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Turkey's democratic impasse: Resurfacing Islamism or business as usual in the political centre?*

Any observer of Turkish politics today would easily admit that the democratic glamour of the AKP's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – Justice and Development Party) first term in power is long over. When the AKP was founded back in August 2001, the party bylaws introduced several mechanisms designed to prevent leader-domination and ensure intra-party democracy within the limits imposed by the Turkish political parties law¹. More importantly, between 2002 and 2004, in an effort to meet the Copenhagen criteria the first AKP cabinet undertook several institutional reforms that undercut the Turkish military's influence over civilian politics². The political parties law was modified such that party closures became more difficult, if not impossible³. On the human rights front, full abolition of the death penalty was achieved in January 2004, and important changes were made to the Turkish Penal Code (TPC) to prevent cases of torture and ill treatment. The annulment of article 8 of the anti-terror law, as well as the amendment of article 8 of the Constitution, brought about a relative improvement in the freedom of thought and press area. Despite their notable shortcomings, certain other advances related to the status of women and children were made through TPC reforms. In the minority rights area, the most significant development was the start of broadcasts and language instruction in Kurdish. The determination and speed with

¹ E. OZBUDUN, *From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: the Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey*, in «South European Society & Politics», 11, 2006, pp. 543-557; S. TEPE, *Turkey's AKP: A Model "Muslim-democratic" Party?*, in «Journal of Democracy», 16, pp. 69-82.

² For a comprehensive analysis of EU accession reforms adopted by Turkey see M.M. BAC, *The Impact of the European Union on Turkish Politics*, in «East European Quarterly», 34, 2000, pp.159-177; M.M. BAC, *Turkey's Political Reforms and the Impact of the European Union*, in «South European Society and Politics», 10, 2005, pp. 17-31

³ When considering party closure cases, the Turkish Constitutional Court is now allowed to cut, fully or partially, the state's financial support to a political party without closing it down. This sanction was put into practice in the closure case filed against the AKP in March 2008 for becoming a "focal point of anti-secular activities". The Court declared its final decision in July 2008 finding the AKP guilty of anti-secular activities, but deemed it sufficient to cut half of the state aid that the party receives from the state treasury.

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Abstract

Any observer of Turkish politics today would easily admit that the democratic glamour of the AKP's first term in power is long over. The downward trend in question roughly began with the shelving of the EU accession reforms in 2005, continued with a number of controversial amendments regarding the authority of the security forces and freedom of expression, and culminated in the stillborn initiatives of 2009 to improve the status of Kurdish and Alevi citizens. This analysis aims to both overview some of these problematic policy areas and to account for the government's recent flirtations with a mild form of authoritarianism by placing it in the context of post-1980 *coup d'état* Turkey. In this respect, it claims that the particular way in which the AKP has come to occupy the political centre by combining economic liberalism with religiously-informed social conservatism is the key to understanding this picture.

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(* The opinions expressed herein are strictly personal and do not necessarily reflect the position of ISPI.

which the governing AKP undertook the above-mentioned political reforms culminated in the EU's December 2004 decision to start accession negotiations, a turning point in Turkey's quest for EU membership.

However, roughly starting from 2005, EU-Turkey relations have increasingly become lukewarm as the government slowed down the pace of accession reforms to the point of virtual stalemate. Inside the AKP, the democratic party by-laws were gradually rolled back through successive amendments⁴. The Prime Minister R.T. Erdogan currently rules the party in a highly personalized manner with firm control over all the main nominations and with almost zero tolerance of intra-party opposition⁵.

In addition to the stalled accession reforms and the erosion of intra-party democracy, in the post-2005 period the AKP undertook several policy steps that have proven rather controversial in terms of their democratic qualities. A corollary to these developments has been a significant rise in social and political polarization based on people's attitude to the government overlapping with already existing social cleavages such as centre-periphery and Islamism-secularism⁶. All in all, today in Turkey one is hard-pressed to find the minimum degree of consensus that is indispensable for conducting reasoned public debate.

So, what went wrong? Why could the AKP not live up to its initial pro-democratization promises? This analysis aims first to provide a brief overview of the main policy areas where governmental actions have led to an erosion of Turkish citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms. Second, it aims to make sense of the AKP's recent flirtations with authoritarian practices by placing it in the context of post-1980 *coup d'état* Turkey. In this respect, the author contends that the illiberal/authoritarian turn in governmental policies does not have much to do with a retreat back to political Islamism. An alternative interpretation can be constructed at the intersection of religiously-informed socio-cultural conservatism and free market economics, which are two central pillars of the AKP's centrist ideological platform.

Civil and political rights: A worrying picture

The EU reforms of the 2002-2004 period brought about certain improvements on the human rights front. Yet these improvements remained limited to human rights violations inside formal detention facilities, with more and more cases of ill-treatment reported outside such facilities⁷. Moreover, starting from 2005 and more markedly from 2007 onwards, many human rights organizations began to report significant increases in cases of torture, arbitrary shootings, disproportionate use of power and similar types of abuse of authority by the security forces⁸.

⁴ S. COSAR - A. OZMAN, *Centre-right Politics in Turkey after the November 2002 General Election: Neo-liberalism with a Muslim Face*, in «Contemporary Politics», 10, 2004, pp. 57-74; TEPE, op. cit.

⁵ H.YAVUZ, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*. New York, 2009, pp. 100-105.

⁶ The distribution of the results of the constitutional referendum that took place on the 12th of September, 2010 illustrated this phenomenon very well by showing the existence of a near one-to-one correspondence between one's party affiliation and its stance towards the new constitution drafted by the AKP. According to a public opinion poll conducted by Konda Research and Consultancy Company, out of a total of 77% voter turnout, only 5 to 10% made up their mind according to the content of the reform package, while the rest said yes or no according to their party affiliation. T. ERDEM, *Kutuplasma AKP'ye yaradı [Polarization benefitted the AKP]*, in «Radikal», September 20, 2010, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=RadikalYazarYazisi&ArticleID=1019795>. For more on various dimensions of the recent social and political polarization in Turkey see the report, B. AGIRDIR, *Toplumda ve Siyasette Kutuplasma [Polarization in Politics and Society]*, Konda Research and Consultancy Company, June 2010, http://www.konda.com.tr/html/dosyalar/ToplumdaSiyasetteKutuplasma_Haziran2010.pdf (accessed September 10, 2009). For a broader historical perspective see, W. HALE - E. OZBUDUN, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: the Case of the AKP*. London and New York, 2009.

⁷ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (HRW), *Press Release: Turkey: Rising police violence goes unpunished*, December 5, 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/12/05/turkey-rising-police-violence-goes-unpunished> (accessed February 15, 2009).

⁸ 'Engin Ceberleri' ihlal raporu [Violation of 'Engin Cebers' report], in «ntvmsnbc.com», October 17, 2008, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/462730.asp>; HRW, op. cit.

One encounters a similar picture with regard to freedom of expression and press. The number of people prosecuted for expressing their opinions increased exponentially from 192 in 2005 to 1013 in 2006, with the year 2007 seeing a doubling of the figures recorded in 2006⁹. According to the latest statistics provided by the International Press Institute's Turkey branch, over 40 journalists are currently imprisoned while the number of those with ongoing court cases filed under various articles of the TPC, anti-terror law and press laws is around 700¹⁰. On a more personal note, the prime minister himself currently holds an all-time record among the politicians of the Republic for over 100 suits for damages he brought against his critics, predominantly from the press, in the first 4 years of his premiership¹¹. Similarly, according to OSCE figures, as of December 2009 around 3700 websites were allegedly blocked in Turkey. They included You Tube, Geocities, Dailymotion and Google, as well as news sites dealing with the Kurdish minority and gay community issues¹².

The key to understanding the role of governmental policies in this picture lies in a series of amendments made to the anti-terror law in June 2006, in the Law on the Powers and Duties of the Police (LPDP) in June 2007, and in Article 301 of the TPC in April 2008. Internet bans, on the other hand, have Law No. 5651, enacted in May 2007, as their main legal basis. This law was passed to combat online crimes and to protect families and children from harmful content¹³. Since its enactment, the law has attracted a considerable amount of criticism from organizations such as Reporters without Borders and the OSCE, for its causing "arbitrary and political" bans on the Internet and thereby violating Turkish citizens' freedom of expression¹⁴. Among the various flaws of the law that pave the ground for such violations is Article 10, listing a number of crimes that could cause site blockings even if there is only "adequate suspicion". The institution charged with overseeing the law's application and carrying out blocking orders, the Telecommunications Communication Presidency (*Telekomunikasyon İletişim Başkanlığı – TIB*)¹⁵, has also been criticized for its lack of transparency as well as for its tendency to interpret the spirit of the law in the most restrictive way¹⁶.

The changes in the anti-terror law were introduced following a long wave of street protests in south-eastern Kurdish provinces, involving serious clashes between protesters and security forces. In addition to extending the scope of what constitutes a terrorist act, these amendments foresaw considerable increases in the capacity of state forces to prosecute and punish suspects¹⁷. In combination with another article of the TPC, since then the anti-terror law has formed the legal basis for the conviction of hun-

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ INTERNATIONAL PRESS INSTITUTE, *Turkey's IPI National Committee Joins Other Turkish Media Organizations in Launch of Campaign against Imprisonment of Journalists*, August 26, 2010, <http://www.freemedia.at/singleview/5120/> (accessed October 26, 2010).

¹¹ M. İLKNUR, *Erdogan cok alingan* [Erdogan takes offense easily], in «Cumhuriyet», January 13, 2007.

¹² The Youtube block was lifted in October 2010 by the ruling of an Ankara court. For the legal review of internet bans in Turkey, commissioned by the OSCE, see Y. AKDENİZ, *Report of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on Turkey and Internet Censorship*, 2010, <http://www.osce.org/item/42294.html> (accessed November 10, 2010).

¹³ Some 200 websites were blocked by the end of May 2009 by court orders for reasons beyond the scope of the Law 5651 such as the provisions of the anti-Terror law or the Article 301 of the TPC despite the fact that there is no legal basis for ordering site blockings for crimes not defined in the Article 8 of the Law 5651. Y. AKDENİZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21.

¹⁴ OSCE, *Press Release: Turkey's Internet Law needs to be reformed or abolished, says OSCE media freedom representative*, January 18, 2010, <http://www.osce.org/item/42372.html> (accessed October 19, 2010); REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS, *Countries under Surveillance: Turkey*, <http://en.rsf.org/surveillance-turkey,36675.html> (accessed October 19, 2010).

¹⁵ The TIB was established by the AKP government in August 2005 for the centralized surveillance and interception of communications.

¹⁶ As of May 2009, the TIB was responsible for about 80% of the site bans in effect. Y. AKDENİZ, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁷ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Basin aciklamasi: Turkiye: Terorle Mucadele Yasasina iliskin genis kapsamli, keyfi ve kisitlayici degisiklik tasarisi konusunda brifing* [Press release: Turkey: Briefing on the comprehensive, arbitrary and restrictive draft proposal regarding the Anti-terror law], June 13, 2006, http://www.amnesty.org.tr/yeni/index.php?view=article&catid=70&id=524&option=com_content (accessed January 7, 2009); HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION (HRA), *Press Release: Human Rights Association's opinions on changes in anti-terror law*, April 30, 2006, http://www.ihd.org.tr/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=107:human-rights-associations-opinions-on-changes-in-anti-terror-law&catid=13:headquarters&Itemid=29 (accessed January 7, 2009).

dreds of children in the region – around 1500 during 2006 and 2007 alone – under various charges including participating in anti-government protests and throwing stones on security forces¹⁸. In addition, publication of the Kurdish daily *Azadiya Welat* has been suspended several times and its editor-in-chief sentenced to over 160 years in prison, again under the same law.

On the other hand, the June 2007 changes in the LPDP have given unprecedented discretionary powers to the police regarding the use of lethal force and the conditions for stopping and searching citizens¹⁹. Following the amendment, cases of ill-treatment and abuse of physical force by security forces, including arbitrary shootings, have literally skyrocketed²⁰. The issue was carried to parliament with demands from the opposition for a reversal of the changes introduced in June 2007. The government declared the law flawless in terms of legal design, and put the blame on the security forces that “misinterpret” it²¹.

Article 301 of the TPC defines “insulting Turkishness” as a criminal act. To date, this article has formed the legal pretext for the prosecution of many prominent journalists, intellectuals and writers, including Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk, under freedom of opinion-related charges²². Moreover, defendants in 301-related lawsuits have often become targets of lynching campaigns by ultra-nationalist groups. One such campaign culminated in the January 2007 assassination of the Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, who was being prosecuted under Article 301-related charges for the third time at the time of his death²³. The article was modified in April 2008 under pressure from both human rights activists and the EU. Yet the changes of 2008 merely altered the indictment procedure by subjecting it to the approval of the justice minister, while keeping the nationalist core of the article – insulting Turkishness – intact. As a result, despite significant decreases in the overall figures, 83 people have still been subjected to prosecution under Article 301 since the amendment²⁴.

Is the Kurdish “opening” going down the drain?

The Kurdish “opening” has arguably been one of the most exciting developments of the last year in Turkish politics. In October 2009 the AKP government took the political initiative to resolve the long-standing Kurdish problem through a series of democratic reforms. Following the official declaration of

¹⁸ Y. TURKER, *Kendi çocuklarinizdan utanin [Be ashamed of your own children]*, in «Radikal», March 16, 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazarYazisi&Date=&ArticleID=92639>.

¹⁹ For more on the amendments, see HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION OF TURKEY (HRFT), *Human Rights Foundation of Turkey UPR Submission for the 8th Session Turkey*, <http://www.tihv.org.tr/index.php?TArkiye-AEnsan-HaklarAE-VakfAE-Human-Rights-Foundation-of-Turkey-UPR-Submission-for-the-8th-Session-Turkey> (accessed October 20, 2010).

²⁰ HRW, op. cit.

²¹ *AKP ‘Polis vurmasin’a karsi [AKP against legislative proposal on police powers]*, in «Radikal», November 13, 2008, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&Date=22.11.2008&ArticleID=909555&CategoryID=77>.

²² According to official figures, only in the years 2006 and 2007, 1042 people were brought before the Turkish courts under 301-related charges. 309 defendants, 6 of which were children, were found guilty in the same period. *301’den 309 kisi mahkum [309 people convicted under 301]*, in «Taraf», February 12, 2009, <http://www.taraf.com.tr/haber/301den-309-kisi-mahkum.htm>. Other articles of the Turkish Penal Code, including no.s 215, 216, 220/8, 222, 288 and 318, as well as the clause no. 7/2 of the modified Anti-terror Law have also been extensively used by state authorities to persecute citizens under freedom of expression related charges. For more on the state of press freedoms, see the report, TURKISH PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION, *2008 Yılı Yayinlama Ozgurlugu Raporu [2008 Publication Freedoms Report]*, <http://www.turkyaybir.org.tr/index.asp?sayfa=uygulamadetay&dil=tr&ID=44> (accessed February 12, 2009).

²³ In January 2007, before his death, Dink had appealed his conviction under the Article 301 of the TPC to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) as a violation of the Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights on the freedom of expression. His family filed another suit post-mortem to the ECHR this time for the violation of his right to life. The Court combined the two cases, and ruled, in September 2010, that the «the [Turkish] authorities failed in their duty to protect the life and freedom of expression of the journalist Firat (Hrant) Dink». For more on the ECHR’s judgement, see ECHR, *Press release issued by the Registrar regarding “Dink vs Turkey (applications no. 2668/07, 6102/08, 30079/08, 7072/09 and 7124/09)”*, <http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?action=html&documentId=873693&portal=hbkm&source=externalbydocnumber&table=F69A27FD8FB86142BF01C1166DEA398649> (accessed November 5, 2010).

²⁴ *Bakan Ergin: Uc yilda 83 kisi 301’lik oldu [Minister Ergin: Only 83 people prosecuted under 301 in 3 years]*, in «Radikal», May 25, 2010, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalHaberDetay&ArticleID=998646&CategoryID=97>.

the initiative, a society-wide debate began along with rising hopes for a consensual, non-violent way out of the ethnic conflict that has been ravaging the south-eastern regions of Turkey for the last thirty years.

Yet a year passed by with no concrete steps taken by the government as part of its much trumpeted Kurdish “opening”, renamed firstly as the “democratic opening” and then as the “project of national unity and brotherhood” in clear contradiction to its putative pluralist spirit. Moreover, as the opening has unfolded, the Kurdish political movement has paradoxically been subjected to a number of oppressive legal and political measures, alienating a sizable section of the Kurdish population from the process. To begin with, the Kurdish *Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (Democratic Society Party –DTP) with 21 seats in the parliament, was closed down by the Constitutional Court in December 2009. 37 of its members received 5 year political bans and 2 deputies lost their seats in parliament. The AKP in turn adopted a complacent attitude to the decision, by emphasizing the alleged links between the DTP and the Kurdish separatist organization PKK, and by making analogies between the DTP and the Herri Batasuna case in Spain²⁵. After the closure, DTP politicians established a new party, *Baris ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party –BDP). Meanwhile, pictures of several humiliated and hand-cuffed DTP/BDP affiliated mayors hit the world news, casting further shadow on the government’s good will regarding the Kurdish issue. The arrests came as a result of a series of police operations which began in April 2009, targeting the illegal Kurdish organization KCK (*Koma Ciwaken Kurdistan* - Kurdistan Union of Peoples). Since then, around 1500 Kurdish politicians including top leaders of the DTP/BDP and several party-affiliated mayors have been placed under arrest awaiting trial²⁶.

This was not the first time that such incidents have taken place. For instance, in the run-up to the March 29th 2009 local elections, several local politicians were prosecuted for using Kurdish in their electoral campaigns while the much-celebrated state channel TRT 6 was making its first broadcasts in Kurdish²⁷. The fact that the AKP considers the DTP/BDP to be its most formidable electoral rival in the south-eastern provinces is crucial for understanding this contradictory picture i.e. more state repression of Kurdish politicians during a period of democratic reform. In order to appeal to the Kurdish electorate without alienating both the nationalist voters and the establishment forces, the party seems to have opted for a strategy of sidelining the DTP/BDP in the process of resolution of the Kurdish problem. Yet not only is this strategy anti-democratic, it is also counter-productive as it amounts to nothing less than the exclusion of legally elected representatives of Kurds from the negotiations, a move likely to breed further resentment and violence.

Conclusions

To go back to the initial question, how to make sense of the authoritarian trend that has been increasingly characterizing the AKP’s policies since 2005, the author contends that political Islamism, understood strictly as vying for the establishment of a Sharia-based state, is not the root cause of the trend in question. Rather, the AKP phenomenon should be seen as the latest incarnation in the political arena, of the ideological supremacy of free market economics and Islamic social conservatism, both of which were institutionalized in Turkish politics in the aftermath of the 1980 *coup d’état* by the military junta.

While a comprehensive discussion of the reasons behind the 1980 intervention and its consequences is beyond the scope of this paper, here it suffices to say that the masterminds were primarily interested in eliminating class-based political contestation to pre-empt the social unrest likely to result from the massive

²⁵ O. CALISLAR, *AK Partililer DTP'nin kapatilmasini mi istiyor?* [Do AKP members want the closure of the DTP?], in «Radikal», December 11, 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=968628&Yazar=ORALÇALIŞLAR&Date=11.12.2009&CategoryID=98>.

²⁶ A. INSEL, *KCK davalari ve AKP* [KCK operations and the AKP], in «Radikal», October 17, 2010, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalEklerDetay&ArticleID=1024286&Date=20.10.2010&CategoryID=42>.

²⁷ TURKISH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STUDIES FOUNDATION (TESEV), *Kurdish Question*, <http://www.tesev.org.tr/default.asp?PG=DMK04EN01> (accessed October 7, 2010). The electoral law in question has been modified in April 2010 so as to allow electoral propaganda in languages other than Turkish.

neoliberal restructuring of the Turkish economy in the post-1980 era²⁸. This could only be achieved by eroding institutional checks and balances on the executive branch of the state - which would take over the project when the soldiers returned to their barracks - while simultaneously suppressing the left-wing opposition²⁹. In addition, the junta adopted an ideological construct known as the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" that underlined the unity of the Turkish nation on the basis of ethnic Turkishness and Sunni Islam, to facilitate the depoliticization of new generations through its dissemination via the educational system³⁰. The centre-right political tradition adapted itself to this post-1980 ideological atmosphere with relative ease because economic liberalism and Islamic social conservatism have always been part and parcel of the Turkish centre-right's worldview³¹. All in all, ideological congruity coupled with the majoritarian biases of the new electoral and political parties laws meant that right-wing centrism would be the dominant political force of post-1980 Turkey.

From this perspective, the AKP can be seen as the re-absorption of religious right - an unintentional by-product of Islam-friendly state policies within the context of widespread impoverishment brought on by economic restructuring - into the political centre, provided that the former shed their religious integralist goals and their reservations about free market capitalism. The party has undertaken bold reforms to diminish the military and the judiciary's influence over civilian politics, and the contribution of these steps to Turkish democratization can hardly be questioned. Yet the authoritarian imprint of the 1980 intervention in the Turkish polity runs much deeper than this. One such imprint is the dominance of the executive, including the presidency and the cabinet, over other branches of the state. Another is the 10% national electoral threshold that has been favouring large parties at the expense of political pluralism. Compulsory religion classes are also cases in point, because they have become one of the main state instruments for reinforcing the cultural dominance of Sunni Islam. Still another legacy is the Higher Education Board (*Yuksek Ogrenim Kurumu* -YOK) created by the military junta to subject universities to centralized state control.

The AKP has done very little so far to address these major democratic deficiencies. Moreover, it has consistently turned a blind eye to calls for the abolition of the 10% electoral threshold as well as the compulsory religion classes, in addition to the expansion of the powers of the YOK after its presidency was passed to a name close to governmental circles. Combined with the more recent restrictions introduced on individual rights and freedoms mentioned above, the AKP's understanding of democratization currently seems rather particularistic and self-serving, as well as being captive of its electoral pragmatism.

The government's commitment to free market economics, on the other hand, has proven so solid that its economic track record since 2002 has made it the most ambitious promoter of economic liberalism in recent Turkish history. On the positive side, these structural reforms have brought about strong and stable growth rates along with general macroeconomic stability in addition to turning Turkey into a magnet for foreign investors. Yet, they have also created severe social dislocations, and led to the economic marginalization of certain sectors of the society. The government has so far accommodated the "losers" of structural reforms through ad hoc populist policies, that more often than not reflect a religious charity mentality instead of a rights-based approach that address the needs of all citizens from a redistributive

²⁸ C. KEYDER. *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development*. London & New York 1987, pp. 197-228.

²⁹ S. COSAR - A. OZMAN, op. cit, pp. 57-59; S. CAM, *Institutional Oppression and Neo-Liberalism in Turkey*, Cardiff School of Social Sciences, Working Paper no. 81, 2006, <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/resources/wrkpaper-81.pdf> (accessed July 5, 2010).

³⁰ B. TOPRAK, *Religion as State Ideology in a Secular Setting: The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis*, in M. WAGSTAFF (ed.), *Aspects of Religion in Secular Turkey*, Occasional Paper Series no. 40, Durham, UK, University of Durham Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, 1990.

³¹ N. MERT, *DP'den AKP'ye merkez sagin kisa tarihi* [A short history of centre-right from the DP to the AKP], in «Radikal», June 10-16, 2007, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=223676>.

perspective³². Yet, when populist policies have not sufficed to buy off consent, it has frequently resorted to authoritarian measures, as evidenced by several episodes of police violence during May Day demonstrations and by its hostile attitude towards the workers of the now-privatized state monopoly, TEKEL.

Accordingly, getting the Turkish democratization process back on track will depend on the revitalization of an effective socio-political opposition to the excesses of executive power, whether they originate from establishment forces ever-ready to tinker with democratic processes or from civilian politicians trying to impose an imagined ethno-religious unity, together with free-market discipline, in a country like Turkey that is characterized by severe social divisions along class, religious and ethnic lines. In this revitalization, domestic political actors certainly have a great role to play in terms of organizing and channelling social dissent in independent and constructive ways.

The EU's role is equally crucial in that it has proven to be the strongest external anchor of Turkish democratization in the last decade, and it still can continue to play this constructive role notwithstanding the on-going stalemate in Turkey-EU relations. In this respect, the Union first needs to go beyond its rather reductionist perspective on the consolidation of Turkish democracy focused almost exclusively on assuring civilian control over the military establishment. As this policy brief attempted to make it clear, the current deficiencies of Turkish democracy originate not only from the words and deeds of military officials but also from those of civilian politicians. Second, while assessing the success of accession reforms, the Union should be more sensitive about the possibility that accession reforms are instrumentalized by local actors to achieve certain particularistic objectives. For instance, State Security Courts (*Devlet Guvenlik Mahkemeleri* - DGM) were abolished in 2004 by the governing AKP, and replaced with High Criminal Courts with Special Powers (*Ozel Yetkili Agir Ceza Mahkemeleri*). Yet the latter have become the prime venue for the trial and imprisonment of hundreds of underage protestors mainly of Kurdish origin since their establishment³³. In short, many reforms that are supposed to lead to further democratization may paradoxically end up reproducing authoritarian practices they aim to overcome originally.

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³² *Ayşe Bugra'yla mulakat: Asil mesele 'sadikan politik iktisadi* [Interview with Ayşe Bugra: the real issue is the political economy of charity], in «Milliyet», February 23, 2009, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yardim-mi---font-color-darkblue-rusvet-mi---font-guncel/haberdetayarsiv/09.11.2010/1063049/default.htm>.

³³ According to the statistics of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, the new courts heard 2400 cases and sentenced 175 children in the last 4 years whereas the State security courts heard 2601 cases and condemned 624 children in 13 years of its existence. '*Tas atan cocuk davalarinda eski DGM'leri arar haldeyiz*' [In the cases of children throwing stones, we almost miss the old DGMs], in «Radikal». February 10, 2010, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalHaberDetay&ArticleID=979541&Date=10.02.2010&CategoryID=98>.