

Huri Tursan, Democratisation in Turkey: The Role of Political Parties, Brussels: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2004.

Comparative studies on regime changes in Southern Europe and Latin America have shown the central role that stable and strong party systems play in the consolidation of democracy. Although Turkish political parties and the party system have received considerable scholarly attention, their impact on the country's democratization process has not been systematically examined. Huri Tursan's book seeks to fill this gap in the literature on contemporary Turkish politics. A modified version of the author's doctoral dissertation written at the European University Institute in Florence, the study describes the historical evolution of political parties, with particular focus on developments concerning party politics since Turkey's transition from an authoritarian one-party regime to a multi-party system in the late 1940s. The bulk of the book analyzes the changing electoral fortunes of the individual parties over the past five decades, the impact of the breakdowns of democracy through military interventions in 1960, 1971, and 1980 on party competition, and trends in the party system over the years. The analysis of the changes in the party system concerning volatility, fragmentation, and polarization constitute the book's main empirical contribution. The picture that emerges from Hursan's study is that of a party system which lacks strong and cohesive parties and which has experienced protracted periods of instability amidst recurring political and economic crises. In particular, military interventions in politics have disrupted party continuity and organizational development. The book's central argument is that despite the relatively long trajectory of political parties and elections, Turkey has failed to make the transition from an electoral democracy to a fully consolidated democratic regime. This particular assessment of Turkey's democratic experience leads Hursan to conclude that political parties have failed to play a significant role in the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes.

The book's main contribution is that it provides a fairly detailed description of developments in Turkish politics since the 1950s, especially those concerning political parties and electoral competition. While many aspects of party politics in Turkey have been analyzed in journal articles or chapters in edited volumes, Tursan's work is the first book-length study published on the subject in recent years. Despite its strengths, *Democratisation in Turkey: The Role of Political Parties* fails to meet the expectations raised by its title primarily because the detailed description of parties and the party system is not accompanied by an equally detailed analysis of their role in the process of democratization. Although the author seems to be interested in framing her study in terms of the recent findings of comparative research on the role of political institutions in democratic transitions and consolidation in Southern Europe and Latin America, she does not fully utilize the insights gained from this literature to explore a number of critical issues and problems concerning the Turkish case. They include such important questions as the legitimacy accorded to political parties in society, the relationship between parties and political accountability, the ability of parties and the party system to represent popular interests and incorporate new constituencies into democratic politics, and the performances of governing parties or coalitions in strengthening democratic institutions through effective public policies. Moreover, the book does not examine the nature of the relationship between political parties and social actors such as labor unions, business organizations, and various social movements to determine how the presence or absence of these relationships have shaped the course of democratization in Turkey. In short, Tursan's study fails to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the role of parties in democratic transitions and redemocratization processes which Turkey has witnessed since the late 1940s.

The 2002 parliamentary elections was a watershed in the Turkish party system. The victory of a party with roots in the Islamic movement was accompanied by the electoral

demise of several major parties at the polls. It remains to be seen how this new critical turn in Turkish politics will affect the progress toward democratization. Since the doctoral dissertation on which Tursan's book is based was completed in 1999, the study only briefly discusses the results of the 2002 elections and does not address the broader implications of the Justice and Development Party's rise to power for the future of Turkish democracy. Nevertheless, Tursan's pessimistic reading of contemporary Turkish politics does conclude on a somewhat more optimistic note concerning the potential positive impact of Turkey's accession process to the EU on the state of Turkish democracy.

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