

# **TURKEY'S REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY AND THE EU**

**PRECONDITIONS FOR EU-TURKEY RELATIONS  
IN THE SECULAR-NATIONALIST VISION**

**Toni Alaranta**

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After 17 years of the Islamic-conservative AKP's electoral hegemony, the secular-nationalist Republican People's Party (CHP) achieved significant success in the recent municipal elections, and is now increasingly challenging President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The secular-nationalist political discourse has traditionally advanced the idea of making Turkey a modern nation-state closely attached to the West, yet the West is also seen as a potential threat. The CHP identifies itself as a social-democratic party, and is now trying to build a wide pro-democratic platform based on a social market economy and fundamental rights.

The party's strong secularist and Turkish nationalist core has made it difficult for the CHP to gain support among the Kurds and religious conservatives, and this remains challenging. Strong nationalism and suspicion about the West are deeply ingrained in Turkey's political culture. On the other hand, in order to be inherently coherent, the secular-nationalist vision requires an ideological attachment to the Western world. Stemming from these premises, under the CHP's government, Turkey's foreign policy would likely prioritize good relations with the West, and re-invigorate the country's EU prospect.



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# TURKEY'S REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY AND THE EU

## PRECONDITIONS FOR EU-TURKEY RELATIONS IN THE SECULAR-NATIONALIST VISION

### INTRODUCTION

Turkey's biggest opposition party, the secular-nationalist Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), gained significant victories in the most recent municipal elections on 31 March 2019. This success, after 17 years of the Islamic-conservative Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) electoral hegemony, highlights the need for a timely analysis of the party's political vision. Simultaneously, the EU has now applied a long-term 'wait-and-see' approach to Turkey. This means that in the foreseeable future Turkey's EU candidacy is in practice suspended while kept in place *de jure*, as if put on ice for undetermined better days. For this to be meaningful, the crucial question is whether Turkey still has a large pro-European party.

Stemming from these premises, this Working Paper analyzes the CHP's current political vision, and the preconditions it establishes for EU-Turkey relations. The paper analyzes the CHP's political agenda in terms of both domestic politics and foreign relations. The specific questions under scrutiny concern what kind of political narratives espoused by the CHP have historically constructed Turkey's relations with Europe; what kind of a 'good society' is currently espoused by the CHP and how this relates to the EU; and how the CHP conceives Turkey's ideal relations with the rest of the world in general and Europe in particular. The paper does not attempt to uncover all of the details concerning the CHP's current EU policy – which in any case often tend to be rather vague general statements – but focuses instead on identity constructions and the overall political agenda as the preconditions for future EU-Turkey relations.

The study starts with a historical approach, looking at the CHP as a political party traditionally committed to Turkey's Westernization. It then analyzes the CHP's current self-representation as the vehicle for Turkey's democratization and consolidation of fundamental human rights in the context of an increasingly authoritarian presidential system constructed under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP. After uncovering the CHP's vision of Turkey's role in the world, the

paper concludes with an assessment of how Turkey-EU relations would likely materialize in the event of the CHP taking over the governmental responsibilities. The paper argues that with some important reservations, the CHP can be seen as a pro-European party committed to Turkey's EU aspiration.

### THE HISTORY OF TURKEY'S WESTERNIZATION

The 'grand narrative' that has historically defined the CHP as a political party is the idea of making Turkey a modern nation-state in line with the European model. While there are also many controversies regarding the CHP's framing of Turkey's relations with the Western world, it is an indisputable fact that the fundamental premises for Turkey's political organization and overall cultural orientation espoused by the CHP as a 'regime-founding' party were inspired by the Western-European countries (Great Britain and France in particular). This is significant now that President Erdoğan and the AKP have rejected Turkey's Westernization and are emphasizing Turkey's identity as the leader of a specifically Islamic civilization, often perceived as being in confrontation with the West.

However, the anxiety about the West within the CHP's tradition is also largely related to the European great powers, as they were the ones most vigorously pushing for the partition of Ottoman Anatolia after the First World War. The founding myth of modern Turkey includes two distinct, contradictory narrative tropes: 1) Abolishing the Islamic regime, transforming Turkey's civilizational identity from the 'East' to the 'West' and establishing a modern secular nation-state that reaches the level of contemporary civilization as manifested in Europe; and 2) Fighting together and with the help of Bolshevik Russia against Western imperialism, thus becoming a beacon of hope for all oppressed 'nations of the East'. This ambiguity towards the West has since remained part of the secular-nationalist political discourse. The important question concerns which of these two becomes dominant in different historical contexts. It can be argued that for the most part, the Westernization narrative has had the

upper hand, nonetheless being seriously challenged at times by the anti-imperialist and sometimes even anti-Western current.

A recent publication neatly defines the Westernization narrative in Turkey:

*'It [Westernization] captures the perspective that Turkey's own modernization is and should be closely aligned with its 'European' and 'Western' partners. In line with this reasoning, it is only logical that Turkey should under all circumstances strive to become a member of the European Community/Union. This narrative was particularly dominant among the Kemalist elites in Turkey, but also among political elites in Europe. Due to its huge importance particularly in the first phases of relations, it is a candidate for a master narrative.'*<sup>1</sup>

The explicit call to make Turkey a European country at the heart of the Kemalist nation-building project since 1923 largely explains why so many Europeans conceptualize Turkey as European in the first place. Yet at the same time the Kemalist elites, who have traditionally been in charge of the CHP, have from time to time and in terms of various topics also held relatively sceptical views about Turkey's Westernization or Europeanization. In addition, the unquestionable mission of Turkey to become part of Europe, feverishly advocated by the Kemalist cadres, has for many Turkish liberals represented the very thing that is perceived to be wrong in Turkey, and which at least in the long run has prevented a full-blown European-type liberal democracy from emerging:

'The bureaucratic and military elite that has controlled Turkey's institutional modernization for much of this history insists that Turkey cannot be modern unless Turks uniformly subscribe to the same set of rigidly defined ideals that are derived from European history.'<sup>2</sup> In other words, in the eyes of the Kemalist vanguard, the ideological drive to become part of Europe required a state-led, top-down nation-building project with a strong emphasis on secularization and, ultimately, a cultural revolution aiming to 'create a new human'.<sup>3</sup> The constituencies opposed to these

policies – whether ethnic minorities (especially Kurds), religious conservatives, leftists, or liberal intellectuals – have all, from their own positions, attacked the Kemalist nation-building project, accusing it of being authoritarian, repressive, rejecting pluralism, and idolizing the state. However, the Kemalist project did place Turkey in the same category as Europe historically, whereas the tradition of Islamic modernization inherited by the incumbent AKP perceives an autonomous modernization path that does not require ideological attachment to the Western world. In the end, this may turn out to be crucial for EU-Turkey relations.

From 1923 to 1950, the CHP ruled Turkey through its one-party government. In the first free elections held in 1950, a conservative and at least in economic policies more liberal Democratic Party (*Demokrat Partisi*, DP) came to power. Since then, conservative centre-right parties continuing the DP's agenda have been the dominant force in elections. Only twice during the 1970s did the CHP gain significant electoral victories, with an agenda specifically targeting the working class. This occurred after the party had redefined its ideology as being 'left-of-centre'.<sup>4</sup> The CHP's transformation into a social democratic party has been a decades-long process, and today the party still has strong nationalist characteristics. This is also significant in the current circumstances as the incumbent AKP has collaborated with the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), especially in taking an uncompromised stance against the Kurdish political movement. The CHP and the main Kurdish party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP), have managed to build temporary alliances in elections, thus increasingly challenging President Erdoğan. However, in terms of Turkey's military operation against PKK-affiliated Kurdish forces in Syria, the HDP is forced to stand alone in opposing the operation supported by a nationalist block consisting of not only the AKP and MHP, but also the CHP.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Turkey's liberal intellectuals have abandoned all hope of the emergence of a more pluralist and liberal version of Kemalism. This highly negative stance also became dominant within the Turkish social sciences with the so-called 'post-Kemalist paradigm'.<sup>5</sup> This also explains why Turkish liberals were so enthusiastic about the conservative AKP and its reform policies from 2002 to 2010,

1 Nurdan Selay Bedir, Atila Eralp, Hanna-Lisa Hauge, and Wolfgang Wessels, 'Mapping milestones and periods of past EU-Turkey relations'. Feature Working Paper, September 2106, p. 9. Available at: [https://www.feuture.uni-koeln.de/sites/feuture/pdf/Deliverable\\_Narratives\\_1.2\\_final\\_neu.pdf](https://www.feuture.uni-koeln.de/sites/feuture/pdf/Deliverable_Narratives_1.2_final_neu.pdf).

2 Reşat Kasaba, 'Introduction' in *The Cambridge History of Modern Turkey: Volume 4*, edited by Reşat Kasaba (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 1.

3 İlhan Selçuk, 'Yeni İnsanı Yaratmak' in Server Tanilli (ed.) *Türkiye'de Aydınlanma Hareketi*, 31–37 (Istanbul: Alkım 1997).

4 Hikmet Bilâ, *CHP 1919–2009* (Istanbul: Doğan, 2008).

5 İltay Aytürk, 'Post-Post Kemalist Paradigmayı Beklerken', *Birikim* 319 (2015).

after which it became increasingly difficult to maintain the view that the AKP under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was democratizing Turkey.

These developments seem to have led to an unfortunate situation whereby all the democratizing and pro-European voices inside Turkey have become completely marginalized. However, throughout these years, instead of abandoning the historical European vocation, the CHP's stance has been one of qualified support for Turkey's EU membership. In the current party programme composed in 2008, this is expressed in the following manner:

*From the very beginning, the CHP has supported Turkey's accession to the European Union. As a policy goal, full membership in the EU is similar to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's modernization project and the Turkish revolution. EU membership thus represents the natural next step in this social transformation. We have only one qualification: full EU membership with equal criteria with all other members, and respect for the fundamental principles of the Republic of Turkey. The Republican People's Party accepts no other alternatives.<sup>6</sup>*

The same requirement to respect Turkey's republican values and national interest is also explicitly stated in terms of the CHP's identity as a social democratic party. In this regard, the programme asserts that while the CHP adheres to the universal values of social democracy, it does not perceive itself as obliged to support any positions taken by international social democratic organizations that contradict Turkey's national interest.<sup>7</sup>

The question of what, exactly, are perceived to be the fundamental republican values and Turkish national interests in the CHP's vision in different eras thus becomes the key issue – the definition of these does not necessarily remain exactly the same in changing circumstances. Detecting these possible changes during the last decade or so at the same time allows one to grasp the transformation of the CHP itself. Overall, one can detect four distinct phases in the party's history. The first comprises the years 1923–1960, during which the CHP first ruled Turkey for three decades through its one party-government, and then from

1950 onwards as an opposition party under the leadership of İsmet İnönü. When Turkey and the EC signed the Association Agreement in 1963, İnönü was not only still in charge of the CHP but was also prime minister, and in this way the traditional Kemalist party made Turkey's European vocation explicit.<sup>8</sup>

The second phase started in the mid-1960s, and witnessed a major transformation as the party was refashioned as a social democratic party under Bülent Ecevit. This phase ended in 1980 when the military junta shut down the CHP together with all other existing parties. The third phase started in 1992 with the re-founding of the CHP. In the 1990s and early 2000s, its nominal social democratic character notwithstanding, the CHP was often perceived as a nationalist and rightist party focusing on the status quo, and prioritizing the preservation of official state secularism. During these years, one loosely defined constituency within the CHP also engaged in the new wave of militant secular nationalism (called *ulusalcılık* in Turkish), and several Kemalist intellectuals, such as Erol Manısalı, Vural Savaş, and Yekta Güngör Özden became either highly sceptical or explicitly anti-Western. The neo-nationalist discourse never overtook the CHP, but CHP supporters have from time to time cherished its ideas.<sup>9</sup>

## **DOMESTIC AGENDA: DEMOCRATIZATION BASED ON UPDATED REPUBLICAN VALUES**

After various transformations and ideological intra-party competition spanning several decades, one can argue that today's CHP is roughly composed of two major factions. The first is the neo-nationalist *ulusalcı* group. It is EU-sceptic, often anti-Western in its general orientation, strictly secularist, and opposes the Kurdish political movement. The second faction, represented by the current party leadership, is the larger group of social democrats. This faction comes very close to European social democratic parties in its commitment to political liberalism and social market economy, and can be characterized as an advocate of a 'social-liberal synthesis'.

6 Çağdaş Türkiye İçin Değişim: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Programı (2008), p. 124. Available at: <https://chp.azureedge.net/1d48b01630ef43d9b2edf45d55842cae.pdf>.

7 Ibid., p. 124. Available at: <https://chp.azureedge.net/1d48b01630ef43d9b2edf45d55842cae.pdf>.

8 Seçkin Barış Gülmez, 'The EU Policy of the Republican People's Party: An Inquiry on the Opposition Party and Euro-Skepticism in Turkey', *Turkish Studies* 9 (3) 2008, p. 421.

9 For the relationship between neo-nationalist circles and the CHP, see Sencer Ayata & Ayşe Güneş Ayata, 'The Center-Left Parties in Turkey', *Turkish Studies* 8 (2), p. 215.

In addition to these two major factions, it is not unusual for commentators to also observe a small leftist faction. All factions see themselves as genuine representatives of the Turkish revolution and the project of enlightenment/modernization, but define its current ideal form in a different manner. It must be noted, however, that a number of influential old school diplomats and parliamentarians do not easily fit into these strict categories. In particular, regarding the CHP's foreign policy expertise, senior members such as Onur Öymen, Haluk Koç, Faruk Loğoğlu, Osman Korutürk, and Hikmet Çetin are best described as statesmen or 'Atatürkist' in a very broad sense. Their reflexes stem from what can be called republican conservatism, a centrist and broadly secular worldview that sees Turkey's place in the Western/Atlantic club but who most of all strictly guard Turkey's national interest.

It is noteworthy that in the 1960s, Turkish industrialists specifically demanded more protectionist policies, and the conservative centre-right parties espoused this policy as well. The requirement to implement protectionist methods also affected the CHP's stance on Turkey's EEC relations, as Turkey insisted on a several decades-long accommodation period. This was based on the idea that Turkish producers could become competitive with Western European firms after just 10–20 years.<sup>10</sup> In terms of the current economic foundations for the 'good society', the CHP strives for a low inflation economy, accompanied by a globally competitive economy based on the goal of full employment and contemporary progressive labour legislation, increasingly based on an information society model and advanced affluence. The aim is to secure a more balanced distribution of national wealth between citizens, regions and fields of production. Thus, the CHP's model roughly corresponds to the social market economy model espoused in particular by the Western social-democratic parties.

In this sense, the party's economic policies have changed considerably since the 1960s, during which time the CHP favoured the policy of important-substitution industrialization, high tariffs, and centralized planning. In this regard, the CHP has followed the Western centre-left parties and, since 1992 when the party was re-established, the CHP has favoured a social market economy.

All the conflicting tendencies that have been part of the CHP's previous transformations also seem to be involved in the currently ongoing project to update the party programme. On the one hand, reports assert that the new party programme will closely scrutinize the programmes of Western European centre-left and social democratic parties.<sup>11</sup> Other reports, however, note that following the success in the 2019 municipal elections in particular, in which the CHP almost historically managed to gain support from the conservative constituencies, the new programme will take advice from some of the most successful conservative centre-right parties, such as the Motherland Party of the 1980s and the True Path Party of the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> Further, some of the reporting notes how the new programme is going to introduce some major changes, while at the same time it is anticipated that the party will increasingly emphasize its founding principles synthesized in the so-called Six Arrows.<sup>13</sup>

It remains to be seen whether a truly workable synthesis of these various elements can be created by February 2020, when the new programme is planned to be made public during the CHP party congress. The conceptual groundwork for a workable synthesis – an updating of the six principles from more liberal-democratic foundations – has already been achieved. In the CHP's 2018 election manifesto, the meaning of Kemalist principles was progressively altered. Republicanism is now representing a human rights and pluralist liberal democracy; Atatürk's nationalism is conceptualized as a tool to embrace cultural variation while simultaneously preserving the ideal of equal citizenship; Statism symbolizes social justice and the idea of human progress; Secularism is perceived as a concept safeguarding different lifestyles and beliefs; National Solidarity stands for humanism and solidarity among citizens; and Revolutionism indicates that the CHP espouses Enlightenment and democratic revolution. Overall, the CHP's strategic narrative builds on the idea of the party of the Anatolian Enlightenment and representing Atatürkism and the universal principles of social democracy in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is likely that a slightly advanced formulation of this synthesis is also included in the upcoming new party

10 Haydar Efe, 'Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi'nin (CHP) parti programlarında, seçim bildirgelerinde ve söylemlerinde "Avrupa Birliği"', XVIII Türk Tarih Kongresi, 2018, p. 6. Available at: <http://earsiv.ebyu.edu.tr/xmlui/handle/20.500.12432/1727#sthash.LOSLvcKj.1LMBq2UJ.dpbs>.

11 *T24 Bağımsız İnternet Gazetesi*, 'CHP'de kurmaylara talimat verildi, parti programı yenileniyor'. Available at: <https://t24.com.tr/haber/chp-de-kurmaylara-talimat-verildi-parti-programi-yenileniyor.828248>.

12 *Aydınlık*, 'CHP parti programını değiştiriyor', 11.7.2019. Available at: <https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/chp-parti-programini-degistiriyor-politika-temmuz-2019>.

13 *Milliyet*, 'CHP parti programı halka sorulacak', 2.8.2019. Available at: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/chp-parti-programi-halka-sorulacak-6009958>.

programme as a recipe for bridging core principles with new openings.

The constituencies traditionally supporting the CHP – Alevis,<sup>14</sup> the secular nationalists, the Westernized urban middle class, and the social democrats – have all wanted to see the party as protecting their interests. All new openings, for instance towards the Kurds and religious conservatives, potentially alienate some of these long-time supporters, and this explains the CHP's often ambivalent positions, particularly regarding the Kurdish question but also in terms of identity issues such as the Islamic headscarf. The long tradition of the CHP as the 'regime-founding' party implementing the Kemalist revolution also affects the party's identity in today's context. The question of how to include the 'others' of the Kemalist secular-nationalist nation-building project – Kurds and religious conservatives – is not easily resolved. The new recipe for overcoming this perpetual dilemma, the so-called playbook of 'radical love', was exceptionally well suited for the recent elections, but whether this will provide the party with a more long-term road to electoral success is still an open question. The 'radical love' message represents a significant new opening as it rejects the idea of countering political opponents' often antagonizing and provocative assaults not with similar hostile arguments but with a soft and conciliatory tone that emphasizes shared values and practices.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the fundamentals of the party, the question of national identity is the utmost challenge. In the Kemalist tradition espoused by the CHP, a Turk was perceived as a civic national denominator. A Turk would thus be a citizen of the new Republic, and not an Anatolian Muslim from a particular class or ethnic group. In practice, however, this idea of civic nationalism transformed into ethnic Turkish nationalism that attempted to assimilate diverse ethnicities into an ethnically Turkish nation.<sup>16</sup> The party is, of course, very much aware of this dilemma.

In particular since 2010 and under the new leadership of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP has tried to complete its transformation into a Western-type social democratic party. Regarding the Kurdish question, in

the party's 2015 Kurdish Report it is strongly emphasized that this question can only be resolved as part of a wider democratization process. In terms of specific methods, the report proposes the establishment of a 'Social Reconciliation Committee'. This would be a comprehensive parliamentary process including all political parties, civil society organizations, trade unions and other stakeholders that are not directly represented in parliament. Another proposal is the establishment of a specific 'truth-founding mission' with the attempt to detect and acknowledge previous wrongdoings, thus paving the way for societal reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> As the regime type has now changed from parliamentary to presidential, it is expected that together with the new programme an updated version of the 'Kurdish Report' is also forthcoming.

The domestic democratization agenda is closely attached to the CHP's understanding of the EU. Democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the welfare state are perceived to be the core values of the European Union, and the CHP anchors their advancement in Turkey to the country's aspirations to join the Union. In addition, the party conceptualizes its mission as joining forces with various European leftist and social democratic partners in order to reform the EU from these premises. According to a formulation found in the party's 2015 election manifesto, 'the CHP inaugurated Turkey's EU aspirations, and we are the ones who will also complete it'.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, then, the CHP's domestic reform agenda based on social democratic ideals is also seen as the recipe for reforming the EU. This seems to call for an approach that emphasizes what is often called a more 'social Europe'.

## **FOREIGN POLICY VISION: ENDING SECTARIANISM AND PRIORITIZING AFFINITY WITH THE WEST**

In its 2015 election manifesto, the CHP presented its foreign policy vision as being based on Atatürk's famous motto 'peace at home, peace in the world'. The starting point for this is a systematic critique of the incumbent AKP's foreign policies.<sup>19</sup> These have, by any conceivable criteria, produced an array of very serious troubles for Turkey, stemming in particular from

14 Alevis are a heterodox religious community that resembles Twelver Shiism, but also differs from it in many respects. In the Sunni-majority Ottoman Empire and subsequently in the Republic of Turkey, Alevis have always been the largest religious minority. The fear of Sunni dominance has traditionally made Alevis strong supporters of republican secularism, which is why Alevis have often preferred the CHP, the standard-bearer of secularism.

15 Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Yerel Yönetimler Birimi, 'Radikal Sevgi Kitabı' (2019). Available at: [https://secim2019.chp.org.tr/files/CHP\\_RSK\\_interactive.pdf](https://secim2019.chp.org.tr/files/CHP_RSK_interactive.pdf).

16 Nathalie Tocci, '21st Century Kemalism: Redefining Turkey-EU Relations in the Post-Helsinki Era', Working Document no. 107, 2001, Centre for European Policy Studies, pp. 3-4.

17 'CHP'nin Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorununa Bakışı, Çözüm Çerçevesi' (2015). Available at: [https://content.chp.org.tr/file/chp\\_kurt\\_meselesi\\_kitapcik.pdf](https://content.chp.org.tr/file/chp_kurt_meselesi_kitapcik.pdf).

18 Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi 2015 Seçim Bildirgesi, p. 175. Available at: <https://chp.azureedge.net/41d1fed67c144d45b4b3d5f770e3e243.pdf>.

19 Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi 2015 Seçim Bildirgesi. Available at: <https://chp.azureedge.net/41d1fed67c144d45b4b3d5f770e3e243.pdf>.

the decision taken in early 2012 to fund and arm the various Sunni Islamist factions – both ‘moderate’ and radical – that have for the last seven years fought the Syrian government forces. This policy also led Turkey to allow the Islamic State (Daesh) terror organization to use Turkish territory as a platform for its recruiting and maintenance activities. Further, the same policy of strongly backing Muslim Brotherhood forces in countries like Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, as well as the increasingly anti-Western rhetoric by President Erdoğan, have made Turkey a deeply controversial actor both in the eyes of its traditional Western allies and its regional neighbours. As early as September 2010, the CHP’s Osman Korutürk described in no uncertain terms the problems Turkey would face after the AKP government started to arm Syrian rebel forces. Korutürk explained how taking sides in other countries’ internal conflicts, as well as basing one’s foreign policy on sectarian affiliations, would gravely jeopardize Turkey’s security. One can easily find the realistic, non-interventionist, multilateral republican strategic culture behind these evaluations.<sup>20</sup>

According to the CHP, the AKP’s foreign policies have left Turkey isolated and without friends in the international arena. Rather than being a country capable of helping to resolve the regions’ problems, under Erdoğan’s leadership Turkey has turned into a country creating regional problems and instability. The critique is based on the traditional ‘Republican strategic culture’ originally developed during the 1920s and 1930s by the young Kemalist state.<sup>21</sup> The CHP has always been its most ardent supporter. Its basic premises include diligent respect for other countries’ sovereignty and the expectation of mutual unconditioned respect for Turkey’s sovereignty by all others. Non-interventionism and the skillful advancement of national interest through diplomatic procedures in international bodies, the United Nations in particular, are also its main expressions.

This traditional foreign policy doctrine has also animated the CHP during Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu’s leadership since 2010. For instance, Faruk Loğoğlu, one of the CHP’s heavyweights in terms of foreign policy expertise, defined Turkey’s ideal foreign policy as being grounded in ‘basic Republican values’, which

according to him consist of the rule of law, secularism, and gender equality. Further, Loğoğlu emphasized that Turkey’s priority was still close attachment to the Euro-Atlantic community.<sup>22</sup> This definition from 2010 still neatly describes the general orientation of the CHP’s foreign policy vision. According to this vision, Turkey should strive for regional cooperation and increase its connections to the globalized world. At the same time, Turkey’s neighbourhood also consists of significant threats, such as terror organizations and sectarian violence. In this environment, Turkey should actively cooperate with the US, the EU and Russia in counter-terrorism, and should take a leading role in decreasing sectarian antagonisms.<sup>23</sup> However, the nationalist and state-centric aspects within the CHP’s foreign policy doctrine also favour taking a security-oriented approach to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). In the current situation where the Erdoğan government is attacking the PKK-affiliated Syrian Kurdish forces in Northeast Syria, the CHP is supporting this policy.

Conservative centre-right parties have challenged the traditional Republican strategic culture, especially during the 1950s led by Adnan Menderes, and in the 1980s by Turgut Özal. It has been replaced to a large extent by the AKP’s imperial strategic culture, especially since 2011. However, the traditional Republican foreign policy doctrine also underwent a significant reformulation after the Cold War. Ismail Cem, Foreign Minister from 1997 to 2002, started to emphasize Turkey’s common history with the Middle East in particular, suggesting that these historical connections should be used more systematically in order to advance Turkey’s economic and political leverage. Clear echoes of this more active and multi-dimensional foreign policy approach can be found in the CHP’s current foreign policy vision. However, prioritizing the Western orientation even within this new, more multi-dimensional approach has remained a key characteristic of the CHP’s foreign policy vision from Cem to Kılıçdaroğlu. There is, nevertheless, a more pronounced desire to alleviate global inequalities and power asymmetries through foreign policy activity in the CHP’s recent formulations.

There are clear signs that, in power, the CHP would again prioritize Turkey’s good relations with the West,

20 Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, ‘CHP deputy Osman Korutürk: “Friendship with Turkey becomes a dangerous thing”’. Available at: <https://chpbrussels.org/2012/09/22/chp-deputy-osman-koruturk-friendship-with-turkey-becomes-a-dangerous-thing/>.

21 On this and its subsequent challengers, see Malik Mufti, *Daring and Caution in Turkish Strategic Culture: The Republic at Sea* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

22 *Milliyet*, ‘Sami Kohen, “CHP’de dış politika ayarı”’, 22 December 2010. Available at: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sami-kohen/chp-de-dis-politika-ayari-1329360>.

23 Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi 2015 Seçim Bildirgesi. Available at: <https://chp.azuredge.net/41d1fed67c144d45b4b3d5f770e3e243.pdf>.

also trying to re-invigorate the EU accession process. Notably, the 2018 election manifesto declares that Turkey should not be waiting to see whether the EU opens new negotiation chapters, but that it should boldly implement domestic reforms nevertheless. It is also stated that the CHP would put strong emphasis on re-invigorating Turkey's EU negotiations in order to achieve full membership, based on social democratic values. The negotiations should strive for the increased well-being of Turkish citizens, and push for visa liberalization, free movement, scientific cooperation, and farming subsidies.<sup>24</sup> However, all of this is framed by an approach according to which EU membership must not be pushed at the expense of Turkey's national interests. These include, primarily, full membership with criteria on a par with all other members and reaching a bicomunal federal arrangement with regard to the Cyprus question. Consequently, the CHP is unlikely to accept the current EU-centric, asymmetrical negotiations paradigm where the Commission dictates the relevant reforms and the applicant country is simply expected to implement them. An expectation of a *genuine negotiations process*, in which both parties make compromises, duly characterizes the CHP's stance in this respect.

## THE CHP AND THE EU: REINVIGORATING THE MEMBERSHIP PROSPECT

In recent years, much of the discussion about EU-Turkey relations has concentrated on President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the authoritarian system established in Turkey. Many Turkish citizens as well as a number of European friends of Turkey have lamented this, arguing that Turkey is more than Erdoğan. It is more, of course. However, some form of strong nationalism and suspicion about the West are deeply ingrained in Turkey's political culture. Having said that, there are many signs indicating that the secular-nationalist variant of Turkish nationalism, and the political vision currently espoused by the Republican People's Party, would be more compatible with any meaningful future EU-Turkey engagement.

Both versions of mainstream Turkish national identity – Islamic conservative and secular – include strong nationalism at their core. In order to be inherently

coherent, the secular-nationalist vision requires an ideological attachment to the Western world, whereas the Islamic conservative variant does not. In the years to come, it may well be that these identity constructions and their relative ability to achieve hegemony will increasingly shape Turkey's role in the transforming multiplex world order.<sup>25</sup> However, as this paper demonstrates, national identity constructions are not closed systems but rather like ideologies with a more or less permanent core that is accompanied by many affiliated concepts.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes these affiliates come together in such a way that the whole orientation of the identity construction turns into something else. In the case of the Republican People's Party, this mechanism partly turned a fundamentally Western-oriented Kemalist ideology into a strongly nationalist and even anti-Western formation during the 1990s.

In the current circumstances, it is justified to argue that under secular-nationalists Turkey's domestic authoritarian, Islamic-conservative state transformation would end. In foreign policy, the country would restore much of its traditional, non-interventionist approach, also trying to re-invigorate EU negotiations. The CHP anchors Turkey's democratization to the country's aspirations to join the Union. In addition, the party conceptualizes its mission as joining forces with various European leftist and social democratic partners in order to reform the EU based on these premises. However, accepting nothing short of full membership is consistently upheld in the CHP's discourse on the EU, while the EU, on the other hand, is increasingly focused on finding other alternatives. In this respect, unless handled with the utmost sensitivity, the current spiral of a strained relationship could also continue under the rule of secular-nationalists.

24 Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi 2018 Seçim Bildirgesi, pp. 120–121. Available at: <http://secim2018.chp.org.tr/files/CHP-SecimBildirgesi-2018-icerik.pdf?v=3>.

25 For this characterization, see Amitav Acharya, 'After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order', *Ethics and International Affairs* 31 (3) 2017: 271–285.

26 For a morphological analysis of ideologies, see Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

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