

# Sule Toktas

---

## Political parties, elections and democracy: A close-up on the political history of Turkey

---

Studia Politicae Universitatis Silesiensis 10, 83-98

---

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Şule Toktaş

## Political parties, elections and democracy: A close-up on the political history of Turkey

**Abstract:** The dynamics of contemporary Turkish politics has its roots in several crucial issues in the history of the Republic. Bearing in mind the classic periodization, the author attempts to outline the characteristic features of decisive periods in political history of Turkey, particularly: the problems accompanying the transition from single party semi-authoritarianism to multi-party politics. The paper introduces the reader into intricacies of the Turkish parliamentary system, which is instructive to understand the country's present orientation towards EU accession.

**Key words:** Turkish parliamentary system, authoritarianism, single party rule, multi-party politics, periodization

### Introduction

It is very common that Turkish political history is categorized into periods determined by party systems and the constitutions functional in those time intervals.<sup>1</sup> The classic periodization of Turkish political history is the Single Party Period, the Multi-Party Period and the post-1980 Period. Having utilized the classic approach, this article aims to draw out the general characteristics of the historical periods in question with a focus on the reforms taken in various fields of political sphere in a chronological order. Thus, the article will first deal with the notion of Republicanism and the consequent measures during the

---

<sup>1</sup> There are several examples of periodization adopted in various studies on Turkish politics which include among others: M. Heper: *State Tradition in Turkey*. North Humberstone 1985; E. Kalaycıoğlu: *Turkish Dynamics. Bridge across Troubled Lands*. New York 2005; F. Ahmad: *The Making of Modern Turkey*. New York 1993.

foundational years of the Republic. In this first part, the Single Party Period covering the years 1923—1945 will be under focus. In the second part, the discussion will be carried out with the Multi-Party Period and the events that occurred between 1945 and 1980. With the transition from the single-party system to a multi-party system, the rules of democracy in Turkey changed phase. New political elite with a new political agenda marked the interval periods up which from time to time met with suspicion from the bureaucratic and the military elite evidenced by two military interventions in democracy in 1960 and in 1971. The article will lay out the major changes and resistances to the transition of multi-party politics. In the third part, the post-1980 Period will be scrutinized with a review of the events all of which can be considered as a socio-political legacy of Turkish politics. The last part of the article makes a summary of the discussion developed throughout the paper and concludes by remarks that would highlight the general trends in Turkish political life.

## The single party period: authoritarianism vs. republicanism

The victory of Turkey in the Independence War (1919—1922) ended in the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne with the Allied Forces. The Treaty is considered the founding treaty of the Republic of Turkey as it internationally recognized Turkey as an independent, sovereign and legitimate state. The Treaty was followed by the proclamation of the Republic in 1923 by the Turkish government in Ankara, the capital.

Turkey as a country that emerged from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire and the wars (WWI and the Independence War) did not present a prolific ground for democracy. The economy was in ruins; there were internal power struggles; the education level of the population in general was very low; and sustaining unity and cohesion were hard tasks in front of the country's political elite. All the developments in terms of politics, state administration, culture and economy were formulated and initiated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk — the prominent national leader of Turkey and the ruling party of the time — the Republican People's Party (CHP). In this regard, the Single Party Period, that is the years between 1923 and 1945, is primarily marked by a cadre of elites who founded the hallmarks of the Kemalist regime driven by the economic, cultural, social and political reforms known as the Kemalist Reforms or the Kemalist Revolution.<sup>2</sup> These reforms laid down the basic principles for

---

<sup>2</sup> E.J. Zürcher: *Turkey, A Modern History*. London 1997; E. Özbudun: "Development of Democratic Government in Turkey: Crises, Interruptions and Re-equilibrations". In: *Perspectives on Democracy in Turkey*. Ed. E. Özbudun. Ankara 1988, pp. 1—53.

government and modern state in Turkey. For that reason, the formation years are also called the Early Republican Period.

In the Single Party Period, extraordinary measures and reform programmes were initiated that addressed Turkey's advancement to the level of "contemporary civilizations". In terms of direction, the address pointed to was Western civilizations. Therefore, it is clear that the modernization reforms taken in this period pinpoint Turkey's ideal for westernization. In other words, modernization, in the Turkish context, referred to westernization.<sup>3</sup>

There had been several social, cultural and educational reforms, some of which are the abolition of the Caliphate, the ratification of the Republic's first constitution and the unification of different kinds of schools under a national education system in 1924; the adoption of the Hat and Clothing Law that prescribed Western codes of attire in daily life, the introduction of secular educational system and the adoption of the Western calendar and timing system in 1925; the adoption of the Civil Law (the Swiss Code) in 1926; the introduction of the Industry Law, introduction of the Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic one and the change of language (from Arabic to Turkish) of the Islamic call to prayer in 1928; the withdrawal of Persian and Arabic language courses from the schools in 1929; granting women's right to vote in local elections in 1930; the adoption of the Western measuring system and the foundation of the Turkish History Institution in 1931; the foundation of the Turkish Language Institution in 1932; granting women's right to vote and be elected in general elections and the adoption of the Law on Surnames in 1934; and the amendment to the 1924 Constitution and the introduction of Article 2 stating that the Turkish state is a secular state in 1937.

All the above-mentioned reforms aimed that policies specifically regarding: a) nation-building; b) secularization; c) modernization and westernization; d) democratization; and e) state formation. The introduction of the constitution in 1924 provided the legal framework for the consequent reformative legislations. In terms of political reforms, the constitution led down the basis of the political structure. The constitution was prepared by the parliament which was elected in 1923. The parliament was largely dominated by the Republican People's Party (CHP). The opponents of Atatürk or of the CHP were not included in the parliament. Therefore, the constitution prepared by the single party served as the major instrument of establishing the single party rule.

The 1924 Constitution emphasized strongly the legislative powers of the parliament. In terms of political powers, the constitution gave superior-

---

<sup>3</sup> B. Lewis: *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. New York 1968; A.Y. Sarıbay: "Kemalist İdeolojide Modernleşmenin Anlamı. Sosyo-Ekonomik Bir Çözülme Denemesi". In: *Türk Siyasal Hayatının Gelişimi*. Red. E. Kalaycıoğlu, A.Y. Sarıbay. Istanbul 1986, pp. 189—204.

urity to the power of legislature and limited the powers of the executive. The freedoms of thought and speech were limited and it was hard to control the parliament and to exert influence on the single party rule of the Republican People's Party. Owing to these characteristics of the 1924 Constitution, the CHP rule turned into an authoritarian government. This political structure in the Early Republican Period led to discussions on "single man" rule representing dictatorship traits. Atatürk and his followers, though setting democracy as their aim, believed that: a democratic rule needed a developed country with a modern society; the Turkish society in terms of socio-economic indicators were underdeveloped; culture-wise the Turkish people were far from the democratic appeal and the Western life standards; and therefore, the transition to democracy in Turkey necessitated a lengthier time. With the single party rule, the CHP was thought to serve as the mobilizing agent for modernization and a democratic culture, which in the end would bring about democracy.

In the period of 1923—1945, the Single Party regime was challenged by rebels and various illegal groups, primarily of Kurdish nationalists and Islamists. Additionally, Atatürk and the CHP met with the opposition of two legal political parties that were founded with the permission of Atatürk during the attempts at transforming the multi-party politics. These challenges not only led the CHP to suppress opposition fiercely but also contributed to the consolidation of the single party rule.

The first attempt at transition to multi-party democracy took place in 1924. The abolition of the Caliphate was criticized by some members of the parliament. There also arose critical voices in the public and media. In order to carry on with the reform process and gain public support and legitimacy, Atatürk played with the idea of channeling opposition voices under the roof of a new political party alternative to the CHP. Some MPs resigned from the CHP and founded the Progressive Republican Party (TCF) in 1924. However in a very short period of time, the new party became the foci of Islamism, conservatism, reaction against the Kemalist reforms and Kurdish separatism. Some of the party members tried to assassinate Atatürk in İzmir, a western province of Turkey. There also arose a mass rebellion in the name of *sharia* (Islamic law) against the central government under the leadership of Sheikh Sait. The rebellion spread to various provinces of the eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey. Although the rebels were suppressed violently by the governmental armed troops and order was sustained with introduction of the Law on the Maintenance of Order, the TCF, having been accused of becoming the house of irreconcilable groups as well as the groups who had attempted to kill the nation's leader, was dissolved in 1925. Thus, the first attempt at democracy failed with the short-lived experience of the TCF.

The second trial on democracy came in 1930. After the major reforms undertaken since 1924 with the failure of the first attempt at multi-party politics, Atatürk wanted to give democracy another chance. He commanded one of his most trusted friends, Fethi Okyar, to resign from the Republican People's Party and establish a new party. Hence, the Free Republican Party (SCF) was founded. However, again in a very short period of time and despite the will of Okyar, the party turned into foci of Islamist and Kurdish opposition groups. There again arose Kurdish rebels in eastern provinces. In the western parts, the event known as the Kubilay Case occurred. In Mene-men, a town in the Aegean region, mobs who reacted against the Republican regime, killed a military officer named Kubilay. In consequence of the instability, the Free Republican Party was closed down after a couple of months since its establishment in 1930.

The single party rule, though carrying several inadequacies with respect to democracy and democratization, contributed to the country's development. The Kemalist Reforms introduced "from above" reflected a state-centric approach which did not seek full public support or social consent. The main rationale of the CHP during the Early Republican Period was that with a democratic approach and public deliberation, the reform process would have been delayed or even stopped. Therefore, "enlightened leader (Atatürk) and the cadres (the CHP cadres)" guiding the ignorant masses to the path of "advancement to the level of contemporary civilizations" was pinpointing the general rationale prevalent in this period. Despite the attempts at multi-party politics and their failure, the democratic ideal kept its strong place in the imaginary of the state elite.<sup>4</sup> The craving to democracy became operational in 1945 with the transition to multi-party politics.

## **Transition to multi-party politics: consolidation of democracy in an environment of uneven civil-military relations**

Turkey, by the establishment of the Republic in 1923, placed itself in the Western league. The Western league, with the impact of the disasters of the Second World War had become closer to democracy as more countries in Western Europe opted for liberal democracy in opposition to socialist democratic model of the countries behind the Iron Curtain. It is in this context that Turkey did not postpone transition to multi-party democracy any longer

---

<sup>4</sup> E. Özbudun: *Contemporary Turkish Politics. Challenges to Democratic Consolidation*. London 2000.

and opted for conducting general elections in which several parties compete. The 1924 Constitution did not require a major amendment for transition to multi-party politics but small revisions in the election (majoritarian electoral system), press and association laws were made that allowed the establishment of political parties other than the Republican People's Party (CHP) in 1945. The first election was made in 1946.

The CHP was not only the founding party of the Republic but also a house or a school for political elite to flourish and get recruited to the politics. Therefore, the main opposition party — the Democratic Party (DP) — was founded by the former members of the CHP. The Second World War environment had created economic and social difficulties to the CHP government during the 1930s and 1940s which resulted in the erosion of the CHP's image. When the Democratic Party started its campaign for the general elections in 1946, it gained immediate mass support. However, the election results did not turn the DP into a ruling party and the CHP won the majority of seats in the assembly. The DP criticized the election procedures and ballots for being corrupted and the results as unjust.

The time for the DP rule came with the 1950 general elections. The DP, having had enough time to get organized in all the regions of Turkey, campaigned vigorously by using critical tones against the CHP leaders and their policies and frequently referred to religious sentiments. The popularity in the political gatherings turned into actual electorate support and the DP gained 53% of the votes, whereas the CHP received 40% of the votes. The victory of the DP continued all throughout the 1950s as it received 58% of the votes in the 1954 elections, whereas the CHP received 35%, and in 1957 national elections the DP received 48% of the votes, whereas the CHP received 41%.

During the 1950s, neither the ruling Democratic Party nor the main opposition — Republican People's Party thought of changing the 1924 Constitution. The 1924 Constitution was granting a more privileged position to the national assembly and both parties were content with the idea of unlimited majority rule.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the same constitutional structure allowed the DP to exploit the majoritarian power structure pressurizing the minority votes. The DP government suppressed the media, limited the freedoms of speech, thought and gathering, exerted pressure on youth and universities, used religious sentiments of the masses in shaping policies, went into dialogue with Islamic establishments and Sufi orders, allowed the dissemination of religious instruction at academic schools, spread religious schooling (Islamic divinity schools), and allowed the use of Arabic in the call to prayer, which was previously in Turkish. The Party became the party of the peasants, the

---

<sup>5</sup> F.W. Weiker: *The Turkish Revolution, 1960—61. Aspects of Military Politics*. Westport, Connecticut 1980.



Sufi groups, businessmen and the merchants on the one hand, and it tried to suppress oppositional voices on the other.<sup>6</sup> The notorious slogan “A millionaire per city district” reflected the populism that the DP exploited as a motto. Although the DP frequently criticized the former policies of the CHP, in a short period of time, it adopted reflexes of a single party itself. The Turkish military intervened in civil sphere for the first time in Turkish history and closed down the DP in 1960. The main party leaders (Prime Minister Aydın Menderes, Foreign Affairs Minister Fatih Rüştü Zorlu and Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan) were executed. Many other party members were arrested and some were banned from politics. The constitution was suspended and a council was appointed by the National Unity Committee (the junta administration) to make a new constitution which would amend the logic of the 1924 Constitution. The military stayed in power only temporarily until the new constitution was ratified and the elections were held.

Similar to the 1924 Constitution, the 1961 Constitution was not the result of social consensus proven by the fact that it only received 62% of the “yes” votes due to bitter execution of the DP leaders by the junta. Yet, it observed the separation among the legislative, the executive and the judiciary powers in a more fair way. The main difference in the new constitution is the structure of the legislative body.<sup>7</sup> The 1924 Constitution was accused of giving ultimate power to the national assembly that led to the majority authoritarianism during the DP rule. Therefore, the new constitution introduced bicameral system composed of the Senate (150 elected senators) and the National Assembly (450 parliamentarians).

The 1961 Constitution broadened the rights and liberties (i.e. freedoms of thought, speech, press and right to assembly) and introduced a wide variety of checks and balances to limit the powers of the legislative (i.e. the judicial review of the constitutionality of laws, strengthening of the administrative courts and full independence of the judiciary). It also gave autonomy to universities and job security to civil servants. In terms of economy, the new constitution observed a statist economic model and included provisions regarding state planning and development. The State Planning Organization was founded. The new constitution also secured the role of the military in politics with the establishment of a National Security Council which was composed of the prime minister, the ministers of internal affairs, foreign affairs, defense and the army commanders. The Council chaired by the President earned a privileged position constitutionally in defining the “internal

<sup>6</sup> Ş. Mardin: “Türk Siyasetini Açıklayabilecek Bir Anahtar. Merkez-Çevre İlişkileri”. In: *Şerif Mardin Türkiye’de Toplum ve Siyaset Makaleler 1*. Istanbul 1990, pp. 30—66.

<sup>7</sup> Ş.A. Gözübüyük: *Açıklamalı Türk Anayasaları*. Ankara 1995.



and external threats” as well as the “national interest” and gained weight in civilian politics.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, Turkey struggled to cope with the new political environment which was marked by the foundation of new political parties competing over the legacy of the Democratic Party, the attempts for new military interventions by some army officers that resulted in failure, the occurrence of ethnic violence on the island of Cyprus between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots, the growing dissatisfaction with the 1961 Constitution, the emergence of the leftist-rightist clash in the society and the growing political instability. The closure of the Democratic Party not only caused problems of representation, but also provoked competition amongst the political parties to fulfill the political vacuum. What is more, there appeared parties within the extremes of the ideological spectrum (i.e. extreme nationalist Republican Peasants and Nation Party which turned into Nationalist Action Party in the 1970s, the Islamist oriented National Order Party which turned into National Salvation Party in the 1970s and the socialist Turkish Workers’ Party) all of which started to receive public support. These parties contributed to ideological polarization in the Turkish society.

The first election after the 1960 military coup took place in 1961. The Justice Party (AP) which claimed the legacy of the DP won 35% of the votes, whereas the CHP won 37% and the New Turkey Party won 14% of the votes. The CHP formed the government, but while AP strengthened its position as the follower of the DP, it increased its votes over time. In the 1965 general elections, the AP gained 53% and the CHP received 30% of the votes. Turkish Workers’ Party, an extreme leftist party, received 14 seats in the parliament. The second half of the 1960s witnessed political unrest, instability and rising of protest movements and ideological polarization. Students’ revolts, ideological violence plus chaos started on the streets. In due course, the military intervened in politics in 1971 for the second time. The AP government was suspended, the parliament was dissolved and a technocrats’ government was formed with the command of the Chief of General Staff. Between 1971 and 1973, major constitutional amendments were made in the 1961 Constitution by the technocratic government. Accordingly, certain liberties pertaining to thought, speech, press and right to assembly were limited; the review power of the courts was restricted; the executive was strengthened; and the institutional autonomy of the military was increased.

In 1973, the multi-party politics restarted and in the national elections of the same year, the CHP gained more votes than the Justice Party because the

---

<sup>8</sup> Ş. Toktaş, Ü. Kurt: “The Turkish Military’s Autonomy, JDP Rule and the EU Reform Process in the 2000s: An Assessment of the Turkish Version of Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DECAF)”. *Turkish Studies* 2010, no. 3, pp. 387—403.

rightist votes were split amongst the AP, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and the National Salvation Party (MSP). The CHP under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit pursued themes of equality and social justice which attracted leftist votes in return.<sup>9</sup> The social democratic CHP and the Islamist MSP formed a weak coalition government. The major event of this government was the invasion of Cyprus in 1974.

The CHP-MSP coalition government did not continue for long and between 1975—1977 and 1977—1979 coalition governments were formed by the AP, the MHP and MSP known as the National Front I and II governments in Turkish political history. Due to political instability, these governments also failed followed by other weak coalition formations by the CHP which resulted in the similar failures. In the meantime, violence on the streets and severe ideological clashes continued. Associations, syndicates and organizations got politicized; nepotism and ideological cadre formations in state offices became ordinary; mass civil violence occurred in several provinces; demonstrations were violently suppressed and assassinations and bombings broke out. The national assembly proved weak in representing the society and politics could not resolve these growing problems. What is more the political parties were unable to form stable and consistent governments or even elect the president. The Turkish military, having had the experience of making interventions at the turn of every decade, intervened in politics in 1980 for the third time. The military junta dissolved the parliament; suspended the constitution; closed down all the parties, syndicates and the civil society organizations; arrested and executed civilians; and banned several politicians.

In sum, during the period of 1961—1980, ideologies of the extreme right and left came to the agenda of Turkish politics. Political ideologies like fascism, Islamism and communism started to find their place in the spectrum of Turkish politics. These ideologies not only dominated the agenda of the new extremist parties, but influenced other mainstream parties and pushed them towards further right or further left of the political spectrum. In consequence, high fragmentation and polarization both in the society and in the national assembly occurred. Identifying the liberal political environment that the 1961 Constitution provided as the root cause of these problems, the military junta changed the constitution in 1982.

---

<sup>9</sup> A. Güneş-Ayata: *CHP. Örgüt ve İdeoloji*. Ankara 1992.

## Roots of the contemporary dynamics of Turkish politics: the post-1980 period

The National Security Council composed of the general staff and led by Kenan Evren, the Chief of General Staff, took over the power in 1980 with the aim of re-establishing democracy and bringing peace and security to the country.<sup>10</sup> The junta declared that it would stay in power for a short period of time. Having seen the 1961 Constitution as the source of political chaos, instability and weak coalition governments, the military government initiated the restructuring of political system with a new constitution as a goal. The major act of the military rule was drafting the 1982 Constitution.

Following its predecessors, the 1982 Constitution was also not prepared by social consensus but by the National Security Council. Therefore, it had weak political legitimacy and hardly met democratic standards.<sup>11</sup> The constitution was put in a referendum that was covering the election of the president as well. In an environment where there were serious restrictions on propagating and the freedom of speech as well as freedom of press, the constitution and the president Kenan Evren — the Chief of General Staff and the National Security Council — were approved by 92%.

The 1982 Constitution reflects a political preference for the protection of the state at the sake of the civil society. It severely controls and limits the activities of political parties, politicians, civil society organizations, trade unions and universities. The linkage between political parties and non-governmental organizations are restricted. Youth and women's branches of the political parties are prohibited. Severe restrictions on syndicalism are put. Basic rights and freedoms are acknowledged but only in a limited framework. For example, ideological views and press or the right to assembly by more than 10 people are sanctioned. In terms of separation of political powers, the executive is granted a privileged position in comparison to the legislative and the judiciary. In addition, within the executive, the presidency assumed a wide appointing role (i.e. university rectors, high court judges) and veto power. The National Security Council preserved its place in the 1982 Constitution as well but its powers got enhanced. The new constitution served for a weakened form of parliamentarism and a strong presidency.<sup>12</sup> Although several of the articles of the constitution have been amended, the spirit of the 1982

---

<sup>10</sup> Ş. İba: *Milli Güvenlik Devleti. Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Belgeleriyle Milli Güvenlik İdeolojisi ve Kuruluşu*. İstanbul 1998.

<sup>11</sup> E. Özbudun: *Perspectives on Democracy in Turkey*. İstanbul 1988.

<sup>12</sup> M. Heper: "Executive in the Third Turkish Republic". *Governance* 1990b, no. 3, pp. 299—319.

Constitution where the state-society relations are regulated and contracted remains the same — providing state a larger protective shield rather than the society and the individuals.

Having closed down all the parties which were active before the 1980 coup, the military commanders allowed only three new parties to go for elections in 1983. The 10% threshold in the general elections helped the emergence of a strong party in the national assembly. Although the president Kenan Evren openly supported the Nationalist Democracy Party, the Motherland Party (ANAVATAN) led by Turgut Özal, who was a former bureaucrat received 45% of the votes. The Motherland Party which affiliated itself with the global New-Right wave of the 1980s gathered conservatism, liberalism and nationalism under the same political roof.<sup>13</sup> The Motherland Party under the leadership of Turgut Özal gained success in the 1987 elections as well and stayed in power until 1991. The 1980s are “the Özal years” during which Özal as the prime minister initiated several economic and social reforms that had great influence on Turkish politics and economy.

The focus of Özal policies were economics. In parallel to globalization all over the globe, Özal pursued economic liberalization and privatization. The import-oriented Turkish economy in the 1970s left its place for market competition, export-led economic model and inflationist growth. At the cost of high unemployment, Turkey witnessed high growth rates in the 1980s. In due course of these economic changes, the class structure of the Turkish state changed and the gap between the rich and the poor widen. The middle and lower classes enhanced due to urbanization, migration from rural to urban places and the development of the private sector. Although one of the major aims of Özal was to erode the giant state structure, he could not succeed in a full extent. The basic obstacle in front of this goal was the strong state tradition which the military frequently abused. Özal did not confront the National Security Council and the 1982 Constitution directly, and what is more, carried out a harmonious relationship with president Evren.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, only small revisions were made in the 1982 Constitution in 1987 and in 1991 not only due to the MPs’ reluctance, but also due to disagreement amongst the opposition parties in the parliament. In 1987, the major constitutional change was done with a referendum that lifted the ban on the politicians formerly put by the military regime in 1980. Özal was faced with competition by other political parties and prominent politicians who had traditionally secured a certain share of votes such as the True Path Party (DVP) and its leader Süleyman Demirel who carried the legacy of the Democratic and Justice par-

---

<sup>13</sup> M. Heper: “The State, Political Party and Society in Post-1983 Turkey”. *Government and Opposition* 1990a, no. 25, pp. 321—333.

<sup>14</sup> A. Evin: “Demilitarisation and Civilianisation of the Regime”. In: *Politics in the Third Turkish Republic*. Eds. M. Heper, A. Evin. Boulder 1994, pp. 23—39.

ties, both of which were closed down in the military interventions of 1960 and 1980. When the presidency term of Kenan Evren ended in 1989, Özal was elected as the president. In the 1991 general elections, the Motherland Party rule ended and the True Path Party and the Social Democratic People's Party (follower of the CHP) formed the coalition government. For most of 1991—2002, coalition governments ruled the country.

The politics of 1980s also served as a play kit for the Turkish-Islam synthesis. The military saw the right-left clash, fragmentation and ideological polarization of the 1970s as the major cause of political instability and advocated depoliticization. It introduced Islam as a unifying bond for the society. With a nationalistic interpretation, Islam was seen as one of the building blocks of the Turkish culture and hence was perceived as the solution to fragmentation in the society with its “gluing” capacity. Özal who also had conservative tendencies agreed to the military's intentions. As a result, mandatory religious courses were introduced to the schools' curricula and the number of religious schools as well as private Koran courses increased.

The 1990s witnessed the rise of the Welfare Party (RP) in Turkish politics. The RP which was in the continuum of the National Order Party (MNP) and the MSP lines, carried Islamist tendencies and even some party members had openly declared their dedication to an Islamist regime by *sharia*.<sup>15</sup> The party used Islamic symbols, showed sensitivity towards religious feelings and frequently appropriated anti-imperialistic, anti-Western and anti-European Union themes. The gradual rise of the RP signified that Turkish society was getting conservative. The RP earned great success in the local elections of 1994. Its success continued with the general elections and the RP formed coalition government with the True Path Party in 1997. The Turkish military, however, sent a memorandum to the government on the 28th of February 1997, and started a process against Islamization. Furthermore, owing to constitutional restrictions like the ban on the use of religion in politics or secularism being one of the basic tenets of Turkish polity, the RP was closed down in 1998 sharing the fate of its predecessors — the National Order Party being closed down in 1971 and the National Salvation Party in 1980. The RP cadres formed the fourth party called the Virtue Party (FP) which was also closed down by the Constitutional Court in 2001. In consequence, the fifth party in the same political line, the Felicity Party, was founded.

The Islamic wing witnessed a separation in the early 2000s and those cadres with a more liberal and tolerant view on Islam formed the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as an alternative party to the Felicity Party. The AKP enjoyed a big success in the 2002 general elections (receiving 34%

---

<sup>15</sup> M. Heper: “Islam and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Reconciliation?” *The Middle East Journal* 1997, no. 51, pp. 32—45.

of the votes) and having eliminated center-right parties like the Motherland Party and the True Path Party locating itself in the center of political scene. The AKP won most of the mayoralities of the country in the 2004 local elections and increased its votes to 47% in the last national elections of 2007. The Felicity Party failed in these elections showing the fact that the AKP had become the dominant party of the conservative wing and of the center-right in Turkey.

Besides these developments in the sphere of religion-politics relationship, the Post-1980 Period is marked by the rise of Kurdish nationalism and separatist movement. The first armed attack by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) occurred in 1984 and since then, there has been an armed struggle going on especially in the eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey. The Kurdish nationalist movement and the activities of PKK were not given substantial attention in the 1980s. When the conflict reached violent levels and started to threaten the unity and integrity of the state, it turned out to be a bottleneck of Turkish politics. The leader of PKK was captured in 1999 but the movement still continues to thrive. Kurdish nationalism also gained weight in civilian politics. There appeared several legal Kurdish parties such as the People's Labour Party, the Democracy Party and the People's Democracy Party all of which were closed down by the Constitutional Court. None of the parties were able to pass the national 10% threshold in the general elections but they achieved some success in the local elections especially in the eastern and south-eastern municipalities. The Democracy Party members entered the 1991 elections from the party listing of the Social Democratic People's Party and established their own party group in the parliament. Yet, in 1994, eight of these Kurdish members of the parliament got arrested and were put in jail with accusation of separatism. The last party in the Kurdish nationalist wing is the Democratic Society Party (DTP). In the last elections of 2007, the DTP passed the 10% threshold by preparing an independent listing and 21 Kurdish origin representatives supported by the DTP constituency entered the parliament. After a short while, these parliamentarians formed the DTP party group in the parliament. The party was closed down for being the center of separatist activities. Some of the DTP representatives were banned from politics by the order of the Constitutional Court. The most recent party founded in the legacy of the DTP is Peace and Democracy Party BDP).

Apart from the rise of Kurdish nationalism and Islamism, Turkish politics witnessed the rise of feminist movement in the Post-1980 Period. Having its roots in leftist politics of the 1970s, an independent women's movement started to develop during the 1980s. Women formed various associations and conducted several campaigns that aimed at the rise of social consciousness in girls' education, women's health, sexual abuse and violence against women, honou crimes, equality in the household and in the public sphere. Women's



associations served as pressure groups to the political parties and lobbied for an increase in the number of female members of the parliament via positive discrimination measures like quotas.

Last but not least, Turkey witnessed the introduction of the European Union as a determinant of the political agenda. Turkey applied for EU membership during the Özal years in 1987 and after a long process started negotiations in 2005. Turkey had always oriented itself to wards Europe, but the EU accession process became the heart of Turkey's westernization project. Furthermore, it contributed to the democratization of the country with a more democratic framework of civil-military relations. Turkey ratified many of the international documents, amended existing laws and legislate new laws necessary to fulfill EU membership requirements. Overall, there had been an advancement in the level of democracy, human rights and treatment of minorities by way of EU reforms packages.

## **Concluding remarks: democratization and europeanization in Turkish politics**

The 2002 national elections brought the AKP to power and the Republican People's Party (CHP) to opposition in the parliament. The two-party system in the parliament crystallized the polarization in the society. The culturally westernized and secularized segments of the Turkish society supported the CHP with the fear of a change for an Islamic regime and the abolition of the Kemalist reforms. The conservative and traditionalist circles, on the other hand, supported the AKP. The polarization reached its peak in April 2007 during the election of the new president. The AKP nominated the former foreign minister Abdullah Gül who was met with strong resistance by the secularist circles. The rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power with a strong majority government caused unrest among the state elite. Some portions of the civil society, i.e. the lawyers' Bars, educational NGOs, media, syndicates, the Alevi associations, women's organizations, university professors and the old establishments such as some bureaucrats and military officers reacted strongly against the AKP policies. They criticized the AKP for recruiting AKP supporters to the cadres in the state organization and abusing religion for politics. They called for the protection of the constitutional principle of secularism. They held protests called "Republican meetings". The military gave a memorandum on the 27th of April 2007 and underlined that the Republic of Turkey was a secular state and any threat against the



basic principles of the Republic would be considered a security issue, hence to be within the domain of the military — the guardian of the state. The presidential elections, in due course, were postponed. This is considered the fifth intervention of the Turkish military, the first four were in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997.

In the national elections of July 2007, the AKP increased its vote share to 47% and formed the government with a stronger political legitimacy. In a few months time, presidential elections were held in the national assembly and Abdullah Gül was elected president. Yet, the secularist vs. conservative bipolarity still continues in the society. Although the AKP, since 2002, advocates Turkey's membership in the EU and legislated several reform packages which are considered to be the most important milestones in EU-Turkey relations, there is still an ongoing mistrust towards the AKP and its policies with respect to its attitude towards the role of Islam in the public sphere. The AKP, on the other hand, repeatedly denies accusations of being Islamist and the party leadership frequently emphasizes that Turkey's major goal is EU membership and the principle of secularism does not diminish the importance of religion for the Turkish society's culture.

With regards to Kurdish nationalism and the minority question in Turkey, Turkish politics has been going through a tough stage. The political representation of the PSP in the parliament in 2007 raised hopes in the peaceful resolution of the problem. However, the declarations of the PSP pertaining to the legitimacy of the armed struggle by the PKK and the resistance to condemn violence as a means of politics caused unrest in the parliament as well as in the media. The Kurdish nationalism also provoked a rise in Turkish nationalism.

The above described contemporary political situation in Turkey pinpoint the two questions — political Islam and the Kurdish issue are the most fundamental problems in Turkey since its establishment in 1923. Political Islam poses a challenge to the secularism principle of the Republic which is protected constitutionally.<sup>16</sup> It is placed in the preamble of the constitution which cannot be changed and even be asked for change. The Kurdish issue threatens the unitary characteristic of the Republic and poses a risk to the centralization and the unity of the territory. Both of these problems are also fundamental because they are closely related to the foundational weaknesses in the Turkish nation-building process. National elections will be held in 2011 and these problems still dominate the democratic consolidation of Turkey. Turkey is a new state (recently founded in the first half of the 20th century) and therefore there are ongoing challenges that Turkish democracy needs to encounter.

---

<sup>16</sup> N. Göle: "Secularism and Islamism in Turkey. The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites". *Middle East Journal* 1997, no. 1, pp. 46—58.

Last but not least, the Europeanization process, on the basis of political conditions enforced by the EU, was an external factor which has pushed democratization further. Indeed, constitutional and legislative reforms, catalyzed by the EU, have resulted in serious consequences and developments in human rights, rights and liberties, democratic control of the armed forces, liberalization of the civil society, and the treatment of minorities. The period from the beginning of 2000 onwards could be described as a period of profound and momentous change in Turkish history enhancing the power of the civilians at the expense of the military's power. Thus, the EU complicated the power structures between the state elite and the political elite. The EU came to the forefront as an important external agent, which initiated the process for change in the allocation of power among the political actors.