

# Prospects for a 'Torn' Turkey: A Secular and Unitary Future?

Svante E. Cornell  
Halil Magnus Karaveli

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## Summary

In October 2008, The Turkish republic celebrates its eighty-fifth anniversary. By early November, seventy years have passed since the death of the founder of the secular and unitary republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. These anniversaries coincide with a defining moment in the history of the Turkish republic. Severe ideological tensions have erupted as traditional republican notions about the role of religion in society and about the nation-state have come to be increasingly challenged.

In 2007 and 2008, Turkey was shaken by a regime crisis in which the ruling Islamic conservatives of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) were pitted against the secular opposition in other parts of the state establishment and in civil society. The decision of the constitutional court in the summer of 2008 not to close down the AKP marked the end of the acute crisis, although not of the age-old struggle over the identity of Turkey.

Internal as well as external dynamics underpin the power of the Islamic conservatives. Having been wielding significant power in society for a long time, the Islamic movement has come close also to achieving the goal of controlling the state. By all accounts, with the survival of the AKP, Turkey has passed a critical threshold.

From a Western policy perspective, there are two basic questions to be asked about Turkey. The first concerns the perceptions of the nature of Islamic conservatism: to what degree is the assumption that guides U.S. and European policy – that it is a force for reform that will make Turkish society more democratic, securing Turkey as a Western asset – ideologically as well as strategically warranted? The second concerns how the forces of secularism are to be conceptualized. Notably, how is the military to be understood? How can it be predicted to act as Turkey becomes a country dominated by Islamic conservatism?

In the decade ahead, what kind of a Turkey can we expect? In particular, what are the implications of religious conservatism and secularism, respectively, for democratization and for Turkey's foreign policy orientation? While trying to fathom what the future may hold, how the republic that will be celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023 may come to look like, this study has also taken stock, in rough outline, of the Kemalist experiment. How that experiment is ultimately understood and judged has an importance that transcends the borders of Turkey.

The forces of secularism and religious conservatism, of republican nationalism and ethnic separatism, pull the country in opposite directions, straining national cohesion, making political stability elusive and the securing of democracy a still more difficult challenge. Turkey presents a very specific case, which fits neither into a European nor a Middle Eastern framework of historical development. Hence, the exercise of predicting its future trajectory is scarcely sustained by any helpful analogies. The central question is how Islamic conservatism will develop, whether or not it will encourage a kind of Islamic reformation – an Islamic reconciliation with Enlightenment values – and secondly, whether or not it will be able to hold the nation-state together. Obviously, the future relationship between Islamic conservatism and secularism will not be determined solely by the internal developments in Turkey. Yet, as the attempts to “redefine” secularism and the description of secularization as a “societal trauma” show, the Islamic conservatives still have a long way to travel before making their peace with the conceptual leap of thinking about politics in exclusively human terms, with the break with political theology.

The co-existence of two divergent worldviews in society, religious conservatism and secularism, will inevitably continue to generate friction and furnish Turkish politics with a defining context for decades to come. Neither religious conservatism nor secularism will be wished away; both are sociologically deeply rooted, and neither can in the short run be expected to prevail altogether over the other. The co-existence of competing value systems, while creating tensions, also signifies that Turkish society is inherently pluralistic, multi-culturally heterogeneous to an extent that it is difficult to envisage that an attempt to establish an authoritarian system – be



it of a religious or a secularist nature – could succeed. However, Turkey seems destined to become a more markedly religious and conservative country, although secularism will not have disappeared as a societal force to be reckoned with. Presently, religious conservatism undoubtedly has the upper hand, and the historical trend since the 1950s is on its side. Meanwhile, it is misleading to describe the Turkish state as having been staunchly secularist in the past half century. In fact, the state has continuously sought to accommodate Islam, while secularism, on the other hand, has not been tended to.

An important conclusion is therefore that the military should not be assumed to have an unwavering commitment to secularism, even if it is obviously not insensitive about the issue. However, the military has little choice but to adjust to a changing societal environment in which religious conservatism is on the ascendancy. In addition, the Kurdish question provides the ground for a possible, durable reconciliation between the military and political Islam, as the latter has proven itself capable of securing the loyalty of a substantial portion of the religiously conservative Kurdish population. It is however an altogether different question to what degree an Islamic conservatism that appeals to the Kurds will remain as attractive for the Turkish majority. An ethnic Turkish nationalism that excludes the Kurds could be in the process of evolving at a popular level as a reaction to the PKK's continued attacks on the Turkish military and its acts of terrorism.

In the long run, it is unlikely that Islamic conservatism would turn Turkey into a more Western-oriented nation. Although Turkey will not “break” with the West strategically, the ties between it and the West are bound to become weakened. The growing Islamicization of society will inevitably lead to a concomitant cultural estrangement of Turkey from the West in general, with possible strategic repercussions. The common ground of shared values which sustains the special relationship between the U.S. and its European allies will in that case be increasingly lacking in the U.S.-Turkish relationship. That will make the relationship, although likely to endure and not necessarily to cool in strategic terms, more vulnerable to mutual misunderstandings and tensions.

One of the AKP's major accomplishments has been to shed the anti-European baggage of the Islamic movement. However, the AKP's enthusiasm for European harmonization reforms had already decreased by the end of 2004. The road ahead for Turkey's relations with the EU is nevertheless unclear, given the multitude of developments both in the EU and in Turkey that could derail it.

Over the coming decade, the twin western vectors that constitute the bedrock of Turkish foreign policy – the relationships with the United States and the EU – are unlikely to unravel. While the Eastern vocation – whether in the Middle East or in the Turkic world – will play a growing role in its calculations, the Turkish leadership is unlikely to shed its primary Western orientation. That does not mean, however, that the bonds connecting Turkey to the West will strengthen; indeed, there is a substantial risk that if left untended, they may weaken.

Turkey's role as a regional force will depend on whether the country will be able to overcome its two existential divides – the issues of religion and ethnicity. Only a Turkey at peace with itself is likely to assume the role of a regional power which the West, most prominently the United States, has been encouraging it to do. Yet such a role is complicated by the essentially reactive nature of Turkish foreign policy, itself a result of the multitude of developments in highly varied bordering regions that affect Turkey, and make it difficult for Ankara to pursue a proactive policy based in a coherent strategy. To become a true regional power, Turkey will have to overcome that limitation.

From the limited overview conducted in this study, a great number of different scenarios for Turkey's future development could be derived. This study proposes three major scenarios, which put most of their attention to the likely domestic development, while taking into account the likely interaction of internal politics with external challenges.

The first scenario – a more conservative Turkey – in principle constitutes the extrapolation and continuation of the trends that have been observed during the past decade, which have seen the crumbling of secular politics and the rise of a dominant religious conservatism in both society and the state. The second – a democratic reconciliation – assumes that the AKP, like other

dominant political movements, is likely to crumble under its own weight as a result of a sclerosis of power, leaving room for yet another redefinition of the political contest between the competing ideologies of religious conservatism and secularism. The last scenario – a return to military stewardship – could occur if the Islamic conservative movement overplays its hand. It is the least probable scenario.

Turkey at 100 will in many ways be recognizable to observers witnessing its 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. The greatest surprise would be if the republic at 100 will have broken with its long-standing traditions and succeeded in developing a truly secularizing ethos.



## Introduction

In 2008, the Turkish republic celebrates its eighty-fifth anniversary. It will also be commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the death of the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938). These are symbolically charged anniversaries. They coincide with a defining moment in the history of the Turkish republic; traditional republican notions about the nation-state and the role of religion in society are in the process of being redefined and renegotiated. Severe ideological tensions between competing power centers in the state apparatus as well as in a civil society, which is divided along ideological lines, have ensued.

In 2007 and 2008, Turkey was shaken by a regime crisis in which the Islamic conservatives, in government since 2002, were pitted against a secular opposition in other parts of the state establishment, mainly the military and parts of the judiciary.<sup>1</sup> The decision of the constitutional court in the summer of 2008 not to follow the republic's chief prosecutor's demand to ban the Justice and development party, the AKP, marked the end of the acute crisis, although not of the age-old struggle over the identity of Turkey. Indeed, the contentious issues remain as unresolved as ever.

The secularist opposition had suffered a resounding defeat in the elections of 2007 when the AKP was re-elected with 47 percent of the votes. Subsequently, for the first time in the history of the republic, the military failed in its attempts to steer politics: Abdullah Gül became the first person of an Islamist background to be elected Turkish president, over the military's objections, and the General staff has since had to acquiesce in the continuation of the AKP's rule as well.

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<sup>1</sup> "Moderate Islamist" is the common description internationally of the Justice and Development Party, AKP. Yet, representatives of the party themselves deny that they are Islamists at all; they do however claim to be the Muslim equivalent of the European, conservative Christian democrats. Thus, it seems appropriate to employ the term "Islamic Conservative" in describing the AKP.

Internal as well as external dynamics underpin the power of the Islamic conservatives. The broader Islamic movement – not least the religious brotherhoods that constitute the societal base of religious conservatism – wields significant power over education, media, and the economy, and is entrenched in the state bureaucracy. Indeed, the AKP has come close to realizing its goal of controlling the state.<sup>2</sup>

The Islamic conservative government enjoys broad international support. The attractiveness of the AKP, an Islamic-rooted party that embraces the West – aiming for EU membership and nurturing close relations with the United States – is understandable. It is an alternative that offers hope, disclaiming, so it seems, the notion of the inevitability of a clash of civilizations between the West and Islam.

A “Muslim democracy” is assumed to be in the making, replacing the old republican, secularist model installed by Atatürk’s revolution in 1923. That model is currently held in low esteem in political as well as intellectual circles in the West. Kemalism, the ideology attributed to Kemal Atatürk but often perverted by his successors, stands accused of being authoritarian, of having inflicted a psychological trauma on the Turkish society by imposing secularism and of having created a nation-state that has violated ethnic diversity.<sup>3</sup> With the abandonment of the Kemalist model, by which greater, societal room is made for religion and for multi-ethnicity, a process of “psychological and cultural healing process” is assumed to have been ushered in.<sup>4</sup>

While the Islamic conservatives have adopted a pro-western discourse, the traditionally Western-oriented secularists, notably the social democrats, have confused and repelled observers in the United States and in Europe by their recent conversion to a vehemently anti-western neo-nationalism. In fact, the confusion and repulsion is reciprocal; the secularists have been disoriented by the Western liberals’ support for Islamic conservatism.

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<sup>2</sup> “I aspire to rule the state”, Nihat Ergün, deputy chairman of the AKP’s parliamentary group, told the authors in May 2008.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Graham E. Fuller, *The New Turkish republic*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007

<sup>4</sup> Fuller, p. 17.

From a Western policy perspective, there are two basic questions to be asked about Turkey: To what degree is the assumption that guides U.S. and European policy towards Turkey about the Islamic conservatives – that they are a force for reform that will make Turkish society more democratic, securing Turkey as a Western asset – warranted? And secondly, how are the forces of Kemalism/secularism to be conceptualized? In particular, how should the military be understood? Observers of Turkey generally take the armed forces' commitment to secularism for granted; does it really run as deep as it is assumed?

The prevailing Western reading of Turkey suffers from a blind spot, of a refusal to fully acknowledge that the confrontation over secularism is a conflict of identities, not just a power struggle between “Muslim democrats” and “authoritarian secularists”. The existential divides of Turkish society – between seculars and religious conservatives, as well as the one between Turks and Kurds – are far from being bridged any time soon. Quite to the contrary, the divisions run deeper than ever. Alongside with the confrontation over secularism, ethnic polarization is sharpening. Recent upheavals are of a kind to raise doubts about the basic viability of Atatürk's republic. Was it stillborn, or does it merely suffer from neglect? Needless to say, how its history is interpreted will make a great difference for the future evolution of the republic.

Looking a decade or so ahead, what kind of a Turkey can we expect? In particular, what are the implications of religious conservatism and secularism respectively for democratization and for Turkey's foreign policy orientations? While trying to fathom what the future may hold, how the republic that will be celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023 may come to look like, this study will also take stock, in rough outline, of the Kemalist experiment. How that historical experiment is ultimately judged has an importance that transcends the borders of Turkey.

### **Perspectives – What is Turkey?**

Turkey is a country that defies easy categorization. Straddling East and West geographically, Turkey is in the cultural and ideological sense neither wholly Eastern nor wholly Western. Indeed, it can, to quote Samuel Huntington, be

described as a “torn” country, which has been unable to reconcile its internal, cultural differences, and settle for a stable democracy unhampered by the temptations of authoritarianism. In that perspective, Turkey would appear to be a vindication of the pessimistic assumption that the application of Western conceptions in a Muslim context is fraught with the near-probability of failure.

The confrontation of 2007-2008 can certainly be placed within a broader historical framework of an ongoing – internal – “clash of civilizations” about the proper place of religion in society. Its origins can be traced to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the first, westernizing steps were taken by the reformers of the Ottoman Empire, paving the way for Atatürk’s subsequent westernizing revolution in the 1920s. Religion was then banished from the public sphere, as law and education were thoroughly secularized.

It is a foregone conclusion that Turkey stands out as a unique country in its part of the world; Muslim but – although intermittently – aspiring to be a part of the liberal civilization of the West. Indeed, Atatürk was a rare kind of a leader in his contemporary European context: stating, at a time when democracy was besieged, that “today (in 1930), the ideal of democracy resembles a rising sea”, and reminding that “the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen many a tyrannical regime drown in that sea”.<sup>5</sup>

Even though stability continues to elude it, Turkey has been the only durable democracy in the Muslim world. That is no coincidence. The founder of the republic significantly believed that the replacement of the religious worldview with one guided by rationalism and science would pave the way for democracy. With the freedom of the mind from religious constraint and indoctrination firmly established, “the citizens will be able to obtain and exercise their political freedom in the best way”, Atatürk put it.<sup>6</sup> The full realization of that ideal, inherited from Enlightenment thought, and typical of the enthusiastic and optimistic liberalism of the nineteenth century, has obviously eluded the Turkish experiment in democracy.

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<sup>5</sup> Can Dündar, *Yükselen bir deniz*, Imge 2006, p. 7

<sup>6</sup> Baskın Oran, *Atatürk milliyetçiliği*, Bilgi, 1990, p. 214



Yet, republican secularism did depart from a system where political legitimacy had been divinely derived; the transformation of a religiously defined community – the Muslim *ummah*, submitted to God and his representative on Earth – into a nation bound together by horizontal rather than vertical loyalty carried with it the implication of empowered citizenship.

The transition from a credal community to a nation state of the European kind was – and remains – a conceptual leap in the Muslim context. Turkish republicanism also represented a departure from the common Middle Eastern and Muslim response since the beginning of the nineteenth century to the impact of Western ideas and victories over Islamic powers. The reformers of Islam had usually attributed the troubles and setbacks of the Muslim world to the abandonment of the divine heritage of Islam, and had thus prescribed more, not less religion and a return to its supposedly pure origins. That is still the predominant reflex in Muslim ideological discourse, whether it is traditionalist or “reformist”. The full privatization of religion is yet to be envisaged. That accomplishment sets Turkey constructively apart in its environment. Turkey is the only, relatively successful Muslim example in modernizing on a European model. It should be recalled that other, European-inspired modernizing experiments in the Middle East – Arab socialism and nationalism, notably – have been dismal failures by comparison. Yet meanwhile, other non-European civilizations have gone through exactly that process, indicating that the pessimism of some European and American liberals regarding the applicability of Enlightenment thought outside Europe may be mistaken. Japan, in particular, stands out as a success story.

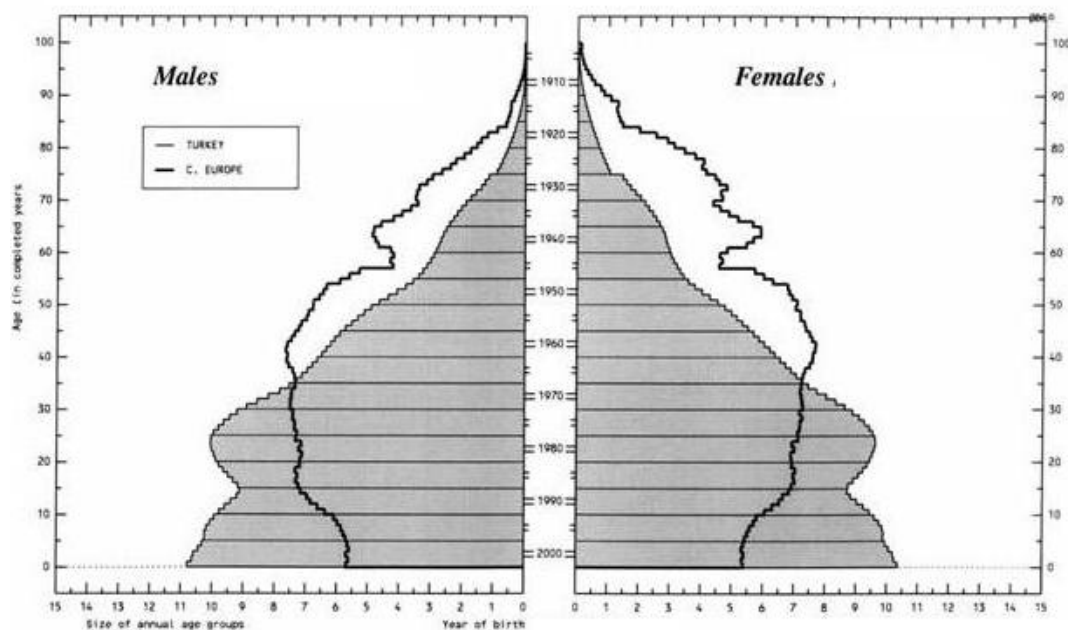
In particular, the emancipation of women and the growth of an urban, well-educated middle class testify to the success of the republican experiment and further distinguish Turkey from the rest of the Muslim world. Women constitute 30 percent of the workforce; 40 percent of the university professors and 40 percent of lawyers are women. The Turkish gross national product ranks 16<sup>th</sup> among world economies; it sustains a military which is the second largest in NATO and the fifth largest in the world.

## Turkey's Demography and Economics

Turkey is home to a young population and a dynamic economy, which has grown rapidly in the past decade. Turkey's population growth is scheduled to decline over the coming decades, stabilizing at around 90 million people. Likewise, as the economy develops, growth is likely to diminish somewhat, while likely to remain high given Turkey's advantageous economic linkages to Europe and its modern industry. That said, Turkey is likely to experience challenges. These include the shifting ethnic mix of the population, with political connotations, as well as the exposure of its economy to the world, especially given Turkey's lack of fossil fuels, making it dependent on imports for the substantial growth in energy consumption that accompanies its economic and demographic growth.

Turkey's demographic outlook is relatively positive. It does not share either the problem of an aging population that characterizes most of Europe, nor the runaway population growth of many developing countries. Instead, Turkey faces the relatively advantageous prospect of a population continuing to grow, but reaching a manageable 90 million by 2030.

Figure 1: Turkey's Population Pyramid (Council of Europe)



As figure one shows, Turkey's population is relatively young, with a considerable population of early working age. The comparison to the average population structure of the Council of Europe member states is palpable. Turkey will hence not for many decades experience the negative economic effects of an aging population. Meanwhile, Turkey's population growth is projected to decline from ca. 1,25% per year at present – which implied an increase of roughly a million people per year in the past decade – to less than half that number by 2020. Based on the Economist Intelligence Unit's projections, the Turkish population – at roughly 75 million today – is scheduled to grow to about 84 million in 2020 and 88 million in 2030. Such a population trajectory is highly favorable for economic growth, and is one explanation frequently cited for the Asian economic miracles of the second half of the twentieth century. Yet this opportunity must be seized for a country to experience such benefits.

Turkey's expected population size would make it the most populous country in the European Union should it gain membership, with a population of more than 15% of the EU-27. That in itself makes Turkey clearly a regional power to contend with simply in terms of its demographic and economic power.

Turkey's economy has become known for its boom-bust cycles. Indeed, recurring economic crises have characterized Turkey since the 1950s. In recent decades, rampant inflation routinely hovered around 100%, while major shocks hit the economy in 1994, and then again more viciously in 2000-2001. That last crisis was particularly disastrous, as it led to the currency falling by 40 percent against the dollar almost overnight, wiping away savings and wages. In 2001, the economy contracted by over 7 percent. Since then, however, Turkey has implemented an IMF-sponsored stabilization program, which built a more stable basis for a developing economy. Turkey's economy has been developing rapidly, and has enjoyed the highest growth rates of the OECD, at ca. 7 percent yearly. An extensive privatization program brought in massive foreign direct investment, facilitated by the reduction of inflation rates from ranges of 60-100 percent to the single digits, and the streamlining of legislation to European standards. A 640-percent growth in companies with foreign capital was experienced from 2002 to 2007. While this economic recovery program was initiated by the former World

Bank economist Kemal Dervis, who was Minister of Economy in the centrist government in 2002, it was followed very closely by the AKP government once it came to power toward the end of that year.

The prospect of EU accession has been the political facilitator of responsible economic policies, coupled with the political stability of a single-party government under the AKP. Whether Turkey will continue along the current, positive path of economic progress is hence dependent partly on global trends – such as the current status of the world economy – and domestic trends, especially the prospects of political stability. That said, Turkey's economy has substantial problems in terms of the current account deficit, which in the past five years amounted to a total of \$118 billion. Likewise, debt has been rising: domestic debt grew by 70 percent from 2002 to 2007, while foreign debt spiked by 83 percent in the same period. While debt figures need to be seen in the context of rapidly growing GDP, they are nevertheless high. Total debt in 2007 stood at half a trillion dollars. Likewise, Turkey has seen a growth in its foreign trade deficit, both in absolute and relative terms. In 2007, the rate of exports to imports was 62 percent, 8 points down from 2002.

On the basis of the current trends of the past decade, most economic forecasts have suggested that Turkey stands a good chance of continuing to be a relatively rapidly growing economy in the coming decade and beyond. Such positive scenarios assume that Turkey's integration with Europe will continue, and that a modicum of political stability will prevail over the decades. In this scenario, the major opportunities for continued integration of Turkey's economy with Europe are foreseen, most specifically in the banking sector and a continued growth of Foreign Direct Investment, which has yet, certainly in per capita terms, failed to reach the levels of the Central and Eastern European countries.

Based on such a scenario, Turkey's economy could grow by an average of over 4 percent until 2020, translating into a GDP per capita growth of close to 3 percent annually in a good scenario. That would bring Turkey to a GDP per capita of us\$11,000 in purchasing power parity terms by the end of the next decade, comparable to Poland in 2003. Meanwhile, alternative scenarios are also plausible. Scenarios that see a return to the political instability and

on-and-off reform of the 1990s, or a Turkey turning away from Europe and into a protracted instability as the Islamic and secular forces battle for control, would reduce these growth rates by one and two percent, on average. Moreover, the negative aspects of single-party rule must also be included into the assessment. Especially in an environment with weak rule of law, the persistence of an elite in power generates growing avenues for corruption. Indeed, the AKP's second term has seen a growth in the tendencies to control independent media and to favor political allies in privatization contracts.<sup>7</sup> This follows on a systematic tendency of the AKP government to appoint cadres to the bureaucracy on the basis of loyalty rather than on the basis of competence and merit. This problem, unless overcome, will prevent Turkey from realizing the most ambitious development goals foreseen by the optimistic development scenarios.

### **The Unpredictable**

Turkey's transformation into a culturally Western, European-style nation-state and democracy remains at best an unfinished revolution. Religious traditionalism, feudal remnants, residual authoritarian inclinations and ethnic fault lines continue to assert themselves. Although the issues of contention are as old, even older, than the republic, the republican enterprise – the nation state and secularism – is challenged as never before. The forces of secularism and of religious conservatism, of Turkish nationalism and Kurdish separatism, continue to pull the country in opposite directions and strain national cohesion, making political stability elusive and the securing of democracy a still more difficult challenge. Turkey presents a special case, which fits neither into a European nor a Middle Eastern framework of historical development; hence, the exercise of predicting its future trajectory is scarcely sustained by analogies.

Looking back a decade and recalling that 1998, the year of the republic's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, had also been marked by the confrontation between secularism and political Islam, gives a useful sense of the unpredictability of political

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<sup>7</sup> M. K. Kaya and Svante E. Cornell, "Politics, Media and Power in Turkey", *Turkey Analyst*, 4 June 2008. (<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2008/080604A.html>)

developments, even when it is possible to discern a historical trend in which they can be placed. Was it possible to predict a decade ago that Islamic conservatives would be in power a decade later and that the regime itself would have reached the point of meltdown? The answer must be no. Political Islam had admittedly been on the rise since the 1970s. The Islamists had registered their first, stunning electoral victory in 1994 when they captured the metropolitan municipalities of Istanbul (where Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected mayor) and Ankara. The Islamist Welfare party emerged as the largest party (though by a razor-thin margin) in the 1995 general elections, and its leader Necmettin Erbakan formed a coalition government with a center-right party, becoming Turkey's first Islamist premier.

However, Erbakan was to overplay his hand. He challenged Turkey's international alliances, calling the relationships with the United States and Israel into question, and establishing links with Iran and Libya, both rogue states at the time. In 1997, Erbakan was forced to resign, following a prolonged, "postmodern" intervention over several months led by the General staff. The military command undercut the position of the government by successfully mobilizing the bureaucracy, business interests and organizations in civil society against it, and by demanding active government action against religious "reactionaries". The Islamist-led government was replaced with a centrist coalition; the Islamists nevertheless remained in charge of largest metropolitan and other municipalities, although Istanbul's Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was sentenced to prison for having incited to violence when reciting a poem about the minarets being the "bayonets" of the Islamist movement. The Welfare party was shut down by the constitutional court. In the elections that were held in 1999, Welfare's successor, the Virtue party, did not fare well. Tellingly, the Islamists did not benefit from any surge of protest votes against the soft military intervention and the subsequent decision of the constitutional court to ban the Welfare party; instead, their share of the votes retreated from 21 to 15 percent.

The ultimate consequences of the military intervention, supported by groups in civil society, against Islamism could hardly have been predicted. The Islamists responded to the "postmodern" coup of 1997 by a total makeover, re-emerging as moderates in the shape of the AKP, the Justice and

Development Party. It had been preceded by a split in the Virtue party, between the reformists who were to found the AKP and the traditional Islamists who refused to steer from the ideological course. The reformists, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, had concluded that the way to power would be barred as long as the Islamists persisted in confronting the West and as long as they appeared to be militants bent on instituting a religious state. Instead, they had to befriend the United States and the European Union, and reach out to the secular middle class and secular business interests in Turkey. Post-Islamism was to be pro-Western and supportive of global capitalism. The AKP leaders established an alliance with the country's small but influential liberal intelligentsia. The embrace of the EU was critically important in bestowing democratic legitimacy on the Islamic conservatives. The external and internal reorientations were reciprocally legitimizing: giving up their traditional opposition to Turkey's EU membership bid and repositioning themselves as fervent supporters of Europeanization and democratization, the successors to the Islamist political tradition became an attractive alternative for parts of the European-minded secular middle class as well. And the support received from liberal intellectuals, such as Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, served to further enhance the image of the Islamic conservatives particularly among liberal European opinion-makers. It was a realignment which would have been utterly impossible to imagine a decade earlier. There was nothing in the deeds and words of the Islamists to indicate the advent of such a fundamental change. On the contrary, a decade ago the movement, including those who were soon to re-emerge as "reformed", were still declaring their intention to overturn the secular system and to impose a religious way of life on the whole of society.

Even then, the AKP's victory in the 2002 election was nevertheless not predestined to happen. The former Islamists were able to win not only because they had successfully remade themselves and courted the liberals, but because the established parties had paved the way for them. In 2002, the center-right parties, which have traditionally governed Turkey, were worn out after having steered Turkey through a deep financial crisis in 2001, together with the nationalist left. When the 1997 military intervention cleared their way to return to power, their leadership was lackluster and had

furthermore been tarnished by charges of corruption for years. But their total collapse, in the wake of a financial meltdown which could not have been foreseen and which was to lead to the victory of the AKP, was not possible to envisage in 1997.

While the coming to power of the AKP was not inevitable, dependent as it was on timing, sheer luck and a range of extraordinary, unforeseen circumstances and a scarcely imaginable ideological realignment, it must ultimately still be understood against the backdrop of the policies pursued by successive governments during the last decades. The causes underlying the rise of Islam as a political force in Turkey will be further elaborated, but it was not far-fetched in itself to imagine the prospect of political Islam mounting yet another challenge to the notion of a secular order.

What virtually no one could foresee was the complete reversal of alliances: that Islamists would become the champions of liberalization and Europeanization, and that the secular forces which have traditionally been the vectors of Turkey's Westernization would become – or at least come to be regarded as – anti-Western and anti-democratic.



## Dynamics of Internal Divisions

It is a testimony to the relative success of the Turkish republic's secularism that the country has eschewed the kind of Islamic radicalization at display across the Muslim world, from the Arab states to South Asia. Indeed, the Turkish political system has had the gradual effect of moderating the discourse of political Islam. The mixture of mild repression against expressions of extremism, and the overt political system that enabled Islamic-based politics to be voiced and compete for votes, has combined to produce a brand of political Islam that – in spite of its flaws – is more “modern” and at peace with the world compared to virtually any other Muslim country. Yet, Islamic conservatism, however moderate, is basically not yet at peace with an understanding of secularism that calls for the withdrawal of religion from the public realm, which in turn is a prerequisite for liberal democracy.

### Radical Islamism

The moderation of political Islam has had only moderate side-effects in terms of the splintering of more radical groups away from the Islamist mainstream. One example is IBDA-C, (*İslami Büyükdoğu Akıncılar Cephesi* or Great Eastern Islamic Raiders Front), a radical group that split from Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation Party. The group shifted to the use of violence in the mid-1990s, primarily in the form of terrorist attacks against civilian targets deemed un-Islamic such as bars, churches, etc. The group's lack of a hierarchical structure nevertheless prevented it from becoming a systemic threat. The groups then faded into the background until 2003, when it claimed responsibility for the high-profile suicide bombing of two synagogues, the British consulate and a British bank in Istanbul. Again in 2008, it claimed responsibility for an armed attack against the police post outside the U.S. consulate in Istanbul. The 2003 attacks suggested that IBDA-C had been incorporated into Al Qaeda or used as a local Al Qaeda

front, nevertheless many observers doubted the authenticity of the claim, calling it instead a pure Al Qaeda operation.

More consequential perhaps is Turkish Hizbullah, unrelated to its Middle Eastern namesake. Created with Iranian support in the 1980s, Hizbullah came to gain strength in the Kurdish areas of Turkey, capitalizing on the dominance of the more orthodox Shafi'i school and the lack of following for the PKK's Marxist-Leninist ideology. Indeed, Hizbullah came into violent confrontation with the PKK in the early 1990s, something that led to unconfirmed speculations that the Turkish military supported or even created the group. What is clear is that the military refrained from targeting Hizbullah until it defeated the PKK following the capture of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, and possibly allowed the group to stage training camps without interference. In 2000-2002, as the group had turned its attention from the PKK to civilian targets deemed un-Islamic as well as the Turkish state, the security forces began directly targeting the group and practically decimated it within a few years.<sup>8</sup> Following this, the group appears to have replaced its violent campaign with one to seek support among the local Kurdish population by social program, akin to the Hamas experience.

These two organizations, like smaller radical groups in Turkey, stand out by their foreign linkages. With the possible exception of the Al Qaeda-connected 2003 attacks, neither has been a major force in the 2000s. Turkey has hence so far mainly succeeded in keeping violent Islamic extremism under control. Whether this will continue to be the case depends largely on the ongoing struggle between secularism and Islam. But barring a major upheaval that would introduce authoritarian rule repressing expressions of political Islam, there is little to suggest that the pattern of the past decades would be reversed. In the unlikely event that a repressive anti-Islamic regime emerges, however, a conceivable consequence could well be the radicalization of parts of the Islamic community in Turkey.

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<sup>8</sup> Soner Çağaptay and Emrullah Uslu, "Hizballah in Turkey Revives: Al Qaeda's Bridge between Europe and Iraq?" *Policy Watch* no 946, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2005.

### Between Conservatism and Modernism

The Turkey of 2008 presents a paradox: In sociological and cultural terms, the country has during the last two decades both become more modern, as well as more conservative,. The ongoing urbanization, the effects of globalization, and the slowly but still rising level of education are indicators of a modernization in progress. However, modernization does not necessarily equal Westernization.

Islamic mores have become more pronounced, in particular since 2002, when the Islamic conservatives came to power. Many of the changes are subtle, but have nevertheless been increasingly clearly felt. Moreover, the societal dynamics of religious conservatism interact with governmental policies. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other representatives of the AKP government have called for a redefinition of secularism, with the implication that religion is to be given a more prominent role in the public life and in politics. Statements by Erdoğan such as one in January 2008 when he said “the state may, but individuals cannot be secular”<sup>9</sup> suggest that the former Islamists, however moderate, have not yet come to terms with the notion of freedom from religion.

The headscarf, a symbol of political Islam since the 1980s, has become more common. The proportion of those women wearing the Islamic headscarf (as opposed to the widely worn and traditional simple scarf) has risen from 4 percent in 2002 to 16 percent in 2008. The pressure to conform to pious sentiments and to a religious way of life, known in Turkish as *mahalle baskısı* (neighborhood pressure) is felt in urban, secular areas as well. There is a general feeling among secular women that they have to be more careful about how they dress. The lengths of sleeves and skirts in advertisements aimed at women are adjusted to accommodate conservative Muslim sentiments. And notably, the need to demonstrate piety has increasingly come to be perceived as a prerequisite for getting government employment or contracts, not to mention advancement in the state bureaucracy.

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<sup>9</sup> “Erdoğan: Kişiler laik olmaz”, *Yeni Şafak*, 26 January 2008.

In large parts of conservative Anatolia, restaurants shut down completely during the month of fasting, and alcohol is never served. The change is palpable compared to the situation only a decade ago.

### *The 1980 Coup and the Growth of Islamic Conservatism*

The origins of the concomitant evolutions of modernization and Islamicization can be traced back to 1980, which represents the defining point of recent Turkish history. That was the year in which the military seized power after years marked by political violence between the extreme right and the extreme left. The military dictatorship only lasted for three years, but it inaugurated a new era in politics, economics and society which has come to last for almost three decades.

First of all, the military intervention crushed the nascent democratic left. The Turkish left had always been weak, but the 1970s had seen the emergence of a force akin to European social democracy and with a comparable electoral following. In the elections of 1977, the social democratic Republican People's Party received 42 percent of the vote. The party, which had once been founded by Kemal Atatürk, was dissolved following the coup. The Republican People's party was to reappear in the 1990s, like the center-right and far-right parties which had also been shut down. But the primary target of the military had been the left; the organizational and intellectual infrastructure of what in time could have possibly evolved into a European type of social democracy was obliterated. Many leftists went into exile or were depoliticized. A third group adjusted to the change of political climate and converted to neo-liberalism.

Secondly, the military junta encouraged Islam as an alternative to the radical left, which had turned into a major problem in the 1970s. While paying lip-service to the legacy of Atatürk, the generals in practice did the opposite, promoting a "Turkish-Islamic synthesis", in an attempt to wed right-wing nationalism and Islam. The coup leader and subsequent president General Kenan Evren delivered public speeches with the Koran in one hand. Education in the tenets of Sunni Islam was made compulsory at the elementary level of the schools (it was already compulsory at the high school level from 1974 onwards), and the decree was even written into the constitution. The expansion of the clerical training schools, the *imam hatip*,

which had already begun during the 1970s, accelerated. The government continued to be engaged in a frenzy of mosque-building. With its 80,000 state-funded mosques, secular Turkey has come to hold the record in the Muslim world. The government-financed and operated imam-schools were initially intended to provide for the need for imams, the prayer leaders in mosques. But even after the expansion of the number of mosques, those educated at these schools vastly exceed the need of prayer leaders; indeed girls, who are barred by the rules of Islam from serving as imam, have come to represent the majority of the imam-students. As a result of the *imam hatip* expansion, Turkey has been provided with a new Islamic intelligentsia, which has gradually come to occupy positions of power within the bureaucracy, in the academic world, and in the media. As the left disappeared, Islam emerged as an intellectual force to be reckoned with; the 1980s saw the proliferation of Islamic publications and the emergence of Islamic media, at first financed by international Islamic capital, mainly from Saudi Arabia. However, the internal sources of Islamic funding were to acquire growing significance as a result of economic liberalization.

Thirdly, the military initiated a liberalization of the economy. Deregulations opened up the Turkish economy, connecting it to the global flows of trade and investment. Economic liberalization has shaped Turkey in sociological and political terms as well. Any visitor to Turkey will be struck by the opulence at display in shopping malls which flourish and stand out as temples of unbound consumer capitalism. Such modernity co-exists with the conservatism to which the Islamic headscarf is testimony; the relationship between capitalist materialism and religious conservatism is indeed symbiotic, although not without tensions.

The export-oriented economic growth, and the consumer economy which it has enabled, have to a large extent affected and benefited the religiously conservative segments of society. The relationship between emergent capitalism and Islam is summed up in the term "Anatolian tigers", which refers to the pious and industrious Muslim bourgeoisie of the Turkish heartland which has been empowered by the liberalization of the economy

and its subsequent globalization.<sup>10</sup> The result has been a proportional decrease in the power of the secular business elites that are mainly centered in western Turkey.

Yet, economic liberalization has not only translated into a growth of wealth which has tilted the balance between center and periphery to the detriment of the former; it has also given rise to income disparities and popular discontent which in “normal” cases tend to furnish parties of the left with political opportunities. The absence of a credible left, which was the result of the havoc brought by the military dictatorship of the 1980s, has instead been capitalized upon by the Islamic conservatives. The ascendancy of Islam as a political force thus owes a great deal to the initial political encouragement of the military, and to a double-edged economic liberalization, which has strengthened the pious bourgeoisie while at the same time creating conditions of social discontent which the Islamic conservatives have been able to capitalize upon in the absence of a credible social democratic left.

#### *Popular Secularism and Conservatism*

Observers of Turkey in general tend to assume that the Islamic ascendancy represents the irresistible reclaim by a supposedly essential popular culture, of a terrain that had been occupied by an alien secularism imposed from above by the state. Yet the perception of Turkey as a country in which a staunchly secularist state is locked in confrontation with a religious-conservative population is largely off-mark. It should not be presumed that secularism is less rooted popularly than what religious conservatism is. The line dividing Turkey over the issue of secularism and the role of religion does not run between state and society, but rather through both. In fact, the Turkish state has been much more accommodating towards religion than is generally acknowledged.

The notion of an excessive and authoritarian secularism provoking a religious reaction from a people deprived of its culture fails to take the history of the Turkish republic fully into account. Rather than being insensitive to religious feelings, successive secular governments have in fact

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent and Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds*, New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2002, 57-87.

paid homage to Islam ever since Turkey became a multi-party democracy in 1950. The secular republic has forced Sunni Islam upon all citizens via the school system – as mentioned above – and through the state body of religious affairs. Religious education is indeed the only education available in large parts of Turkey. Although it is mandatory, only 56 percent of the children attend the secondary level of education, due to the lack of schools and teachers.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, 70 percent of those left out of the ordinary school system are enrolled in Quranic education. During the tenure of the Islamic conservatives, Islam has come to permeate textbooks in schools; Darwin's theory of evolution has typically been called into question. There has been a steady expansion of private, nominally non-religious schools which are funded by Islamic fraternities and orders, the most important of which is the Fethullah Gülen brotherhood.<sup>12</sup> The Gülen brotherhood also controls or influences substantial parts of the media and exerts a powerful influence on Turkish society. Though the movement is not officially linked to any political party, it has provided the AKP with much of its governmental cadres.

The bureaucratic cadres of the state itself have over time become heavily invested with Islamic brotherhoods. Members of the Gülen brotherhood, while being routinely purged from the military, have come to dominate the police apparatus.<sup>13</sup> Adhesion to Islam, be it nominal, has in practice always been a prerequisite for any state position. The history of the Turkish republic is a history of how religion has seeped upwards and “sanctified” the state. Yet, it is also a history of how original Kemalist secularism – placing religion under state control in order to secure the freedom from religious intervention in society – has succeeded in giving birth to a modern religiosity at peace with being restricted to the conscience and to the shrine, and consequently with freedom and democracy.

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<sup>11</sup> UNDP, *Youth in Turkey: 2008 Human Development Report*, p. 28.

([http://www.undp.org.tr/publicationsDocuments/NHDR\\_En.pdf](http://www.undp.org.tr/publicationsDocuments/NHDR_En.pdf))

<sup>12</sup> Bülent Aras and Ömer Çaha, “Fethullah Gulen And His Liberal “Turkish Islam” Movement”, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 4 no. 4, December 2000; Hakan Yavuz, “Towards an Islamic Liberalism?: The Nurcu Movement and Fethullah Gülen”, *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 53 no. 4, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> See Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*. It should however be noted that this year, the General staff did not submit any list of Islamist officers to be purged.

*The Social Roots of Secularism*

As has been pointed out, the roots of secularism stretch back at least two hundred years. It may even be argued that the secular enterprise, as well as the notion of a moderate Islam, rests on even older historical and anthropological foundations. The survival of pre-Islamic social and cultural patterns, concerning for instance the role of women, and the centuries of coexistence of religious creeds in Anatolia can be suspected to have contributed to a decidedly non-dogmatic popular understanding of religion. The existence of the idiosyncratic Alevi creed, a blend of Shia Islam, Christian influences, and Anatolian folk traditions, has in particular been of great importance for the success of the secular enterprise. The Alevi minority, historically suppressed by Sunni orthodoxy and believed to account for around 20 percent of the population, has provided secularism with a significant popular base.

Some polls suggest that society's commitment to secularism is waning. A Pew poll in 2007 revealed that of the 42 countries surveyed, Turkey has seen the second-largest drop in support for secularism over the past five years. In 2002, 73 percent of the Turkish respondents agreed that "religion is a matter of personal faith and should be kept separate from government policy." By 2007, that proportion had dipped to 55 percent.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, a survey conducted by the Bosphorus University in Istanbul in conjunction with the Open Society Institute's Turkey branch in 2007 conveyed a somewhat more optimistic message concerning the popular adhesion to secularism: accordingly, there is little public support for a departure from traditional secularism, understood as the privatization of religion. 45 percent adhered to the view that "secularism should be fully applied without any changes whatsoever". Those desiring a "redefinition" amounted to 12 percent.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, a substantial portion of the population perceives the specter of a redefined secularism as a threat: among those with the highest levels of

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<sup>14</sup> Brian J. Grim and Richard Wike, "Turkey and Its (Many) Discontents", Pew Global Attitudes Project, October 2007. (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/623/turkey>)

<sup>15</sup> "Orta Sınıf Darbeye Karşı", *Milliyet*, 26 October 2007.



education, 72 percent believed that moderate Islamism threatened secularism. In urban areas, 60 percent believed it to be threatened.<sup>16</sup>

The internalization of secularism is equally evident in how religiosity has come to be perceived: 62,7 percent defined themselves as “modern religious”, while 37,3 percent described themselves as “traditional religious”. The differences between the two categories are striking. 83 percent of those in the first category believed it to be possible to adhere strictly to secular and democratic values, without compromising their religiosity. Only 17 percent among the traditionally religious subscribed to that view, instead perceiving religion and democratic liberty as standing in opposition.<sup>17</sup>

Overall, these figures suggest that the enterprise of secularism has anything but weak foundations, although also suggesting that there is a strong base of religious conservatism as well.

Until recently, the popular implantation of secular values had not been publicly manifested; the silence of civil society could create the impression that secularism indeed only was a matter for the bureaucratic elite and for the military. The crisis of 2007-2008 partly changed that perception as a new, popular mobilization in favor of secularism took place. During the spring of 2007, a time of growing political controversy over the upcoming presidential election, millions gathered at “republican rallies” saying “No to Sharia and no to a coup”. Western observers largely failed to appreciate the significance and novelty of these rallies; indeed, western observers presumed the participants were seeking to restore an authoritarian order. The organizing force behind the rallies was the “Atatürk thought association”, at the time led by a former four-star general, who was subsequently arrested in the summer of 2008 at a round-up of suspected coup-plotters (but who was yet to be charged with a crime several months later). There is no reason to doubt the democratic sincerity of the majority of the millions who gathered at the pro-secular rallies.

The participants were predominantly urban middle class women and notably Alevis, both groups which have been increasingly alarmed by the tide of

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<sup>16</sup> Ertuğrul Özkök, *Hürriyet*, 15 May 2008.

<sup>17</sup> “Orta sınıf darbeye karsı” [Middle class opposed to coup], *Milliyet*, 26 October 2007. (<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/10/26/guncel/axgunoi.html>)

religious conservatism. Sociologically, these categories represent the backbone of the westernization of Turkey; indeed urban middle class women are its main product. Politically, these categories are far from being intrinsically anti-democratic. According to the 2007 survey conducted by Bosphorus University and the Open Society Institute of Turkey, 81,9 percent of Turks are categorically opposed to a military regime. Those who express support for a military take-over amount to 12,3 percent.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Military's Ambiguous Relationship to Secularism*

The military has represented the vanguard of modernization ever since the closing century of the Ottoman Empire. However, as the experience of the military regime of the 1980s demonstrates, the armed forces have not displayed the secularist consistency often attributed to them. What the military has been consistent about is the territorial integrity and unity of the nation and the established order of the state. Historically, that has mainly meant targeting the left and secessionist Kurds. In addition, the General staff has traditionally taken care to nurture Turkey's strategic bedrock, the alliance with the United States. Internal and external stability, rather than any Kemalist (i.e. secularist) ideological purity, has defined the military's interpretation of its mission as guardians of the republic. Yet the historical legacy of having been a vector of modernization is evidently of lasting importance; military cadets are brought up to revere Atatürk as the founder of the nation and as an ideological inspiration. Secularism, and obviously nationalism, carries existential connotations for many in the military ranks. Indeed, as will be further elaborated, secularism and nationalism are interrelated in the Turkish context. Furthermore, the confrontation of 2007-2008 may have rekindled an original Kemalist creed among the military, as it has in parts of civil society. But it should still not be assumed that the military represents an ideologically unified, secularist front. Indeed, the dividing lines of society can be expected to run through the military as well; given the sociological "genetics" of the officer corps – the vast majority of military cadets are recruited from a lower middle class with generally conservative mores – it would in fact be surprising if the ascendant religious

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

conservatism was not reflected at all in the political inclinations of in particular officers of lower rank.

The military has in fact experienced severe difficulties in trying to navigate the new ideological landscape. Developments since the Islamic conservatives came to power in 2002 have disoriented – and possibly dispirited – the military. Its powers have been curtailed as a result of Turkey's adjustment to the norms of the EU; above all, the military, though it still remains by far the most trusted institution in society, has lost much of the ideological high ground, a fact that was born out during the crisis of 2007-2008 when the military was subjected to heavy criticism in the media and its political interventions were challenged – and repelled – as never before. In 2000, Abdullah Gül, the current president, had notably predicted that “the military will be isolated if it tries to direct the future”.<sup>19</sup> So far, developments have not proven him wrong.

During the last decade, the Islamic movement has succeeded in acquiring control over much of the media in Turkey. The AKP government has used legal loopholes to transfer large media companies to pro-AKP businessmen. The fact that the media has largely come to be controlled by Islamic business interests has obviously restricted the outreach of secularist ideological dissemination.

#### *Confusion about the nature of Kemalism*

Indeed, there has been a significant shift in the public discourse about the republican experience. Even if a majority of the population still remains attached to the republican heritage of secularism, that founding principle has been intellectually weakened. Not least the liberal intelligentsia has come to perceive the republican conception as innately synonymous with authoritarianism.

Liberal think-tanks and privately funded universities have contributed to creating and sustaining a new, anti-Kemalist ideological paradigm. As has already been noted, the liberal intelligentsia played a decisive role by allying itself with the Islamic conservatives. Obviously, Turkish liberals are not motivated by anti-secularism; rather, they fail to fully appreciate the value of

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<sup>19</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Eastward to Tartary*, Vintage, 2000, p. 120.

Atatürk's endeavor. Already in the 1960s, Indian Prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had notably told a Turkish interlocutor that "you Turks don't realize the greatness of your accomplishment". Since then, the perception of Atatürk's legacy has been distorted by the military's monopolization – in rhetoric – of the label of "Kemalism", especially during the dictatorship of 1980-83, when in fact, secularism was being undermined.

The result is a lasting intellectual confusion about what the implications of the Kemalist heritage really are. Indeed, the genesis of that confusion can be traced to the epoch of Kemal Atatürk himself. In his memoirs, Hasan Rıza Soyak, Atatürk's chief of cabinet, recounts how the president reacted when he was presented with a blueprint for a new party program for the ruling CHP by the party secretary Recep Peker, who had been inspired by what he had seen during a trip to fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. "What kind of disturbed thinking is this", Atatürk burst out, after having spent a whole night reading in disgust. "Apparently, not even those who are closest to us have understood what we are trying to achieve. We strive for a kind of regime in which even those who would want to reinstate the sultanate would be allowed to form a political party."<sup>20</sup> That observation is echoed in the recent statement of Şerif Mardin, the doyen of Turkish sociology: "The Kemalists themselves have not properly understood Atatürk, let alone being able to explain Kemalism and secularism and have them embraced by society."

Mardin stirred debate when he earlier this year announced the defeat of the republic: "The mosque, the imam, and the books read by the imam, have defeated the school and the teacher, the structure that represents the modernizing republic", he maintained.<sup>21</sup> According to the renowned sociologist, religion is victorious because "the republic has not given the question of what is good, right and aesthetic any deeper consideration. That is the deficiency of Kemalism." In fact, the teacher has long since ceased to be a symbol of republican modernization, defeated not so much by the imam as abandoned to traditionalism by the republic itself.

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<sup>20</sup> Hasan Rıza Soyak, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları 2008, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> Halil Magnus Karaveli, "Where Did the Secular Republic Fail?", *Turkey Analyst*, 4 June 2008. (<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2008/080604B.html>)

If a secularizing ethos has indeed failed to take hold, if Kemalism has remained shallow, that is due to the defensive posture of a nominally secularist republic that has shied away from confronting religion, critics of Mardin pointed out. The development of secular ethics has notably been impeded by the deficiencies of the educational system. Philosophy was removed from the curriculum by a center-right government, and the military junta of the 1980s made a point of uniting religion (i.e. Islam) and ethics as a single subject in the curriculum, effectively signaling that there are no secular ethics.

Yet, what lends originality to Mardin's analysis, although it is partly unfair, is that it implies that Kemalism has been "unsuccessful", not because it has been applied with uncompromising vigor and insensitivity to popularly held beliefs, thus provoking an Islamic conservative backlash – but because republican ideology has remained philosophically arid, being insufficiently connected to and fecundated by the heritage of Enlightenment. That in turn challenges the current, Western perception of why the Kemalist experiment is supposedly doomed.

The internal Turkish ideological evolution away from Kemalism has had a parallel – with which it has interacted – at the international level. It should be recalled that Kemalism, which by now has come to be understood as a pejorative term, was once lauded in the West, as being synonymous with Westernization. The recent depreciation of Kemalism is in part due to the fact that the relevance of the Enlightenment heritage for the Muslim world has come to be reconsidered in the West. Columbia University scholar Mark Lilla's statement that "we have little reason to expect societies in the grip of a powerful tradition of political theology to follow our unusual path, which was opened up by a unique crisis within Christian civilization", is characteristic of the current Western intellectual mood.<sup>22</sup> And Samuel Huntington has advised Turkey to "do a South Africa", "abandoning secularism as alien to its being as South Africa abandoned apartheid".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Lilla, *The stillborn God*, Vintage, 2008, p. 319

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, Simon and Schuster, 1996, pp. 178-79.

At another level, the Kemalist experience has come to be reassessed, in the West as well as in Turkey as awareness of the seriousness of the Kurdish question has grown since the 1990s. The Kurdish insurgency, which began in the 1980s, and which the Turkish state has had great difficulties subduing, is another reason why the republican construction – which rests on the twin pillars of secularism and the nation-state – as a whole has tended to become intellectually de-legitimized, or at least has come to be questioned. The apparent difficulty of maintaining the integrity of the nation-state has suggested to liberal, modernist intellectuals, who themselves are the product of the modernizing republic, that the republican enterprise in its entirety is misconceived.

### **The Challenge of Ethnic Separatism**

As an ancient crossroads of civilization, Turkey has always been multi-ethnic, with over 50 ethnic groups represented in the country today.<sup>24</sup> With the globalization and modernization processes gaining strength in recent decades, Turkey experiences two conflicting developments. On the one hand, Turkey experiences an integration of the population into a Turkish identity, spurred by urbanization and education; but on the other, a process of rediscovery of ethnic identity among minority populations.

It is difficult to draw an ethnic map of Turkey, for at least two reasons: first, ethnicity has been a sensitive and delicate issue in a nationalizing nation-state, something that the conflict involving separatist Kurdish movements further exacerbated. Second, modern Turkey on the whole is an example of the successful integration of many population groups into a common, Turkish identity. Turkishness has traditionally not been defined by ethnicity. “The people of Turkey that founded the Turkish republic are called Turks”, Atatürk put it. Thus, as in the French case, Turkish national identity has rested on common citizenship, not on blood ties. It is legion for Turks to extol the melting pot of Turks, Arabs, Kurds, and peoples of Caucasian and Balkan origins intermarrying and developing the modern Turkish nation. And indeed, this characterization is in many ways correct, as people of mixed and varied background now identify primarily as Turks.

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Alford Andrews, *Türkiye’de Etnik Gruplar*, Istanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1992.

That said a countervailing process of self-assertion especially among Kurdish and Caucasian ethnicities has been clearly observable in the past two decades. Meanwhile, an ethnic Turkish nationalism (although it is impossible to demarcate “Turkishness” ethnically), that defines itself against the Kurds has evolved as a reaction to Kurdish ethnic assertiveness, and in particular as a result of PKK’s attacks on the Turkish military and its acts of terrorism in urban areas.

Of Turkey’s 75 million people, over three quarters can be defined as Turks, including people of an ethnically Turkic background, as well as those having assimilated into a primarily Turkish identity. This latter category blends into those whose ethnic or linguistic identities remain non-Turkic. This in turn includes substantial numbers of people that have a non-Turkic ethnic origin, but are linguistically Turkified to the extent that they have forgotten their mother tongue. Largest among the non-Turkic peoples are the Kurds, at roughly 12 million, themselves divided into several sub-categories. People of Caucasian origin follow, consisting mainly of Circassians and Georgians. The term *Çerkez* is often used to describe all North Caucasians, including Chechens, Abkhaz and Ossetians. While these are close to three million in numbers, over 75% no longer speak their mother tongues. Over a million people of Georgian origin are also present, as well as the Laz community of the Northeast, bringing the population of Caucasian background to close to five million. Persons of Balkan background, chiefly Bosnians and Albanians, likely form over three million people, but experience a strong process of Turkification. Finally, among major ethnic groups Arabs form close to a million people, over one percent of the population. These ethnic divisions also mirror regional ones: Kurds in the southeast, Arabs in the south, people from the Balkans in the northwest and west, and Chechens along the northern coast. These estimations are found in several major independent studies, including a significant one commissioned by the military leadership in the past decade.

Figure 2: Fertility rates, 1993 and 2003.<sup>25</sup>

	Turks	Kurds	Total
Total Fertility Rate, 1993	2,25	4,57	2,74
Total Fertility Rate, 2003	1,88	4,07	2,23

Demographically, the Kurds stand out not only through their size, but because of their diverging demographic pattern: their fertility rates are more than double that of the Turkish population on average. As figure one indicates, Kurdish women tend to have two more children, on average, than Turkish women – the latter already at under the replacement rate. While Kurdish fertility rates are likely to decline in the long term as well, this clearly indicates that the population of Turkey will shift somewhat in coming decades, with the Kurdish population growing in both absolute and relative terms, moving from constituting slightly over one in eight at present to one in six around 2030. Together with ongoing political developments in the region, this suggests that the Kurdish issue is unlikely to diminish in importance.

#### *The PKK's Domination of Kurdish Nationalism*

Kurdish separatism and the terrorism of the PKK are by no means synonymous phenomena. While Kurdish separatism is a force that the republic has been forced to deal with since its inception, the PKK became its dominant representative only in the 1980s, when it hijacked the Kurdish cause into its very specific Marxist-Leninist rhetoric and an accompanying militant approach. Since then, despite ups and downs, the PKK has maintained a stranglehold on political expressions of Kurdishness in Turkey.

As noted above, the Turkish nation-building experience has on the whole been a successful enterprise. Millions of people that do not have an ethnically Turkic background see themselves exclusively or primarily as Turks, notably an inclusively defined identity determined by citizenship, and not an exclusive one defined by blood. That includes many of the people of Kurdish

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<sup>25</sup> Source: Ismet Koç, Attila Hancıoğlu, and Alanur Cavlin, “Demographic Differentials and Demographic Integration of Turkish and Kurdish Populations in Turkey”, *Population Research Policy Review*, vol. 27 no. 3, p. 452.



origin, primarily among those that migrated to the western areas of Turkey. Yet the Kurds remain the main failure in the Turkish nation-building project. Undeniably, the Turkish state failed to integrate or assimilate a large portion of the Kurds, especially those in the southeast. There are several reasons for this. The first and most obvious factor is demography: the Kurds are by far the largest non-Turkish speaking group in the country. A second reason is geography: the Kurds are traditionally settled in a defined area of the country, where they form a majority, and which is distant from the country's administrative center, as well as inaccessible because of its topography. Thirdly, the Kurds differ from other large non-Turkic groups such as Slavs or Caucasians because they were an indigenous group and not comparatively recent migrants at the republic's creation. Uprooted immigrant populations that suffered upheavals and hardships understandably proved significantly more willing to embrace a new national identity, compared to indigenous groups. Fourthly, the Kurds, unlike other populations, were organized according to a tribal and feudal social structure, a factor that remains crucial to this day in determining loyalties. Just as tribal populations elsewhere have proven difficult to integrate (Chechens and Pashtuns come to mind), the tribal system of the Kurds and its own hierarchies and loyalties proved harder for the Turkish state to integrate than other minorities. Finally, the Kurds have traditionally been a more fervently Islamic population, belonging to a more orthodox school of jurisprudence. Whereas Turks belong to the more liberal Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, Kurds are traditionally part of the more orthodox Shafi'i school, which, like the Hanbali school, practically excludes the exercise of private judgment and the interpretation of religious tenets according to circumstances of the modern day.

These factors all combined to make the Kurdish question intractable. Paradoxically, the feudal structure of Kurdish society led attempts to integrate Kurds in the political system to backfire. Feudal leaders, of course, see the spread of education and economic development to their areas ambivalently at best, since it leads to the integration of the population with the rest of the country, and therefore to the dissolution of feudal structures of allegiance, in turn undermining the social position of the feudal leaders. Hence, when the Turkish republic sought to embrace Kurdish leaders, it was

natural for feudal leaders to be courted, primarily by the right-wing parties. That, in turn, integrated into the power structures ethnically Kurdish representatives that often played a directly negative effect for the integration and development of Kurdish-populated regions.

This in turn explains the rise of the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party. Its staunch Marxism-Leninism stems precisely from a revolt against the feudal structure of Kurdish society – indeed, the PKK's main aim at the outset was the transformation of Kurdish society, and its main enemy was the feudal elite. The Turkish state was initially seen as a potential ally in this struggle; but the PKK rapidly realized that the Turkish state was a force protecting rather than challenging the status quo. This turned the Turkish state to the PKK's target. That process was in turn exacerbated by the collapse of communism worldwide. The PKK always built on two elements: Kurdish nationalism and Marxist-Leninist ideology. It was hence natural in the 1990s to soften the ideological aspect and emphasize Kurdish nationalism.

The ruthlessness of the PKK, coupled with the Turkish state's response, essentially forced all political expressions of Kurdishness to choose sides. Indeed, perhaps seeing the weak appeal of its leftist ideology, the PKK always saw as one of its main objectives the prevention of the emergence of alternative political representatives of Kurdishness. This reality survived the 1998 capture and imprisonment of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan. Indeed, successive Kurdish political parties in Turkey – HADEP, DEHAP, and the present DTP – all failed to shake off the decisive influence that the PKK and Öcalan personally has exercised over them. As the PKK refused to give up terrorism – hence failing to make the transition toward legitimacy undergone by the PLO and the IRA – it has also continuously failed to achieve one of its main aims, being recognized by Europe as the legitimate representative of the Kurds. Moreover, the PKK's control over the legal Kurdish political parties has led the latter, also, to refrain from denouncing terrorism and the PKK; as a result, Europe refuses to accept them as a legitimate interlocutor. Hence, the PKK and its affiliates continue to dominate Kurdish politics in Turkey, but fail to be accepted as legitimate internationally. This effectively deprives Kurdish nationalism of a fully legitimate representative both in Turkey and

internationally, something that has helped the AKP garner much of the Kurdish vote.

For the future, a main question will be whether the PKK will continue to maintain this policy of self-isolation. The most likely scenario is that it will. The PKK appears to fear that a renunciation of violence would catapult it to irrelevance, and that it can only sustain its position by continuing to stoke up tensions, perhaps hoping to generate a repressive response by the Turkish state or population, that would in turn bolster its standing. The organization has so far proven unable to change its main precepts, and will likely remain unable to do so at least as long as Öcalan continues to control the PKK from his prison cell. That leaves the most important question: whether the PKK will be able to continue to dominate Kurdish politics, a decidedly less certain issue. Indeed, the opening of the Turkish political system and the gradual Europeanization of Turkey would suggest that the ability of the PKK to continue to exercise a stranglehold over Kurdish political parties is doubtful, unless a growing popular Turkish backlash against Kurds materializes. Indeed, in the coming decade it is likely that expressions of Kurdish identity that are not controlled by, and perhaps even directly opposed to, the PKK may appear. Such forces – Kurdish groups that explicitly denounce violence while campaigning for greater Kurdish rights – would be likely to both garner substantial votes in the southeast, as well as gain legitimacy in Europe. Precisely because that would destroy the PKK's primacy, the PKK is likely to utilize all instruments to prevent this from happening, including brute force. Nevertheless, its ability to do so over the coming decade may well recede. However, other domestic or regional developments could also help the PKK to rekindle its violent campaign, such as concerns that its terrorist acts succeed in provoking a growth of ethnic nationalism among Turks, which has so far been absent. Indeed, the PKK for over twenty years failed to make the conflict with Turkey one perceived as ethnic in nature by most Turks; nevertheless, that may be changing, and would imply that the PKK would have succeeded in pushing the conflict over a tipping point.

#### *The External Factor*

Kurdish separatism and the PKK's fortunes have always been closely tied to external factors. The PKK boomed in the early 1990s, as the Gulf War made

northern Iraq a sanctuary and Syrian support was forthcoming; it faded into irrelevance in the early 2000s as Ankara pressured Syria to withdraw support and the Turkish military set up security zones inside Iraq. It emerged with force again in 2004, when the American occupation of Iraq made northern Iraq quasi-independent, and as America's troubles in the rest of Iraq precluded it from targeting the PKK directly, unwilling to risk the stability in the only calm region of the country. But in 2007, the success of the surge allowed Washington to permit Turkey to again target PKK bases in northern Iraq, decimating the PKK.

Yet it is a fact that the past fifteen years have seen the emergence of a *de facto* Kurdish state in northern Iraq. While it is nominally part of Iraq, and while Kurds exercise an important influence over Iraqi politics writ large, it remains the case that northern Iraq as an autonomous Kurdish political entity is a reality that is unlikely to disappear. Quite to the contrary, this political reality is only likely to strengthen in the coming decade, whether within the context of a federal Iraq, or even more pointedly in the case of a dissolution of Iraq. This political reality has exercised a double political impact on Turkey. First, it provided the PKK – at least until 2007 – with a sanctuary, something that made the prospect of a rapprochement between Ankara and the Kurdish Regional Government in Erbil decidedly more difficult. To Turkey, it indicated that the Iraqi Kurdish leadership was not a partner, but instead opportunistically allowed the PKK to weaken Turkey while the U.S. was unwilling or unable to intervene. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it inspired a revival of Kurdish nationalism inside Turkey. The emergence of a Kurdish political entity under the name of Kurdistan, replete with a flag and national anthem, provide exactly the symbolism that Turkey long but unsuccessfully sought to avoid. This reality implies that Kurdish nationalism in Turkey will remain a force to be reckoned with.

However, the Islamic conservatives have manifested a certain capability to steer the Kurds away from Kurdish nationalism. In the 2007 elections, the AKP succeeded in effectively marginalizing the Kurdish nationalist Democratic Society Party in the predominantly Kurdish southeastern areas. Abdullah Gül had indeed declared that “there is a convergence between the

aspirations of the Kurds and us [the Islamic conservatives]”.<sup>26</sup> It was no coincidence that the first rebellion against the republican revolution, the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, was a Kurdish uprising aimed at restoring Kurdish autonomy *as well as* the Islamic order of the defunct Ottoman Empire. Neither is it a coincidence that the AKP has successfully wooed Kurdish voters. In sociological terms, the Kurdish southeast is the most conservative part of Turkey. The southeastern city of Batman has the highest rate of reported suicides among women in the whole of the country, a fact related to the tradition of upholding “honor”. Indeed, “honor killings” are widespread in heavily Kurdish areas.

### **Transformations of Turkish Nationalism**

In a sense, the decline of secularism could be seen at least in part as the collateral damage of the confrontation between Kurdish separatism and Turkish republican nationalism. Indeed, the issues of secularism and nationalism are historically intertwined.

Secularism was the constitutive element of the national identity forged by the Kemalist revolutionaries. Modernity, secular Turkishness, was to replace religion as the binding glue of the community. Nationalism was in itself tantamount to a replacement of the Islamic solidarity of the faithful; making sure that religion does not clash with the imperative of loyalty to the nation became a republican priority. That in turn is one explanation as to why the military, as the custodians of the nation-state, have remained more or less wary of Islam.

However, the understanding and definition of national identity is changing. Turkish nationalism is pulled in three different directions simultaneously: It is becoming less secular, more ethnically exclusive and more anti-western. In the 1980s, as mentioned, the military itself introduced the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis”. According to a poll taken by TESEV, a Turkish NGO, the number of people identifying themselves as Muslims first, as opposed to Turks or Turkish citizens, has increased by ten percentage points since 2002. As a matter of fact, the relation between Turkishness and Islam was never severed. Although the self-understanding of the community was changed

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<sup>26</sup> Kaplan, p. 120.

with the founding of the republic – a community of Muslims was told that being Muslims was no longer the sole, or the most significant thing they had in common – the republican enterprise did draw on the powerful sense of Muslim solidarity. Turkish-speaking Christians, significantly, were excluded from the Turkish nation that was to be constructed. (Notably, the inhabitants of the Karaman region of Central Anatolia were deported to Greece in 1923. And the request by the Gagauz Turks of Moldova to immigrate to Turkey in the 1930s was rejected.)

The Islamic movement has for its part moved towards a more pronounced nationalistic position. As President Abdullah Gül stated a few years ago, “we [the Islamic conservatives] are religious and nationalist”.<sup>27</sup> The most powerful Islamic brotherhood, the Fethullah Gülen movement, has made a point of reconciling religion and Turkish nationalism. Just as they have appealed to the right as well as to the left with liberal economic policies coupled with generous welfare subsidies, the Islamic conservatives manage to simultaneously canalize Turkish nationalism and Kurdish aspirations.

From the nationalist perspective that the military, in particular, espouses, Islam can either be understood as a threat or as a promise. The Islamicization of society implies a retreat from Turkish identity; that may be emotionally difficult to accept for those who remain attached to the traditional definition of what it means to be a Turkish citizen. On the other hand, it may eventually prove that the integrity of the state can only be maintained by elevating the Muslim identity of Turkey at the expense of Turkishness. An Islamic conservatism that declares its loyalty to Turkish nationalism while simultaneously managing to remain attractive to the Kurdish population evidently fulfills a critically important mission.

And as the interrelationship between Turkish nationalism and Islam keeps evolving Turkish nationalist perceptions of the West are partly transformed as well. Atatürk had harnessed nationalism instrumentally; what mattered was to modernize and westernize, and that entailed breaking out of the Muslim *ummah*, as well as securing independence from Western, imperialist powers. Yet, just as a total break with Muslim solidarity was to prove utopian, the relationship to the West was inherently ambiguous. Turkey had

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<sup>27</sup> Kaplan, p. 119.

freed itself from Western domination, in order to eventually become an equal partner within the Western world. Thus, Turkish nationalism rests on a contradictory heritage of anti-imperialism and pro-westernism. For instance, while the example of Atatürk inspired independence movements, notably in the Indian subcontinent and in French North Africa, Turkey in the 1950s sided with its Western ally, France, against the independence of Algeria. Traditionally, there has been no doubt as to where the republican elites – the military, the bureaucracy, secular business groups – have wanted to belong. Turkey's accession process to the EU predates the EU alignment of the Islamic conservatives by several decades. However, an anti-Western neo-nationalism, inspired by the anti-imperialist part of Atatürk's endeavor, has gained some ground among those circles and in particular among the secular, traditionally Western-oriented middle class during the last half decade.

Although the attachment to the independence of the nation-state, affected by the demands of the EU, and the effects of globalization typically provide grounds for nationalist resentment in Turkey as well as in other comparable examples, the resistance to globalization and the influence of the West is mainly fed by the ideological confusion, indeed panic, caused by the unequivocal Western support for the Islamic conservatives. The concessions demanded by the EU in Cyprus and the question of Kurdish rights further fuels Turkish neo-nationalism.

Significantly, neo-nationalism has a divisive potential within the military. Two coup attempts, involving senior generals and triggered by the concessions offered by the AKP government to the EU in Cyprus, were allegedly averted by the Chief of the General staff in 2004.<sup>28</sup>

General Hilmi Özkök, who had taken a favorable view of the EU reforms that were enacted by the AKP government, did not trust his close subordinates within the High command, and reportedly went as far as taking the precaution of having his meals brought from home, rather than being served at the restaurant of the General staff.<sup>29</sup> The fact that a Chief of the

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<sup>28</sup> İsmet Berkan, "Resim daha da belirginleştirdi", *Radikal*, 14 July 2008. (<http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=HaberYazdir&ArticleID=888283>)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

General staff could feel insecure at the premises of the General staff is a vivid illustration of the divisions within military ranks. The coup plotters were subsequently retired, but intra-military tensions undoubtedly remain, and can be expected to have grown even more severe since 2004.

Notably, certain retired generals have voiced the view that Turkey should move towards closer relations with Russia and China, in response to what is interpreted as Western disregard for the integrity of the Turkish nation-state and the founding ideology of secularism. That prescription hardly commands wide support in the High command; the consciousness that the alliance with the United States constitutes Turkey's strategic bedrock is ingrained in military thinking since decades. General İlker Başbuğ reiterated the commitment to the alliance with the United States in his inauguration speech as new chief of the General staff in August 2008. It is however noteworthy that the new Army chief General Işık Koşaner, who is scheduled to replace Başbuğ in 2010, struck a radically different chord in his inauguration speech, more or less accusing Washington of siding with the enemies of Turkey, notably the PKK. General Koşaner's speech suggests that there is an important undercurrent of neo-nationalism in military ranks which the High Command apparently feels obliged to cater to.

A Turkish EU membership would represent the coronation of the process of Westernization of which the military has been the principal promoter for the last two hundred years; the military has subscribed to a nationalism that has sought self-fulfillment in becoming part of the West. However, there is evidently ambivalence in military ranks about the EU, caused by the concern that the territorial integrity of Turkey could eventually be jeopardized as a result of adjustments to EU norms, which in turn fuels an isolationistic nationalism.



## Prospects for Reconciliation

The “survival” of the AKP signifies that the secularist part of the Turkish state establishment has had to reconcile itself with the reality of the power of the Islamic movement, although notably the Constitutional court has tried to rein in Islamic conservatism by reasserting the principles of the secular order. Given the republican establishment’s history of accommodation of religious demands, and the historical record of power-sharing in the state bureaucracy with religious elites, the inclusion of the ascendant religious bourgeoisie, represented by the AKP, in the establishment coalition of the military and the secular business community would indeed be the logical outcome of the confrontation of 2007-2008.

What galvanized a secular opposition within the state and in civil society in 2007-2008 was the AKP’s unwillingness or inability to remain ideologically in the center, and the perception that the Islamic conservatives were not ready to share power with the seculars. Significantly, the insistence that the president should be “religious”, with a wife wearing the Islamic headscarf, confirmed long-standing indications that religiosity, measured by the headscarf, was going to be the criterion for advancement within the bureaucracy. The AKP acted in a way that created the impression that the Islamic conservatives expected the seculars to accept total surrender.

The key question for the future is whether Islamic conservatism will be emboldened or moderated within a new framework of systemic reconciliation based on tacit, secularist admittance of relative weakness.

Religious conservatism owes much of its strength to the state establishments’ lack of secular resolve. On the other hand, the system has tried to maintain certain barriers to excesses of Islamicization, a fact that is, as has been noted, largely responsible for the relative moderation of political Islam in Turkey. However, even if these barriers – such as the restriction to wear the Islamic headscarf in universities and in public offices – remain enforced, that may still not prove enough to counter-balance the societal strength that religious

conservatism has achieved and secure its moderation. Islamic conservatism may have become a little too powerful for its own good. The current marginalization of political opposition and the fact that a growing section of the media has come to be controlled by business interests close to the Islamic movement have given rise to a political hubris which risks setting authoritarian tendencies that have never been absent loose.

Still, political power may in the long term make the Islamist movement conducive to reconciliation with secularism. Middle Eastern examples, notably the evolution in recent years of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt and Jordan would seem to suggest that increased political participation incites to displaying greater consideration for secular values such as democracy, human rights and gender equality, simply out of the need to attract other groups of voters beside the religious conservative core. The Turkish Islamic conservatives have indeed been successful in attracting secular voters. On the other hand, they have displayed disregard for secular sensibilities and showed authoritarian inclinations. The pressure of the conservative base is also bound to make itself felt.

As was noted above, an Islamic “reformation” of a kind has taken place in Turkey; a majority of the population has come to accept that religion should be privatized – that is, confined to the conscience and to the shrine. Barely 10 percent support the introduction of Islamic law. But opinion polls, significantly, reveal that there is a much larger constituency – around 35 percent – of a religious conservatism which is distinguished by a marked uneasiness with the concepts of secularism and democracy; as has been noted, surveys further suggest that support for secularism has been decreasing during the last half-decade.

Attitudes within the Islamic movement, the religious brotherhoods, and in particular the Fethullah Gülen *cemaat* (the most powerful of these) as well as among the cadres of the ruling Islamic conservatives, have not yet evolved to the point of a reconciliation with secularism. The leading representatives of the AKP have not made any secret of their displeasure with the changes that were brought on with the republic, specifically concerning the restriction of the societal role of religion. Dengir Mir Mehmet Fırat, deputy chairman of the AKP, stirred the debate in 2008 when he claimed that society had been

“traumatized” by the abolition of Sharia and the religious, societal order. The Gülen brotherhood, while in principle claiming to be opposed to the confusion of religion and politics, has in practice steadfastly sought and acquired positions of power in the state bureaucracy.

The question at the heart of the evolution of Turkish political Islam transcends Turkey: will an Islamic reconciliation with liberal, Enlightenment values come about? The enduring ambivalence towards Western civilization was well summed up in the 2008 statement of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that Turkey had so far only imported “the immorality of the West, instead of its science”. Erdoğan did not specify the content of that immorality, but the Turkish intellectual debate has been haunted by the same expectation since Westernization started in the nineteenth century, namely that it would somehow reveal itself to be possible to acquire the science and technology of the West without having to import Western freedom of the mind, specifically the freedom to inquire about and question religious beliefs. It is in line with that tradition that President Abdullah Gül has spoken of the universities as places where “religious beliefs are to be freely expressed”, and notably not as institutions where beliefs of all kinds are supposed to be discussed and challenged.

Turkey is regularly held up as a potential model for the Muslim world, but the ideological evolution of the Islamic movement in Turkey itself will be affected by the direction taken by international Islamic movements. Turkey’s Islamic dynamics will also continue to interact with economic globalization and geopolitics.

With trade booming, Turkey’s religiously conservative Anatolian heartland is closer to the West than ever before. It has been suggested that the pious Anatolian bourgeoisie will further political liberalization, as a result of its interaction with global, economic liberalism. However, such a development cannot be taken for granted. As the examples of Russia, China and Saudi Arabia illustrate, participation in a globalized economy and growing prosperity do not necessarily translate into democratization and cultural openness.

The development of the central Anatolian industrial city of Kayseri is thought-provoking in that perspective. Kayseri is an economic and industrial

success-story, home to a religiously conservative class of entrepreneurs which has prospered by plugging into the global economy. The city has frequently been cited in Western media as proof of how religious conservatism can connect to the outside world through trade. But economic openness has so far not translated into cultural openness. Culturally, Kayseri, never cosmopolitan, is even more isolated today than it was a decade ago. There are no cinemas and theatres in the city, and the number of book-shops has decreased during the last twenty years; those few remaining only offer books on religious subjects.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, economic globalization is also a challenge to traditional religiosity. The tension between indulgence in almost hedonist consumption and preservation of piety, the simple life-style and humility traditionally prescribed by Islam, is giving rise to ideological dissensions within the Islamic movement. There is growing awareness among Turkish Islamic as well as non-Islamic intellectuals about the risk posed by materialism; if the pious, religiously anchored values that have supplied Turkish society with its principal moral glue are undermined, the relative social stability which Islam has guaranteed will evidently be at risk.

Politically though, globalization has had the effect of strengthening religious conservatism. Turkey's dependency on the global flows of capital and investment has sensitized the secularist establishment, not least the military, to the expectations and demands of international actors. In fact, the Turkish General Staff has never staged an intervention without being sanctioned by the United States. The fact that the generals, albeit probably grudgingly, have had to reconcile themselves with the continued rule of the AKP owes a lot to the expectations of and to the pressures exerted by the international environment. At a time when Washington seeks to stabilize Iraq and Afghanistan, and when Iran looms as a challenge, instability in Turkey, as a result of the closure of the ruling party, would of course have been unwelcome from an American perspective.

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<sup>30</sup> Kadri Gürsel, "Merak edilecek bir kent", [A city worth interest], *Milliyet*, 29 June 2008. (<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Yazdir.aspx?aType=HaberDetayPrint&ArticleID=887512>)

Still, the principal ground for an eventual, durable reconciliation between the military and political Islam is provided by the Kurdish question. As has been elaborated and as indicated by the AKP's ability to appeal to the Kurds, Islam may succeed where Kemalist nationalism has failed. Consequently, the military faces the challenge to reconcile the ideological imperative, securing secularism, and the territorial imperative, preventing the loss of the Kurdish south-east. It can hardly be expected to prioritize the former over the latter.

It is however, an altogether different question to what degree an Islamic conservatism that appeals to the Kurds will remain as attractive for the Turkish majority. As has been noted, an ethnic Turkish nationalism that excludes the Kurds is in the process of evolving at a popular level. The fact that the war waged by the PKK against the Turkish state since 1984 has so far not ignited ethnic violence across Turkey, in the cities in the west, where Turks and Kurds live side by side, has been a testimony to the basic solidarity that unites Turkish citizens. It showed that the Turkish majority did not perceive the conflict as an ethnic one, but rather as a "terrorism" problem, restricted to the PKK. The attacks of the PKK on Turkish soldiers did not result in ordinary Kurds being targeted for revenge. But there are ominous signs. The terrain of the conflict is shifting to the west: The PKK increasingly recruits among the Kurds in western cities, and hatred against Kurds is developing among Turks, in particular in the western, Aegean region, where descendants of Muslim refugees from the Balkans and the Caucasus make up an important part of the population.

Obviously, there is a risk that PKK terrorism could provoke Turkish militarism. But General Ilker Başbuğ, Chief of the General staff since August 2008, has displayed a conciliatory attitude, stating the importance of seeking non-military solutions to the problem. As has been noted, a vast majority of the population, at over 80 percent, opposes military rule. All prior coups, of 1960, 1971, 1980 and the "post-modern" coup in 1997 enjoyed popular legitimacy. The confrontation of 2007-2008 underlined that the military no longer enjoys such legitimacy, that it has lost the ideological high-ground, that it is not automatically obeyed or welcomed as before, and that its interventions carry the risk of unseating the status it still enjoys in society.

Indeed, the consciousness that coups in the long run create more problems than they solve, is near-universal, uniting secularists and religious conservatives. Although there were civilian secularists who expected the military to save them from Islamic conservative rule during the confrontation of 2007-2008, the military's intervention in April 2007 – when an e-memorandum was posted at the website of the General staff, expressing opposition to the election of Abdullah Gül as president – was greeted with incomprehension by secularist opinion-makers in general.

Turkey's experience with military rule is in fact not reassuring from a secularist perspective; in particular the decisive coup of 1980 has had the effect of casting a lasting doubt over the secular trustworthiness of the officer corps. As was noted earlier, it would be surprising if the ascendant religious conservatism of the society was not reflected in military ranks as well. Still, a future, military putsch cannot be excluded; but in that event, it is more likely to be a mutiny outside the chain of command, resembling the coup attempt in Spain in 1981, or the alleged attempted coups in Turkey 2004.

However, twenty-first century Turkey is likely to remain as “militaristic” as ever, irrespective of whether it becomes less secular or not. The notion that the Turkish military would cease yielding power – becoming a normal, European military – is unrealistic given the weight of historical heritage and Turkey's strategic environment. The armed forces can be expected for the foreseeable future to carry significant political clout in matters related to foreign policy and national security, regardless of how Turkey evolves politically in other respects. And nothing suggests that the Islamic conservatives are unprepared to reconcile themselves with that reality. What they have in mind is rather a division of labor, basically leaving the supervision of national security to the military, while expecting it to step back and accept that religion permeates more of the daily life in society. Indeed, such a division of labor would not be entirely new; Islam and the military have in fact always supplied the main foundations of the republican order, religion securing a certain societal cohesion and stability and the military maintaining internal order.

The co-existence of two divergent worldviews in society will however inevitably continue to generate friction and furnish Turkish politics with a

defining context for decades to come. Neither religious conservatism nor secularism will be wished away; both are sociologically deeply rooted, and neither can in the short run be expected to prevail altogether over the other. The co-existence of competing value systems, while creating tensions, also signifies that Turkish society is inherently pluralistic, multi-culturally heterogeneous to an extent that it is difficult to envisage that an attempt to establish an authoritarian system – be it of a religious or secularist nature – could succeed. Yet, religious conservatism undoubtedly has the upper hand, and the historical trend – since the 1950s – is definitely on its side.

The election victory in 2007 suggested that the AKP was destined to fulfill a function as the dominating party, akin to that of the Swedish social democrats or the German Christian democrats. Just as these parties founded their power on an ability to reach out beyond their traditional core of socialists and religious conservatives, respectively, the Islamic conservatives had largely managed to reconcile the left-right divide of Turkish politics, appealing to voters of a conservative, liberal and social democratic inclination alike. It is however an attraction that depends on a continuously successful managerial record. The Islamic conservatives will at one point inevitably become politically worn out, just as happened to the center-right a decade ago. Corruption, which is as widespread among the AKP cadres as it was during the reign of the center-right, can be expected to tarnish their image. Indeed, the recent unraveling of the extent of corruption has not failed to affect the standing of the AKP in opinion polls. Economic woes are sure to exact their toll, and this is almost certain to happen within the next decade at the latest. That would, in theory, create the opportunity for a return of the center-right that has been the traditionally dominant force of Turkish politics.

However, such a return would not amount to any dramatic rupture with long-term societal and ideological trends as the center-right itself has been instrumental in paving the way for a more religiously conservative society. A thoroughly secular liberalism of the European kind has never succeeded in emerging in Turkey. As the AKP to all intents and purposes has become the trustee – although with an obviously stronger tinge of Islam – of the center-

right tradition, what is lacking in the democratic equation of Turkey is a center-left which can credibly aspire to govern.

The center-left alternative, the Republican People's Party (CHP), has, at least temporarily, ideologically gone astray; as the Islamic conservatives turned to Europe, bewildered social democrats abandoned the Western-oriented tradition of which the CHP had been a promoter for nearly a century. CHP sought refuge in a marriage of secularism and anti-Western nationalism. In fact, the latter has limited appeal, as the election of 2007 proved. The urban middle class, the traditional electoral base of the center-left, is inherently pro-Western. There are signs that the ideological deviation of the CHP from its traditional course may prove to have been momentary; there is a growing realization among social democrats that the center-left has to make peace with Europe, and that it has to find ways of reaching out to the broader masses with innovative and viable social and economic policies. In fact, the history of CHP is not unpromising for the future: the party adapted itself to new circumstances, when it steered Turkey's transition to democracy in 1950, and again in the 1970s, when it tuned in with the European social democracy, a liberal move at that juncture.

Civilian secularism remains an untapped resource for a potential, modern left and/or liberalism of the European kind, indeed for Turkey's democratization. The ideological inclinations of the secular middle class, of which a majority is opposed to military rule, refute the assumption that the embrace of the Atatürk legacy is tantamount to opposition to democracy.

A possible reconciliation of the military and Islamic conservatism raises the specter of a less liberal Turkey. In contrast, and viewed optimistically, the aspiration of the Islamic conservatives to be ideologically all-embracing, hence moderates, and the strengthening of civilian, anti-authoritarian secularism would seem to converge to offer the prospect of democratic reconciliation.

Yet, the record of the Islamic conservatives, their actual deeds so far is not encouraging. It is, after all, to ask a little too much of Islamic conservatism to expect it to become the safeguard of a secularism that confronts Islam itself by relegating religion to the private sphere. It may be that AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan really has changed, that he no longer thinks that "democracy



is a bus, from which we descend when we arrive at our destination". But, as the attempts to "redefine" secularism and the description of secularization as a "societal trauma" show, the Islamic conservatives still have a long way to travel before they have made their peace with that conceptual leap, without which democratic evolution is not possible.

To put the Turkish experiment of secularism in perspective, it has been suggested that the Western experiment itself, that is, the world created by the intellectual rebellion against political theology in the West four centuries ago, suffers from fragility: "The West does appear to have passed some kind of historical watershed, making it barely imaginable that theocracies could spring up among us. Even so, our world is fragile, not because promises our political societies fail to keep, but because of the promises our political thought refuses to make", writes Columbia scholar Mark Lilla in his acclaimed account of the history of Western secularism.<sup>31</sup> The temptation of political theology, the quest to bring the whole of human life under God's authority, is age-old and universal, Lilla reminds. If the Western renunciation of divine revelation as justification of political principles is an experiment whose continuation cannot be taken for granted, than obviously the prospects of an experiment of secularism taking place in a Muslim context, where the tradition of thinking about politics exclusively in human terms is lacking, would appear dim.

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<sup>31</sup> Lilla, p. 6-7.

## Foreign Relations and Geopolitics

After having guarded the south-eastern frontier of the Western alliance for decades, Turkey has, since the end of the Cold war, faced the challenge of redefining its strategic identity. The republic that was created out of what was left of an empire that had bled to death on battlefields from Central Europe to Arabia had prioritized survival and made abstention from foreign adventures a founding article of faith. “The Turkish people has sacrificed enough in the pursuit of impossible dreams”, declared Kemal Atatürk.

Since the end of the Cold war, Turkish strategic thinking has nevertheless ventured beyond borders. The imperial legacy is being re-evaluated. In fact, foreign policy and internal politics interact; reevaluating Ottoman imperialism is tantamount to devaluing the republic. It has indeed become an article of faith for those who want to settle accounts with the Kemalist legacy that the republic deprived the Turkish people of its natural zone of influence in the Muslim world. Political scientist Deniz Ülke Arıboğan, for example, holds that the republic is “depressed”, that Turkey has never been allowed to properly mourn the loss of its empire.<sup>32</sup>

The promise of a Turkic world, “stretching from the Adriatic to China” in the words of President Süleyman Demirel, excited Turkey when the Turkic states of Central Asia became independent with the fall of the Soviet Union. It proved to be a short-lived dream. Yet, the Ottoman heritage is today believed to supply Turkey with “strategic depth” – a term coined in the Turkish context by Ahmet Davutoglu, foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, but used with less success by Pakistan in the past decade – in the Muslim Middle East in particular.

The geopolitical dynamics are in a sense perpetual, and keep reasserting themselves: Anatolia (of which Turkey largely consists) was an intermediary in the ancient Silk Road, and is today once more being assigned such a role in

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<sup>32</sup> İsmail Küçükkaya, ed., *Cumhuriyetimize Dair*, Aşina, 2008, p. 205.

the transition of valuable commodities from the East to the West, this time as an energy transit route. The perspectives on, and the importance accorded to the Turkish republic by outside powers, have tended to vary with the conjunctures of international politics. In the aftermath of 9/11, it came to be assumed by Western policymakers and observers that Turkey is a “bridge” between Europe and the Muslim world, with the implication that it has the potential to serve as a model – significantly demonstrating the compatibility of Islam and democracy – for other Muslim countries in the Middle East. That is, it may be argued, an expression of intellectual theorizing, even wishful thinking, which assumes that the Muslim Middle Eastern countries would be naturally prone to look upon Turkey as a role model in the first place.

Turkey’s culture and religious affiliation had not been accorded any particular interest during the Cold War. The term “Muslim democracy” was never used in the West to describe Turkey during that period. Cultural and religious considerations had taken a back seat to the strategic imperative of securing the strength of the Western alliance with the inclusion of Turkey. Thus, Turkey was recognized as a potential member of what was to become the future European Union, when the EEC and Turkey signed the Ankara agreement in 1963. In 1978, Turkey was even offered European Community membership together with Greece. The historic opportunity was missed by the Turkish government. When Turkey applied for membership in the EC in 1987, the strategic tide had withdrawn from such a perspective. Turkey received a cold shoulder from the European Community in 1989. Initially, the fall of the Soviet Union gave birth to the assumption in the West that Turkey had lost much of its strategic value for the West. That notion was to be shattered first with the ensuing Gulf War, and definitely with al-Qaeda’s attack on the United States. Turkey was now accorded a renewed strategic, as well as a cultural and ideological, importance. It was once again seen as a key Western ally, but now on account of its Muslim identity.

Turkey’s geographic location makes the conduct of foreign and security policy a tall order for any Turkish government. Its western aspirations have made relationships to the United States and the European Union central to its national interests; meanwhile, Turkey has had to deal with a large array of

regional issues in its constantly volatile neighborhood. Indeed, Turkey is located between three hotbeds of instability: the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Balkans, and to that has had the Cyprus conflict with Greece to deal with. This complexity makes Turkey's future foreign relations and geopolitical situation very difficult to predict, as it tends to make Turkey a reactive rather than proactive actor. Nevertheless, certain main tendencies can be extrapolated, based on the long-term trends in Turkish foreign relations.

### **Remaining with the West?**

Turkey's foreign relations are based on two major bilateral relations: those with the U.S. and the EU. While Turkey's linkages to the Middle East and the Turkic world have gained in importance, the western orientation remains the paramount direction of Turkish foreign policy.

#### *A Strategic Bedrock: the Relationship with the United States*

The Turkish-U.S. relationship has been the strategic bedrock of the country for sixty years, built on strong military-to-military ties that have remained intact in spite of political changes in both countries. The relationship remains key to this day, in spite of one of the worst slumps in mutual relations in recent years. Turkey has been an important U.S. ally, within the NATO-alliance since the 1950s. The Cyprus issue caused tensions in 1964 – when the U.S. stopped Turkey from intervening on the island and again in 1974, when an American arms embargo was imposed subsequent to the Turkish intervention. But it is Iraq that has given rise to the most severe crisis ever between the U.S and Turkey. The newly elected AKP government's failure on March 1, 2003, to pass a resolution opening a northern front in the upcoming Iraq war led to a freeze in U.S.-Turkish relations. Rather than using its parliamentary majority and party discipline to push through a resolution, the AKP allowed parliamentarians to vote freely, leading the measure to fail. The Turkish military's ambivalence also worsened its ties to Washington. As a result, Turkey lost any possible influence on the conduct of America's war in Iraq and on the situation in that country for years to come, and hence renounced the possibility of affecting the developing situation in northern Iraq. Indeed, the AKP government was caught between

strategic considerations on the one hand, and the sentiments of its base, which essentially focused on two issues: opposition by its moderate Islamist base against an attack on a Muslim country, which intersected with opposition by its ethnic Kurdish members against a Turkish military presence in Kurdish-populated northern Iraq.

The Iraq war, and the effect it had on Turkey's economy and security, was the chief factor leading to the booming of anti-Americanism in Turkey. Turkey saw a dramatic shift in the 1990s, with once quite high favorable views of the United States dropping to the single digits. This was the result of the equivalent of a "perfect storm", as all main political forces developed anti-American views for very different reasons. Islamists were dismayed by the war in Iraq and the general confrontational U.S. foreign policy; most Turks were outraged by the PKK's resurgence and America's perceived unwillingness to help Turkey on this issue, in spite of growing military and civilian casualties; while seculars and nationalists were furious with Washington's support for the moderate Islamist government. Nevertheless, more detailed polls suggest that it is American policies rather than America as such that are most denounced by Turks; this entails that America's ratings in Turkey could easily recover under different political conditions.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the U.S. support to Turkish military operations in Iraq in early 2008 brought visible improvements in relations as well as perceptions of America.

U.S.-Turkish relations in the coming decade are likely to continue to follow the main path of the past decades. A collapse in relations is unlikely. The Turkish military remains firmly committed to the alliance with the U.S., and the appreciation that challenging Turkey's basic strategic orientation barred the way to power was decisive in the ideological-tactical evolution of the Islamic conservatives. However, a growing Islamicization of society will inevitably lead to a cultural estrangement of Turkey from the West in general, with possible strategic repercussions. The common ground of shared values which sustains the special relationship between the U.S and its European allies will in that case be increasingly lacking in the U.S-Turkish relationship. That will make the relationship, although likely to endure and

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<sup>33</sup> İhsan Bal, "US Fury on Anti-Americanism in Turkey", *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, 11 April 2005. [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/editorial.php?id=11>]

not necessarily to cool in strategic terms, more vulnerable to mutual misunderstandings and tensions. Both Iraq and the recent war in Georgia are examples of how Turkey's priorities and sensibilities may deviate from those of the U.S.; in that respect, Turkey is no different from other European allies of the U.S. What risks complicating, if not undermining, the strategic relationship in the long-run is rather the differing cultural orientation of Turkish society. In fact, Turkish socio-political trends offer a paradox: those segments of society that are sociologically and culturally farthest from Western culture – the Islamic conservatives – are, as has been noted, beneficiaries of a globalization that is spearheaded by the U.S., and thus prone to be politically pro-Western at least in the short-run, while the seculars, who have traditionally been oriented towards the West, have become estranged from the U.S (and the EU) as a result of the American and European support to the Islamic conservatives. However, rather than a dominance of Islamic conservatism, it is the secular republic that would provide the Turkish-U.S-relationship with a more predictably stable ground in the long run, as it entails a continued cultural Westernization of Turkey.

The major wild card in the Turkish-American relationship, of course, is the Middle East. The Iraq issue has somewhat receded since the surge succeeded in calming the domestic situation there. That said, a dissolution of Iraq in the future – and the potential independence of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq – would be certain to bring the U.S. and Turkey to new tensions. Even more pointedly, the question of Iran and its nuclear weapons program could seriously harm Turkey's security, as well as its relationship with the U.S., as discussed below.

### *The Dream of Europe*

As Turkey's prospects of EU membership received a lease of life in the early 2000s, the prospect of Brussels replacing Washington as Ankara's main orientation was vividly discussed. Yet the realization that Turkey's accession to the EU remains an open question, and to that one that is likely to be cumbersome and extended at best, implied that this prospect is unlikely to materialize in the immediate future. Both inside Turkey and in the EU, strong opponents of accession have prominent positions. France and Germany, most importantly, have strong forces opposing Turkish

membership; while the realization is growing in Turkey that EU accession implies the handover of large portions of Turkey's sovereignty to Brussels, a prospect decidedly unpopular among both civilian and military circles in Ankara. Especially in neo-nationalist circles, an increasing and sometimes paranoid anti-Europeanism parallels the anti-American sentiment.

Both economically and politically, however, Turkey has no realistic alternative to Europe. Ideas are broached periodically of alternative constellations; the 1990s saw talk of a Turkic Union, and Erbakan's Islamist-led government proposed a union of Muslim states instead of the EU. Subsequently, various brands of nationalists have proposed alternative strategic alliances, sometimes with America and Israel, or with Russia and Iran. Yet the reality is that Turkey's economy is heavily dependent on Europe; about half of its imports as well as exports tie it to the EU. Politically as well, integration with Europe has been an issue that is not only about foreign policy, but that is in fact primarily about Turkey's identity as European power.

One of the AKP's major accomplishments was to shed the anti-European baggage of the Islamic movement. The AKP continued along the reform-path laid out by the previous, centrist government, and followed it through. That said, the AKP's enthusiasm for European harmonization reforms had already decreased by the end of 2004. The road ahead for Turkey's relations with the EU is unclear, given the multitude of developments both in the EU and in Turkey that could derail it. It is safe to conclude that Turkish EU membership is not a foregone conclusion. While it is one of several possible end states in the current negotiations, it is entirely plausible to imagine scenarios whereby either Turkey or the EU decide to sever the accession negotiations, leading eventually to another form of relationship.

Most realistically, both Turkey and the EU will spend a good deal of time in the next half decade coming to terms with their respective internal problems – the un-governability of the EU, and the likely recurring regime crisis in Turkey. Toward the middle of the next decade, however, the most likely outcome of Turkish-European relations is probably going to be visible. At present, the most probable scenario appears to be one whereby Turkey, in a decade, enjoys a continued possibility to move toward EU membership, and a

closer relationship to Europe, but will still not have attained membership. An equally plausible scenario is a much cooler and acrimonious relationship, where the option of membership has been effectively excluded, but where both parties continue to maintain an overtly civil relationship. A third scenario – the complete breakdown of relations and a re-orientation of Turkey away from Europe – is possible but highly unlikely.

Over the last decades, Turkey has experienced severe tensions in its relations with Greece. A Greco-Turkish war, when Turkey intervened on Cyprus in 1974, was only averted by the last-minute intervention of the U.S. In 1996, an incident in the Aegean Sea came close to igniting an armed conflict. Since the end of the 1990s, however, the relations have improved considerably, although the unresolved Cyprus issue remains a complication.

With the accession of the Greek-Cypriot administered part of Cyprus to EU membership in 2004, the traditional Turkish position has come to be challenged. A majority of the Turkish Cypriot population expressed its desire to join the Greek Cypriots in a federation that would make them citizens of the EU. Strong forces in Turkey, not least the Turkish military, oppose “surrendering” Cyprus, for purportedly strategic reasons, but equally out of nationalist and emotional attachment. The symbolic importance of the issue for the military should not be underestimated; as has been noted, high-ranking generals reportedly plotted to overthrow the AKP government in 2004 when it went along with the UN plan to unite the island. Yet Turkey is ultimately likely to acquiesce in the unification of Cyprus, provided that it is permitted to retain some sort of military presence on the island.

### **Turning towards the East?**

The end of the cold war catapulted Turkey into a much less predictable neighborhood. As Turkish diplomats liked to say in the early 1990s, their most predictable and stable borders in the late 1980s had been those with Iraq and the Soviet Union – both of which became major headaches in the following decades. During the Cold war, Turkish foreign policy was exclusively dictated by the imperative of containment of communism. Turkey did not isolate itself from the Middle East and Asia. As early as 1938, seeking friendly relations with the East, Turkey had been among the



signatories (together with Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan) of the non-aggression treaty of Saadabad. In 1954, it signed a pact of mutual cooperation with Pakistan. In 1955, it signed the Baghdad pact (later renamed CENTO) together with Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and the United Kingdom. Yet, CENTO typically had the goal to contain communism. With the end of the Cold war Turkey was compelled to devise more active and differentiated policies toward the East – the Middle Eastern states, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and Russia. These vectors are by no means likely to challenge the predominant western orientation of Turkish foreign policy; however, as in the past decade, their relative importance is likely to grow.

### *The Return of the Middle East*

For decades, the Turkish foreign policy and national security establishment assumed that Turkish interests would be best served by a defensive posture in Middle Eastern affairs. The experience of empire, which had ended with the very independent existence of a Turkish nation being put into question, had made republican Turkey wary of foreign policy adventurism, particularly toward that region. This cautious posture was possible to maintain during most of the cold war, when Turkey's border with Syria functioned as an extension of the Iron Curtain through Europe. Yet even then, Turkey was a key element in the network of alliances that worked for the containment of communism in the Middle East. But the main cultural and political orientation of the republic toward the West reduced the Middle East to a security concern rather than anything else.

By the 1980s, events in the Middle East by the 1980s made a more assertive policy necessary. The Iranian revolution affected Turkey strongly, both in symbolic terms and given Iranian subversive activities in Turkey. More importantly, Syria's support for the PKK and its own efforts to undermine Turkey could not be ignored. The Gulf war implied a fundamentally new challenge, to which president Turgut Özal responded actively, supporting the U.S. intervention against the more traditionally cautious advice of his top brass. This brought Turkey back as a key regional actor for the West, a role many Turks had feared it would lose with the end of the cold war.

Özal's more activist foreign policy was disliked at the time by the military; yet only a few years later, the military leadership itself embarked on a project

that would rewrite the strategic map of the Middle East, the Turkish-Israeli alignment. This relationship was to strengthen for a decade, bringing great strategic benefits to both parties, as well as providing Turkey with powerful support in the U.S. domestic lobbying game. Indeed, this alignment was a key factor enabling Turkey to cut Syrian support for the PKK and decimate the organization.

The AKP's decidedly different approach to the Middle East did not mean aloofness. Quite to the contrary, the Middle East has been a chief preoccupation for the Islamic conservative Islamist government. But rather than focusing on Israel, the AKP capitalized on its Islamic credentials to build relationships with the Arab world and Iran that earlier government could not or would not do. Hence the AKP repaired ties with Syria, and improved relations with Iran, while seeking to maximize its influence over Iraq's future. It has been much less concerned about ties with Israel, while maintaining a certain cordiality that permitted it to try to mediate between the Jewish state and its Syrian arch-rival in 2008.

Reality dictates that Turkey will be compelled to have the Middle East as a key element in any future foreign policy. Iraq and Iran, in particular, will be issues dominating Turkey's agenda. In Iraq, dealing with the reality of a Kurdish entity in that country's North will continue to be Ankara's main concern, simply because no other foreign policy issue has comparable potential ramifications for Turkey's domestic stability. Here, its interest in maintaining Iraq's integrity will be shared by the country's other neighbors, chiefly Iran. As far as Iran is concerned, Ankara is not thrilled by Tehran's radicalism or its nuclear program. Indeed, an Iranian nuclear weapon would likely raise the prospect of Turkey seeking nuclear capability as well. Yet the AKP appears to believe, perhaps exaggeratedly, that it could play a role in the diplomatic games on the issue. Tehran, however, is likely to play along mainly in order to gain time.

Given current trajectories, the likelihood of a regional conflict over Iran's nuclear ambitions stands at the top of the list of issues that are likely to affect Turkey's regional security in the coming decade. Such a conflict would put immense pressure on Turkey, exceeding even that prior to the 2003 Iraq war. Indeed, Turkey's stance would likely determine the future of its relationship

with the U.S., the strategic bedrock of the country, while the fallout of such a conflict could hit Turkey very directly.

### *The Pull of the Turkic World*

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey essentially ignored the captive nations of Central Asia and the Caucasus, most of which were its “distant cousins”. Only the far-right nationalist MHP strongly maintained an interest for the “outside Turks”. But the independence of five Turkic states in Azerbaijan and Central Asia coincided with Turkey’s feeling of rejection from the European Community, leading to short-lived euphoric plans of confederation in Central Asia.

Domestically, however, this issue is one that arouses varying degrees of interest. The centrist forces, most prominently former president Süleyman Demirel, paid great attention to this emerging vector of Turkish foreign policy, while also instilling it with substantial realism. Initially, a culturally determined focus on distant Central Asia dominated, which ignored the fact that Turkey does not have a land corridor to the rest of the Turkic world. Yet this gradually gave way to a much more focused approach that gave priority to the South Caucasus due to its proximity and strategic importance. This implied greater attention to Georgia, a non-Turkic country that nevertheless constitutes Turkey’s access route to Azerbaijan. The building of the east-west transportation and energy corridor is a result very much of the trilateral Turkish-Azerbaijani-Georgian partnership led by Demirel in conjunction with Azerbaijan’s Heydar Aliyev and Georgia’s Eduard Shevardnadze in the 1990s. This accomplishment practically made Turkey a leading Western force in the region. Indeed, at that time, the “West” in the South Caucasus consisted of three powers – America, Turkey and Europe, roughly in that order of influence.

Yet the Islamic forces have never shared the enthusiasm for these regions displayed by the centrist forces. This, moreover, is true both for the original Islamists under Erbakan, as well as for the moderate ones under Erdoğan. With a self-identification as much religious as ethnic, they often display greater affinity for “true” Muslims of the Middle East compared to the less observant “Soviet” Muslims of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Indeed, a much greater interest for the Middle East as opposed to the Caucasus and

Central Asia is visible in the AKP's foreign policy. The 2008 war in Georgia, which elicited only a half-hearted Turkish reaction, is a case in point.

Turkey has great potential for economic and political influence in the areas of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Nevertheless, this remains an unfulfilled potential largely due to a relative lack of interest on the part of the current government, perhaps understandable given the multitude of more prioritized issues such as Europe, Iraq and Cyprus. To that, recent experience has shown that Turkish policy in the Caspian region is likely to be effective and influential only if coordinated with the West, primarily but not only in the energy sphere. By contrast, flirtations with the idea of dealing with Russia in the region are bound to failure. This is the case simply because there is little room for Turkey in Russia's plans for the region – which overtly seek Russian dominance over the South Caucasus – while Turkey could play a considerable role in Western strategies.

This reality notwithstanding, the war in Georgia in 2008 showed that Turkish leaders by no means felt an instinctive reaction to coordinate policies with the West. In fact, when Prime Minister Erdoğan revived the moribund idea of a Caucasus Stability Pact (swiftly renamed into a somewhat less compelling Initiative) in the middle of the war, the proposed structure would include the three states of the South Caucasus, Turkey, and Russia. Neither Iran nor the EU or the U.S. featured in Turkey's calculations, in spite of them all being included in earlier proposals for a stability mechanism for the region; and western spokesmen made it clear that the initiative had not been discussed with them. Naturally, this raised eyebrows in western capitals, as it seemed to indicate a submissive reaction to blatantly aggressive Russian policies, salvaging Turkish interests by accommodating Moscow. It prompted worries across the South Caucasus that the AKP government had defected from playing a leading role in Western policies toward the Caucasus, instead beginning to play second fiddle to Russia, a role hitherto reserved for Iran.

#### *Russia – Rival and Partner*

Turkish-Russian relations have developed greatly since the collapse of the USSR, becoming a vector in its own right not least because of the huge trade relationship: Turkey's economic ties with Russia by far outweigh Turkish

economic interests in the Turkic world. Yet Turkey and Russia, while experiencing a rapprochement in the 2003-07 period, always remained uneasy. On the one hand, commercial ties combined with a common skepticism on the part of the Erdoğan and Putin governments toward American designs on the broader region. Indeed, in the Black Sea, Turkey and Russia share a consensus on preventing the militarization of the sea, shorthand for hindering greater American and NATO presence there.

While these issues provided some common ground, it also remained patently clear that any true partnership between Ankara and Moscow is unlikely, because the fundamental interests of the two countries are not compatible. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, Moscow seeks dominance and control, something that effectively negates a meaningful Turkish role, unless it develops on Moscow's terms. Likewise, in energy politics, Moscow seeks to continue to dominate the export of Caspian oil and gas. Conversely, Turkey's ambition to function as an energy hub for Europe is directly dependent on supplies of Caspian energy that do not cross Russian territory. Turkey and Russia are hence direct competitors, a fact most blatantly exposed by the competing pipeline projects under development. Turkey support Trans-Caspian pipelines that would bring greater amounts of energy across the South Caucasus energy corridor, into Turkey for onward transit to Europe via the Nabucco pipeline. Russia, by contrast, seeks to absorb the Caspian reserves, re-exporting them across an direct competitor to Nabucco, the South Stream pipeline project. Even in terms of Bosphorus bypass, the two countries clash: Turkey's pet project is the Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline, while Russia opted for the rival Burgas-Alexandropouli project.

Considerations of national interest imply that Turkish-Russian relations are likely to remain cordial, given the amount of common interests uniting the countries; but not much more, given the obvious differences.

### **Turkey's Regional and Global Role**

Turkey's location and size provide the country with an importance in regional and to some extent global affairs that indicate a potential for a role as a power in its own right. Indeed, both Western and Turkish observers regularly ascribe a role to Turkey as a regional power, sometimes even as a

“model” for others. This latter tendency is nevertheless often counter-productive, caricaturing Turkey rather than supporting its strengths – the concept of a moderate Muslim state, supported by strong forces in the U.S., comes to mind. Yet with a population likely to approach 100 million in the next two decades, with Europe’s strongest conventional military force, and a booming economy, Turkey has a massive under-utilized potential to function as a bulwark of stability and positive force for the development of surrounding regions, be it the Caucasus, the wider Black Sea region, the Eastern Mediterranean or the Middle East. To some extent, Turkey already plays this role: it has taken on important duties in peacekeeping and stability-building in Afghanistan and the Balkans, and in supporting the development of post-Soviet states. Yet this potential remains under-utilized; something that in a sense is understandable, given that few countries have as challenging a foreign policy environment as Turkey, requiring constant attention to and expertise about very different regions of the world.

Indeed, this complex reality acts as a break on Turkey’s ambitions. Turkey’s potential as a regional power is only likely to develop if the country proves able to resolve the several impediments that continue to mar it. Three chief issues deserve specific mention.

First, Turkey’s location implies as many challenges as opportunities. Indeed, the fact of being surrounded by unruly hotspots implies that Turkish foreign policy can hardly escape a tendency of being reactive rather than proactive. Sudden unexpected crises force Turkey to act, but prevent it from designing tenable long-term strategies – just as events tend to rapidly unravel any strategies designed.

Secondly, consecutive Turkish leaders appear to lack a realistic strategy for the future of their country’s regional role. The lack of capacity to handle the many divergent hotspots surrounding the country is apparent; indeed, the foreign policy establishment continues to lack adequate human and financial resources to stand up to the challenge. Strongly focused toward the West by tradition, it has failed to develop sufficient capacities in terms of analysis and networking in the eastern vectors of the foreign policy to play this role. Moreover, the Turkish leadership as well as intellectual classes continue to be marred by a penchant toward conspiracy theories as well as emotionally

based concepts that lack a basis in reality. Ideas of confederation in Central Asia in the early 1990s, of an alliance with Iran and Russia in the latter part of the decade, and of a powerful role in the Middle East in the 2000s are all examples of that.

Third and most importantly, Turkey's internal challenges form a strong obstacle to ambitions of a role as regional power. Indeed, Turkey's two main domestic problems – the Kurdish question and the role of religion in society and state – combine to form a severe drag on Turkey's regional role by sapping energy and diverting attention and resources. Turkey is unlikely to become a proactive regional power able to project influence unless it is able to resolve these two challenges. Only a Turkey at peace with itself is likely to be able to play the role of a regional power that its leaders aspire to, and which the West, most prominently the United States, has been supporting.

Turkey's regional role in the next two decades will hence to a large extent be dependent on whether successive governments resolve the internal challenges of the country and build a stronger foreign and security policy apparatus to formulate and implement policy.

## Turkey in 2023: the Republic at 100

This study has sought to detail the internal as well as external challenges that are likely to shape Turkey's evolution over the next decade. This raises the questions what Turkey could look like as the republic approaches its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023. From the limited overview conducted in this study, a great number of different scenarios could be derived. This study proposes three major scenarios, which put most of their attention to the likely domestic development, while taking into account the likely interaction of internal politics with external and transnational challenges.

The first scenario – a more conservative Turkey – in principle constitutes the extrapolation and continuation of the trends that have been observed during the past decade, which have seen the crumbling of secular politics, and the rise of a dominant religious conservatism in both society and the state. The second – a democratic reconciliation – assumes that the AKP, like other dominant political movements, is likely to crumble under its own weight as a result of a sclerosis of power, leaving room for yet another redefinition of the political scene in the direction of greater conciliation of the presently opposing ideologies. Finally, the last scenario – a return to military stewardship – could occur if the rift in Turkish politics deepens and an array of factors combine to lead to the forced downfall of the Islamic conservative leadership, most likely as a result of overreach.

### **Scenario One: A More Conservative Turkey**

In this scenario, the republic that celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a markedly more conservative nation than what its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, had once envisaged. Yet, it is also a country with strong, secular traditions that continues to set it apart among most other Muslim countries. Turkey has by no means become an Islamic state, ruled by the *Sharia*. But Islamic conservatism has become established as the dominant societal force. The co-existence of two divergent world-views – religious conservatism and



secularism – will have continued to generate friction, and to furnish Turkish politics with a defining context.

In its second term in power (2007-2011) the AKP government was severely tested by a global economic crisis, which threatened to reconfigure the dynamics and alignments that had once opened the gates of power for it. The flight of foreign capital in particular during the global crisis revealed the vulnerabilities of the Turkish economy, and made it difficult for the AKP to maintain the generous welfare policies which had contributed to its victory in the elections of 2007.

Yet, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan once again proved that he is an astute leader, capable of overcoming dire challenges. The AKP recovered, and won the elections held in 2011. The main opposition party, the secularist and nationalist Republican people's party, CHP, had once again failed to evolve into a modern social democratic force, and hence remained more or less marginalized. Instead, a new centrist force emerged as the main opposition party, together with the far-right MHP. In 2014, Turkey held its first popular election for president; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won with a large margin and succeeded Abdullah Gül, who became prime minister. Erdoğan was re-elected in 2019.

The continued marginalization of the opposition made it difficult for the AKP to control its authoritarian impulse to have it all; a new political crisis erupted in 2011 when President Gül appointed Islamic-oriented judges to the Constitutional court. However, the new constitution that the AKP had tailored and put to referendum in 2010 had already curtailed the powers of the court, which could no longer rule on the closure of political parties, except when they were involved in acts of violence. Yet, the Chief of Staff, General Işık Koşaner, reacted sharply to the appointments to the court, and issued a warning that the principles of Atatürk had to be respected. As had happened in 2007-2008, the military, fearful of scaring off foreign investments, and failing to receive a green light for a coup from Washington, had to content itself with issuing a verbal warning, after which it got back to business-as-usual with the Islamic conservative government.

The AKP managed to keep the Kurdish issue under control. Islamic loyalty proved more powerful than the nationalist temptation. Yet, the Kurdish PKK

continued to cause trouble. Its acts of violence sparked Turkish nationalism, and occasionally exacerbated tensions between Turks and Kurds in the western and southern parts of the country. Secular opinion remained politically marginalized, and was increasingly attracted to anti-Islamist and anti-western neo-nationalism.

### **Scenario Two: Democratic Reconciliation**

In a second scenario, the 100-year old republic has managed to reconcile conservatism and secularism. The AKP was fatally hit by the global economic crisis more than a decade ago, and growing revelations of high-level corruption that were reminiscent of the center-right of the 1990s. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was not re-elected in 2011. Yet, the stumbling of the AKP did not amount to a defeat for Islamic conservatism. A new, untainted leader emerged from within the ranks of the AKP and formed a new party. The new party explicitly positioned itself as a centrist force, appealing to religious conservatives as well as to a significant portion of the seculars. It also received the implicit support of the military, which feared the consequences of political instability, significantly wanting to avert the risk that the Kurds in the southeast would revert to the Kurdish nationalist party, under a new incarnation after being closed down in late 2008.

The crumbling of the AKP served as an encouragement to secular opinion, which had become dispirited by the apparent invincibility of the Islamic conservatives displayed in 2007-2008. When the fears that the republic was about to become an “AKP republic” – where the opposition to the ruling party was destined to be driven to the margins of the political system – were dissipated, the seculars regained a healthy self-confidence. The attraction of extremist alternatives diminished with the earlier desperation; and the civilian secularism that had manifested itself during the mass rallies in 2007 was channeled into politics. When Deniz Baykal was finally persuaded to resign as leader of the Republican People’s Party, he was replaced by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who had caught the public attention in 2008 when he had contributed to revealing the rampant corruption among AKP dignitaries circles. The CHP re-emerged as a modern, European-style social democratic centrist party. The reformation of the party – as well as the strengthening of

civilian secularism – owed a lot to the support given by European parties, EU institutions and European civil society associations.

With a center-right party appealing to the religiously conservative bourgeoisie, to the Kurds of the southeast, as well as to right-leaning seculars, and a social democratic alternative that caters to the center-left seculars while being equally attentive to the economically vulnerable part of the conservative electorate, the centenary republic had been equipped with a political equation that manifested democratic reconciliation and secured stability.

### **Scenario Three: Return of Military Stewardship**

In a third scenario, the tensions between Islamic conservatism and secularism had finally become impossible to contain. The AKP government was emboldened by its ability to defeat the challenge to its power in 2008, and did not bother to take the seculars' sensibilities into due consideration. A new constitution was tailored, curtailing the power of the Constitutional court and with a redefinition of secularism to imply a greater public role for religion. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and president Abdullah Gül miscalculated when they assumed that the military would not be able to challenge them; the AKP government was overthrown by the military in 2011, in an intervention reminiscent of the March 9, 1971, memorandum and the February 27, 1997, "postmodern coup" – but with a more pointed threat of a full-scale coup. The Chief of the General staff, Gen. Işık Koşaner, who had struck a staunchly secularist and die-hard nationalist chord in his inauguration speech as new army chief in 2008, had in fact been forced to take pre-emptive action as a coup outside the chain of command threatened.

The conditions in 2011 were markedly different to those of 2007-2008, when the hands of the military had been tied by external and internal factors. The global economic crisis of 2008-2010 had effectively undermined the power of the AKP government, which was no longer seen as being able to offer economic stability and growth. The AKP had also lost much of its international backing. Although the EU had remained supportive of the Turkish Islamic conservatives, it no longer seemed to offer any prospect of membership to Turkey. Thus, for the secular, pro-European voters, the

rationale for supporting the AKP had disappeared. These were instead increasingly attracted by the neo-nationalism of the opposition Republican People's party, the CHP. Most importantly, the AKP had lost its backing in the U.S., when it failed to deliver support when the incoming U.S. Administration decided to take action against Iranian nuclear facilities. Indeed, the U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran in 2010 changed the map of the Middle East. With the replacement of the Iranian theocracy by a secular regime in an ensuing popular uprising, the perception of Turkish secularism in the U.S. had changed as well. By then, it had become apparent that "moderate" Islamism did not serve America's interests, leading to a re-evaluation in the U.S. of the secular alternative for the Middle East.

The extended transitional regime brought in by the military took decisive measures to counter-act the effects of decades of Islamicization. Significantly, the education system was overhauled. Notably, the expansion of the imam schools was checked, and secular alternatives to the attractive schools run by the religious fraternities were created. However, the suspension of democracy exacerbated ethnic tensions. The Kurdish population was increasingly tempted by separatism. Gen. Koşaner, who as new army chief in 2008 had called for giving priority to a military solution to separatism, responded by the use of force, leading to an intensification of conflict that further damaged Turkey's international standing and tested the unity of the country to its limits, as in the early 1990s. Furthermore, military authoritarianism had the effect of radicalizing the Islamic movement.

### **Judging the Likelihood of Scenarios**

Attributing degrees of likelihood to the three scenarios mentioned above is necessarily tentative. The least probable scenario is the third, which appears at best a possible result of a confluence of negative trends. As for scenario one, it is fully plausible given the strength and clarity of current trends in Turkey. Yet a reading of recent history also suggests that the prospect of a linear development in Turkey is not probable, and that any ruling coalition is likely to be weakened and replaced within the timeframe envisaged in this study. That leaves scenario two, which is by far the most optimistic scenario for Turkey's future. Again, that scenario may appear to be wishful thinking

given the current acrimonies of Turkish politics and the growing “culture wars”, to borrow an American term, in society. In the final analysis, the most likely development for Turkey lies in some form of combination of the event foreseen in scenarios one and two.

## Conclusions

Turkey's internal and external complexity makes it inescapable that the scenarios discussed in this study must remain speculative at best. Indeed, the standard reaction of Turkish interlocutors being told that the authors of this report sought to predict their country's evolution a decade and more ahead was a sly smile, followed by any variation of the following quip: "We hardly know what might happen in Turkey next week."

Indeed, given the multitude of external and internal factors – ranging from long-term trends to individual incidents – that stand to affect Turkey's evolution, the mathematical probability that a series of major events will derail any scenario remains prohibitively high. A similar study written in 1998 – when Islamists had just been defeated following the February 28, 1997, National Security Council meeting – the idea that half a decade later, a revamped form of more moderated Islamism would secure control over power for the better part of a decade, buoyed by compact support from the U.S., EU and the domestic liberal intelligentsia, would have appeared ludicrous. Similarly, many of the assumptions underlying the analysis in this study are likely to be overcome by unexpected events.

That said, this study has sought to identify the main trends in Turkish society, politics and foreign policy that are likely to be the main determinants of the way the country will look when celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. All things considered, Turkey is likely to be a more conservative and religious country. Islamic conservatism is unlikely to have made Turkey more Western-oriented.

Although Turkey will not have "broken" with the West strategically, the ties between it and the West are bound to have been weakened. Turkey will most probably not yet have entered the EU. It is likely to have continued to juggle, uneasily, the competing regional security challenges surrounding it, some of which (such as the Balkans) are likely to have become less problematic, while others (such as Iran) may have tested the republican establishment severely. Internally, its Kurdish problem is unlikely to have gone away.

The Turkey at 100 will in many ways be recognizable to observers witnessing its 85<sup>th</sup> birthday; but many elements of it will be sure to come as a surprise to the most seasoned observer of the republic's earlier history. The republic was not "stillborn", but neither has it been properly tended to. The greatest surprise would be if the republic at 100 will have broken with its long-standing traditions and succeeded in developing a truly secularizing ethos.

## Authors' Bio

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