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**THESES OF THE PHD DISSERTATION**

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**TRANSFORMATION OF THE TURKISH POLITICAL SYSTEM**

**BETWEEN 2002 AND 2018**

**Supervisor:**

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Budapest, 2019

**Institute of International Studies**

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## **1. Introduction and Topic Selection**

In spite of numerous challenges and internal political crises, the Turkish government managed to remain in power between 2002 and 2018. The “long decade” of AK Parti was characterised by economic development – albeit at a reducing rate – and the stability of the democratic institutions. By widening individual and collective democratic rights and modification of the Institution reinforced by multiple referendums and by the direct presidential election in force since 2014 representative democracy has gradually improved. Although the governance supported by a wide variety of traditions in reform and the secular quality of the state could not eliminate all social inequalities, it brought about social, economic and cultural rearrangement. The object of my studies is Turkish democracy at the beginning of the third millennium, since although it is characterised by social divides and is far from independent of the conflicts of the region, it may be regarded as stable in spite of the coup attempts and the wave of dissatisfaction in 2013, and the character of the state may probably be considered to be of a lasting nature. Apart from Turkey’s geopolitical importance, studying the recent past of the country is also important since in spite of the fairly busy Hungarian-Turkish political, economic and cultural relations rather few analytical reports were published on the topic.

I analysed five basic topics in the activity of the Turkish governments between 2002 and 2008:

- AK Parti’s efforts at democratisation,
- “Demilitarisation” of the Turkish society,
- Individual and collective rights of ethnic and religious minorities, in particular the Kurds,
- The government’s management of the democratisation process and the tendency of dissatisfaction particularly strengthening from 2013,
- Marginalising Erdogan’s non-partisan rivals, weakening of democracy, and the events and the situation of Turkish politics after the 2015 coup attempt.

In my dissertation I aim to evidence the following main hypotheses:

- Between 2002 and 2013 under AK Parti governments a democratisation process was carried out.
- Between 2013 and 2018 under AK Parti governments the democratisation process in Turkey weakened.

- AK Parti has built a secular state system which is different from the secularism of Kemalists.

Beside my main hypotheses there are a number of individual and general partial hypotheses as well:

- One of the preconditions of Turkey's internal peace and stability is to exclude the army from politics while preserving its power at the same time.
- Another precondition of Turkey's internal peace and stability is to settle the situation of minorities, especially the Kurds in the country.
- Political and economic conditions of the stability of governments include economic and infrastructural development, eliminating regional differences and introducing welfare measures.

## **2. Government functions and democratisation measures of the AK Parti**

AK Parti came into power in 2002 in Turkey. In the beginning it showed the image of a strengthening party, became more confident and opened up to the demands of religious crowds. Later the previously successful Turkish economy had to face the 2008-2009 global financial and economic crisis. The government also started the reforms of the political institutional system the most important part of which is the 2007 constitutional reform. By the end of 2013 it became clear that the reforms of AK Parti override certain interests. Those with conflicts of interest are the groups of society excluded from power, mostly the left and Kemalists, and also the internal opposition of the party.

The effect of the constitutional amendment on democratisation

In 2007, Turkey went through a constitutional crisis. The need of a constitutional reform became evident and was sanctioned by the referendums of 2007 and 2010. The 2007 constitutional reform meant a significant change in the democratic institutional system. Representatives of the National Assembly were elected for 4 years instead of 5 and the referendum also voted the direct election of the President of the Republic. This latter guarantees that the person of the president would not represent a small circle of elite. The frames of electability was also defined and the 2007 referendum changed the operation of the National Assembly bringing about a more active parliamentary activity and more efficient jurisdiction.

One of the most important elements of the 2010 reform was the reform of the structure and operation of the Constitutional Court. As part of democratisation it means that the fate of a certain political power got into the hands of voters instead of judges. Another important reform concerning the Constitutional Court is that Turkish citizens were given the right to turn to the Court as natural persons. The second scope of the package of proposals was the reform of the Supreme Court and Prosecution. The third important topic was military courts: from 2010, in case of common law offences, civil courts were entitled to try soldiers while civilians could not be tried by military courts in times of peace. As a part of the constitutional reform, the institution of the Ombudsman was also introduced.

#### Demilitarization of the Turkish society

A central element of my work is the long and difficult process of democratisation during the time of AK Parti, an important element of which is the relationship of the army, “civilians” and the elected government. The army is an important factor since during Turkish history it seriously intervened in the process of democratic development 3 times, in 1960, 1971 and 1980. (I will refer to the latest, 2016 coup attempt later.) These 3 political coups were due to the fact that Turkish society was highly divided, and the army took sides with one of the political circles. In a stable and democratic Turkey, the army is not allowed to take sides with any side of political life, but its main task is to ensure the integrity of the country, therefore the efforts of AK Parti to exclude the army from political life may well be understood. There was an important factor in the transformation of the relationship between the army and civilians considered legitim by both the army and the civilian governments, that is, the requirements of the European Union which wanted to transform the army from the praetorian system towards the professional model established in Europe. The victory of AK Parti at the 2002 elections and their pro-integration program highly accelerated the revaluation of the role of the army. Democratisation prescribed in the Copenhagen Criteria is one of the preconditions of accession to the European Union that the Turkish government could not disregard and also met the claims of the people. During the years to come whenever there was a conflict between military staff and the civilian government the European Union always supported the government, thus making the introductions of reforms constricting the power of the army easier. The AK Parti government restricted the power of the Council of National Security even further. A civilian Secretary-General was appointed to the Council in 2003 and the frequency of their meetings was also restricted to once in two months. A 2003 amendment authorised the Grand National Assembly to review army

budget. More frequent restrictions and stronger civil control made the army retreat. In 2007 they released a press release that brought about a fear from the possibility of military overthrowing the democratically elected government. But the press released induced a war of statements instead of a civil war and finally proved that the power of the army significantly decreased during the previous years. The unfortunate press release seriously damaged the prestige of the army. As Turkish political powers, with full support of the European Union, were trying to constrict the rights of the army, the possibility of revoking the legal possibility of solving internal conflicts with force increased. The slowly changing Turkish military have become one of the attendants of government politics and now deals with traditional security issues while the Turkish government do their best to provide state of the art equipment.

### The Kurdish question

The leaders of the European Union meeting in Helsinki in 1999 summoned Turkey to observe the so called “Helsinki Criteria” in minority issues as well. Therefore, during the era of the Bülent Ecevit coalition government the Grand National Assembly accepted a constitutional reform to facilitate the use of minority languages and dialects in communication as well. Presently the most numerous minority in Turkey are the Kurds. The situation and freedom of the Kurds is the key to Turkey’s European integration.

AK Parti was the first Turkish political party to realise that Kurds may be represented in a way that, while recognising their existence and their idiosyncrasy, integrates them in the Turkish nation. Therefore, AK Parti regarded Kurds as an opportunity, and part of the Kurdish voters accepted the political vision represented by them – namely, to make Turkey one of the leading economic powers of the world by 2023, which would also provide development and prosperity to the Kurdish regions. The most important station of opening up to Kurds was the new regulation concerning the Kurdish language: in 2004, the first Kurdish radio and TV station was started, and in 2012 Kurdish was integrated in the national curriculum as an “optional foreign language”. However, there were two main obstacles in the way of Turkish – Kurdish relationships: poverty and terrorism. Poverty is also one of the reasons that called PKK, the Kurdish Workers’ Party to life. PKK became more and more militant, and in 1984 they started an armed fight against the government, not sparing educational institutions either. The founder Öcalan was caught in 1998, he was first sentenced to death which was later replaced by life imprisonment. This also induced a turnaround with Öcalan who called to a ceasefire and gave up the idea of separatism, aiming for the equality of Turks and Kurds in a democratic Turkey. The Turkish government had sought the ways of dialogue with the arrested terrorist leader and

terrorists hiding out in the mountains. Preparation for peaceful settlement began in 2006 and the peace process itself was started in 2013. However, there were further obstacles in the way of the immediate solution of the Kurdish question, one of them being the political representation of the Kurdish minority in Turkish public life. The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), founded in 2012, is generally described as a Kurd-friendly party, but the classic Western liberalism could be well observed in their program as well as the representation of interests of other ethnic, religious and sexual minorities. In the 2018 parliamentary elections the party could reach the 10% threshold of parliamentary representation while one of their leaders and numerous other politicians were in prison and they got marginal presence and representation in state media. Demirtaş and his companions were charged with supporting terrorism. Collisions between PKK and government forces not only became more frequent but were often transferred from desolate mountains to densely populated regions. Ceasefire was replaced by increasing armed conflicts, and the stubbornness of both parties and their efforts to find violent solutions instead of peaceful ones rebounded on a peaceful transition of historical significance.

#### Deterioration in the Assessment of AK Parti

Gezi park has become the centre as well as symbol of the 2013 wave of dissatisfaction in Turkey. The demonstration broke out because of the trees to be cut down in the park and first involved just a small group of environmentalists, but due to the government's violent measures and unfortunate communication were later joined by multiple critics of the regime all over the country. Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality voted the plan of "transforming Taksim Square into a pedestrian zone". The first wave of protests, "Taksim Square Solidarity" was started in 2012 by inhabitants and entrepreneurs of the region as a non-political movement. As construction work progressed, more and more protesters and even politicians appeared on site. In his speech Erdogan made it clear that in spite of the protest the constructions planned would be carried out. Meanwhile, police forces intervened more and more violently against the growing crowd. Police brutality did not spare politicians either. Anti-government phrases replaced political ones and thousands joined the new political movement all over the country. On 1 June 90 demonstrations were carried out in 48 provinces, hundreds were injured, and thousands were arrested, the demonstrations turned into riotings. In the end the Prime Minister was forced to start a negotiation with the leaders of the protesters, even offering the possibility of a referendum to decide about the Gezi Park investments. Negotiation proves that the government came to the conclusion that no solution can be reached without a compromise.



Although there were still some demonstrations until the end of the month, their intensity decreased and the government as well as the protesters opted for more peaceful solutions.

The after-effect of Gezi Park and the presidential elections

The year 2013 brought about a crisis of the government in both the Western cities and the southeast region of the country. These regions felt the effect of the economic crisis brought about partly by the civil war in the two neighbouring countries of Syria and Iraq, and partly by the decade-long insecurity of Kurd-inhabited regions. The end of the Ergenekon case brought a sentence that was very strict. It further reinforced the position of the governing AK Parti, showing them as the saviours of the nations against conspirators. In December 2013 relatives of AK Parti- or government-related businessmen and politicians were arrested. The wave of arrests damaged Turkey in two ways: damaging the image of AK Parti, and the head of the government was forced to radically reform his cabinet. There was just one way out of the double crisis: to defeat the Gülen-movement supposed to be behind the wave of arrests. Political openness in the 1990's made it possible for the members of the Gülen-movement to infiltrate legal, national security and educational systems. The movement began to exercise a major influence on society with a significant number of schools, media organs and cultural institutions in their hand, thus creating a group that was able to compete with the government. Originally, the Gülen-movement built good relations with both sides. The final breakup between the movement and the government became evident when AK Parti decided to close down university preparatory schools of the movement that made increasingly more religious and political propaganda. The 2013 wave of arrests started an open enmity between the government and Gülenists. At the beginning of 2014 prosecutors, policemen and public servant related to the Gülenist movement were arrested all over the country. The coup attempt and the following state of emergency may be regarded as the height of the conflicts between the government and the Gülen-movement. AK Party blames Gülen for the attempted armed takeover, therefore all organisations and media related to him, and ten thousands of activists were arrested under the charge of supporting the failed coup attempt.

Late 2013 and early 2014 is characterised by an enormous leap in Turkish economy and infrastructure. In 2014 the government cut of access to multiple social media sites thus alienating many of the young. The results of the 2014 municipal elections not only proved that AK Parti was able to keep their position but was also a major success to the government regarding the fact that they managed to increase the number of their supporters compared to 2009. The two opposition parties, CHP and MHP also performed better than 5 years before, and

the small parties proved to be the losers of the election. In the history of the Turkish Republic 2014 was the first year when voters could elect their president directly. Erdogan won the elections in the first round and used his presidential position to legitimize the presidential system. The 2017 referendum of the constitutional reform approved of this trend, although with only a small majority. Leadership of the party and the position of the Prime Minister was taken by Ahmet Davutoglu. The change regarding the power of the AK Parti was brought about by the 2015 parliamentary elections. This time the party could get a mere 40.8% of votes which was insufficient for the formation of a new government. This can also be regarded as the effect of the crises in internal politics during the previous 2 years. The events at Gezi Park and the scandals brought about by the Gülen-movement also decreased the popularity of AK Party. 4 parties managed to get into the Grand National Assembly, however, a coalition stable enough to form a new government could not be reached. In order to alleviate the emerging political crisis, early elections were made on 1 November where AK Parti could increase their support and secure an absolute majority of 49.5%. The stability of the one-party government is also supported by the fact that they remained in power after the 2016 coup attempt.

In the process of Erdogan trying to marginalise potential political rivals the 2014 December corruption scandal served well and resulted in 4 ministers, among them Muammer Güler and Egemen Bagis being removed from political life. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu who ratified the refugee agreement made between Turkey and the EU in March 2016 became the target of increasing criticism partly because of his unpopular foreign policy and much more due to his critical voice. He was made to resign on 29 April and replaced by Binali Yildirim who was loyal to Erdogan.

#### Major events in internal politics in Turkey, 2015-2018

Several major events in internal affairs have taken place since 2015, two of which influence the future of the Turkish Republic on the long run – transition to the presidential system and the 2016 coup attempt.

Transition to the presidential system and its preparation (constitutional reform, referendum, elections) radically transformed the works and structure of the Turkish state, since the system is organised around a single politician which carries the risk of the weakening of the republic, since levers and counterweights are diminished in the process. Transition was justified by the fact that the Constitution gave exaggerated rights to the National Assembly that therefore could not be effectively controlled by the president. Also, since 2007 it was the nation that elected the president therefore the political system became “double-headed”, that is, apart from a strong

parliament an equally strong president was in place, which interfered with the controllability of the republic on the long run. Another important argument is that the decision making process was too slow and in acute cases of emergency as the armed coup attempt it was unable to react in time. Ahmet Davutoglu openly declared his opinion that he did not support the presidential system. Others opposing the transition argued that the influence of the president will grow disproportionately in the new system, and brakes and counterweights that had previously restricted the president of the republic would be eliminated. They also argued that although the United States was taken as an example when wording the constitutional changes, not enough attention was paid to the democratic separation of the branches of power. Executive power concentrated in the hands of a single person may result in Turkey shifting towards single-person leadership. The practice of appointing a president would weaken the already constrained national assembly therefore they insisted on extended sphere of rights for the representatives to appoint ministers. Yildirim managed to persuade a part of the opposition representatives that political reform is a national interest. In 2016 the two parties (AK Parti and MHP) submitted a proposition to the National Assembly about the constitutional reform. The proposition of the two parties was accepted by the parliament and on April 17 2017 was confirmed by voters – with exceptionally high participation rate but only a very small majority.

The new system not only included the presidential system, but also restricted the power of the Grand National Assembly, changed its social and political role in order to avoid situations where both the president and the national assembly have control. The new system provides four constitutional provisions to the National Assembly to control the president which facilitate the investigation of the president and his politics, and also reform the parliament itself. In Turkey, the president is also the commander in chief of the armed forces, he appoints members of the staff, may announce a state of emergency or martial law, and also responsible for higher education appointing the heads of state universities and members of the Conference of Rectors, and the Constitution authorises him to amend the financial law. Therefore, the Turkish president is conferred with an extremely wide circle of power, and while before there used to be a variety of brakes and counterweights to ensure political stability, in the future the functioning of the republic would depend on the personal view and understanding of the president. In the presidential system the president is elected as a candidate of a certain political party, thus representing and putting into practice the policy of his party.

The coup attempt itself and the preceding period may be viewed as the rivalry for power between two strong characters, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Fetullah Gülen. This rivalry was first realised in economic areas, with the Turkish state practically nationalising Bank Asya in

2015, one of the main monetary institutions providing financing to the Gülenists. Prosecution continued with liquidating a company network related to the movement having financial statements in mining, press and media as well. This also marked the beginning of the liquidation of the Gülenist media. In 2016 the movement's most popular newspaper, Zaman came to the same fate. Prohibition of Gülenist media platforms was regarded as the violation of press freedom by some. The constant restrictions of the Gülenist movement facilitates the complete liquidation of the organisation infiltrating every area of the state.

On July 15, 2016 certain corps of the Turkish Armed Forces attacked some institutions and thus the democratic order. Since the majority of the armed forces remained loyal to the government, a counterstrike was directed and the arrest of the perpetrators began. The coup attempt failed since the perpetrators did not have enough support from the nation or the military. According to the official explanation of the Turkish government, Gülen and his movement (FETÖ) was behind the failed coup attempt. After the coup attempt a state of emergency was declared in Turkey. More than 40,000 people were arrested and 150,000 were made subjects of investigative measures, being charged with FETÖ membership or supporting the coup attempt. All organisations with links to FETÖ – schools, dormitories, media and other enterprises, foundations and associations - were discontinued. Liquidation of FETÖ brought about numerous arrests and lays-off, therefore critics of the AK Parti regarded it as an attack on civil society, the autonomy of universities or press freedom. Several administrative measures were introduced in order to prevent further coup attempts, the most important of which is the overall reform of military education that may prevent the future generation of officers from turning against the Turkish state. After the failed coup attempt of 15 July there were several more unexpected resignations or forced resignations just like Davutoglu's had been, which may all be related to Erdogan's concentration of power.

### **3. Results**

The history of the Turkish Republic may be divided into two well separated periods: the single-party and the multiple-party period. While the single-party period was a kind of autarchy along Kemalist principles which, by its nature, aimed at creating stability, the multiple-party system introduced in 1946 and reinforced by the 1950 elections was not always able to eliminate factors of political and economic uncertainties. I analysed multiple events that influenced against stability or can be understood as a reaction to the lack of stability.

The constraint of coalition in Turkish politics – apart from the 2000’s – also acted against stability. The best example of the failure of multiple-party governments is the 1990’s, especially the second half, when completely different parties formed coalitions, but with their political programs they could not ensure stable government for more than a year. Furthermore, the army also interfered in political collisions by forcing the supposedly Islamism-rooted Refah party, led by Necmettin Erbakan to leave government. This case also underlines the most typical reactions originating from the lack of stability, namely, that the Turkish Armed Forces which consider themselves the keepers of secular and republican traditions interfered in political life even in the past two decades, albeit with decreasing intensity. The army conducted three coups during the period of the Republic, and, although managed to stabilise the country, hindered democratic development. It is an interesting paradox that Turkish Armed Forces considered the keepers of secular and republican traditions ruined democratic ethos and institutional stability themselves. Obviously, the army became a part of the problem, not the solution.

The above-mentioned facts resulted in two social phenomena. First, the constant coalition fights and conflicts of interest in politics and society had a negative influence on Turkish economy, creating runaway inflation and a widespread corruption that almost always characterises similar periods. Secondly, the exaggerated power of the army became more and more constraining in a NATO-member and EU-candidate Turkey and made the demilitarization of the country inevitable.

The period of coalitions was ended in 2002. The government of Bülent Ecevit practically failed, being unable to manage the natural and economic disasters without social tension. The government reacted to this situation with tactics taken from the West, that is, a neoliberal economic policy and restrictive measures.

Most Turkish voters voted on a total change of approach. This was managed best by the conservatives of the three sides of traditional Turkish political life (Kemalist-left, national and conservative) that formed their politics alongside religious values. The expectations of the masses influenced the decisions of political actors on multiple levels. Thus, it was not a surprise that conservatives established a new party, the Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) which could persuade the masses that the modern formation with well-known politicians will indeed stand up against corruption, rearrange economy and keep the army in their barracks. Furthermore AK Parti could mobilise masses by redefining national identity and using the methods of nationalism.

Apart from voters’ preferences and mobilisation methods, institutional structure also supported the AK Parti. Turkish elector system is characterised by an unusually high (10%)

parliament threshold. Due to this feature, even if AK Parti could not get absolute majority, they were able to form a government. During the next two elections they could further increase the number of votes, creating the “long decade” of Turkish history, when a certain political power reorganized society based on their particular principles, and create opportunities for the middle class, carry out major economic and social reforms, and last but not least, develop the infrastructure of the country markedly. This latter decreased the inequalities and social gap between Western and Eastern regions. The development of infrastructure also changed the character of western cities. Istanbul, Ankara or Bursa came to take after European cities. However, the fast transformation was difficult to follow for many, and it made the dark sides of the AK Parti government surface as well. In 2013 the development of downtown Istanbul Gezi Park brought about a wave of protests that started peacefully with the demands of environmentalist movements but became violent and turned into the search of a Western-like, liberal alternative with numerous elements of left-wing extremism in it.

The protests at Gezi Park were undoubtedly the most significant signs of crisis, but the ones at Gezi Park were not the only group that aimed at removing AK Parti from power. There was the old Kemalist elite among the enemies of the party as well, and also the military or civilian formations that were blamed with conspiracy by the government. The Kemalist elite revoked from power in 2002 attacked AK Parti on multiple fronts. One of their attempts was aimed at the prohibition of the party and used the Constitutional Court as well. Their attempt failed because the party was able to prove that – unlike its predecessors – it operates secularly even if it has religion-based values as well and does not contradict democratic and republican values. The other attempt of the Kemalist elite was related to the numerous military-backed conspirations. The most significant of these was the Ergenekon case. This ultranationalist group committed multiple murders and terrorist attacks, its so-called leader, the ex-chairman of staff, İlker Başbuğ was imprisoned for a while but the long trial only proved that the military is less and less able to overthrow any civilian government. All in all, it can be said that nowadays it is not governments that are loyal to the army, but on the contrary, the Turkish Armed Forces are the attendants of the government’s goal, as it is usual in a classic democracy. “Due to the reforms prescribed by the EU, the army lost its power that had seemed to become stronger after every coup, and their usual memorandums and political statements are less and less credible since their credibility was damaged by the Ergenekon- and the Balyoz-case and the trials following the 1980 and 1997 coup. These trials strengthened Turkish democracy and made it impossible for the army to overthrow the government elected by the nation.” (AKNUR, 2013, 146-147)

The most critical conflict testing the stability of the government was their decision to close down university preparatory schools. This seemingly educational policy measure was indeed the first accord of the liquidation of the “internal opposition”. Most preparatory courses were operated by “Hizmet”, the movement of the preacher Fethullah Gülen living in the USA. Gülen’s community may be regarded as “internal opposition”, since they had supported AK Parti with their votes for a long time, but they are also more than a mere internal opposition since they had their own political goals and therefore created a particular organisational order for their movement. Pro-government Turkish media calls this system that filled significant posts with their own members a “parallel structure”. This is exactly what makes the Gülen-movement strong. They are still able to defy AK Parti because the movement made preparations for decades and consists of members who would stand by their leader to the end.

As we can see from this list, the three consecutive victories at the elections, absolute majority and the authorisation by voters are still not enough for a government to be able to lead Turkey in stability for 13 years. It is my conviction that there are two more factors facilitating this, one related to the AK Parti, the other not. The factor related to the AK Parti is that it is not simply a program party, but they have their proprietary social, economic and political vision, it’s not just an ideological party, but they believe in their mission for history and the Turkish nation. This is mostly supported by the Vision of 2023 that aims to turn Turkey into a world power by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Turkish Republic, that is, 2023. Considering Turkish internal affairs from this point of view, AK Parti is a conservative party that took sides with progress for a long time, supports EU-accession and European values while not losing the world view of Turkishness and Islam. However, the biggest opposition party, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) defines itself as a progressive party while trying to entrench an old ruling elite and system.

The factor independent of the AK Parti is that the “new opposition” and the old parliamentary opposition trying to entrench the old elite behind recent conflicts cannot offer a credible alternative. This could mainly be expected from the groups we call “new opposition”. Protests at Gezi Park were against the system, Ak Party and Erdogan, but they could not accentuate a unified system of ideas that could address crowds. And mainly, it did not have a significant message to those disappointed with the Ak Parti. However, one effect is indisputable: events at Gezi Park directed the attention of the West on the Turkish opposition, and the Turkish opposition recognised the West as well, as a potential supporter and a source of ideology. Even if this Western liberalism influenced only a very narrow layer of city-dweller intellectuals, probably it will spread in Turkey during the following years and thus may create

a liberal circle similar to that of western states and may even become a decisive factor at parliamentary elections.

Opportunities of the classic opposition, that is, CHP, are restricted, results of the presidential elections showed that voters will not unconditionally accept a cooperation against AK Part without principles. The attempts of CHP are not able to mobilise even their own supporters, let alone address conservative or nationalist voters.

AK Parti has a particular national vision and does not have an opposition that is unified and able to show alternatives. In itself it enabled them to fulfill their mandate against all attempts at prohibition, memorandums, riots at Gezi Park or conspirations. However, we should also consider another significant factor, that is, AK Parti established the necessary spirit of compromise. At the beginning of the Gezi Park protests the party was still rigid, with Erdogan calling the protesters “a mob”. After a 3-week state of paralysis, exactly when the intensity of protests decreased, AK Parti took their own supporters to the streets and reconciled with the relatively moderate of the protesters.

It should also be stressed that during the government of AK Parti two different periods are to be distinguished, with a ceasure between the two in 2013. At this time, it became obvious that democratisation policy will be interrupted by the fight against the Gülenist Movement named Fethullah Terrorist Organisation, FETÖ. Although FETÖ had tried to get their members in key positions for decades, by this time they got to the level to be able to overthrow the democratic order of state with strong political, and later military steps, take over political power, and later, just like in the case of Iran, turn the secular Turkey into a religious state. The first step against FETÖ was to cut off their most significant source of income and close down their schools, the “dershanes”, providing popular preparatory courses where students were to pay a significant tuition fee. FETÖ first tried to strike back financially: in 2013, prosecutors belonging to FETÖ charged numerous government-related individuals – among others the children of 3 ministers – with corruption. The fight between FETÖ and the government culminated during the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. Open fight between 2013 and 2016 and the consecutive 2 years of state of emergency forced the AK Parti to give up their efforts in democratization in order to carry out a radical reform of the Turkish political system to enable the Republic to defend itself from an internal enemy.

The two eras are also different in the meaning that Erdogan’s and the AK Parti’s mechanism of exercise of power also changed significantly. After coming to power in 2002 the party and the government seemed a community of brethren where Erdogan was just one of the talented and influential politicians. But other significant leaders of the party like Abdullah Gül, Ahmet



Davutoğlu, Bülent Arınç, Cemil Çiçek, Ali Babacan etc were gradually marginalised and the government of the country shifted towards single-person leadership. While multiple charismatic politicians shaped Turkish politics Erdogan was also forced to compromise with them.

The result of the 2018 elections also shows that Erdogan is still popular, more popular than his own party, and with his victory and the gradual stabilisation after the coup attempt, he has a chance to return the democratization process and consultative leadership carried out before 2013. If he can step over the complicated system of political loyalties and support his government with recognised economic experts like Ali Babacan the brakes and counterweights inherent in the system might be re-evaluated.

To sum up, my theses were acknowledged: between 2002 and 2013 under the government of the AK Parti a democratization process was in progress in Turkey. By democratization I mean the construction of a new system of institutions that provided a framework for the free expression of opinion and enabled Turkish citizens and state administrators to avoid constraints. One of the first measures of the AK Parti government was the expansion of the freedom of press and opinion. These initial steps got the Turkish used to the idea of constant changes throughout the political system and they could feel their direct influence on private, professional and public life. At the same time there was an enlivenment in civil society and initiations as well. Apart from political stabilisation, the era between 2002 and 2005 also brought about increasing economic and financial stabilisation and a spectacular infrastructural development. This process improved the financial situation of Turkish citizens, which, in turn, further promoted civil society. This resulted in a wide variety of voices made heard, including critics of the government. More and more people dared to criticise the less and less democratic decision-making process.

In 2013 the events at Gezi Park showed that those in power, the political elite and Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself made decision over the heads of the people. Many deemed it arrogant that the government decides on building to a popular green area and the reaction of power was regarded as precluding to freedom of press and assembly. Police brutality also shocked the public. The main significance of the Gezi Park events is that they accentuated that the democratization process was in a crisis. The other significant event in 2013, that is, the wave of arrests also shows that the elite broke off the common crowds financially as well. The fact that members of the government and their families were charged with corruption may have suggested that freedom itself had become relative in Turkish society. Instead of conducting an investigation about the corruption charges, the government cynically dubbed them as a “conspiracy theory”. At this point the Turkish man of the street might have felt that while

members of the elite may even commit injustice and still will be protected by those in power, he himself is under an increasing pressure. The government tried to influence the institutional system by putting pressure on the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK). The government trying to abuse their power to be promptly informed about ongoing investigations was also contradictory to the democratisation process. At the same time, even the increasing pressure could not silence voices of criticism and 15 members of the HSYK protested attacks directed at them. This also shows that the democratisation process between 2002 and 2013 had its influence on Turkish society and civil courage did not disappear at once when the government did not pay enough attention to the separation of powers. It is also part of the weakening of the democratisation process that the parliament group of AK Parti was trying to find a legal solution to the political conflict created by the accusations of corruption instead of a political one. They did not start a discussion about the source of the crisis and initiate an investigation, as could be expected in a constitutional state, but they initiated a constitutional reform almost immediately. This initiation may also be regarded as a strong pursuit of centralisation since according to the original plan, members of HSYK or at least their majority were to be elected by the parliament.

In the end this reaction demonstrated that while up to 2013 legislation was one of the main devices of democratisation, after 2013 it was employed as a tool of keeping and centralising power. It means that although formally and operationally Turkey may still be regarded a democratic system, it is distancing itself from the ideals of Europe and the European Union, and single-person leadership started to dominate which brings about a number of issues. Among them the most disquieting is the fact that the president acquires too much power being the sole person deciding about the appointment of ministers and leading members of government, dissolving the parliament and declare early elections. The new system also entitles the president to govern by regulations disregarding the parliament. International opinion also views the fact that the president can be the member of a political party and therefore representing the interests of his own party instead of the general public as the weakening of the democratisation process. A major argument against political transition is the fact that appointing members of the HSYK is also concentrated in the hands of the president, therefore the results that could not be achieved by the parliament after 2013 were realised by the transition to the presidential system.

Scenarios of democratisation

Turkey has been democratised and has further potentials of democratisation but cannot be set on a Western-style path of development. There are four scenarios worth considering that will decide if the 2018 transition to the presidential system will entrench a certain system or just create a framework for development. In the first scenario, political insecurity will become permanent in Turkey. This is mostly the characteristic of the divided opposition and has multiple sources. AK Parti as the governing party seems much more unified. Insecurity benefits Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AK Parti. In the second scenario, the injustice encoded in the system will increase and the opposition will get less fulfilment. The political system will increasingly be adjusted to the political ideals of the AK Parti and will be further away from the republic regarded ideal by CHP. The third scenario builds on the idea that Erdogan will not stop at the present level and will not be satisfied by the introduction of the presidential system but wants to build a single-person governing style. In the fourth scenario, the popularity of Recep Tayyip Erdogan will decrease significantly, and the opposition gains more room for manoeuvre by which they can force back Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AK Party to the path of democratisation started before 2013.

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