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JULY 15TH COUP
ATTEMPT:
WHEN ELITES POLARIZE
OVER POLARIZATION**

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About Istanbul Policy Center

Istanbul Policy Center (IPC) is a global policy research institution that specializes in key social and political issues ranging from democratization to climate change, transatlantic relations to conflict resolution and mediation. IPC organizes and conducts its research under three main clusters: The Istanbul Policy Center-Sabancı University-Stiftung Mercator Initiative, Democratization and Institutional Reform, and Conflict Resolution and Mediation. For over a decade, IPC has provided decision makers, opinion leaders, and other major stakeholders with objective analyses and innovative policy recommendations. As an essential part of Sabancı University, IPC strives to foster academic research. The Center extends intellectual and substantive support to young academics and policy researchers through its various programs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a lot of debate and controversy over the levels of popular and elite polarization in Turkey, which intensified after the July 15th coup attempt.¹ This report looks at the factors driving popular polarization in Turkey by focusing on elite views on political polarization. Hence, rather than measuring the levels of elite and/or popular polarization in Turkey, we look at how the Turkish elite views claims for increasing polarization in the country. This is done by discussing the results of a closed workshop and in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with selected political elites on polarization in Turkey. The report finds that Turkey's elites are so polarized that they cannot even near a consensus over whether polarization exists in the country. Drawing on the insights from the workshop and the interviews, particularly regarding the reasons put forward for polarization and the possible solutions towards tackling it, certain policy recommendations are made in the report with a view to attain societal reconciliation in Turkey.

¹ This policy report is written as part of the Post-Coup Opportunities on Conflict Resolution and Democracy Project conducted by the Conflict Resolution and Mediation Stream of Istanbul Policy Center.

INTRODUCTION

Popular polarization refers to a situation where the electorate's attitudes towards social and political issues become heavily divided along partisan lines. There has been a lot of discussion concerning polarization in Turkey in recent years, which has intensified further in the aftermath of the July 15th coup attempt. There is now a growing consensus in the literature that Turkey's population is currently polarized more than ever over many political and cultural issues, including economic policy, democracy, secularism, and foreign policy. This rise in polarization, which is related to many factors from rising populism to partisanship in the media, has substantive policy consequences such as increased levels of political gridlock that encourage centralization of authority; decreased capability to adjust to changes in economic, social, or demographic state of affairs; an increase in social and political discontent;² and negative impacts on economic development.³

This report looks at the factors driving popular polarization in Turkey by focusing on elite views on political polarization. Hence, rather than measuring the levels of elite and/or popular polarization in Turkey, we look at *how the Turkish elite views claims for increasing polarization* in the country. This is done by discussing the results of a closed workshop and in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with selected political elites on polarization in Turkey. The closed workshop on "Polarization, Reconciliation and Democracy in Turkey after July 15" was held at the Istanbul Policy Center (IPC) on January 17, 2017, with the attendance of 24 participants comprising of prominent representatives from academia, think tanks, civil society organizations, and the media. In-depth interviews were conducted in Ankara from January 4-5, 2017, with eight members of parliament from several political parties including the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - AKP), Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* - CHP), Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi* - HDP), and one former mem-

ber of parliament from the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* - MHP).⁴

2 Joan Esteban and Debraj Ray, "Linking Conflict to Inequality and Polarization," *The American Economic Review* 101, no. 4 (2011): 1345-1374.

3 Keefer Philip and Stephen Knack, "Polarization, Politics and Property Rights: Links between Inequality and Growth," *Public Choice* 111, no. 1 (2002): 127-154.

4 Both the workshop and the interviews were carried out as part of the Post-Coup Opportunities on Conflict Resolution and Democracy Project. Members of parliament from the MHP that were contacted did not accept to be interviewed with the exception of one former member of parliament from the party.

IS TURKEY POLARIZED?

Turkish society has long been divided along strong ethnic and secular-conservative cleavages as reflected to some extent by the Turkish party system. However, surveys show that political parties have recently become more clearly sorted on moral and cultural issues while social distance along partisan lines has been growing, pointing to increasing levels of party-driven political and societal polarization in Turkey. For example, a 2016 survey entitled “Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey,” conducted by the Association of Corporate Responsibility, found high levels of societal polarization along party lines. To measure the social distance between constituencies of different political party supporters, the survey asked each respondent from which party he/she feels most distant. About 65 percent of AKP voters expressed that the party furthest from their worldview was the HDP, whereas for 61 percent of voters belonging to the main opposition party, CHP, this party was the AKP. The survey revealed that 78 percent of respondents reject the idea of doing business with someone who votes for the party that they feel most distant from, while 74 percent reject the idea of their children playing with children from families supporting that party.⁵ These results show that a deep and extensive political antipathy manifests itself in many ways, both in politics and everyday life in Turkey.

Research on the public’s view on polarization in Turkey shows that the Turkish public agrees with the arguments in favor of the existence of polarization in the country. In January 2017, Kadir Has University reported its Survey of Social-Political Trends in Turkey, which showed that 61.7 percent of the Turkish public thinks that the country is polarized. Of these, 47.6 percent thinks that polarization is driven by the secular-conservative divide, 21.9 percent believes that it is caused by the left-right cleavage, whereas 15.2 percent thinks that it is reflective of the East-West divide in the country.⁶ Hence, the limited but current research suggests that high degrees of popular polarization are a current reality of the country, and the public itself overwhelmingly believes that this is indeed the case.

5 Emre Erdoğan, “Turkey: Divided We Stand,” GMFUS, April 12, 2016, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/turkey-divided-we-stand>.

6 Özge Özdemir, “Muhafazakar Kesim Kutuplaşmaya Nasıl Bakıyor?” BBC, January 27, 2017, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-38667730>.

WHAT DRIVES POLARIZATION?

Elite polarization and populism

Some scholars argue that elite polarization is one of the major factors behind popular polarization. Although voters may also have polarizing tendencies, in isolation this process is slow and imperfect. Elite polarization, however, eventually leads to increased awareness of party differences by the electorate and can thus have a major impact on the ways in which the public takes political decisions.⁷ The existing literature has shown that polarized political environments can fundamentally change the ways in which citizens reach political decisions. When elites are highly polarized, this amplifies the impact of party positions on citizens' opinions and makes them less reliant on substantial "facts" and more on "partisan endorsements" in taking their decisions.⁸ Hence, elite polarization tends to decrease citizens' openness to alternative viewpoints, which in turn restricts the public space for diversified political contestation—a key to a consolidated and healthy functioning democracy.

The role of populism is crucial for explaining how elite polarization leads to popular polarization. Populism is a monist, moralist ideology that appeals to emotions and values by creating antagonistic identities. Although many definitions of populism abound, the one by the prominent populism scholar Cas Mudde is widely accepted in the literature. Mudde defines populism as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."⁹ This uncompromising stand eventually leads to a polarized political culture.¹⁰ Populist parties send clear, exclusivist cues to the electorate, which then gradually identifies itself through more clearly identifiable categories in relation to its various "Other(s)" in society. Especially when there are strong religious and ethnic cleavages within society, populist politicians

have more opportunities to utilize them by framing these differences as sources of existential threats to the larger group identity.

Populist leaders fuel societal polarization not only through their discourse but also via their authoritarian mode of governance that relies on the use of majoritarian instruments such as referenda rather than a system that prioritizes checks and balances and the protection of minority rights. Authoritarian tendencies seem to be bolstered in those cases where there is already existent societal polarization in a given country.¹¹ Strong leadership combined with authoritarian rule can run the risk of boosting further polarization, resulting in the building of a vicious cycle of populist rule that becomes increasingly difficult to break.

Applied to the case of Turkey, it can be argued that the rise of right-wing populism espoused by the governing party, AKP, particularly since 2011, has contributed to the growing polarization within Turkish society. The imposed worldview of the "people" vs. the "elite" where the party and its leader are represented as "the voice" of the genuine "will of the people" as opposed to that of the "elite" identified with the opposition has helped to foster a binary worldview across society. Majoritarianism has also been the preferred mode of governance where those in opposition were marginalized not only through party political discourse but also through the restriction of the democratic space in which they can exercise their basic rights and freedoms.

Structural causes

Growing ideological distance is not, however, confined to partisanship. The culture war narrative assumes that politics is increasingly divided into two value camps: cultural conservatives with a religious view of morality and cultural progressives with a secular view. In turn, it is argued that these divergences in cultural value systems provide a rich ground for political polarization to flourish worldwide.¹² However, there is growing empirical evidence that cultural divisions interact closely with educational, generational, and economic factors. Regarding voter demographics, there is much evidence that educational attainment is one of the

7 Morris P. Fiorina and Samuel J. Abrams, "Political Polarization in the American Public," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008): 563-588.

8 James N. Druckman, Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus, "How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation," *American Political Science* 107, no. 1 (2013): 57-79.

9 Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39 (2004): 542.

10 Cas Mudde, "The Problem with Populism," *The Guardian*, February 17, 2015, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/17/problem-populism-syriza-podem-os-dark-side-europe>.

11 Marc J. Hetherington and Jonathan D. Weiler, *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

12 Michael E. Sobel and Ted Mouw, "Culture Wars and Opinion Polarization: The Case of Abortion," *American Journal of Sociology* 106, no. 4 (2001): 913-943.

main influences in voting behavior. Over the past decade, ideological differences across generations have also widened: while younger generations remain less polarized and more progressive, older generations are more conservative and polarized.

Concerning the Turkish case, it has been found that a growing *Kulturkampf* is defining the political landscape across the country. In other words, Turkish voters seem to be divided sharply along value lines, between the more “socio-cultural liberal and secular” classes and the more “religious conservative” masses in society.¹³ While this divide has been present for decades, there is wide agreement that its centrality in politics has increased significantly especially after the 2007 general elections.¹⁴

Institutional causes

Political polarization also has institutional causes. As much as elections are the most important institutions of democratic society, they also polarize societies. Remaining in electioneering mode, without giving the community the time to rebuild and develop new means of consensus, ultimately increases polarization. This is especially true for referenda where the options are presented in black and white. Furthermore, when “political parties choose to treat referenda as elections, voters’ predispositions are more likely to be reinforced and partisan voting is more likely to prevail.”¹⁵ In the course of the last five years, Turkey has gone through one presidential election and local elections in 2014, two general elections in 2015, and an upcoming referendum on the introduction of a presidential system in 2017. Hence in the Turkish case, with the exception of one year, electioneering has been a constant state of affairs in the political life of the country over the last five years. This, in turn, has contributed to the sustenance of the high intensity of political debates and consolidation of stark divisions across partisan lines.

Another institutional cause of political polarization is the erosion of public institutions. Institutions should build bridges between the members of a community. However, polarization (and populism) can generate strong partisan critiques of major democratic institutions, such as the judiciary, which may then damage the credibility and legitimacy of these institutions. Partisan nominations further contribute to these institutions’

declining credibility. The erosion of moderating institutions, in turn, sharply increases political polarization. For example, as the Kadir Has survey shows, there is no institution that Turkish citizens trust in common while overall public trust in institutions has declined sharply. The most trusted institution in Turkey is the presidency, with 49.4 percent of citizens declaring their trust. Previously, the Turkish military was always identified as the most trusted institution. However, after the July 15th coup attempt, trust in the Turkish military declined. While 62.4 percent of participants trusted the military the most in 2015, it was only the second most trusted institution in 2016, equal to the police at 47.4%.¹⁶

Media Polarization

In Turkey, where approximately half of all households have access to the internet and where traditional media sources have increasingly been silenced by the government, social media has over the recent years become a key source of news and information as well as a public platform for political debate for an important segment of the citizenry. However, there is much evidence that shows the proliferation of media sources has increased polarization rather than strengthened public deliberation across the world.¹⁷ Contrary to the longstanding argument that mass media tends to induce conformity and reduce polarization, it is now claimed that the new media (social media, cable TV, etc.) enables people to interact with like-minded individuals so that the political opinions they hear through these channels are often in line with their own views. Thus, the new media has increased polarization by enabling individuals to select outlets that are already in line with their ideologies. In fact, when it comes to getting news about politics and government, research has shown that different political party supporters inhabit different worlds with little overlap in the news sources they turn to and trust.¹⁸ Another way through which these new media instruments can fuel polarization is by making it easier for regimes to track down and suppress opposition. For instance, the 2014 Internet Law in Turkey requires internet providers in the country to store the data that they collect on web users’ activities and to make it available to the authorities upon request for two years. There have been numerous cases of people being put

13 Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, “Kulturkampf in Turkey: The Constitutional Referendum of 12 September 2010,” *South European Society and Politics* 17, no. 1 (2012): 1-22.

14 Ibid.

15 Ece Özlem Atıkcın and Kerem Öge, “Referendum Campaigns in Polarized Societies: The Case of Turkey,” *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 3 (2012): 449.

16 Kadir Has University news, n.d., <http://www.khas.edu.tr/en/news/256>.

17 Cass R. Sunstein, *Going to Extremes: How like Minds Unite and Divide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008).

18 Markus Prior, “Media and Political Polarization,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (2013): 101-127.

on trial in the country on the basis of messages that they posted on Twitter and Facebook.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the print media faces a climate where facts no longer drive the debate and partisanship is becoming more dominant. The media themselves often wholeheartedly support or even provoke the obstructive strategies used by political incumbents to disrupt their opponents. Furthermore, partisanship directly affects which media sources are chosen for political news, which further accelerates the trend observed for social media usage—i.e., that people are likely to hear views largely in line with their own thinking.

19 Thomas Carothers, “Why Technology Hasn’t Delivered More Democracy,” Carnegie Endowment, June 3, 2015, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/06/03/why-technology-hasn-t-delivered-more-democracy-pub-60305>.

ELITE ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLARIZATION

Our findings attest that elite polarization in Turkey extends to the elite's own views on *the existence of polarization* in the country. In other words, the Turkish elite fundamentally disagrees on whether polarization exists in Turkey, depending on their relative proximity to the government. This disagreement includes their views on the impact of the July 15th coup attempt on polarization in Turkey. Whereas for the pro-government elite, the coup attempt has helped to bridge whatever polarization had existed, those critical of the government argue that it helped to divide Turkish society further.

Insights from the Closed Workshop

The most striking finding of this research is that those who define themselves as AKP supporters and hold office within the government deny that Turkish society is polarized. According to one government official, Turkish society has always been polarized to some extent, so problems of political polarization are nothing new. Another government official emphasized that, as an apolitical party, the AKP receives electoral support from both ends of the spectrum, which he used as evidence of the lack of polarization. In a similar vein, these participants believe that political polarization significantly declined after the July 15th coup attempt. According to one of the participants, one of the major reasons for this is a newly found value in the Turkish flag. This participant put forward the argument that the Islamist worldview was not in the past used to embrace the idea of the Turkish state as much as it does now, with the idea of “belonging to the nation” becoming stronger than ever after the coup attempt. Some participants who politically identified themselves with the AKP even reacted to the idea of a workshop on polarization—claiming that this is a debate spread by foreign powers to further unsettle the country. Another government official described what is happening currently in Turkey as a period of transition rather than polarization, in which secular elites are increasingly being replaced by conservative elites. Another defined it as the transformation of the state apparatus to conservative values. They claimed that the discourse of “political polarization” was a political reaction to this genuine transformation.

While pro-AKP participants define polarization as a perception and not as an existing fact, other participants from a wide ideological range but all sharing a considerable political distance from the government

highlight polarization as one of the most urgent problems of Turkey. They are also united in their belief that polarization increased after the coup attempt of July 15th and with the referendum on the presidential system. Hence, it was observed that the elites themselves were polarized around the idea of polarization. There were multiple grounds on which arguments in favor of the existence of polarization were put forward by these participants, many of which were also identified in the literature alluded to above.

The constant electioneering mode aggravated further by the referendum on the presidential system, the *Kulturkampf* between religious and secular values and lifestyles, the existent populist mode of governance, institutional decay, politicians' discourses, media representations, violence by the Islamic State (ISIS) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*-PKK), and the lack of democracy and the rule of law were commonly cited as the root causes of the increasing levels of polarization in society. All converged on the view that *the inclusion/exclusion nexus* amplified by these dynamics created a fertile ground for polarization to grow. As one of the political scientists in the workshop succinctly pointed out, “when an individual is a part of a group that feels safe, he/she has the tendency not to empathize or even understand what happens to other individuals from groups that feel threatened,” which in turn fuels polarization for these individuals. Participants of Kurdish origin especially focused on how they have been categorized as the “Other” and how their identities have been completely securitized, especially after the June 7 elections. They argued that the framing of Kurdish identity as an existential threat to the Turkish Republic significantly increased ethnic polarization in the country. Some participants also focused on how they felt excluded from the “spirit of Yenikapı,” which claims to be inclusive. Thus for them, the measures taken in the aftermath of the coup attempt fueled political polarization by deepening the inclusion/exclusion nexus instead of bringing the public together, as argued by the pro-AKP elites. Participants of Alevi origin in particular echoed this sentiment, which signaled a sectarian polarization and stressed the necessity for inclusive and credible public institutions in the country. In fact, the decline in the credibility of public institutions was one of the major themes that emerged from the workshop. Another theme that was emphasized was the polarization of education along secular and

conservative lines. In particular, the de-secularization of public education, both through transforming many public schools into religious schools and through changes in the curriculum, was emphasized as one of the major causes of polarization.

The workshop participants reached a consensus only over two issues: a) that merit-based recruitment is the most important measure to strengthen the legitimacy of public institutions and thus decrease (perceived or real) polarization; and b) that changes in the media environment can help polarize or depolarize the citizens exposed to it. At the end of the workshop, five small groups were convened where the participants were asked to come together and identify five major areas of polarization. The small-group workshop encouraged participants with radically different views on political polarization to reach a consensus in small groups. However, two groups were unable to reach a consensus over these five issues. One group decided that every participant should state their own view by identifying one striking problem of polarization. The other group only reached a consensus regarding two issues that they saw as important for political polarization. The remaining three groups were able to reach a consensus focused on inclusive institutions, democracy, the rule of law, the discourse of political elites, increased partisanship in the media, the EU's role, and recognition and respect for groups that we see as the Other(s).

Insights from the Interviews

The elite interviews similarly reveal that there is sharp polarization among the political elite regarding the existence and level of polarization in Turkey. For example, an HDP parliamentarian argued that polarization is a systematic governing strategy for the government:

I am convinced that polarization in society is deepening and the government is systematically using polarization as a strategy to govern easily. I believe that polarization has helped the ruling party to consolidate its critical mass to win elections... But I think the level of polarization is getting very risky for the country's peace because all segments of society are being radicalized: both the opponents of the government and those who are pro-government. I think this is a very serious handicap in terms of social communication.²⁰

²⁰ Interview with an HDP parliamentarian conducted by Pinar Akpınar, January 4, 2017.

A CHP parliamentarian expressed a similar view:

We need to name polarization as a major problem, especially after the July 15th coup attempt. Actually, we have been living in a very polarized society since the June 7 elections. Let's say that, with July 15, after the declaration of the state of emergency, polarization became a little bit more legal, a little bit more institutionalized. Polarization is Turkey's biggest problem right now. It is a terrible thing, starting from the top and spreading to the bottom, alienating people from their neighbors and from their families.²¹

Another member of parliament from the CHP also agreed that polarization has increased since the July 15th coup attempt:

The amendment of the Constitution immediately after the coup attempt has tremendously increased polarization. Now, because of this referendum, Turkey is divided into two camps. Public opinion polls show that the population is divided down the middle, fifty-fifty; this is pretty similar in other contexts as well. Turkey is divided into two halves... This has increased after the declaration of the state of emergency. We need to get back to normal politics quickly. OHAL (the state of emergency) should have not been extended. A huge victimized population has been created everywhere around Turkey. This is alarming... The political climate is toxic. People call each other traitors every day... The judiciary as an institution has also become a major contributor to this polarizing political climate.²²

Similar to the workshops, exclusion on grounds of identity and values, the majoritarian mode of political governance, the lack of democracy and the rule of law, constant electioneering mode, and the lack of transparency, meritocracy, and accountability in the state apparatus were commonly cited by these members of parliament as the main reasons behind the perceived high levels of polarization in Turkey.

However, starkly opposite views were observed to be present across the AKP members of parliament and the former MHP member that were interviewed. The former MHP parliamentarian disagreed that polarization increased after the July 15th coup attempt. According to him, the increasing polarization, which

²¹ Interview with a CHP parliamentarian conducted by Pinar Akpınar, January 4, 2017.

²² Interview with a CHP parliamentarian conducted by Pinar Akpınar, January 4, 2017.

began with the Gezi movement, has in fact decreased since July 15th because of the *Yenikapı spirit*, which brought all political parties together (with the exception of the HDP). In a similar vein, one high-level government official completely denied that there was polarization, particularly along secular-conservative lines. He also stressed that there was freedom to choose lifestyles. When asked why he thought there was no polarization, he cited the country's imperial past, which forced Turkey's population to coexist peacefully. When further asked why polarization is widely discussed across elite networks, he argued that polarization seems to occur only because of the media and foreign provocation. In fact, he claimed that foreign provocation was behind key polarizing events in the past such as the Sivas massacre in 1993, with the intention to destroy the harmony of Turkish society.²³

In short, while the HDP and CHP elites think that Turkey is deeply polarized, the AKP elites and the former MHP member of parliament think the opposite. While the AKP elites believe that there has never been an increase in polarization during the AKP governments' terms, the former MHP member of parliament has expressed that polarization decreased since the July 15th coup attempt. The interviews support the findings from the workshop, in which incumbent elites and those that are close to them strongly denied that polarization is an issue whereas their political opponents overwhelmingly highlighted that this is the most critical issue for Turkey.

²³ Interview with a former MHP parliamentarian conducted by Pınar Akpınar, January 4, 2017.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

By way of conclusion, we can argue that Turkey's elites are so polarized that they cannot even near a consensus over whether polarization exists in the country. Drawing on the insights from the workshop and the interviews, particularly regarding the reasons put forward for polarization and the possible solutions towards tackling it, the following policy recommendations can be made in attaining societal reconciliation in Turkey:

- Discourse matters in the conduct of politics and its ramifications on society: The partisan language used by politicians is often identified as increasing polarization, so it is important that they opt for a more inclusive language that covers all segments of society without designating "Other"(s) as the enemy.
- The same holds true for media discourse. The partisan language used by the media is widely expressed as a factor that increases polarization by different political groups. This is indeed a rare point that binds the elites from different political backgrounds together, regardless of their differing views on the extent of polarization in the country, pointing at the significance of press freedom and inclusive language in the media. However, it also needs to be kept in mind that the media is no longer confined to classical media outlets. In the new media environment, everyone can become an instant journalist. Thus, a social media ethics course should be taught at an early age, and citizens should create awareness of the responsibilities of using social media.
- A decline in the credibility of public institutions because of partisan recruitment and ideological decision-making procedures is shown to increase polarization. Utmost importance should therefore be given to establishing inclusive institutions and ensuring meritocratic recruitment and the rule of law in the post July 15th institutional reconstruction process in Turkey.
- Education unites: When access to quality education declines, polarization is found to increase. There is thus a need for a radical reform of public education, including the taking of precautions against the desecularization of public education and the increasing privatization of secular education. Social pluralism and state secularism should be guaranteed through a comprehensive reform of the education system.
- Violence (either physical or cultural) divides and polarizes, so political issues should be discussed without resorting to violence. Securitization and criminalization of ethnic or religious identities should be completely avoided.
- It is well known that in many cases, elite polarization precedes popular polarization. Since elites have various channels to communicate with one another, the necessary measures should be taken to ensure that those mechanisms are effective in fostering intra-elite dialogue. In particular, legislative organs such as parliamentary commissions should be made more effective. Efforts to increase channels of dialogue among different segments of society should coexist with these measures.
- A new constitution based on equal citizenship is a prerequisite for any efforts towards societal reconciliation in Turkey. This would set the much-needed legislative framework for social inclusion and democratic institutions that would in turn help to reduce polarizing tensions in society. Implementation would prove crucial for the effectiveness of the new constitution.
- In today's world, it is no longer possible to completely disentangle domestic politics from foreign policy initiatives. This is specifically the case for Turkey's relations with the European Union (EU), which have been suffering from substantial stagnation over the past decade. Despite the deteriorating relations between the two sides at the macro level, the potential role of the EU in promoting democratization and alleviating polarization in Turkey has been raised by a number of participants in the closed workshop. The revitalization of Turkey's relations with the EU could help to strengthen the EU's anchorage for domestic political reforms in Turkey, which could in turn aid in strengthening democracy and reducing the levels of polarization in the country.



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