetoric towards Europe and the EU has been completely reversed, with Erdoğan accusing Europe of being a rotten continent and a centre of Nazism; that Europe was

no longer the centre of democracy and human rights but of Nazis and oppression; that all the values they had been defending for centuries had collapsed (Daily News, 2017). This discourse has the background of an analysis which has Turkey surrounded by enemies.

Towards a one-man regime – 2010 and after

In 2010 and the following years, the AKP established a hegemony among the judiciary. During the election of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) in 2010, the AKP made a bargain with the Gülen movement under which all members of the Board that were elected were Gülenist supporters or pro-goverment. Not only the members of the Supreme Board but also the judges of the supreme court were elected by the government and the Gülen movement in co-operation in this way. A former under-secretary in the ministry of justice acknowledged this bargain many years later (see Erdem, 2017). (Later on, almost all these judges and prosecutors were sacked from public service due to being members of 'Fethullah terrorist organisation (FETÖ)'.)

This hegemony has been realised not only among the judicial system but also across all public services and especially the media. Journalists have started to self-censor their news reporting, with it being almost impossible to criticise the goverment and its leader. If journalists crossed a red line, they would be sacked and, during this period, many journalists indeed lost their jobs. According to the 2016 World Press Freedom index of the Reporters Without Borders organisation, Turkey was in 151th place, between Tajikistan and Democratic Republic of Congo. One report, titled 'Autocratic Ottoman: Turkey is sending its journalists to prison', describes these as 'Dark days for journalism in Turkey,' pointing out that journalists are routinely sacked or dragged through the courts (Economist, 2017b).

The AKP has spread its tentacles across Turkish society. The courts, the police, the intelligence service, the mosques, the public education and health system and the media are all, in one way or another, subject to the party's overweening influence. The period has forgotten such concepts as transparency, accountability, participation, the rule of law; in short, democracy and human rights.

This heavy pressure has been implemented also on ordinary people who use social media. Prosecutors have investigated more than two thousand people for insulting the President on social media, some of them children aged 12-15 years old. If one criticises the goverment or its leader, this is reasonable enough evidence of membership of a terror organisation.

Per Wastberg, a Swedish writer and President Emeritus of PEN, describes the situation thus:

> Freedom has always been precarious in Turkey, but now it has reached a 'breaking point.' Turkey has always had less freedom than one would like to have, but it has come to a critical point, where it might no longer be possible to treat it as a civilized European country… Because Turkey has become the biggest prison for journalists and intellectuals in the world. (Wastberg, 2017)

This hegemonic system has been deployed as regards the business community by tax regulation as well as on academic staff, politicians, etc. Ultimately, no-one is exempt from this heavy pressure in society.

The Gezi protest and aftermath

Another form of pressure was visited on young people and intellectuals during the Gezi protest. The Gezi protests began in late May 2013 as an effort to stop bulldozers from razing central Istanbul's Gezi Park, one of the few green spaces left in the city's heart at Taksim, in order to build a shopping mall. Unrest quickly spread across Turkey, developing into a revolt against what protesters said was the increasing authoritarianism of Erdoğan's decade-long rule. A group of activists from Taksim Solidarity, a civil group that had voiced criticism of the renovation plans all along, gathered in Gezi Park after bulldozers came to the area to cut down the trees in the Park.

Police staged many dawn operations to disperse the crowd. One officer burned down the tents of the protesters, attracting more fury from the country. Activists made a call through social media for a major gathering at the Park and, in the evening, more than 10 000 people were at Gezi Park.

The German pianist, Davide Martello, and the Turkish musician, Yiğit Özatalay, performed a joint piano concert at Taksim Square in support of the Gezi Park protesters. Otherwise, the Park and Taksim Square were relatively quiet late in the evening compared to previous nights. A single man who stood silently in the middle of Istanbul's city centre instigated a silent struggle across Turkey for the right to protest. The young man, later identified as performance artist Erdem Gündüz, stood in the same place without moving for eight hours on June 17, staring at a flag of the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, at the Atatürk Culture Centre.

It is a good example which underlines the level of freedom of the media: when thousands came together at Taksim Square shouting for freedom and for the environment, the television was broadcasting a documentary on penguins even though it was located only a couple of hundred metres from Taksim Square.

Riot police entered Taksim Square after a ten-day détente in the harshest crackdown since the movement started. Police used tear gas and water cannon throughout the clashes, which lasted all day and well into the night. The Istanbul governor called on the Gezi protesters to return home, saying he could no longer guarantee their safety. Erdoğan defended the police efforts to stop the protesters, calling on the people to stop the protests.

However, hundreds of thousands of people in more than forty Turkish cities continued to protest. Fiery clashes also took place in Ankara and İzmir. The Interior Minister said that 1 730 people had been detained in 235 protests held in 67 cities. Some 255 protesters, including seven foreigners, were charged with a range of offences including 'damaging public property,' 'taking part in illegal demonstrations,' 'causing interruptions to public services,' 'damaging a place of worship' and 'protecting criminals.' The indictment sought between one and 11 years six months in jail for the suspects.

After the Gezi protest, the level of casualty was so dramatic that some people lost their lives and hundreds were injured.

The Gezi protest was one of the crucial breaking points in Turkish politics and voters divided on pro-goverment and secular lines. Meanwhile, another breaking point was that the honeymoon with the Gülen movement finished. To everyone's surprise, some investigations were started by Gülenist prosecutors against the sons of government ministers, as well as other high-level authorities, on the grounds of corruption and money laundering. Some journalists and intellectuals considered that this action, first towards the son of the prime minister and then the prime minister himself, was the beginning of *coup d'etat* on the government. So, a new enemy emerged for the government: its old ally the Gülen movement.

This process witnessed a great challenge among the former allies in the government and the Gülen movement. So as not to be faced with discharge, Gülenist supporters in the military attempted a *coup d'etat* on 15 July 2016. People of all persuasions went out into the streets the following day and there was a mass resistance to the *coup*. During the clashes, almost 250 people were killed and some 2 500 were injured. This is a very dramatic process in the history of the democracy. Up to now, some 161 000 people have been investigated; 50 000 arrested; and more than 2 000 judges and prosecutors have been arrested, some of them were senior judges and prosecutors. More than 7 000 military staff, some of whom were generals, almost 10 000 police, some governers and their deputies, and thousands of academic staff and public servants have been sacked or arrested.

There is no doubt that a large majority of this number consists of Gülenist supporters but, unfortunately meanwhile, this challenge has been converted into an attack on opponents in order to exact revenge on modernists and secular people. More than 150 000 people have lost their job, including among academic staff. There are very painful stories, such as 37 suicides, while hundreds of journalists are behind bars. Many press and publishing entities have been closed down, companies have been shut and the personal property of people imprisoned has been confiscated (*Cumhuriyet*, 2017), for the first time in the history of the judicial system of Turkey. One of the most interesting examples is Professor İbrahim Kaboğlu; formerly, even during this goverment, he was a member of the committee of human rights but he has been sacked from his university without reason. Due to the cancellation of his passport there is no opportunity to travel to France and take up his teaching duties at Sorbonne Nouvelle University; he is forced to use Skype for lessons.

Teachers Semih Özakça and Nuriye Gülmen were working in the education sector before being sacked under the state of emergency and going on hunger strike for more than one hundred days. The government did not pay attention to their problem and ultimately they were arrested. The request of the two teachers was to get their jobs back, but the government insists on accusing them of being terrorists. Nowadays, it is almost paranoia because, according to the government, almost all opponents are terrorists, either pro-PKK or pro-Gülenist.

This pressure towards a one-man regime has increased across all sectors and the country as a whole; the political atmosphere is far removed from freedom of speech

and a free media. The invocation of the notorious 'state of emergency' assumes the capability for the regime to crush its opponents and the independent media.

It was most unfortunate that Turkey headed into the 2017 referendum in such a schizoid, febrile atmosphere.

One-man regime – the referendum

Turkey faced the 16 April 2017 referendum on constitutional changes in an extremely chaotic atmosphere. The content of the constitutional change was wide-sweeping:

- abolition of the position of prime minister
- the president to be given the power to issue decrees to form and regulate ministries, and appoint and remove senior civil servants, without the approval of parliament
- the president to be able to hold membership of, or leadership positions in, a political party
- the president to be able to declare a state of emergency without requiring the approval of the cabinet
- the president to be able to draft the budget, currently drawn up by parliament
- all high-level members of boards to be assigned by the president.

This meant not only the end of a parliamentary regime based on the division of powers but also the consolidation of power created under a presidential system. Every kind of power and incentives are focused on the president. Unfortunately, in the new system there are no checks and balances which form the backbone of democracy. The new constitution would bring about the most radical overhaul of the state since 1923.

After the announcement of the result of the referendum by the Supreme Election Board (YSK; Yüksek Seçim Kurulu), a group of academic staff released a statement expressing deep anxiety concerning the organisation of the referendum. The group criticised YSK regarding the collection of data and its processing, transparency and the reliability of the system. Ultimately, they said:

> It is scientifically impossible to say that the results of the referendum announced by the YSK reflects the true will of the people. (Siyasi Haber; 2017)

Such allegations will haunt Erdoğan for years, leaving the country even more polarised than before. Erdoğan might be 'The most unassailable Turkish leader since Atatürk but this legitimacy issue will hang over his head,' reported Soner Çağaptay, a fellow at the Washington Institute (Economist, 2017). Some opponents called the process an attempt by the Palace of the President to 'Impose a one-man regime with an illegitimate referendum after stealing the "no vote"... using the Supreme Election Board.' (sendika.org, 2017)

After the referendum, CHP (the secular Republican People's Party), the main opposition party, called for the referendum results to be annulled on the grounds that the last-minute decision by the country's electoral board to accept unstamped ballot papers created the risk of mass fraud. Indeed, claims of vote-rigging, especially in

the Kurdish south-east, have been pouring in. In a scathing assesment, observers from the intergovernmental Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2017b) said the YSK's move had:

> Undermined an important safeguard and contradicted the law that explicitly states that such ballots should be considered invalid.

Additionally, the OSCE commented that:

> Voters were not provided with impartial information about key aspects of the reform,

and that:

> Fundamental freedoms essential to a genuinely democratic process were curtailed.

Concerning the results of the referendum, there has been plenty of discussion over claims of the obstructions faced by the 'no' campaign, including campaign bans, police intervention and violent scuffles at its events. The OSCE report highlighted the anti-democratic pressures at work during the referendum campaign, concluding that such obstructions:

> Contravened pagraph 7.7 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

Essentially, such a conclusion disallows Turkey from claiming that campaigning was conducted in a 'fair and free' atmosphere.

The People's Democratic Party (HDP; Halkların Demokratik Partisi, a pro-Kurdish Party) claimed in a statement that there was manipulation in the outcome of abour four percentage points, citing irregularities in south-east Turkey, where many Kurdish Turks live. In fact, there was an unforeseen surge in the 'yes' vote coming from that region, where almost no political party representatives other than those of the AKP could monitor the casting of votes and the counting of ballots due to the level of political oppression. For example, the result of 60 ballot boxes counted in a neighborhood of Şanlıurfa, a southern border city, surprised everbody with their 13 067 'yes' and just 58 'no' votes. Later, it was revealed that just one person had signed off all those 'yes' votes. The most serious allegation was, as mentioned above, the YSK's acceptance of 1.5 million unstamped ballot papers, in contravention of the electoral law, a move which clearly had the potential to change the outcome.

The new system for recording voter registrations made it possible, according to Cumhuriyet Online, to cross-check the recorded results, opening the way to corruption and abuse. According to another commentator, reporting ten days before the date of the referendum, close to 1.5 million people living outside Turkey had already voted, but allegations of an irregular process had already surfaced: an AKP member tweeted a picture of a ballot even before the papers were delivered in Europe; in Luxembourg, approximately 10 000 Turks voted whereas there were only 571 registered voters; in Ireland, where many Turks were on record as supporting the 'no'

vote, the authorities restricted the number of ballot boxes, causing long queues as a means of deterring people from voting (Yayla, 2017).

The mission report of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, issued on 8 March 2017, paid attention, among other things, to certain restrictions on active and passive suffrage rights; the limited regulation on campaign finance; and the lack of possibility to challenge the Supreme Election Board (OSCE, 2017a). Furthermore, the mission report of the observers of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2017) reported several aspects in which this was a very asymmetric contest between goverment and opposition parties:

> The legal framework for referenda is inadequate for the conduct of a democratic referendum. It focuses on elections and is limited in regard to the specificities of referenda – in particular, it gives rights to the political parties but does not establish rights and equal opportunities for the camps of proponents and opponents of the proposal. Although aspects were addressed in regulations and instructions, the Supreme Board of Elections (SBE) did not exercise fully its authority to regulate the process to ensure a clear legal framework and declined to provide interpretations on campaign rules and the relocation of polling stations when formally requested to do so by stakeholders. Past Parliamentary Assembly recommendations on the legal framework have not been addressed, including those on suffrage rights, campaign financing, lack of judicial review and rights of observers. (para. 14)
>
> The SBE received some 45 complaints, which were considered in a timely manner, but the dispute resolution process lacked transparency as hearings were closed and decisions were not published. The SBE satisfied appeals lodged by opposition parties against District Electoral Board (DEB) decisions to relocate polling stations in the south-east for security reasons. While many cases of campaign interference and misuse of administrative resources were noted by the IROM, few complaints were lodged due to diminished confidence in the dispute resolution process. The SBE and the courts did not provide effective redress in such cases, particularly for non-party stakeholders. (para. 18)
>
> The campaign was characterised by the lack of a level playing field. The significantly more visible "Yes" campaign, led by the governing AKP and to some extent the MHP, was supported by several leading national officials, including the Prime Minister and the President, who under the Constitution is required to remain non-partisan and perform his duties without bias, as well as by many lower-level public officials. (para. 31)
>
> Supporters of the "No" campaign faced a number of undue limitations on their freedom to campaign. Many "No" campaigners suffered physical attacks. A high number were arrested, most often on charges of organising unlawful public events or insulting the President. Some "No" campaigners faced difficulties renting premises for events or had their events cancelled by the authorities or venue proprietors, often on short notice. The HDP's campaign poster and a song in Kurdish were banned by the authorities on the grounds that they violated the principles of the integrity of the State and Turkish as the official language. (para. 34)
>
> The media landscape is dominated by outlets that are often owned by business groups that depend on public contracts. Since the July events, a total of 158 media outlets have been closed, including 60 television and radio stations, 19 newspapers, 29 publishing houses and five press agencies, which the Venice Commission described as a "mass liquidation of media outlets". The majority of the 150 journalists currently in detention were arrested following the attempted coup, and arrests continued during the referendum period. This surge of closures, arrests and prosecutions has resulted in widespread self-censorship. (para. 37)

The outcome was considered by many European political leaders (Reuters, 2017): German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, regarded the outcome as a narrow victory, saying:

> The tight referendum result shows how deeply divided Turkish society is and that means a big responsibility for the Turkish leadership and for President Erdoğan personally.

Meanwhile, the view of the EU Commission was that:

> Turkey should seek a national consensus on the constitutional amendments, given the narrow majority and extent of their impact.

At the same time, the Venice Commission of legal experts of the Council of Europe evaluated the situation as a:

> Dangerous step backwards for democracy.

In the US, the Washington Post anounced the outcome to readers as follows:

> By a razor-thin margin, Turkish voters on Sunday approved constitutional changes that will radically transform the country's system of goverment… Before the referendum, Erdoğan had leveled sharp criticism against Europe. (Washington Post, 2017)

Ultimately, Ahmet Yayla (2017) comments:

> The referendum is about rubber-stumping a *de facto* dictatorship, extending to Erdoğan extreme powers held by no other state leader in the world. It is safe to assume that Erdoğan will increase his distance from the west after the referendum. Human rights violations will worsen, and the goverment's oppression of journalist and any civil servant suspected of disloyality will go unreversed.
>
> Mr. Erdoğan will continue to radicalize and politicize Turkish Muslims, conceivably marching his nation toward a Sunni version of the Iranian Islamic State with elements from the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafism. This desire was clearly stated by pro-Erdoğan Daily *Yeni Safak*'s editor-in-chief recently. He wrote that after Erdoğan gets the referendum, a new era starts, "Turkey should stop fighting the Islamic State and arm itself with nuclear weapons," according to the editorial. (Yayla, 2017)

Assessment

Turkish politics in the recent era has been characterised by significant transformation and a considerable degree of instability. Important steps have been taken towards democratic consolidation, as part of a broader Europeanisation process. At the same time, recent developments suggest that the process of democratic consolidation is far from complete. Turkey, in the second decade of the 2000s, continued to project an image of a highly polarised society. Indeed, from a longer term perspective, Turkey remains a polarised society and the underlying problems have not disappeared; they have simply been postponed.

According to the analysis of the well-known journal *The Economist* (4 February 2016) Erdoğan's commitment to democracy seems to be fading. Meanwhile, Turkey's never-ending cycle of victimisation of Islamists, communists, secularists, kurds, Gülenists... has gained velocity. Erdoğan is, according to that journal, making the same tragic mistake he made in 2009-2010: using his vast popularity to undermine democracy and the rule of law rather than restoring them.

One of the major problematic areas is the rule of law. There are serious criticisms of Turkey from the Council of Europe and the European Commission stemming from the violations of human rights and the principles of the Copenhagen EU accession criteria.

The *World Justice Project Rule of Law Index* presents a portrait of the rule of law in each country by providing scores and rankings organised around eight factors: constraints on government powers; absence of corruption; open government; fundamental rights; order and security; regulatory enforcement; civil justice; and criminal justice. The *Index* describes itself as 'The world's leading source for original, independent data on the rule of law,' with the 2016 version expanding coverage to 113 countries and seeking to measure how the rule of law is experienced in practical, everyday situations. The eight factors see each country scored and ranked globally and against their regional and income peers.

Turkey takes 99th place within the 113 countries covered; evidently, this is a very poor placing for one of the members of the Council of Europea and a candidate for EU membership. The top fifteen and the bottom fifteen countries in the Index are indicated in Table 1:

Table 1 – Rule of law index

Top fifteen countries	Index	Rank
Denmark	0.89	1
Norway	0.88	2
Finland	0.87	3
Sweden	0.86	4=
Netherlands	0.86	4=
Germany	0.83	6=
Austria	0.83	6=
New Zealand	0.83	6=
Singapore	0.82	9
United Kingdom	0.81	10=
Australia	0.81	10=
Canada	0.81	10=
Belgium	0.79	13=

Estonia	0.79	13=
Japan	0.78	15
Bottom fifteen countries		
Turkey	0.43	99=
Kenya	0.43	99=
Nicaragua	0.42	101=
Honduras	0.42	101=
Bangladesh	0.41	103
Bolivia	0.40	104
Uganda	0.39	105
Pakistan	0.38	106=
Ethiopia	0.38	106=
Zimbabwe	0.37	108=
Cameroon	0.37	108=
Egypt	0.37	108=
Afghanistan	0.35	111
Cambodia	0.33	112
Venezuela	0.28	113

According to geographic ranking, Turkey is considered within the Index's East Europe and Asia category; even in this category, the place of Turkey is lowest among Georgia, Moldova and Russia, as Table 2 reports:

Table 2 – East Europe and Asia

	Index	Rank
Georgia	0.65	34
Bosnia & Herzegovina	0.56	50
FYR Macedonia	0.54	54=
Belarus	0.54	54=
Albania	0.50	72=
Kazakhstan	0.50	72=
Serbia	0.50	72=
Moldova	0.49	77=

Ukraine	0.49	77=
Kyrgyzstan	0.47	83
Russia	0.45	92=
Uzbekistan	0.45	92=
Turkey	0.43	99=

According to ranking along the lines of income distribution, Turkey takes its place in the Upper Middle Income Countries category but, even here, it is positioned as the second worst country, as recorded in Table 3:

Table 3 – Ranking by income distribution

	Index	**Rank**
Jordan	0.59	42=
South Africa	0.59	42=
China	0.48	80
Belize	0.47	82=
Dominican Republic	0.47	82=
Iran	0.47	82=
Mexico	0.46	88=
Lebanon	0.46	88=
Ecuador	0.45	91=
Russia	0.45	91=
Turkey	0.43	99=
Venezuela	0.28	113

These rankings indicating how poor is Turkey in the field of rule of law and human rights. Over a long period, intellectuals and the main opposition party have criticised the goverment on these issues, the last incidence of which followed the arrest of a CHP MP (a prominent journalist and former editor-in-chief of *Hürriyet*) and his imprisonment in June this year for 25 years on a charge of leaking classified state secrets. The CHP leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, decided to march the 450km from Ankara to İstanbul in order to protest at the injustice. This was physically very tough since, on some days during the 25 days of the march, the heat rose above 40 degrees. The march proved very popular, with thousands joining in, many from different identities and political ideologies to CHP, including even conservatives, and Kurds and others. At the end, there was a mass rally in İstanbul attended by about two million people. The march has been compared to the famous 'salt march' against colonialism realised by Mahatma Ghandi in the 1930s. During the march and rally, the single slo-

gan was 'Justice'. This event – one of the most important initiatives undertaken by CHP – indicated how crucial the issue of justice is to Turkish people.

Nowadays, one former discussion – 'Is Islam compatible with democracy?' – is once again on the table. According to some, it is hard for democracy to survive in an Islamic atmosphere because leaders may be backed by hard-line mullahs and imams, and terrorists may emerge from the shadows in the name of Islam and jihad; while education does not play a strong enough role in Islamic democracies. In support of the latter, Turkey now has the experience of the replacement of evolution in high school curricula with jihad.

The Economist described Erdoğan as 'masterful at playing both victor and victim' while claiming to be surrounded by enemies both at home and abroad:

> For Erdoğan, the world is divided into two groups; on the one hand, his voters; on the other, a dizzying coalition of foes that include the political opposition and western countries allegedly envious of Turkey's progress. (Economist, 2016)

For Moisi (2016), the situation is clear:

> Turkey was certainly in a strong position to make a difference. With its functioning democracy, booming market economy and rich cultural history, Turkey seemed to offer an attractive economic, social and political model for the region. Like Indonesia, it was living proof that Islam is, in fact, compatible with both democracy and modernity...
>
> Erdoğan was already giving the impression that he might seek to concentrate power in his own hands, thereby undermining Turkey's democracy and, in turn, its regional leadership ambitions.
>
> Unfortunately, that is precisely what has happened...
>
> In this context, Erdoğan seems to have no intention of changing his approach, even though it is increasing Turkey's ısolation from its western allies.
>
> He apparently remains convinced that the West needs him – both to control NATO"s southern flank and to filter and stem the flow of Syrian refugees toward Europe – more than he needs the West.
>
> But this wouldn't be the first time Erdoğan's self-assuredness backfired.

Furthermore, The Economist notes that there is a range of domestic troubles besetting Erdoğan at home:

> Year by year in the AKP era, the economy also suffers from a range of home-grown troubles. Onerous regulations make it hard for small businesses to grow bigger and be more efficient. The World Economic Forum, a think-tank, ranks Turkey 131st out of 144 countries by labour market efficiency. Turkey is a classic case of what economists call the 'middle income trap'. Martin Raiser, until recently Turkey director for the World Bank, has described the kind of shift required as a move from the 'know-who' to the 'know-how' economy.

At a time when almost all western countries are focused on Turkey, the AKP leader ignores this situation and insists on an Islamist line in the education sector, such as increasing religious lessons and stopping the teaching of evolution in high

schools. Such indicators as these show Turkey to be on a journey of slow but steady radicalisation towards an Islamic society.

On the one hand, there is a serious dilemma for the future: either that the leader of AKP starts to normalise and stops the growth of Islamist hard-line attitudes; or breaks away from the western world and turns to the east with a religious motivation, insisting on *rabia* contrary to the western world. Of course, the price of such policies will be very heavy for Turkey, but the problem is one of precisely how rational decisions will be taken by the government in determining the future of Turkey as well as the future of Turkey-EU relations.

On the other hand, there is the question of how long these tensioned relations with the EU will be tolerated by Turkish business leaders and highly-educated people or intellectuals who retain a core of support for EU-Turkish relations. The limit to patience will otherwise be determined by the level of political or economic instability which might hit the benefits of the Turkish bourgeoisie, implying that support will no longer be held in place for the ruling party.

As a final word, it is only AKP and the supporters of Erdoğan who are happy with the new constitutional system and leadership, following the abolition of the position of prime minister as well as the constraints placed on the function of parliament, political parties, legal institutions and NGOs; the rest are worried about it. In these circumstances, is this a sustainable position? Certainly not. That is why, when things reach a complicated crossroads, the path will be radicalisation or normalisation. There is no other way.

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