# Turkey's Transformation Under the *AKP* Rule

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Ever since the crushing victory of the formerly Islamists' Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*-AKP) in the November 2002 general elections, discussions on Turkish political life revolves around two main issues, which also happen to represent Turkey's hopes and challenges. On the one side, there is the fear on the part of the hard-line "Republicans" of Islamization and dismantling of the secularist legacy of Kemalism, the official ideology named after the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Often referred to as the secularist establishment, these hard-liners comprise the president, the military top brass, upper echelons of the bureaucracy and judiciary, some of the prominent figures of the intelligentsia and a number of established political parties like the Republican Peoples Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*-CHP). Origins of their fear can be traced back to the Republic's Orientalist assessment of Islam as incompatible with both democracy and modernity, as well as to a number of Islamic upheavals in the 1920s.

More recently, the AKP's Islamist ancestor Welfare Party's (*Refah Partisi*-RP) government experience (1996–1997) provided hardliners with a pretext and with some evidence to argue once again that regardless of its illiberal features, secularism is inherently pro-democracy and Islamism is inherently authoritarian and unchangeable. Today, the maxim "once an Islamist always an Islamist" helps hard-liners maintain their suspicion of the AKP. On the other side, the AKP signifies the possibility of a reconciliation of Islam with secularism and democracy, thus arguably becoming a model for the rest of the Muslim world.

Those hopeful for such a reconciliation reject essentialist approaches to both secularism and Islamism, recognize the possibility of the transformation of Islamism and make a rather positive assessment of the capacities of new "Islamism" to liberalize the polity on the basis of the AKP's agenda and performance since 2002. These "optimist" sectors of society comprise the

business world, liberal members of the intelligentsia, Islamic identity and most of the deprived parts of society. Some international circles have also expressed their optimism for Turkey's capacities to reconcile Islam and democracy under the AKP rule.[1]

Currently, the optimist tendency seems to be prevailing, because the AKP government has been able to put on a hope-injecting performance in almost all respects. Since November 2002, the economy has been stabilized, the inflation rate is steadily decreasing, the process of integration with the EU has been accelerated, and, after having sufficiently fulfilled the Copenhagen Criteria, accession negotiations with the EU began on October 3, 2005. Public broadcasting in Kurdish, teaching the Kurdish language in private language schools, and changing the composition and profile of the military-dominated National Security Council, which once set the parameters of civilian policy making, were some of the democratizing and civilianizing reforms introduced by the AKP. Policies to reform Turkey's outdated education and administrative systems as well are on the agenda of the AKP. Moreover, the AKP has managed to alter Turkey's traditionally status-quo oriented stance on the divided island of Cyprus and has taken some genuine steps towards its unification in accordance with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's plan. Some, like EU Commissioner Gunter Verheugen, referred to speedy reforms under the AKP government as "the second revolution after the establishment of the Republic by Ataturk."[2] The AKP, therefore, seems to have initiated a process that will probably end "politics as we know it" in Turkey.

This article addresses the questions why and how the AKP, despite being damned by the secularist establishment for being born with the original sin of Islamism, was able to expand the political sphere and initiate a process of liberalization in Turkey. Since Turkey's political structures traditionally restrict the domain of civilian policy-making and strip the elected governments of sufficient wherewithal to alter the status quo,[3] the AKP's overwhelming majority in the parliament alone cannot provide a sufficient answer to the question. We, therefore, take a broader view and discuss two main issues: the predicament of Kemalism as the foundational ideology of the Republic and the transformation of Islamism in Turkey as reflected in the AKP. The latter will entail a comparative study of the RP and the AKP in terms of (1) the place of Islam in the discourse of the parties; (2) attitudes of the parties towards the state, namely their dispositions *vis-a-vis* Kemalism, secularism and democracy; and (3) styles of their politics with special reference to relations with the broader society, the constituency and the rank-and-file of the parties. The article will conclude with a critical evaluation of the capacities of the AKP to further the transformation of Turkey towards a more liberal order.

Largely due to its own undoing, Kemalism today is associated with conservatism and has lost the ability to resonate with the people, except as a shield for secularism against an apparent Islamic threat. But, since the AKP does not pursue an Islamist agenda, the secularist establishment's suspicion based scare-mongering seems ungrounded. The AKP did not challenge the secularist establishment outright by constructing an alternative democratizing ideology. Instead, it has found a safe haven in de-emphasizing ideology and in engaging with Kemalism on its own terms by pursuing Turkey's "above-politics" EU membership project. The strategy of democratization via Europeanization, however, is precarious in the long run and poses challenges to the AKP itself.

## The Predicament of Kemalism as a State-Centered Paradigm

Since the 1920s, the development of modern Turkey has rested on Kemalism, which can be defined as a state-centered, elite-defined and illiberal modernization project.[4] By moralizing a pre-politically defined notion of common good as the center on which society is supposedly united, Kemalism denies what politics pre-supposes, i.e., identity and interest differences, and confuses unity with uniformity/homogeneity. It therefore cannot see politics as an integrative societal activity of identity and interest differences; since politics is by definition an activity of differences, it keeps an eye on the political sphere so as to control the polity while purporting to "modernize" it. To the extent that the development of a healthy civil society and democratic civility is dependent on the creation of a civilized and self-limiting state that is open to public participation,[5] Kemalism today can be considered as a hindrance to democracy.

There are interrelated external and internal reasons for the predicament of Kemalism. Externally speaking, furthering modernization and maintaining the state-centered Kemalist paradigm is no longer possible. This is because the state-centered top-down understanding of modernization has been taken over by the self-generation of society, the facilitating role of exogenous factors, democratization and the market in the contemporary age of globalization. If the external forces are the essential cause and catalyst of political modernization, and if "political modernity" is about the greater "adaptive capacity" on the part of a state to these forces,[6] then the Kemalist state is expected to adapt to the new society-centered modernizing trends so as not to become a conservative anti-modernization force. Indeed, since the recognition of Turkey's candidate status by the EU at the 1999 Helsinki Summit, it is less and less possible to reconcile the state-centered and Westernist aspects of Kemalism, because achieving EU membership, as the

zenith of Turkish Westernization, necessitates a democratic-liberal transformation of the Kemalist state-society relationship.

Internally, the social transformations especially since the mid-1980s, "require us to come up with a new definition of the Turkish political centre."[7] But because of its "anti-political" nature, which does not allow for political reexamination and redefinition of such fundamental issues as the nature of secularism and national identity, the Kemalist paradigm inhibits redefinition of the center. Moreover, the restricted political sphere in Turkey has turned politics into a vocation of distributing spoils through patronage networks and of striking a delicate balance between the state ideology and societal demands on such issues as secularism.[8] As the sources of patronage have shrunk due to neo-liberal economic policies and economic crises in the post-1980 period, centrist parties are faced with an identity crisis and have lost their ability to sustain a broad constituency through clientalistic networks.[9] The rise of the Islamist RP to the government as a major coalition partner with the True Path Party (*Dogru Yol Partisi*-DYP) in June 1996 can be better comprehended against the background of the failure of Turkey's political system to build a dynamic societal consensus that would embrace the newly emerging economic and intellectual counter-elite, deprived people in urban and rural sectors of society and the Kurds — all of which had formed the electoral basis of the RP.[10]

## The Undoing of the 28 February Process

The foundation of the Islamist RP-led coalition government prompted the secularist military to embark upon a project, usually referred to as "the 28 February [1997] process," after the meeting of the military dominated National Security Council on that date. In the actual meeting a list of measures was handed down to the government to fight against the creeping Islamist threat. The measures included the closing down of secondary-level religious schools, which the government could not implement. Subsequent political tension generated by the military in tandem with the secularist sectors of society resulted in the resignation of the government. The military's project, however, continued, for it was also aiming at redesigning Turkey's political landscape to restore the Kemalist-secularist political center without actually taking over.

By turning the protection of secularism into a top priority security issue, and by accusing civilian politics of undermining it, "the 28 February process" has made the primary function of politics to implement the security measures formulated by the military rather than societal representation. At a time when political activity was geared to the security needs of the state, it was being responsive and responsible to "the state" rather than the people, which allowed the three party coalition government (May 1999–November 2002) led by Bulent Ecevit to survive despite its policy failures and despite Ecevit's

inability to run the prime ministry due to his ailing health. This resulted in further disillusionment and disenchantment of the people with the performance and the practice of the centrist parties, which by 2002 were reduced to the non-parliamentary CHP and the three coalition parties, the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*-ANAP), the Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Parti*-DSP) and the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetci Hareket Partisi*-MHP). The DYP was already vetoed for forming a coalition with the RP, and the RP along with its successor Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*-FP) were closed by the Constitutional Court in January 1998 and June 2001, respectively.[11]

In the run up to the November 2002 elections, while the secularist establishment delegitimized the AKP as the heir to the Islamist RP,[12] the centrist parties distinguished themselves from the AKP by emphasizing their state-friendly characteristics. They primarily campaigned on a platform presenting a possible AKP government as an invitation for another 28 February process.[13] Such a strategy proved to be ineffective not only because of its failure to address the demands and hopes of the people, but also because the AKP as the least state-friendly party did not have an Islamist platform. The AKP rather sent moderate, conciliatory and reformist messages by campaigning on a platform of "bread and democracy,"[14] promising to prioritize the material problems of the people rather than military-defined security threats. Hence, the AKP won 363 of 550 seats in the parliament with 34.2% of the votes. Of the 17 other parties competing in the elections, only the CHP passed the 10% threshold and gained 178 seats in the parliament with 19.4% of the votes. In this respect, it could be said that while clearly stating that an RP-like party is unable to survive in power, the 28 February process has eventually failed to achieve its original political design, aggravated the identity crisis of the established parties and provided the AKP with a political vacuum to fill.

## The Transformation of Islamism from the RP to the AKP

By closing the RP and banning Necmettin Erbakan, the founding father of political Islam in Turkey, the 28 February process has also triggered the division of political Islam into the reformist and traditionalist factions. The RP's successor FP was an arena of struggle between these two factions. Although the FP employed a pro-EU and pro-human rights discourse, the traditionalists' turn to democracy and to the EU did not involve any self-criticism and was designed only to demonstrate the undemocratic practices of the 28 February process against the RP. For the traditionalist faction, removing the ban imposed on Erbakan held priority over endorsing a broad agenda for democratization and representation of the grievances of the Islamic constituency. The younger

generation, on the other hand, favored an Islam-sensitive, rather than Islamist, political stance and employed a more comprehensive and consistent language of democracy and human rights. In this way, they hoped to be able to fill the political vacuum created by the 28 February process, to make inroads into Turkey's power structure and to better represent the interests of Islamic identity without risking their own political survival. Once the FP was closed, the reformists founded the AKP in August 2001 and took the helm only fifteen months later. The traditionalists' Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*-SP), founded in July 2001, represented a softer version of RP-style Islamism and has received only 2.5% of the votes in the 2002 elections. In what follows, we will delineate some major aspects of this division by comparing and contrasting the RP and the AKP. The FP is left out of this comparison so as to better see the magnitude of the transformation from the RP to AKP.[15]

## The Place of Islam: From Religion to Politics

The RP's prescriptions for solving problems, its narration of history and conceptualization of human rights and "good society" were all religious in essence.[16] It saw history as a clash between "just" religious and "unjust" secular civilizations. The West, whose fundamental characteristic was said to be oppression against Muslims, represented the latter. In the RP's analysis, the decline of Muslim civilization (the Ottoman Empire), was due to the degenerating impact of Westernization reforms since the Tanzimat (1839), which allegedly introduced "the sickness of materialism" to Turkish society. Its cure was to eradicate Westernism through a process of moral development, i.e., Islamization, by using the power of the state.[17] In this way, the RP believed, economic development can be achieved, material problems can be resolved and an orderly society of virtuous/religious people can be built. Moreover, a "morally developed" Turkey could lead the Muslim world in the revitalization of Islamic civilization and in the formation of an Islamic international bloc against the West. Naturally, the RP was an anti-Western and anti-EU political party, categorizing itself as the spearhead of the "religious" in relation to the secularized imperialist West and its indigenous collaborators and imitators.[18] In its struggle to revitalize the Islamic civilization, the RP equated itself with Islam, portrayed all prophets as its predecessors and all its followers as its believers, who by working and voting for the party would be saved both here and hereafter.[19]

By contrast, as an outcome of the conclusions they have drawn from the 28 February process, the AKP defects from associating, let alone equating, itself with religion.[20] The leading figures of the AKP make a distinction between a political party and religion party, which they associate with the RP. Defining themselves as a political party, they criticize religion parties as being a

peculiarity of the ideological politics of the bi-polar Cold War era. The polarizing, excluding and conflictual tendencies of ideological politics or a religion party, the AKP believe, are rendered ineffective by the globalization process, which necessitates participatory, non-discriminating, conciliatory and pluralist political approaches that pay special attention to the protection of basic rights and liberties.[21] Unlike the RP, AKP does not equate globalization with Western imperialism, but considers it as the changing context of politics to which Turkey should adapt by way of accelerating its integration with the EU. As a party aiming to be in harmony with the global trends, the AKP claims to be a non-ideological, non-Islamist *political party* aiming to serve the people in general but not restricting its horizon to religious issues or religious people only.[22] "Using religion for political purposes, turning religion into a tool, adopting an exclusionary approach in the name of religion," Erdogan maintains, "harms societal peace, political pluralism and religion itself."[23]

The AKP recognizes such problems of Islamic identity as the restrictions on wearing the headscarf, but in addressing them it pays attention to two principles so as not to appear to be a religion party. First, it abstains from an exclusive focus on religious issues in order not to be accused of "abusing religion for political purposes" or of aiming to serve the particular interests of the religious people only. In this way, the AKP hopes to avoid the curse of the secularist establishment and fulfill the criteria it has set for being a non-ideological political party. Second, the AKP employs a conciliatory and moderate approach in aiming to solve the problems of Islamic identity through a consensus with the secularist establishment. Without such a consensus, the AKP fears, any attempt at redefining secularism may facilitate further crackdown on Islamic identity, as happened in the 28 February Process.[24]

## Adversarial Agendas: From Islamizing to Right-Sizing

On the basis of its non-Islamist agenda, it is sometimes said that the AKP is allowed to rule because it is not as adversarial towards the state as the RP was. However, a close comparison of the parties' attitudes towards the state shows that it is not the degree but the angle of the adversary that differentiates the parties.

For the RP, Republican secularism was the crux of all problems as it imprisoned religion into the conscience of the people and thereby prevented their moral development, which was seen as the prerequisite of all good things.[25] The problem with republican secularism, in turn, was actually the Westernizing elite, which encompassed the rest of the political class and which oppressed the uniformly Muslim Turkish people in alliance with Western and Zionist forces by using the machinery of the state.[26] Thereby, the RP disregarded the heterogeneous nature of society and refrained from a genuine

consensus-building, compromising only tactically when the exigencies of power-seeking required. Here the RP's approach was Kemalist at least in two respects. First, in seeking a panacea in the replacement of the alienated elite with its pious cadres, the RP neglected/downplayed the importance of the Kemalist state-society relationship. Ultimately, the RP's stance *vis-a-vis* the state/power structure was institutionally conservative in the sense of maintaining state-centered structures. Second, the RP's institutional conservatism was functional not just for integrating its own constituency into the well-established patronage network, but also for the realization of its own project of "moral development" in a top-down fashion. Accordingly, if the Republican elite controlled religion to limit its role, the RP would also maintain this control to expand the role of religion and encourage religiosity. Hence, a number of Islamization proposals, such as making Friday a holiday, were defended in terms of the state's duty to provide religious services.

Compared to the RP's institutionally conservative, personalistic and power-seeking approach, the AKP problematizes the non-pluralist and illiberal form of secularism and state-society relationship. The AKP, too, is critical of the current practice of secularism in Turkey because it discriminates against religious people and inhibits religious freedoms.[27] However, the AKP's alternative to the current practice of secularism is not a top-down Islamization as the RP's was. The AKP conceives and frames secularism as a matter of democratization/liberalization and wants it to be conceived as such so that consensus between the parties can be achieved.[28] For the AKP the choice is not between Islam and the West or between alienated elite and its pious contenders. The choice for the AKP is between old and new understandings of modernization. In this respect, Kemalism is the catalyst of the AKP's political identity, defined primarily in anti-social engineering terms. The old understanding of modernization as cultural shift, the AKP maintains, resulted in a bureaucratic-statist form of state society relationship that keeps the domains of state intervention quite large. Currently, such a relationship hinders societal dynamism, economic development and further modernization because it does not set society free from the conservative grip of the state.[29] Altering the top-down, bureaucratic-statist structures by redistributing political power is the panacea offered by the AKP: correcting the error of "big state" will deliver all good things in a smooth process. While the RP aimed at remaking society by maintaining the state centered structures under the control of its pious cadres, the AKP aims at remaking the state by restricting its domains of control and intervention in accordance with global trends. In defending its state project, the AKP takes pride in Turkish society's dynamism and adaptive capacities, which in essence runs contrary to the Kemalist distrust of society. It is important to note also that AKP's reform proposals towards

deconcentration of political power aims at externalizing such political responsibilities as balanced regional development in accordance with the global trends.[30]

## Political Styles: Misrepresentation vs. Silent Representation of Islamic Identity

Because the RP was so self-obsessed with its own 'truth,' there was a disjuncture between the RP and its electoral base. The RP was, therefore, unable to sustain its legitimacy. The AKP on the other hand is more susceptible to societal signals, enabling it to be responsive, to maintain legitimacy and to undermine the secularist establishment's suspicion-based strategy of opposition.

It is possible to suggest that the RP pursued an agenda independent of the concerns of its own support base and clashed not only with the military, but also with large sectors of society. Underlying these was the RP's conceptualization of politics as a mechanism for serving religion and the consequent absolutist claim to represent 'the truth.' Following the Qur'ānic principle "the Truth has come and the Wrong has become null," the RP claimed to represent the Truth. This claim inevitably involved the dismissal of all the rest of the political class as "discotheque boys," aiming at unification with the infidels and severing links with Islam.[31] But more importantly, the RP judged all those sectors of society not conforming to its conceptualization of Muslim Turk as having a false state of consciousness. Rescuing them from their alleged moral crisis or state of false-consciousness, according to Erbakan, was a religious act of tenderness/care (*sefkat*) with enormous rewards in the hereafter.[32] Hence, the failure of the RP to recognize society as it is and the perception of the RP as a threat to secular life-styles.

The absolutist, monopolizing and top-down pattern of relationship with society was also valid for the RP's intra-party organization and relations with the Islamic constituency. Erbakan and a handful of his stalwarts, often referred to as the *politburo*, have monopolized the formulation of the party's policies and demanded unconditional obedience from the rank-and-file of the party as well as from the younger generation of its top figures. This gave way to an extremely hierarchical organization that did not allow any (self) criticism.[33] The premium value in organizational terms was "unity" as reflected in unquestioned loyalty to hierarchical superiors and ultimately to the leader. Only in this way, it was believed, could the mission be pursued better. Consequently, no input was expected in the formulation of policies from the constituency or society at large. "In our culture," one of the close associates of Erbakan, Oguzhan Asilturk, stated "there is no place for criticism. If one is not authorized to reach the good, then she/he is to help those who are authorized

to reach the good."[34] As such, the need for political accountability for the RP was less pressing than it seemed for a political party. This resulted in room for maneuver and flexibility, while serving religion and pursuing the 'truth.' Coupled with the portrayal of its struggle as a war, exigencies of which necessitated deception, censorship and self-censorship,[35] the RP was able to make significant u-turns in its pursuit of power, and yet claim to be truthful to its mission. Eventually, however, the RP appeared to be treating Islamic identity solely as a "mobilizational tool" for power-seeking purposes.[36] Moreover, the political agenda that the RP pursued seemed to be grounded in its own fictitious truth and independent of the hopes and demands of the people. There was therefore a disjuncture between the RP and its societal base.

Pointing to the failure of the RP style Islamism, Erdogan stated that they aim to show how successfully religious people will make politics.[37] To this end, the AKP disassociates itself from religion, except the piety of its individual members; refrains from attacking the principle of secularism; and embraces democracy as an antidote of illiberal secularism. They represent Islamic identity mostly by their silent piety and by expressing their demands every once in a while. One of the prominent figures of the AKP, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, explained that conservative people can only be attractive to the electorate if they are modern (*cagdas*), and that they can only be modern if they are democratic.[38] In sharp contrast to the RP, the AKP rejects the possibility of a non-negotiable absolute truth in a democratic regime and recognizes the necessity of dialogue, compromise and consensus for a democratic rule.[39] Consequently, the AKP's relationship with society is less conflictual and exclusionary than that of the RP. Moreover, the AKP's understanding of democratic legitimacy seems to go beyond an electoral and majority-rule understanding of democracy and includes such fundamentals as the rule of law and inalienable rights and liberties. As such, the AKP recognizes that democratic legitimacy needs to be constantly reproduced in the actions and policies of a political party. The AKP therefore is more susceptible to societal signals and aims at gaining the trust of the people as opposed to the RP's aim of molding them with an Islamic identity in a top-down manner.

Contrary to the RP, the AKP does not have a missionary zeal. It sees politics primarily as a mechanism for reconciling differences and serving the people, and as an art of solving problems.[40] Negotiation, discussion and compromise are the key elements of such a pragmatist political activity. Most importantly, as a result of the conclusions they have drawn from the 28 February process, the leaders of the AKP emphasize the importance of realism in politics. In sharp contrast to unworkable idealizations of the RP, which resulted in a kind of romanticism, the AKP defects from pursuing a pre-politically defined divine mission and holds itself responsible for representing and serving the people,

which in turn necessitates taking into account the social and political realities of Turkey. Without taking into account such realities as the concerns and power of the military or the plurality of Islam in society, the AKP believes, the risk of creating political tension is high. As the 28 February process' crackdown on Islamic identity has shown, political tension serves no one. Moreover, as a political party, the AKP leaders argue, they have to think about society in general and should not sacrifice its prosperity and stability for the sake of pursuing Islamic issues only. Hence, after a number of attempts, it has once again become clear that conditions for a new consensus on secularism are not yet ripe. The AKP has withdrawn its proposals on removing the restrictions on wearing headscarf.

Despite its initial promises for intra-party democracy and teamwork, the AKP is a centrist leadership party. While promoting the party as a brand, Erdogan, as Erbakan did, undermines the autonomy of party members and parliamentarians and concentrates power in his hands at the party headquarters.[41] In addition to Erdogan's patronizing style, one of the motives here seems to be the fear of losing control and becoming an outlet for excessive Islamist demands of the former RP members in the rank-and-file. Another motive is to mold the party's identity along the lines of "conservative democracy." This still in-the-making identity thus far has served to distinguish the AKP from the RP-style Islamism, while at the same time indicating that issues related to Islamic identity are still a concern for the AKP. Nevertheless, one can also talk about an ongoing process of remolding Islamic identity in another, less parochial, direction. An illustration of this process is Erdogan's response to secularist Bulent Ecevit's fear that "Turkey may lose its religion, and thereby risk its unity" as a result of increasing Christian missionary activities. In a speech he delivered at the First Congress of the Women Branch of the AKP's Trabzon provincial organization, Erdogan addressed Ecevit's concerns in an unexpectedly progressive manner for a former Islamist: "If there are mosques in Germany, France and other European countries, then we have to reciprocate with them. If one trusts one's religion, one will not fear losing it."[42] That the AKP has a transforming impact on Islamic identity is also illustrated by the findings of a nation-wide survey published in July 2004.[43] The results of this research have shown that among the conservative-nationalist sectors of society, supporters of the AKP are the least anti-EU.

## The Rule of the AKP

In light of the above discussion, it is not the principle of secularism, unless one equates it with a sterilized and monist public sphere, but the state-centered legacy of Kemalism that is under threat. The AKP is accused of having a hidden Islamist agenda and of being reactionary mainly for two reasons,

both of which reveal the poverty of Kemalist opposition as it stands. First, the AKP's Islamist pedigree, but not its concrete policy proposals, provides the "evidence" for its hidden reactionary agenda. Here, the method of the secularist establishment for gathering evidence is mind-reading. For the opposition CHP, the AKP needs to be checked, balanced and guided more than any other government because of its Islamist origins.[44] This distrust of the AKP results in a political debate centered only on the question of *who* proposes policies. For example, although it was on its agenda as well, the CHP finds it suspicious and rejects the AKP's call for cooperation in preparing a new constitution that would replace the 1982 Constitution, promulgated by the coup administration.[45]

Secondly, the link established between state-centricism and regime stability, and the underlying assumption of an inevitable retreat into the Islamic roots if the grip of state over the society loosens, seems to be a determining factor in the opposition against the AKP. Such an opposition in effect perpetuates the Kemalist distrust of society and upholds the current state structure, which is known for its failures and ineffectiveness. Moreover, if Orientalism means questioning the capacities of Muslim societies to achieve democracy, the Turkish opposition reproduces Orientalist assumptions and runs the risk of being an opposition to democratization and the establishment of the rule of law. An illustration is the military's accusation that the AKP's dissension to the High Military Council decisions to purge allegedly Islamist officers encourages Islamic reactionism. The dissent of the AKP, however, also springs from the immunity of the decisions from judicial review, which violates the basic principle of a constitutional state- all acts of administration should be subject to appeal in courts.

## The EU Leverage

On the one hand, the AKP's non-Islamist, pro-democracy and pro-EU political stance makes the secularist scare-mongering less effective. On the other hand, the societal current that brought the AKP to power represents a broad-based demand for further democratic reform.[46] Yet, while helpful, none of these would have sufficed to overcome the conservative resistance of the establishment if Turkey did not have its Europeanization project, which signifies the fulfilling of the Kemalist goal of Westernization. Once it took the helm, the AKP defined itself as the agency for executing agency the original Kemalist project of "reaching the level of contemporary civilizations." The crystallization of civilization, according to the AKP, was the EU, and the two distinguishing features of being civilized were economic well-being and democracy with guaranteed basic rights and liberties, including the right to wear the headscarf in educational institutions.[47] The process of integration with

the EU, according to the AKP, necessitated the alteration of the state-centered Kemalist paradigm and the redefinition of democracy in such a way that inalienable rights, pluralism and non-electoral participation (of civil society organizations) are institutionalized.[48] In fact, all the reforms AKP has introduced were made within the framework of fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria, a precondition for the start of accession negotiations with the EU. Hence, by adopting the pillar principle of Kemalism in a modified way, the AKP combined reformism with a de-emphasis on political ideology and conflict, overcame the conservative and immobilizing opposition, and initiated a process of altering the Kemalist paradigm without clashing with its guardians directly.

The above-politics status of the EU membership project meant that no party posed an outright force of opposition to it. The general attitude of the state-friendly parties towards the EU has been to follow the footsteps of the secularist establishment, which on the pretext of Turkey's unique conditions, apologetically asks for exceptions to and concessions from the criteria of membership without abandoning the project of EU membership. This approach practically prefers a democracy customized to the Turkish context and discordant with such international standards as rule of law, accountability and limited state. The AKP, on the other hand, rejects tutelary democracy on the grounds that Turkish society is mature enough for a democracy that fulfils universal standards.[49] "Our fundamental objective" Abdullah Gul declared, "is to transform Turkey into a fully functioning European democracy."[50] Underlying the AKP's strong political will behind the Europeanization project is that "the only way for this party to survive in power and endure is through a liberal transformation of the Turkish polity and its civilization."[51]

The impact of the AKP's resolve in pursuing democratization via Europeanization has been the revelation of the conservative nature of Kemalism and the state-friendly political parties and consequently a change of positions in the political spectrum. Immediately after the recognition of Turkey's EU-candidate status in 1999, some guardians of Kemalism joined the Islamist camp by declaring the EU a "Christian Club" undermining the secular and unitarian regime in Turkey.[52] Underlying this isolationist response is an obsession with protecting the achievements of the Republic by curbing and controlling societal dynamics, which, as retired General Salim Dervisoglu recently admitted, is conservative in essence for it relegates the furthering of modernization to a secondary place.[53] The CHP's "leftist" opposition too accuses the AKP of undermining Turkey's secularist unitarian regime and of abusing the EU project for its own political ends by doing too much to realize it.[54] The opposition mostly claims that the AKP is making up for its domestic legitimacy deficit by allying with external forces that undermine

"our national unity and interests." A natural consequence of this Third-Worldist adversary, which neglects the internal dynamics of Turkish society, is resorting to conspiracy theories to explain Turkish politics.[55]

## Limits to Turkey's Transformation under AKP Rule

In the absence of an opposition that gives effective expression to the language of democratization and that would help the AKP and Turkish society further habituate the norms and values of democracy, the risks of having a shallow democracy is high for two main reasons. First, the bounty of full membership in the EU appears as the sole driving force of democratization in Turkey. Yet, at the 17 December 2005 Summit, while opening the negotiations, the EU as whole was unable to support Turkey's full membership perspective with a strong political will. That the future of the EU Constitution after the French and Dutch referenda is uncertain means a shift of priorities away from the integration of economically backward and populous Turkey. In addition, essentialist biases of some top European policy makers also play a role in the EU's inability to form a strong political will in favor of Turkey's membership. For example, the French Prime Minister Jean Marie Raffarain expressed his doubts about Muslim Turkish society's capacity to embrace European human rights values.[56] As the possibility of other options than full membership, such as "privileged partnership" is now mentioned in the official EU documents, the momentum of Turkey's Europeanization may face a setback.

Secondly, the Europeanization project poses some challenges to its sole political contractor, the AKP itself. One difficulty for the AKP to maintain its resolve in Europeanization springs from the crucial issue of the illiberal practice of secularism. The approval of the ban on wearing the headscarf on university premises by the European Court of Human Rights and the silence of the Progress Reports concerning the rights and liberties of Islamic identity have alienated the Islamic identity from the EU and stripped the AKP of the means to redefine secularism as a matter of democracy and pluralism. As it stands, in the pluralist public sphere envisioned by the EU, there is no room for the representation of Islamic identity.

Another difficulty for the AKP to pursue Turkey's Europeanization springs from its restricted understanding of democracy. The AKP restricts the relation of power, and thus the project of democratization, to the relation between elected representatives of the people and the non-elected state elite in the political sphere.[57] It thereby neglects the societal aspects of democratization. As can be seen in the EU's October 2004 and November 2005 progress reports, which call for public representation of such societal differences as Turkish Alevis, Kurds, Armenians, Greek Orthodox and so on, substantive democratization has a society-related aspect as well. Since the AKP's conservative democratic

approach conceptualizes society as a harmonious unity of differences and as lacking power relations between, for example, Kurds and Turks, men and women, labor and capital and so on, the AKP argues against the representation and politicization of societal differences, while recognizing the existence of them. "Bringing our differences to a political level," Erdogan claims, "will be the biggest damage one can make to this country."[58] One exception here is the rights and liberties of Islamic identity. Erdogan criticizes the monist conceptualization of the public sphere for being closed to societal differences and for inhibiting freedoms only when it comes to the ban on wearing the headscarf on university premises.[59] The normative bias and the failure of the AKP to flatly employ a pluralist-liberalizing discourse can further be seen in its failed attempt to criminalize adultery in autumn 2004. By categorizing the issue of adultery as a matter of morality and by aiming to criminalize it, Erdogan has clearly shown that there are conservative exceptions to the principle of restricting the domains of state intervention.

This is not to deny that the AKP endorses democracy, but to indicate that if it is to push for further democratization in Turkey, its concept of democracy has to go beyond the non-violent transfer of power through elections and its language of pluralist democracy has to embrace a broader spectrum of identities. This, in turn, necessitates not religious reform, but an intellectually grounded conceptualization of democracy and a well-defined strategy of democratization, because, as the historical track record of Turkish democracy has shown, democratic consolidation is not an inevitable outcome of pragmatic political competition for power.[60] Yet, while upholding democratization as a top priority issue, AKP leaders seem to be concerned with neither the concept nor the strategy of democratization.[61] In the end, it is perhaps the AKP's pragmatic reduction of democracy to electoral competition and to expansion of the domains of civilian policy-making that forms one of the bottlenecks of democratization in Turkey.

## Endnotes

1. See for example British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, interview by Sedat Ergin "Turkiye AKP ile Degisti," [Turkey Changes with the AKP], *Hurriyet*, 3 March 2004.

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3. On the political autonomy of the military see Umit Cizre-Sakallioglu, "The Anatomy of the Turkish Military's Political Autonomy," *Comparative Politics*, 29, (2), 1997, 151–166.

4. Çaglar Keyder, "Whither the Project of Modernity" in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, Sibel Bozdogan and Resat Kasaba (eds), (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1997).

5. Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 20, 215.

6. Philip Cerny, "Modernization and the Fifth Republic," in *France and Modernization*, John Gaffney (ed), (Avebury: Aldershot, 1988), 14, 19.

7. Cengiz Çandar, "Redefining Turkey's Political Center," *Journal of Democracy*, 10, (4), 1999, 129–141, 136.

8. Menderes Çinar, "Siyasetin Ahlaki Varolus Krizi ve Yeni Olusumlar," [Moral Crisis of Politics and the New Formations], *Birikim*, 147, (2001), 42–49; and Suleyman Demirel, interview by Metin Sever, "Demirel: Tabani Darbeler Boldu," [Demirel: Constituency was Divided by the Coups], *Radikal*, 13 October 2002.

9. Ümit Cizre, "Liberalism, Democracy and the Turkish Center Right: The Identity Crisis of the True Path Party," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32, (2), 1996, 142–161.

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11. This paragraph draws from Umit Cizre and Menderes Çinar, "Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102, (2/3), 2003, 309–332.

12. "Kivrikoglu Erdogan'a Sert," [Kıvrıkoglu Tough on Erdogan], *Radikal*, 24 April 2002.

13. See Canan Gedik "AKP 28 Subat Davetiyesidir," [AKP Invites 28 February Process], *Radikal*, 18 October 2002, "Ecevit: AKP Devlet Sorunu", [AKP is a State Problem], *Radikal*, 12 November 2002, and "Ecevit'ten Laik Veda," [Secularist Farewell of Ecevit], *Radikal*, 13 November 2002.

14. For one of Erdogan's election rallies, see "Ekmek ve Demokrasi," [Bread and democracy], *Yeni Safak*, 28 November 2001.

15. For a discussion of the FP period see, Ahmet Yildiz, "Politico-Religious Discourse of Political Islam in Turkey: The Parties of National Outlook," *Muslim World*, 93, (2), 2003, 187–210; R. Quinn Mecham, "From the Ashes to Virtue, A Promise of Light: Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly*, 25, (2), 2004, 339–358.

16. Yildiz, "Politico-Religious Discourse of Political Islam in Turkey," 189–195.

17. Necmettin Erbakan, *Turkiyenin Meseleleri ve Cozumleri*, [Turkey's Problems and Solutions], Ankara, np, 1991, 11–15, see also *RP Secim Beyannamesi: 24 Aralik 1995*, [RP Election Declaration: 24 December 1995], passim.

18. Necmettin Erbakan, *Adil Ekonomik Duzen*, [Just Economic Order], Ankara, np, 1991, 14–17, 72–77.

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22. AKP's Justice and Development Programme, *AK Parti Adalet ve Kalkinma Programi*, 7; "Basortusu Zaman Icinde Cozulecek," [Headscarf Issue Will be Solved in Time], *Cumhuriyet*, 28 December 2004; and Rusen Cakir and Fehmi Calmuk, *Recep Tayyip Erdogan: Bir Donusumun Oykusu*, [Recep Tayyip Erdogan: A Story of Transformation], Istanbul, Metis, 2001, 131, 181.

23. Ergun Aksoy, "AKP, Degisim Partisi," [AKP is a Party for Change], *Radikal*, 11 January 2004.

24. For Erdogan's statement see "Bedel Odeten Olmam," [I will not Let You Pay a Price], *Yeni Safak*, 8 July 2004.

25. Hasan Hüseyin Ceylan, ed., *Erbakan ve Turkiyenin Temel Meseleleri*, [Erbakan and Turkey's Problems], Ankara: Rehber Yayincilik, 1996, 215.

26. Erbakan, *Turkiyenin Meseleleri ve Cozumleri*, 7, 11–15.

27. "Erdogan Laikligi Anlatti," [Erdogan Explained Secularism], *Radikal*, 11 November 2003.

28. "Turbani Meclis Cozer," [Headscarf Issue will be Solved in the Parliament], *Radikal*, 7 January 2005.

29. The AKP's 2002 Election Declaration, *AK Parti Secim Beyannamesi*, 31–32; The AKP's Justice and Development Program, *AK Parti Adalet ve Kalkinma Programi*, 29–30, 59–60.

30. The author personally observed in the AKP's election rally in Urfa province that Erdogan rather ironically equates devolution of power with fulfilling the social responsibilities of the state.

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32. Necmettin Erbakan, interview by Nevzat Ozpelitoglu, "Islam Birligi AB'den Daha Kolay Kurulacak," [Islamic Union Easier then the EU], *Milli Gazete*, 20.9.1995

33. For a detailed discussion of the intra-party absolutism by the AKP's former RP-members, see Yavuz Selim, *Milli Gorus Hareketindeki Ayrismanin Perde Arkasi*, [Behind the Scenes of the Division in the National Outlook Movement], (Ankara: Hiler Yayinlari, 2002), 26–40.

34. Oguzhan Asilturk, interview by Rusen Cakir "Arkadaslarin Sorunu Makam," [Their Concern is Posts], *Milliyet*, 12 February 2000.

35. Ahmet Akgul, "Siyaset Sanatinda Hile'nin Hukmu," [The Rule of Deception in the Art of Politics], *Milli Gazete*, 7 November 1996; "Basin Ahlaki ve Dogruluk Yasasi," [Media Ethic and Law of Rightousness], *Milli Gazete*, 8 December 1996.

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42. "Basbakanlik Nedir ki, Bugun Var, Yarin Yok," [Primiership is Temporary], *Yeni Safak*, 8 January 2005.

43. Pollmark *NATO ve Turk Dis Politikasi Arastirmasi*, [NATO and Turkish Foreign Policy Survey], July 2004, 4, 14.

44. Deniz Baykal's speech to CHP Parliamentary Group, 29 April 2003.

45. "Kasimpasaliya Mesaj Var," [Message to Erdogan], *Radikal*, 27 November 2003.

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49. "Erdogan SSK'da Rest Cekti," [Erdogan Speaks Conclusive on Social Insurance Institution], *Radikal*, 3 November 2004.

50. Abdullah Gul's address to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Strasbourg, 27 January 2003.

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52. For some top general's statements see, "AB Hristiyan Klubu," [EU is a Christian Club], *Radikal*, 14 January 2001; "Bolucuyle AB'nin Istekleri Ortusuyor," [EU and Separatists Converge], *Hurriyet*, 13 January 2000; "Zirveye Sozde Demokrasi Uyarisi," [Artificial Democracy Warning to the Summit], *Yeni Binyil*, 28 August 2000.

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54. "AB'yi Hedeflerine Kilif Yapiyorlar," [They are Abusing the EU], *Cumhuriyet*, 4 June 2003.

55. Deniz Baykal, interview by Sami Gokce, "CHP'ye Uluslararası Bir Komplo Kurdular," [They Set up an International Conspiracy Against the CHP], *Yeni Safak*, 16 April 2004.

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57. Yalçın Akdoğan, *Muhafazakar Demokrasi*, [Conservative Democracy], (Ankara, AK Parti, 2003), 30–32, 54–56. Authored by one of Erdogan's top advisors and published by the AKP, this book is an attempt to clarify the AKP's political identity. For a critique of the book see, Ismet Akca, "AKP İdeolojisini Buldu," [AKP Has Found its Ideology], *Gelecek*, 15, 2003, 12–14.

58. "DEHAP'a Sert Tavir," [Tough on Democratic Peoples Party], *Radikal*, 16 June 2004.

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60. Cf. Vali Nasr, "The Rise of Muslim Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, 16, (2), 2005, 13–27.

61. Author's interviews with Mir Dengir Firat, Vice-Chairman, Speaker for the Chairman, Head of the Political and Legal Affairs Unit and MP from Mersin district; and with Saban Disli, Vice-Chariman, Head of Foreign Affairs Unit a and MP from Sakarya district, 24 November 2005 and 20 December 2005, respectively.