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TURKEY UNDER THE AKP

A CRITICAL EVALUATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
TURKEY'S EU NEGOTIATIONS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Turkish social science research has been steeped in interpretations according to which Turkey's 20th century political history is marked by an uneven struggle between an "omnipotent Kemalist state" and a rather powerless society. This argument has been very coherently used by the governing Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) in its articulation of the (Kemalist) Westernizer as the "domestic other".

This paper argues that Turkey's European Union membership negotiation process under the current AKP regime can only be adequately explained based on these premises. Turkey's EU accession negotiations started in October 2005, six years after the EU had confirmed the country's official candidate status. As of the beginning of 2015, only one of the 35 negotiation chapters has been completed. Thus, as the tenth anniversary of the kick-off of the accession negotiations is approaching, it is an appropriate time to ask some very basic questions concerning its nature. The present working paper tackles this issue by concentrating on the following questions: What is the nature of the AKP as a political movement, and how best to evaluate Turkey's EU bid under its rule?

The paper first presents a Western view of Turkey that has been widely held during the last decade. This is followed by a short summary of the main factors that induced the EU to start official membership negotiations with Turkey. After this, the AKP's attempt to destroy what its leadership asserts is the old Kemalist regime and replace it with a "New Turkey" is evaluated. This evaluation leads to an outline of the main factors behind the AKP's EU accession negotiations.

The paper argues that it is highly unlikely that the AKP can ever establish a workable liberal democracy in Turkey. A further observation directly following on from this is that the AKP regime will never be able to fulfil Turkey's EU aspirations. The dominant image of Turkey as a European country firmly in the Western camp no longer corresponds with reality. Internally, the current regime believes that Turkey's Westernization has been a degenerating process – a historical mistake – that has now been annihilated. As the internal state legitimation no longer requires anchoring Turkey to the West, but rather making the West a counter-image, a radical redefinition of Turkey's national interests and position in the world has come about.

Introduction

When the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923, Europe was conceived as its destiny by the Kemalist leadership dedicated to the secularization and modernization of the country. There is no doubt that accepting Turkey as an EU candidate country is based on this Kemalist modernization-as-Europeanization project. It is useful to recall in this context that when Morocco – another Muslim majority country geographically as close to Europe as Turkey – applied to join the EU (then the EC) in 1987, its application was rejected by the Community foreign ministers as they did not consider Morocco to be a European country. The fact that Turkey is (in this sense) considered a European country is not based on geography, history, or popular identities, but on the Kemalist modernization project.

However, largely due to its inability to find a political solution to the Kurdish question, the Kemalist tradition has in recent decades been seen as the greatest obstacle preventing Turkey from transforming into a workable liberal democracy. This state of affairs has duly been seen to obstruct Turkey’s EU bid. During recent decades, Turkish social science research has been steeped in interpretations according to which Turkey’s 20th century political history is marked by an uneven struggle between an “omnipotent Kemalist state” and, if compared to the state, a rather powerless society.

If we are to understand the dynamics of the Turkish political process during the last fifteen years, it is with these widely held assumptions that we must begin.¹ As demonstrated below, this generally accepted argument has been very coherently used by the governing Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) and its supporters in their articulation of the (Kemalist) secularist Westernizer as the “domestic other” that has illegitimately occupied the state apparatuses.² Further, this paper argues that Turkey’s European Union membership negotiation process under the current AKP regime can only be adequately explained based on these premises.

Turkey’s EU accession negotiations started in October 2005, six years after the EU had, during its Helsinki summit of 1999, confirmed the country’s official candidate status. As of the beginning of 2015, only one of the 35 negotiation chapters has been completed. Thus, as the tenth anniversary of the kick-off of the accession negotiations is approaching, it is an appropriate time to take a critical look at the process, and to ask some very basic questions concerning its nature.

The present working paper tackles this issue by concentrating on the following question: What is the nature of the AKP as a political movement, and how best to evaluate Turkey’s EU bid under its rule?

In order to answer this question, this paper first presents a Western view of Turkey that has been widely held during the last decade. This is followed by a short summary of the main factors that induced the EU to start official membership negotiations with Turkey.

1 This FIIA Working Paper draws on the author’s forthcoming book *National and State Identity in Turkey: The Transformation of the Republic’s Status in the International System* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

2 On the concept of “domestic other”, see Hopf 2002.

After this, the AKP's attempt to destroy what its leadership asserts is the old Kemalist regime and replace it with a "New Turkey" is critically evaluated. This evaluation finally leads to an outline of the main factors behind the AKP's EU accession negotiations. Based on these factors, this paper argues that it is highly unlikely that the AKP or similar parties based on Islamic identity politics can ever establish a workable liberal democracy in Turkey. A further observation directly following on from this is that the AKP regime will never be able to fulfil Turkey's EU aspirations.

The dominant Western perspective on Turkey under the AKP

The 1980s is often seen as the first sign of the "people" managing to challenge and finally overcome the Kemalist statist military and civilian cadres. This resulted, even during that decade, in the tendency to conceptualize the socially conservative but – in economic policies – liberal Turkey's centre-right (at that time represented by Turgut Özal's Motherland Party) as the engine of reformism. When the AKP, whose founders all came from the *Milli Görüş* movement of Turkish political Islam, pledged to continue this tradition, in a situation when it had acquired a clear popular mandate in the general elections of 2002, its promise of reformism and democracy was taken at face value in many quarters. The idea of democratization through economic liberalization is still the dominant assumption, both among the EU elites as well as many Turkish liberals.

During the last ten years, a wide array of studies has provided striking and highly valuable interpretations on Turkey's new determinants, whether economic, political, or social, as well as how these have all affected each other.³ The overall common aspect of this otherwise heterogeneous group of previous studies has been the idea of the emergence of a "New Turkey", and thus the assertion that Turkey has practically re-invented itself, both in its domestic as well as in its foreign policies, since the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. Further, within the overall observation of a "New Turkey", the most central aspect connecting most, if not all, of these previous studies is the alleged democratization, usually understood as resulting in the main from three interrelated issues: the annihilation of the army's political role, the empowerment of devout Muslims, and the related issue of the renegotiation of Turkey's national identity. The overall rise of identity politics ever since the 1980s, as well as the economic restructuring producing the material basis for the empowerment of the Anatolian middle classes, has indeed been rightly observed as the main contributor to the increasing salience of this Islamic identity politics.⁴

If we are to properly understand the particular characteristics of Turkey-EU relations during the last decade, this relationship needs to be placed within the wider context of the international system. The end of the Cold War challenged nearly all states to redefine their international positioning.⁵ This general wisdom also applies to the EU member states and Turkey. Turkey's serious search for a new international role started in the

3 See Çağaptay 2014; Buğra and Savaşkan 2014; Keyman and Gumuscu 2014; White 2013; Hale and Özbudun 2010; Atasoy 2009; Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2009; Jenkins 2008; Yavuz 2006; Morris 2005.

4 See, for example, Atasoy 2009.

5 Katzenstein 1996, p. 19.

latter half of the 1990s as a pragmatic attempt to engage with the central Asian Turkic republics, such as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the Middle East, largely in order to boost Turkey's economic interests, even though the EU bid still remained the priority.⁶

Unlike in the 1990s, during the last ten years the concept of "Europeanization" has become thoroughly re-evaluated in Turkey.⁷ Even though the previous state elites were often hardly concerned whether or not Turkey fulfilled the criteria of modern liberal democracy, they nevertheless on an ideological level spoke and acted as if Turkey was a normal member of the community of Western nations. From today's perspective, the crucial issue is to analyze how the relationship between Turkey and Europe has been formed recently under the AKP government's EU accession negotiations. It needs to be underscored that the focus here is on the Turkish side, as I only briefly discuss the way in which the EU has, for its part, obstructed Turkey's road to the EU in various ways. During the last ten years, a large number of analyses have been published on the problematic relationship between Turkey and Europe, and it is beyond the scope of this study to consider even a minor part of these. Thus, the focus here is on one particular question in terms of this relationship, namely how it has been interpreted of late, and used by the ruling AKP government.

The strained relationship between what we commonly call the Western and the Islamic worlds has by now become only one, but still a major, component in the overall process within which the parameters of a new world order are being negotiated and fought over. Even though the existence of clearly defined civilizations that could confront each other as antagonistic entities is highly dubious, the narratives reproducing that kind of confrontation are very real indeed. In this sense, there has been a structural demand for a country that could function as a "balancer" or a "bridge" between these two civilizational entities. For much of the first decade of the new millennium, Turkey under the allegedly "Muslim democrat" AKP regime was seen in many quarters, and also in Turkey itself, as the obvious candidate for that esteemed position. The importance of Turkey within the whole international system in this respect is well observed by Fred Halliday:

It can be argued that, in terms of both historic impact and the laying down of an agenda, a set of major and still unresolved political and social questions for the whole region, the Turkish revolution of 1908–23 was the most important upheaval in modern Middle Eastern history... If future relations between the Middle East/ the Islamic world and the west are to be based on a solid foundation, then the fate of the still ongoing Turkish experience may be not just influential but decisive. The particular international/diplomatic focus of this process, Turkey's possible accession to the European Union, is but the visible part of a much broader political, economic and cultural interaction.⁸

6 For these very determined efforts to "update" traditional Kemalist foreign policy doctrine after the end of the Cold War, see Cem 2000.

7 For the utility and usage of this concept beyond the current EU studies, see Conway and Patel 2010.

8 Halliday 2005, p. 7.

The era under discussion in this study, from the beginning of the 2000s to the present, has also been the period of Turkey's official EU negotiations. However, it can be argued that the EU and Turkey have changed considerably during the almost decade-long negotiation process. The EU has undergone its eastern enlargement, becoming a political union of 28 different states, now plagued by economic stagnation and stamped by what is often called "enlargement fatigue". Turkey, on the other hand, has undergone a perplexing and highly controversial transformation process, which used to be described, at least until very recently, as a democratization process. That kind of reading of Turkey's transformation was perhaps inevitable in the current systemic context. The end of international communism and the increasing ability of Western capitalism to penetrate all societies almost inevitably created an expectation that the AKP regime, by strengthening Turkey's neo-liberal restructuring, would demolish what has been widely defined as the Kemalist "tutelary regime" and the ideologically driven, authoritarian modernization project. Further, the EU has been widely seen as a democratization and stabilization "machine" which, by absorbing various, economically vastly unequal European states into its unique institutional setting, has been able to bring peace and prosperity to the whole European continent.

Encouraged by this practical success, simultaneously promoted by highly influential theories of integration as well as more traditional ideas of federalism,⁹ this project was seen as being capable of extending the European liberal democratic order even to those territories whose European identity was historically ambivalent, and who had once themselves been major global powers, namely Russia and Turkey. However, as this study demonstrates, both ideas, of a "European Turkey" and a "liberal democratic Turkey", which have so commonly been described as the end result of a transformation project implemented by the AKP, have been wholly premature and inadequate. The reason for this is the AKP's instrumental use of the EU and the democratization discourse. However, before broaching that issue, it would be worthwhile to provide a brief description of the main factors that led to the EU's decision to start negotiations with Turkey in 2005.

The EU's decision to start negotiations with Turkey: Main drivers

For many European policymakers and analysts, one important reason for backing Turkey's EU membership has been its presumed ability to contribute to European security. It is noteworthy that in its October 2004 report focusing on the issues arising from Turkey's membership perspective, the Commission pointed to Turkey's capacity "to contribute to regional and international stability".¹⁰ Within this reasoning, Turkey has been perceived as a relatively stable democracy that wants to prevent radical movements and regional warfare in its neighbourhood, an area which is simultaneously the EU's southern and eastern borderland. There are indeed good reasons to justify the expectation that Turkey could contribute to the European collective security arrangements. As a long-established NATO country with considerable firepower and politico-cultural influence in the region, Turkey would appear to be a natural first row candidate in security matters. Recently, this stance was reiterated by Sandro Gozi, Italy's state secretary for EU affairs, who said that the recent turmoil in the Middle East

⁹ See, for example, Wiener and Diez 2009.

¹⁰ Commission staff working document, "Issues arising from Turkey's membership perspective", SEC (2004).

makes Turkey's EU membership more crucial than ever before, adding that it was mutual economic interests and external security issues that caused the EU to take up the Turkish application in the first place.¹¹

Besides security, there has been a widespread expectation that only by absorbing Turkey could the EU become a truly global player. The EU is in the process of building its own international identity, a phenomenon that can be reduced to the basic question of the Union's role in the current international system. Neither a traditional state nor a mere international organization, the idea of the EU as an actor in world politics has always been ambivalent, especially due to the fact that the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has remained in the hands of the member states. By accepting Turkey as a member, the EU would be seen to significantly increase its leverage and ability to act in the Middle East, a neighbouring region traditionally under considerable US influence. This idea – of Turkey making the EU a global actor with a genuine multi-cultural nature – has been repeatedly advocated by the current Turkish regime as well. When the AKP came to power in 2002, it stated that it was respected by all parties in the Middle East, having a good working relationship with both Israel and the Arabs. A further aspect of the idea that Turkey would be highly valuable to the EU in its foreign relations underscored how the country, with its allegedly “moderate Islamic” government, could function as an important “bridge” between different civilizations in the post -9/11 world.

Further, there is no doubt that Turkey's economic boom since the beginning of the new millennium, and the widely held image of the country as a dynamic, rising power populated by young, work-oriented citizens, has contributed to the EU's decision to start membership negotiations with the country. With its nearly 77 million inhabitants, Turkey is of course seen as a significant market area for European companies to expand to and invest in. However, one could argue that the current customs union that has been in effect since 1996 already provides many of the advantages in terms of economic benefits. With the exception of agricultural goods, which are subject to the common agricultural policy, all customs duties and quantitative restrictions for industrial products and processed agricultural goods have been abolished. Moreover, Turkey has adopted the common external tariff and the Community's commercial policy towards third countries. Thus, in the event of Turkey's EU membership, no major institutional changes in regard to trade issues are to be anticipated, at least not as far as manufactured goods are concerned. The only really significant change wrought by Turkey's accession to the EU's internal market resulting from full membership would thus be the free movement of people, which would allow Turkish workers to seek jobs within the whole EU area, although probably only after a certain transition period. Compared to the current EU members, Turkey's GDP is the sixth biggest, after Germany, France, the UK, Italy, and Spain.

Within the alleged economic rationale for Turkey's EU membership, energy plays a significant role. Since the Ukrainian crisis, the ability to secure the EU countries' energy requirements has become an increasingly topical concern. From the very beginning, however, the idea of Turkey's ability to function as a key energy route, especially in terms of natural gas, between producer countries in the Caspian region and the Middle East and the EU, has provided ample reasons to back the acceptance of Turkey to the EU. Nowadays, however, the assumption that Turkey and the EU clearly share a common

11 “Middle East turmoil makes Turkey's EU membership more crucial: Italy”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 21 July, 2014.

interest in the energy issue has become more complicated, as Turkey has shown tendencies to make bilateral deals with natural gas producing countries, rather than engaging in joint efforts with the EU. However, it is obvious that both parties, the EU and Turkey, would ultimately benefit if they were able to broker deals with producer countries as a united front.

The AKP and the hegemonic discourse of a “New Turkey”

The Republic of Turkey has been widely seen as a “torn” country, heir to a powerful Ottoman state tradition where the question of the ultimate source of state legitimacy has from the beginning been fought over by roughly two opposing groups, secularist Westernizers and Islamic conservatives.¹² As noted, it was widely believed that under the AKP regime, Turkey had finally managed to dispel this dichotomy, becoming a “Muslim democracy” capable of effecting a workable synthesis of Islam and secular liberal democracy. Above was presented a short account aiming to contextualize the “New Turkey” discourse. Within this context, the concept of a “New Turkey” has been used to refer to the widely held opinion, both in Turkey and in the Western world, according to which the AKP’s coming to power in 2002 started a whole new era in Turkish political history, and that a significant democratization and “normalization” process was on its way. As observed, a wide array of academic research has, for its part, also argued along these same lines. But seen from today’s perspective, the building of a “New Turkey” has had a second, much more powerful face, namely that of consolidating an intolerant Islamic-conservative ideology and constituency. It must therefore be acknowledged that there is indeed a strong Islamic ideology that animates the worldview of the AKP leadership. Now it is time to demonstrate why such a claim can be made, and how the project of building a “New Turkey” relates to that dominant ideology.

We can start this investigation by reading through the programme of Turkey’s 62nd government, headed by the new Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu. It is explicitly stated in the programme that the presidential elections of 10 August 2014, in which the new President of the Republic was for the first time ever elected in a popular vote, threw open the doors of the New Turkey (*Yeni Türkiye*). Further, it is stated that, on the one hand, with the election of the new President the building of a “New Turkey” has now started, while on the other hand it is claimed that without the steps taken during the AKP’s 12-year rule, “New Turkey” would not be possible.¹³ Soon after this, the author of the programme, PM Davutoğlu, gave us at least a hint of what this “New Turkey” actually means: “I want to emphasize this: the AKP governments in power until this day have not only formed a government, governed the state, done politics, or held authority, but have been executing a civilizational consolidation (*yeni bir medeniyet ihyası*), and established a new path”.¹⁴ Ahmet İnsel analyzes these statements in the context of Turkish conservative political tradition and describes how the conservative circles have during the last decade (again) become seemingly anxious about preserving what they

12 See, for example, Baran 2010; Huntington 1996.

13 Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık, 62. Hükümet Programı. Available at http://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/_Global/_Government/pg_GovernmentProgram.aspx.

14 Ibid.

believe is an authentic Turkish-Muslim identity threatened by the EU and globalization. In the new government programme this anxiety is observable in the way it first declares that the EU remains Turkey's "strategic goal", while on the other hand the programme implies that Turkey needs to protect its own, different civilizational project against the West. As İnsel notes, combining these two projects seems difficult indeed.¹⁵

The Islamic movement's ability to conquer the Turkish state is seen as a re-conquest, a project within which the true Muslim Turkish nation re-established its sovereignty after the artificial, "alien" Westernizers. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has called this a "restoration", implying that the legitimate and glorious Ottoman Islamic sovereignty has now been able to overcome the alien Kemalist state.¹⁶ By reading Davutoğlu's earlier speeches, it becomes obvious that dismantling the Kemalist Westernization-secularization project in Turkey is closely linked to the idea that Turkey is leading the whole Middle East into a new era of "civilizational re-awakening", meaning that under Islamic Turkey the whole Middle East will be guided out of the 100 years of Western imperialist rule.¹⁷

Further, on the very first day of his premiership, the previous foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, made it explicitly clear that the "New Turkey", as the AKP's great mission indicates, is a thoroughly Islamic Turkey:

The AKP is not a political party formed under some specific political conjunctures. Neither is it a party established to serve a specific group... the AKP is the current expression of a holy march that will endure forever. The AKP is the nation itself; it is the manifestation of the will of the nation.¹⁸

This identification of the party with the nation, and thus the nation with the "holy cause", was immediately taken up by the major pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak*, which expressed in a triumphal tone: "Today the state and the nation embraced each other in love. The state tradition that used to dictate its will from above came to an end. The state and the nation are now heading in the same direction".¹⁹ The AKP is not just a neo-liberal, socially conservative centre-right party that has managed to foster a decade-long economic boom. It is explicitly clear to the party's constituency that the party is much more than a political party. It is, as the leadership itself puts it, an expression of an historical "cause" (*dava*). As current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

15 İnsel 2014.

16 İdiz 2014.

17 See for example, "Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Diyarbakır Dicle Üniversitesinde Verdiği "Büyük Restorasyon: Kadim'den Küreselleşmeye Yeni Siyaset Anlayışımız" Konulu Konferans, 15 March 2013, Diyarbakır Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-davutoglu-diyarbakir-dicle-universitesi-ogrencilerine-hitap-etti.tr.mfa>.

18 Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Sayın Davutoğlu'nun AK Parti 1. Olağüstü Büyük Kurultayı'nda yaptığı konuşmanın tam metni. Available at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/sayin-davutoglundun-ak-parti-1.-olagustu-buyuk-kurultayinda-yaptigi-konusman/66351%20-%201#1>.

19 *Yeni Şafak*, August 11, 2014.

recently explicitly put it, “As I have said before, even though the AKP was formed less than 13 years ago, we are the expression of a holy march, a holy cause (*kutlu bir dava*) originally inaugurated centuries before.²⁰ When these words are read within their relevant political and historical context, it is crystal clear that the AKP as a political movement represents political Islam.

The idea that the AKP is the expression of an eternal Muslim cause and identity is widely internalized among Turkey’s Islamic movement. Here we can quote Abdurrahman Dilipak, one of the leading ultra-conservative Islamic intellectuals and an active columnist for the major Islamist daily, *Yeni Akit*:

The AKP was able to embrace a historical current that is based on this society’s beliefs and traditions. It became the nominee of this mission. Behind it stands an entire nation...The AKP is rowing in the same direction as the historical current. Everyone stands behind this movement. One cannot explain the AKP’s success by only referring to its members... This success is the sum total of the prayers of our brothers in Gaza, Palestine, Somalia, Myanmar, Syria, and Turkmenistan... it is the sum total of prayers by the Anatolian capitalists, its wretched ones, as well as the mothers with a bleeding heart.²¹

The AKP and the new foreign policy

If there was once a time when Turkish liberals thought that the AKP represents liberal democracy, and that its mass support could be used to annihilate the Kemalist state tradition, today there is no doubt that all the various groupings of political Islamists in Turkey perceive the AKP as their true representative, defending the Muslim cause in the country and around the world. Indeed, the “holy cause” in terms of Turkey’s external relations seems to be pretty clear to new President Erdoğan:

Once there was a Turkey that was afraid of its own shadow, afraid of its own nation. In terms of international issues, this old Turkey was hiding behind the back of dominant powers. In my view, those who still gather around the markers of that old Turkey cannot be the nation’s representatives, because that does not represent our nation. My forefathers were different; they sent a navy to Aceh because the locals were persecuted... We increased Turkey’s international prestige and we became the voice of the wretched in the world. We became the voice of the oppressed in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Myanmar, and Patani, and we became the hope of the poor in Somalia.²²

If – and as I believe we are obliged to say – now that this missionary foreign policy approach is attached to the new, more proactive conceptualization of Turkey’s role in

20 “Erdoğan’ın AK Parti’ye Veda Konuşması,” *Star*, August 27, 2014.

21 Dilipak 2014.

22 Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Başbakan Erdoğan’ın 9 Temmuz Tarihli Tokat Mitingi Konuşmasının Tam Metni. Available at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/basbakan-erdoganin-9-temmuz-tarihli-tokat-mitingi-konusmasinin-tam-metni/64861%20-%201#1>.

the post-Cold War world, originally developed by İsmail Cem at the end of the 1990s, it becomes clear that something other than a modification of Turkey's position in the world is currently under construction – something that justifies speaking about a transformed state identity. For his part, new Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu seems to have held ideologically driven foreign policy goals for quite some time. According to Behlül Özkan, Davutoğlu's former student and currently assistant professor of political science at Marmara University, Turkey's foreign policy has since 2002, when the AKP came to power, been characterized by Ahmet Davutoğlu's idea of "Strategic Depth", a foreign policy doctrine first presented in a book by the same name. This era has been marked by leaving behind the traditional foreign policy, and replacing it with a new vision to make Turkey a new global force in its region. Contrary to those Turkish and Western analysts who have dubbed this new foreign policy "neo-Ottoman", Özkan asserts that "pan-Islamist" is a much better term. Unlike the Ottomanist ideology, which tried to pull not only Muslims but also non-Muslim subjects (Bulgarians, Armenians, and Jews) under its spell, Davutoğlu's approach more closely resembles the pan-Islamist policies espoused by sultan Abdülhamid II. In Özkan's view, Davutoğlu thinks that whereas Abdülhamid's pan-Islamist policies were able to halt the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the same kind of approach, building on Islamic solidarity, could be used to make Turkey the leader of the post-Cold War Middle East.²³

As early as the 1990s, Davutoğlu wrote that Turkey should support the Islamic political movement in the Middle East and that, once the authoritarian regimes of Mubarak, Gaddafi, and Assad came to an end, sooner or later, these forces would take their place. The opportunity to realize this plan was, from Davutoğlu's perspective, presented by the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. Thus for a while, when the Ennahda Party in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood forces in Egypt and Syria seemed to be conquering the government, Davutoğlu's plan for Turkey's global power position based on pan-Islamist ideology seemed to have taken its first crucial steps. However, subsequent events, Özkan underscores, did not follow the path predicted by Davutoğlu, as Syria became trapped in a civil war, the military in Egypt ousted the Muslim Brothers, and in the end a radical Islamist group (Islamic State) took vast areas of Syria and Iraq under its brutal rule. Perhaps even more important in the long run, Özkan argues, is that unlike the original pan-Islamism, which was a defensive movement aimed at protecting Ottoman Muslim subjects against Western imperialism, Davutoğlu's contemporary pan-Islamist ideology is itself an expansionist doctrine, aimed at building a Turkish hegemony that is not welcomed by the peoples in the Middle East.²⁴

Thus, claiming that the recurrent emphasis by the AKP leadership on Islamic motives and solidarity – the politics of a "holy cause" (*dava*) – is nothing but populist rhetoric is a highly unsatisfactory interpretation. A rather telling episode in the AKP regime's position in this respect was the notorious *Mavi Marmara* flotilla incident, which ended with nine Turkish citizens being shot dead by the Israeli army. Although the AKP leadership proclaimed that the aid convoy was organized by an NGO focusing on humanitarian relief work, it is well-known that this particular NGO, "The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief" (*İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı*, İHH), is closely affiliated with the AKP. In this sense it is misleading

23 Özkan 2014.

24 Ibid.

to define the İHH as an independent NGO. It is completely out of the question for this sort of aid flotilla to sail to Gaza, in order to provoke a reaction from Israel, without the very explicit blessing of the Turkish government. Israel declared days before that it would not allow the aid flotilla to sail to Gaza, and Turkey had all the usual diplomatic instruments to prevent the tragic incident had it only desired to do so. The İHH is one of many “civil society” organizations founded by the *Milli Görüş* movement, and there have been several incidents indicating that the same organization has subsequently been involved, again with the government’s blessing, in assisting Syrian jihadist rebel factions.²⁵ Irrespective of what we may think about Israel’s policies against the Palestinians, the flotilla incident made it clear that Turkey was hardly an impartial broker but now part of the Middle East conflict, something the previous Turkey’s (Kemalist) grand strategy always tried to vehemently prevent. As is the case with the foreign radical jihadist fighters operating freely within Turkey’s territory, dispatching a flotilla to Gaza would have been absolutely unthinkable before the AKP era.

Thus, there have already been so many concrete policies following Islamic ideology that it would be very unconvincing to argue that this ideology does not exist in the first place, or that it does not have any effect on policies actually implemented.²⁶ In addition to these concrete policies, the self-conception of many actors supportive of the AKP does not allow for seeing the party as purely “pragmatic” or, at most, being inspired by Ottoman post-imperial grandeur as suggested recently by Jenny White and many others.²⁷ By way of example here, we can quote Halime Kökçe, a columnist writing for the pro-government daily *Star*, and one of the prominent new female Muslim intellectuals:

The generation after Erbakan is often seen to have abandoned Islamism in their political struggle. But in my opinion, this is more properly interpreted as the localization of political Islam. During that process within which Islamism has left behind its opposition posture, the relationship between religion and the state has become understood through tradition-based codes. In this sense I believe the AKP has localized Islamism.²⁸

To reiterate, Turkey’s current governing party has an Islamic-conservative ideology, which has already had concrete outcomes, also in foreign policy. Further, foreign policy and national identity are not a one-way street. It is of course the case that national identity defines the national interest, which then defines the concrete policies taken in relation to the external environment. But this works the other way around as well, so that the sum total of foreign policy actions within a certain period contributes to constituting the national identity. In other words, more enduring foreign policy actions, for their part, help to shape citizens’ perceptions of their country’s position in the world with regard to who are allies, and who are enemies. These perceptions, based on the

25 See, for example, Taştekin 2014; Gürsel 2013; Kansu 2010; Onur 2010.

26 For several other examples that are difficult to explain without reference to Islamist ideology, see Edelman et al. 2013.

27 White 2013, p. 11.

28 Kökçe 2013.

state's behaviour in the international arena, create idealistic images of the nation, and thus partly constitute the national identity.

In the speeches of the newly elected President Erdoğan and his vocal supporters in the media, the “national will” (*milli irade*) is supreme. When this is viewed against Erdoğan's concept of religiously defined “good”, we start to get an idea of where the problem lies with regard to “New Turkey” from the liberal point of view. After proclaiming that, in his view, the President of the Republic is definitely an executive power, Erdoğan continued by asserting the following:

Dear friends, hear what I say: if you say you are a Muslim it means that you understand that on the one side there is justice, and on the other side there is that which is wrong and unjust. The duty of a Muslim is to be on the side of the good and just; you are not impartial. You choose one of these. This is why there is the saying “if you are impartial, you are not there.” We will not be impartial, we will take sides, and we will be on the side of what is right, not on the side of what is wrong. That is, on the one side there is the nation, and on the other side there is the state. We will be on the side of the nation.²⁹

When this, on the other hand, is read together with what Hayrettin Karaman, an influential Islamic scholar writing for the pro-government daily *Yeni Şafak* has to say about Islam and pluralism, the problem becomes explicit:

Whether we use the term laicism or secularism, they both propose an area where religion cannot intrude. But when it comes to Islam, there is no such non-religious area, neither private nor public. According to Islam, man has a free choice...but in terms of legislation, giving guidance, and setting rules, there is no area that could be called non-religious.³⁰

Why religiously defined moral truth and its concomitant conception of the “good society” are particularly problematic from the liberal point of view becomes clear in John Rawls' thinking. According to Rawls, a state's legitimacy depends solely on the endorsement of reasonable and rational persons. Reasonable persons in Rawls' view are those who seek fair terms of social cooperation with others and who expect people living under free institutions (provided by the liberal democratic state) to disagree about fundamental matters of religion, morality, or philosophy.³¹ In Turkey under the AKP, it is currently very difficult to defend the view that it is normal for citizens to disagree about fundamental matters of religion, morality, or philosophy. The “good” is what the AKP says it is, and all those expressing dissident opinions are defined as *vatan hainleri*, namely “traitors”.

29 Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Başbakan Erdoğan'ın 10 Temmuz Tarihli Yozgat Mitingi Konuşmasının Tam Metni. Available at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/basbakan-erdoganin-10-temmuz-tarihli-yozgat-mitingi-konusmasinin-tam-metni/64885%20-%201#1>.

30 Karaman 2014.

31 Friedman 2000.

It can be inferred from this that the “New Turkey” is a synthesizing concept employed to convey a fresh, dynamic and, to a certain degree, neutralized image of a political project that is conservative and non-pluralist in essence. In addition, “New Turkey” becomes a catchword disseminated to the public in order to define the core elements of a particular national imagery aiming at hegemony. As Valerie Hudson asserts, when we speak of culture and national identity as they relate to foreign policy, we are seeking the answers that people of a nation-state would give to the following three questions: “Who are we?,” “What do ‘we’ do?,” and “Who are they?”.³² From this perspective, “New Turkey” is a mobilizing tool as well as a tool to de-contest that which is fundamentally contested, namely national identity. It indeed becomes impossible to interpret the meaning of the “New Turkey” unless it is viewed in close harmony with the Islamic-conservative ideology espoused by the AKP leadership. It must be underscored that the academic research as well as the more policy-oriented analyses confirming, for nearly a decade, that the AKP government has thoroughly transformed Turkey, and that this has been a democratization process, have played a significant role in the AKP regime’s ability to utilize the positively resonating discourse of building a “New Turkey” in its successful operation of implementing an Islamic-conservative ideology at the heart of the state institutions. Paradigmatic examples of this argumentation can be found in the following two statements made by prominent Turkish social scientists. According to Reşat Kasaba:

Turkey has been pursuing a bifurcated programme of modernization consisting of an institutional and popular component which, far from being in agreement, have been conflicting and undermining each other.³³

The same interpretation is expressed even more explicitly by Kerem Öktem:

The political system...has been another source of constant tension: a dual structure emerged, with a “guardian state” of an all-powerful coalition of the judiciary, the bureaucracy and the military on the one side, and elected, yet often insecure, governments on the other. The guardian state was a reincarnation of the Kemalist one-party state and a result of the country’s incomplete transformation to democracy.³⁴

Obviously, this is not to say that academics and analysts, whether Turkish or Western, would not have been justified in appreciating the reforms the AKP did indeed implement during its first tenure. This is to say, however, that we need to recognize that there is a powerful mechanism at work here. This mechanism is the AKP’s ability to utilize the support offered by the Western and Turkish liberal commentators long after the relatively short period of reformism was replaced by an authoritarian, non-pluralist political agenda. Today, there is no doubt that Western analysts, guided by Turkish liberals, have thoroughly misinterpreted the AKP’s attempt to build a new Turkey.

32 Hudson 2007, pp. 104–105.

33 Kasaba 2002, p. 1.

34 Öktem 2011, p. 7.

A peculiar case: Turkey's EU bid under the AKP regime

The developments in Turkey have seriously demonstrated the inadequacy of the proposals concerning the tripartite (EU–Russia–Turkey) security approach put forward in the 2010 report published by the European Council of Foreign Relations. In this report, titled *The Spectre of a Multipolar Europe*, the contributors asserted that the European security landscape was composed of four mutually dependent state- and identity-building projects: the EU; consolidation of Russia's post-imperial identity within its current borders; encouraging Turkey's post-Kemalist ambition to be a regional power while simultaneously integrating it into a common framework; and, lastly, stimulating the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU and building functioning states on the territory of the former Soviet Union. To its credit, this report rightly accounted for Turkey's increasingly independent and proactive foreign policy, but it completely failed to observe how much this has been backed by building an authoritarian regime at home. According to the report, Turkey is a democracy whose domestic orientation and structural relationship with the EU "could not be more different from Moscow".³⁵ This assertion, written in 2010, sounds completely misguided today as Turkey and Russia are clearly on a similar path to a one-party (or one-man) authoritarian rule, where the basic freedoms and rights of political opponents are totally suppressed.

The aforementioned observations regarding Turkey's foreign policy demonstrate that in recent years it has become increasingly obvious that the country's new assertive, proactive foreign policy doctrine, developed since the incumbent AKP came to power in 2002, has not only failed to solve problems or decrease tension in the EU's south/south-eastern neighbourhood, but has actually generated these tensions and security challenges. Thus, whether or not Turkey's active participation in the European collective security system would actually be an asset or a liability has in the current context become a perfectly justified question indeed. Thus, several transformations within Turkey, as well as international developments in the Middle East during the 2000s (and especially after the Arab Spring revolutions of 2011), have led to a situation where it is not at all clear whether the EU and Turkey have common, or even remotely compatible, ideas on how best to promote security in their common neighbourhood.

By now, it has become rather obvious that even though the AKP still occasionally uses the "bridge" metaphor, the party leadership – and increasingly also its devoted supporters – perceive Turkey as a central country (*merkez ülke*) rather than as a mediator. The EU should immediately wake up to this reality, and stop seeing Turkey as an actor eager to confirm some pre-ordained European "sphere of influence" in the eastern Mediterranean. The mindset of the AKP leadership is currently animated by the unbridled pursuit of grandeur, based on a curious synthesis of pan-Islamism and striving for regional hegemony by utilizing liberal ideas such as "producing order" and "consolidating democracy". The highly contradictory nature of this new foreign policy discourse is apparent when observing how the constant use of pejorative language about the EU and Europeans is an inherent component. Thus, the dominant image of Turkey as a European country firmly in the Western camp no longer corresponds with reality. Internally, the current regime believes that Turkey's Westernization has been a degenerating process – a historical mistake – that is now annihilated. As the internal state legitimation no longer requires anchoring Turkey to the West, but rather making

35 Krastev and Leonard 2010, p. 51.

the West a counter-image of an allegedly authentic Muslim “self”, a radical redefinition of Turkey’s national interests and position in the world has come about.

Everything that has been said so far naturally prompts a critical look at Turkey’s EU bid under the AKP regime. In 2010, Şahin Alpay, a university lecturer and columnist for a major Turkish daily, neatly summarized Turkey’s EU aspirations, as conceived by liberal, pro-EU Turkish actors. According to Alpay, Turkey’s real interest in European integration began in the 1980s, when integration with Europe promised economic prosperity and democratic consolidation. Turkey’s genuine aspiration to join the EU led to the signing of a customs union between Turkey and the EU in 1995, and finally, to the confirmation of an official candidate status in 1999.³⁶ This narrative is easy to place within the dominant liberal intergovernmentalist explanatory model in the sense that it depicts Turkey’s leadership, backed by leading domestic industrial and trade interest groups, as being in a position to calculate the benefits and costs of integration into the EU. As the liberals in Turkey wanted both democracy and economic prosperity, the EU reforms seemed to be worth the adaptation costs. Further, for these groups, Turkey was destined to become a European state. Within the dominant liberal mindset, Turkey’s Westernization (or Europeanization) had been left semi-completed by the Kemalist regime that had started the top-down modernization project, but then constrained the development of true democracy due to its restrictions on religious freedoms and minority rights. Anchored within the EU, or so the liberals obviously thought, this harmful, repressive Kemalist legacy could be done away with, resulting in a prosperous and democratic “European Turkey”.

Furthermore, according to this basic narrative presented by Alpay, Turkey embarked on a determined EU reform project starting in 2001, which really picked up under the AKP regime during its first term, from 2002 to 2005. These reforms included “substantial constitutional and legal reforms towards improving human rights, curbing the political role of the military, and opening the way for the recognition of linguistic and cultural rights of the Kurds” which, according to Alpay, led the European Council to open accession talks with Turkey at the end of 2005. According to Alpay, it was the EU’s subsequent actions – anti-Turkish statements and unnecessary obstructions – that led to the disillusionment in Turkey, both among the government and the general public.³⁷ Thus, in Alpay’s view, Turkey’s regime has indeed departed from its reform agenda, but the original blame for this must be put on the EU. There are many within Europe and the USA – Western “friends of Turkey”, if you like – who more or less share this view, asserting that the EU has now “lost Turkey” due to adopting the wrong attitude.

How credible is this narrative? Does it capture the main determinants of the Turkey-EU relationship during the last ten years? One could argue that there is at least a grain of truth in this evaluation. This argument can be demonstrated by counter-factual reasoning, that is, by asking whether Turkey would be firmly on its way to full membership today *if* it had done the right thing. In other words, if Turkey had allowed Greek Cypriot vessels into its ports, established cultural rights for the Kurdish minority, harmonized its legislation with the EU, and adopted a new inclusive civilian constitution, would the current member states all approve its membership? I believe the answer to

36 Alpay 2010.

37 Ibid.

this question is “no”, mainly because several important constituencies and governments in Europe have explicitly said that Turkey is culturally too different to become an EU member.³⁸ But the crucial point here is that even if we accept this argument, there are factors on the Turkish side that make it highly doubtful whether the AKP regime ever planned to go through the required reforms enumerated above. That is to say, there are strong indicators suggesting that rather than really wanting to make Turkey an EU member, the AKP regime has used the EU accession process and the concomitant reforms highly instrumentally, in order to consolidate its power within the Turkish state structures. If these assertions can be validated, then it makes little difference what the EU has or has not done during this process.

By now it has become obvious that Turkey’s EU bid is embedded within the domestic power struggle in a very strong sense. In other words, the Turkish EU bid under the current AKP regime is not about a dominant coalition composed of leading industrialists and business circles together with a (neo)liberal government and a middle class advocating the country’s EU membership against the more nationalist and illiberal forces keen to resist integration. Turkey’s domestic politics are being played out within a context of highly conflicting conceptions of “modernity” and “national identity”. To begin with, since the 1990s all major political parties in Turkey have advocated a rather similar version of a liberal market economy, resulting in more or less similar economic policies. For this reason, purely economic calculations among at least the two main parties (the AKP and CHP), both being dominated by representatives from the middle class, business interests, professionals and bureaucrats, more or less straightforwardly point to EU accession. Thus, the domestic power struggle is not about nationalist and protectionist forces challenging the dominant pro-EU power coalition, but is instead about conflicting narratives of national identity and cultural, economic, and status positions embedded within, and articulated by, these conflicting identities.

Four years after Şahin Alpay’s article summing up the liberal perspective, the same Turkish daily, the English-language *Today’s Zaman*, published an article by Ali Yurttagül, one of the best informed EU experts in Turkey. Yurttagül’s article includes many aspects that are completely at odds with those presented by Alpay four years earlier. Judging by Yurttagül’s article, it becomes evident that for the *Milli Görüş* movement (Turkish political Islam), of which the AKP is the contemporary expression, Turkey’s EU bid was never based primarily on economic calculations. When the leaders of the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) abandoned their previous anti-EU agenda in the latter part of the 1990s and became supporters of Turkey’s EU bid, they made two primary calculations. First, the EU membership process was seen to guarantee freedom of religion in Turkey. Thus, according to this calculation, devout practising Muslims were harassed and repressed by the Turkish secularist (Kemalist) regime, but the EU would not have allowed such a practice to continue. Second, Turkey’s EU membership was seen to secure democratization in Turkey, understood by the Islamists as a mechanism that would allow the Islamist party (after winning the elections), to actually rule the country.³⁹ According to Yurttagül, these original objectives had been achieved by 2010, and that is why the AKP regime no longer needs the EU reforms. The party has now

38 For this “politics of exclusion”, see Hughes 2011.

39 Yurttagül 2014.

consolidated its power base, annihilated the opposing forces among the state structures, and completely de-legitimized the secularist actors within society.

Having analyzed in detail the ideological underpinnings of the AKP as a political movement, and how the democratization reforms implemented especially during its first term of office from 2002 to 2005 have helped the AKP to eliminate its domestic opponents from the state institutions, and especially observing how the AKP's absorption of pro-EU and pro-democracy discourse managed to completely delegitimize the secularist constituency, it is difficult not to agree with Yurttagül's argument emphasizing the completely instrumental nature of the AKP's European Union bid. But why, then, is membership of the EU still earmarked as a "strategic goal" in the new AKP government programme? The answer seems to lie in the nature of the international system characterized by economic interdependence. The AKP regime knows all too well that its continuing rule requires a prosperous economy, and in this context defining the EU as a strategic goal is a tactical move to pacify international investors and domestic business circles.

Conclusion

During his presidential election campaign in the summer of 2014, the then Prime Minister Erdoğan made it absolutely clear that his purpose was to become a strong president with executive powers. Erdoğan argued that most presidents of the Republic had demonstrated political preferences, usually in defending the Kemalist "tutelary regime" against the nation. Erdoğan, on the contrary, would defend the people against the state.⁴⁰ It is not hard to understand the problems inherent in this position after having observed the non-pluralist concept of society advocated by the AKP circles. As the critical parliamentary elections are approaching (scheduled for June 2015), Erdoğan's closest circle has now indicated that starting in January 2015, the President will be in charge of government meetings whenever he deems it necessary, and that the Presidential Office will increase its "directorates general" to include, for example, homeland security, external relations, economy, defence, investment monitoring, energy and social affairs.⁴¹ Thus, the concentration of power in President Erdoğan's hands is already underway, even before the widely anticipated attempt to design a new Constitution with a presidential system after the parliamentary elections of 2015.

There are increasing indications of the AKP becoming more and more decisive about returning to its Islamist roots, for example by implementing education policies aiming to produce "pious generations",⁴² and signs that government control over the judiciary, media, and civil society will be tightened still further.⁴³ Part of this authoritarian current

40 Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Başbakan Erdoğan'ın 10 Temmuz Tarihli Yozgat Mitingi Konuşasının Tam Metni. Available at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/basbakan-erdoganin-10-temmuz-tarihli-yozgat-mitingi-konusmasinin-tam-metni/64885%20-%201#1>.

41 "President Erdoğan to chair Cabinet in 2015", *Hürriyet Daily News*, December 11, 2014.

42 Yılmaz 2014.

43 Korkmaz 2014.

is the attempt to destroy the religious Gülen movement, a former ally in building the conservative hegemony that is now accused of forming a “parallel state”. As is well known, the leading cadres of the AKP have all received their political education within the *Milli Görüş*, the Turkish tradition of political Islam, and after the liberals within the party have been completely marginalized, what will remain is this Islamist core.

At the same time, the political opposition seems totally incapable of seriously challenging the AKP in the upcoming elections, a phenomenon that has now continued for twelve years. If one imagines the two minor opposition parties currently holding seats in the parliament, the Kurdish nationalist People’s Democracy Party (*Halkların Demokrat Partisi*, HDP) and its ideological opponent, the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), espousing Turkish ethno-nationalism, it is obvious that the current stalemate in the peace process between the Kurds and the Turkish state binds both parties to their basic constituency. Thus, the MHP can expect to receive support from its traditional constituency (around 10–15 per cent), while the Kurdish nationalist HDP will have difficulty breaking the 10 per cent threshold needed to get representatives into the Turkish parliament. There is, however, the option that the AKP regime’s inability to deliver any new concrete rights (or especially local autonomy) for the Kurds can alienate some of the party’s Kurdish voters. On the other hand, the main opposition party, the secularist/Kemalist social-democratic Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) is (once again) going through an internal crisis, as the party leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, seems to be unable to hold the party’s social democrat and nationalist wings together. All these factors will work in the AKP’s favour in the next elections.

The AKP has thus secured an electoral hegemony in Turkey. But it has also succeeded in building an Islamic-conservative constituency that feels existentially attached to the party and its declared “cause”. The narrative of devout Muslims re-conquering the Turkish state has become the dominant political articulation of the Islamic-conservative constituency during the last ten years. Rather than being understood as existing independently, this Islamic-conservative constituency is, to a significant degree, a product of the polarizing political articulation advocated by the AKP. The fact that this same articulation also eclectically uses liberal democratic concepts and has duly managed to absorb, at least in the beginning, pro-European liberals as well, does not change the ideological core of the party. This has meant that the liberals, who at the start of the AKP’s rule helped to legitimize the party both at home and abroad, have become completely marginalized. In this sense, what used to be, from the 1950s to the 1990s, a rather marginal component in the mainstream centre-right’s discourse – Islamic identity politics – has now become the dominant political discourse in Turkey. It can be stated that what has been described as a “normalization” and “democratization” process is something much more problematic, especially if we insist that modern democracy should embrace the ideas of Rawlsian political liberalism.

The AKP has made huge political capital out of the mainstream historical interpretation (the liberal emancipation narrative) provided by Turkey’s prominent social scientists. However, this interpretation is highly questionable because Islam was restored to the heart of the state institutions as early as the 1950s by the Democrat Party,⁴⁴ and in this sense the narrative of pious Muslims being oppressed by the omnipotent Kemalist state

44 See, for example, McDowall 2007, p. 398.

does not correspond with the historical reality, but instead needs to be seen as a device to build a coherent Islamic-conservative constituency by creating an emotionally and intellectually convincing image of a “domestic other”. Establishing a genuine liberal democracy where the rights of ideological and ethnic minorities are protected would require the AKP to abandon its hegemonic discourse that de-legitimizes the secularist constituency. At the moment the party leadership has indicated no desire to do so. Within this context, it is highly unlikely that the party would reset its discourse in case it again manages to form a majority government after the June 2015 elections. It has not embarked on an inclusive and pluralist agenda since its previous election victories, and there is consequently little reason to expect that to happen now either.

What all this entails is that while the EU has made it clear it still considers Turkey an important “strategic partner” and expects it to cooperate more frequently in issues of foreign policy and energy, Turkey’s domestic tendency for authoritarianism seems to be increasing as the country approaches the parliamentary elections. If the AKP wins and again forms a majority government by itself – a scenario that seems very likely – then the party will be in charge of Turkey for yet another four years. The EU should thus prepare a detailed strategy on how to deal with a country that increasingly seems to resemble an Islamic version of President Putin’s Russia. Unfortunately for Turkey’s genuine pro-European forces, the volatile neighbourhood characterized by an expansionist Russia and institutionalized jihadist extremism in the Middle East will probably lead to a situation where the EU increasingly ignores Turkey’s domestic authoritarianism. This option should, however, be studiously avoided.

By now it has become very clear that Turkey’s EU accession negotiations under the AKP regime represent a case where the ability of the EU to generate positive socio-political change in the applicant country is meagre. Within the domestic power struggle the AKP has used the EU membership negotiations instrumentally, without any real intention of establishing a genuine liberal democracy in Turkey. Opening new negotiation chapters (such as those on judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice) in this situation is unarguably the wrong policy option – the argument for furthering Turkey’s democratization by engaging with the country more systematically has not generated any positive steps in recent years: it has only succeeded in sending the wrong signal by providing external support for the AKP’s centralization of power, thus further alienating and marginalizing Turkey’s real pro-EU forces. The AKP is not – and never has been – a pro-European party. It is a modern Islamist party that has learned how to survive in an international system characterized by economic interdependence. In other words, its economic policies conform to the international free trade regime, while at the same time it has created an authoritarian political order by articulating a “domestic other” in order to create a coherent Islamic-conservative constituency that is very much immune to any external criticism.

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