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TURKEY'S POLITICAL DIRECTION

AUTHORITARIANISM, LIBERAL DEMOCRACY OR DISSOLUTION?

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SUMMARY

After the re-run of the parliamentary election on 1 November 2015, it is certain that Turkey will again be ruled by the Justice and Development Party's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) one-party government. Based on this premise, this study provides a future-oriented analysis in the form of three scenarios: 1) an authoritarian Islamist state; 2) a consolidated liberal democracy; and 3) the dissolution of the Turkish state. The study also identifies three major drivers: a) the AKP and the Islamic-conservative state project; b) regional instability; and c) the Kurdish question.

Regarding scenario one, there are factors and processes present that decidedly increase the possibility of an authoritarian Islamist state in Turkey. On the other hand, the republican tradition of parliamentary democracy has at the same time proved to be remarkably resilient, suggesting that the course of events depicted in the positive scenario two still have a significant chance in the long run. Scenario three, the dissolution of the Turkish state, would create enormous instability in the EU's immediate neighbourhood and exponentially increase unpredictable tendencies and conflicts. The internal and external forces that could produce such a dramatic outcome are still rather weak, but they do exist in an embryonic form.

Thus, the republican modernization project attaching Turkey to the Western legacy of secular humanism should not be underestimated and may well prevail in the end. For the time being, however, it seems to be on the losing side as the political process is consolidating the Islamic-conservative version of Turkish nationalism. At the present moment this current is pointing to a concentration of power and a non-pluralist authoritarian regime whereby national identity is increasingly constructed in a form that conceptualizes political liberalism as an existential threat.

1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey is undoubtedly at a crossroads. In recent months, it has been particularly difficult to picture what the future will hold for Turkish politics in the next five years or so. However, after the 1 November 2015 re-run of the parliamentary election, it is certain that Turkey will again be ruled by the Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) one-party government. Based on this premise, this study provides a future-oriented analysis in the form of three scenarios: 1) an authoritarian Islamist state; 2) a consolidated liberal democracy; and 3) the dissolution of the Turkish state.

Ten years ago, Turkey was widely expected to develop into a functioning liberal democracy, perhaps even taking its place among the EU states. The argument was that with the coming to power of the AKP, Turkey had finally risen above the age-long Islam versus secularism divide, and was now ruled by Muslim democrats who had embraced liberalism and the pluralist conception of society.[1]

Two powerful narratives regarding Turkey converged during 2002–2012, allegedly consolidating each other. According to the first, the rise of the AKP indicated the emergence of a democratizing force that would, through the EU-backed reform process, force the retreat of the so-called Kemalist state and thus liberate the Turkish modernization process from the forces that had allegedly hijacked it since the 1920s and the establishment of the secular Republic.[2] The result was supposed to be a consolidated liberal democracy in a Muslim-majority society serving, at the same time, as a role model for the rest of the Middle East.[3]

The second narrative, on the other hand, described how the Europeanized and democratized Turkey was about to make the EU a major actor in the Middle East and, through that position, even globally. Thus, according to this influential account, by embracing Turkey the EU had found a partner that could function as a bridge between two civilizations, "Western" and "Islamic", which after the 9/11 terrorist attacks were often seen as being on a dangerous collision course.[4]

Both of these narratives have now collapsed. In Turkey, the liberal pro-EU actors tried to domesticate a party of political Islamists in order to use it against the so-called

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1   See, for example, Thomas Patrick Carrol, 'Turkey's Justice and Development Party: A Model for Democratic Islam?', *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* (6) 6–7, June/July 2004. Available at: https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0407_t1.htm.

2   Most Western liberals seem to have agreed with Hakan Yavuz, who claims that "The source of the contemporary crisis in Turkey is rooted in the Kemalist ideology". M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 32.

3   See, for example, Stefan Höjelid (ed.), *Turkey: from tutelary to liberal democracy?* (Lund: Sekel Bokförlag, 2009).

4   For a paradigmatic text expressing this line of argumentation, see Sedat Laçiner, 'Possible Impacts of Turkey's Full Membership to EU's Foreign Policy', In *European Union with Turkey: The Possible Impacts of Turkey's Membership on the European Union* (Ankara: International Strategic Research Organization, 2005).

omnipotent Kemalist state.[5] But the political Islamists instrumentalized the EU reforms, marginalized the liberals, and inaugurated a transformation project that was indeed radical but not in the sense imagined by the liberals: the AKP's transformation project was instead an attempt to establish an Islamic-conservative socio-political order that cannot be challenged from the secular/liberal position.

The crucial question, then, is not whether the AKP project has been positive for Turkey – obviously it has not – but whether or not this authoritarian project has now reached a dead-end, beyond which something more positive is emerging. There are forces within Turkish society that could, if able to acquire more strength and opportunities, lead Turkey back to the democratic and pluralist path. In an ideal situation this positive path would be generated, first of all, by a new awareness among the Islamic-conservative constituency that their socio-economic status and collective identity is no longer best served by the AKP's polarizing politics and, on the other hand, by the emergence of a newly defined secular and national identity among the anti-AKP block. In order for that ideal process to take root, there should be a genuine renegotiation of the republican modernization project without the abandonment of its secular-humanist components – a mistake the AKP made while demonizing the Kemalists. On the other hand, the Islamic identity project that was initially about strengthening the self-esteem of the conservative and religious constituencies was turned, in the hands of the AKP, into an intolerant and authoritarian state project where sentiments about past grievances – whether real or imagined – were misused in order to provide political legitimation for the concentration of power.[6] To a very significant degree, the November 2015 election demonstrated that this was still a very powerful formula for success.

The reason why strong criticism of the AKP experience is justified is that with its huge popular mandate, foreign support (from the USA and the EU most notably), and beneficial conjunctures provided by a decade-long economic boom, the AKP had at its disposal all the necessary elements to create (and generate popular allegiance to) a democratic and pluralist project of state transformation. In effect, it did the exact opposite: abused the popular mandate and external support in order to concentrate power and demonize the opposition. The result is today's depressingly strained society where basic freedoms are constantly under threat.

Further, and what is perhaps even more worrying, the Islamic-conservative state project implemented during the AKP era has had an enormously problematic foreign policy dimension, one that has made Turkey very vulnerable to regional instability. To put it more explicitly, Turkey has itself to a significant degree contributed to that instability by funding and arming various jihadist terror organizations fighting against the Syrian regime.[7]

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5   For a powerful critique of the liberals' argumentation, see Cihan Tuğal, 'Stillbirth: The New Liberal–Conservative Mobilization in Turkey'. *Jadaliyya*, May 15. Available at: http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/17706/stillbirth_the-new-liberal-conservative-mobilizati.

6   The exclusionary form of the AKP's agenda was observed as early as 2010. See Fuat Keyman, 'Modernization, Globalization and Democratization in Turkey: The AKP Experience and its Limits', *Constellations* 17 (2) 2010: 325.

7   See, for example, Fehim Taştekin, *Suriye: Yıkıl Git Diren Kal* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2015).

Thus, what emerges is a picture of a country with huge potential and, at least if compared to its immediate neighbours in the east and the south, a relatively long tradition of more or less functioning parliamentary democracy, now struggling to overcome an overwhelming social polarization created in the last ten years by the AKP governments.

What follows is an outline of the most important drivers determining the future orientation of Turkish politics, followed by three scenarios where the current turmoil, instability, authoritarianism and forces of resistance generate different future courses of events. The study identifies three major drivers: 1) the AKP and the Islamic-conservative state project; 2) the regional instability; 3) the Kurdish question.

A scenario is here defined as a description of a possible future situation, including the course of events leading up to that situation. It thus describes the developments, dynamics, and moving forces from which a specific conceptual future results. In the process of outlining alternative futures, various factors and events are intentionally included while others are excluded. As this implies, the selection and combination of key drivers regarding the future is an imaginative construct, within which the factors defined as the most important are brought into play with one another. Such a scenario is based on assumptions regarding which direction certain trends might take, which currently observable developments might remain constant, and which are likely to change over the course of time.[8] Although one cannot study the future directly through empirical observations, it is possible to assert that the future is nevertheless present as a complex array of intentions which can indeed be empirically observed.

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8   Ian Miles, 'Scenario analysis: contrasting visions of the future', In *WFSF, Futuribles, AMPS & UNDP: Reclaiming the future: A Manual of Futures Studies for African Planners* (London: Tycooly, 1986).

2. IDENTIFYING KEY DRIVERS

The AKP and the Islamic-conservative state project

After having ruled Turkey singlehandedly for 13 years, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) was unable to secure its absolute parliamentary majority in the June 7, 2015 election, but then managed to do precisely that a few months later on 1 November. The AKP confronted both elections with a campaign headed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is supposed to be impartial according to the Turkish Constitution. Nevertheless, even during his own presidential campaign in 2014, Erdoğan made it clear that, if elected, he would not be impartial but always "on the side of the people". This means being on the side of the AKP because, in Erdoğan's view, other parties do not legitimately represent the Turkish nation.

During the parliamentary election campaigns, Erdoğan not only supported the AKP but also strongly promoted the idea of turning Turkey into a strong executive presidential regime. The idea is to create an unchallenged executive power backed by the AKP's one-party government. Even though the November 2015 election did not yield the super majority (330 seats) that would be required to hold a referendum on the adoption of a presidential system, this will be advanced one way or another now that the AKP once again rules through a one-party government.[9]

There is little doubt that the reason why such an omnipotent executive has become Erdoğan's ultimate dream stems from his desire to radically transform Turkey into an Islamic-conservative ideal society, and that this would of course be best achieved by creating an executive power with a popularly elected President implementing legislation without any obstacles. The electorate seemed to vote against such a scheme in the June 7 election. However, even though the idea of establishing a super-presidency was at least temporarily halted, the AKP's master project of creating an Islamic-conservative ideal society has not been abandoned, and after the triumph in the November 2015 re-run, there is little doubt that this will continue.

During the last ten years, a whole new Islamist intellectual cadre has been educated that truly believes in this project. Further, the AKP is still by far the most popular party in Turkey, and there are very few indications at the moment that this will change anytime soon. This means that the Islamic-conservative state project is likely to remain Turkey's most conspicuous (and most contested) political project in the foreseeable future. The main components of this project include: the retelling of national history, and hence identity, from a specifically Islamic perspective;[10] Islamizing the education system so that the AKP's power cannot be legitimately challenged from the secular-liberal

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9   In the new AKP government programme, the presidential system is defined as the most suitable for Turkey. See Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık, 64. Hükümet Programı, p. 26. Available at: http://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/_Global/_Government/pg_GovernmentProgram.aspx.

10   See, for example, Toni Alaranta, *National and State Identity in Turkey: The Transformation of the Republic's Status in the International System* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

position;[11] and ensuring that the material basis of the new Islamist state-elite is secured by the government's economic policies.[12] There is no doubt that this project has already alienated large segments of Turkish society, and will continue to do so to an even greater extent in the future. As such, this project can only be maintained by authoritarian methods.

The regional instability

In the official rhetoric, the AKP leadership is keen to paint a picture according to which Turkey is surrounded by a circle of fire and terror, emanating mainly from three sources: the Kurdish separatist PKK (including its Syrian affiliate PYD); the Islamic State jihadist terror organization ruling large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria; and the "state terror" implemented by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which is seen as the root cause of all instability and violence in the region. However, whereas Turkey likes to depict itself as a victim of all these malevolent forces, the truth is that the AKP has had a hand, either directly or indirectly, in causing many of the threats it now allegedly faces.

Turkey's main foreign policy priority since 2011 has been the ousting of Assad from power. In practical terms, this has meant that Turkey voluntarily became a participant in the Syrian civil war, most of all by financing, equipping and hosting the Syrian armed opposition forces, both moderate and radical. Thus, even if we accept that the initial intention to oust the brutal Assad regime might have been a noble one, the idea of enforcing a regime change at whatever cost has been a disaster for Turkey. The ability of Turkish supporters of jihadist organizations, such as the Islamic State and al Qaeda, to conduct suicide bombings even in the centre of Ankara is a clear indication of this foreign policy failure by the AKP regime.[13] This means that Turkey has become very vulnerable to various threatening and violent forces in its neighbourhood. This regional instability is unlikely to end any time soon. Further, through the Kurdish constituency, the regional instability and future developments regarding the Kurds of Syria and Iraq will inevitably have consequences for Turkey as well.

The current situation where both Syria and Iraq are in pieces, without any guarantee of whether they can ever be put back together again as unitary states, is likely to have significant consequences for Turkey. On the other hand, if the AKP continues its current foreign policy, Turkey is itself likely to remain a destabilizing factor, thus directly contributing to the failed states of Syria and Iraq. The Syrian civil war spilled over to

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11   Regarding the Islamization of education, see Svante E. Cornell, 'The Islamization of Turkey: Erdoğan's Education Reforms', *Turkey Analyst*, 8 (16) 2015. Available at: http://www.turkeyanalyst.org/ publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/437-the-islamization-of-turkey-erdoğan's-education-reforms.html.

12   See, for example, Güven Gürkan Öztan, 'Sermaye-iktidar kol kola yeni anayasaya', *Birgün*, 7 December, 2015. Available at: http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/sermaye-iktidar-kol-kola-yeni-anayasaya-97081.html.

13   See, for example, Cengiz Çandar, 'Terror in Turkey', *Al Monitor*, October 15, 2015. Available at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/10/turkey-syria-ankara-bombings-kurds-cause-further-disarray.html.

Turkish soil during autumn 2015 with the Ankara bomb attacks, and the same can be said in terms of Iraq – the Islamic State has a presence in Turkey and it is doubtful whether it can be eliminated anytime soon. For all these reasons, regional instability is a major force determining the future course of events in Turkey.

The Kurdish question

There is no doubt that the status of the large Kurdish minority, long deprived of cultural rights and under the state's assimilation policies, is a major issue determining the future of Turkey. The AKP gained considerable admiration from Turkish and Western liberals by inaugurating a process within which the Kurdish issue was acknowledged, and the securitization approach was replaced with political dialogue.[14] When it was made public in December 2012 that the AKP government was conducting negotiations with the jailed PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, a political solution to the Kurdish question seemed to be at hand. It also created high expectations among the Kurdish population that a political solution was finally in the pipeline, and that the violent conflict could be brought to an end. However, in spring 2015 President Erdoğan announced that he was not happy with the idea of the government composing a detailed settlement process with the PPK. Since President Erdoğan's decision to halt the peace process,[15] the conflict has again erupted, with armed attacks and counterattacks on a daily basis. There is thus no doubt that the Kurdish question will be part of all major political developments in Turkey during the next five years.

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14   See Oral Çalışlar, 'The Kurdish Issue in Turkey: Its Social, Political, and Cultural Dimensions', In *Understanding Turkey's Kurdish Question*, edited by Fevzi Bilgin and Ali Sarıhan (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 41–42.

15   President Erdoğan declared publicly that he had not approved the road map negotiated between the Kurdish delegation and the AKP government prepared in the so-called Dolmabache talks in February 2014. This in all practical terms marked an end to the attempt to define a legal procedure for the PKK's withdrawal from Turkey. See, "Erdoğan, Dolmabahçe'yi de 10 maddeyi de eleştirdi", *Aljazeera Turk*, 22 March, 2015. Available at: http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/erdogan-dolmabahceyi-de-10-maddeyi-de-elestirdi.

3. SCENARIO ONE: AN AUTHORITARIAN ISLAMIST STATE

The political direction Turkey has taken during recent years is creating a tendency whereby one is forced to ask whether the AKP governments have managed to create a "state of no return" in terms of establishing an authoritarian Islamist state repressing the political opponents without mercy.[16] This question became even more acute when the AKP won a landslide election victory on 1 November 2015, after having skillfully manipulated violence and generated fear in gathering the votes of the nationalist-conservative constituency. President Erdoğan and his devoted supporters within the AKP have repeatedly refused to recognize the political rights of the opposition, paving the way for tremendous social strain. This has also further escalated the armed conflict between the Turkish Armed Forces and the Kurdish PKK. In addition to this, the Turkish liberal circles fear that President Erdoğan has both the desire and the ability to manipulate the political system in order to establish a strong executive presidency, leading to a situation where the current de facto one-man rule would be formally sealed through constitutional arrangements.

In a socio-political context that is already severely polarized, Erdoğan's ambition forces one to contemplate the possible reaction of the opposition groups to such a drastic regime transformation. On the other hand, based on how the AKP regime responded when it was confronted by a nationwide resistance movement during the so-called Gezi demonstrations in 2013, it is very likely that the party leadership would firmly crush all attempts aimed at preventing the establishment of a presidential system. This might easily induce President Erdoğan to use his extraordinary powers provided by the current 1982 Constitution. Erdoğan could, for example, declare a nationwide emergency rule in order to frame the situation as an attempt to violently bring down an elected government.

On the other hand, there is the possibility that the increased social turmoil will finally start to alienate even the AKP's own supporters, perhaps forcing some influential party members to abandon the AKP. However, internal disputes and resignations do not necessarily weaken the party but may instead even further consolidate President Erdoğan and his devout supporters' position. This is why the recently widely disseminated polemics according to which the AKP was about to become paralyzed due to intra-party conflict may remain pure speculation. Within this context, there is a strong prospect that Turkey will soon be ruled with a constitution concentrating powers in an executive President that is legally representing a partisan view.

An enormous obstacle to these designs, however, might be at hand with the increasing conflict between the army and the PKK. The conflict, which was at least partly triggered by President Erdoğan himself in order to create "controlled chaos" before the repeated parliamentary elections, may have become too difficult to tame. On the other hand, there are signs that the predicted general Kurdish uprising will not emerge. First of all, many Kurds are deeply anxious due to the PKK's violence and the drastic measures it

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16   In describing Turkey's current situation, one prominent political analyst said that "an authoritarian system with religious legitimacy is waiting at the door", to be completed with the establishment of a strong executive presidential regime. Nuray Mert, 'Turkey's presidential system debate as farce', *Hurriyet Daily News*, 4 January, 2015. Available at: http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-presidential-system-debate-as-farce--.aspx?pageID=449&nID=93336&NewsCatID=406.

provokes from the Turkish army. It is possible that the mutual violence between the army and the PKK will lose its momentum and the urban warfare in the south-east will start to subside. President Erdoğan can contribute to this de-escalation by initiating confidence-building measures among the conservative Kurdish constituency, which has always been disturbed by the PKK's acts of terror and its strong leftist-secularist ideology. Thus, similar to the 1980 military regime which managed to end the war between the left-wing and right-wing armed gangs by implementing draconian security measures, the AKP's potentiality to cooperate with conservative Kurds in isolating and even crushing the PKK has the ability to bring the armed conflict to an end. The result would be a consolidated AKP rule whereby the political opposition becomes increasingly marginalized.

Thus, President Erdoğan's tactics of creating "controlled chaos" in the form of a reignited war with the PKK in order to delegitimize the Kurdish-focused DHP and thus gather the votes of a large nationalist-conservative block in order to restore the AKP's one-party rule in the November 2015 parliamentary election, may still prove to be successful in the long run. Contrary to what is often expected nowadays, the war with the PKK does not necessarily entail a full-scale ethnic confrontation between the Turks and Kurds, but can instead create a situation where the conservative and religiously-oriented Kurdish constituencies are forced to de-emphasize the ethnic cause and cooperate again with the Islamist AKP in order to have the PKK threat eliminated.

The ability of the AKP government to rule Turkey might be enhanced as soon as it manages to end the armed conflict with the PKK and rebuild social trust among the conservative Kurdish constituency. If this is accentuated by increased efforts to crack down on Islamic State jihadists within Turkey, the necessary requirements for a consolidated AKP regime would be established.

If the AKP is indeed able to maintain its internal coherence after the 1 November 2015 election, the secular opposition parties (secular-nationalist CHP and pro-Kurdish, increasingly liberal-leftist HDP), are unlikely to significantly increase their support base. The HDP might survive the bashing campaigns and violence targeted against it, but if the conservative Kurds are again increasingly choosing their political allegiance as defined by religion rather than ethnicity, the party is likely to stagnate at the current 10–12 per cent support base. On the other hand, if the AKP succeeds in reaping the fruits of the controlled chaos it has been creating, the Republican People's Party (CHP), the secularist bastion that has increasingly tried to acquire a genuine social democratic identity, is unlikely to increase its support either – it has been traditionally perceived with suspicion if not outright contempt by a large sector of Turkish society.

In that sort of situation, the CHP-HDP block, although it might be capable of cooperation and a common stance on some of the most crucial questions, will presumably fail to secure more than 35 per cent of the votes in the next parliamentary election, scheduled for 2019. This will not be enough as the AKP is increasingly eating into the support base of the minor nationalist-conservative party (MHP), thus securing the 45–50 per cent of votes needed to rule the country alone. In this scenario, where the AKP is able to secure its one-party government even in the next parliamentary election, there will be no obstacles preventing the party from fulfilling its long-term agenda of implementing the Islamic-conservative state project and bringing it to its logical conclusion after having

disestablished parliamentary democracy and replaced it with an extremely powerful presidency that allows for an ideological executive and full power monopoly.

Ultimately, the ability of the AKP to enforce and maintain an authoritarian Islamist state is based on the external factors that have allowed this to happen. The European Union has by now been paralyzed by the enduring instability in its wider neighbourhood from Ukraine to North Africa and beyond. At the same time, the internal controversies, inability to find coherent policies regarding the transformation of national societies in the face of millions of refugees and the rise of nationalism, are creating a tendency whereby the EU is increasingly ill-equipped to adopt a constructive position when confronted by the relatively stable but deeply authoritarian Turkish regime. In this sense, there is a strong possibility that the period starting from the beginning of 2016 onwards will be a repetition of the pattern that has already been seen since 2010: the EU will be seriously impeded in its ability to update its position regarding Turkey under the AKP. Further, the continuing instability in Iraq and Syria, as well as Russia's ability to challenge the West, are likely to produce a situation where the USA and its NATO allies increasingly ignore the inconvenient truth that it has now become impossible to argue that Turkey still shares the common values of NATO.

The consolidation of an authoritarian Islamist state in Turkey is likely to be quite different from the existing Islamist regimes, such as Iran or Saudi Arabia. Most of the laws will continue to be secular, although there will probably be constant attempts to reconfigure family law in accordance with the principles of *sharia*, the religious law. Further, once the political system is redesigned as a strong presidential regime with President Erdoğan at the helm with almost unrestricted executive powers, there might even be an opportunity for a momentary relaxation of the political pressure and social polarization. However, political opposition and the free press will be completely silenced for the time being. What is perhaps even more important, there are strong indications that the education system is going to be carefully designed to produce a generation of Islamic-conservative youth who do not question the Islamic identification of the Turkish state, and where it becomes more or less impossible to criticize the regime from the secular and liberal positions.

4. SCENARIO TWO: A CONSOLIDATED LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

The political landscape that has emerged since the 1 November 2015 parliamentary election ended a more immediate political deadlock in Turkey by allowing the AKP to form yet another one-party government. However, in the near future, this outcome is likely to increase the authoritarian state project implemented recently by the AKP under President Erdoğan. That said, one can argue that the Turkish parliamentary democracy, initially firmly attached to the Kemalist state ideology advocating secular nationalism, has proved to be very resilient, managing to endure several military interventions and enormous internal conflicts in past decades, especially during the 1970s when left-wing and right-wing groups violently clashed on a daily basis throughout Turkish cities and university campuses.[17] Even though the prospects for a more liberal democratic order in Turkey now seem dim, President Erdoğan's refusal to encourage more conciliatory policies may end up doing precisely that in the long run.

There is a possibility that President Erdoğan's uncompromised attempt to push for a strong executive presidency through a referendum will further increase tensions not only within the wider society but also among the AKP members. It is likely that before the referendum, there will be attempts by the AKP-led state institutions and media to manipulate the popular debate in order to gain strong backing for the "yes" vote. However, thus far at least, the majority has clearly objected to the idea of a strong executive presidency and this may well be the case also in the forthcoming referendum. In that kind of situation, it is quite possible that the influential group of Erdoğan loyalists within the AKP, who owe their position to being hand-picked by Erdoğan, may decide to ignore the referendum result and push for an all-powerful presidency in any case.

This kind of development might finally generate the intra-party struggle already predicted earlier by several analysts. This could mean that the AKP would disintegrate into two distinct groups, as the more moderate wing opposed to Erdoğan would establish a new conservative centre-right party, for example under the auspices of former President Abdullah Gül and a number of prominent businessmen. Thus, in that situation, the AKP would face a fate similar to that of the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*) of the 1980s, the previous dominant conservative coalition party. It would also mean that the process that started in 2002 when the AKP was established would come to an end, in a way resulting in a situation strongly resembling what happened at the end of the 1990s when the Turkish political Islamist movement was initially split into two as the Virtue Party disintegrated into the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*) and the AKP. Through that sort of process – an internal transformation process within Islamic-conservative circles – the liberal alternative of Turkish conservative politics would again become possible.

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17   Recently there has been an ongoing discussion regarding the merits and faults of the secularizing and modernizing project inaugurated by the Kemalist revolution during the 1920s. In this context, one can argue that in European history, nationalism has carried the idea of radical freedom inherent in modernity. As Delanty and O'Mahony put it, "at the heart of the modern cultural model is the quintessentially liberal and post-Christian view that human societies are incomplete and that human nature is endlessly capable of perfectibility". Gerard Delanty and Patrick O'Mahony, *Nationalism and Social Theory: Modernity and the Recalcitrance of the Nation* (London: Sage, 2002), p. 6. One can argue that Kemalist secular nationalism, so often pejoratively labelled as "Jacobin", effectively manifests this crucial element of European modernity (and liberalism) in the Turkish context.

That kind of intra-party struggle within the AKP would in all likelihood open the door for a more pluralist political agenda, as it would cut the majoritarian base upon which President Erdoğan has been able to establish his de facto one-man rule. The devoted group of Erdoğan loyalists would in all likelihood still be able to harass the opposition, but with a new conservative party on the stage, they would also need to attack a significant number of conservative and Islamic actors from the shared constituency, making it much more difficult to count on the previous narrative based on generating fear of a "Kemalist resurgence" in the event that the AKP loses its power.

A further development that might, in these circumstances, encourage a more pluralist and liberal democratic political agenda might well be founded on the ability of the presumably emerging new centre-right conservative party to accept the social democratic CHP and the Kurdish-focused HDP as legitimate representatives of the Turkish nation. One possible result would then be a new coalition government in the next election, based on cooperation between the CHP and the new, more liberal conservative party.[18]

In this way, the failed campaign for a super-presidency would ultimately open the door for a strong consensus-seeking government that could also finally handle the high priority issues, such as the Kurdish question and national trust-building among various constituencies. What would emerge, then, would be a completely new political balance that could isolate the AKP and President Erdoğan. However, one can imagine that the more or less strained political situation at the level of major state institutions would nevertheless continue at least until Erdoğan's era as the President of the Republic comes to an end in 2019.

The domestic reorientation towards democracy would in all likelihood have a very positive effect on Turkish foreign policy as well. The regional instability would probably still continue to have its negative repercussions in Turkey, as many Syrian refugees are probably unable or unwilling to return to their home country, and as the Islamic State, or at least the very likely emerging offshoot jihadi factions, will continue to threaten Turkey. However, after completely detaching Turkey from the Syrian and Iraqi conundrum as a participant actor, Turkey would be able to secure its border much more effectively and stop the jihadist indoctrination within the country. Also, the relationship with the EU could improve significantly, as the ideologically motivated anti-Western agenda of the AKP would become exhausted.

Having said that, it is nevertheless likely that the enormous social polarization and distrust between various constituencies, intentionally created during the AKP era, will

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18   A characteristic trait of the AKP era in Turkey has not only been the ruling party's "electoral hegemony" but also the weakness and division of the opposition parties. The AKP has been able to mobilize three major constituencies, namely the Turkish socially conservative nationalists, the Islamists, and the conservative Kurds, accompanied by a large section of voters mainly supporting the AKP's economic policies. See M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 250. The opposition is politically represented by three parties in the main: the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP), the Kurdish-oriented but now increasingly liberal-leftist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), and the secular social-democratic Republican People's Party (CHP). In previous elections, this heterogeneous conglomeration, where the MHP and the HDP regard each other as ultimate counterforces, has received around 45–50 per cent of all votes. Apart from being anti-AKP, there is very little that unites these parties.

haunt Turkey long after the emergence of a possible new political balance. However, there is no doubt that with the re-emergence of a more liberal version of conservative Turkish mainstream politics, the country could embark on a path that at least has the ideological foundations to generate consolidated liberal democracy and a pluralist understanding of society.

Of paramount importance in this respect would not only be a reinforced conviction among the governing bloc that constitutional government secures the political rights of the minority, but also a reinvigorated adherence to the respected tradition of republican Westernization (and Europeanization). This has become thoroughly despised and marginalized during the Islamic-conservative AKP, but within the HDP/CHP centre-left block, as well as among the representatives of the predicted new conservative centre-right, for whom the AKP era has been a sobering experience, the idea of political liberalism could again have a major impact.

Thus, what could happen in Turkey during the coming years is a process of democratization that was generally believed to have taken place since 2002 and the rise of the AKP. What would be different this time? Why would a truly democratic option materialize now? The main reason for this positive development would not only be a more social-democratic and liberal approach taken by the main opposition, the secularist CHP, but also the new understanding within the conservative centre-right regarding religion and politics. Finally, the new conservative centre-right movement should reach a more mature liberal position where it would not try to manipulate the cultural identities of the conservative majority – the project of identity politics that in the hands of the AKP led to an Islamo-fascist regime.

However, the AKP's exclusionary and essentializing view of tradition and politics has been a successful formula for mass mobilization, and this is why the danger that this formula would re-emerge also within the ranks of the presumed new, initially liberal-oriented conservatives, is an option that cannot be ignored. In this sense, the positive scenario presented here requires Turkey's centre-left forces to become strong enough to deter more radical right-wing conservative tendencies. Together with a relatively good economic development, this might help to secure the future consolidation of liberal democracy in Turkey.

5. SCENARIO THREE: THE DISSOLUTION OF THE TURKISH STATE

There are tendencies present in Turkey and its surrounding region that could, in principle, have devastating and unprecedented consequences for the country during the next five years or so. The domestic power struggle and the penetration of Islamist jihadi networks in Turkey together comprise a force that could, unless tamed, even cause the collapse of the powerful Turkish unitary state. In domestic politics, the current instability and social tension caused by the Islamic-conservative state project forcefully implemented by the AKP, which increasingly maintains its power by creating an atmosphere of severe social distrust among various constituencies, has the potentiality to transform into a countrywide uprising. Even more importantly, the resurged armed conflict between the army and the Kurdish separatist PKK has recently escalated and many commentators are now concerned that this could lead to an out-and-out civil war between ethnic Turks and Kurds.[19]

The main internal forces causing an eventual state dissolution would mean, then, that the fight against the PKK escalates into a full-blown civil war. Such a development would also put the Turkish Armed Forces' centralized command structure under severe pressure. Even though the army has traditionally been the main institution advocating a military solution to what is seen as a terrorist threat, a full-blown civil war could result in a division of the army along various ideological, sectarian, and socio-economic fault lines.[20] From this perspective, an armed struggle including a significant number of civilians would have the potentiality to cause a rift within the army units, especially between Alevis and Sunnis, members of different religious brotherhoods, and supporters and opponents of the AKP's Islamic-conservative state project.

On the other hand, in the long run, the escalating armed conflict would severely decrease the ability of the central government to keep the state's territories under its sovereignty, especially in the south-east but also in several major urban centres. That sort of process is already taking place locally, as many neighbourhoods have been taken over by PKK militants, and declared as "self-rule" (özyönetim) areas. The lack of security and the virtual absence of the central state in these districts, on the one hand, and the inability of the central state to find any solution other than military, on the other, have the potentiality to cause a complete delegitimation of the state in the eyes of the majority of citizens. In the most severe situation, the result would be a country divided into various separate units.

However, it is unlikely that the internal conflict would alone be sufficient to cause a complete dissolution of the central state. The potentiality for such a dramatic process, however, cannot to be totally ignored due to the existence of an array of disruptive external forces. Most important in this sense is the penetration of various offshoots of the

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19   See, for example, 'HDP deputy Fırat: AK Party's divisive policies dragging Turkey towards cliff', *Today's Zaman*, December 21, 2015, Available at: http://www.todayszaman.com/national_hdp-deputy-firat-ak-partys-divisive-policies-dragging-turkey-towards-cliff_407584.html.

20   Initial signs of internal strife between various religious brotherhoods are already observable within the security authorities; see 'Cemaatler arasında "Emniyet bürokrasisinde güç kazanma kavgası" mı var?', *Radikal*, 21 December, 2015. Available at: http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/cemaatler-arasinda-emniyet-burokrasisinde-guc-kazanma-kavgasi-mi-var-1494835/.

Islamic State and other jihadi groups, such as al Qaeda, within Turkey. There is a distinct possibility that as the international coalition in all likelihood during the coming years succeeds in annihilating the central structure and territorial possessions of the Islamic State organization in Syria and Iraq, this group and its likely-emerging ideological offshoots will be able to maintain at least a shadowy presence in Turkey and, in the event of the central government of Syria and Iraq remaining weak, in these countries as well.

In such a future situation, if Turkey were simultaneously internally weakened due to an emerging ethnic civil war, the Islamic State offshoot groups could have considerable ability to establish their new stronghold in Turkey. In those circumstances, at a time of losing its ability to control what was going on in various parts of the country, Turkey under the AKP regime might also make the crucial mistake and use the Islamic State jihadists in its struggle against the PKK, in particular in the south-eastern Kurdish-majority districts. This would in all likelihood further escalate the conflict and call the legitimacy of the central state into question in the eyes of many citizens.

The process that could lead to a dramatic dissolution of the Turkish central state would have its matrix in the AKP government's reluctance to abandon its authoritarian state project after the November 1, 2015 parliamentary election, which allowed it to regain its one-party rule. At the moment, there are many indicators suggesting that Turkey will live through a period of increased domestic instability as it seems very likely that the AKP government under the whims of President Erdoğan will push onwards with the new Constitution. The main component of the new Constitution is a strong executive presidency with very few checks and balances. Not having been able to gain enough seats to change the Constitution by itself, the AKP regime has now proposed resolving this issue through a referendum.

Many fear that if accepted, the de facto authoritarian presidential rule now in place will become formally accepted and subsequently irreversible. The idea of a party-politically partisan executive president is completely unacceptable to the majority of those in the secular and liberal opposition. Pushing through with this highly controversial idea, then, is another factor that will increasingly alienate a large section of society.

There is a great possibility that in such a situation, the opposition will again organize country-wide demonstrations spreading to all major cities, similar to what happened during the Gezi revolt of 2013. President Erdoğan's previous actions prompt one to predict that in confronting such explicit resistance, he will respond with drastic measures, for example by declaring a nationwide emergency law, and then insisting on using his extraordinary powers. In such a situation some of the remaining secular and liberal factions within the state apparatus might refuse to implement the given orders, leaving their posts. On the other hand, the Kurdish-majority municipalities that have already started to implement de facto autonomy in several neighbourhoods would in all likelihood become fully separated from the central government, thus intensifying a full-scale urban war between the army and the PKK. This could easily cause the death of thousands and even tens of thousands of civilians.

The AKP's reluctance to negotiate a consensus with the opposition parties could thus result in a complete political deadlock, which could then degenerate into the complete disintegration of the state institutions and a large-scale armed conflict. A major part of such an increasing tendency for the political struggle to deteriorate into an armed

conflict would thus result directly from the AKP's uncompromising policies and its increasing tendency to allow various nominally independent civil society organizations, which in reality operate as paramilitary units (such as the so-called Ottoman Hearths), to continuously harass the political opposition.

The possible increased penetration of the jihadi groups in Turkey would take place mainly because of the AKP government's previous policies, which have allowed the jihadist organizations to recruit and indoctrinate supporters among the Turkish population since 2012. Even though the authorities have started to raid these groups more vigorously since the Ankara suicide bombing, conducted by Turkish members of the Islamic State organization in October 2015, this might turn out to be too little too late. There is an increasing fear that the AKP's policies of creating a jihadist proxy army in Syria have resulted in a new breed of radical Islamist constituency composed of young Turks. During any possible internal conflict between left-wing Kurds and nationalist Turks, these Islamist radicals could launch an attack not only against the Kurdish groups but, particularly if there is an attempt to control them, also against the Turkish army units in order to carve out territory for the expansion of the jihadist groups.

Thus, regarding the external factors, regional instability continues to play a crucial role in any possible conflict that might erupt due to the AKP government's authoritarian Islamic-conservative state project. The EU and the USA, on the other hand, at least up to now, have had very few tools to prevent the destructive tendencies outlined above, mainly because they have been unable (and unwilling) to adjust their policies at an earlier stage. Had the EU suspended Turkey's EU candidacy immediately after the first reports indicating large-scale instrumentalization of the EU reforms, the Islamization of society, and the concentration of power in the hands of a non-democratic faction within the AKP became known, it might have increased the ability of the democratic and liberal forces to defend the rule of law, also putting the brakes on the foreign policy that supported the jihadists in Syria and Iraq. However, after having backed the AKP for many years, the EU has not changed its position and it seems unlikely that it will do so in the near future.

In conclusion, the AKP's radical Islamic-conservative state transformation project, which can only be successfully implemented through authoritarian methods, ultimately generates a process that increases the conflict-ridden tendencies, and that might even lead to the dissolution of the state. Taken together, the internal and external disruptive factors might produce an unforeseen situation where the Turkish central state becomes paralyzed. This, on the other hand, might open the floodgates to an even more dramatic scenario, leading to a full-scale civil war. Finally, in the worst case, the central state might disintegrate into various separate units with several armed groups fighting each other, enabling the international jihadi network to establish its headquarters in Turkey.

6. CONCLUSION

After 13 years of uninterrupted AKP rule, which in recent years has taken the form of an anti-Western authoritarian Islamic-conservative state project, Turkey is currently in flux. However, after the 1 November 2015 parliamentary election, there is little doubt that the AKP and President Erdoğan are again the main factors defining Turkey's political future. The present scenario analysis has outlined three alterative futures for Turkey. From the viewpoint of the European Union and Turkey's own liberals, it is clear that only the second alternative – a consolidated liberal democracy – is a positive one.

As matters stand at the time of writing, there are factors and processes present that increase the possibility of scenario two to a considerable degree. On the other hand, the republican tradition of parliamentary democracy has proved remarkably resilient, suggesting that the course of events depicted in the positive scenario two still have significant chances in the long run. The republican modernization project attaching Turkey to the Western legacy of secular humanism should not be underestimated and it may well prevail in the end. For the time being, however, it seems to be on the losing side as the political balance consolidates the Islamic-conservative version of Turkish nationalism.

At the present moment this current is pointing to a concentration of power and a non-pluralist authoritarian regime where the national identity is increasingly constructed in a form that conceptualizes political liberalism as an existential threat. In its extreme form, this scenario has the prospect of creating a more or less religiously legitimized dictatorship in Europe's vicinity that suppresses all voices critical of the government. This development would also mean that Turkey would become the centre of an anti-Western socio-political movement at least for a generation. Finally, scenario three, the dissolution of the Turkish state, would create enormous instability in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, exponentially increasing unpredictable tendencies, conflicts, and in all likelihood the influx of refugees. The internal and external forces that could produce such a dramatic outcome are still rather weak, but they do exist in an embryonic form.

Thus, whereas scenario three would require a strong increase in both internal and external disruptive forces in order to actually materialize, the crucial components of scenario one are already very much in place, thus considerably calling into question whether the positive scenario two could emerge, at least within the shorter time span.

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