

Turkey in transition?

Essays on the state of a country caught between repression and resistance

Published by Özlem Alev Demirel MEP



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Foreword

Dear Readers,

No other country has been the subject of so much discussion and reporting in the European public sphere as Turkey. There is a reason why: the autocrat Erdogan and the AKP-led government have transformed Turkey into a country of unrest, uncertainty, contradictions and bad news.

Almost everything that happens in Turkey is associated with Erdogan. No wonder, given his despotic actions.

In order to fully interrogate the question of freedom of expression and human rights in Turkey we must avoid taking a one-dimensional view and consider the full constellation of issues in motion right now.

The structural deficits of the Turkish economy, the situation of women, workers, migrants living in Turkey, refugees and culture are often not considered, described and analysed enough. Additionally, the different struggles - for example of the environmental movements or the trade unions - remain mostly invisible in European debate. But they do exist - these people who are fighting for a peaceful, democratic and socially cohesive future for Turkey.

This publication aims to contribute to broadening the view of Turkey. Turkey is a country in transition - a country between repression and resistance, a country full of contradictory developments in domestic and foreign affairs. It is a country in which something new and with great scope can or does happen every day - a country full of caesuras.

It should be noted that the format of this publication precludes it from being up-to-date with the very recent events in Turkey. The articles

of this publication were being written at the turn of 2020/2021. Since then - in March this year - the regime has launched a new wave of persecution against opposition figures, and during this time, we have watched the West once again moving even closer towards Turkey. The EU, together with the Biden administration, retreated from the announced sanctions against Turkey because of the dispute over gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean. The Turkish lira continued to fall, the key interest rate rose and under cover of darkness the Turkish president passed a decree withdrawing Turkey from the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women. The day before, the Supreme Public Prosecutor initiated proceedings to ban the second largest opposition party - the HDP. Even if this worrying escalation could not be directly included in the articles, the texts are still relevant and topical, because they help us to understand the fundamental and structural dynamics of daily political conflicts much more clearly. Furthermore, I also understand this book to be a vital contribution that serves to fill with life and arguments the so urgently needed solidarity with the democracy movement in Turkey.

My thanks go to the expertise of the authors of the contributions contained in these pages, and to the Federation of Democratic Workers' Associations (DİDF), which arranged these contacts.

Özlem Alev Demirel MEP

Relations between the EU and Turkey

Professed values

Özlem Alev Demirel

There were two contenders for the most frequently repeated phrase of the year 2020: ‘It’s time to redefine our relationship with Turkey’; and words to the effect that Turkey is ‘a strategic partner and important neighbour for the EU’.

To date, there has been no particular rift. Neither has a fundamental realignment of EU-Turkey relations taken place. It is an open secret nonetheless that foreign policy and military manoeuvres under the AKP/MHP coalition give the EU and its Member States particular cause for concern. After all, these manoeuvres affect EU Member States, their spheres of activity and geostrategic interests.

Where relations with neighbouring countries were concerned, no issue was more frequently discussed in the European Parliament and at EU summits over the course of 2019/2020 than the decisions taken by the ‘palace government’¹ in Ankara. The question therefore arises as to what form a redefinition of relations with Turkey might take and when, if ever, it would happen.

First let us take a look at the current situation.

Turkey’s membership of the EU

It is not possible to view relations between the EU and Turkey other than in their connection to the rapport between the EU and the United

¹ ‘Saray hükümeti’ is a current criticism in Turkey, underlining the one-man-rule of the country by President Erdogan.

States. Within this particular network, Turkey always played an important part on both economic and foreign policy fronts, affecting both EU and US foreign policy with regard to the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus. Turkey assumes the role of a regional power thanks to her history in these regions – this in respect of Turkic peoples too, her geographical position as a door-opener in the Middle East and her economic and political significance as one of the most developed countries of the region. And this regional power is important for the geopolitical affairs of the EU and the US.

Turkey's prospective EU membership was encouraged by all parties until 2012 and 2013, when the Erdogan government began to steer the country in a different political direction. After that, only the US and Great Britain continued to press ahead, whilst Germany and France, for instance, were more restrained.

The particular thing about Turkey had always been her strong economic links with the EU on the one hand and an unmistakable dependence on the US in matters military, security and administration on the other. Laws and cultural arguments (western world/Orient) aside, the EU was essentially faced with the important question of whether they necessarily wanted as member a state so clearly dependent on the US. Step by step, the EU attempted to overcome the difficulties and risks posed by Turkey's particularity. There was intensive forging of economic links counterbalanced by successive bids to convert state structures so as to achieve conformity with the EU through the Copenhagen criteria (rule of law, constitutional reform, etc.).

The feelings and consequences provoked by the 2013 Gezi Park protests, the 2016 attempted coup and the election of Trump later that same year put paid to that course of development. The EU was faced with a completely new situation.

Today, all talk of accession has been placed on hold until further notice; no longer do any of the parties seriously believe in the possibility of EU membership for Turkey. Instead, out of respect for her strategic role, recourse is sought to terms previously used, such as 'privileged

partnership'. Currently, there is also talk of the continued existence of the customs union, how it might persist and, where possible, be further modernised.

The agreement on refugees

Today, the EU's refugee agreement with Turkey is an important factor in relations between the two partners. In reporting on the fundamental relationship with Turkey, refugees always come into the picture. Especially with regard to the reasons for Germany's position as well as Chancellor Merkel's personal attitude, the retention of this agreement is a decisive motif. Yet the refugee agreement is strongly contested, both by critics of Turkey's policies and by refugee initiatives and human rights organisations.

Nor does Turkey's democratic opposition favour the refugee agreement: through this deal, EU heads of state and above all Frau Merkel have effectively strengthened the AKP government. In the summer of 2015, she lost her only ruling majority. She received indirect support for an election campaign by virtue of the agreement. The images of Angela Merkel travelling to Turkey during the election campaign and having her photograph taken in the presidential palace with Erdogan, seated on golden thrones, are still remembered.

Reservations about the refugee agreement include the questionability of 'secure third countries' as a legal construction; there is also some doubt as to whether Turkey qualifies as a 'secure state' under the Erdogan administration. Syrian refugees do not receive the rights due to them under the Geneva Convention. Instead they are fobbed off with a more meagre temporary protection status. Reports are furthermore piling up of deportations from Turkey to Syria. Turkish citizens too have felt a deterioration in their human rights since the failed coup of 2016. Applications for asylum in the EU from Turks are rising.

The aim of the agreement is to ensure that Syrians stay in Turkey and do not attempt the crossing to Greece or other EU countries. In return, Turkey is asked to impose better border controls. Turkey is obliged

to take back Syrian refugees who arrive on the Greek Aegean islands from Turkey and are unsuccessful in obtaining asylum there. The EU accepts another refugee for every refugee who is sent back. The EU gives Turkey money for Syrian refugees on their territory, amounting to six billion Euro. Previously, most of the money ended up in the Turkish government's coffers, in deference to Erdogan. Now it goes to aid organisations.

In response to this issue, as well as to the retention of some of the aid monies, the Erdogan administration is using refugees to pile on the pressure. At the end of February/beginning of March 2020 for example, and without bothering to conceal their actions, they opened sections of the border, sending people seeking protection towards the EU.

Greece and the EU on one side and Turkey on the other are flinging harsh accusations at each other. The EU is accused of wrongfully rejecting refugees; Turkey, of opening the border and attempting extortion. A section of this book concerns the refugee situation in Turkey. The accuracy of Turkey's reproach concerning the way the EU is pushing back refugees does indicate that disregard for the rights of refugees in the Eastern Mediterranean is not the sole preserve of the Erdogan government.

The militarised foreign policy of Turkey

The numerous disputes in which the Erdogan administration has played a part – in Syria, Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean, Nagorno-Karabakh and most recently Cyprus have led to discomfort in the EU. Neither the EU nor the international community (in other words, the UN) have so far helped to provide a material solution to these disputes. And this has left a vacuum which Erdogan has exploited, even to the point of military action.

It became apparent as early as 2019 that the Erdogan administration was bent on a more aggressive and militarised foreign policy. First, it was already clear at that point that Turkey's economic and political crises were reaching a tipping point. Erdogan's government was becoming ever more dependent on its ultra-nationalist coalition partner,

the MHP. That is why they evoked 'national unity' using the country's military strength; nationalistic discourse was used to split the opposition and thus stabilise inherent power. Second, it emerged that Erdogan's foreign policy was about to isolate the country to such an extent that they would have to take a hard line just to be able to sit at the negotiating table.

This was most evident in the aggressive manner they adopted in dealing with the dispute on the Eastern Mediterranean gas reserves. The intervention in the Libyan conflict is moreover closely linked to this agreement.

But war and a militarised foreign policy are unacceptable. This applies to Turkey just as much as to the US and Russia or Germany and France: indeed, to the EU and NATO too. When one examines the ongoing conflicts as well as their underlying causes, one realises that several powers are involved.

Conclusions of the EU - what should happen, and what is happening

The export of weapons from EU Member States to Turkey must finally be forbidden. This is long overdue. Yet all appeals to the Council and the Commission for a more resolute approach to Turkey's autocratic regime have so far died away, achieving nothing. At most, minor sanctions are in the offing – not because of the disregard of human rights and the infringement of international law – but on account of the violation of EU Member States' geostrategic interests and of the Erdogan government's solo actions and attendant insubordination.

Clearly, the EU is playing a double game. Their agenda, on the one hand, is the future 'taming' of the Erdogan regime, coordinated with the US government, as one of the first focal points of renewed transatlantic cooperation; on the other hand, it is not a good idea to drive out Erdogan, either as a NATO partner or as someone who can deflect the influx of refugees into the EU. EU strategists must withdraw their notions of a weapons embargo. Anyone rightfully admonishing another

state for its militarised foreign policy should not be aiding and abetting that policy through arms supplies.

The October summit – a turning point?

At the council summit held in October 2020, conclusions on external relations were drawn:

‘The EU has a strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey. Pursuing dialogue in good faith and abstaining from unilateral actions which run counter to the EU interests and violate international law and the sovereign rights of EU Member States is an absolute requirement in this regard.’²

In order to place these important passages in their proper context, one should note that a few days prior to the summit, thousands of opposition members had once again been incarcerated in Turkey. Yet neither the Council Decision in October, nor that of December 2020 contains key passages on the human rights situation in Turkey. The suspension of basic rights, as well as the repression of opposition groups and dissenters would seem not to be guiding principles of an EU summit’s findings.

However, the Erdogan administration’s foreign policy manoeuvres and the increasingly military behaviour of the Turkish government do appear to have impelled the heads of state to threaten, or resolve to take, symbolic measures against the AKP government.

First, there came the incursion by Turkish troops in Northern Syria in 2019 in violation of international law, which targeted in particular the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)³. Then, Ankara undertook military intervention in response to a request in early 2020 from the Sarraj gov-

² https://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2020/10/01/european-council-conclusions-on-external-relations-1-october-2020/?fbclid=IwAR2Wjp_PujE9_ihf2xyebEXGWNllLk-wAtBIYjJsAz0KCvX89Ag9cgnf0E

³ The dominant forces in the Rojava region.

ernment. The aim here was to lay the groundwork – through a treaty with the recognised leader of Libya – for a share in the agreement on gas in the Eastern Mediterranean. There followed provocation in the form of gas drilling and an aggressive approach towards Greece and other EU Member States whom Turkey wished to exclude from drilling rights and access to natural gas. At the same time, Ankara lent support to the Azerbaijani Government in order to resolve the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh; she thereby precipitated the offensive organised by Baku which led on 27 September 2020 to a six-week war, which claimed several thousand lives.

Despite this, President Erdogan wrote a letter before the October summit reiterating his desire to remain a thoroughly business-like partner for the EU. He therefore requested that any decisions detrimental to relations be avoided, underlining Turkey's continued readiness to 'enter into dialogue' and to be available for 'cooperation'. In particular, he highlighted the refugee agreement, pointing to common interests in the 'fight against terrorism' and 'illegal migration', as well as in the areas of economic and energy policy.⁴

Turkey, a strategic partner

Turkey's strategic importance for the prevailing policies of the EU is obvious: first, Turkey is a NATO member and second, a very important market for European goods. As a regional power, she is also critical. Last but not least, Turkey is also a significant consumer of European weapons and weapons systems – particularly those of German suppliers.

Added to this is the agreement on refugees, an essential component of the EU's false policy of turning refugees away; nor should Turkey's geographical position be forgotten. It is vitally important for supply chains in the Middle East and the Far East.

And it is based on these factors that a European Union, desirous of

⁴ <https://www.dw.com/tr/erdo%C4%9Fandan-zirve-%C3%B6ncesi-ab-liderlerine-mektup/a-55102100>

keeping its status as an economic power with a say in global politics, professes its interest in a 'strategic partnership' with Turkey.⁵ Various strategic and economic interests in regard to EU-Turkish relations, which France and Germany share, will not impede the weightier interests of the alliance in the longer term.

It would therefore seem that EU relations with Turkey will always be founded on the EU's own interests and those of her member countries. As long as a Turkish president does not fundamentally stand in the way of these interests, the EU will continue to cultivate the relationship. Another part of the equation is speculation, on the part of both EU heads of state and the administration of the EU, that rulers will at some point step down whereas the central geographic and strategic importance of Turkey is permanent. This is the clear and cynical viewpoint from which European foreign policy is directed, purely by its own visions of profit and power.

Sadly, the example of Turkey illuminates the EU's interpretation of human rights, freedom of the press and civil society: they claim these values for themselves. In foreign policy, such values are swiftly professed where no conflict with economic or geopolitical purposes obtains; even better if the same values are means of achieving those ends. If a conflict with own interests exists however, the EU quickly turns a blind eye.

The EU's approach to the Erdogan administration might be characterised as a 'carrot and stick' approach.

More 'stick'

To look at the various interrelations with Turkey in 2020 is to recognise that the EU's main activity lay in defusing the centrifugal tendencies of the Erdogan administration in its domestic, but more particularly its foreign policies. These were questions of damage limitation and fathoming out how to continue to collaborate on individual matters; no longer can one talk about consolidating relations. Even economic

⁵ This is not my own political opinion, but a description of the present prevailing policy of the EU.

cooperation is currently stagnating, rather than expanding or being strengthened.

In the 2020 conclusions and decisions of the Council, the outlook for 2021 would seem to be the use of slightly more ‘stick’ than ‘carrot’ in EU-Turkey relations.

Hence the Council determined to impose restrictive measures in view of unacceptable drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and invited High Representative Joseph Borrell and the Commission to submit for deliberation, by March 2021, a ‘report on the state of play concerning EU-Turkey political, economic and trade relations and on instruments and options for how to proceed, including with regard to the extension and the scope of the above ruling’.⁶

Ahead of the December summit, High Representative Joseph Borrell wrote:

‘For the EU and the US, a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean is in our strategic interest. We should seek to coordinate efforts in our relations with Turkey, and overcome the current challenges’.

The most important outcome of the December 2020 EU summit is thus the declaration of political intent, in agreement with the US, to define and coordinate relations with Turkey for the year 2021.

Under Trump, the US administration repeatedly warned the government in Ankara against the acquisition and deployment of the Russian S400 missile defence system. The Pentagon and NATO said that such actions would be incompatible with Turkey’s obligations as a NATO partner. For this reason, the US imposed sanctions in December 2020.

After the ‘lapses’ in transatlantic relations between the EU and US during the Trump years, the EU now sees the chance to engage the newly elected Biden government in helping to steer Turkey towards the ‘right path’, should the Turkish ruler see fit to undertake further

⁶<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/meetings/european-council/2020/12/10-11/>

foreign policy exploits against the (capital) interests of the EU or US.

How far the interests of the EU and the Biden administration converge remains to be seen over the next few years – with respect to Turkey, yes, but not exclusively, of course.

In their shared approach, the EU and US will above all endeavour to curtail those elements in Turkey that pursue a Eurasian foreign policy approach.⁷ As far as domestic policies are concerned, it will be a matter of strengthening the voices that seek a return to the parliamentary system and stand for the rule of law and independent institutions, where investment necessitates this. These aspects are also significant for the government in Washington. Everything else – whether Turkey's role in NATO, in the region, in the Balkans, her relationship with China, Russia, Iran and Israel, etc., – must be negotiated in a larger context with the US. It is also true that relations between the US and EU have changed enormously. There will be no simple 'return to the status quo ante'. On that, both sides are agreed.

One might also say that EU-Turkey relations were, up to a few years ago, an integral if also contradictory aspect of EU-US relations. The Erdogan regime and four years of Trump resulted in those relations becoming an unresolved problem. Now, relations with Turkey must be rearranged, potentially as an initial focal point for renewed transatlantic cooperation.

In the meantime, the Erdogan administration has recognised the seriousness of the situation and the President has several times sent out messages in the EU's direction. He has rescinded reforms in the justice system and expressed a conviction that Turkey's place should be at the side of the EU. Since that time, the exchange concerning future relations between the EU and Turkey has resumed, albeit without any transparency in respect of the negotiations and their content.

Now, there is much to suggest that the Turkish government could

⁷ This means the elements that paid no heed to the previous compatibility of Turkish foreign and security policies with the (capital) interests of the EU or, from the United States' point of view, the (capital) interests of the US.

amend laws, which would result in more security for foreign investment. Here, the principle of the rule of law must apply. Investment is certainly something Turkey urgently needs in order to stop the further decline of the Turkish currency, the LIRA, and to curb the economic crisis. If the Erdogan administration does not emerge from the economic slump, they will not be able to conquer their own crisis.

Erdogan's message to the EU is clear: I understand what you are saying when you talk of democracy and human rights – you mean economic ties. This is my abiding interest too. Yet in tandem with this message, Erdogan attacks the opposition in ever harsher ways. Assaults by paramilitary units mount up, as seen from the case of Gökhan Günes.⁸

The central question in the 2021 discussion on EU-Turkey relations therefore remains: What is at stake for the EU? After a few flagship reforms, will the economic and geostrategic interests of the EU be the deciding factor, or will a position be taken for international law, democracy and human rights?

Most European citizens believe in these values and adhere to them. Without harbouring naive illusions about the predominant policies of the EU, also with regard to its policy on Turkey, it is in fact up to populations and to progressive forces to exert more pressure on European governments and the institutions of the EU so that they declare themselves defenders of these values. And so that a plethora of soapbox speeches can be followed up with (foreign) policy action.

⁸ Günes is a young construction worker from Istanbul and member of a left-wing party in Turkey. In January 2021 he was abducted by unknown men who called themselves 'the Invisible', kept him prisoner for six days and tortured him. Apparently, whilst being tortured, Günes was offered the chance of cooperation with the 'Invisible'.

Middle power ambitions in a post-hegemonic world

Sinan Birdal

Is Turkey parting ways with the West? Turkey's relations with its Western allies has been a controversial topic for more than a decade. Following a series of Turkish initiatives (including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's scolding of Israeli president Shimon Peres in Davos in 2009, support for Hamas and Hezbollah, and rapprochement with Iran), pundits and academics started arguing about an 'axial shift' in Turkish foreign policy. Despite frequent disagreements, however, cooperation between Turkey and the West continued in many areas, most famously in dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis. Recent controversies regarding Turkish foreign policy need to be interpreted against this background of conflict and cooperation.

Challenges to transatlanticism

Turkey's Western connection was first questioned by the end of the Cold War. What role – if any – would Turkey claim in the Western alliance after the fall of the Soviet Union? The late historian of Turkish diplomacy, Oral Sander, reassured his readers that Western orientation is a constant feature of Turkish foreign policy and cannot be explained by variables such as security or threat perceptions. He counted three major factors behind Turkey's Western connection: first, the legacy of the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; second, the geographical location of Turkey, its place in the international system and

its sense of insecurity caused by these factors; third, economic preferences shaped by the first two factors.¹

These factors, however, have been put to test soon after Sander passed away in 1995. The local elections of 1994, in which Erdoğan won the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, marked the rise of the Islamist Welfare Party. Two years later, in the general elections of 1996, the party became the largest party, and its leader Necmettin Erbakan became Prime Minister.

An Islamist foreign policy?

Erbakan's geopolitical vision imagined a world divided by a colonizing West and a post-colonial abode of Islam. Thus, it combined the division of classical Islamic law of nations between the abode of peace (Dar al Islam) and the abode of war (Dar al Harb) with postwar postcolonial developmentalism. Accordingly, Western civilization admired power and force, while Islamic civilization advocated a 'Just Order' (Adil Düzen). This geopolitical discourse was a reflection of the Islamist program at home.

Just Order was the ideological program of the Welfare Party articulating the interests of small and middle-size capital in Turkey. Erbakan himself entered the political scene in 1970 as the president of the Union of Chambers of Turkey, an organization consisting mainly of small and medium size capitalists. A year later the haute bourgeoisie would found the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD) to distinguish itself from the small and medium size capitalists. This representational divide between the two fractions of capital within the developmentalist import-substitution model was the cradle of contemporary Islamism in Turkey. Divisions between the two fractions were heightened when the IMF-sponsored structural adjustment program of 1980 initiated the export-oriented growth strategy, followed by commercial and financial liberalization. The Just Order program defended the interests of small

¹ Oral Sander, "Türkiye'nin Dış Politikasında Sürekliliğin Nedenleri," in Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası [Turkey's Foreign Policy], ed. Melek Fırat, Ankara, İmge Yayınları, 1998, pp. 69-71.

and medium size capital against the monopoly of TÜSİAD over markets and politics under new economic and geopolitical conditions.

A much-publicized initiative of the Just Order program was the foundation of the Developing 8 (D-8) in 1997, including Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan and Turkey. The imagined unity of Muslim countries, however, proved harder to be put into action and the organization remained largely dysfunctional. Other foreign policy initiatives also proved futile and counterproductive. Erbakan's official visits to Pakistan, Iran and Libya as opposed to Western capitals were perceived as important statements of his foreign policy. Nevertheless, as symbolic gestures they achieved nothing. Moreover, the Welfare Party emphasized that the Just Order would not radically change Turkey's geopolitical orientation and that its extant alliances would be respected.

Regardless of its fiery anti-establishment rhetoric, the Erbakan government continued the traditional Western-oriented Turkish foreign policy. This did not prevent the Turkish Armed Forces from issuing a memorandum on 28 February 1997, eventually leading to Erbakan's fall. The name of the military unit behind the memorandum is reminiscent of the controversies regarding Erbakan's geopolitics: the West Working Group (Batı Çalışma Grubu). Thus, the military legitimized its intervention in electoral politics by its Western and so-called 'secularist' credentials. The fall of the Welfare Party from power and the imposition of military tutelage ushered in an unstable period of tripartite coalition governments, economic crisis and rising authoritarianism.

Turkey was in the middle of a serious economic crisis, triggered by a constitutional crisis between the President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, when the 9/11 attacks hit the US. The American decision to go to war in Iraq put further pressure on the coalition government which was forced to go to elections by its ultra-nationalist partner MHP. The November 2002 elections carried the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power.

The discreet charm of the Muslim bourgeoisie

The AKP and its leader Erdoğan, who had been banned from politics by court decision, took the opportunity to refashion the Islamist movement in a conservative-liberal form. After failing to wrest power from Erbakan, the AKP leaders decided to start a new party which deliberately invoked a European outlook. There were two momentous opportunities for the AKP in reshaping its relation to the West: an ongoing financial reform program under IMF auspices and the Bush administration push for war in the Middle East. When the Turkish parliament rejected Bush's war plans despite Erdoğan's support for them, the AKP could present itself as a loyal transatlantic ally. The shift in Western public opinion was remarkable: the traditional transatlantic allies, the Turkish civil and military bureaucracy and the so-called 'secularist elites' were now regarded as an impediment to democratization, while the reformed Islamists became the new partners. In the first decade of the new millennium Western media and academia analyzed Turkey in accordance with a commonplace dichotomy between 'authoritarian secularists' and 'democratic Muslims'.

The prevailing truism in support of the AKP in its first decade in power rested on the thesis that the party represented the emerging new middle classes. The Weberian thesis on the Protestant Ethic was recycled to articulate a new religious bourgeois agency paving the way for free markets and liberal democracy. The clash between the religious bourgeoisie and the secular state bureaucracy would inevitably and eventually lead to democracy. The celebratory tone of this mechanistic paradigm, however, would soon turn to bitter disappointment. Ultimately, this binary discourse was abandoned altogether. While the rise of the AKP was explained by sociological explanations of a new middle class, its tightening grip over political power was attributed to the individual motives of its leader.

A new role in a new partnership?

Following the constitutional referendum on 12 September 2010, which sealed Erdoğan's victory over the secular establishment, the AKP's re-

lations with the West began to deteriorate. Having control over the military and the judiciary, Erdogan had less need for the political support of the West, which was itself divided over many political and economic issues. The AKP would exploit the rift within the transatlantic alliance and the rise of Russia and China.

On 21 September 2010 the late Turkish journalist, Mehmet Ali Birand, reported a meeting of 20 experts from the CIA, the NSC and the academy on the direction of Turkish politics under the AKP.² According to Birand's source, experts could not agree on the analysis of Turkish premier Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, though all of them concurred that there was a change in Turkish-American relations. Some thought Erdoğan was a mere pragmatist, while others argued that he was increasingly infusing Turkish politics with an Islamist ideology. The seasoned journalist sounded much more optimistic in late December when he reported another meeting organized by the American Peace Institution.

According to Birand, the tone of the December meeting was very different from similar previous meetings. He summed up the key conclusions of the meeting: Turkey had a more independent and important role in the region and the majority of US policy circles was not ready to accept this fact. The US government did not give up on the JDP. Despite expecting disagreements, it was hopeful about reaching long term consensus. Washington recognized the need to come to grips with the new Turkish relations with Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, Sudan and Syria despite its strong objections. The concept of "strategic partnership" appeared to be out of date and the Turkish-American relations needed a new concept. The new Turkish foreign policy could not be defined as an axial shift, but a search for a new place and approach in world politics. However, Ankara needed to communicate this better to its allies and to re-address its stance on Iran and Israel, while the US should share its policies with Turkey.³ Around the same time, the newspaper *Hürriyet*

² Mehmet Ali Birand, "Ne Dersek Diyelim, Dünya Eksen Kaymasına İnaniyor," [Whatever we say, the world believes in the axial shift] *Milliyet*, 21 September 2010.

³ Mehmet Ali Birand, "Türk-ABD İlişkilerinde Yeni Bir Tango Başlıyor..." [A new tango begins in Tur-

published an interview with President Obama who reaffirmed his confidence in Turkish-US relations despite some disagreements.

AKP's Openings

The AKP's strategic concept was called "zero problems with neighbors". It rested on the assumption that world politics was transitioning from unipolarity to multipolarity. Turkey was supposed to use its regional gravitas to become a global player without reneging on its commitments to the transatlantic alliance. Part and parcel of this strategy was the initiation of peace talks with the PKK. An alliance with the Kurds would be the first and essential step in this strategy. In other words, the global ascendancy of Turkey would only be possible with the regional cooperation of the Kurds. Both the change in foreign policy and Kurdish policy were dubbed 'openings' (açılım). Both openings were articulated as a break with traditional Kemalism, though both have been first tried and set aside by Kemalism. The problem with Turkish foreign policy, asserted the Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, was the identity crisis imposed by Kemalist reforms and the Westernized republican elites. Lacking confidence in its own identity, Westernized elites were doomed to adopt a passive stance. By restoring the nation's identity, the AKP could finally switch to a more confident, active foreign policy.⁴

Arab and Gezi Uprisings

The confidence of the Muslim bourgeoisie was shaken by a series of street protests, first in North Africa and the Gulf, and eventually in cities all over Turkey. The Arab Uprisings in 2011-2012 made the implementation of the "zero problems with neighbors" policy virtually impossible. Erdoğan's first reaction was to adopt the role of mediator between incumbent governments and protesters. He reached out to

kish-American relations...] Milliyet, 24 December 2010.

⁴ Mehmet Sinan Birdal, "The Davutoğlu Doctrine: The Populist Construction of the Strategic Subject," in *Turkey Reframed: Constituting Neoliberal Hegemony*, Ahmet Bekmen, İsmet Akça and Barış Alp Özden (eds.), London, Pluto Press, 2014, pp. 92-106.

Bashar al-Assad, whom he had previously met personally, to convince him of a political solution. Erdoğan's previous rapprochement with Assad (and his eagerness to act as a mediator between Syria and Israel) was one of the reasons for talking about an "axial shift". Erdoğan and Assad held joint cabinet meetings and introduced visa-free travel between the two countries. The Turco-Syrian rapprochement, the show-room model of AKP's "opening", thus turned to total enmity between the two regimes as Erdoğan gave his unprecedented support for the militarization of the Syrian opposition. What triggered this fundamental change?

The NATO intervention in Libya changed the landscape within which AKP's foreign policy was operating. At first, Prime Minister Erdoğan lashed out at NATO, opposing any intervention in Libya. Once it became clear that NATO forces would go in with or without Turkey, Erdoğan threatened a veto in NATO in order to take part in the military intervention. Observing American willingness to ditch its long-time ally in Egypt and to intervene in Libya, Turkish policy makers assumed that an American intervention in Syria was imminent. Thus, the active foreign policy paradigm dictated an intervention in Syria to avoid being excluded as it happened in Iraq following the Second Gulf War.

The presence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Arab uprisings also gave the AKP a new impetus to fashion itself as a model of Muslim democracy, though Erdoğan's lectures on how to combine Islam and secularism were received coldly in Tunisia and Egypt. Two successive shocks damaged this strategy irreparably: the Gezi uprisings in Turkey and another wave of street protests, followed by a coup in Egypt in the spring/summer of 2013. It should come as no surprise that Erdoğan interprets these two historic events as two sides of the same coin: a plot against his government. Both events triggered major changes in Erdoğan's domestic and foreign policy.

The coup in Egypt drove a wedge between Turkey and Saudi Arabia (and its partner, the UAE) not only in Egypt, but also in Syria and Libya. Gradually, Turkey moved towards other regional powers, Iran and Russia.

Meanwhile, the Gezi uprisings in Turkey dealt a heavy blow to relations with the West. Having surprisingly discovered that social opposition to Erdoğan's Muslim democracy was not limited to the elite secularist establishment, Turkey's Western allies wavered. Only two weeks before the protests, Hannes Swoboda, leader of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, had cancelled his appointment with Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the main opposition party CHP, after the latter criticized Erdoğan by comparing him to Assad. The Obama administration's treatment of Kılıçdaroğlu was no different. Erdoğan's leverage over Western allies in Syria was big enough to isolate any domestic opposition diplomatically.

The Kurdish question and Syria

The Gezi protests constitute the single largest social protest movement in republican history. According to the Interior Minister Muammer Güler, protests occurred over six days in 67 cities across the country.⁵ As such, they defied the prevailing "secularist-religious binary" in analyses of Turkish politics and changed the mood in international public opinion. More importantly, they opened new opportunities for the opposition, especially the Kurdish movement. The founding of the HDP represented the willingness of the Kurdish movement to become a countrywide (and not merely a regional) mass party. The popularity of HDP's Selahaddin Demirtaş and the electoral victory on 7 June 2015 were indicative of monumental changes in Turkish politics. For the first time the HDP entered the general elections as a party (rather than with individual candidates) and thus obtained more than 10 percent of nationwide votes. The HDP was now the third biggest party in parliament.

Meanwhile the Kurdish fighters in Syria seem to be enjoying the support of both Russia and the Western world in their struggle against ISIS. The emergence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria not only alarmed Western

⁵ "Gezi parkı eylemleri: Olaylar sırasında neler oldu, protestolarda neler yaşandı?" [Gezi park demonstrations: what happened during the events, what occurred in the protests?] BBC News Türkçe, 30 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-44304326>.

governments and empowered Russian and Iranian influence in the region, it also put the Kurds in the spotlight. The simultaneous rise of the Kurdish movement in Turkey and in Syria led Turkish decision-makers to end the “Kurdish opening” abruptly. Since the Gezi protests, Erdoğan had already broken with his erstwhile ally, the Fethullah Gülen community, which was an essential component in relations with the West. In a renversement des alliances, Erdoğan embraced the ultra-nationalist MHP and other Third World (pro-Russian, pro-Chinese) Turkish nationalists. As he shelved his openings for good, Erdoğan depended on a crucial factor in his relations with the West: the Syrian refugee crisis.

The coup attempt and presidentialism

The closing of the “openings” ushered a new era in Turkish politics: domestically, the regime evolved into a presidential system with no checks and balances; internationally, it increasingly relied on Russia, Iran and China. Despite supporting different sides in a bloody civil war in Syria, Turkey and Russia both cooperated to emerge as influential actors in Syria. Russian cooperation allowed Turkey to intervene in Kurdish areas and to build a “security zone” to prevent a so-called “Kurdish corridor” stretching from Iran to the Mediterranean. This strategy served as the foundation of Erdoğan’s new coalition with the MHP, civil and military bureaucracy, leading to the new presidential system.

The coup attempt of 15 July 2016 was a landmark in this regard. Prior to 15 July newspapers reported that the Chief of General Staff and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had reserves about a military intervention in Syria. Following a massive purge in the bureaucracy after 15 July, these reserves were lifted and the road to Syria lay open. Erdoğan obtained consent for the Syrian intervention from parties in the parliament, except for the HDP. Thus, with one move Erdoğan not only isolated the HDP, but also neutralized the main opposition, the CHP.

Erdoğan’s maneuver was only possible with a balancing act between the US and Russia. Since Russia controlled half of the Syrian airspace,

any military expedition without Russian support was too risky. Meanwhile the other half of the airspace was controlled by the US in close collaboration with the Kurds against ISIS. Thus, Erdoğan had to cajole these two rival great powers into accepting a Turkish incursion into Syria. The Eurasianists, who had been accused of plotting a coup against the AKP less than a decade earlier, were welcomed in Erdoğan's new coalition, substituting the Gülenists as new partners. In contrast to Gülenists, who maintained close ties to the Western alliance, the Eurasianists helped Erdoğan to mend ties with Russia, Iran and China. This did not mean, however, that transatlanticism was put aside. On the contrary, Erdoğan reassured the US that Turkey and not the Kurds was the official and long-standing ally in the region and that it could play a major role in the fight against ISIS. The transfer of power in the White House from Obama to Trump made Erdoğan's offer fall on receptive ears.

Hedging strategy and tactics

Many marvel at Erdoğan's strategic and tactical maneuvers over the last two decades, while discounting the opportunity structures that allowed these maneuvers to be conceived in the first place. Erdoğan's main political achievement is to forge a new power bloc reconciling both fractions of capital and pacifying the urban poor in the post-Cold War world. Much has changed in Sander's three conditions: the Kemalist legacy, the international system and domestic economic constituencies. Erdoğan did not articulate a new grand strategy for Turkey, but rather implemented a hedging strategy for a middle power in the post-Cold War world.⁶ Thus, under Erdoğan Turkey continues to hedge against the possibility of a deteriorating relationship with the US (and the EU) by diversifying its foreign policy portfolio. Influence in Syria and Libya present the regime in Turkey with opportunities to negotiate with its

⁶ Mehmet Sinan Birdal, "The hedging strategy in foreign policy," Heinrich Böll Stiftung Perspectives, Issue 7, January 2014, pp. 52-57. Available at: <https://tr.boell.org/en/2014/06/16/hedging-strategy-foreign-policy-publikationen>.

Western allies and isolate domestic opposition. In this regard, Erdoğan's strategic approach represents continuity rather than a break with Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s.

A brief overview of the status of the press in Turkey

Gökhan Durmuş

Issues surrounding freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Turkey is a topic frequently raised by journalists, trade unions and professional organizations, and from time to time by opposition politicians. The limits of press freedom in Turkey were never fully defined in the past. However, after 2002, when the AKP came to power, and especially since 2006, the government's policies in the media sector have played a major role in the country's press arriving at its present situation.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was intolerant of criticism against his actions even during his term as mayor, took steps to control the media at every opportunity. There have been both changes in media ownership and monopolization. He encouraged businesspeople close to him to acquire newspapers and television channels and provided financial incentives (credit support through state banks, public tenders etc.).

Since 2010, the pressure on journalists has increased even further. Conspiracies were set up against journalists through the media channels of his former companion Fethullah Gülen and his community. Dozens of journalists were deprived of their liberty with the Ergenekon and KCK cases that lasted for years. During this period, dozens of journalists were imprisoned, they were branded as terrorists and were humiliated in front of society. The character assassinations aimed at journalists continue to this day in various ways.

The conflict of interests between Erdogan and Fethullah Gülen and the subsequent coup attempt gave Erdogan the opportunity to create exactly the conditions he wanted. Politically, all power was concentrated in one man. Operations carried out against opposition groups after the coup attempt also included media organizations and journalists. Again, dozens of journalists were sent to prison.

Media organizations trying to uphold journalism were either bought out or shut down one by one. Aydin Dogan, who was the owner of Hürriyet newspaper which has been described as the flagship media outlet in Turkey, was forced to sell his newspapers and television channels to a businessperson close to the government because of the government's financial pressure and threats.

Thus, the government, which controls 90 percent of the media through media bosses with close political ties, increased its influence even more. After this change in the media sector, hundreds of journalists lost their jobs and began to search for a new way. The reason why online media has grown so rapidly in Turkey is that these unemployed journalists established new channels in which to practice their profession. By establishing new, alternative news channels, the freedom of the people to receive information was actively being defended.

The government, which is hostile to real and qualified news, has never given up on its quest to close these new channels. Broadcasting bans, access bans and penalties were often unlawfully imposed. The Information Technologies and Communication Authority was put in place to prevent the spread of online news. Undesirable news and content were censored, access was banned, and news websites were closed.

Social media usage has increased rapidly in Turkey in the last two years. Just like citizens, journalists started to deliver news to the public through their social media accounts. When interactions on social media increased and the news announced on these platforms became more wide-spread and more effective, the government also began implementing restrictions in this area. Although it is presented to the public as "the obligation of having point of contact in Turkey for international

companies,” the latest regulations form the legal basis for censorship of social media accounts. The “access ban on previous news items” included within the scope of this legal regulation aims to restrict access to historical government acts, and to erase its mistakes from social media memory. By banning access to or deleting videos depicting the close relation with the archenemy and former partner FETÖ, the aim is to erase it from the public’s memory.

Various pressure tactics against the 10 percent of the media which the government cannot control continue to be fully implemented. The Press Advertisement Institution (BIK), which was established in order to distribute public advertisements fairly and prevent political and economic pressure on the media, is used for exactly the opposite of its founding principles. This institution, whose autonomy was removed, then started to function like the private office of the President. The BIK, which is responsible for imposing numerous baseless and unlawful penalties against opposition media organizations, is now also using financial force to make them tow the government’s line. For example, BIK has not placed any public advertisements in the Evrensel and BirGün newspapers for almost a year citing baseless and unlawful reasons. Intimidation tactics are being applied against newspapers and journalists, who are merely trying to do their jobs as journalists, with numerous investigations and criminal proceedings.

An unprecedented number of defamation lawsuits have been commenced against journalists and even against ordinary citizens over recent years. The defamation cases, which were previously limited to the alleged defamation of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have recently started to include those in his immediate circle. People, journalists and politicians living in Turkey are not allowed to criticize the President nor the people within his immediate vicinity; they cannot even write about them. For example, a lawsuit was filed against a journalist who covered an illegal building project of the Presidency’s Director of Communications, and access to the news item was barred.

Courts are overwhelmed with proceedings against journalists who are accused of nothing other than carrying out their journalistic work. The fact that courts are overstretched is evidence for the fact that the judiciary has long since lost its impartiality. 72 journalists are still locked away in various prisons in Turkey, deprived of their liberty because of their news reports.

The press, which can be considered the eyes and ears of the public in uncovering the truth, is an indispensable element of democracy. However, it has become quite difficult to say that the press is playing this role in Turkey. Political polarization in society has also affected journalists. So-called “journalists” have emerged, who do not protect the public interest but act as executors for the government and target their colleagues. There is almost no news item that has not been censored. And because of the increasing pressure, self-censorship has become a strong factor obstructing journalism.

Today, it has become commonplace for newspapers under the control of the government to have the same daily headlines as if they were prepared by a single source.

There is a relatively low level of unionization and organization in the media sector. There are 25,000 people employed in that sector, with 10,000 unemployed. Journalists are forced to work as freelancers, without insurance and accept low paid work. The division among professional organizations also deepens the problems faced by professionals in the field of journalism.

However, the struggle to change this negative image and to organize journalists in unions in order to get the respect the profession deserves continues. It has never been possible for journalists to be completely silenced in our country. We have no doubt that journalism, which survived the Abdülhamit period and its repressions only to grow stronger as a result, will survive today's difficulties as well.

On the Kurdish problem in Turkey

Yusuf Karataş

The Kurdish problem revolves around the question whether the existence of the Kurds as a nation is accepted and whether their national-democratic rights are recognized on this basis. The construction of the republican regime as a “nation state” based on the interests of the Turkish middle-class formed the basis of the denial of the existence of the Kurds as a nation since the Republic was founded in October 1923. This went hand in hand with an assimilation towards Turkification and suppression of their national-democratic struggles with repression and violence. One of the most concrete expressions of this policy is the definition of citizenship based on “Turkishness” since the 1924 Constitution and the acceptance of “everybody with a civic relationship to the state as Turkish”.

Today, the Kurdish problem plays an important role in both the oppression policies within the country and the expansionist ambitions of Turkey’s foreign policy of the “one-man rule” that has an authoritarian-fascist character in Turkey. In this context, the solution of the Kurdish problem is intertwined with the struggle for democracy in the country and peace in the region (Middle East).

A brief overview of the historical background to the Kurdish problem

Because of both the religious (caliphate) structure of the state and the late entry into the capitalization process of the regions they lived in,

the process of nationalization of Muslim peoples such as Turks, Arabs and Kurds in the Ottoman Empire took place later than that of Christian peoples who had commercial, political and cultural relations with European capitalist countries. On this basis, the nationalization process of the Kurds, one of the settled peoples of Upper Mesopotamia, only began at the end of the 19th century, and the first Kurdish newspaper (Kurdistan), which is one of the important catalysts and indicators of the nationalization process, was published in 1898. Many political parties/organizations and associations were established as a result of the nationalization movement of the Kurds since the beginning of the 1900s but especially after the proclamation of the 2nd Constitutional Monarchy (1908).

In the last period of the Ottoman Empire, the Committee for Union and Progress (Young Turks), which is a Turkish bourgeois movement, came to power. It ensured that Turkish nationalism, unlike other nations, did not aim to separate itself from the state, but to transform the state. However, this transformation, which was left unfinished with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire alongside Germany in the First Imperialist Re-Division War, was completed with the War of Independence and the following establishment of the Republic.

On the other hand, even though a monist “nation state” policy was adopted after the proclamation of the Republic, which recognized the Turks as the only nation, the Kurds were accepted as one of the two founding nations along with the Turks during the War of Independence (1919-1923). Mustafa Kemal¹, mentioned granting autonomy to the Kurds only a few months before the establishment of the Republic. İsmet İnönü went to Lausanne on 23 July 1923 as the representative of the Turks and Kurds to sign the contract that is regarded as the founding agreement of the Republic. However, the Turkish bourgeoisie did not want to share sovereignty and the Republic regime was established as a nation state in October 1923. After the establishment of the Republic,

¹ Atatürk

the relatively weak and fragmented attempts by the Kurds to demand their national rights were violently suppressed. With the Law on Safeguarding Public Order, martial law was declared and extraordinary courts were established. Under the Compulsory Resettlement Law, Kurds were forced to leave their homeland. Another law prohibited all languages other than Turkish. Thus, the oppression and assimilation were made permanent.

In the 1960s, when social movements were on the increase in the world and also in Turkey, the Kurdish national movement also began to revive, and it turned into an armed movement following the fascist coup of 12 September 1980. After 1984, in what former Prime Minister and President Süleyman Demirel defined as the “final Kurdish revolt”, the armed Kurdish opposition that emerged was met by the state suppressing this movement with violence just like in the early years of the Republic. However, the policies of repression and violence played a role in increasing the national consciousness of the Kurds and accelerating their unification around a national movement. Throughout the 1990s, when conflicts intensified, the state force committed thousands of extrajudicial executions and “unsolved murders” using counter-guerrilla (special warfare) methods. During this period, the ceasefire, which was declared to create appropriate conditions for a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish problem, remained one-sided. The efforts of PKK leader Öcalan, who was arrested and brought to Turkey in 1999 in connection with USA’s regional (Middle Eastern) plans, to find a peaceful solution were also left unanswered.

During this period, the Kurdish issue was placed on the agenda in Turkey’s relations with the USA and the European countries. The USA used this fight against PKK as a bargaining chip in its regional plans, and the EU used the issue of democratization in order to put pressure on Turkey as part of the EU integration process.

The Kurdish problem in the AKP/Erdogan period

The AKP won the 2002 elections. This was a time where armed conflict

had been suspended because after Öcalan was brought to Turkey in 1999 because the PK announced a unilateral ceasefire. However, instead of using these conditions as an opportunity for a democratic and peaceful solution to the problem, the AKP and Erdogan chose to ignore the problem. During a visit to Russia, a Kurdish worker from Turkey asked Erdogan what he will do about the Kurdish problem. Erdogan responded, “If you don’t think about it, then there is no Kurdish problem”. However, after the PKK ended the ceasefire, which had lasted for 5 years, on 1 June 2004, Erdogan had no chance of not seeing and thinking about the problem.

The establishment of the Iraqi Autonomous Region of Kurdistan (ARKI) after the US intervention in Iraq in 2003 played a role in accelerating the process of intertwining the Kurdish question with regional (Middle Eastern) developments. During this period, the US aimed at bringing Turkey and ARKI together to further its own regional interests, although the rejection on 1 March 2003 of a request by the US to use Turkey’s territory for the US intervention in Iraq increased tensions in US-Turkey relations. A two-pronged policy was adopted on the Kurdish issue. On the one hand, a policy that would create expectations for the solution of the Kurdish problem based on the development of relations and cooperation between the ARKI and Turkey, but on the other hand steps would be taken towards the liquidation of both the PKK and legal Kurdish political forces in order to ensure that the Turkish state held the reigns in this solution. This process, called “Initiative” or “Opening”, lasted until the Gülen community, which was a partner of the government after 2011, uncovered secret meetings held in Oslo between the Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT) and the PKK. Gülen supporters carried out this coup as an attempt to seize MIT.

The AKP-Erdogan government’s Syrian intervention and the consequences of this in terms of the Kurdish issue

The AKP-Erdogan government, which hosted the central command of NATO forces that intervened in Libya, attempted to play a leading role

in Syria, too. Its aim was to have a say again in the lands once dominated by the Ottoman Empire, in other words, to have a share in the re-division struggles in the region by starting to lead the policy of intervention in Syria in 2011. By employing a subtle rhetoric (leading AKP politicians spoke about Friday prayers in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus), this policy, also called “neo-Ottomanism”, had a touch of denominational conflict (Sunni Islamism against Assad, who is an Alawite). As a result of this policy, jihadist militants who came to Syria from all over the world started to come to the fore in the war against the Syrian regime.

Another important result of the policy of intervention in Syria was the establishment of autonomous cantons by the Kurds in the North of Syria in the summer of 2012 due to the changing balances created by the Syrian war. Following these developments, the Erdogan administration’s dream of overthrowing the Syrian administration and praying in the Umayyad Mosque within 6 months was not realized. Due to the new balances that emerged, he was forced to start a negotiation process with Öcalan, who had been held in Imrali Prison since January 2013.

The Erdogan government had two main goals as part of the “solution process”: the first was to use the Kurdish movement for its own policies by recognizing certain individual personal rights in order to achieve its goal of introducing a presidential system.

And the second was to bring the Kurdish movement in Syria, which is in line with Öcalan, together with the radical Islamist opposition forces it supports in Syria, to overthrow the Syrian administration and achieve the goal of regional leadership.

However, the process of the state’s negotiations with Öcalan resulted in the opposite of what the AKP and Erdogan had expected.

On the one hand, this environment of non-conflict paved the way for the legitimacy of the Kurdish movement to be accepted and strengthened in the democratic field. This political attitude found its expression in the slogan “We will prevent your election as President”, made by Selahattin Demirtaş, the then co-chair of HDP during the 7

June 2015 elections. Erdogan thus had to give up on his goal of becoming President and the AKP lost its majority.

On the other hand, with the support of the international US-led coalition against ISIS, the siege of the Kobanê canton by the radical Islamist ISIS group was ended. The latter had been supported in order to eradicate the “autonomous cantons” established by the Syrian Kurds. Erdogan, whose two main goals related to the negotiation process with Öcalan were not realized, ended the negotiation process, and paved the way for another armed conflict.

During this period, the PKK decided to implement a strategy called “city wars”, which brought the conflicts to the cities in order to “make autonomy a reality”. This, in turn, made it easy for the Erdogan government to take steps to liquidate the democratic and legal Kurdish movement. “Trustees” were appointed to Kurdish municipalities, and thousands of Kurdish politicians, including party leaders, deputies and mayors, were arrested.

Another important fact revealed by the “city wars” in this period was how the EU’s “democracy criteria” changed depending on its political strategies, and the hypocrisy of the European Court of Human Rights’ (ECHR) principles of “defending human life and fundamental rights and freedoms”. Based on its political interests, the EU, which applied “democratization” pressure on Turkey’s administration when it served its purpose, had its head in the sand when it came to human rights violations against civilians committed by Turkey’s government and in the face of the murder of hundreds of civilians, especially the elderly and children. Germany’s Prime Minister Merkel did not want to jeopardize the refugee deal made with Erdogan and wanted to prevent Erdogan from using the refugee issue as political leverage. In situations that could not be ignored, she just expressed her “deep concerns”. More dramatically, applications to the ECHR for the rescue of civilians trapped in basements were simply ignored. The EU thereby became complicit in the murder of thousands of civilians.

On 15 July 2016, the coup attempt of Gülen supporters, who shared

power with Erdogan's AKP from 2002 to 2013 (later named the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization – FETÖ), created the conditions Erdogan had wanted for a long time. He declared a state of emergency, which paved the way for his de facto presidential regime. The state of emergency that was declared under the name of fighting the coup plotters (FETÖ) became the basis of the government's comprehensive attack policy against the Kurdish movement, especially the opposition.

At the same time, the Erdogan administration launched the “Euphrates Shield” operation, ostensibly against ISIS but in reality, against the Syrian Kurds, by using the conflict between the United States, which collaborated with the Kurds in Syria, and Russia, which supported the Syrian administration. The operations against the Syrian Kurds continued with the operations “Olive Branch” in Afrin and “Peace Spring” east of the Euphrates.

The state of emergency, which put paid to all kinds of democratic rights in the country, and the operations against Kurds beyond the borders, opened the way for the far-right-nationalist MHP's support for Erdogan in introducing a presidential regime and the establishment of the fascist “people's alliance” between Erdogan's AKP and the MHP on this basis. Following the constitutional referendum in 2017 and the general elections in 2018, the repressive, anti-democratic “one-man regime” under the name of presidency was installed and constitutionally enshrined.

Today, the fascist “people's alliance” continues its policy of aggression based on expansionist warmongering abroad and the liquidation of all democratic rights within the country, including the liquidation of Kurdish politics, in order to build a fascist regime in the country.

The current situation and suggestions for solutions to the Kurdish problem

As a continuation of the pressure applied in the country on the Kurdish issue and the liquidation policy of Kurdish politics, the Erdogan government sees any gains made by the Kurds beyond Turkey's borders as

a threat and seeks to intervene in order to eliminate them. It sought to get the USA, which cooperated with the Kurds for its own regional interests, to cease cooperating with the Kurds. On the other hand, it attempted to hamper Russian attempts at forging a political solution between the Syrian Kurds and the Syrian administration. However, the interventions and the operations on both the Syrian and Iraqi borders resulted in spreading the problem over a larger area, and involving more actors and thus deepening the deadlock.

By way of summary, it should be noted that, as we pointed out at the beginning, the solution of the Kurdish problem is only possibly by increasing the fight against the one-man regime and his fascist policies at home and against his expansionist warmongering abroad.

On this basis, the following is required to achieve a democratic-peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem:

- The policy of intervention across borders should come to an end, and the soldiers who were deployed in Syria and Iraq as a result of operations in these countries should be withdrawn.
- The cooperation with jihadist militants, who are used as a tool of this policy and are a threat to the peoples of the world, must be ended immediately. They must be disarmed and tried.
- The policies of repression and liquidation against the Kurdish movement must be discontinued immediately. A new dialogue/negotiation process should be initiated in order to find a solution to the problem through peaceful methods.
- The obstacles to mother-tongue education should be removed.
- Citizens who were forced to leave their homes and victimized during the conflict must be compensated and their return facilitated for those who want to return.

- The decision on what status they will live under should be left to the Kurds by way of a referendum.
- All democratic rights and freedoms should be guaranteed through a democratic constitution to be drafted with the participation of all social groups.

The general picture of migration and refugees in Turkey

Ercüment Akdeniz

Official figures show that 3.6 million Syrian refugees live in Turkey today. Together with unregistered Syrian refugees, this figure is around 4 million. The number of immigrants and refugees from other countries is around 1 million.

Since Turkey added a “geographical reservation” in the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, migrants coming from the East are no longer accepted as refugees. Syrians in Turkey therefore have an insecure immigration status known as “temporary protection”. However, the temporary status has become permanent. Since the UN’s withdrawal from Turkey, all the authority fell to the Ministry of Interior, General Directorate of Migration Administration. As a result, the asylum admission process became extremely difficult. The EU together with the developed countries of the world see Turkey as a reception center for refugees and want to perpetuate this strategy through funding. However, this situation violates both the universal declaration of human rights and international law. The Readmission Agreement signed between the EU and Turkey is also tantamount to abolishing refugees’ rights to asylum and sanctuary.

Immigrant labor exploitation and work-related deaths

According to the regular reports issued by the Occupational Health and Safety Assembly, the number of work-related deaths of refugees and migrant workers among the total number of refugee and migrant deaths are steadily on the rise in Turkey. This is because employers have found a way to get rich quickly by exploiting informal migrant labor.

Since the start of the 2011 Syrian war, over 500 refugee workers have been victims of work-related deaths. In Adana and Urfa, the bodies of victims of work-related deaths were deposited outside of factories or construction sites to avoid employers being punished.

Today the overwhelming majority of the 1.4 million refugee workers in Turkey are working in precarious employment. The Labor Law for Foreigners excludes workers from secure employment and thereby leaves them to the mercy of employers. In addition, this law paved the way for Syrian agricultural workers to work informally under an exemption certificate. The EU is generally silent about this brutal exploitation of labor. Refugee children work in small backyard workshops sewing “Produced in the EU” labels into products. Although the clients are not EU companies, intermediaries ensure that such contracts are awarded to subcontractors.

Refugees during the pandemic

There has been no satisfactory explanation to date, and no data has been shared by the UN or the Turkish state on how refugees are affected by the pandemic. Refugees, as the invisible victims of the pandemic, have not featured on the agenda of the mainstream media either.

Due to potential quarantine periods of 14 days, the majority of refugees do not go to hospitals for fear of losing their jobs and being repatriated. Migrants are forced to choose between “dying from coronavirus or starving”. They have been sentenced to a life between home and workshop. The number of meals on their table has dropped. They cannot access hygiene items. Milk and diapers for babies have become unavailable. They try to get through the pandemic by borrowing money.

While 5 million refugees and migrants are at risk of starvation in Turkey, 1.4 million of them have been deprived of unemployment benefits and social security because 99 percent of these workers are uninsured. Ali El Hemdan, one of the workers who escaped from the police to avoid a street checkpoint, died by a police bullet. In Turkey, which in the view of the EU has become the “new Bangladesh” or “new China” given the use of migrants and refugees, they have become almost completely invisible during the pandemic.

Pazarkule events

In February 2020, 33 soldiers lost their lives in an attack on Turkish army units in Syria. Shortly after this event, President Erdogan pointed to the EU-Turkey land border crossings and said, “We have opened the doors and will not close them in the future”. This declaration led to thousands of refugees and migrants in Turkey starting their journey to Edirne.

Migrants on the way to Europe headed towards the border crossing. All over the country, traffickers started to appear and people who had quit their jobs and sold their belongings fell into their hands. Their target was the Pazarkule border crossing. However, the gates there did not open, and would never open to refugees.

Although it was known that the border would not open, the question why these people were dragged there was not addressed by the mainstream media. The same “hopes” had been stirred up in 2015 and were used as a bargaining chip in negotiations about the refugee deal with the EU, although the gates remained closed back then, too. Syrian refugees who had experienced this then did not return to the border gate in 2020. The arrivals were mostly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and African countries.

The Syrian national, Nader Almonla, one of the refugees who was put at risk of the pandemic and exposed to violence by the Greek law enforcement officials, drowned in the Meriç River. Immigrants who had their hopes dashed in the no-man’s-land at the border were taken to

removal centers where they were left unattended for 14 days of quarantine. No coaches were chartered for their return, as had been done for their free trip to the border. Negotiations between Turkey and the EU, in which the refugees were used as a bargaining chip, have been temporarily suspended. There were to be no images of refugees being used as “cannon fodder” in Pazarkule and the Aegean Sea for a while.

New death route: Lake Van

Migrant border crossings decreased during the pandemic. With the relaxation of measures against the pandemic, border crossings are again on the up. The world’s third-longest wall is part of the Turkish-Syrian border. That is why increasing numbers of refugees have shifted their crossing to the Turkish-Iranian border in Van. More and more reports have emerged of refugees who have died by freezing in winter and drowning while crossing Lake Van in summer.

The bodies of 61 refugees were recovered from a boat that sank on Lake Van on 27 June. The death toll is estimated to be higher. The Van Bar Association Migration and Asylum Commission published a report setting out how traffickers have made Van their base. In the report, public border officials were asked to declare their assets. It emphasized that the closure of the UNHCR office in Van and the decline in asylum policies have paved the way for disasters. Unfortunately, the deaths of refugees in Van today do not attract as much interest as the death toll in the Aegean and Mediterranean.

Discrimination, racism, violence

Unfortunately, Turkey also ranks highly when it comes to violence and mob law against refugees. There were three major lynch mob events. Two of these occurred in 2014 and 2016, and large numbers of people fell victim to the violence. The attacks in 2016 started with the announcement by government spokespersons that Syrians would be granted citizenship. In 2019 and 2020 there was a new wave of violence.

The following list illustrates the extent of the violence:

15 July 2020: The Syrian national Hamza Acan (17), who worked at a bakery in Bursa, was asked to interpret in a dispute involving a female Syrian colleague. When he asked the traders involved to stop insulting the woman, he was killed. Only one of the four siblings arrested was of age.

26 July 2020: Five Syrian pupils, who were preparing for the “Foreign Students Exam” in the Kırıkhan district of Hatay, were attacked after their course. The aggressive group shouted, “Either you leave this country, or we will kill you.” Enes Hassani (17), who suffered a cerebral haemorrhage during the attack, is still being treated for his injuries.

26 July 2020: In the Küçükçekmece district of Istanbul, the Syrian refugee Muhammed Saeed (19), a construction worker, was attacked by an unknown group. He suffered deep cuts to his leg. The person yielding a knife shouted, “I will kill every Syrian I meet.”

11 August 2020: The Syrian Worker Muayyid El Milhim (24) was killed with a shotgun while working in Mardin Dargeçit. The reason given by the killer was that Muayyid was not available to lay parquet in his home due to lack of time.

16 August 2020: Six Syrian workers, who went to Istanbul Zeytinburnu beach to relax, were shot by someone who was allegedly drunk. The attacker swore at the Syrians from the balcony of his house. Two of the bullets hit the iron worker Abdulkadir Davud (21) who died at the scene.

23 August 2020: In Adana, the Syrian refugee Selahattin Elhasan Elcunid (27), who had been chased with a shotgun by a person with whom he was arguing on the street, was shot and killed.

The language of hate against immigrants in politics and in the media is an important factor in the occurrence of these attacks. According to reports published by research companies such as KONDA and Istanbul, concern about refugees is rapidly giving way to hatred and violence. Growing unemployment and impoverishment due to the economic crisis and pandemic are among the socio-economic reasons for this situation.

Outlook to the near future

400 refugee babies are born every day in Turkey. The number of refugee children who were born in Turkey has now exceeded half a million. Therefore, although the older Syrian generation wants to return, this is not realistic in the view of the younger generation. In addition, economic difficulties are forcing many families to live in Turkey. Of course, there is also part of the population that wants to return despite everything but almost everyone first wants to wait for peace and safety to return. The fact that Turkey as well as the EU and the UN classify the situation as a “temporary problem” makes it difficult to find permanent solutions and paves the way for polarization, xenophobia and social trauma.

The turkish economy: Plenty of unknowns and serve social problems

Bülent Falakaoğlu

The Turkish economy entered 2020 with optimistic forecasts. It was expected that the 2018-19 crisis was over, and that technically the economy would show positive growth in 2020. Both Turkish shareholders and international organizations had high expectations. Indeed, disregarding the fact that the growth was described as “not sustainable” given its nature, Turkey’s GDP had grown by 4.5 percent in the first quarter of the year. However, the pandemic, which started before the existing crisis was over, led to a new collapse. According to official calculations, the economy contracted by 9.91 percent in the second quarter. Although there are doubts as to whether this figure is realistic since it does not reflect the strong decline in the industrial and service sectors, this has become the second highest quarterly decline in the history of the Turkish economy.

Obviously, a severe recession was to be expected due to the pandemic. However, it would be very misleading to attribute the sharp contraction in the economy only to the pandemic. A quick glance at the situation before the pandemic shows this clearly. Pre-pandemic social and economic indicators reveal the tragedy of Turkish capitalism and the existence of the severe problems.

In February 2020, before the pandemic took hold and before some sectors had to end or restrict their economic activities, half of those who could work had dropped out of the labour market for various reasons. From August 2018 to February 2020, the population not in work increased by approximately 3.5 million. The rate of unemployment in the working population increased from 45 percent to 50 percent. After the start of the pandemic, this proportion increased even more. Women and young people were particularly hard hit. Existing problems such as poverty and income inequality deepened even more.

According to pre-pandemic economic indicators, the Turkish economy was among the most vulnerable economies in the world. As is illustrated in figure 1, Turkey was one of the countries with the highest external debt in proportion to its GDP. On the other hand, it is also one of the countries with the lowest foreign exchange reserves compared to its GDP (see figure 2). Turkey’s Central Bank has insufficient reserves to cover the country’s short-term debts. Turkey was therefore listed as within the 5 “economically most vulnerable” countries, and the credit rating institutions lowered Turkey’s rating to “not creditworthy”.

Private sector indebtedness was also one of the major problems for the Turkish economy which entered the pandemic with more than 170 billion dollars of foreign currency debt to be paid within one year and had no reserves to cover this. Turkey shared the first three places together with Hong Kong and China in the list of countries whose private sector is the most indebted. Moreover, the fact that a significant portion of the debt, around 80 billion dollars, belongs to

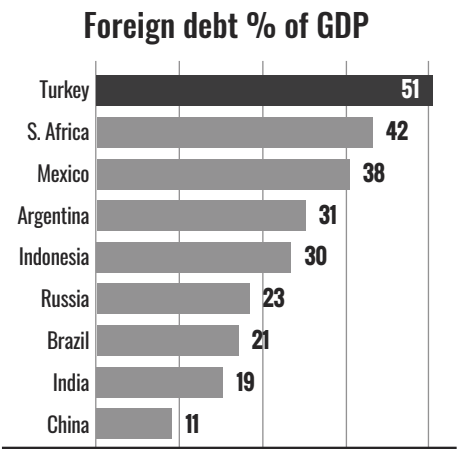


Figure 1

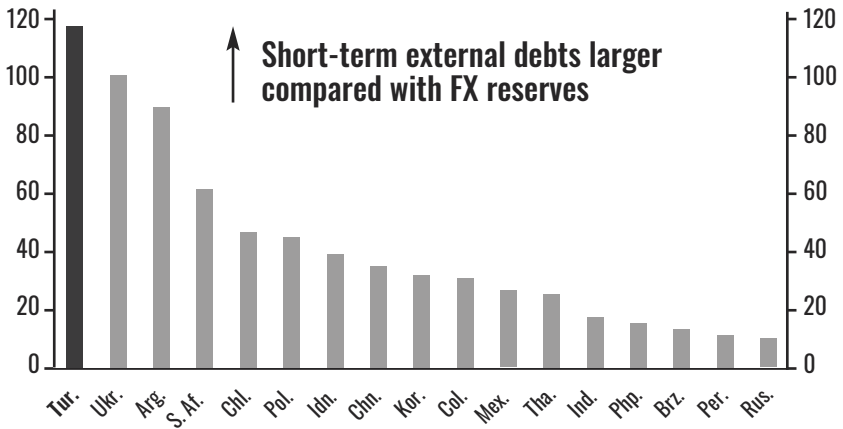


Figure 2

companies within the real economy meant that the volatility in the exchange rate was one of the biggest risks for the private sector. To make matters worse, Turkey's negative credit rating meant that it had to borrow at excessive interest rates, in some case 10 percentage points above US government bonds.

According to some commentators, the fight against the current pandemic will lead to "an economic collapse at a magnitude similar to the 1929 crisis". And Turkey entered into this pandemic with a fragile economy where the following actions were put into practice:

- In order to stimulate the economy, cheap credit was provided.
- Financial incentives were paid to companies.
- The state borrowed more in order to provide new funds, and constantly printed new money.
- Measures and rhetoric used abroad were imported into Turkey: instead of resolving the problems arising from foreign exchange shortage, measures were taken making imports more difficult, restricting foreign exchange buying and selling, and new capital controls were introduced.
- The authoritarian pressure on workers was increased: the exploitation of non-unionized cheap labor was further increased. The most obvious indicator for the increase of the authoritarian pressure was

that large sections of the working class in Turkey were exempted from measures taken to curb the coronavirus outbreak.

The practices implemented to get out of the crisis led to a recovery in the economy with the relaxation of pandemic measures in June. This led to a 75% recovery in the period from May to August compared to pre-pandemic times. From September, however, the recovery slowed down, and the following side effects of the measures came to the forefront:

1. Consumption based on cheap loans started to decrease; automotive and real estate sales started to decline.
2. Interest rates, which had been reduced almost by “force” increased.
3. Indebtedness went through the roof. In 2002, when the crisis hit the country’s economy heavily, public and private domestic and foreign debts had risen to 364.5 billion liras, a figure equivalent to the value of the GDP.
4. The creation of resources by constantly printing money, borrowing and lending backfired. Monetary expansion resulted in a run on foreign currency and a loss in value of the lira instead of investments since the economy was weak. This, in turn, led to an increase in inflation.
5. In addition to the budget deficit, a current account deficit occurred. In order to control the currency exchange rate, the Central Bank used up its currency reserves. Those three factors together led to an increase in the fragility of the economy.
6. Despite all developmentalist claims, the dependency on foreign production increased. The export/import coverage ratio declined to 75 percent. The fact that 73.8 percent of imports were intermediate goods revealed that generous support was only offered to the capital without any specific development program.

It should also be noted that the AKP government’s growth model deepened the economic problems. Throughout the 2010s, an investment and growth strategy based on construction (mega projects, infrastruc-

ture, housing, etc.) was put forward. So much so that one third of the increase in national income came from construction in the last seven years up until the 2018 economic crisis. With this model, the AKP government hoped to generate income and create resources for capital groups close to government. Furthermore, the active construction sector was supposed to stimulate employment and the supply industry. However, this meant that the government became dependent on the construction industry after a while. And that dependency started to gnaw at the economy, and foreign debt increased to twice the gross national product. One third of this was attributable to construction, which is not part of the manufacturing industry.

Investments made under the name of public-private partnerships with a high income guarantee turned into projects that created large holes in the central budget and created a heavy burden for the future of the country. There is a commitment of \$ 153.8 billion to these projects. Moreover, new PPP projects with income guarantees are in the pipeline. The government, which earned 673 billion in tax revenues in 2019, transferred 20 billion liras of this revenue to the projects it guarantees. However, due to the drop in the exchange rate and the decrease in demand, the amount to be paid this year has tripled. It is estimated that one-fifteenth of total tax revenues will go to these income guarantee projects over the next few years.

Despite the fact that the government's dependence on the sector worsens the effect of the crisis, each new incentive package promises "support for the construction industry". But in times of crisis, the numerous "incentive packages", which include increased support and cheap credit for capital groups including construction, financed by public borrowing, always have the same results: a temporary relief and a postponement of the problem. Attempts to delay the depreciation of the Turkish lira also always result in an increase in interest rates. The packages announced one after the other for the sake of stimulating the economy bring forward future consumption and create a burden on future income. In other words, it paves the way for future crises.

The Turkish economy, however, has come to its limit in terms of being able to “postpone the burdens for the future”. The dirt can no longer be swept under the rug. The government today is obliged to adopt practices that restrain credit expansion. The number of instalments is reduced, interests are increased etc. When the loans stop, the problems swept under the rug will start to hurt even more.

Moreover, a troubled period awaits the real sector. It is time to pay the taxes deferred in March when the first wave of the pandemic started and merged with the payments to be made in October. The grace period for the loans with a “2-year grace period” for the incentives given in the 2018 crisis has ended. Now, deferral requests are on the agenda again. The obligations due will inevitably lead to an even bigger budget deficit in 2020. The associated increase in public borrowing in the last quarter will cause a raise in interest rates. Turkey’s reaction to the 2020 financial collapse have created a financial imbalance and paved the way for a financial crisis.

Societal risks and problems are also on the increase. Unemployment has become a permanent state of affairs, independent of poor economic performance. Unemployment rates have chronically soared since 2015. It has increased from the 10-11 percent band in 2010 to the 13-14 percent range prior to the pandemic. The broadly defined unemployment rate calculated by including those who have no hope of finding a job, seasonal workers, and those in temporary work is much higher. Turkey is one of the five worst countries in the world in terms of youth unemployment (with a 25 percent rate).

Poverty is getting worse, and the number of suicides due to debt and poverty is increasing. Income inequality is deepening; income distribution does not improve even in years of high growth. The number of marriages and children are decreasing due to the economic troubles. The burdens placed on society are ever-increasing. Intervening in the foreign exchange market, for example by shifting debt to the treasury, does provide breathing space for indebted companies. However, this merely transfers the economic risks of companies to the public.

The crisis of the Turkish economy is triggered by two factors in addition to the inevitable laws of capitalist mechanics. The first one is external dependency which it has never been able to reduce, in terms of industry, markets and finance. The second one is the practices implemented by the government (including the policy of constant war and tension). Due to the problems in Turkey related to the economic model and the crisis management response, longer-term and deepening crises will continue to alternate with short recovery phases. So everything points to the fact that the expensive and long-lasting vicious circle of ups and downs will not be broken in the near future!

State of the trade union and labor movement in Turkey

The impact of privatization and subcontracting on trade unions

Seyit Aslan

The trade union movement in Turkey is currently experiencing its “weakest” period of the last 20 years. One of the main factors in this is the privatization and subcontracting process that started in the 1990s. Most of the manufacturing companies in the public sector have been sold to the private sector or to international groups. In a first step, union representations in those companies were dissolved, and the de-unionisation began. Unsold companies were closed to stop them competing with the private sector. Only few public institutions remain. The number of employees of the remaining public institutions, who were primarily employed by sub-contractors, declined to a minimum. Unions lost hundreds of thousands of members as a result of years of privatization. Given that lost members were not replaced, and despite an increase in the number of employed workers and in the population, membership numbers fell below those of 40 years ago.

Working conditions of workers

According to official figures, the total number of employed workers today is 14,251,655. Taking into account unregistered workers and refugee workers in the country, there are a total of over 30 million workers. Unregistered workers have no social security and are not even allowed

to become union members. Although the legal working time is 7.5 hours, most workers are forced to work 10-14 hours a day. Wages are extremely low despite long working hours. Unionized workers are paid slightly better. The average wage of non-unionized workers is between 2,400 and 2,600 Turkish liras, which is approximately 300 euros. Difficult working conditions, modern slavery and compulsory labor have become the rule. By implementing new working conditions and performance criteria, workers are forced to compete with each other and production is increased exponentially. There are now very few factories left that do not present a hazard to health. There is a lack of ventilation in factory halls, and canteens, showers and toilets are not being kept clean enough. Workers are provided with low-calorie, poor quality and cheap meals. The vehicles that take workers to and from factories are old and are operated over capacity. Working hours of workers, including the time spent on the road, vary between 12 and 16 hours. Low wages and difficult working conditions have a negative impact on workers' physical and psychological health.

Trade union laws

Historically, there had never been a democratic law in Turkey that ensured trade union rights and freedoms, including the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike. The rights gained through industrial action before the military coup of 12 September 1980 were basically abolished. The Trade Union Law No. 2821 and the Strike and Collective Labor Agreement Law No. 2822, enacted under the military rulership, substantially restricted the vested rights of workers. In order to gain the right to collective bargaining, for instance, the law required trade unions to organize 10% of workers in the business sector at country level, as well as having representations in more than 40% of companies. These requirements made unionization de facto impossible. Even though these laws have now been partially revised by the AKP, the obstacles to organizing collectively continue to apply in a similar vein. Union membership is subject to laws and limits drawn up by the state. To become a member

of a union, it is compulsory to register on the ministry's website. Workers must choose a union from a pre-defined list. Country-wide thresholds with regard to organizational quotas in the respective business sectors and companies continue to apply. If everything goes well and no obstacles are encountered, the minimum time of employment required for workers to benefit from a collective bargaining agreement in the workplace is one year. If there is an objection from the employer or the unions regarding a collective agreement, this process takes up to six years in the courts until an enforceable agreement is reached. This is tantamount to a ban of collective agreements. During this time, workers who are union members may be dismissed, forced to resign from the union, or the union may be banned from the workplace. De facto, workers have no freedom to choose unions. Every worker who gets involved in union work faces the risk of being fired. Especially in the last 20 years, there have been mass layoffs in many workplaces that have become unionized. The large number of fights in companies who had merely demanded the acceptance of unions and the reemployment of workers who had been laid off pay testament to this.

Divided union structure

One reason for the weakness of the trade union movement is a divided and fragmented union structure. There are dozens of independent unions, together with three trade union federations (DİSK, Türk-İş, Hak-İş). There are 22 unions affiliated with 'DİSK, 21 affiliated with Hak-İş, and 34 affiliated with Türk-İş. In the most recent statistics of the Ministry of Labor, from a total of 1,946,165 unionized workers, Türk-İş has 1,021,952 members, Hak-İş has 687,790 members, and DİSK has 190,559 members. 45,754 workers are members of independent trade unions. 8% of all workers who are members of trade unions benefit from collective bargaining agreements, the remaining 5.66% do not benefit from any rights. The reason for this is that in many cases unions cannot use their collective bargaining rights since they do not have the required organizational quotas. Hak-İş has gained the most members

in the last 15 years. This is due to the direct support of the state and the AKP government, which forced workers to become members of Hak-İş. Those working in the public sector were forced to do so especially by the government, ministers, undersecretaries, superiors, directors, local municipalities and by political pressure. While the same is true for Türk-İş, Hak-İş is the backyard of the AKP government, and the trojan horse in the labor and trade union movement. Türk-İş and Hak-İş support a significant part of the policies of the AKP government and express this openly.

Union bureaucracy

One of the main problems faced by the working class and the trade union movement is union bureaucracy. While the laws make it difficult for workers to unionize, they give great privileges to union executives. Their wages, lifestyle and working conditions are completely unregulated. There is no evidence of union democracy. Although there are unions that carry out elections, representatives are mostly appointed, and consist of people close to the union headquarters who have been approved by the employers. Branch delegate elections are carried out for show only; union congresses are not run as boards where issues are discussed and solutions found. Opposition workers and trade unionists are punished by being dismissed or moved to another workplace. Astronomically high wages paid to most trade union officials deepen the gap between them and the workers. Union bureaucracy walks hand in hand with the state, government and capital. There are many obstacles to the supervision of unions by workers. The limited opportunities offered by union congresses are very restricted because the unions suppress the democratic process. It is not possible for workers to contact union leaders and managers. Information about the collective bargaining process is not shared with workers, and collective bargaining agreements are signed without seeking workers' opinion. On the other hand, sects and religious groups are encouraged by the state and by some union leaders to organize workers with the aim of getting workers to resign

themselves to their fate and refrain from going on strike. These sects are primarily active in large companies (Renault, Tofaş, Bosch, Tüpraş).

Pandemic, crisis and unemployment

Unemployment is at the highest level of the last 20 years. The pandemic combined with the existing crisis has caused unemployment to soar. According to data of the Turkish Statistical Institute (Tür), the labor force decreased by 2.742 million within the last year, from 32,426,000 to 29,684,000. In addition, there are 3.5 million unemployed public workers. During the pandemic, 1,800,000 workers were sent on unpaid leave and had to live on 1,168 lira (130 euros as at the end of 2020) per month. 3.5 million workers were put on short-time work and lost 40% of their wages. According to official figures, the number of workers registered with the ministry is 14,251,655. This means that the unemployment rate is close to 45%. There is no trust in the statements and the statistics provided by official institutions in Turkey. More reliance is placed on statements made by independent institutions, according to which there are approximately 12 million unemployed people, i.e. 35% of the total workforce. During the pandemic, workers became more vulnerable and working conditions have worsened. The necessary preventive measures are not taken in workplaces which is why Covid-19 is rife there. Recently, many vested rights have been withdrawn. Labor laws are being made more flexible. Severance pay was undermined and the contributions were transferred to a state-owned fund. Weekly working hours were extended and obligations introduced to make up for any periods of sick leave. Unpaid leave, short-time work allowance, and mass layoffs remain on the agenda. Out of all these problems, women workers face the most issues as more women than men are made unemployed.

Strike bans

The most important weapon workers have at their disposal to get their demands accepted by employers is strike. When we look at the development of strike bans in Turkey, we see that the number of strikes has

decreased by 85% between 2001-2015 compared to the 1985-2000 period. During AKP rulership, countless strikes were banned and the right to strike was practically abolished. A total of 16 strikes was banned between 2002 and 2019. Seven of these bans came during the state of emergency. Workers' right to collective bargaining has been completely eroded with the strike bans. Erdogan's words at the meeting of representatives of international capital: "In our time, there will be no strikes and no industrial action" say it all. They show that the AKP is on the side of capital. The strike bans were brought before the administrative courts and the Court of Cassation, whose only mandate is to rule in favor of approving the bans. In the last few years there was not a single court ruling setting aside a strike ban imposed by the government.

Refugee workers

The situation is more difficult for refugee workers who are part of the working class in Turkey. Especially in the last six years, refugee workers, among the millions of refugees who fled the war in Syria, have been forced to work without any security whatsoever. They have to work in harder and more dangerous jobs compared to Turkish workers. They have to sleep and live at their workplaces. In many cases, they are cheated out of their fair wages because they work without employment contracts and therefore without social insurance and legal rights. Those in government encourage this situation because competitiveness of the capital takes precedence over everything else. Syrian workers suffer a higher percentage of work-related deaths than their Turkish colleagues despite being paid less. Refugee workers are considered to be a potential danger and are forced to live in a state of fear and discrimination.

Tendency to engage in labor disputes

In Turkey's history, workers and laborers have been involved in many labor disputes. During these struggles for economic, social and democratic rights and freedoms, they learned from their own practices and gained a lot of experience.

Before the pandemic, the actions of workers were mainly aimed against dismissals, privatizations, for an improvement of wages and a decent minimum wage, against long working hours, for the payment of overtime wages, against uninsured and insecure work, for permanent employment contracts, against poor working conditions and against work-related deaths etc.

Since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2018, hundreds of thousands of workers have participated in resistance and industrial action in the construction, textile, metal, automotive, food, transportation, petrochemical, energy, cleaning and health industries.

However, although action was often taken for similar or even the same demands, they mostly took place at the level of individual factories and workplaces, and did not expand to span a wider level of business sectors.

In 2018-2019, the metal sector was the area with most industrial action taken and with the largest numbers of participants in demonstrations and rallies across the country. During these years, two collective bargaining processes took place in the metal sector, and metalworkers fought for an improvement to working conditions and especially for wage increases. Although the participating workers made the experience that they will not get what they want unless they take matters into their own hands, workers who did not want to leave the fight at the mercy of union bureaucracy were sadly in the minority.

Other prominent examples of workers' struggles and resistance was the industrial action taken by the workers of Istanbul's 3rd Airport, Flormar, Tariş, Tüpraş, Izban and Izenerji.

The level of organization of the workers in the factory and the workplace was the determining factor as to whether these struggles were successful or not. In companies where workers managed to unite at the factory and workplace level or managed to come together behind union representatives or pioneer workers, their unity was their key to successful industrial action.

With the coronavirus pandemic starting to be felt from the middle of March 2020, the authoritarian government pursued a herd immunity

policy for workers, which is why the demands for healthy working and living conditions were added to the demands listed above. Demands included the suspension of production in the event of increased infection numbers, the prohibition of dismissals, the distribution of free masks, widespread and regular tests in factories and workplaces and free health services.

Serious protests arose in major industrial cities against the continued requirement for workers to come into work by insisting that production must continue even during the most intense weeks in which the “stay at home” recommendation issued by the Science Committee, which was established by the AKP government under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Health and whose power is just limited to consultation, applied. In dozens of factories and workplaces where outbreaks in cases occurred, workers managed to achieve the suspension of production with the right to paid leave for a period of 2 to 4 weeks in general and in some places more than that.

The common theme present throughout these actions was that they were mainly experienced as power struggles, and that they got results according to the strength of factory and workplace organization.

In June 2020, when the summer months and the “new normal” began, so did another attempt of usurping workers’ rights, which the Erdogan government and the capitalists behind it have been exploiting at every opportunity for years. This attempt, which mainly involved enacting a new law undermining the right to severance pay, included a complementary retirement fund and an extension of the working life for some sectors. There have been significant protest reactions among workers against these new attacks on existing rights. The government took a temporary step back and postponed these regulations until October/November in order to stem the rising tide of protests.

Conclusion

During the rulership of the AKP, union organization weakened, workers became impoverished, unemployment increased, per capita income de-

creased, the number of workers killed in work-related deaths increased exponentially and working conditions worsened. Over the past 18 years, the AKP managed to gain support from workers for economic reasons. It received mass support by addressing the Kurdish issue, through its Syrian policy and by invoking big neo-Ottoman dreams. By appearing anti-imperialist and by promising to make the country one of the ten richest, the AKP created an illusion in order to stop workers from protesting. It mobilized all the possibilities open to the state to gain new powers, forge new election alliances and to use Goebbels-like propaganda to convince the people. Now, we are in a period where the AKP is showing the first cracks and volatilities and workers are becoming more and more likely to question AKP policies. Supporters and voters amongst the workers no longer treat their politics as uncritically as they once did. In the meantime, local platforms and unions have been organized without making any distinction as to trade union federation membership. The most concrete example of this is the Istanbul Workers' Unions Branches Platform. Local trade union branches came together in the working-class towns of Gebze, Kocaeli, Eskişehir, İzmir, Lüleburgaz and many more. This trend is on the up and is paving the way for the workers' movement.

Work-related deaths, severance pay and the law

Dr. Murat Özveri

The occupational health and safety legislation aimed at preventing work-related deaths in our country is far from providing adequate protection. Inadequate legislation is of course an important problem. The problem becomes even more severe when even the inadequate legal measures remain on paper and do not get implemented, which exacerbates this problem. Even if it is difficult, these problems should not prevent the effective implementation of the law against work-related deaths.

1. Employer's Liability

The practice of our country regarding an employer's liability for work-related deaths has adopted the principle of compensation based on fault where legal liability is concerned. The employer is responsible according to its level of fault, and the distribution of joint and several liability, which is a legal concept, is left to the discretion of the experts in labor trials. The judges determine compensation according to the distribution of joint and several liability as determined by the expert. The task of the expert to reveal the factors that have led to the accident has steadily expanded and today involves determining each party's liability quota. The role of the judge has become limited to deciding the amount of compensation calculated according to the liability quota determined by the expert.

The determination of the criminal liability of the employer hides behind the “personality principle” and criminal sanctions mainly hit lower-level managers (as the employer’s representatives). The same clauses under criminal law that relate to crimes committed in negligence also apply to work-related deaths. Thus, those really responsible for work-related deaths have not faced any deterrent sanctions in legal practice for more than 80 years.

2. The State Fails to Fulfil Its Obligations Arising from the International Conventions and the Constitution

In our country, Article 5 of the 1982 Constitution lists the basic duties of the state, which includes “the removal of political, economic and social obstacles that limit the fundamental rights and freedoms of the person and are incompatible with the principles of the social state under the rule of law and with the law, and the creation of the necessary conditions for the development of the material and spiritual development of human beings”. In the justification of Article 5, it says that “the state will ease the individual’s life struggle. It will make it possible for individuals to live in dignity. This is the duty of the social state.” The Constitution, in Article 2, describes the state as a “social state” and included provisions that guarantee a series of social rights.

If provisions of the Constitution that require the state to take measures are understood as “programmatic provisions”, this is not an approach compliant with the characteristics of social rights. These provisions place the state under an obligation to enable individuals to exercise their social rights. In concrete terms, the state’s obligation has two dimensions. The first is the granting of social rights, and the second is to provide all citizens with equal access to these rights. A state that does not grant a social right defined in the Constitution – for whatever reason – and does not create the opportunity for everyone to benefit from an existing right equally and effectively will be held responsible for not fulfilling either or both obligations.

To give a concrete example, the state did not fulfil its duties properly while making regulations in the field of occupational health and safety. In the Occupational Health and Safety Law No. 6331, the state did not employ an adequate number of qualified and assured labor inspectors who would effectively carry out external audits of workplaces. For example, in Soma, in addition to its general obligations, it failed to appoint an engineer as a technical supervisor and did not ensure that notarized technical supervisor books were kept at least every fifteen days.

It did not provide the assurances it was obliged to by ILO Convention No. 161 to occupational health professionals and workplace physicians who are responsible for internal company supervision, as well as to workers' representatives responsible for occupational health and safety measures.¹ However, in accordance with Article 10 of the Convention, Turkey is under the obligation to ensure that workers' representatives who are responsible for occupational health and safety measures "shall enjoy full professional independence". The responsibility of the state is not only limited to these examples. The state is responsible for taking positive action in the realization of social rights. It is responsible for ensuring that the opportunities for exercising these rights are provided.²

Severance Pay: What, Why, and How? What Should Be Done?

On 10 April 2019, the Minister of Treasury and Finance, Berat Albayrak, announced that there will be a reform of severance pay as part of a recovery package; under this reform a severance payment fund will be established, and this fund will be integrated in the private pension insurance.

¹ Turkey ratified "ILO Convention No. 161 Concerning Occupational Health Services" with Ratification Act No. 5039 on 7 January 2004. The Act was published in Official Gazette No. 25345 on 13 January 2004. According to Article 10 of ILO Convention No. 161, "The personnel providing occupational health services shall enjoy full professional independence from employers, workers, and their representatives, where they exist, in relation to the functions listed in Article 5."

² On the responsibility of the state regarding social rights, see Murat Özveri, "Realization of Social Rights by taking Legal Action in Turkish Law", Social Rights International Symposium III, Papers, Petrol Is Publication 116, 2011, p. 139, also available under <http://www.sosyalhaklar.net/2011/bildiri/ozveri.pdf>

Immediately after the announcement of Minister Albayrak, the South Korean severance pay model began to be discussed.

South Korea changed its system of severance pay in 2005. Under the new model, severance pay has been turned into a payment made to workers only when they retire. To put it more clearly, severance pay was abolished in South Korea starting from 2005. In the system that was put in place, employers must initiate a retirement plan for their workers who work at least 15 hours a week and have at least 1 year of service. The annual premiums to be paid by the employer to the fund must be sufficient to ensure that the workers receive an income equal to 1 month's gross wages for each year. If they wish, the workers themselves are able to increase the amount of money they accumulate by paying into private pension funds.

Under this system, workers will only receive severance payments in addition to their pension if they want to use the money to buy a house or have to finance a prolonged hospital stay.

If neither of those two options is exercised, the South Korean model provides that the severance pay is paid out as a second pension.

And that is the key point in the planned reform:

- South Korea is the country with the highest rate of senior poverty among OECD countries. It is ranked first place on the high poverty rate of the population over the age of 65.
- South Korea is the second lowest OECD country with a ratio of public pension spending in relation to GDP at 3%.

These two facts show us that pensions are very low in South Korea and retirees face enormous problems. Instead of increasing pensions under its model, the government of South Korea has implemented a policy of repaying the additional contributions made by retirees during their time of employment. In short, the South Korean government has resorted to tackling senior poverty caused by low pensions by imposing new burdens that also need to be borne by workers.

The essence of the so-called South Korean model is the state confiscating severance pay.

The South Korean Model - Decreasing Pensions and Severance Pay in Turkey

The retirement age was raised in Turkey by Law No. 5510, which entered into force in 2008. The indices used as a multiplier in the calculation of the retirement pension and the share of contributions have been reduced. Thus, pensions have been reduced by approximately 30% since entry into force of the new law.

The AKP government has the choice of either increasing the pensions, that is, transfer resources from the rich to the poor, or making workers pay the price of new law, as in South Korea.

There are clues as to which option it will choose in the Eleventh Development Plan:

- Article 271 of the Eleventh Development Plan reads:”Participation in pension systems other than the public pension system will be encouraged in order to increase the retirement income of individuals.”
- Article 271(1) of the Eleventh Development Plan reads:”The scope of complementary pension funds will be expanded and complementary pension funds based on sector, business line or occupation will be strengthened.”

That means that the Eleventh Development Plan says that the state will not increase pensions but will encourage other pension systems, which workers will have to finance out of their own pocket. The low pensions are bolstered by additional funds taken from workers’ pockets. How so?

- Article 223(3) of Part 2.1.2 of the Eleventh Development Plan, headed “internal savings”, reads: “The mandatory membership in private pension insurance will be rearranged to increase the duration of stay and the fund volume. In addition, a fund will be integrated based on individual memberships, which will be used to finance severance pay.”

It is quite obvious: the Eleventh Development Plan aims at implementing the South Korean model in Turkey. That means that poverty caused by low pensions is to be fought by confiscating workers' severance pay. Again, the poor are made to pay the price of poverty.

- Article 568 of the Eleventh Development Plan reads: "Severance pay reform will be implemented."
- Article 568(1) of the Eleventh Development Plan reads: "Severance pay reform will be carried out in agreement with the social partners."

Will the social partners make those who created this poverty brought about by the reduced pensions pay, or will they waive their right to severance pay to combat old age poverty? Will workers' representatives be satisfied with the assurances given under the South Korean model, will they sacrifice severance pay to make it a means of compensating retirees for the reduction of pensions and combatting senior poverty?

Under the pretext of introducing the South Korean model, the government wants to confiscate workers' severance payments.

When South Korea introduced the model, it killed two birds with one stone. On the one hand, it confiscated the severance pay of the workers and transformed these additional funds into a second pension system. And, on the other, the huge sums of money collected in the additional

Work-related deaths in the last five years

According to the data of the Istanbul occupational health and safety council, from 2015 to July 2020, at least 10,463 workers suffered work-related deaths.

in Work-related deaths

Years	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	total
Deaths	1.730	1.970	2.006	1.923	1.736	1.098	10.463

Source: Istanbul Occupational Health and Safety Council

* Data for the first 7 months of 2020

funds were transferred to capital groups to use as they please. The AKP government, too, wants to take the money from the severance pay fund to pay off domestic debts.

Therefore, one cannot expect that the assurances that the severance pay fund will be maintained can be kept under the planned reform. The fund must be structured as an unseizable right of workers that is paid to the worker upon its dissolution, secured with a treasury guarantee. All proposals outside of this framework are nothing more than a veil masking the confiscation of severance pay by the state.

Restructuring of the judicial system in Turkey and the role of lawyers

Gülşah Kaya

In light of the government policies and practices that have been going on throughout its history, it is no exaggeration to say that Turkey has never been a state that complied with the rule of law. However, it is an objective fact that the universal principles of law were completely abandoned with the legal practices that started with the declaration of a state of emergency (OHAL) declared after the coup attempt in 2016 and the consequent introduction of the presidential system. Considering the radical changes made to constitutional institutions in the last few years, it is fair to describe the new legal order and state as a “one-man rule”. In order to examine this change and the restructuring process, it is useful to take a look at the current state of affairs.

A state of emergency was declared by the Council of Ministers on 20 July 2016, immediately after the coup attempt on 15 July 2016. During the 730-day state of emergency, the state was governed by statutory decrees (Kanun Hükmünde Kararnameler – KHK) that were issued overnight. With these statutory decrees, radical changes were made to various laws, and hundreds of thousands of public officials were dismissed.

The first changes were made to the Code of Criminal Procedure (CMK). During the state of emergency, 4 changes were made to the CMK at different times. According to the new order, custody periods

were extended from 4 days to 15 days, the maximum detention period was increased from 3 to 5 years, and the period for monitoring suspects by technical means was increased from 2 months to 4 months. Lawyers were banned from seeing their clients in custody. Regulations were made that violate all principles of modern criminal proceedings, such as restricting visitations with prisoners, recording them with cameras and monitoring by a guard during visitations. In addition, serious restrictions were imposed on the right to defence, such as banning lawyers who are under investigation from performing their duties related to terror crimes, limiting the maximum number of lawyers representing a defendant to 3, continuing the trial and reaching a judgment even in the absence of a lawyer.

Fundamental changes have been made regarding the functioning and decisions of the Regional Courts, which act as courts of appeal, and the Supreme Court, which is the highest appeal court in the country. Under these changes, the lack of justification for a court decision is no longer a reason for the reversal of a judgment. The circumstances in which the Supreme Court had to hear an appeal case, which had previously been defined by law, are now left to the discretion of the Supreme Court.

During the same period, many judges and prosecutors were dismissed from public service and arrested, and their assets were confiscated on the grounds that they were members of FETÖ¹. Although there was no proof of this, some opposing judges and prosecutors were either exiled or forced to retire. Following the dismissals and retirements, due to which the number of judicial personnel decreased significantly, changes were made in the conditions for becoming a judge and prosecutor. With a statutory decree issued 6 months after the declaration of the state of emergency, the threshold score required to get from the written exam to becoming a judge and prosecutor was removed. Almost everyone who took the exam was given an oral in-

¹ Fethullahist Terrorist Organization

terview. This change soon revealed its consequences. It turned out that almost all the newly appointed judges and prosecutors were members of the AKP.

Shortly after this change, a constitutional referendum was held, which included the transition to the presidential system. The “one-man” administration of the President, who was already equipped with the powers to commit all kinds of illegal acts using the statutory decrees after the coup attempt, became legal as of 18 April 2017. The “principle of separation of powers”, which had already practically disappeared, was formally abolished. The rule of “not being a member of any political party”, one of the most important indicators symbolising the independence and impartiality of the president, was removed and the “party member presidency” period started. Right after the referendum, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan became a member of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). This change has become one of the symbols of the new era. At the same time, the President was given superior powers with this referendum. In summary, almost all the powers of the state were concentrated under the President.

With the new system, not only the style of state administration, but also the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) was transformed and turned into the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK). Undoubtedly, this change was not just about names. Seven of the 13 members of the HSK are appointed by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM), and 4 members other than the Minister of Justice and the undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice, who are both considered natural members of the HSK, are appointed by the President. The fact that the majority of members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly as well as the President belongs to the AKP means that all HSK members are determined by the current ruling party. As a matter of fact, all candidates who participated in the first election were members of the AKP and its ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). In the previous week, when the judges were appointed, it transpired that they were all members of the ruling party.

The step-by-step changes throughout this process have been the clear and final moves in the restructuring of the judiciary. In this process, the legislative, executive and judicial powers were concentrated in the hands of the President, and the principle of separation of powers, and therefore the rule of law, was formally left behind. As a natural consequence of the politicization of the judiciary, the independent and impartial judiciary was shelved, and all violations of the law became public.

Practices in the new judicial era

The effects of the new judicial era became more obvious especially in political cases. The judicial system was turned into a means of punishing opponents, by instrumentalizing members of the judiciary while casting a cloud over their independence and impartiality. Judges and prosecutors who were previously stigmatized for obtaining evidence by using illegal methods or creating false evidence in previous periods were replaced with judges and prosecutors who handed down judgments as instructed and without any evidence. It was not even felt necessary to hide the fact that judgments were based entirely on instructions. Court decisions that have not yet been handed down are being announced by pro-government media channels. Judges who decided against the will of the government found themselves suspended, demoted or moved to another job for disciplinary reasons. Those who reflected the will of the government in their decisions were promoted to higher judicial bodies. The principle of fair trial was entirely deleted from the Turkish judiciary.

In the practice of the new era, the principles of modern criminal proceedings are being ignored, and the practices are reminiscent of the order of medieval inquisition courts. Instead of charging the suspect on the basis of evidence, the opposite applies in that suspects are selected first and then evidence is sought. Opponents are detained for months without any reason, even without an indictment. They are arbitrarily held in solitary confinement and under severe conditions. All kinds of legitimate political actions of the government's opponents, who undergo secret investigations, are being portrayed as "terrorist" activities. Thou-

sands of people were subjected to severe sanctions, such as prison sentences, only because of criticism they shared on social media. A teacher was punished for saying “Don’t let children die” in a television program, and academics were dismissed for being peace activists.

Lawyers due to their duty of defence, journalists who criticized the government, workers protesting workplace conditions, women taking to the streets against violence, or students wanting an independent university – in short, everyone in opposition was dragged in front of the courts of the new era. However, in proceedings where the opponents were victims, justice was reversed. No justice was served in trials involving political opponents who were subjected to state violence. Investigations were closed, and public officials went unpunished.

Lawyers as the last bastion of the opposition

One of the things that can be clearly said for the AKP government is that it transformed almost all public institutions and organizations in its favour during its 18 years in power. The appointment of its own people to leadership positions, whose effects can be clearly seen in the fields of education and health, was not that obvious in the judiciary until the period described above. However, as AKP Chairman and President Erdogan himself expressed, the coup attempt was a “grace from heaven”, which not only enabled the government to seize the army, one of the dominant powers, but also accelerated the appointment of its own people in all other fields.

As a result of the process summarized above, two of the three constituent pillars of the judiciary, namely judges and prosecutors, have clearly come under the control of the government. As opponents of the unlawful practices of the government, lawyers have remained the last bastion of the judiciary. Because almost all of the norms that were legalized by the statutory decrees caused violations of human rights, lawyers stood against these violations at every stage in judicial proceedings. Lawyers tried to keep doing their work without following the new and unlawful rules. For this reason, they had to fight both

professionally and politically. This situation made lawyers a direct target.

Professional organizations and bar associations in Turkey were targeted due to their opposing attitudes and their effects on politics in general, especially during the Gezi Park protests that started in 2013. Various sanctions were imposed on almost all of these organizations. However, in addition to being oppositional in general, the bar associations became the “archenemy” of the government because of their opposition to the restructuring of the judicial system. In fact, there are 80 bar associations in Turkey and almost none of them are led by people who are close to the AKP. Therefore, bar associations are in the position of permanent opponents of the judicial policies of the AKP.

It has been known for a long time that there are plans to split the bar associations to “bring down” the lawyers who the AKP regards as obstacles in the judiciary. In June 2020, when Mehmet Görmez, the President of Religious Affairs, said that LGBTI individuals spread illness, the Ankara Bar Association reacted to this. The government used this as an excuse to press the button for what the government was long planning. The “divide and conquer” logic, which is the AKP’s policy whenever it cannot take power, came into play here as well.

All 80 bar associations affiliated with the Turkey Bar Association (TBA) protested in the streets for days and put out press statements and studies to oppose this system. All the dangers of this system were explained in detail: it would divide the profession, blacklist lawyers and affect court decisions. All objections, including some of the lawyers within the AKP, were ignored and a bill was prepared. While lawyers continued their protests in their own cities, presidents of the bar associations marched to Ankara. However, they were blocked at the entrance of Ankara by the police and barricaded for days within a police cordon and subjected to violence. Throughout the whole process, TBA President Metin Feyzioğlu stood by the government, against the lawyers, and even tried to divide the bar associations. For this reason, he faced severe reactions from both lawyers and the bar association presidents.

Despite all the opposition, the law was passed by Parliament. This was how the AKP showed the world that it had the power to carry out all kinds of illegal acts. However, time showed that it will not be easy to split bar associations. To this day, it has not been possible to collect an adequate number of signatures to establish a new bar association, which has therefore not been established yet. However, attacks against lawyers have not stopped, and discussion about the dismissal of lawyers from the profession have commenced.

An attempt was made to keep the influence of the lawyers, who were the only group within the judiciary who was resisting the pressure, out of the process described above. Lawyers' access to the case files was banned by restrictions placed on the investigation files. Parts of buildings in which prosecutors and judges assigned to terrorist crimes have their offices, may only be entered with a special permit. Many lawyers were banned from courtrooms due to their objections. In addition, all actions and activities carried out by lawyers for human rights were suppressed by police violence. The most drastic attack to date was the attempt to portray professional activities of lawyers as a crime. Many lawyers were investigated, prosecuted, arrested, and their offices and homes were raided.

Recently, almost all the lawyers of the law firm "Halkın Hukuk Bürosu" were arrested in an operation. Despite the release of the lawyers in the first hearing, the decision was unlawfully reversed and the court panel that made the decision was removed from the case. After the lawyers were arrested again, the court quickly decided to punish them. Two of the detained lawyers, Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal, went on hunger strike, demanding a fair trial. Human rights organizations and political parties protested, asking the Supreme Court to order an immediate release decision. The Supreme Court persistently refused to release them, which meant that the lawyer, Ebru Timtik, died 238 days into her hunger strike. The lawyer Aytaç Ünsal, on the other hand, was released after 212 days on hunger strike, following the death of Ebru.

After Ebru's death, her colleagues held a ceremony in front of the Istanbul Bar Association of which she was a member. During the ceremony, a banner with a photograph of Ebru was hung from the bar building. Süleyman Soylu, Minister of Interior Affairs, used this as a pretext to make a speech threatening the bar association. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan repeated his call for "lawyers engaged in terrorist activities" to be dismissed from the profession, and the AKP immediately started preparations. This latest move shows once more that lawyers are the strongest obstacle to the restructuring of the judicial system.

The development and the current status of ecological efforts in Turkey

Özer Akdemir

Although ecological efforts in Turkey have taken a bumpy course at times, they developed in line with measures taken by governments, which led to nature being exploited and destroyed. In the dizzying pace of the country's agenda, it has gained increasing momentum in recent years.

The ecological dimension of economic and social developments is shaped by the political preferences of a political power integrated with world capitalism. The economic policies implemented by the AKP government, the pollution of living spaces, air, water and soil, dispossession, non-agricultural use of agricultural land, giving the country's resources to the capital and other factors have led to the strengthening of ecological efforts made by locals.

While some of these struggles have been hampered by legal proceedings, others have resulted in local environmental resistance initiatives, known in Turkey as “vigils for life”.

While some of these local campaigns break up after periods of successes or failures, we see new dynamics emerging somewhere else. These local efforts, which are linked to other areas of struggle in society, have managed to last longer provided they were backed by mass public support.

19 years of AKP rulership in Turkey have not only been characterised by problems involving democracy, labor freedom, the Kurdish issue, human rights, press freedom, women, university activism and the economy, but they have also brought with them the plundering and destruction of nature.

These 19 years were years in which struggles for democracy, labor rights, freedom and ecology in the country were tested again and again.

It is now a scientific fact that the climate crisis triggered by global warming has dragged our planet, the home of all living things, almost to a point of no return. Turkey's government increases carbon emissions every year and simply ignores the warning signs that the world's ecological balance is under threat. It insists on a political line that is incompatible with the new climate change reality by building new thermal power plants.

With its hydroelectric power plants (HEPPs) and a policy that commercializes water, private companies are seizing our water. There are almost no streams left in the country without any planned HEPP projects. By drying up streams, HEPPs destroy not only the habitat of creatures living in or by those streams, but also the ecosystem and the social and cultural structure of a whole region.¹

Under new legislation, whole forests are "offered up on a plate" to private companies. During the period between 2012 and 2018, 205.6 hectares of land, legally designated as "state forests", were allowed to be used for various non-forestry purposes. 65.9 hectares of this land was allocated for mining activities. The extent of the forests and maquis ecosystems damaged by such permits is unknown.

Mining companies use wild west methods to mine gold and nickel, coal, geothermal and wind power plants, fish farms and bad agricultural practices, pollute and destroy the country's water, soil, air and seas.

The history, culture, and folklore of ancient Anatolia, which has been the cradle of civilization for thousands of years, are under threat.

¹ <https://onedio.com/haber/hes-lerin-can-suyu-olmadigini-gosteren-15-madde-317904>

Allianoi, Hasankeyf, the Çine Slim Arch Bridge and similar buildings are being swallowed up by dams. Other treasures like Kyme, Klaros, Párior, Priapos are disappearing beneath factories.

The citizens in Aydın, Aliğa, Dilovası, Soma - Yırca, Gaziemir, Söke Kisir Village, Köprübaşı and all over the country are fighting soaring cancer rates caused by environmental pollution.

By building a nuclear power plant the government fancies its chances of finally having the capacity to produce nuclear weapons. In fact, Turkey used to be a country that could not cope with nuclear waste and radiation pollution despite not having a nuclear power plant. For years it has not been possible to determine where nuclear power plant fuel rods, which were found in the garden of an old battery factory in Gaziemir, came from.

While, particularly in light of the Fukushima disaster, the world is turning its back on nuclear power, the AKP pursues the opposite policy and orders hundreds of thousands of trees to be cut down for a nuclear power plant in Mersin Akkuyu and Sinop. The environmental report for the nuclear power plant in Sinop was announced last September.

The public is being misled with unrealistic statements about alleged energy deficits, while pro-government companies fill their coffers with earnings from disorganised and uncontrolled investments in the energy sector. According to the official report of the President's Office, there was 31% of excess energy in Turkey in 2017, while 32% of excess energy was projected for 2019.²

Agricultural land has been declared building land for all kinds of projects in the fields of energy, housing, mining, energy production facilities etc.

In food production, the use of GMOs and hybrid seeds is still rife. A regulation has been issued recently to transfer the production of local seeds to private companies. The world's seed monopolies want to make our country their new base after being expelled from Europe.

² <https://enerji.mmo.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/MMO-TEG-2019-Sunumu-Mart-2019.pdf>

In the working-class neighbourhoods of our cities, community services that would make life more comfortable are not being introduced. Instead, people are chased away from these areas in the name of “urban transformation” and the building plots are given to new owners. In that way, whole neighbourhoods become the object of highly profitable investments.

Megaprojects such as the 3rd Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul Airport and Canal Istanbul act as new sources of profit for capital groups while, on the other hand, destroying nature. They threaten Istanbul’s northern forests and wetlands, which will directly threaten the supply of drinking water to the city. Millions of trees were cut down and water reservoirs were destroyed for the 3rd Bridge and the airport, which have now been completed. Canal Istanbul will be “the biggest betrayal and planned slaying of the city” according to Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu.³ Areas of land designated for building but which have not yet been developed have already been marketed to the capital groups that support the AKP and some oil-rich countries, especially Qatar.⁴ The canal, which will split the European side of Istanbul right down the middle, will turn the cut-off part into an island. Warnings of scientists of the catastrophic effect of Canal Istanbul on the marine ecosystem are not heeded.

There are spontaneous acts of resistance against these attacks in many places. People try to resist these attacks on nature and protect their living spaces.

The struggle for natural resources has literally become a struggle for survival. As in other area in this country, legal proceedings often prove futile also when it comes to ecology. Years of lawsuits and ever-increasing court costs, which require great fundraising efforts, and even lawsuits that are won often prove to be almost worthless. The AKP government removed all legal obstacles, one by one, and enacted new laws

³ <https://www.ibb.istanbul/News/Detail/36257>

⁴ <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2019/gundem/kanal-istanbul-guzergahinda-en-buyuk-araziler-3-arap-sirketine-ait-5530096/>

in their place that have paved the way for investments. Examples include the Mining Law, the Law on Conservation of Nature and Biodiversity, regulations for the re-evaluation of designated nature conservation areas, the Forestry Law etc.

All of the above indicates clearly that the judiciary can rarely be relied upon to take decisions for the protection of natural resources. Even if the judiciary does hand down a positive decision for the environment, companies and governments are well versed in finding a way around it. In an environment where recourse to legal remedies has practically been blocked due to high costs of legal proceedings and expert reports, poor people and farmers find it increasingly hard to continue the legal struggle to protect their living spaces.

In a situation where people cannot seek protection under the law, the only solution is actual resistance. Article 56 of the Constitution enacted by the military junta on 12 September 1980, which has been criticized in many ways, imposes a duty on citizens and the state to protect the environment.

A significant number of environmental organizations was established in recent years as part of the process of resistance. People established local resistance groups, which became a central port of call for professional organizations, interested trade unions, associations and other groups; and in some regions political parties also become involved.

These platforms, which are generally formed by interested people from the middle class and various professions, are generally not active all of the time but spring into action once the general fight picks up. In some case they act as leaders in these fights. In some cases the platforms, which seek to unite the scattered resistance efforts in local areas under the roof of one central organization, provide scientific, legal, and technical support to these groups. They do, however, see themselves as a strict “cadre organization”, which is not interested in organising the struggle as broadly as possible, thus narrowing the scope of the ecological movement.

It is impossible to be successful in a struggle in which local people are not at the centre of the matter, do not take responsibility and do not show a determination to protect their living spaces.

The resistance of the Bergama villagers are a good example of this. Bergama was an environment-related villager movement that continued from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s and still becomes active today on various occasions. Villagers in the Bergama region⁵ had founded committees to organize the actions of thousands of villagers in the fight against an international company that wanted to mine gold using cyanide. With their numerous and varied fights, they mobilised not only the local community but people from all over the country.

The Ecology Union, which held its founding meeting in November 2017 in Bergama with the attendance of the 11 main ecological organizations spread across the country, was established to combine local ecological efforts and to create the basis for unions to form.

In its founding declaration, announced after its meeting in Eskisehir in March 2019, the Ecology Union emphasized that the Union was established “in order not to be stuck in our local regions, to raise our resistance to defend life shoulder-to-shoulder, and to create a platform for solidarity and organization spread throughout the country”. The Ecology Union has gathered around 80 local ecology organizations under the same roof from all regions of the country.

Today, all life activists in Turkey know very well that there cannot be an ecological struggle independent of the country’s political agenda. Those who struggle to leave the world and land they inhabit clean for the future learn by experiencing that there is no life in harmony with nature and human dignity where there is no democracy, respect for human rights, freedom, scientific autonomy, the superiority of knowledge, the right to the city and the liberation of labor.

⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279444753_Bergama_mucadelesi_dogusu_gelisimi_ve_sonuc_lari

Women in Turkey in the AKP-Era:

Inequality, frequent violence, struggles

Sevda Karaca

For the past 18 years, women in Turkey have faced heavy attacks on the progress they have achieved during 100 years of struggle. In these 100 years, the women's movement changed laws and social conditions. However, the AKP government made even the laws enacted during its own period of power unusable with its practices and rhetoric. Laws were changed to abolish aspects of equality, and many regulations that were already insufficient in terms of women's equality were transformed into a basis for sexist practices with the changes made during the AKP period. Women were excluded from being individual and equal citizens and were imprisoned in the "family". Women's policies were reduced to social welfare policies and sexist stereotypes were reinforced by the government.

AKP spokespersons expressly state that men and women are not equal, that their "nature" is different, that the ideal of "equality" is an "imported", "non-domestic" "western" concept, and that what really matters is "justice". They advocate "gender justice", with a religious reference rather than equality, which will be achieved by acting in accordance with the traditional roles of men and women.

The neoliberal Islamist policies implemented by the government since the day it first came to power results in the exclusion of women from social, economic and cultural life, the sexualization of women as

“childbearing machines”, the restriction of many reproductive rights including the right to abortion, placing women in a position where they can only exist as a “mother and spouse” within the family unit, and an increase in violence and brutality. This development goes hand in hand with a serious increase in impoverishment and insecurity for the majority of the population. The neoliberal transformation of working life over the last 18 years has brought great problems and loss of rights especially for women. Women were forced to work flexibly, in informal working arrangements with long hours, under difficult conditions and without any social security. The privatization rush in the field of education and healthcare created heavy burdens especially for women. Inequalities in working life have deepened. Women bear the brunt of childcare and other caring responsibilities within the family, and are faced with the stark choice of either working in insecure, unstable conditions or leaving their jobs and returning home. They were expected to accept the limited social benefits and, in return, give up all individual and civic rights and be grateful for the help. Long working hours and lack of health and safety precautions at work, including the lack of inspection, has led to an increasing number of work-related deaths with numbers of victims rising year on year.

Since 2015, when the country was placed under the “authoritarian rule”, preparing the ground for the abolition of universal values such as democracy, women’s rights, freedom of expression and organization, secularism, peace etc., and the existing problems of women became even more severe.

While women were faced with violence, discrimination and sexism in all areas of social life, even the protective laws that did exist on paper were not being implemented, and the international conventions that Turkey has signed were starting to be scrutinized. Some laws that guarantee the rights of women were attacked by various sects and religious communities. These discussions and attacks were put on the societal agenda with arguments such as that “the rights given to women damage family unity, spoil women, violate the rights of men as the

head of family, and that they were abused by women because they protected women too much". Although they were initially being discussed by marginal groups, these debates have been embraced by government spokespersons for the last 2 years. Turkey has long boasted being the first country to ratify the Istanbul Convention, which carries significant weight in the protection of women against violence and imposes various obligations on the state, is under attack. Government officials are planning to withdraw from the Convention and encourage opponents to the Convention on the grounds that "it gives women more than the necessary rights, is an offensive on the family, and encourages LGBTI groups".

In fact, neither the Istanbul Convention nor the Protection of Family and Women from Violence Act No. 6284, which was enacted in order to implement the Convention, are being applied in Turkey yet. Not a single regulation required by the Convention has been implemented since the day it was signed.

In fact, we are faced with a completely contrasting picture regarding violence against women. Terrible judicial decisions are being handed down on a daily basis in crimes against women and children, each one worse than the last. Dozens of women share daily tales of violent incidents on social media, revealing examples of how law enforcement and justice mechanisms protect and watch over the men who are the perpetrators of violence, and demand that the wider public respond to ensure justice is served. And it is true that justice is only done when there is a large outcry. Most of the time, the law is undermined in judicial proceedings, virtually exposing women to violence a second time. This policy of impunity incites further violence. The perpetrators of violence are becoming more brutal, as the statistics show.

According to a report, at least 7,500 women were murdered in the past 18 years, over 100,000 women were subjected to sexual assault, 200,000 sexual harassment cases were brought to justice. 992 out of 1,000 perpetrators of violence in Turkey continue their life without any penalty. According to the official records of the Ministry of the Interior,

358 women per day sought the help of law enforcement officers on the grounds that they were subjected to violence last year. A “temporary protection order” was issued for 41,955 women. These official figures show that 115 women per day, 5 women every hour, face the risk of death in Turkey.

Admittedly, violence against women was a major problem in Turkey in the past as well. However, during the AKP period, murders of women and all kinds of violence against women reached a new dimension both in terms of quantity and quality. Even in the face of major events that dominated the country’s agenda, violence against women did not fade into the background. Of course, women who continued the struggle under adverse circumstances played a role in this as well as the high number and brutality of the violence incidents.

The AKP government is also aware of this. Women were seen by the government as the most important subjects that would allow neoliberal conservatism to penetrate society. The AKP wanted to turn women, who constitute half of the population, into their own political operatives and agents. It declared the women it could not control to be enemies and a marginal force. This women’s policy is aimed at controlling the whole of society, i.e. children and men as well. In order to achieve this social transformation, which is very important to the AKP, foundations and associations were established and encouraged personally by the order of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He placed his son Bilal Erdogan at the head of TÜRGEV (Türkiye Gençlik ve Eğitime Hizmet Vakfı – Youth Service Foundation of Turkey), which was established to transform the field of education, and his daughter Sümeyye Erdogan at the head of KADEM (Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği – Association of Women and Democracy), which was established to implement transformation in the field of women’s issues. As part of taking all these steps, the government has established “women’s organizations” that tow the party line in issues of women’s policy in order to ensure societal legitimacy and to be able to say “women’s organizations support us”. It cooperated with these organizations in every field and offered unlimited state re-

sources to them. It appointed trustees to the municipalities won in elections by the Kurdish political movement, one of the largest opposition groups. The first thing that trustees did was to close women's units and women's shelters established by elected municipalities. The buildings of women's organizations, shelters and counselling centers were turned into registry offices as well as venues for Quran and motherhood courses. With the closure of many women's organizations, sexual assault and abuse, suicide and suicide attempts, prostitution and drug addiction have increased significantly. The situation is getting worse for women with every passing day as preventive and rehabilitative mechanisms are eliminated. In addition, since 2015, many women's associations were closed overnight by decree. The buildings and assets of those associations were transferred to women's organizations that support the government. During the same period, some media organizations that prioritized news and content on violence against women were closed. While women's struggles are barely visible in the media, this move has further narrowed the opportunities for women to express their opinion with regard to the policies implemented. Attacks on freedom of expression and the press affected women more given that they already had limited opportunities to express themselves. The latest planned tightening of the law and increased pressure on social media are intended to deprive women of their last opportunity to seek justice and try to trigger public discussions.

Turkey is a country where child abuse together with violence against women is always on the agenda. According to criminal statistics, there has been a serious increase in sexual abuse cases against children in recent years. According to data of the Police Department, one in every three marriages in Turkey is a forced child marriage. More than one third of girls who are married are second wives. Out of 300,000 marriages entered into every year, one third are with girls. The legal age of marriage is as low as 12 for girls. Turkey is in the top ten countries for child marriage in the world. The government, however, comes out with policies that encourage child abuse instead of taking measures against this child

abuse. Changes in the education system have paved the way for girls to be taken out of school for religious reasons and to continue their education by way of “distant learning”. For example, the Ministry of Education changed regulations to permit high school and middle school students to get engaged. Even worse, since 2016, the government has repeatedly introduced a bill that will ensure that perpetrators of child abuse are left unpunished if they marry their victims. This regulation, which attracted an outcry from the public and from women’s organizations, has not yet been enacted due to these reactions. But the danger has not passed.

The pandemic has aggravated this terrible situation. Women in Turkey mostly work in the food, agriculture and service sectors. The majority of the 1 million women working from home in Turkey are employed without contracts, in temporary and insecure conditions. The number of unemployed women, which is currently close to 2 million, has increased as a result of increased layoffs on the pretext of the pandemic. Women were forced to take unpaid leave. They were forced to return to their homes where they could not be protected from poverty, hunger and violence. Women workers who are still required to work are working in unhealthy, bad conditions, and under the threat of dismissal. Violence, pressure, and sexist practices have also increased in the workplace. Women workers were put in charge of cleaning their workplaces in addition to the work they did under the force of their foremen. Fear of dismissal has increased the harassment and attitudes that damage women’s dignity in the workplace. Women, who make up 70 percent of health workers, are the group most affected by the pandemic due to both the intense work pace and new risks in their workplaces. Women healthcare workers are under great pressure due to the increased workload in hospitals, the risk of catching the virus, the risk of carrying the virus home and insufficient precautions. Likewise, subcontracted cleaning and cafeteria workers working in hospitals are forced to work without adequate protection measures in many places as well as being discriminated against and “treated like a virus”. The capital introduced “isolated

labor camps”, an example of which occurred in a factory employing 1,000 women. When most of the workers were infected with Covid-19, the boss supposedly took “precautions” by making them work without sending them home and locking them in dormitories overnight.

Along with a lack of protective measures against the pandemic, no measures were taken to protect women from violence. Physical violence increased by 80 percent, psychological violence by 93 percent, demand for shelters by 78 percent, and cases of violence without legal support by 96 percent.

These conditions not only led to an increase in inequality, but also in violence and murders of women, in child abuse, in women becoming impoverished and losing their rights. In many cases, they have become the straw that broke the camel’s back and caused women’s patience to snap. They were forced to speak up, to unite for a common struggle, and to recognize the clear connections between their own personal and societal problems. Today, we see that large sections of women are more open to participate in the struggle to change both their own life and societal life. Women, and in particular young women, are increasingly at the forefront of labor and civil movements. However, as the anger of women increases and the reactions to government intensify, very weak levels of organization prevent large sections of women from fighting jointly during the pandemic process. Unionization and organization rates, which are the main basis for working women to join the struggle around their most basic demands, are quite low. This is of course influenced by the oppressive policies of the authoritarian government as well as by trade union bureaucracy, which do not take the specific demands of women workers and laborers into account.

Women’s movement in Turkey: demands, successes and current situation

Throughout the AKP’s time in power, Turkey’s women’s movement has struggled to maintain some of their vested legal rights. Since women paid the highest price for the social structure introduced by the AKP

government, they founded solidarity networks, movement platforms and took action in order not to lose their rights. They endeavoured to provide the public with accurate information in the face of manipulations on the part of pro-government media, and to reach women in all walks of life.

To that end, they used all methods and tools available to them despite all the pressure; they organized street protests, media campaigns, local gatherings and forums, open meetings and press conferences neighbourhood initiatives to put pressure on members of parliament, even if a lot of its previous functions have now been lost.

The women's movement in Turkey has always been a "dominant" factor in the background of the occasional legal arrangements made in favor of women.

There have been many achievements such as the abolishment of Article 438 of the Turkish Criminal Code which provided for a reduction in criminal penalty for the rape of prostitutes, the amendment of Article 159 of the Turkish Civil Code according to a woman required the permission of her husband to take up work; women can now keep their own last name along with their husband's, designations such as "virgin", "widow" and "divorced" have been removed from ID cards, adultery has been decriminalized and the phrase "the head of the family union is the husband" has been removed.

The agenda and institutionalization created by the women's movement at the social level has reflected on the state as well. For example, the General Directorate of Women's Status Issues (KSSGM) was established in 1990. Since the 2000s, the women's movement has pushed to create a common platform tasked with gaining legal status for various achievements. The most significant changes took place through these platforms in the Civil Code (2001), Criminal Code (2004) and the Constitution. It took the lead in the realization of legal reforms such as the law for the prevention of violence against women and for family protection and changes to family courts laws. Gender discrimination was successfully removed from the relevant laws and a right to object to

possible discriminations was introduced. In addition to these, common platforms formed for the purpose of opposing violence against women, also fight for equal representation of women in politics.

The achievements and experiences of the 1980s and 1990s led to legal changes in the Civil Code and the Criminal Code as follows: making marital rape a crime, removing the suspension of sentences in cases where the perpetrator of rape marries the victim, and making harassment in the workplace a crime. In addition to these, changes were made in labor law regarding equality between women and men, such as the prohibition of gender discrimination in the workplace and the increase of maternity leave to sixteen weeks.

The impact of the experiences of the women's movement and their enormous contribution to these legal changes cannot be denied. In addition to this, international conventions and the EU candidacy process have also played a role in the state keeping the door open to these changes.

In this period, the campaign for solidarity with women workers who went on strike in the Novamed factory in the Antalya Free Zone made sure that the experiences of working women, which is a fundamental issue missing in the women's movement, have become more prominent. This period was also a period when the Social Security and General Health Insurance bill, under which the AKP government wanted to usurp the social and pension rights of employees by transforming the social security system, was also on the agenda. The women's movement highlighted the discriminatory consequences of this transformation, especially for women workers, started a discussion on this and opposed this regulation. The demands of secure employment in accordance with human dignity, equal pay for equal work, daycare in every neighborhood in order to prevent women carrying the burden of childcare and humane working conditions are still the basic demands of women today; however, it cannot be said that these demands still constitute the main focus of the women's movement. The weakness of the trade union struggle and the low level of workers' organizations are a big factor in

this. However, it should also be noted that the characteristics of the most active groups of Turkey's women's movement is made up of middle-class women, which has an impact on this.

The women's movement also fought for the signing of the Istanbul Convention, for the enactment of laws to combat violence against women, and for the establishment and operation of institutional mechanisms in that regard.

From 2010 onwards, the AKP implemented the neoliberal policies that had been on the agenda in the country since 1990. During this period, we see that the issues that most occupy the agenda of women and the women's movement are as follows: defining the role of women within the family, presenting flexible working as a panacea for work-family life balance, the prohibition of abortions and caesarean births, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's call for 3 children per family, which he first voiced on 8 March 2008, arguing that the country "needed a young and dynamic population". In 2011 he declared that "abortion is murder". When 34 villagers were bombed by military helicopters in Uludere in December 2011, he started saying "every abortion is an Uludere". In addition to abortion, caesarean births were declared to be "conspiracies to eradicate the nation". In summary, we can say that the policies implemented by the government in the 2010s are policies and practices that directly involve interventions on the lives and bodies of women, serve to strengthen the family and not women, and try to undermine the progress women had achieved as a result of the struggles of the women's movement. Some important reflections of these policies were changing the name of the "Ministry of State for Women and Family" to "Ministry for Family and Social Policies" (2011), completely eliminating the word "woman" at the state level, transforming all units into "family" units and deleting the term gender equality from all public texts.

The response of the women's movement to one of the most important women's issues of the 2010s, abortion bans, were actions and campaigns carried out all around Turkey in the summer of 2012 using slogans such as "banned abortion kills, not legal abortion", "abortion is a right to be

exercised by women”, “my body, my decision”. Women all over Turkey poured into the streets to protest against the draft amendment aimed at reducing the legal abortion period, which is up to ten weeks, and the abortion ban was put aside in the courts. But the ban had already entered common practice. Currently, abortion is administered up to eight weeks’ gestation in many public hospitals. In addition to this, access to contraception is being restricted in many places.

In the 2010s, women also became an important part of the Gezi uprising, with their anger and revolt against authority and the restrictions placed on their lives and bodies. One of the most important reasons that brought women and the women’s movements to Gezi were the government’s attempts at banning abortion and the rhetoric used by the government in this context.

After Gezi, an important incident that brought women and women’s organizations to the streets was the death of Özgecan Aslan, a 19-year-old university student who was killed in a van for resisting an attempted rape in the Tarsus district of Mersin on 11 February 2015. In light of this event, in many cities in Turkey protests took place against the murder of women, violence against women, and harassment, which was also directed at AKP since it did not take adequate precautions.

A commission established in parliament in 2016 made it clear what the AKP government’s “program” is in terms of women’s policies. This commission was established to “investigate reasons for divorce”. It was to propose a policy to intervene in the causes of divorces. The women’s movement renamed it the “Commission for the Prevention of Divorces”. The commission’s report is quite striking in that it sets the stage for the government’s policies and, by contrast, the agenda of the women’s movement.

The report of the commission reveals the mentality that encourages “ignoring all kinds of violence and violation of rights in the family so that the integrity of the family is not broken” while arguing “the necessity of strengthening the family” that has been emphasized since the first period of the AKP government.

What was in the report that women's organizations objected to with such disdain?

- Mandatory counselling and mediation in divorce and anti-violence proceedings,
- "Consent" can be sought in sexual intercourse with children and the abuser may evade punishment by marrying the child,
- Shortening the duration of measures such as orders to stay away from the victim to 15 days in case of violence (to prevent men from being "victimized"),
- Excluding the public from all cases that involve violence to preserve "the unity of the family", thus excluding women's organizations from the trial and isolating women,
- Restriction of women's right to alimony depending on the duration of the marriage,
- Religious officials to work in all areas of social life, e.g. to persuade women not to divorce, to support victims of domestic violence in women's shelters, to work as "family protection officers" with the right to access houses in their neighborhoods.

Today, the women's movement's main point of focus is to oppose the government's plans to pull Turkey's signature from the Istanbul Convention, which is the apex of misogynous practices.

Besides local women's platforms that have existed for years in many cities in Turkey, country-wide platforms have been established with the aim of jointly fighting all these attacks.

The women's movement continues its struggle around 10 fundamental demands:

1. Gender equality should be unquestionably acknowledged so that nobody can be discriminated against on the basis of their gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. Concrete steps should be taken to ensure equal representation of women in all areas of life and to realize equality. A Ministry of Women should be established to ensure gender equality.

2. A reduction of alimony payments, complication of divorce processes and mediation, amnesty for child marriages; in short, all discussions that threaten the acquired rights of women and children should be ended. The deficiencies in the implementation of Law No. 6284 on the Prevention of Violence should be eliminated, and a national plan of emergency measures against violence against women should be announced. Employment, accommodation and education opportunities should be provided for women following divorce. Policies that will empower women against violence should be implemented. The Istanbul Convention should be implemented effectively in order to eliminate impunity.
3. A separate violence against women hotline which is accessible to women 24/7, operating in different languages and free of charge should be established. Women counselling centers and an adequate number of shelters should be opened.
4. An independent method of data collection on violence against women and children should be developed and this data should be made public on a regular basis.
5. Necessary steps should be taken to ensure safe, timely and free access to essential healthcare services surrounding abortion.
6. Coordination and crisis centers should be established to fight sexual violence. Online harassment and stalking should be recognized as criminal offences by law and penalized.
7. The education system – consisting of 4 years' primary school, 4 years' middle school and 4 years' high school – which pushes especially girls out of formal education and paves the way for child marriage and child labor should be ended. 12 years of uninterrupted and free education should be made the norm. Gender equality should be made a compulsory subject at all levels of education. The “Document on Gender Equality in Higher Education” should be fully implemented.
8. As the Istanbul Convention stipulates, there should be clear arrangements for all women and children living as refugees and asylum seekers in our country to have equal rights and be protected against violence.

9. Easily accessible, free, qualified, 24-hour nurseries, study centers and childcare centers should be opened in every neighbourhood and workplace.
10. Effective policies should be implemented to prevent gender-based violence and discrimination in the workplace and to ensure equality, and all obstacles to the right to organize should be removed. Trade unions should fulfil their responsibility to ensure gender equality in all areas, to secure and enforce the rights of women workers.

These are the 10 basic and urgent demands of women who are part of the women's movement in Turkey. Even though they are from many different classes and backgrounds, these are the rights they are fighting for. They continue to say that they will not give up their rights or their lives. They will not give up their struggle until their demands are fulfilled. These women will continue to fight side by side in every battle.

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Erdogan's "cultural power" and power culture

Hakkı Özdal

Turkey today is being forced time and again into two separate "cultural" debates that are being directly kept alive by the political troupe that has been in charge of the country for 18 years.

The first of these is the "identity/culture conflict" myth, which does not accurately describe the social tensions in the country and is based solely on superficial phenomena. According to this, Turkish society – not only today but historically – has been divided into two different cultural and sociological camps. One side of this divide is formed by the ruling elite, and the civil and military bureaucracy that have been carrying out the "westernization" project for 200 years, as well as state-backed capital groups. The other side, however, is said to consist of the majority of society, including "religious" people, peasants, and Anatolian merchants.

The second debate is a "subjective" problem that President Tayyip Erdogan, the main figure in power for 18 years, regularly complains about. At regular intervals, Erdogan says: "We have become a political power, but not a cultural/intellectual power..."

In this short article, I will treat those two debates as interrelated. I will show that both the default "cultural conflict" myth in Turkey and the neo-Islamist ruling elite's anxiety about the "lack of cultural power" are derived from a common ground and that their secondary functions are more effective.

Let's start with the first debate. One of the political pillars that brought the AKP to power and kept it stable for so long is the hypothesis that there is a historical tension/conflict between "religious and pious people" and "secular and modern" elites in Turkey. This hypothesis, which has gained support in very diverse circles, states that, in the period between the reform movements that started in the first half of the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire and led to the founding of the Republic in 1923, a top-down, compulsory, artificial modernization and westernization was "imposed" despite the religious-cultural beliefs and values of the people. This reductionist view, which shows a lack of understanding of the late Ottoman period in terms of both its internal dynamics and development and its interaction with the international system, largely determined the historical theses of the Islamist and nationalist movement. It was this view which created the narrative of the "oppressed religious people" and led to the historical propositions that mainly defined the Islamist and nationalist movement. And it was also this perspective that led to a distorted view of history among secular and left-leaning intellectuals at various times. This was a "pragmatic" approach that was trying to understand the changes which occurred in Turkish society and its government and the bureaucratic interferences that accompany them within a simplified "people and the elites" dichotomy, outside the framework of the objective society, and which saw all those tensions outside of economic and social factors, production relations, and conflicts based on this. The Turkish and more generally the Muslim people in the late Ottoman Empire, which was (gradually) becoming capitalist and whose agricultural economy collapsed, were being instrumentalized in favor of a part of society that was ruling the collapsing system. And that was the point that constituted the "pragmatic use". In 1839, during the Tanzimat reform which was considered a milestone of the first constitutional pursuits in the Ottoman Empire, some classes had lost their privileges. This included the tax-privileged

“state elite”, which was generally responsible for implementing the tax system in the Empire and owned the land. The ulama (clergy) class, who based the social legitimacy of the ruling class on a religious (ideological) framework also lost some of their privileges. The loss of these privileges in the form of appropriating the surplus value created by peasants led to a change of power and influence, particularly in rural areas, while also causing class tension between the elites of the old and the new order. It was inevitable that this conflict would bring about new “desires” as the agricultural economy based on smallholdings dissolved and new external markets developed that had to be integrated into the new economic life. Aspects of the old order, which were being dissolved in connection with the late capitalization of the Ottoman Empire, often criticized and denied the administrative and legal reforms that cost them their privileges on religious grounds. They argued that reforms regarding the Ottoman society and state order were a kind of “godlessness”. In fact, they harboured a class hostility not only towards non-Muslim (usually Greek and Armenian) merchants, who had achieved legal equality as part of these reforms, but also against intellectuals and officials of the Tanzimat era, who were Muslims. While their rhetoric, disguised as religious discourse, facilitated their relationship with the poor and uneducated public, it was also allowing them to hide their own naked interests behind a “cultural” guise. Today, the “cultural division”, which especially Islamic tradition in Turkey very much likes to bring into play, was essentially a Platonic shadow of a conflict of interest with roots that can be traced back to this economic transformation. This cultural-ideological thorn in the side continued to motivate the forces representing the “old order” both during the 1st World War when the nationalist members of the Committee of Union and Progress were looking for prosperity alongside Germany and during the period of the republic when the secular bureaucracy rolled up their sleeves with claims of establishing a new society. Even though the tax collectors disappeared as a class, their ideological legacies – that they built together with the clergy – were kept alive by various elements of

society. Turkey has expanded and contracted in various points of its history through different class alliances. After the Republic, this ideological-cultural basis became the common ground for large landowners and small town traders as well as for the sects and religious communities that resisted the unsuccessful attempts to eradicate them.

The military coup on 12 September 1980 broke up the workers' movement and the political left, which had strengthened its position throughout the 1970s, with the aim of applying neoliberal policies; this led to great unrest in society. Political Islamists succeeded in turning the potential created by this unrest into fuel for their engines in the absence of the left. Both during the 1990s, when they were in conflict with the secular generals, and after 2002, when they came to power, they created a distorting picture and spread the view that the country's problems were a "cultural problem". This message was addressed to groups of citizens in poverty and despair, to the nonunionized and generally unorganized working class, to the unemployed or those with precarious jobs who flocked to the big cities with the dissolution of agriculture. Political Islamists also knew how to present the deep conflicts caused by the neoliberal direction of Turkish capitalism after 1980 as the tension between pro-secular segments of society and the religious public and to distract from the true conflicting parties, and they were quite successful in this regard. When leading functionaries today, and especially Erdogan, preach Turkish "culture conflict", this is an attempt at evoking the ghosts of the past over and over again.

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The second problem entitled "failed attempt at becoming the cultural power", which Erdogan often repeats. Erdogan expresses this reproach from two different angles. The first is the problem of not being able to adopt an inclusive and integrated Islamist ideological hegemony, especially in the education system, and he is largely right in this regard. During the 18 years of power of the Islamist regime, Turkish society

was not able to find a – in their view – respected cultural-ideological capacity. On the contrary, a multi-layered cultural degeneration became apparent in many areas from daily life to media, from education to cultural life. The Islamist-conservative regime (and the “Grey Wolf” nationalists who have shared power with them for a while) have become central actors in this degeneration with their cultural legacy. They demonstrated that they did not have any potential, failing to make progress despite the enormous state resources they used. This led to the government giving advice on daily life rooted in religion, to the extraordinary increase in violence against women, to sexual and physical violence against children in religious institutions close to the government, to the institutionalization of corruption in public administration and its legitimization, as well as to lies, manipulation, and deviousness becoming permissible methods. Conservatives claiming that they had been excluded from power for decades, excluded almost everyone except their own supporters by establishing an order in which the law of the jungle applied when they came to power and where they only established superficial relations based on “full allegiance”. The gift of Erdogan’s rule to the country has been to put nepotism and patrimonial tendencies, which existed as a generic code in Turkey’s right-wing, into circulation by uncovering them without hiding anything. This decay is not limited to the political-state environment and has gradually become established as a “culture of power” which shows increasing effectiveness in society. It is true that the AKP/Erdogan regime has failed to produce a quality that could be classed as “cultural power” in the positive sense of the word. However, in the negative sense of the word, it has acted much more skilfully than previous governments in injecting a negative “culture” into the veins of society.

The “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” trend in turkish political life

Prof. Dr. Taner Timur

A spectre has been haunting Turkish political life for a long time and it goes by the name of “Turkish-Islamic synthesis”. However, this is actually a contradictory formula and an expression of an empty wish. It is not possible to have a synthesis between religions that open themselves up universally and nations made up of specific communities.

Religious ideology and nationalism, of course, are not mutually exclusive. They have coexisted for centuries, and still coexist. But the relationship between them does not constitute a “synthesis” but an eclectic situation, that is, a partnership. The concept of “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” entered the language of politics in Turkey in the 1970s, in a special political conjuncture.

Turks began to convert to Islam on a mass scale only in the 10th century and only identified as a “dynasty state” with references to Islam until the end of the 19th century. Turkish nationalism was born among discussions of “how to become a Turk?” and “how to become a Muslim?” at the beginning of the 20th century, and Ziya Gökalp was the dominant driver of these discussions.

Ziya Gökalp had developed an understanding of nationalism in which Turkism encompassed all aspects of collective life. In the part of his program related to religion, he accepted “real Islam” in social life as it was and understood “Turkism in religion” only as “reading religious books and sermons in Turkish”. (Fundamentals of Turkism, 1923).

In fact, the Kemalist Republic also remained loyal to this principle. It did not enter into discussions of Quranic interpretation and theology. Instead, it radically separated religion and state affairs under the principle of secularism. Meanwhile it banned dervish lodges and Islamic monasteries. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, established in 1924, was tasked with controlling outdated and counter-revolutionary religious practices and implement an “enlightened” understanding of Islam.

However, broad sections of the population held onto their outdated beliefs and the majority experienced this transformation as a form of oppression and “hatred of religion”. Thus, this was one of the most frequently expressed themes by the opposition parties, which were established in 1946 when the multi-party system was introduced. Even the Democratic Party (DP), which was founded by four rebel delegates who left the Kemalist ruling party (CHP), did not hesitate to use this trump card to win power after winning the parliamentary elections in 1950. It could only bring itself to embrace the principle of secularism years later when integrated sects began engaging in destructive actions.

In all these developments, there was never a trend known as “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” in the political scene. Nevertheless, Turkishness and Islam were viewed as a whole, and non-Muslim citizens were not viewed as Turks. The picture started to change with the May 1960 military coup.

This coup attempt, led by young officers outside of the army hierarchy, brought new themes to Turkish politics. Protests against the Vietnam and Algerian wars, the rising left and anti-imperialism were the trends

that marked the international conjuncture at that time. They were also being watched in Turkey and were affecting intellectuals. Thus, a leftist anti-imperialist sentiment began to blossom in the country. This internationalism was against religious fanaticism as well as ethnic/racist prejudices and the discriminatory separation of Alevi and Sunni.

This was a novelty, and this was what terrified the ruling classes. They did not tolerate this universalist trend that was developing outside of their nationalism and Islamism. Interestingly, the “Aydınlar Kulübü” (Intellectuals Club) which paved the way for the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” that developed over the following years, was established in 1962, two years after the coup. The club’s “founding father” was Islamist thinker Necip Fazıl Kısakürek who had a strong influence on R. T. Erdoğan, the President governing Turkey today.

The club consisted of Islamist and nationalist writers, academics and politicians, and its most important activity was to organize seminars. It also had a certain effect on young people, and the movement became even more radical in 1965 when the National Turkish Student Union (NTSU) fell into the hands of right-wing students. This change also meant that NTSU turned more and more into the centre of action, a situation that would continue until 1970.

The “Intellectuals Club” sought ways to increase its power by reorganizing under the name “Aydınlar Ocağı” (Aydınlar Intellectuals Home) in 1970. Interestingly, the president of the association, İbrahim Kafesoğlu, and other leading administrators made their first visit to President Cevdet Sunay and received his support. Sunay said, “I am a teacher’s child, but I have to avoid going to Friday prayer for fear of criticism”, and continued by praising them, “Are there more teachers like you in the universities”? The support of Sunay who, after the military coup of 12 March 1971 was the leader of the unofficial “Association of the Turkish Armed Forces” – an organization that defended

the guardianship of the military over the government – was of great significance.

In the 1970s, the armed conflicts between the left and the right left their mark on Turkish political life in an environment where the opposition shifted out of parliament and the socialist left was deemed illegal. This development also had an impact on the “Aydınlar Ocağı”, and first disagreements started between the non-religious nationalists and the Islamists in the association. İbrahim Kafesoğlu, President of the Association, invited Medical Professor Süleyman Yalçın, who was working on research projects in the USA, to Turkey. Yalçın, who returned to the country and took over leadership of the organization, was expected to put an end to this internal conflict. Yalçın hoped to end the “Are we Muslim or Turkish first?” discussions by introducing the concept of “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” and defined a Turk as follows: “a Turk is a Turkish-speaking Muslim.”

Evidently, this description stated that non-Muslims could not be Turks and represented an ethnic-based nationalism. However, the pioneering struggle between Islamists and nationalists about the leadership of the right-wing movement continued. However, the military coup of 12 September 1980, carried out with the support of the CIA, opened a new page in Turkish political life as the fascist junta declared leftist movements to be the greatest enemy.

According to the coup organizers, the strongest wall against leftist movements could be the religious feelings of the people. Kenan Evren, the leader of the junta, came from a religious family and had visited Mecca. Even though Atatürk’s name is always mentioned in official statements, Islamism became the rising trend, not last with the encouragement of the USA. As a matter of fact, it was through the work of this junta that religion was made a compulsory lesson in schools.

Even though all political associations were prohibited during the junta period, the “Aydınlar Ocağı” was excluded from this prohibition and further increased its intellectual influence. In the following years, the most detailed presentation of the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” was made during the period of Özal, which represented the civil continuation of the 12 September junta. The first President of “Aydınlar Ocağı” , İ. Kafesoğlu, stood out as the theorist of the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” with his work published in 1985, which summarized this synthesis by removing the “pragmatism” of Ancient Greece and “the Semitic-Iranian-Hindu belief in miracles” and defining it as follows: “the development of the Islamic way of thinking that puts the will to the forefront and understands the divine orders in the light of reason and evidence, requires a legal order that observes the conditions of time and place. To that end, the understanding of the state in the old Bozkır Turkish political organizations, freedom of conscience and military traditions were combined with Islam. From politics to science and art, this has created a Turkish-style Islamic understanding and practice in every phase of life. This book outlines the historical process of this synthesis.” (İ. Kafesoğlu; Turkish-Islamic Synthesis; 1985).

However, after the 12 September coup Islam started to dominate the movement that was carried out in the name of “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis”, and the idealist-nationalists (the “Grey Wolves”), who were suffering at the hands of the coup plotters due to their terrorist acts, gradually began to lean on religion. Now, the idealist militants no longer started their street demonstrations with their slogans of Central Asia and the Grey Wolves, but by chanting “Allah-u Akbar”. And this situation got stronger in the following years. After the coalition governments following the Özal era and the subsequent economic crisis, the Islamist movement rose to power in the 2002 elections.

Nobody was talking about the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” anymore. In fact, even the Islamist AKP, which won the 2002 elections, sought to become allies not with nationalists but with liberals and Gülenist Muslims. The developments that brought the nationalist movement back to being an ally were the gradual weakening of the ruling party while the Kurdish movement gained momentum. Another factor was the need to mobilize the country, which suffered a great loss of reputation in the outside world, against “external enemies”. Today, the unofficial coalition of AKP and MHP under the name of “People’s Alliance” means that this objective has initially been met. And it does not involve a coercive “synthesis” between Islam and Turkishness, but is more akin to a union where nationalism supports Islamist authoritarianism – with the former having a narrow range of action. However, in light of the historical principles and developments of these two movements, which are at times at odds with each other and which have deeply insulted each other in the recent past, any sense of unity is fragile and the partners reserve all options with regard to ending their relationship.

Attempts at creating a "Small Turkey" in Europe

Political exploitation and polarization policies regarding Turkish migrants

Tonguç Karahan

After the Second World War, especially since the 1950s, Turkey was one of the countries that responded to the need for a labor force in Europe's advanced industrial countries, especially in Germany. Starting from the 1960s, labor migration from Turkey to Germany and other European countries rose to hundreds of thousands of people within a few years, eventually reaching into the millions.

Today, a total of approximately 3.5 million Turkish migrants live in Germany, many of whom are now German citizens of Turkish origin. This number is estimated to be close to 6 million across Europe.

This community, which is comprised of enough people to surpass the population of many European countries, has naturally been on the radar of the Turkish state and of governments and political movements of various colours for 50 years, both economically and politically, and has been seen as an appealing target with huge potential.

Economic exploitation

The labor migration that continued throughout the 1960s and the 1970s was seen as a positive opportunity for the rulers of Turkey for two reasons. First, it reduced the burden of unemployment and second, it brought with it a much-needed foreign currency influx.

In order to utilize this potential, the political powers implemented an ongoing and versatile incentive program in the 1960s to attract savings of Turks abroad into Turkey.

In some cases, companies, cooperatives etc. known as “expatriate worker factories” were established that were financed by the savings of Turkish workers living abroad and usually went bankrupt within a few years. Sometimes, workers were promised pension entitlements in Turkey based on retroactive contributions and the opportunity to retire in Turkey. Or they were encouraged to open an account with the Turkish Central Bank with the promise of high interest rates.

Besides these state programmes, so-called “Islamic companies” and “Islamic associations” tried to get their hands on the savings of expatriate Turkish workers. With the promise of dividends, Turkish migrants in Germany and other European countries were publicly ripped off to the tune of billions of euros worth of savings, which were pocketed in the form of charitable grants and donations.

The governments, religious communities and nationalist-religious political movements, which saw Turkish workers as “foreign exchange depots”, fell over themselves to exploit this potential, a process that started in the first years of migration and is still ongoing. The prominent propaganda motives of this economic abuse had a direct ideological and political message: “Support the motherland, the Turkish nation and the Islamic cause”. Large and small Islamist congregations and religious-nationalist organizations, including the AKP, used Turkish migrants as a major source of financial benefits throughout the history of migration, and they are doing it to this day.

Political exploitation

The main damage done to migrants of Turkish origin, however, occurred in the ideological-political field.

There are two basic foundations for this ideological and political intervention which was carried out either by Turkish governments or by the political movements that instrumentalized the religious belief and

ethnic origin of migrants of Turkish origin living in Germany and Europe. This policy rested on two pillars: religion and nationalism.

Both the political powers and the religious-nationalist organizations carried out increasingly systematic work based on these two sensitive issues.

Migration policies of the european states facilitated the work of religious-nationalist organizations

The fears, needs and problems of migrants who had difficulties starting a new life in a country they did not know made them vulnerable to outside influence. The immigration policy pursued by the German state and its governments was based on seeing them purely as a “workforce” serving the interests of German industry; their social and cultural existence were ignored. Starting from the first years of immigration, this meant that migrants were left under the influence of religious and nationalist movements.

Official institutions and religious-political movements exploited the damage caused by the immigration policies of European states, and these movements made a multi-faceted effort to “keep the bonds with the homeland alive” by establishing mosques and associations for Turkish migrants to help them “not to forget their language, religion, national identity and culture”.

These efforts and interventions were so intense and the integration and immigration policy of the German governments was so extremely careless that all political movements and agendas in Turkey, including religious and nationalist movements at first, started to define the political, social and cultural life of Turkish migrants even though they lived as an integral part of Germany, and a “small Turkey” emerged in Germany both politically and culturally.

During the almost 60 year history of migration, Turkish migrants also experienced a natural change, of course. As hospitality evolved into permanent residency, their ties with the society they lived in deepened and became more diverse. However, the ideological-political in-

terventions pursued on the basis of religious and national values from the very beginning of the migration process continued as an integral part of this process, and increased prejudices, fears and isolation. They constantly played a role in suppressing the level of integration with the host society and helped create “parallel worlds” and “new types of ghettos”.

Akp’s “diaspora policy”

Of course, the attempts at organizing migrants of Turkish origin by using Islamic and nationally motivated propaganda did not start with the AKP. From the very beginning of migration, these attempts were part of state policy and of the activities of many political party and religious communities.

However, since 2002 when the AKP came to power, this intervention became more professional, more daring and more effective. The AKP, by using all the measures available to it by virtue of being the government, became more aggressive and intervened in religious, political and cultural life of the Turkish migrants living in Germany and Europe. Under the guise of lobbying on their behalf, it increasingly used its ties within the mosque community to make them political lobbying material and to use them as a trump card against the governments of the countries where they lived.

These attempts, which were previously made on a state/institutional basis, were given a civil and political character during the times of the AKP.

The Turkish-Islamic Union of Religious Affairs (DITIB), which was established in 1984 under the military junta, was extended into a more active political tool by the AKP and benefited from various sects and communities that were instrumentalized to serve its own goals. It embarked on a special diaspora policy by establishing a state institution focusing entirely on this issue under the name of “Executive Committee for Turks Abroad and Related Communities” in 2010.

The AKP, which took steps to intervene more actively and aggressively

in the lives of migrants of Turkish origin in Europe, drew attention by exporting to Europe the political polarization it used in Turkey. Using the infrastructure provided by the development in communication and internet technology, AKP was able to increasingly push the political conflicts and agendas in Turkey onto the agenda of Turks in Europe. By promoting the motto “We are behind you, you are not alone” to Turkish migrants, it divided them according to their faith, denomination and ethnic origin, and pushed them further into isolation as well as inciting their prejudices against the local population. By moving ballot boxes to European countries, up to 1 million migrants with a Turkish passport participated in Turkish elections – ten times more than in previous elections and accompanied by heated rallies and long political debates.

Why is the akp’s impact so strong?

The AKP, which combined its Islamist politics with state resources for 18 years since coming to power, had a considerable impact on Turkish migrants in Germany and Europe within this period. The public in Germany and other countries found it difficult to understand this impact, and reacted to it mainly by being critical and accusatory. The question of “How can they support an antidemocratic political figure like Erdogan and AKP despite being born and living in a democratic country?” has still not been answered.

The answer to this is hidden in the following points that also present a summary of the versatile exploitation and polarization policy of Turkish migrants:

The foreigner and migration policy pursued in Germany and other European countries did not work to integrate the local and migrant community more closely but instead incited separation. It did not encourage a sense of belonging among migrants to the country in which they live, made Turkish migrants receptive towards Erdogan and AKP policies and almost pushed them into their arms.

The increasingly racist, nationalist, right-wing-populist political winds in Europe have had a strong impact on Turkish migrants feeling

excluded and not accepted in this society. It increased their ongoing concerns of being economically at the lowest level of society. The feeling of being excluded and discriminated against because they are Turkish and Muslim has increased sympathy for organizations and leaders who claimed to protect and watch over these values.

Developments such as increasing international competition and economic-policy conflicts all around the world, unemployment, low-wage policies, cuts in social rights and the worsening of the economic standards of working people etc. have strengthened more right-wing nationalist policies and trends in Europe and around the world. The AKP's rhetoric that Western countries did not want Turkey's growth and empowerment and their claims that the AKP will make Turkey the leading country in the world resonated among Turkish migrants.

These conditions strengthened Erdogan's hand, who would announce "Hey Europe! Turkey is not the old weak Turkey that you know, we will not let you to oppress our country, our citizens". His strong stance against Europe's most powerful states, for example with regard to the refugee deal, had a considerable impact on migrants who believed that they were oppressed for years and excluded because of their beliefs and ethnic origins.

Because of the economic and political interests in Turkey and the Middle East and the volatility in the international power-balance, Germany and some other European states occasionally agreed to compromises with Erdogan and his AKP, and even supported their policies when necessary. But from time to time they would confront them in order to teach Turkey a lesson. These diplomatic tensions and contradictions led to Turkish migrants to lose their trust in the European countries where they live and triggered a "protective reflex" among them in favor of Turkey.

Another issue is related to the general socio-cultural characteristics of Turkish migrants although these change from generation to generation. As with every migration process, the resulting problems, needs and sensitivities of being a migrant have also led to concerns of "as-

similation” and “loss of identity” among Turkish migrants. The fear of losing one’s religious and national identity, one’s belonging to the homeland, culture, traditions etc. makes them more susceptible to conservative political tendencies. This fear made them conserve their ties and consequently lagging behind the socio-cultural development in their country of origin. For example, since the beginning of migration, the votes of Turkish people in Germany for right-wing parties, whose policies are based on religious belief and ethnic origin, have consistently been 10 percent higher than votes cast in Turkey. The AKP and Erdogan, along with other factors, have built on this legacy.

Is there no end to instrumentalization in sight?

The experience of migration in every country shows that integration and cohesion between locals and migrants is a long and difficult process. However, although there are periodic regressions or external obstacles, over time it always evolves in a direction that ends in the complete merging with the host society.

It is clear that in areas such as religion and culture, this development will take much longer. However, unusually strong isolation, polarization and division due to political factors and periodic political winds are not the main feature and unavoidable fate of the migration process.

The AKP’s interventions that make this process difficult and painful will not last forever. And whether they will ultimately fail is closely related to the introduction of other political-social actors.

First, this poses the question how strong and speedy the steps will be that will provide a deeper integration of the Turkish migrant population, whose majority still consists of workers and laborers, and when the local working class will understand that they and the Turkish migrants form a single class. Working in the same factory and living in the same neighborhood will not automatically result in this insight. It will depend on the level of political initiatives that will bring awareness to both domestic and migrant workers that they are one class with common needs, common interests and a common destiny.

The second question is how strong the resistance to racism, discrimination and right-wing populism in the host society will be. The feeling that this society, this country does not exclude migrants, that it embraces them and protects them against discrimination and nationalism will strengthen this feeling and will be the most important antidote against nationalist-separatist movements such as the AKP because movements like the AKP feed off this feeling of exclusion among migrants.

A third factor that may reduce disunity and the strong influence of Turkish right-wing conservative parties and movements is for the local and migrant society to come together more and become partners in social movements that may arise with regard to common social problems and agendas.

As they unite in the environmental movement, on issues surrounding health, education and housing, or peace or democracy movements, this will provide a positive contribution to mutual understanding and reduce the impact of religious and nationalist movements. In this respect, steps that offer support to the development of political tendencies and reflexes based on problems and agendas arising from living in Germany, and that not polarized along the political agenda in Turkey, are of great importance.

As this happens, the partnership between Turkish migrants and indigenous communities will become stronger and their similarities can develop. And at the same time the polarizations among the Turkish migrants based on religious belief and ethnic origin as well as political developments in Turkey will be reduced. Indeed, the polarizations that prevail today and that feed on the division into Turks and Kurds, Alevi and Sunni, secularists and Islamists etc. sometimes go beyond the polarization between Germans and Turks in terms of its harshness and its consequences.

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The essays published here are intended to broaden and deepen our view of Turkey. Questions of human rights, freedom of expression and freedom of the press in Turkey are repeatedly addressed, but often only superficially.

However, the restriction of fundamental rights is also a reaction to economic and social issues and disputes that determine political life in Turkey, but are often not present in people's perception.

The structural deficits of the Turkish economy, the situation of women, the environmental movement, the workers' and trade union movement, refugees living in Turkey, culture and much more are examined, described and analysed here.

The progressive voices and assessments on these topics and on the state of the struggles gathered in this volume give an insight into a Turkey that is in the midst of an exciting upheaval.