

# Dealing with a Rising Power: Turkey's Transformation and its Implications for the EU

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# Table of Contents

**Introduction** . . . . . 5

**Cause for Concern? The Transformation of Turkey's Internal Politics and Foreign Policy**  
Svante Cornell . . . . . 8

**Regime Change in the Court Room: EU Soft Power and Civil-Military Relations in Turkey**  
Gerald Knaus . . . . . 70

**A Sceptical Commentary on the Possibility of Turkey's Accession**  
Manfred Scheich . . . . . 120

## KEYWORDS

Turkey - European Union - Enlargement - Accession process - Military - Justice and Development Party (AKP)

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The European Union and Turkey have a long-standing and complicated relationship. Turkey became an associate member of the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community, in 1963 and applied for full membership in 1987. After signing a Customs Union agreement with the EU in 1995, Turkey was granted candidate status in 1999. Although membership negotiations began in 2005, they have recently ground to a halt. At the time of writing, March 2012, 18 areas of negotiation, or chapters, have been blocked. Of these, the EU has completely frozen eight because Turkey has not ratified a customs agreement with the EU and is barring traffic from the Republic of Cyprus to its ports and airports. Both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy have called for Turkey to have a privileged partnership with the EU, rather than full membership.

Debates on the desirability of Turkey's accession have been held against a backdrop of the country's rapid economic growth—a 9% rise in GDP in 2010 has made Turkey the world's fifteenth largest economy—and its growing assertiveness on the international stage.

In order to explore the complexity of the EU–Turkey relationship at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Centre for European Studies (CES) has commissioned authors Svante Cornell and Gerald Knaus to provide their views of recent developments in Turkey and its position vis-à-vis the EU and countries in the Middle East. In addition, the CES asked Manfred Scheich to provide a brief commentary on European and Turkish identities.

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<sup>1</sup> The CES would like to thank Svante Cornell for suggesting the title for this study.

Both Svante Cornell and Gerald Knaus appreciate how far Turkey has come in transforming its political system. These two authors have diverging views, however, on the role of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Knaus's overview of the military's role illustrates the subtle regime change which the country has undertaken. Military thinking has been the backbone of the Kemalist republic, and civilian governments have been tolerated as long as they did not overstep the boundaries of the secular republicanism embodied by the armed forces. The military has in effect ruled without governing in modern Turkey but the simultaneous impact of the AKP's rise to power and the prospect of EU membership have radically changed the balance of power between the military and other political actors, thus bringing Turkey closer to Western democratic standards.

For Cornell, changes in Turkey's foreign policy mimic the changes in the AKP. The party's first term in office (2002–7) was considered a breath of fresh air at home and abroad, and generated an image of a modernising party in the mould of European Christian Democrats. Its second term (2007–11) proved to be much more controversial. At home, heavy-handed moves brought the AKP's democratic credentials into question. In the international arena, Turkey gained a much higher profile that has sometimes confounded its traditional European and NATO allies. Cornell argues that European analysis of the AKP has not kept up with facts on the ground. He sees the recent turn against judicial independence and freedom of the press as signs that the AKP is moving away from democratic reforms and away from liberal democracy. Furthermore, the collapse of its 'zero problems with the neighbours' approach to

international relations leaves Turkey in dire need of a new foreign policy concept.

Cornell implicitly agrees with Knaus that the Turkish regime has evolved and that successive civilian governments have progressively gained the upper hand over the military. Cornell also believes, however, that the Turkish government has not used its new-found confidence to consolidate democratic institutions. The question is whether Erdoğan and the AKP are merely manoeuvring to solidify their presence at the head of Turkey's institutions, thus turning a regime controlled by the military into one led by a single political party.

Regardless of Turkey's democratic evolution, the country is finding its place as an autonomous power in the international arena. All this time, the EU has been grading Turkey against membership criteria. As Scheich argues, perhaps the issue today is whether Turkey's ambition is still to be an EU member or whether it is becoming an independent regional power on its own terms.

This publication reflects views of academics and experts. This publication does not express the views of the European People's Party or the Centre for European Studies.

# Cause for Concern? The Transformation of Turkey's Internal Politics and Foreign Policy

Svante Cornell

<b>Executive Summary</b> . . . . .	9
<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	10
<b>Turkey's Accession and The EU's Role in the World</b> . .	12
<b>Turkey's Transformation</b> . . . . .	17
The AKP's Undulations . . . . .	18
The Opposition's Decline – and Rebirth? . . . . .	29
<b>Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP</b> . . . . .	33
The AKP and "Strategic Depth" . . . . .	34
From Mediating to Taking Sides, 2007-2010 . . . . .	36
Making Sense of the Foreign Policy Shift: Pragmatism, Overextension and Ideology . . . . .	42
The Collapse of "Zero Problems": Towards a Reassessment? . . . . .	48
<b>Conclusions</b> . . . . .	52
<b>Recommendations</b> . . . . .	53
<b>Bibliography</b> . . . . .	56

## Executive Summary

In 2012, 10 years after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power, Turkey has witnessed multiple transformations. Most important, Turkey has experienced an economic boom, boosting its self-confidence as a regional power. Given Europe's current crisis, Turkey is, in one sense, a more attractive partner for the EU than ever before. Yet the likelihood of Turkish membership of the EU also appears to be more distant than ever. The atmosphere of hope that surrounded the first few years of the AKP's tenure, when it initiated comprehensive EU harmonisation reforms and began negotiations for membership, has been followed by one of despair. The accession process is all but frozen, and while support for Turkish membership has continued to fall in Europe, ever fewer Turks now appear to view EU membership as either likely or desirable.

The AKP's record suggests that Turkey's political development is intimately linked to its relationship with Europe. Domestically, its reform agenda has faltered as leading European politicians have spoken out against Turkish EU membership on civilisational grounds. As Turkey has become more alienated from Europe, the liberal and democratic forces and instincts within the AKP—and in Turkish society in general—have gradually given way to the increasingly authoritarian tendencies which dominate today. Similarly, in foreign policy, Turkey has chartered an increasingly independent course, which has frequently put it at odds with European interests and positions. Indeed, Turkey is increasingly a partner that will align with Europe and the US on the basis of common interests rather than common values.

The experience of the past several years has shown that a Turkey decoupled from Europe is likely to be more turbulent

and unstable domestically, with the capacity to undermine or uphold European interests in a wide range of areas. This is exactly why European leaders should re-engage Turkey, and seek to develop a broad and long-term policy to keep Turkey anchored in Europe. Only such a policy—difficult as it may be—will make Turkey more democratic and stable in the long run, while ensuring that Turkish foreign and security policies align with European interests.

## Introduction

Half a decade after Turkey began negotiations for membership of the EU, the talks remain in deadlock. Observers across Europe, in Turkey and in the US are increasingly pessimistic regarding the prospect of Turkey ever joining the Union. Indeed, Turkey's accession appeared more likely five years ago than it does now. On the European side, opposition to Turkish membership is more outspoken; more important, it is now more often argued in terms of cultural identity than in terms of fulfilling actual criteria for membership. Turkey itself is increasingly troubled as the domestic democratic credentials of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) have suffered, while its foreign policy has become more and more controversial. Turkey's leaders increasingly appear to see themselves not as attached to the 'West', but as part of the dynamic 'rest' whose power in global economics and politics looks to be on the rise. Moreover, an anti-Western mood has not only been sweeping through Turkey's political leadership, but through society as a whole.

The time has thus come to reframe the debate about Turkey's relationship with the EU. This paper will argue that Turkish membership remains in the interests of the EU as a long-term goal. However, it will also argue that Turkey has moved away from EU accession in both its domestic politics and foreign relations, and that the pro-European constituency in Turkish politics has contracted alarmingly. Turkey today is less permeable to European pressure, and less interested in membership, than it has been in recent decades. Domestically, the Turkish government has shown growing authoritarian tendencies; in terms of foreign policy, Ankara has drifted increasingly towards associating itself with Islamic causes rather than European values. However, this process may nevertheless have reached a temporary climax as Ankara's love affair with the Middle East appears to have unravelled in 2011, and its renewed confrontation with Iran has led to moves to reassert its Western alignment. As counter-intuitive as it may sound, these developments should not lead the EU to write Turkey off, but rather to redouble its efforts of engagement with Turkey in favour of the country's integration into European institutions. In Europe's present political atmosphere this is unlikely to happen, and the atmosphere in Turkey is not exactly welcoming either. But, if steps to anchor Turkey to Europe are not revived, the bad news emanating from Turkey in the past few years is likely to be only a harbinger of things to come.

## Turkey's Accession and the EU's Role in the World

The case for Turkish membership of the EU has relied on two chief factors: the decades-long notion of Turkey's belonging to the West and the strategic argument that Europe would be a stronger global player if Turkey was part of the Union than if it was to remain an external actor.

Whether Turkey belongs in Europe is currently a hotly contested topic. Yet the controversy is recent, having been spurred by the growing tendency in both the West and the Muslim world to view the world through civilisational lenses. The Ottoman Empire, Turkey's predecessor, arose on the shores of the Black Sea, occupying large tracts of Eastern Europe long before it expanded into Central Anatolia. The Ottoman Empire was always considered a European empire; even during its long decay, it was famously known as 'the sick man of Europe', not of Asia. The Kemalist revolution of 1923 completed a process of institutional westernisation that had begun with the Tanzimat reforms of 1839; while it was drastic in the scope of its reforms, it was not novel in its ambition. Turkey joined NATO in 1952, at a time when it was already a member of the Council of Europe, and became a key asset in the defence of the West against the Soviet Union. Its Association Agreement with the European Communities dates back to 1963, a full 40 years before accession talks began. It is also worth recalling that when Turkey applied for European Community membership in 1987, Morocco did too. Both applications were rejected in 1989; but while Morocco was rejected on the grounds that it was not a European country, Turkey was told that it had not yet satisfied the membership criteria. Thus, the EU settled the question of whether or not Turkey is European more than 20 years ago. During this period Turkish society also

became increasingly European, although this phenomenon was mainly focused in the wealthier urban areas, and the western and southern coastal regions. Indeed, the failure of European values to penetrate the Turkish hinterland should not be underestimated, nor should the success of modern political Islam in doing so.

Unfortunately, changes in world politics since the end of the Cold War have reopened this debate. The relationship between Turkey and Euro–Atlantic structures has not been nurtured since the close of the Cold War. The growing polarisation between the West and the Muslim world, especially following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, has had a most negative effect. In Europe, this has been paralleled by a spectacular failure to integrate the millions of Muslims living across the continent, leading to the growth of isolationist sentiments among these Muslims, and of anti-immigration and anti-Muslim views among the native population. Thus, the idea of Europe has assumed an increasingly civilisational character, one which emphasises Europe's Christian heritage, thus turning Muslims, implicitly or explicitly, into the 'other'. It is in this context that opposition to EU membership for Turkey, a large Muslim country, has grown.

Turkey, too, has been affected by these global trends—not least by the formidable global Islamic revival. While the middle-class urban and coastal areas have become increasingly westernised, since the 1970s foreign and domestic Islamic movements have wielded greater influence in the Anatolian heartland and the working-class areas of the large cities.<sup>2</sup> These movements have been aided by the easy availability of funding from the Persian Gulf and from

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, David Shankland, 'Islam and Politics in Turkey: The 2007 Presidential Elections and Beyond', *International Affairs* 83/1 (2007), 364–5.

Turkish Islamic movements in Europe. Nevertheless, none of this changes the fact that Turkey—not only its political and business elites but large segments of its society—continues to view itself as predominantly European.

The Turkish question is one of fundamental importance for Europe. Inherently, it will define the Union. A Europe that leaves Turkey out on the basis of its Islamic identity would by necessity be one based on ethnic and cultural affinity rather than on common values of liberal democracy and human rights. It would be increasingly parochial and insular, and would tend to be more intolerant of diversity, and thus experience further difficulties in dealing with the reality of European Islam. Indeed, it would be the 'Christian Club' that many Turks already view it to be. The implications for Europe's moral and political clout in the world, and its perceived image abroad, would be significant. By contrast, a Europe that does embrace Turkey would prove that its union is inclusive and based on common, modern Western values and not on common origins. The positive impact on Europe's image as a dynamic force in the twenty-first century would be powerful.

The strategic arguments for Turkish membership are no less important. Following the latest round of enlargement, the challenge facing the EU is one of completing Europe's borders.<sup>3</sup> The eventual membership of the Western Balkans is a foregone conclusion, while Russia has clearly shown that it views itself as an equal partner to the EU, not as a country seeking integration into it. The remaining issues are the countries of the Eastern Partnership—notably Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which actively seek further integration—and Turkey. The EU will thus, in the coming two

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<sup>3</sup> Iris Kempe, 'Completing Europe', in The German Marshall Fund of the United States, *On Wider Europe*, (Washington, DC: German Marshall Fund, July 2010).

decades, face the task of delimiting Europe's south-eastern boundaries with unstable areas in Eurasia and the Middle East.

As a result of its size, location, economic and military power, and its strong historical ties both to Europe and to the Middle East, Turkey's role is paramount. Turkey influences its neighbourhood both by its own status and by its policies; its spectacular economic rise in the past decade has only amplified this fact. Stability in Turkey promotes stability among its neighbours. Moreover, when Turkey advocates cooperation, conciliation and harmony, it influences the policies of its neighbours and helps to create security. When, by contrast, it promotes hostility and agitation, it makes the neighbourhood a more dangerous environment. Turkey possesses the largest conventional military forces of any European state, and has been a frequent participant in peacekeeping operations, including in Afghanistan. In view of the likelihood of continued instability in the Middle East, the South Caucasus and greater Central Asia, Turkey thus has a great ability to contribute to European goals for these regions—but also the potential to cause problems should its views not align with European priorities. Energy security is a case in point: as Europe seeks to diversify away from its natural gas dependency on Russia's Gazprom monopoly, Turkey is a potential bridge to the energy resources of the Caspian region and the Middle East. However, Turkey has also toyed with the idea of becoming a second Gazprom—buying gas cheaply at its eastern border and reselling it to Europe at higher prices, rather than providing market-based access to these resources.

For Europe, the question is whether Turkey, as a powerful regional force, will be tied in as a part of Europe, or whether it will remain an independent partner. There is also the

potential worst-case scenario of Turkey as an antagonistic power, although this is currently unlikely. A Turkey that is part of Europe would help to shape European policies and have an important voice in Brussels, but would also be bound by these policies once determined. However, a Turkey that is simply an independent partner would count Europe's views among the many other considerations that it would factor into its policies, including the views of Moscow, Tehran and Washington. Given that Turkey has traditionally aligned itself with European policies, there is little experience of what a more independent-minded Turkey might mean. But the past three years, as discussed below, provide a window onto what Turkish policies decoupled from the West could mean—and the results are not encouraging. Thus, this suggests that the benefits of having Turkey on board as an EU Member State vastly surpass the potential costs when considering Europe's long-term interests.

The discussion above makes the strategic case for why Turkish membership of the EU is in Europe's interests. However, none of this should be understood to mean that Turkey should be exempted from the objective criteria for membership. Indeed, only a Turkey that has internalised European values into its polity and society could play the constructive role foreseen above. Yet, what this does mean is that European leaders should not subject Turkey to additional, arbitrary criteria for inclusion, but that they should rather support and encourage the process of Turkish accession to the EU.

## Turkey's Transformation

Turkey has changed considerably in the past decade, though the nature of these changes remains the subject of great controversy. Since 2002, in contrast to the unstable coalition governments of the 1990s, Turkey has been dominated by a single political force, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), and its charismatic leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In this period, Turkey has undergone a powerful economic boom: it is now the world's sixteenth largest economy, and has a powerful industrial base geared towards exports and a large domestic market with increasing levels of purchasing power. However, most of the progress and reforms took place during the first three years of the AKP's tenure. In their two latter terms, Mr Erdoğan and the AKP have become increasingly authoritarian. While Turkey has continued to experience an economic boom, its record is much more mixed in the political field. Indeed, the AKP's record contains both liberal and illiberal elements. In numerous areas, Turkey's development has stagnated, and even backtracked.

There is great controversy, both within the country and abroad, over Turkey's current direction. The AKP's supporters see it as a bearer of democratisation, while its detractors see the party as an inherently authoritarian force aiming to impose its own authoritarian rule and Islamicise Turkey by stealth. How can two such incompatible narratives coexist? Disagreements partly stem from the extent to which observers focus on the recent past—that is, the regime of military tutelage that was created by the 1980 military coup. Those putting considerable emphasis on this have tended to be more forgiving towards the AKP. More broadly, the optimists have focused on the AKP's democratic rhetoric and the undeniable accomplishments of its first few years

in power; the pessimists have emphasised the authoritarian roots of the AKP, as well as the darker record of its more recent past.

### The AKP's Undulations

The AKP undoubtedly deserves credit for dismantling the rigid statist structure that dominated Turkey for decades and led the country into stagnation. Many taboos have been broken, and the combination of liberal reforms and the globalisation of Turkey's economy have contributed to making debate and discussion far more open than it was a decade ago. Yet it is by no means clear that the alternative to secular statism will be liberal democracy; nor is it apparent that Turkey is freer today than it was in 2007. While the accomplishments of the AKP's early days are undeniable, the question of whether Turkey is becoming more or less liberal on the AKP's watch is increasingly muddled with every year that it remains in power.

The AKP traces its origins to Turkey's political Islamic movement, dominated by the conservative Naqshbandiyya order and its political offshoot, the Milli Görüş organisation.<sup>4</sup> The movement expanded greatly in the 1980s, as the military tutelage regime sought to promote a fusion of Turkish nationalism and Muslim identity as an antidote to Soviet-supported communism.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, while the AKP and the

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<sup>4</sup> Birol Yesilada, 'The Refah Party Phenomenon in Turkey', in Birol Yesilada (ed.), *Comparative Political Parties and Party Elites* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 123–150; Itzhak Weissmann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2007), 152–156; Svante E. Cornell and Ingvar Svanberg, 'Turkey', in Dawid Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg (eds), *Islam Outside the Arab World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 125–148.

<sup>5</sup> Banu Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially 85–135.

military are often presented as diehard adversaries, it was the 1980 military coup that deliberately provided the boost to Islamic conservatism, which was seen by the military as a lesser evil than communism. Thus, in part, it was the military policies of the 1980s that made the Islamic conservative movement what it is today.<sup>6</sup> In the 1990s, the movement further benefited from the growing mismanagement and corruption of the country's established elites, and the AKP's predecessor gained power in a short-lived coalition. Yet in less than a year, its fall from power was engineered following its leadership's overreach: leading figures had called for the introduction of sharia law,<sup>7</sup> among other things, and pursued a foreign policy that sought to distance Turkey from the 'imperialist' West.<sup>8</sup>

Following this debacle, a young splinter group led by former Istanbul mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emerged and broke away to form the AKP in 2001. They repudiated Islamism, emphasised their commitment to democracy and sought to have their new party accepted as a mainstream conservative force, akin to the Christian

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<sup>6</sup> Angel Rabasa and F. Stephen Larrabee, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2008), 37–38.

<sup>7</sup> Eligur, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey*, 153; Mustafa Koçak, 'Islam and National Law in Turkey', in Jan Michiel Otto (ed.), *Sharia Incorporated: A Comparative Overview of the Legal Systems of Twelve Muslim Countries in Past and Present* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010), 260–61. This view was upheld by the European Court of Human Rights, which concluded that 'the intention to set up a regime based on Sharia was explicitly portended in the following remarks [by Refah representatives]. . . . The Court can therefore accept the Constitutional Court's conclusion that these remarks and stances of Refah's leaders formed a whole and gave a clear picture of a model conceived and proposed by the party of a State and society organised according to religious rules'. Further, the Court found that 'Sharia is incompatible with the fundamental principles of democracy, as set forth in the convention'. See European Court of Human Rights, 'Case of Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) and Others v. Turkey', Judgment, 13 February 2003, paragraphs 120–3.

<sup>8</sup> Birol Yeşilada, 'The Virtue Party', in Barry M. Rubin and Metin Heper (eds), *Political Parties in Turkey* (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Gareth H. Jenkins, 'Muslim Democrats in Turkey', *Survival* 45/1 (2003), 45–66. For a discussion of this period, see also Svante E. Cornell, 'Turkey: Return to Stability?', *Middle Eastern Studies* 35/4 (October 1999).

Democratic parties of Europe.<sup>9</sup> In a 180-degree turn, the new party embraced the market economy and Turkey's EU membership aspirations. In the same year a deep financial crisis exacerbated voters' disgust with the established political elite, allowing the AKP to sweep to power in the 2002 elections. Since only two parties surpassed the 10% threshold needed to gain seats in parliament, the AKP's 36% of the vote secured it a two-thirds majority.

During its first term, the AKP implemented some of the most thorough economic and political reforms in Turkey's history, which led to an extended period of high growth, broadened minority rights and allowed Turkey to begin negotiations for membership of the European Union. By late 2004, the AKP-dominated parliament had passed seven large reform packages, which the main opposition, the Republican People's Party (CHP), had tended to support. Its economic policies, building on an IMF stabilisation package, managed to stabilise Turkey's currency for the first time in decades, opening the way for foreign investment and spectacular economic growth. Turkish laws and regulations were brought considerably in line with the EU *acquis*, the military's role in politics was reduced and the process of closing down political parties was made significantly more difficult. A new tone was struck concerning the Kurdish issue and reforms to broaden minority cultural rights were implemented.

The reforms brought the AKP almost unreserved support from intellectuals in Europe, support that continues to this day. But the AKP's critics highlighted a growing tendency on its part to purge government offices and replace civil servants with individuals more sympathetic to the party's

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<sup>9</sup>William Hale, 'Christian Democracy and the AKP: Parallels and Contrasts', *Turkish Studies* 6/2 (June 2006), 293–310; Sultan Tepe, 'Turkey's AKP: A Model "Muslim-Democratic" Party?', *Journal of Democracy* 16/3 (2005), 69–82.

ideological views, a practice known as *Kadrolaşma*, which can be roughly translated as 'cadrelisation'. Yet there was comparatively little evidence of an alleged Islamist or authoritarian hidden agenda. The main exception was the AKP's attempt to criminalise adultery during its reform of the criminal code, which nevertheless failed.<sup>10</sup>

Around 2005, having achieved the long-standing aim of beginning accession negotiations with the EU, the AKP's reformist zeal appeared to rapidly expire. The government lost interest in Europe, beginning instead to focus on consolidating its power. A number of factors contributed to this change of heart. First, there is no denying that anti-Turkish rhetoric emanating from major European capitals played a role. The opposition of Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy to Turkish EU membership amounted, for most Turks, to blatant double standards. With some justification, Turks argued that the EU treated Turkey differently from other candidate countries. This generated growing anti-European sentiment and strengthened the politics of Muslim identification that had already taken root in the post-9/11 political atmosphere. Among Islamic conservatives—but not only them—the US invasion of Iraq had also come to play an important role in the growing tendency to view the world in civilisational terms, as increasingly polarised between the West and the Muslim world.

Yet the AKP's change of heart was not only the West's fault. In fact, leading AKP figures seemed to lose faith in the extent to which Europe was useful to its domestic agenda. A case in point is the headscarf issue and, more broadly, the AKP's hope of using the rhetoric of individual freedom to break down the restrictions on religion that Turkey's French-

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<sup>10</sup> Pinar Ilkkaracan, 'How Adultery Almost Derailed Turkey's Aspiration to Join the European Union', in Pinar Ilkkaracan (ed.), *Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East* (London: Ashgate, 2008), 41–64.

style secularism mandated. Many AKP members interviewed by this author highlighted the case of *Leyla Şahin versus Turkey*, which was brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), in which a female university student, who was prohibited from attending university while wearing an Islamic headscarf, sued Turkey, arguing (as the AKP leadership did) that the headscarf ban violated her rights. However, the Court upheld the headscarf ban.<sup>11</sup> The AKP leadership appears to have concluded that Europe was not a consistent proxy in their efforts to confront Turkey's secular-state establishment. The fact that the ECHR is a branch of the Council of Europe, and not the EU, mattered little.

Most significantly, during this period the AKP shifted its focus from achieving a date for accession negotiations to consolidating its position at home. The big prize was capturing the presidency, which aside from the Constitutional Court was the only major civilian institution not under the AKP's control. Given the extensive veto powers of the presidency, this was a major impediment to the party's ability to freely set the country's agenda. Through a protracted political crisis that saw both a botched military attempt to oppose the AKP's candidate and early elections that returned the AKP to power with a renewed mandate, the AKP eventually managed to install its foreign minister, Abdullah Gül, in the presidential palace at Çankaya.

The AKP's second term, very much unlike its first, has seen significant backtracking in a number of areas. The acquisition of the presidency allowed the AKP to speed up the process of 'cadrelisation' in the state bureaucracy, systematically replacing staff with members more sympathetic to its own ideology. In practice, this primarily

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<sup>11</sup> European Court of Human Rights, 'Case of Leyla Şahin v. Turkey', Judgment, 10 November 2005, accessed at <http://portal.coe.ge/downloads/Judgments/LEYLA%20SAHIN%20v%20TURKEY.pdf>

meant recruiting members or sympathisers from certain religious orders. Among these orders, two stand out. One is the Naqshbandiyya, especially its Menzil and Iskender-Paşa branches, the latter being Erdoğan's own branch. The other is the movement led by Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish preacher residing in Pennsylvania, which has grown in the past three decades to become Turkey's largest social movement. When loyalty to the ruling party's ideology is the main criterion for advancement, the bureaucracy becomes politicised, undermining its neutrality and thereby also democracy. This suggests that the AKP may not be bent on reforming and liberalising an omnipotent semi-authoritarian state—a long-standing assumption among Turkey watchers in the West—but on employing its dominance of state institutions to ensconce itself in power, further its ideological agenda and ensure that its momentum becomes irreversible.

Second, the AKP has shown a worrying tendency to use its growing influence over the judiciary to intimidate oppositional forces. This has been most vividly made apparent by the large-scale investigation into alleged coup plotters, known as the Ergenekon case. The investigation into alleged plotting against the AKP by fringe nationalist groups and retired (and some serving) military officers initially appeared to be a much-needed opportunity to rid Turkey of the shady connections that many knew existed between the state, organised crime and the death squads used against suspected terrorists. Yet when they went on to arrest over two hundred suspects including university rectors, non-governmental organisation (NGO) activists and journalists,<sup>12</sup> the prosecutors rapidly overstepped their boundaries. No evidence emerged to suggest that crimes

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<sup>12</sup> '40 Turks Arrested in Ergenekon Probe', *UPI*, 13 April 2009, accessed at [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/2009/04/13/40-Turks-arrested-in-Ergenekon-probe/UPI-69711239625343/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2009/04/13/40-Turks-arrested-in-Ergenekon-probe/UPI-69711239625343/); 'Arrests of Academics in Turkey Prompt Protests', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 April 2009, accessed at <http://chronicle.com/article/Arrests-of-Academics-in-Turkey/42769/>; 'Turkey Arrests Rectors Under Ergenekon Probe', *Worldbulletin.net*, 17 April 2009, accessed at [http://www.worldbulletin.net/news\\_detail.php?id=40243](http://www.worldbulletin.net/news_detail.php?id=40243)

had been committed by many, if not most, of the suspects, some of whom have now spent months and sometimes years in detention without being formally charged with any crime.<sup>13</sup> Prosecutors' claims defied reason: the indictments actually accused the supposed 'Ergenekon' terrorist organisation — whose existence has yet to be proven — of having masterminded every single act of political violence in Turkey's modern history.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the indictments included deep inconsistencies and internal contradictions, as well as instances where evidence had clearly been manipulated.<sup>15</sup> To make matters worse, evidence from the investigation was systematically leaked to the pro-AKP press.<sup>16</sup> The investigation's effect — and likely intent — was to create a climate of fear among opponents of the AKP and Islamic conservatism.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Nichole Sobecki, 'Trial or Witch Hunt? Ergenekon Plot Thickens', *Global Post*, 4 February 2009, accessed at <http://www.globalpost.com/print/267544>; 'Journalist Organizations Urge for "Fair Trials" for Journalists', *BIA News*, 19 August 2010, accessed at <http://bianet.org/english/freedom-of-expression/124236-journalist-organizations-urge-for-fair-trials-for-journalists>; Orhan Kemal Cengiz, 'Are We Overlooking the Rights of the Accused in the Ergenekon Case?', *Today's Zaman*, 2 April 2010, accessed at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-206106-109-centerare-we-overlooking-the-rights-of-the-accused-in-the-ergenekon-casebr-i-by-i-brorhan-kemal-cengizcenter.html>; Orhan Kemal Cengiz, 'Turkish Courts' Abuse of Detention on Remand', *Today's Zaman*, 1 October 2010, accessed at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-223138-turkish-courts-abuse-of-detention-on-remand-ergenekon-avci-by-orhan-kemal-cengiz.html>

<sup>14</sup> Turkey, Office of the Istanbul Chief Prosecutor, 'Ergenekon Indictment', 10 July 2008, 81.

<sup>15</sup> For example, an evidence file allegedly recovered from the office of one of the accused in early summer 2008 included documents from the Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs which were not written until the end of 2008. See Gareth H. Jenkins, 'The Devil in the Detail: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation Enters a Fourth Year', *Turkey Analyst* 3/13 (5 July 2010), accessed at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2010/100705B.html>

<sup>16</sup> Nicole Sobecki, 'Turkey's Ergenekon Conspiracy: Justice, or a Secular Witch Hunt?', *Global Post*, 1 March 2010, accessed at <http://www.globalpost.com/passport/foreign-desk/100301/turkey%E2%80%99s-ergenekon-conspiracy-justice-or-secular-witch-hunt>; 'Judge in Ergenekon Case Files Complaint', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 23 June 2010, accessed at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=chief-judge-of-ergenekon-filed-criminal-complaint-2010-06-23>; 'Changes to Turkish Law Create Confusion over Limits to Arrest', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 31 December 2010.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed overview, see Gareth H. Jenkins, *Between Fact and Fiction: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation*, Silk Road Paper Series (Washington, DC/Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, August 2009).

Subsequent arrest waves have specifically targeted opponents of the government and of the Fethullah Gülen network. Thus, in August 2010, prosecutors arrested Hanefi Avcı, a police chief who had once been sympathetic to the Gülen movement, but who, in 2010, published a book that accused the Gülen network of manipulating judicial processes and appointments.<sup>18</sup> In February and March 2011, the targets comprised nine journalists. The first four to be arrested were employees of the anti-AKP Oda television network, who were about to broadcast footage implicating police officers in planting evidence on suspects in the Ergenekon investigation. Then in March, further unlikely members of a terrorist organisation were arrested: Nedim Şener has won international awards for his reporting on the alleged involvement of security forces in the numerous political assassinations in Turkey over the past two decades, while Ahmet Şık had just completed a book, still unpublished, on the Gülen movement's increasing dominance over the police force. Most of these people remain in prison, though Şener and Şık were released on bail in spring 2012.<sup>19</sup>

Closely linked to this is the AKP's onslaught on the independent media. When mainstream media outlets began to voice criticism of the AKP's unilateralist policies in 2007, Prime Minister Erdoğan publicly rebuked them.<sup>20</sup> In the same year, regulators seized the country's second-largest media group, ATV–Sabah, subsequently auctioning it off in a single-bidder auction to the energy company Çalık,

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<sup>18</sup> Gareth H. Jenkins, 'Turkey's New "Deep State": A Movement without a Mover?', *Turkey Analyst* 3/15 (13 September 2010).

<sup>19</sup> See Gareth H. Jenkins, 'The Fading Masquerade: Ergenekon and the Politics of Justice in Turkey', *Turkey Analyst* 4/7 (4 April 2011).

<sup>20</sup> *Yanlış Yazan Gazeteyi Evlerinize Sokmayın* [Do Not Let Inaccurate Newspapers into Your Houses], *Star*, 19 September 2008, accessed at <http://www.stargazete.com/politika/yanlis-yazan-gazeteyi-evlerinize-sokmayin-128907.htm>; Derya Sazak, 'Gazete Boykotu' [The Newspaper Boycott], *Milliyet*, 20 September 2008.

whose media wing is run by Erdoğan's son-in-law.<sup>21</sup> In 2008 Erdoğan attacked the country's largest media group, Doğan Media (DMG), after it reported on a corruption case in Germany that implicated figures close to Erdoğan and the AKP in siphoning off millions from charities to fund pro-AKP media outlets in Turkey.<sup>22</sup> Erdoğan publicly and repeatedly urged his supporters to boycott all DMG-owned newspapers and television stations. The tax authorities then slammed DMG with two obviously politically motivated fines, totalling almost \$3 billion.<sup>23</sup> Today, most media outlets not controlled by or supportive of the AKP have, for obvious reasons, become increasingly prudent in their editorial policies. As a result, Turkey has fallen like a stone on the Reporters without Borders' World Press Freedom Index. In 2008, Turkey was rated at 102 out of 173 countries; it fell to 122 in 2009, 138 in 2010, and in 2011 to 148 out of 179 countries, six places below Russia.<sup>24</sup>

The constitutional amendments approved by referendum on 12 September 2010 did not alter this picture: although many amendments were positive, they did not constitute a democratic breakthrough. The key changes increased the power of the ruling party over appointments to Turkey's

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<sup>21</sup> See M. K. Kaya and Svante E. Cornell, 'Politics, Media and Power in Turkey', *Turkey Analyst* 1/8 (2 June 2008), accessed at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2008/080604A.html>; Gareth H. Jenkins, 'Turkish Banks Make Huge Loans to Friend of Erdoğan', *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 5/78 (24 April 2008); 'RTL Pulls Out of Turkish ATV-Sabah Bidding', *Reuters*, 4 December 2007; 'Turkey Accepts Calik's \$1.1 Bln Bid for ATV-Sabah', *Reuters*, 5 December 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Svante E. Cornell, 'As Dogan Yields, Turkish Media Freedom Plummets', *Turkey Analyst* 3/1 (18 January 2010), accessed at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2010/100118A.html>; 'The Travails of Turkey's Dogan Yayin', *Economist*, 10 September 2009.

<sup>23</sup> 'Turkey Government Hits Media Group Dogan with Tax Fine', *Reuters*, 8 September 2009, accessed at <http://uk.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=UKL815352620090908>; Janine Zacharia, 'As Turkey Looks to West, Trial Highlights Lagging Press Freedom', *Washington Post*, 5 July 2010, accessed at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/04/AR2010070404004\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/04/AR2010070404004_pf.html)

<sup>24</sup> 'Turkey Down 40 Notches on World Press Freedom Index', *Today's Zaman*, 22 October 2010, accessed at <http://www.todayzaman.com/news-225078-101-turkey-down-40-notches-on-world-press-freedom-index.html>; Özgür Öğret, 'Freedom of the Press Remains Elusive in Turkey', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 29 April 2010.

highest judicial bodies.<sup>25</sup> As the AKP had staffed the bureaucracy, checked the power of the military, intimidated dissidents and asserted control over the media, the judiciary was the only remaining institution that the AKP did not control. The September 2010 referendum thus made Erdoğan by far the most powerful leader in Turkish history since Atatürk. He will no longer be able to blame anyone else for deficiencies in Turkish democracy. Indeed, having been re-elected for a third time in June 2011, Erdoğan now bears full responsibility for the direction of Turkey's politics.

This includes perhaps the country's most dangerous issue, the Kurdish question. While the AKP, in cooperation with state institutions, initiated an 'opening' with the Kurds in 2009, this policy had been replaced by a renewed crackdown on all forms of Kurdish nationalism by 2011. Erdoğan appeared to have given up on the Kurdish vote, and instead took the AKP in a Turkish nationalist direction in the run-up to the 2011 elections. It is likely that this was intended to target voters of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), in an attempt to force it under the 10% threshold—which would have rendered a two-party parliament that the AKP could dominate. This thesis is strengthened by the mysterious release of videos during the election campaign, in which several high-level MHP officials were caught on film in compromising situations with women other than their wives. The scope of the recordings suggested an entrapment operation with considerable resources.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Svante E. Cornell, 'What Is Turkey's Referendum About?', *Turkey Analyst* 3/14 (30 August 2010), accessed at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2010/100830A.html>; İzgi Güngör, 'Judicial Reform Should be in Balance with Executive Power, Says Top Judge', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 2 March 2010, accessed at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=judicial-reform-should-be-in-balance-with-executive-power-says-top-judge-2010-03-02>. See also the excellent overview by Marc Champion, 'Intrigue in Turkey's Bloodless Civil War', *Wall Street Journal*, 4 May 2010, accessed at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704671904575194020905495614.html>

<sup>26</sup> Gareth H. Jenkins, 'Above the Threshold, Below the Belt: the Video Campaign against the MHP', *Turkey Analyst* 4/11 (30 May 2011), accessed at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2011/110530A.html>

Tellingly, the AKP's close alliance with Turkey's liberal intelligentsia has all but collapsed. By the autumn of 2011, some of the most ardent supporters of the AKP, including columnists Cengiz Çandar, Hasan Cemal and Ahmet Altan, had come to conclude that the AKP was no longer a force for democratisation.<sup>27</sup> Çandar reportedly narrowly escaped being arrested himself in early 2012.

Furthermore, in early 2012 the ruling coalition itself showed signs of crumbling. Prime Minister Erdoğan was hospitalised in November 2011 for surgery, officially for intestinal problems—though Ankara insiders suggest the real reason was a fear of colon cancer. As he disappeared from public view for several weeks, cracks began to emerge in the Islamic conservative movement. Most importantly, the relationship between Erdoğan and the Fethullah Gülen movement, so critical to the AKP's success, appeared to dissolve. Most Gülen supporters had already been purged from the AKP party lists ahead of the 2011 elections, and countless bureaucrats had seen their promotions frozen in a broad reform of the public administration. In February 2012, a pro-Gülen prosecutor wielded grave accusations against Erdoğan's hand-picked head of the intelligence services, opening the first salvo in a confrontation that saw pro-Gülen and pro-Erdoğan media outlets take opposing sides. Such rifts are more reminiscent of authoritarian regimes than of European democracies.

In sum, the AKP has retreated significantly from its moderate image and democratic ideals. From having

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Cengiz Çandar, 'Arap baharı, *Türk sonbaharı'na dönüşür mü?* [Will the Arab Spring Turn into a Turkish Autumn?], *Radikal*, 11 November 2011; Hasan Cemal, 'Yine aynı soru: Sayın Başbakan, Ankara'lılaştınız mı yoksa?' [The Same Question Again: Mr Prime Minister, Have You Been Changed by Ankara?], *Milliyet*, 17 November 2011, accessed at <http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/yine-ayni-soru-sayin-basbakan-ankara-lilastiniz-mi-yoksa-/siyaset/siyasetyazardetay/17.11.2011/1463734/default.htm>; Ahmet Altan, 'Eksik demokraside tam iktidar' [Full Power in a Flawed Democracy], *Taraf*, 16 November 2011, accessed at <http://www.taraf.com.tr/ahmet-altan/makale-eksik-demokraside-tam-iktidar.htm>

been a force for democratic development, the AKP has, the evidence thus far suggests, become an increasingly authoritarian force bent on sustaining its position in power. Clearly, this has made the prospect of Turkish EU accession all the more difficult.

### The Opposition's Decline - and Rebirth?

In spite of the observable stagnation and backtracking since the AKP government's second term in power, it has largely been spared widespread criticism in Europe. One reason for this is the benefit of the doubt that the AKP enjoys, particularly as a result of its support from liberal intellectuals. Inertia has contributed to perceptions changing slowly even when the facts on the ground are changing rapidly. Another factor is the widespread perception that whatever faults the AKP may have, there appear to be no alternative forces in Turkish politics that could constitute better partners for the West. There is truth to this argument.

Turkish politics have traditionally been dominated by secular centre-right parties, epitomised by the careers of Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel, conservative politicians who were pragmatic and non-ideological, yet committed to the Western alliance. They maintained positive ties with the West and formed part of the secular establishment, while simultaneously attracting religious voters, and often even

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<sup>28</sup> Heinz Kramer, *A Changing Turkey: The Challenge to Europe and the United States* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 62–5. For greater detail on political parties in Turkey, see Barry M. Rubin and Metin Heper (eds), *Political Parties in Turkey* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), especially Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, 'The Motherland Party: The Challenge of Institutionalization in a Charismatic Leader Party', 41–61; and Ümit Cizre, 'From Ruler to Pariah: The Life and Times of the True Path Party', 82–101. Also Huri Türsan, *Democratisation in Turkey: The Role of Political Parties* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2004).

pandering to religious communities.<sup>28</sup> Yet the centre-right has never recovered from its electoral defeat of 2002, failing to produce viable leaders and watching its political networks being either dismantled or absorbed by the AKP. Instead, the mantle of opposition has been taken up by the centre-left CHP and the nationalist MHP. For most of the AKP's tenure, the opposition leaders Deniz Baykal and Devlet Bahçeli, in their seventies and sixties respectively and each in control of their parties for more than a decade, have been increasingly unappealing to the young Turkish electorate—especially when compared with Erdoğan's powerful and dynamic figure. Moreover, they appeared to be wedded to the statist tradition rather than to the people, severely damaging their electoral prospects.

The MHP is by nature unfavourably inclined to the West, preaching criticism of globalisation and Western imperialism.<sup>29</sup> As for the CHP, a self-proclaimed social democratic party, under the leadership of Deniz Baykal in the 2000s it gravitated increasingly in the direction of statism and nationalism.<sup>30</sup> In spite of being bitter historical enemies and having widely divergent voter bases—the MHP mobilises the nationalist Turkish masses of central Anatolia, while the CHP is the party of urban, westernised Turks—the two parties grew ever closer in the 2000s.

The CHP's voter base epitomises the modernisation of Turkey, and has traditionally been the advocate of Turkey's European vocation. Yet in recent years, this group has been affected by ardent nationalist, anti-Western and particularly anti-American sentiments. This counter-

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<sup>28</sup> Hakan Yavuz, 'The Politics of Fear: The Rise of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) in Turkey', *Middle East Journal* 56/2 (Spring 2002), 200–21; Sultan Tepe, 'A Kemalist-Islamist Movement? The Nationalist Action Party', *Turkish Studies* 1/2 (Autumn 2000), 59–72; Metin Heper and Basak Ince, 'Devlet Bahçeli and "Far Right" Politics in Turkey, 1999–2002', *Middle Eastern Studies* 42/6 (November 2006), 873–88.

<sup>30</sup> Sinan Ciddi, *Kemalism in Turkish Politics: The Republican People's Party, Secularism and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

intuitive phenomenon must be understood through the prism of Turkey's domestic politics, and the emotional and conspiratorial mindset that dominates the country. In fact, convinced from day one of the Islamist and authoritarian agenda of the AKP, Turkey's secular forces were dumbfounded by the massive support that the AKP received from the West, and the abandonment, and near betrayal, to which they felt they were being exposed.<sup>31</sup>

Various theories have emerged to explain this betrayal. Some verge on the absurd, such as the conviction among many secular nationalists that the West, bent on keeping Turkey weak, systematically supports forces that do not have the country's interests at heart—including, supposedly, the AKP.<sup>32</sup> A more widespread explanation is that following 9/11, the West thought it desperately needed to find interlocutors in the Muslim world—'good' or 'moderate Muslims'—and thus threw all its weight behind the AKP, ignoring the possibility that this would throw out the secular Turkish republic with the bathwater.<sup>33</sup> While often overstated, this view does have some justification. Politically, however, the general acceptance of this view among Turkey's secular groups has led the most-European inclined forces in Turkey to become the most anti-Western. Given that the Islamic conservatives already possess deep-rooted anti-Western feelings, this state of affairs helps to explain why Turkey consistently tops the global list for anti-American sentiment.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, 'The Anatomy of Anti-Americanism in Turkey', Brookings Institution, November 2005, accessed at [http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2005/1116turkey\\_taspinar.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2005/1116turkey_taspinar.aspx)

<sup>32</sup> Interview with a senior Turkish lawyer, Ankara, August 2010.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, 'Wolfowitz Praises Moderate Islam in "War on Terror" Speech', *Insight on the News*, 30 September 2002. For a developed argument to this effect, see Graham Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 2008); and Graham Fuller, 'The Erdoğan Experiment in Turkey is the Future', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 22/3 (2005), 60–7.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Transatlantic Trends 2010*, accessed at <http://www.gmfus.org/trends/2010/>

Thus, as of early 2010, all the political parties represented in the Turkish parliament had a questionable commitment to democracy—including the Kurdish nationalist groups that were no longer bothering to seriously deny their close ties to (and indeed, their subordination to) the terrorist PKK.<sup>35</sup> All the parties harboured strong, inherently anti-Western, including anti-European, sentiments. Yet a sliver of hope appeared in the spring of 2010, as a scandal forced Deniz Baykal to resign from the helm of the CHP. He was replaced by the much more dynamic Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, a former bureaucrat who made his name as an anti-corruption crusader who exposed the shady dealings of a number of leading AKP figures. Unlike his predecessor, Kılıçdaroğlu can hardly be accused of being detached from Turkey's realities or of representing the statist elite. The son of a mid-level bureaucrat from Tunceli (Dersim) province, Kılıçdaroğlu is of Kurdish heritage as well as a member of the minority Alevi religious community. His election met with a groundswell of public enthusiasm, as he succeeded in tapping into a growing dissatisfaction with Erdoğan and the AKP that had yet to find an outlet. Kılıçdaroğlu faces a considerable challenge in turning the CHP into a serious alternative to the AKP. Yet his initial accomplishments in this regard are notable, as a clear shift towards democratic principles has occurred in the CHP's rhetoric. Yet Kılıçdaroğlu's campaign for a 'no' in the September 2010 referendum faced defeat and his performance in the 2011 elections failed to meet high expectations, with the CHP obtaining just 26% of the vote. Given the CHP's distinct disadvantage in a media environment dominated by the ruling party, this was a respectable result, but far from the surge that some observers had predicted.

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<sup>35</sup> See Halil M. Karaveli, *Reconciling Statism with Freedom: Turkey's Kurdish Opening*, Silk Road Paper series (Washington, DC/Stockholm: Central Asia–Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, October 2010), accessed at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1010Karaveli.pdf>

Ultimately, the question is whether even the ouster of the AKP will bring Turkey back onto a more democratic and pro-European track. In the short term this is unlikely, given present public opinion. Even if the AKP is ousted, it has had a considerable impact on Turkey's population. Compared to a decade ago, today more Turks identify as Muslims first rather than Turks first,<sup>36</sup> and their suspicion of the West, including Europe, has grown. Thus, Islamic conservatism has made its mark on Turkey. As a result, large segments of Turkish society identify less with Europe and more with the Middle East. In the longer term, however, these trends can be reversed. Kılıçdaroğlu may yet, if given time and support, succeed in making the CHP a social democratic alternative to the AKP. And even the MHP is a mixed bowl. While Bahçeli's aggressive, nationalist rhetoric is what most Europeans have heard, the party does include a number of more moderate figures—such as former Interior Minister Meral Akşener and Tuğrul Türkeş—who have the potential to one day pull the party more towards the political centre.

## Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP

The latter phase of the AKP's tenure has coincided with a considerable transformation in foreign policy. The basic tenets that had guided the country's foreign policy since the republic's establishment included a focus on caution and pragmatism—especially where the Middle East was concerned. The imperial hangover of the Ottoman era had

<sup>36</sup> Sabrina Tavernise, 'Allure of Islam Signals a Shift within Turkey', *New York Times*, 28 November 2006, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/28/world/europe/28turkey.html>; Ali Carkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak, *Religion, Society and Politics in a Changing Turkey* (Istanbul: TESEV, 2007), accessed at [http://research.sabanciuniv.edu/5854/1/2007\\_08\\_Religion,\\_Society\\_and\\_Politics\\_in\\_a\\_Changing\\_Turkey.pdf](http://research.sabanciuniv.edu/5854/1/2007_08_Religion,_Society_and_Politics_in_a_Changing_Turkey.pdf)

driven home the lesson that Turkey had little to gain and much to lose from interjecting itself into the acrimonious politics of the region. Ankara's focus was, despite occasional differences with Western powers, on playing its role in the European security structure.

### The AKP and 'Strategic Depth'

The AKP departed significantly from this consensus during its second term. Guided by the concept of 'strategic depth' elaborated by Erdoğan's long-term advisor and now foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Ankara began focusing increasingly on its neighbourhood—and disproportionately so on the Middle East—with a view to positioning Turkey as a regional power. The intention was to make Turkey a dominant and stabilising force in its neighbourhood, one that would function as an honest broker and project its economic clout on neighbouring regions, a prospect that became increasingly realistic as Turkey's economy grew to become the world's sixteenth largest.<sup>37</sup>

The official leitmotif was 'zero problems with neighbours', a policy that explicitly rejected the insecurity of earlier policies, which saw Turkey's neighbours as potential foes rather than potential friends. Instead, Davutoğlu argued, through engagement, Turkey would develop positive ties with all its neighbours. As would become clear by 2011, this policy was logically deficient, resting on untenable assumptions. First, it assumed that Turkey's neighbours did not have interests that might clash with Turkey's—that is, that they would be nice to Turkey if Turkey was nice to

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<sup>37</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

them. Second, the policy focused almost entirely on building ties with regimes. In countries like Iran, Libya and Syria, close ties with the existing leadership would become a liability once the positions of those repressive regimes were challenged by popular movements. Finally, Ankara ignored the complex and often acrimonious connections between its neighbours; thus, improving relations with one occasionally complicated relations with others, for example Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia and Georgia, and Syria and Israel.

Nevertheless, Ankara rapidly developed its relationship with Syria to that of a strategic partnership; Turkish officials also began developing closer economic and political ties with Iran and Russia, both of which are significant energy providers for the growing Turkish economy. In a bold but ultimately failed move, the AKP leadership also sought to mend fences with Armenia, a country with which Turkey had never established diplomatic relations due to Armenia's occupation of a sixth of Turkic Azerbaijan's territory in the early 1990s.

These moves were generally welcomed in the West—and in the case of Armenia, were partially the result of serious pressure applied by the Obama administration. While hardliners in the US deplored Ankara's outreach to Tehran and Damascus, Turkey borders both Iran and Syria and needed to find a modus vivendi with these states. In any case, the incoming administration of Barack Obama would go on to develop somewhat similar policies. In Europe, the AKP argued that it could function as a bridge, an interlocutor with these regimes in Turkey's backyard with which Europe had only limited ties. A more active Turkey would thus benefit Europe as well.

Initially, therefore, the AKP outreach to the Middle East was supported in the West. Even its growing rhetoric

against Israel raised few eyebrows, at least in Europe, given the growth of anti-Israeli sentiment in Europe itself. Ankara's eagerness to mediate in complex conflicts also brought goodwill: the Turkish government offered its good offices in bridging the differences between Syria and Israel, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and between Fatah and Hamas, as well as offering outreach to the regime in Tehran. Most importantly, European leaders took the AKP's argument at face value, giving Turkish leaders the benefit of the doubt as they assured their Western partners that their outreach would help moderate their eastern interlocutors and bring them back into the international system.

### From Mediating to Taking Sides, 2007–2010

Yet Ankara's course soon began to deviate substantially from the official narrative, as the AKP government gradually began to take sides ever more clearly in these conflicts. Four issues in particular have generated concern about the AKP's foreign policy intentions: Iran, Israel, Sudan and Turkey's stance in NATO.

Ankara's policy of engagement with Tehran was welcomed as long as Ankara was influencing the Iranians, rather than the other way around. In mid-2008, Ankara offered to mediate in the conflict over Iran's nuclear programme.<sup>38</sup> But, far from the stated objective of acting as a go-between, Erdoğan and his associates gradually became increasingly outspoken defenders of Iran's nuclear programme. In a speech in Washington in November 2008, Erdoğan urged nuclear weapons powers to abolish their

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<sup>38</sup> 'Turkey Might Be Asked to Mediate on Iranian Nuclear Project', *BBC International*, 5 July 2008.

own arsenals before meddling with Iran.<sup>39</sup> Following a visit to Tehran in October 2009, Erdoğan referred to Iranian President Ahmadinejad as a 'friend',<sup>40</sup> thus appearing to lend legitimacy to the Iranian regime rather than exerting pressure on it to comply with its obligations. Indeed, Ankara was among the first to congratulate Ahmadinejad upon his fraudulent and blood-stained election result in June 2009.<sup>41</sup> Turkish leaders then began publicly juxtaposing the issue of Israeli nuclear weapons on Iran's covert programme.<sup>42</sup> In November 2009, Turkey abstained from a sanctions resolution by the International Atomic Energy Association against Iran that both Moscow and Beijing supported.<sup>43</sup> In June 2010, Erdoğan and Brazilian President Lula made their well-publicised coup on the eve of the UN Security Council vote on a new round of sanctions against Iran, standing in Tehran holding hands with Ahmadinejad in a display of defiance, and announcing their alternative diplomatic proposal for handling the Iranian nuclear issue.<sup>44</sup> In the space of two years, Ankara had become Tehran's most valuable international supporter. It should be noted that

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<sup>39</sup> 'Erdoğan Warns Obama Possible Plights Ahead', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 17 November 2008, accessed at <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=10373516> on 15 February 2012; 'Turkey: The Worrying Tayyip Erdoğan', *Economist*, 27 November 2008.

<sup>40</sup> 'Iran is Our Friend, Says Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan', *Guardian*, 26 October 2009, accessed at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/26/turkey-iran1>; Gabriel Hershman, 'Turkish PM Erdoğan pays tribute to his "friend" Ahmadinejad', *Sofia Echo*, 26 October 2009, accessed at [http://www.sofiaecho.com/2009/10/26/805050\\_turkish-pm-erdogan-pays-tribute-to-his-friend-ahmadinejad](http://www.sofiaecho.com/2009/10/26/805050_turkish-pm-erdogan-pays-tribute-to-his-friend-ahmadinejad)

<sup>41</sup> Svante E. Cornell, 'Iranian Crisis Catches the Turkish Government Off Guard', *Turkey Analyst* 2/12 (19 June 2009), accessed at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2009/090619B.html>; As late as February 2010, Davutoğlu stated that 'We consider the elections democratic and, in terms of the people's turnout, a positive development'. Fulya Özerkan, 'Turkey Hails Iran's Presidential Elections Again', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 2 February 2010.

<sup>42</sup> 'Turkish PM: Why Pressure Iran, Not Nuclear Israel?', *Middle East Online*, 17 March 2010, accessed at <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=37881>; Marc Champion, 'Erdoğan Calls Israel "Threat" to Peace', *Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 2010, accessed at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303591204575169980169518418.html>

<sup>43</sup> IAEA Votes to Censure Iran over Nuclear Cover-Up', *Reuters*, 27 November 2009, accessed at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5AQ1BZ20091127>

<sup>44</sup> 'The Tehran Tango', *Economist*, 17 May 2010, accessed at <http://www.economist.com/node/16152554>

Ankara's ties with Tehran began to crumble in 2011, when the two neighbours fell out over Syria and Turkey agreed to house US missile defence facilities. The honeymoon between them may be over, but the episode suggests that Ankara has made a concerted effort to establish a close partnership with Tehran.

The issue of Israel is another example of Ankara's about-face in foreign policy. In the 1990s, Ankara and Jerusalem developed a strategic partnership with a strong military component, which laid the foundations for a broader relationship that proved highly beneficial to both parties.<sup>45</sup> Given broad pro-Palestinian feelings in Turkey, it was the Oslo peace process that made this rapprochement possible;<sup>46</sup> the second Intifada thus made the relationship increasingly complicated from 2000. Yet in most sectors, including tourism, it persisted at a more discreet level, without generating domestic trouble in Turkey. At first, the AKP sought to mediate between Syria and Israel, as well as between the two Palestinian factions, Fatah and the Islamist Hamas movement.<sup>47</sup> Yet in 2006, following the violent power grab by Hamas in the Gaza strip, Ankara broke the Western boycott of Hamas when it invited its leader, Khaled Meshaal, to Ankara.<sup>48</sup> Following the 2008–9 war in Gaza, Ankara abandoned all appearances of balance, becoming the chief

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<sup>45</sup> Amikam Nachmani, 'The Remarkable Turkish–Israeli Tie', *Middle East Quarterly* 5/2 (June 1998), 19–29; Dov Waxman, 'Turkey and Israel: A New Balance of Power in the Middle East', *The Washington Quarterly* 22/1 (Winter 1999), 25–32.

<sup>46</sup> 'The Rise and Fall of the Israel–Turkey Alliance', *Moment Magazine*, July/August 2010, accessed at <http://www.momentmag.com/moment/issues/2010/08/Turkey.html>

<sup>47</sup> Ethan Bonner, 'Israel and Syria Negotiate as Turkey Mediates', *New York Times*, 21 May 2008, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/21/world/africa/21iht-mideast.4.13101516.html>; 'Turkey Wants to Mediate Hamas–Fatah Reconciliation Talks', *Haaretz*, 30 June 2009, accessed at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/turkey-wants-to-mediate-hamas-fatah-reconciliation-talks-1.281075>; 'Forging Palestinian Unity Tough Task, Even for Turkey', *Reuters*, 10 June 2010, accessed at <http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFLDE6580BH20100610>

<sup>48</sup> 'Turkey and Israel in Diplomatic Spat over Meshaal Visit', *Khaleej Times*, 19 February 2006.

castigator of Israel in international fora.<sup>49</sup> In January 2009, Erdoğan famously walked out of an event at the Davos World Economic Forum after starting a shouting match with Israeli President Shimon Peres; Turkey subsequently disinvented Israel from planned joint military exercises under the NATO aegis.<sup>50</sup> By the spring of 2010, an NGO closely connected to the AKP,<sup>51</sup> the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), designed and implemented the notorious 'Ship to Gaza' flotilla that aimed to put Israel in an untenable position. When nine Turkish citizens were killed after offering armed resistance to Israeli commandos boarding the ship, Ankara went wild. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu called the event 'Turkey's 9/11',<sup>52</sup> and a series of Turkish leaders threatened to cut off diplomatic relations with Israel, while Erdoğan stated in no uncertain terms that he did not believe Hamas was a terrorist organisation.<sup>53</sup> Subsequently, Turkish leaders threatened to provide military escort to future aid flotillas to Gaza, as well as to prevent Israel and Cyprus from extracting natural gas from their exclusive economic zones in the Mediterranean.

<sup>49</sup> 'Turkish PM Denies Anti-Semitism, Says "Jewish-Backed Media" Spread False Info on Gaza', *Haaretz*, 13 January 2009, accessed at <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/news/turkish-pm-denies-anti-semitism-says-jewish-backed-media-spread-false-info-on-gaza-1.268063>; Yigal Schleifer, 'Turkey: PM Erdoğan's Criticism of Israel Could Damage Ankara's Aspirations as Mid-East Peace Broker', *Eurasianet.org*, 4 February 2009, accessed at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav020509.shtml>; 'Erdoğan Publicly Slams Israel—Again', *Jerusalem Post*, 13 January 2009.

<sup>50</sup> 'Turkey Cancels Air Force Drill because of Israeli Participation', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 11 October 2009, accessed at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-cancels-air-force-drill-because-of-israeli-participation.-2009-10-11>

<sup>51</sup> On the IHH's connections to the AKP, see Svante E. Cornell, 'Turkish Hubris: Has the AKP Overreached in Its Foreign Policy?', *Turkey Analyst* 3/11 (7 June 2010), accessed at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2010/100607A.html>; Yaakov Katz, 'Erdoğan and Turkish Government Supported IHH', *Jerusalem Post*, 24 June 2011, accessed at <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=204948&R=3>; Michael Weiss, 'Ankara's Proxy', *Standpoint*, July/August 2010, accessed at <http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/node/3247/full>

<sup>52</sup> 'Turkish FM: Flotilla Affair is Turkey's 9/11', *Jerusalem Post*, 6 February 2010, accessed at <http://www.jpost.com/Home/Article.aspx?id=177185>

<sup>53</sup> Tank Işık, 'Erdoğan, Hamas'a sahîp çıktı: Direniş Örgütü' [Erdoğan Defends Hamas: Resistance Organization], *Radikal*, 4 June 2010, accessed at <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&Date=4.6.2010&ArticleID=1000714&CategoryID=78>; 'Erdoğan: Hamas not a Terrorist Group', *Jerusalem Post*, 4 June 2010, accessed at <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=177496>

As in the Iranian case, the progression of Turkish policy was clear: at first, Ankara sought to function as an honest broker and regional peacemaker; but gradually it moved to side with one of the parties involved.

As for Sudan, since 2005 it has taken centre stage in Ankara's efforts to engage with Africa. The AKP has made an effort to cultivate Sudan as Turkey's main 'partner in Africa', a term that AKP officials have used repeatedly. While bilateral trade has grown, economics alone cannot explain this close relationship—in 2007, Sudan was only Turkey's seventh-largest trade partner in Africa.<sup>54</sup> In spite of growing outrage over the crimes against humanity in Darfur committed by Khartoum-aligned militia groups, Erdoğan lent legitimacy to Khartoum during a 2006 visit, stating that he saw no sign of genocide in Darfur.<sup>55</sup> Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir was invited to Turkey twice in 2008. By 2009, Erdoğan was publicly arguing that Israel's alleged war crimes in Gaza were worse than whatever had happened in Darfur, where it is widely acknowledged that over 300,000 people have been killed: 'Gaza and Darfur should not be confused with each other. Fifteen hundred people were killed in Gaza. If there was something like this in Darfur, we would follow that to the end as well.'<sup>56</sup> Ankara's growing relationship with the regime of Omar Al-Bashir raised eyebrows in the West. Iran was a neighbouring country, and the Israel–Palestinian conflict generated much emotion even in the West, and especially within a Europe that was growing increasingly hostile to Israel. But there was

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<sup>54</sup> Gareth H. Jenkins, 'Sudanese Presidential Visit Renews Suspicions about Ideological Dimension to Turkey's Foreign Policy', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 15 January 2008, accessed at [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=33295](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=33295)

<sup>55</sup> Utku Çakırözler, 'Erdoğan: Darfur'da soykırım yapılmadı' [Erdoğan: No Genocide in Darfur], *Milliyet*, 30 March 2006, accessed at <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/03/30/siyaset/axsiy02.html>

<sup>56</sup> 'Prime Minister Erdoğan Reiterates "No Genocide" in Darfur', *Today's Zaman*, 9 November 2009.

no similar explanation for Ankara's ever closer relationship with Khartoum, except for growing identification with Islamic regimes. Erdoğan opened another window into his thoughts when he stated, in reference to Bashir, that 'a Muslim cannot commit genocide.'<sup>57</sup>

With regard to NATO, Ankara's handling of the nomination of Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen for NATO secretary general also generated controversy. Ankara opposed the nomination on several grounds, including Turkish anger at Denmark's hosting of the pro-PKK Roj television station. Yet the argument voiced most strongly by Turkish officials was that Rasmussen was unfit for the post as a result of refusing to apologise for the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005–6.<sup>58</sup> It was not only Ankara's opposition that attracted attention, but the way in which Ankara behaved—departing from the tradition of endorsing a candidate once a majority had settled for him. Instead, Turkey threatened to veto the nomination, forcing several high-level appointments of Turkish nationals before giving in. This stance led Turkey to lose one of the strongest supporters of Turkish EU membership, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner.<sup>59</sup> Since 2011, it should be noted that Ankara's penchant for controversy appears to have cooled somewhat. While it was visible in the initial stages of the Libya conflict, Turkey's falling out with Syria and Iran have led it to be more careful to nurture its relationship with the West, particularly the United States. Both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu have largely toned down their anti-Western rhetoric.

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<sup>57</sup> 'Müslüman Soykırım Yapamaz' [A Muslim Cannot Commit Genocide], *Hürriyet*, 9 November 2009, accessed at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/12893412.asp?gid=0&srld=0&oid=0&l=1>

<sup>58</sup> Turkey Agreed to NATO Chief After Obama Pledges', *Reuters*, 4 April 2009, accessed at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL4594859>

<sup>59</sup> Philippe Naughton, 'France Foreign Minister Rebuffs Obama's Call for Turkey's EU Admission', *Times*, 7 April 2009.

## Making Sense of the Foreign Policy Shift: Pragmatism, Overextension and Ideology

When faced with criticism of Turkey's foreign policy, Turkish leaders feel misunderstood. In a July 2010 interview, President Abdullah Gül rejected any notion that Turkey had turned its back on the West. Turkey 'was now a big economic power that had embraced democracy, human rights and the free market. It had become a "source of inspiration" in the region,' and 'the US and Europe should welcome its growing engagement in the Middle East because it [is] promoting Western values in a region largely governed by authoritarian regimes.'<sup>60</sup> Yet the episodes related above suggest that concerns over Turkey's policies are legitimate.

A number of factors have been cited to explain the evolution of Turkish foreign policy. First, much of the change can be ascribed to Turkey's growing economic and political clout. Since 1990, Turkey's GDP has quadrupled, exports have grown by a factor of 5, foreign direct investment by a factor of 25, and the value of traded stocks by a factor of 40. As the world's sixteenth-largest economy, it is only natural that Turkey should act with more self-confidence on the international scene and expand its relations with the neighbouring Middle East.

Second, Western mistakes have played their part. While Turkey has traditionally sided with Western states in major foreign policy issues, this relationship has always been based on reciprocity. Unfortunately, the growing calls by French and German leaders against Turkish accession have had a profound impact in Turkey, where politicians of all

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<sup>60</sup> Martin Fletcher and Suna Erdem, 'Turkey Acts to Ease Fears over Islamic Ties', *Times*, 3 July 2010.

stripes agree on the hypocrisy of Europe's stance on Turkey. Meanwhile, the US has failed to nurture bilateral ties. While the Cold War laid the foundations for Turkey's integration into the West, the relationship has not been developed on a new, post-Cold War footing. Particularly given the crisis in the West and the contrasting growth in many emerging markets, it should come as no surprise that a stronger Turkey would seek to go its own way on some issues, or pay less attention to Western priorities.

Third, with Turkey's foreign policy evolving even more rapidly than its economy, some of the differences that have arisen can be attributed to Turkey's overextension. From being a status quo power that engaged in few initiatives and then only with caution, Davutoğlu has dramatically expanded the level of Turkish diplomatic activity. The new self-confidence is explicit: Davutoğlu often laments the trepidation and lack of self-confidence of previous governments, implying that a Turkey at ease with its identity and history can play a great role in the region and beyond—one not locked into the one-dimensional focus on the Western alliance. Turkish leaders have begun referring to Turkey as not only a regional, but also a global power. In 2010, Davutoğlu explicitly stated his expectation that Turkey would be among the world's top 10 powers by 2023. In a 2009 speech in Sarajevo, he laid out Ankara's ambition: 'we will reintegrate the Balkan region, Middle East and Caucasus . . . together with Turkey as the centre of world politics in the future'<sup>61</sup>. While there is much to suggest Turkey's role in the world is likely to grow, confidence thus appears to have turned into hubris. At the bureaucratic level, Turkey's state apparatus—especially the foreign ministry—is not equipped to handle the many initiatives coming from Davutoğlu's

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<sup>61</sup> Speech by Ahmet Davutoğlu at the opening ceremony of the conference on the 'Ottoman legacy and Balkan Muslim Communities today' in Sarajevo, Friday, 16 October 2009, accessed at [http://www.ius.edu.ba/dzsusko/Davutoglu\\_transcript\\_dzs.doc](http://www.ius.edu.ba/dzsusko/Davutoglu_transcript_dzs.doc)

office; expansion of the foreign policy bureaucracy can only happen gradually. Thus, many Turkish initiatives have been ill prepared, suggesting a top-heavy approach rather than balanced and serious planning. This was true of the opening with Armenia; similarly, Turkish leaders appeared truly surprised when the Turkish–Brazilian deal on Iran failed to prevent new sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council. But mostly, perhaps, these policies have been based on the notion that America and the West need Turkey more than Turkey needs the West. This may make sense when Turkey is growing while the West is in crisis, but it may be a dangerous assumption in the long term.

As much as these factors explain, they are nevertheless unable to account for the breadth of the changes taking place under the AKP's tenure. This begs the question of to what extent ideological factors have been at play, a question that is particularly relevant given the AKP's roots in the strongly ideological milieu of the *Milli Görüş* school. In fact, statements suggestive of a reassertion of Islamist ideology are plentiful, as detailed in the previous section. It should be mentioned, though, that Erdoğan's statements on Israel show not only a growing antipathy towards the Jewish state, but are strikingly evocative of the anti-Semitic tendencies pervading Islamist movements throughout the world. Thus, in 2009 he blamed 'Jewish-backed media' for allegedly spreading lies about the Gaza war; and when the *Economist* endorsed the Turkish opposition party, the CHP, in the June 2011 elections, Erdoğan accused it of working on behalf of Israeli interests and castigated the CHP's leader for being an Israeli tool. At the same time he expressed regret over the fact that the CHP, under Turkey's second president, İsmet

Inönü, had recognised the State of Israel,<sup>62</sup> alluding also to a growing perception 'equating the star of Zion with the swastika'.<sup>63</sup> Many of Erdoğan's most combative statements have occurred during electoral campaigns and thus could be interpreted as electoral populism. Nevertheless, the formulation and conduct of Turkish foreign policy has been dominated by Davutoğlu, who is widely considered to be the architect of the AKP's foreign policy and a major influence on Erdoğan's views. With a long academic career preceding his ascent to political fame, Davutoğlu has left a substantial trail of published work that provides ample insights into his worldview.

While Davutoğlu's best-known work is his 2000 book *Stratejik Derinlik*<sup>64</sup> (Strategic Depth), of equal interest are his earlier works: a doctoral dissertation, published in 1993 as *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory*,<sup>65</sup> and his 1994 volume *Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World*.<sup>66</sup> These works are dense theoretical treatises, as are several lengthy articles published in Turkish in the late 1990s. While heavy going, the main thrust of Davutoğlu's work is crystal clear: it is dominated by a deep conviction of the incompatibility of the West and the Islamic world, and by resentment of the West for its attempt to impose its values and political system on the rest of the world. While most of this work is almost two decades old, Davutoğlu has continued to reiterate

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<sup>62</sup> 'Turkish PM Denies Anti-Semitism, Says "Jewish-Backed Media" Spread False Info on Gaza', *Ha'aretz*, 13 January 2009; 'Turkey's Leaders Livid over Economist Article', *Reuters*, 6 June 2011; 'Erdoğan'dan Kılıçdaroğlu Eleştirisi', *Bugün*, 4 June 2011, accessed at <http://www.bugun.com.tr/haber-detay/157409-erdogan-dan-kilicdaroglu-elestirisi-haberi.aspx>

<sup>63</sup> Sedat Ergin, 'Can the Symbols of Nazism and Judaism Be Considered Equal?' *Hürriyet*, 22 June 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms: the Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993).

<sup>66</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World* (Kuala Lumpur: Mahir Publications, 1994).

the same views, showing their continued relevance to his thinking, as he did in a lengthy interview in 2010.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, Davutoğlu argues that the 'conflicts and contrasts between Western and Islamic political thought originate mainly from their philosophical, methodological, and theoretical background rather than from mere institutional and historical differences'.<sup>68</sup> Davutoğlu's problem with the Western 'modernist paradigm' lies in its 'peripherality of revelation', that is, the distinction drawn between reason and experience, on the one hand, and revelation on the other, resulting in an 'acute crisis of Western civilization'.<sup>69</sup> By contrast, Davutoğlu underscores the Islamic concept of Tawhid, 'the unity of truth and the unity of life which provides a strong internal consistency' by rejecting the misconceived secular division of matters belonging to church and state.<sup>70</sup> Such a view is neither merely theological nor theoretical, and its main implication is that the Western and Islamic worlds are essentially different, and that Turkey's long-standing effort to become part of the West is both impossible and undesirable. It is impossible because it goes against the country's intrinsic nature: the 'failure of the Westernization-oriented intelligentsia in the Muslim countries . . . demonstrates the extensive characteristic of this civilizational confrontation'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Kerim Balci, 'Philosophical Depth: A Scholarly Talk with the Turkish Foreign Minister', *Turkish Review*, 1 November 2010, accessed at [http://www.turkishreview.org/tr/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=223051](http://www.turkishreview.org/tr/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=223051)

<sup>68</sup> Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms*, 195; Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation*, 13–14.

<sup>70</sup> Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms*, 196; Michael Koplow, 'Hiding in Plain Sight', *Foreign Policy*, 2 December 2010, accessed at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/02/hiding\\_in\\_plain\\_sight](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/02/hiding_in_plain_sight)

<sup>71</sup> Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation*, 64.

As far as Turkey is concerned, Davutoğlu concludes that Atatürk's republican endeavour was 'an ambitious and utopian project to achieve a total civilizational change which ignored the real cultural, historical, social, and political forces in the society'. Moreover, it is undesirable, because, Davutoğlu argues, the West is in a state of crisis. As early as 1994, he argued that capitalism and socialism were 'different forms of the same philosophical background' and that 'the collapse of socialism is an indication for a comprehensive civilizational crisis and transformation rather than an ultimate victory of Western capitalism'.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the downfall of communism was not a victory for the West but the first step on the path to the end of European domination of the world, to be followed by the collapse of Western capitalism.<sup>73</sup> Davutoğlu approvingly characterises the emergence of the Islamic state as a response to the imposition of Western nation states on the world and takes the argument one step further: viewing globalisation as a challenge to the nation state system, he suggests that 'the core issue for Islamic polity seems to be to reinterpret its political tradition and theory as an alternative world-system rather than merely as a program for the Islamization of nation-states'.<sup>74</sup>

Davutoğlu's worldview has important consequences for how recent key world events have been interpreted in Ankara. For example, since the 2008 financial crisis has affected the West much more severely than emerging economies, it could easily be taken as evidence of the supposed 'acute crisis of the West' that Davutoğlu wrote about 20 years ago, thus vindicating his view of Western civilisation in decline. Davutoğlu's writings demonstrate the power of the ideology that lies behind some of Turkey's most controversial foreign policy stances. Indeed, the

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<sup>72</sup> Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation*, 64.

<sup>73</sup> Davutoğlu, *Civilizational Transformation*, iii.

<sup>74</sup> Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms*, 202.

increasing tendency of the AKP government to side with Islamist causes and its growing attention to non-Western powers, combined with its often instinctive suspicion of Western motives, can only be fully understood if the ideological background of Turkey's top decision-makers is taken into account. This is not to say that the other factors previously cited are not useful in grasping the changes in Turkish foreign policy. However, it suggests that the ideological component must be factored in for a full understanding of Ankara's evolving policies.

### **The Collapse of 'Zero Problems': Towards a Reassessment?**

The cataclysms of the past two years have challenged the foundations of Turkey's new foreign policy. As the honeymoon with the Middle East fades, so might the salience of ideology, perhaps giving way to a pragmatic reassessment of Turkey's relationship with Europe.

The Arab Spring has proven challenging for Turkey, which has seemed to struggle with formulating its stance in the face of unfolding events. Ankara was an early cheerleader for the Egyptian revolution: Prime Minister Erdoğan called on Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak to resign on 2 February 2011, making him the first world leader to do so. The language used was markedly different from Turkey's reaction to the 2009 events in Iran, which were otherwise very similar to the Egyptian protests. If Ankara was unequivocal on Egypt, Libya proved more complicated, not least because of the large Turkish business presence in the country. When violence in Libya escalated, the Turkish leadership refrained from taking a clear stance. In fact,

Erdoğan and Davutoğlu initially opposed UN sanctions on the Gaddafi regime and rejected calls for a NATO operation in the developing civil war. Erdoğan, Gül and Davutoğlu cast doubt on Western motives, referring to 'hidden agendas' and the West's thirst for Libya's oil resources.<sup>75</sup> When some of its reservations were taken into account, Ankara eventually relented and approved the NATO operation, but not before angry protestors had picketed the Turkish consulate in Benghazi over Ankara's indecision. Ankara called for Gaddafi's resignation in April, and formally withdrew its ambassador from Tripoli and recognised the Transitional Council in early July.

The deteriorating situation in Syria has proven to be the most difficult for Ankara to handle. A country with which Turkey almost went to war in 1998, Syria had become what one expert called 'the model success story for [Turkey's] improved foreign policy'.<sup>76</sup> A close rapprochement developed between the two countries, involving the lifting of visa regimes, economic integration and deepened strategic relations. In particular, Erdoğan developed a close personal relationship with Bashar Al-Assad. When Assad's violence against civilian protesters escalated over the spring and summer of 2011, Ankara took it upon itself to pressure the Syrian regime to exercise restraint. However, Turkish efforts appeared to yield no result, in spite of repeated trips by Davutoğlu to Damascus. In June, Erdoğan deplored the 'inhumane crackdown' and stated that 'we can't support Syria amidst all this'.<sup>77</sup> In early August, confronted with the large-scale repression in Hama at the beginning of

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<sup>75</sup> 'Turkey's PM Questions West Motives in Libya', *Worldbulletin.net*, 24 March 2011, accessed at <http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=71591>

<sup>76</sup> Henri Barkey, 'Assad Stands Alone', *National Interest*, 14 June 2011.

<sup>77</sup> 'Turkey Deplores "Inhumane" Syrian Crackdown, Reprimands Assad Family', *Today's Zaman*, 10 June 2011, accessed at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-246828-turkey-deplores-inhumane-syrian-crackdown-reprimands-assad-family.html>

Ramadan, Turkish leaders spoke of 'shock', and of being unable to 'remain indifferent to the violence', and issued condemnations but continued to demand reform in Syria.<sup>78</sup> When Syrian promises to Turkey to halt the violence against civilians were broken, Ankara called for 'democratic change' but initially stopped short of demanding Assad's resignation, as Western allies had by this time. By late autumn, Erdoğan had urged Assad to resign, endorsed UN sanctions on Syria and come to support the opposition to Assad. In November, Turkey even floated the possibility of military intervention.

Thus, Turkey's response to the Arab Spring lends itself to two conclusions. First, it shook the policy of 'zero problems with neighbours' to its core. Second, it showed that the level of Turkish influence in the Middle East has been greatly exaggerated.

An inescapable conclusion of the events of the Arab Spring is that Davutoğlu's much-touted doctrine of 'zero problems with neighbours' lies in tatters. The refugees pouring over the Turkish border fleeing Assad's crackdown have triggered an inevitable test of the Davutoğlu doctrine. Ankara has proven unable to use its clout with the Assad regime to affect its policies to any significant degree and has effectively wiped out the results of the considerable investment it had made in ties with its former adversary. Moreover, Turkey's growing criticism of Assad has led to a deterioration of Turkish–Iranian ties. Since June 2011, official Iranian media outlets have openly criticised Turkey's stance on Syria, alluding to Turkey doing the bidding of the West in the region. Thus, a second pillar of the zero-problems policy, the rapprochement with Iran, has also been threatened by the events in Syria. Indeed, a policy of 'zero problems'

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<sup>78</sup> 'Turkey Reacts Strongly to Bloody Operation by Syrian Regime in Hama', *Turkish Daily News*, 1 August 2011, accessed at <http://www.businesssturkeytoday.com/turkey-reacts-strongly-to-bloody-operation-by-syrian-regime-in-hama/>

essentially suggests the absence of principles or, for that matter, concrete and well-defined national interests. With the demise of the doctrine, Turkey will need to develop a more realistic one to supplant it.

A second conclusion is that the AKP government has grossly overestimated its influence in the Middle East. Erdoğan's hard line on Israel had indeed made him a darling of the Arab street, and the AKP government had spent significant effort on building trade relations within the region. As seen above, Turkey peddled its clout in the Middle East as a key reason for the West to be supportive of the changes in its foreign policy—this supposed influence has been a key element in Ankara's claims to great power status. Nevertheless, the events of the Arab Spring suggest that the level of Turkey's rhetoric has not been matched by its actual influence. That is not to say that Turkey is not a rising power, but that the country's leadership has been unable to realistically gauge its true level of influence. Indeed, building regional influence of the type to which Turkey aspires is a process that takes place gradually and incrementally over decades, and not as an immediate result of Davutoğlu's hyperactive diplomacy.

As Ankara rebuilds its foreign policy, it appears that a reassessment is underway. The AKP euphoria over the Middle East may yet go the same way as the nationalist euphoria over the emerging Turkey in the 1990s: in both instances a cold shower forced Turkish leaders to realise that its ambitions and resources were not in alignment. In the 1990s, this drove home the lesson that Turkey's anchoring in the West was irreplaceable; it remains to be seen if the current turmoil leads Ankara to similar conclusions.

## Conclusions

While the early 2000s provided hope for the consolidation of liberal democracy in Turkey, recent years have seen a reversal of that trend. The commitment to democratic principles, and to integration with Europe, has declined both within the governing AKP, and among the opposition parties. This slide at the political level has been paralleled at the popular level as a result of the combination of factors described in this essay.

This is not to say that Turkey lacks either democratic or pro-European forces. In fact, such forces are present within the AKP, just as they are within the CHP and even, though more tentatively, in the MHP and the pro-Kurdish BDP. In the AKP, a sizeable pro-European and democratic constituency holds positions in the party hierarchy and appears increasingly disillusioned by the party leadership's policies and Erdoğan's antics. These forces can mostly trace their political origins to the centre-right, but a chunk of the Islamist core of the party also appears to have embraced democratic principles. Of course, the extent of this commitment will be seen if and when the Islamic conservatives lose power. In the CHP, more democratic-minded forces appear to have regained leadership of the party, although a full transformation cannot happen overnight. Yet these forces have been more or less shunned by their European counterparts, who have focused exclusively on contact with the AKP.

In parallel, Turkish foreign policy has become increasingly decoupled from the West. Nonetheless, Turkey is now an active and independent player in regional affairs, whose clout is likely to continue to grow. It is also a less predictable force than it used to be, and one whose policies will occasionally clash with those of the West. While a cause for

concern, Ankara's changing foreign policy is not necessarily a cause for alarm. On many issues, Turkey is a power with which the West can work: as the Libyan operation showed, suspicions of Western motives notwithstanding, Ankara came around to join the undertaking. The reaction to the Syrian crisis and Turkish cooperation on missile defence are further examples of this. But significantly, whenever Turkey and the West do cooperate, it will be because their interests happen to align rather than as a result of shared values. Where the values of the Turkish leadership do not align with those of the West, most prominently concerning Cyprus and Israel, Turkish behaviour will continue to diverge from that of the Ankara the West used to know. It is increasingly clear that the Turkish leadership does not consider itself Western, a worldview that will inevitably have far-reaching implications for Turkey's role in the Euro–Atlantic community.

## Recommendations

The analysis above suggests that Europe should revisit its policies regarding Turkey. Several recommendations follow as to what such policies might include:

- For strategic reasons, the EU should re-engage Turkey. In the past decade, Turkey has grown economically and begun to wield a level of influence in its neighbourhood that most European observers have yet to comprehend. Simply put, it is in the interests of the European Union to lock in, to the extent possible, this rising power to act in line with European interests—no matter what opinion one has on the issue of Turkish EU membership. As the last three years have shown, a Turkey that is decoupled

from Europe is likely to be more turbulent and unstable domestically. In foreign policy terms, a decoupled Turkey has the capacity to undermine or hurt European interests in a wide range of areas, from energy security to the Middle East conflict and relations with powers such as Iran or Russia. The collapse of Ankara's Middle East-centred policies provides an important opportunity for such a re-engagement.

- EU leaders, despite the political difficulties of doing so, need to seek a solution regarding the handling of Turkey's EU membership bid, because the current impasse is not sustainable. Presently, neither Brussels nor Ankara appear to be interested in pursuing the adjustment process; yet left festering, this issue will poison all relations, including those that are not membership-related. If several years pass without any chapters being either opened or closed, this will have a strongly negative effect on Europe's influence on, and standing in, Turkey.
- While re-engaging Turkey, the EU should do so in a clear-eyed and discerning manner. In practice, this means that the EU should avoid picking favourites and embrace a broad-based approach that includes engaging with all relevant forces, including liberals, conservatives, Islamists and nationalists of different stripes. In the past decade, Europeans have alienated large segments of the Turkish political spectrum by overwhelmingly focusing on ties with the AKP, ignoring all opposition forces in the process.
- Europe must speak clearly and loudly about the democratic deficiencies and backtracking of the AKP. So far, the EU, European governments and the

European media have largely failed to draw attention to the fate of the Turkish media and the indiscriminate incarcerations made as a result of the Ergenekon investigation. Yet Europe does maintain an influence in Turkey, and only by raising the AKP's excesses in dialogues with the government, and criticising them publicly, can these be checked.

- The AKP has not lived up to the promise of a 'Muslim Democratic' party on the model of Europe's Christian Democrats. The movement—and in particular, its current leader—has yet to shed the remnants of its authoritarian heritage; indeed, these have re-emerged as the AKP's power has grown. Likewise, the opposition CHP possesses statist traits that lead it to fall short of the standards required of a European social democratic party. Yet none of this should mean that these two parties should be expelled from, or shunned within, the European People's Party (EPP) or the Party of European Socialists (PES). On the contrary, both parties need continued and redoubled exposure to the principles and practices of Western democracy, and training in these areas. The nationalist MHP may prove a harder nut to crack, yet it must also be engaged.
- Europe needs to reach out to Turkish civil society and broaden the pro-democratic and pro-European constituency. While engaging political parties is important, Europe has lost ground not only in the political sphere but in Turkish society too. Reversing this trend will depend on European policies; but also on Turkish society's exposure to Europe. A major obstacle in this regard remains language: Turkish is

a non-Indo-European language, meaning that Turks face a greater barrier to learning European languages, and thus find themselves excessively dependent on Turkish-language media and news sources. Redoubling language training efforts, which are in great demand, would play an important role in increasing Turkey's exposure to Europe.

- Finally, while pursuing efforts to re-engage and integrate Turkey with Europe, European leaders must also mentally adjust to the changing balances in world politics. A decade or two ago, it was Turkey that was desperately trying to convince a recalcitrant Europe of the benefits of a Turkey in Europe. In the not too distant future, the tables may be turned: Turkey may no longer seek EU membership. Alternatively, Turkey may move towards a model which combines a skewed market economy with a semi-authoritarian political system—whether under the rule of the Islamic conservative movement as now, or under a future nationalist political coalition. Europe needs to prepare for such scenarios, and consider how it would respond to them.

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# Regime Change in the Court Room: EU Soft Power and Civil-Military Relations in Turkey

Gerald Knaus

**Executive Summary** . . . . . 71

**Turkey's Ancien Regime** . . . . .72

    A Military Nation . . . . .73

    A History of Coups . . . . .78

**A Revolution in Three Acts** . . . . .81

    Act One: EU Soft Power and its Limits . . . . .81

    Act Two: 'The Military may soon Step In' . . . . .90

    Act Three: Regime Change in the Court Room . . . . .98

**Consolidation** . . . . .105

    A Military Besieged . . . . .105

    Completing the Transition . . . . .109

**Bibliography** . . . . .113

## Executive Summary

For many decades it was the men in uniform who defined the parameters of Turkish domestic and foreign policy. Despite regular democratic elections Turkey had a political system in which the generals ruled without having to govern. Since Turkey's first democratic elections in 1950, the armed forces have intervened about once every 10 years: in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. This succession of military interventions created a constitutional basis for the military's privileged position. Each time it reshaped the country's institutions, always increasing its influence in politics and public life.

Then, within the space of a few years, this system of military guardianship crumbled. The generals proved unable to veto decisions they deeply resented, such as the 2007 election of the AKP's Abdullah Gül as president. They lost control over the National Security Council (NSC) and the Supreme Military Council (SMC), two crucial institutions they had always dominated. The generals also lost their judicial impunity. A large number of soldiers and generals were put on trial in courtrooms across Turkey, many on charges of conspiracy. It was a dramatic, traumatic and unexpected turn of events for Turkey's proud military.

This report looks at the causes of this dramatic transformation in the relationship between the civilian government and senior generals. It looks at the influence of the European Union accession process and at the role played by the AKP-led government since 2002. It highlights how a series of recent court cases, starting in 2008, have

shifted the balance of power in Turkey. It also notes the limits of this transformation in civil-military relations as even today Turkey is far from meeting EU standards.

### Turkey's Ancien Regime

In July 2011 the chief of the Turkish general staff, General Isik Kosaner, resigned from his position together with three of Turkey's most senior generals, the leaders of the navy, army and air force. He did so in the wake of a wave of arrests of senior military officials, including the commander of the military academy. In his resignation statement he complained about a political campaign against his institution:

At this moment 250 generals, admirals, officers, non-commissioned officers, sergeant majors of the gendarmerie, 173 of whom are on active duty and 77 in retirement, are deprived of their freedom . . . It has not gone without notice that one of the objectives of the investigation and these long lasting detentions is to keep the Turkish army constantly on the agenda in order to present it as a criminal organization to the public.

The president and prime minister moved quickly to appoint Kosaner's successor. A single photograph from the ensuing August 2011 meeting of the Supreme Military Council captured the new political climate: the Turkish prime minister, instead of sitting alongside the new chief of staff, as had been the rule until then, sat alone at the top of the table, chairing the meeting. In Turkey commentators saw the beginning of a new era.

Over the past decade three successive turns in power for Turkey's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) have brought about a dramatic transformation in the relationship between the civilian government and senior generals: a revolution dramatic enough to qualify as non-violent regime change.

### A Military Nation

Military thinking has strongly shaped the Turkish republic since its very beginnings.<sup>79</sup> Among the first seven heads of state between 1923 and 1989, only one, Celal Bayar, was not a former general. He was ousted in the country's first military coup in 1960 and sentenced to death by the junta that overthrew him, although he was subsequently pardoned on account of his age. Since Turkey's first free and democratic elections in 1950, the armed forces have intervened about once every 10 years: in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. As İsmet İnönü, another former general and president, noted in 1971, 'From time to time, Turkey goes through "restoration" periods. During these periods, the army intervenes in politics, stays in power for a while and then leaves. After some time, we the politicians begin once more to mismanage the country, and the army intervenes once more.'<sup>80</sup>

A succession of military interventions helped create a constitutional basis for the privileged position of generals in the political system. Each time the army set about reshaping

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<sup>79</sup> P. Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2003).

<sup>80</sup> M. A. Birand, 12 Eylül Saat: 04:00 [12 September, Time: 04:00 AM] (Istanbul: Karacan, 1984), 13.

the country's institutions, it increased its influence in politics and public life. The men in uniform defined the basic parameters of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy. As one scholar, Steven Cook, observed, this was a system in which the generals ruled without having to govern: 'Although the officers are responsible for the political order' he noted, 'the presence of institutions resembling a democratic polity effectively shields them from any public dissatisfaction.'<sup>81</sup> The 1961 constitution, adopted after the first military coup, cemented the army's influence through the creation of a National Security Council (NSC) as a constitutional body.<sup>82</sup> The result was 'a double headed political system: the civilian council of ministers coexisted with the national security council on the executive level.'<sup>83</sup> With the National Security Council Law of 1983<sup>84</sup> passed after yet another coup, the definition of 'national security' became so wide that it covered almost everything, including 'the defence and protection of the state against every kind of external and internal threat to the constitutional order, national existence, unity, and to all its interests and contractual rights in the international arena including in the political, social, cultural and economic spheres'.<sup>85</sup>

The NSC had a majority of military members. Its task was to define threats to national security. It was to follow up on what other institutions did to carry out national security policy. Threats to national security were set out in

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<sup>81</sup> S. Cook, *Ruling But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 106.

<sup>82</sup> Secretariat of the National Security Council, accessed at [http://www.mgk.gov.tr/Ingilizce/index\\_en.htm](http://www.mgk.gov.tr/Ingilizce/index_en.htm)

<sup>83</sup> Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, 'The Anatomy of the Turkish Military's Political Autonomy', *Comparative Politics* 15/2 (January 1997).

<sup>84</sup> Turkey, *Law on the National Security Council and its Secretary General*, Art. 2a, (9 November 1983).

<sup>85</sup> G. Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics*, Adelphi Paper 337 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46.

the National Security Policy Document, updated every few years and kept secret even from parliament. It was referred to as Turkey's 'secret constitution'.<sup>86</sup> All other ministries were required by law to act within the country's national security policy. The generals also controlled the powerful secretariat of the NSC, one of the country's most important executive bodies with almost one thousand staff members whose secretary general was always a four star general. The secretariat had the right to request all documents, public or secret, from all other bodies of the state. As the NSC's secretary general, General Tuncer Kilinc, explained in 2003: 'Psychological warfare is in fact carried out to enlighten society about destructive and separatist activity. At the same time, it includes counter propaganda targeted at destructive and separatist propaganda.'<sup>87</sup> The secretariat would 'employ all available measures to guide the Turkish nation towards Atatürkist thought, principles and reforms, nationalist ethos and values, and nationalist goals.'<sup>88</sup>

The ministry of defence, on the other hand, was essentially a department within the office of the chief of general staff (it was even located in the same building). Undersecretaries of defence and all department heads were military.<sup>89</sup> Promotions and dismissals of senior military officials were decided in the Supreme Military Council (SMC), where the generals had a majority (15 of them facing the prime minister and defence minister) and where decisions could not be appealed in any court. The chief of the general staff, not the ministry, drew up all

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<sup>86</sup> This is known as the National Security Policy Document.

<sup>87</sup> 'NSC Announcement on the Secret Provisions', *Radikal*, 8 September 2003.

<sup>88</sup> H. Akay, *Security Sector in Turkey: Questions, Problems and Solutions* (Istanbul: TESEV Publications, 2010), 11, accessed at [http://www.aciktoplumvakfi.org.tr/pdf/guven\\_rapor\\_dunya\\_duzelti.pdf](http://www.aciktoplumvakfi.org.tr/pdf/guven_rapor_dunya_duzelti.pdf)

<sup>89</sup> According to Law 1325, Milli Savunma Bakanligi Gorev ve Teskilat Hakkinda Kanun, Article 1, paragraph 2.

important operational plans, such as the Turkish National Military Strategy (TUMAS), which was not even shared with parliament.

The generals also controlled the gendarmerie, Turkey's oldest police force. Although it was supposed to report to the ministry of interior in times of peace, the gendarmerie was always headed by a four star general, used conscripts, and its members were protected from scrutiny by the shield of the military justice system. It became—as far as domestic security was concerned—a rival organisation to the regular police services. The military also maintained an extensive autonomous justice system, with uniformed judges and prosecutors who were part of the military chain of command. The Turkish military 'vigorously resisted any attempt by the civilian authorities to investigate allegations against serving or retired officers.'<sup>90</sup> While military courts could judge and sentence civilians, the reverse was not possible. No civilian court could put on trial members, current or retired, of the armed forces.<sup>91</sup>

Turkey's generals saw themselves as guardians of an indigenous ideology. Kemalism was at the heart of the military curriculum, with Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the nation, worshipped as a quasi religious figure:

On 13 March, the anniversary of Ataturk enrolling as a cadet, at morning roll-call, an officer calls out Ataturk's name and the cadets respond in unison: 'Present!' It is not unusual for cadets to be so overcome with

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<sup>90</sup> G. Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics*, Adelphi Papers 41/337, International Institute for Strategic Studies, (London, 2001), 29.

<sup>91</sup> 'Turkish Government Could Eliminate Military Judiciary', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 28 November 2010, accessed at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=government-plans-to-bypass-military-judiciary-2010-11-28>

emotion . . . Photographs of likenesses of Ataturk's face in the clouds or in the shadows cast by the clouds on a hill are hung on walls in training academies.<sup>92</sup>

Within the armed forces a process of rigorous ideological vetting, which begins in four military high schools and continues all the way through the staff colleges, and which relies on regular dismissals of those judged not ideologically reliable, was intended to ensure that only like-minded people rose to be generals. A famous speech (*Nutuk*) delivered by Ataturk in October 1927, which summarised the Turkish War of Liberation, is the sacred book of Kemalism. It describes a social-Darwinian struggle for national survival. To survive, Ataturk told his audience, a state had to be internally cohesive and on guard against traitors: 'The inner structure of the state, including many cultures and national characters, different aspirations, and disharmonious peoples with their contradictory wishes, undoubtedly sits on a shaky foundation and is therefore rotten.'<sup>93</sup> As Ataturk also explained, 'Gentlemen, power and sovereignty are not given from one person to another by scholarly debates or polemics. Sovereignty is taken by force.'<sup>94</sup>

For generations of civilian leaders, a cycle of military coups drove home the message that a politician's ability to get along with, and defer to, the generals was the key to survival. A coup was always more than a vague threat. It was a Damoclean sword that continually hung over the whole political process. This was a system of civil-military relations without parallel in any other European democracy.

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<sup>92</sup> Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance*, 32.

<sup>93</sup> T. Alaranta, 'Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's Six Day Speech of 1927: Defining the Official Historical View of the Foundation of the Turkish Republic', *Turkish Studies* 9/1 (2008).

<sup>94</sup> Alaranta, 'Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's Six Day Speech of 1927'.

## A History of Coups

Turkey was a founding member of the Council of Europe, has been a member of NATO since the 1950s and has had an association agreement with the European Economic Community since 1963. And yet Turkey's political history during the cold war is reminiscent less of its European allies than of Latin America. When in the early morning of 27 May 1960 a junta took control in Istanbul and Ankara and Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and the whole parliamentary delegation of his party were arrested, the *New York Times* described this intervention as 'quick, efficient and virtually bloodless.'<sup>95</sup> Menderes and two of his ministers were put on trial and executed in September 1961. At the time the primary concern for the Western powers was that the coup leaders ensure 'that Turkey . . . continue her role in the Western alliance against the Soviet Union. . . The modern Turkish Army has always been bitterly anti-Russian and now is firmly anti-communist.'<sup>96</sup>

Not all military interventions required the formal suspension of democracy. In 1971, for instance, the generals presented the civilian government with a list of demands, warning that failure to implement these would result in the use of force. The demands presented by the generals were not negotiable. A state of emergency was declared in Turkey's big cities, followed by mass arrests and widespread torture. The government in power fell and a new government of technocrats proceeded to implement the military's directives .

The 1980 coup was also preceded by declarations of states of emergency in many parts of the country, and

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<sup>95</sup> 'Junta in Control', *New York Times*, 28 May 1960.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

planned at least a year in advance by then Chief of General Staff Kenan Evren. When the coup was finally announced by radio in the early morning hours of 12 September 1980, it hardly came as a surprise. The generals declared martial law, sent tanks into the streets, imposed a curfew, dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution, and banned all political parties and most NGOs. Immediately following the coup the US State Department stated: 'While expressing the hope that democracy would be restored in Turkey, the United States indicated that it was sympathetic to the goals of the Turkish military.'<sup>97</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people were arrested, and torture was widespread. Apologists for these interventions argued that the role of the generals was 'corrective' and that the military did not seek to stay in control for long. In fact, although Kenan Evren announced a return to civilian rule 'within a reasonable time', the suspension of democratic institutions continued for three years. Evren himself remained president until 1989.

Finally, the most recent intervention, in 1997, proceeded along lines similar to the one in 1971. With the end of the cold war the justification for an intervention had shifted from anti-communism to anti-Islamism. The electoral gains of Necmettin Erbakan, an Islamist leader, and his party, had rattled the generals' nerves. With a quarter of the votes, Erbakan became leader of a coalition government. On 22 January 1997 the commanders of the armed forces met at the naval base in Golcuk to discuss the threat that this posed to the secular nature of the state. At a National Security Council meeting on 28 February 1997, the general staff issued an 18-point memorandum requesting the government to take measures against 'Islamist activities'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> 'Turks Gave Assurances before the Coup', *New York Times*, 13 September 1980.

<sup>98</sup> See the memorandum in Turkish. Accessed at [http://tr.wikisource.org/wiki/28\\_%C5%9Eubat\\_Kararlar%C4%B1](http://tr.wikisource.org/wiki/28_%C5%9Eubat_Kararlar%C4%B1)

In the memorandum the army demanded among other things 'control of media groups that oppose the Turkish Armed Forces' and 'prevention of extremist infiltration into the Turkish Armed Forces.'<sup>99</sup> The threat of an armed intervention hung in the air, as 'sources close to the high command informed journalists that a full-blooded coup remained an option of last resort.'<sup>100</sup> The military also launched a cross-border operation into northern Iraq in May 1997 without informing the government. The message was clear. It was the generals, not the ministers, who were in charge. Prime Minister Erbakan stepped down on 18 June.<sup>101</sup> This was only the beginning of a broader campaign, however.<sup>102</sup> In January 1998 the Welfare Party was closed down on the grounds that it had attempted to overthrow the secular order. Erbakan was banned from politics for five years. In April 1998 the mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, also a Welfare Party member, was sentenced to 10 months in prison for 'inciting religious hatred'.

The 1997 intervention reminded politicians once more of the risk of eliciting the generals' anger. Gareth Jenkins, an expert on the Turkish military who subsequently wrote a book on it in 2001, expected this pattern to continue for the foreseeable future: 'If the Islamist movement is able to reunite and once again pose a threat to the regime, there is little doubt that civilian Kemalists will expect the military to safeguard, or at least take the lead in protecting, secularism rather than taking on the responsibility themselves.'<sup>103</sup> This

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<sup>99</sup> See Cook, *Ruling But Not Governing*, 125.

<sup>100</sup> Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance*.

<sup>101</sup> M. Demir, 'Post-modern darbe taniminin 10 yıllık sirri' [The 10 year secret of the post modern coup definition], *Sabah*, 28 February 2007, accessed at <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/02/28/siy106.html>

<sup>102</sup> M. Howe, *Turkey Today: A Nation Divided Over Islam's Revival* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 238.

<sup>103</sup> Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance*, 67.

was a view shared by Turkey's generals. In September 1999 the chief of general staff, Huseyin Kivrikoglu, stated publicly that the military was determined to continue the struggle against fundamentalism 'for a hundred, a thousand years if necessary.'<sup>104</sup>

## A Revolution in Three Acts

### Act One: EU Soft Power and its Limits

At the December 1999 EU summit in Helsinki, Turkey obtained EU candidate status. In 2000 the European Commission concluded in its annual report that 'Turkey still does not meet the Copenhagen political criteria' concerning the state of human rights and the quality of its democracy. The EU criticised in particular the impact of the Turkish military's influence on civilian politics, singling out the extraordinary role of the National Security Council (NSC). In March 2003 Dutch Christian Democrat Arie Oostlander, the European Parliament's rapporteur on Turkey, listed a whole range of specific reforms that would have to be made. Turkey had to 'align civilian control of the military with practice in EU member states'. Turkey needed to 'abolish the National Security Council in its current form'. Oostlander's report warned that 'the army's excessive role slows down Turkey's development towards a democratic and pluralist system'. There needed to be 'full parliamentary control over the military budget as a part of the national budget'. In order to 'move towards the European Union

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 65.

the Turkish constitution should be rewritten based on EU regulations rather than on Kemalism'.<sup>105</sup> All this required more than passing a few new laws, however; the real obstacle to democratisation was 'the underlying philosophy of the Turkish state'. Oostlander described this ideology as 'statism, an important role for the army, and a very rigid attitude to religion'. In an early draft of his report Oostlander referred to 'Kemalism' as a 'barrier to EU membership'.<sup>106</sup>

The 2002 program of the main opposition party, CHP, presented EU accession as a way of 'defending the "Turkish Model" inherited by Ataturk': as a choice between 'the enlightenment of the Ataturk revolutions, or intolerance, non-modernity, and dogmatism'.<sup>107</sup> This view was shared by the chief of general staff from 2002 to 2006, General Hilmi Ozkok. Ozkok defined Kemalism as looking into the future, not into the past: 'One has to be able to look in the same direction as Ataturk did, and have the same foresight that Ataturk had'.<sup>108</sup> Ozkok later explained that the 'EU is a system of rules and principles that can only lead to prosperity, happiness and success'.<sup>109</sup> The military's role, in his view, was to support the EU process and democratisation: 'From now on we should have greater trust in the people's judgement'.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> European Parliament, *Report on Turkey's Application for Membership of the European Union*, A5-0160/2003 final, 19 May 2003, accessed at <http://www.oostlander.net/rapporten/030518e.html>

<sup>106</sup> European Parliament, *Report on Turkey's Application for Membership of the European Union*.

<sup>107</sup> Yeni Bir Baslangic, 'CHP 2002 Secim Bildirgesi' [A New Beginning, the Election Declaration of the CHP in 2002].

<sup>108</sup> *Hürriyet*, 3 November 2002.

<sup>109</sup> M. Yetkin, 'Hilmi Ozkok, the Democrat General', *Hürriyet*, 12 July 2008, accessed at <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=-633457>

<sup>110</sup> H. Ozkok, *Hürriyet*, 23 August 2003.

In November 2002 elections had taken place against the background of a serious economic crisis. Two prominent members of the outlawed Welfare Party, Recep Erdogan and Abdullah Gül, had created a new party—the Justice and Development Party, or AKP—in 2001. They won a large majority. From the outset the AKP embraced the EU agenda. Erdogan, the leader of the party, praised Turkey's EU goal as 'the most important project in order to realise Atatürk's goal of reaching the level of contemporary civilization'.<sup>111</sup> The party wanted to make the suppression of political parties more difficult and limit the influence exercised by the military through the National Security Council. The Copenhagen criteria allowed the ruling party to question all aspects of the traditional Kemalist understanding of the state. The needs of the AKP—reassuring wary secular elites, broadening its legitimacy internationally and reducing the influence of the army—coincided with the EU's demands for democratisation. In December 2002 the EU Copenhagen summit promised that Turkey could start accession talks without delay if by the end of 2004 it met the Copenhagen political criteria. This was EU conditionality at its most effective: there was a credible and attractive goal and a promise of a tough but fair evaluation of progress.

For most of Turkey's generals, the EU process posed a real dilemma. Suat Ilhan, who headed military intelligence and then taught at the army's military academy, noted that 'there is no real difference between the imperialism of the nineteenth century and that of today'.<sup>112</sup> On 30 November 2002 General Sener Eryugur, commander of the Turkish gendarmerie, told Mustafa Balbay, Ankara correspondent

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<sup>111</sup> Quoted in O. D. Bagdonas, 'The Clash of Kemalism? Reflections on the Past and Present Politics of Kemalism in Turkish Political Discourse', *Turkish Studies*, 9/1 (March 2008).

<sup>112</sup> S. Ilhan, *Avrupa Birliği'ne neden hayir* [Why No to the European Union], (Istanbul: Otuken, 2002).

of the daily *Cumhuriyet*: 'We won't be accepted into the EU. Erdogan knows that, too. But since they know that they can do some things through the EU, they act like this. Their basic goals are to weaken the role of the army. But we won't allow this.'<sup>113</sup> General Tuncer Kilinc, the influential secretary general of the National Security Council after 2001, described the EU as a 'neo colonialist force that is determined to divide Turkey' and suggested that Turkey would do better by beginning 'a new search [for allies] that would include Iran and the Russian Federation'.<sup>114</sup> In a speech in Brussels in April 2003 Kilinc noted that the European Union must not be trusted:

Since the conquest of Istanbul, the Europeans have viewed us as their foes . . . After World War One they turned the Armenians against us and created the foundation for dozens of horrific events that followed. The PKK is an organization that the EU has established. The EU is the reason 33,000 of our people were killed. The EU secretly and openly supported terrorist organizations in Turkey.<sup>115</sup>

In April 2007 the weekly *Nokta* published excerpts from a diary by retired navy commander Admiral Ozden Ornek. It describes conversations between him and the three other force commanders—Aytac Yalman (the commander of the

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<sup>113</sup> 'Iste Mustafa Balbay'in gunlugu' [The diaries of Mustafa Balbay], accessed at <http://habermerkezi.wordpress.com/2009/03/17/iste-mustafa-balbayin-gunlugu/>

<sup>114</sup> O. D. Bagdonas, 'The Clash of Kemalisms? Reflections on the Past and Present Politics of Kemalism in Turkish Political Discourse', *Turkish Studies* 9/1 (2008), 103.

<sup>115</sup> T. Akcam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2004).

land forces), Ibrahim Firtina (air force) and Sener Eryugur (gendarmerie)—in 2003 and 2004. Ornek described serious tensions between the force commanders and the chief of general staff, Hilmi Ozkok. In December 2003 the force commanders met alone at the invitation of Gendarmerie Commander Eryugur:

We decided to form an action plan on our own. We were first going to take control of the media. . . . We were going to keep in contact with rectors and arrange for students to engage in demonstrations. We were going to act in unison with unions. We were going to get posters hung in the streets. We were going to contact associations and incite them against the government. We were going to do all of this across the country, and it would be known as Blond-Girl. (6 December)

In Ornek's diaries General Eryugur, the gendarmerie commander, emerges as a key figure: 'The commander of the gendarmarie is a real hawk [*sahin*]. He has a certain belief about the chief of staff and this belief has become an obsession. No matter what the chief of staff does, he responds with suspicion.' Eryugur, Ornek noted, was 'constantly yearning for a coup, he was talking as if we should execute it as soon as possible.' (20 January 2004) Ornek quotes a statement of 1 December 2003 by Yalman, the commander of the land forces: 'I am very upset and the state deteriorates. Martial law has to be declared as soon as possible.' Ornek added: 'Since we all know for certain that

this government acts against the constitution, it is our duty to protect the constitution according to Article 35 [Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Law].<sup>116</sup>

At the same time the other commanders saw serious obstacles to an intervention. On 1 February 2004 Land Forces Commander Yalman told Ornek: 'I don't approve of the actions of Sener [General Eryugur] and Ibrahim [General Firtina]. They are overdoing it . . . the actions of the commander of the gendarmerie [General Eryugur] are known by everyone and are evaluated as unlawful.' Eryugur did not want to give up. On 28 February 2004 there was another meeting of the four force commanders: 'The second topic was again how we should overthrow these guys with a coup [*darbe*]. Sener [General Eryugur] and the air force commander are insistent on this issue. Sener almost can't get it out of his mind, it seems to be the only thing he talks about. The same goes for the commander of the air forces.'

On 13 March 2004 it was Yalman who, having consulted all the high ranking officers of the land forces, poured cold water on Eryugur's plans:

Everyone is troubled by this situation and no one likes the present course. But no one wants to correct this course through a coup [*darbe*]. They want the civilians to react appropriately and they want us to support them [the civilians]. This was very important . . .

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<sup>116</sup> When former General Kenan Evren, leader of the military coup of 12 September 1980, testified for the first time to prosecutors on 6 June 2011, he said that he based his actions on Article 35 of the Internal Service Law, and added: 'I do not regret what I did. I would stage a coup again under the circumstances of those times if I had the authority.' 'Coup Leaders Testify to Prosecutors for the First Time in Turkey', *Today's Zaman Weekly Almanac*, 12 June 2011, accessed at [http://todayzaman.com/mobile\\_detailn.action?newsId=246973](http://todayzaman.com/mobile_detailn.action?newsId=246973). This is not the only such provision: there is also article 85/1 of the Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Directive, which notes the duty of the military to react 'by arms when necessary, against internal and external threats'.

The commander of the gendarmerie wasn't going to like this news, but this was the truth.

The diaries are the chronicle of an intervention that never happened. One strong reason was the opposition of Chief of Staff Hilmi Ozkok. On 16 March 2004 Ornek described a meeting with the chief of general staff himself:

He was aware of almost all of our [the commanders] initiatives and in particular those of the commander of the gendarmerie. For some reason he was targeting the commander of the gendarmerie [in particular]. 'I possess all of the documents, I will put them in the archives of the state [*devlet*], this is a historical duty. The actions of Sener [General Eruygur] exceed his authority.'

Throughout these deliberations there was the realisation that coup leaders in Turkey were internationally isolated. On 25 October 2003 Admiral Ornek had told the others: 'What we have to do from now on is to focus on the view that the EU doesn't want us and popularise it. In doing so, we should make the government fear us by taking the EU trump out of their hands and bringing them back to domestic politics.'<sup>117</sup> On 3 February 2004 Ornek told Yalman: 'Despite the fact that the US supported previous coups, at the moment they support the AKP. It is really difficult to have a coup or government that they [the US] do not favour.'

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<sup>117</sup> In March 2007 the current affairs weekly *Nokta* published excerpts from a journal kept by Admiral Ozden Ornek. The diaries can be found at <http://habermerkezi.wordpress.com/2008/07/06/darbe-gunlukleri-online-oku/>.

When Eryugur retired in August 2004 he was bitter. He warned publicly that 'lack of action, insensitivity and reactions that are formal only encourage opponents of the Republic.'<sup>118</sup> In 2004 constitutional amendments deleted the 'secrecy clause' that had hitherto shielded military assets from the court of auditor's scrutiny. The NSC was also transformed. The secret regulation concerning the duties and work of the National Security Council (NSC) general secretariat was abolished.<sup>119</sup> So were the units responsible for psychological operations.<sup>120</sup> The number of its personnel was reduced from 950 to 250. Plans and blacklists produced by the NSC were destroyed.<sup>121</sup> In July 2003 one Kemalist author described all these changes in dramatic language:

. . . the nightmare of the generals became a reality. The parliament voted to curb the political power of the military. . . The NSC's secretary general, a four star general whose power in the past had rivaled that of the prime minister, was to be replaced by a civilian after one year . . . not long ago, the far-reaching reform package might have been cause for a coup d'état by the army brass.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>118</sup> A. Bayramoğlu and A. Insel, *Almanac Turkey 2006–2008: Security Sector and Democratic Oversight, Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV)*, (Istanbul: TESEV Publications, 2010), 159, accessed at [http://www.tesev.org.tr/UD\\_OBJS/PDF/DEMP/ENG/gsr-almanac-2006-08.pdf](http://www.tesev.org.tr/UD_OBJS/PDF/DEMP/ENG/gsr-almanac-2006-08.pdf)

<sup>119</sup> Articles 12, 18 and 21 of the Law no. 2945; see Hale Akay, 'Security Sector in Turkey', 10–11, accessed at [http://www.aciktoplumvakfi.org.tr/pdf/guven\\_rapor\\_dunya\\_duzelti.pdf](http://www.aciktoplumvakfi.org.tr/pdf/guven_rapor_dunya_duzelti.pdf)

<sup>120</sup> G. Ozcan, 'National Security Council', in U. Cizre (ed.), *Almanac Turkey 2005, Security Sector and Democratic Oversight*, DCAF-TESEV Series in Security Sector Studies, September 2006, 45, accessed at [http://www.tesev.org.tr/UD\\_OBJS/PDF/DEMP/Almanac-2005-Ingilizce-Tam%20Metin.pdf](http://www.tesev.org.tr/UD_OBJS/PDF/DEMP/Almanac-2005-Ingilizce-Tam%20Metin.pdf)

<sup>121</sup> F. Balancar and E. Elmas, 'Military Interference in Politics and the Politicization of the Army', in A. Insel and A. Bayramoğlu (eds.), *Almanac Turkey 2006–2008, Security Sector and Democratic Oversight*, 158.

<sup>122</sup> M. Kaylan, *The Kemalists: Islamic Revival and the Fate of Secular Turkey* (New York, Prometheus Books, 2005), 423.

August 2004 also saw the first civilian secretary general of the NSC. And yet by 2005 the EU-inspired reforms had not yet changed the structure of the system the generals had constructed. The 2004 constitutional changes on military assets did not make any difference. As the EU noted in 2009, 'the court of auditors' oversight of military expenditures continues to exist only on paper'.<sup>123</sup> The National Security Policy Document (NSPD), up for revision in 2005, remained secret.<sup>124</sup> When parts of the confidential draft were leaked, the press reported that it still referred to 'the use of the army against domestic security threats and, when necessary, the assumption of rule by the army in order to abolish these threats'.<sup>125</sup> In August and December 2005 the Supreme Military Council (SMC) expelled 14 members of the military for disciplinary reasons despite the opposition of the prime minister.<sup>126</sup> And when the new NSC general secretary entered office, many files had disappeared.<sup>127</sup> Control over the gendarmerie remained in the hands of the military. The military judiciary remained as before.

The EU progress report in 2005 noted how much remained to be done: 'The definition of national security in Turkey is subject to interpretation, the military plays too important a role in it, and this situation threatens the freedom of expression and crimes by security forces are not punished.' In August 2006, looking back at an intense period, Hilmi Ozkok noted in his farewell speech that 'these

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<sup>123</sup> N. Akyesilmen, 'Legislation: The Turkish Grand National Assembly', in A. Insel and A. Bayramoglu (eds.), *Almanac Turkey 2006 – 2008: Security Sector and Democratic Oversight*, 15.

<sup>124</sup> Robins, *Suits and Uniforms*, 77.

<sup>125</sup> Z. Sarlak, 'National Security Council', in A. Insel and A. Bayramoglu (eds.), *Almanac Turkey 2006–2008*, 97, quoting D. Zeyrek, 'Gerekirse asker yine goreve' [If necessary, the military will do their duty], *Radikal*, 26 October 2005.

<sup>126</sup> G. Ozcan, 'National Security Council', in Umit Cizre (ed.), *Almanac Turkey 2005*, 29–30, accessed at [http://www.tesev.org.tr/UD\\_OBJS/PDF/DEMP/Almanak-2005-Ingilizce-Tam%20Metin.pdf](http://www.tesev.org.tr/UD_OBJS/PDF/DEMP/Almanak-2005-Ingilizce-Tam%20Metin.pdf)

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

four years will be recorded in history as a period of thorny crisis and transformations that were difficult to manage.<sup>128</sup> Few observers knew at the time the extent of the internal battles he was referring to. Even fewer would have anticipated the intensity of the power struggles yet to come.

### Act Two: 'The Military may soon Step In'

When General Yasar Buyukanit replaced Hilmi Ozkok as chief of general staff in 2006, the tone changed almost immediately. In his inaugural speech in 2006 Buyukanit warned that 'the Turkish Republic has since its foundation never been face to face with so many threats at the same time.' From the outset he focused on two threats: separatism and anti-secularism. There was 'armed separatist terrorism'. There was also the 'unarmed terrorism of domestic and foreign formations and initiatives' that challenged the unitary structure of the Turkish Republic.

EU progress reports after 2007 continued to suggest a long list of reforms concerning civil-military relations. In an overview of the security sector a leading Turkish think tank, TESEV, listed proposals: 'ensure that the military does not intervene in political issues and that civilian authorities fully exercise supervisory functions on security matters' and 'limit the jurisdiction of military courts solely to military duties of military personnel'.<sup>129</sup> By this point, however, Turkey's generals had drawn a line in the sand, sending signals to the government, to civil society and to the US and the EU, that there were to be no further reforms. An article in *Foreign Affairs* in 2006 by three authors, two of them former military officials, warned the EU not to press for further changes:

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<sup>128</sup> TESEV *Almanac 2006–2008: Security Sector and Democratic Oversight*, 163.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

'As the country's ultimate guardian [emphasis added], the military will carefully balance the EU's demands for reform, especially those regarding cultural diversity, with national security . . . the EU must bear in mind that it should not hasten to ask for the removal of the military's remaining footholds in Turkish civilian society.'<sup>130</sup> According to the authors the military was not ready to change its ways: 'Much like captains trying to dock an oil tanker in a new port, Turkey's top generals are impelled to steer Turkey's reform with the strategies they have developed over the years.'<sup>131</sup>

Another article, appearing in December 2006 in *Newsweek*, was even more explicit about these strategies. Zeyno Baran, a Turkish analyst based at the DC Hudson Institute with good contacts to Turkey's military, warned about turbulences ahead in Turkey: 'In recent weeks I have spoken with Turkey's most senior officers. All made clear that, while they would not want to see an interruption in democracy, the military may soon have to step in to protect secularism, without which there cannot be democracy in a majority Muslim country. These are no-nonsense people who mean what they say.'

Baran also had a message for the European Union: 'Why is this happening? Chiefly because of the European Union. Never mind Cyprus, or the new human-rights laws Turkey has willingly passed under European pressure. The real problem is the EU's core demand: more civilian control over the military. That, senior officers say, would inevitably produce an Islamic Turkey.'<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> E. Aydinli, N.A. Özcan and D. Akyaz, 'The Turkish Military's March toward Europe', *Foreign Affairs* 85/1 (January/February 2006).

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>132</sup> Z. Baran, 'The Coming Coup d'Etat', *Newsweek*, 4 December 2006, accessed at [http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication\\_details&id=4349](http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication_details&id=4349)

The most likely scenario for Turkey in 2007 was a repetition of the 'post-modern coup' of 1997:

Almost 10 years ago, the Turkish military ousted a popularly elected Islamist prime minister. The circumstances that produced that coup are re-emerging today. Once again, an Islamist is in power. Once again, the generals are muttering angrily about how his government is undermining the secular state—the foundation of modern Turkey. As I rate it, the chances of a military coup in Turkey occurring in 2007 are roughly 50-50.<sup>133</sup>

1997 had seen the first mobilisation of civil society against the government in power. There were subsequent signs that something similar was happening. The years 2005 and 2006 also saw a sudden upsurge in ultranationalist anti-governmental activity. There was a sudden obsession with Christian missionaries.<sup>134</sup> There was a sudden upsurge in court cases targeting minorities and pro-European intellectuals. There was also a wave of violence targeting the tiny Christian community.

At the same time the mechanisms of the separate military justice system remained in place to prevent any serious investigations. In March 2004 Abdulkadir Aygan, a Turkish citizen living in Sweden, gave an interview to the newspaper *Ozgur Gundem* about one of the most important clandestine deep state organisation in Turkey: the Gendarmerie

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<sup>133</sup> Baran, 'The Coming Coup d'Etat'.

<sup>134</sup> See also the ESI report Murder in Anatolia: Christian Missionaries and Turkish Ultrnationalism, January 2011, accessed at [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_document\\_id\\_124.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_124.pdf)

Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Department (Jandarma Istihbarat ve Terorle Mucadele, JITEM).<sup>135</sup> Aygan explained that he had worked for JITEM for nine years after 1990. He noted that members of JITEM were given their own guns and became civil servants with full benefits and pension rights. In another interview Aygan explained what 'operation' meant in JITEM jargon:

There were local agents and informants among the people. Persons in contact with the PKK or supplying the PKK were denounced to JITEM. JITEM then did its job. To do the job means to take a person extrajudicially, bring him to JITEM to question him and then to kill him, to throw the dead body away, burn him or bury him. The extrajudicial killings started in 1993 and went on until the 1996 Susurluk incident. Especially during these four years the number of murders was very high. All operations ended with death. The torture lasted one or two nights.<sup>136</sup>

Aygan also claimed that on 10 March 1994 a man called Murat Aslan was kidnapped by JITEM as he was walking in Diyarbakir, taken to the JITEM Headquarters in Diyarbakir and afterwards killed in a place near the Tigris River and set afire. Excavations supported by the Diyarbakir Bar Association led to the discovery of the bones of a burned human corpse. DNA test confirmed that it was the body of Murat Aslan. Aygan had also explained that this action was

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<sup>135</sup> *Ozgur Gundem*, 12 March 2004, AL I, 184 n. 68.

<sup>136</sup> N. Duzel, 'Abdulkadir Aygan: "Olmedi, hastaneden alip yine infaz ettik"' [He didn't die, we took him from the hospital and executed him again], *Taraf*, 27 January 2009, accessed at <http://www.taraf.com.tr/nese-duzel/makale-abdulkadir-aygan-olmedi-hastaneden-alip-yine.htm>

carried out by Commander Abdulkерim Kirca, the JITEM commander at that time. The reaction of the authorities was striking: on 12 December 2004 Abdulkерim Kirca received a State Medal of Honour from Turkey's President Ahmet Necdet Sezer. Then the Diyarbakir Bar Association and the Human Rights Association of Turkey filed a lawsuit against 31 people. In an indictment Diyarbakir's prosecutor, Mithat Ozcan, demanded life sentences for eight people accused among other things of 'torture' and 'premeditated murder'. He included in this list Abdulkерim Kirca. Then, one day later, the investigation was taken away from Mithat Ozcan. A decision on the 'lack of jurisdiction' followed. Since three of the eight suspects belonged to the military, their files had to be transferred to the Diyarbakir Military Prosecutor's Office of the Army Corps Command.

Impunity for murder by security agents not only covered crimes committed in the 1990s, however. On 9 November 2005 at lunch time, a hand grenade was thrown into the Umut bookstore, owned by Seferi Yilmaz, in the small town of Semdinli in the Hakkari province in Turkey's Kurdish South East. Yilmaz ran after the person who threw the grenade, which killed one of his friends and injured many more. Bystanders stopped the person who tried to escape with two others in a white car. A crowd surrounded the car in order to prevent the three suspects from leaving. In the car weapons and information of alleged PKK sympathizers were found. Then it turned out that the two men in the car were officers working for the gendarmerie intelligence department.<sup>137</sup> The assassination in Semdinli appeared to be the work of an official death squad similar to the ones which had haunted South East Anatolia in the 1990s.

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<sup>137</sup> G. Jenkins, *Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation*, Silk Road Paper (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Program, 2009), 33–5.

On 22 November 2005 an investigation was started by Ferhat Sarikaya, the prosecutor in Van. The three suspects were arrested.<sup>138</sup> An indictment, drafted by Sarikaya, was published on 3 March 2006. Sarikaya did not limit his accusations to the men caught red handed, however. On page 68 of the indictment he called for an investigation of the commander of the Land Forces, General Yasar Buyukanit.<sup>139</sup> The indictment alleged that other explosions in Hakkari province might have been linked.<sup>140</sup> An investigation had to establish whether they had acted within a chain of command. The indictment even suggested the motivation behind this incident: 'permitting security chaos in the region to be used to apply pressure on the political authority, and thereby . . . to frustrate Turkey's fundamental political directions (the modernising project, the EU process)—and to protect the power and position of the core political/ bureaucratic governing elite'.<sup>141</sup>

On 6 March 2006 then Chief of the General Staff, Hilmi Özkök, met with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss the accusations.<sup>142</sup> Opposition leader and CHP chairman, Deniz Baykal, harshly criticised the indictment.<sup>143</sup> On 8 March 2006 the Justice Ministry initiated an investigation into the conduct of Sarikaya. On 20 March the Turkish Armed Forces published a harsh reaction: 'Those who hold constitutional responsibility should take a stand against these unfair and intentional accusations against the

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<sup>138</sup> IMC, accessed at [http://www.imc-tv.com/haber\\_detay.php?id=343/#!/semdinli-davasi-nda-savunmaya-sure#ixzz1g9YrsCEB](http://www.imc-tv.com/haber_detay.php?id=343/#!/semdinli-davasi-nda-savunmaya-sure#ixzz1g9YrsCEB)

<sup>139</sup> Semdinli indictment, pp. 68 and 69, accessed at [http://www.milliyet.com.tr/sabitimg/06/gazete/siyaset/semdinli\\_iddianame.pdf](http://www.milliyet.com.tr/sabitimg/06/gazete/siyaset/semdinli_iddianame.pdf)

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>142</sup> A. Zaman, 'Turkish General Tried to Thwart Nation's EU Bid, Prosecutor Asserts', *LA Times*, 7 March 2006.

<sup>143</sup> Z. Erdem, 'Deniz Baykal: TSK'ya darbe', *Radikal*, 7 March 2003, accessed at <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=180626>

Turkish Armed Forces, they should expose all aspects of this attack, publicly announce the distorted mentality behind it, regardless of their title or status, and take the necessary legal actions against them.<sup>144</sup> On 20 April 2006 Sarikaya lost his job for dishonouring the legal profession and preparing a faulty indictment.<sup>145</sup> He even lost his licence to practise as a lawyer.

The men he had charged were more fortunate at first. On 4 May 2006 the trial started at the Van Serious Crimes Court. On 19 June 2006 the court convicted and sentenced Ali Kaya and Özcan İldeniz to 39 years imprisonment each after being found guilty of 'forming a criminal organisation, killing people, attempting to kill people and causing injury.' On 16 May 2007 the Supreme Court of Appeals (*Yargıtay*) overturned the verdict, arguing that 'the suspects were on anti-terrorist duty at the time of the bombing' and therefore the case had to go to a military court.<sup>146</sup> In the summer of 2007 the judges of the Van court were all replaced. When the hearing started with an entirely new panel of judges these decided that the case should indeed be transferred to a military court. On 14 December 2007 the first hearing started at the Van gendarmerie command military court. Now all three suspects were released and the two officers were immediately redeployed to Western Turkey.<sup>147</sup> As a result by December 2007, while prosecutor Sarikaya had lost his job, all suspects were free again and a military trial was under way which was to last for years without any

<sup>144</sup> Insel and Bayramoglu (eds.) *Almanac Turkey 2006–2008*, 161.

<sup>145</sup> *Promoting Conflict – The Semdinli Bombing: Trial Observation Report* (London: Kurdish Human Rights Project, 2006) accessed at [http://www.barhumanrights.org.uk/docs/bhrckhrp/Promoting\\_Conflict.pdf](http://www.barhumanrights.org.uk/docs/bhrckhrp/Promoting_Conflict.pdf) and [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special\\_report/65.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/65.pdf)

<sup>146</sup> T. Korkut, 'Undue Influence of Military in Semdinli Trial', *bianet*, 18 May 2007, accessed at <http://bianet.org/english/english/96206-undue-influence-of-military-in-semdinli-trial>

<sup>147</sup> 'Semdinli Sanığı Astsubaylar Batı'ya Tayin Ediliyor', *bianet*, 17 December 2007, accessed at <http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/103626-semdinli-sanigi-astsubaylar-batiya-tayin-ediliyor>

result. Impunity even for a death squad of the gendarmerie intelligence unit in late 2005 had been restored.

Meanwhile political tension came to a head in spring 2007. Outgoing President Sezer warned in a speech at the military academy in early April 2007: 'Since the foundation of the Republic Turkey's political regime has never faced such dangers as it does today. The core values of the secular republic are being openly debated for the very first time.' On 24 April 2007 the AKP announced that Abdullah Gül would be its candidate for the post of President of the Republic. Gül, a champion of Turkey's EU integration effort, had been prime minister in 2002, later becoming deputy prime minister and foreign minister. His selection triggered a harsh reaction from the military, drawing attention to the fact that his wife wore the headscarf. On 27 April the Turkish military published a warning by way of a late-night posting on its website. The general staff reminded the Turkish government of the military's role as 'staunch defender of secularism': 'The fundamentalist understanding was eroding the very foundation of the Turkish Republic.'<sup>148</sup>

The AKP opted for early elections and scored a landslide victory on 22 July 2007 with almost 47% of the vote—an increase of more than 12%. The parliament elected Abdullah Gül as president in September 2007. However, the crisis was not over. In a *Cumhuriyet* article on 3 February 2008 a retired general, Dogu Silahcioglu, suggested concretely filing 'a lawsuit by the chief prosecutor in the Constitutional Court against the AKP for being the centre of anti-secular activities and to seek the closure of the AKP'. This happened a few weeks later. On 14 March 2008 the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals, Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya,

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<sup>148</sup> 'Excerpts of Turkish Army Statement', BBC News, 28 April 2007, accessed at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6602775.stm>

applied to the Turkish Constitutional Court to outlaw the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and to ban 71 politicians, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gül, from politics. On 31 March 2008 the Constitutional Court unanimously decided to accept the case. By August 2008, however, the opponents of military rule were fighting back. Another battle was underway, a battle fought in court-rooms by civilian prosecutors.

### Act Three: Regime Change in the Court Room

On 17 May 2006 the lawyer Alparslan Arslan<sup>149</sup> stormed into the council of state (*Danistay*, Turkey's highest administrative court) in Ankara shouting 'I am God's soldier, God is great!'<sup>150</sup> Arslan shot at the judges sitting in their chamber, killing one of them. Arslan later stated that he was motivated by a court ruling in which the judges had decided not to promote a primary school teacher because she wore a headscarf outside of class.<sup>151</sup>

This murder was to change Turkey's dynamic when prosecutors linked it to a retired special operations sergeant, Oktay Yildirim, and to an ultranationalist association which had been set up in 2005. The Kuvayi Milliye Dernegi (National Forces Association, or KMD), named after the irregular forces fighting with Ataturk against the Greeks in

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<sup>149</sup> 'Dindar ve ulkucu bir kisi', [A religious and fascist person], *Milliyet*, 18 May 2006, accessed at <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/05/18/guncel/gun01a.html>

<sup>150</sup> 'Allah'in askeriyim' dedi vurdu' [He said I am God's soldier and shot], *Hürriyet*, 18 May 2006, accessed at <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=4432607&taarih=2006-05-18>

<sup>151</sup> 'Judge Shot Dead after Blocking Promotion of Teacher Who Wore Muslim Headscarf', *Sunday Times*, 18 May 2006, accessed at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article720515.ece>

1919, had developed rapidly and set up offices throughout Turkey. A video of the group was made public in January 2007. It showed members swearing an oath with guns on the table 'to die and to kill' and never to betray their 'race'.<sup>152</sup> Yildirim was the head of KMD's Istanbul office but there were many more offices throughout Turkey. For an organisation that had just been created, its growth by 2007 had been impressive, numbering a few thousands members, many former military.

In summer 2007 the police discovered 27 hand grenades in Istanbul's suburban Umraniye district.<sup>153</sup> The tenant in the house where the grenades were found, Ali Yigit, and the owner, his uncle, told the police that the grenades were put there by Oktay Yildirim, who had been the uncle's commander in South East Anatolia in the late 1990s.<sup>154</sup> Oktay Yildirim's fingerprints were found on the hand grenades. Yigit claimed that Yildirim got the weapons from a military depository in Semdinli, where he had worked from 1997 to 1999. Oktay Yildirim also told Ali about the KMD: 'He said that Kuva-i Milliye is an association protecting the interests of the state. That those ruling the state are not the real rulers and that there is something else going on inside the state.'<sup>155</sup> When Yildirim was arrested on 12 June 2007 he had already become a face familiar to Istanbul's intellectuals and minorities: he had regularly held protests against Greek and Armenian minorities, the EU office and consulates, and at the trial of writers and intellectuals in 2005 and 2006,

<sup>152</sup> 'Ulusalci dernek oldurme yemininden vazgecmiyor' [The neo-nationalist association doesn't give up the killing oath], *Zaman*, 11 February 2007, accessed at <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=498747>; 'Kuvayi Milliye suc islemek icin kuruldu' [Kuvayi Milliye was founded to commit crimes], *Yeni Safak*, 21 February 2007, accessed at <http://yenisafak.com.tr/gundem/?t=21.02.2007&q=1&c=1&i=30981&Ulusalc%u00c4%u00b1%2ftahrik%2fnihayet%2fyarg%u00c4%u00b1da>

<sup>153</sup> First Ergenekon indictment, 33.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 534.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

together with other retired officers and ultranationalist intellectuals.

In late January 2008 news broke of a major operation by Turkish police leading to many more arrests. Among those arrested at this time was also retired Colonel Fikri Karadag, the founder of the KMD in November 2005.<sup>156</sup> He was arrested together with 17 other KMD members.<sup>157</sup>

Another person also arrested created even more attention, however: retired General Veli Kucuk. Veli Kucuk had served in the gendarmerie in the 1990s in Turkey's south-east at a time when special units within the gendarmerie (part of the Turkish armed forces) were used for clandestine counterinsurgency operations. The most infamous unit was known as Gendarmerie Intelligence or JITEM (Jandarma Istihbarat ve Terorle Mucadele).<sup>158</sup> In an interview in January 2008 former JITEM member Abdulkadir Aygan also talked about the role of Veli Kucuk. Kucuk, Aygan claimed, had been a JITEM commander in the early 1990s:

JITEM's headquarters was in a large building with two floors. All personnel in the building used to wear civilian clothes. The vehicles used in official service had civilian plates; however, these were the gendarmerie's registered vehicles. It is certain that he [Kucuk] was one of the founders of the organization.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Kuvayi Milliye Dernegi (National Forces Association) evokes the Turkish national insurgents who fought against the Allies after First World War and opposed the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, which was signed by the Ottoman government and which partitioned Anatolia.

<sup>157</sup> First Ergenekon Indictment, 2110.

<sup>158</sup> First Ergenekon Indictment, 921, 927–29.

<sup>159</sup> M. Duvakli, 'JITEM Hitman: Veli Kucuk Conceals Masterminds', *Today's Zaman*, 30 January 2008, accessed at [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?load=detay&link=132811](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?load=detay&link=132811)

Aygan highlighted his role: 'When Cem Ersever died [a former JITEM commander assassinated in 1993], Veli Kucuk became the power centre. Even if he was a commander of a normal gendarmerie unit, he used the same JITEM-like methods, he continued the JITEM system as a commander where he was placed.'

Given his status as a retired general it had never been possible to bring Kucuk before any court or even to question him in parliament. A car accident in November 1996 near Susurluk led to the discovery that a senior police officer, a member of Parliament and Abdullah Catli, a convicted fugitive and leader of an ultranationalist organisation wanted by the police for multiple murders and drug trafficking, were travelling together. A subsequent investigation revealed that Veli Kucuk had been the last person to talk to Catli, the fugitive, before the accident.<sup>160</sup> He refused to be questioned. JITEM was also never really investigated.<sup>161</sup> A report by the Turkish Grand National Assembly ad-hoc Susurluk Committee merely stated in 1998 that 'we fail to understand the nature of JITEM's activities in the region . . . the fact that JITEM is staging operations in a precinct without informing the police makes the citizens question authority'.<sup>162</sup>

Now, however, Istanbul prosecutors linked a group around Veli Kucuk and Oktay Yildirim to the murder of an Ankara judge in 2006. They also found what looked like a series of assassination plans in KMD offices. One witness, Osman Yildirim (no relative of Oktay), told prosecutors that there had been a meeting on 30 April 2006 with Alparslan Arslan, the murderer, Oktay Yildirim from KMD,

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<sup>160</sup> 'Veli Kucuk'e 200 soru', *Timeturk*, 28 March 2008, accessed at <http://www.timeturk.com/tr/2008/03/28/veli-kucuk-e-200-soru.html>

<sup>161</sup> E. Kilic, *Jitem* (Istanbul: Timas Publishing, 2009), 13.

<sup>162</sup> E. Bese, 'Intelligence Activities of the Gendarmerie Corps (JITEM & JIT)', in *Almanac Turkey 2005*, 174.

and another retired military official and friend of Yildirim, Muzaffer Tekin.<sup>163</sup> The witness testified in 2009: 'Those who used Arslan were Kucuk and Tekin. Their superiors were Sener Eruygur [former commander of the gendarmerie], Hursit Tolon [former commander of the first army] and Fikri Karadag.'<sup>164</sup> Arslan and Tekin also admitted in court that they had indeed been in close contact in the months preceding the attack.

Kucuk was not the only important name to be brought to court. Another was Ibrahim Sahin, arrested in 2008. The former head of the special operations department of the ministry of the interior, Sahin had also been previously linked to ultranationalist organised crime figures (and had been sentenced in the late 1990s). Investigators arrested retired Gendarmerie Colonel Arif Dogan, who declared that he had been one of the founders of JITEM. Prosecutors now referred to all of them as members of a vast terrorist organisation, a gang called 'Ergenekon'. This was the name of a clandestine network described in a document (from 1999) found on the computers of some of the suspects.

Soon the rapidly expanding case, which started in a huge courtroom in Silivri outside of Istanbul in October 2008, targeted a network which—prosecutors claim—included generals, academics and journalists, mafia figures and former members of special police forces. In 2008 Sener Eruygur, the former commander of the gendarmerie, and Hursit Tolon, the former commander of the First Army, and Tuncer Kilinc, the former general secretary of the NSC, were also arrested. As prosecutors launched more court cases, the controversy over these investigations intensified. Many

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<sup>163</sup> Witness testimony of Osman Yildirim, First Ergenekon Indictment, 579.

<sup>164</sup> Osman Yildirim's testimony during the 121 court hearing, I. Ergenekon court case on 9 November 2009.

leading military figures from the past decade now found themselves in the crosshairs of investigators.

Finally in 2010 charges were brought against the former commander of the First Army, Cetin Dogan, and more than two hundred other members of the military. This was the heaviest blow against the Turkish military so far: more than 200 members of the armed forces were charged with allegedly plotting against the government in 2003. In September 2010 a constitutional referendum approved reforms that allowed putting members of the military on trial in civilian courts.

These investigations quickly became controversial. The authenticity of documents used by the prosecution to prove that a March 2003 seminar organised by the commander of the First army, General Cetin Dogan was a dress rehearsal for a coup code-named Sledgehammer (*Balyoz*) was questioned. Dani Rodrik, son-in-law of General Cetin Dogan, listed a number of contradictions and inconsistencies.<sup>165</sup> References in these coup plans, which were supposedly written in 2003, to businesses which did not exist until later suggested that incriminating material 'was prepared in August 2009 at the earliest', i.e. long after Dogan had retired. Rodrik asked why prosecutors had 'failed to interview key figures, including inexplicably, the head of landed forces Aytac Yalman who, the indictment suggested, had prevented the coup'.<sup>166</sup> The recordings of the March 2003 closed seminar organised by the commander of the First army in Istanbul did not refer to any coup plan called

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<sup>165</sup> See for instance D. Rodrik, 'Ergenekon and Sledgehammer: Building or Undermining the Rule of Law?' *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 10/1 (2011), 99–109. Or for a detailed analysis of the Sledgehammer document see 'A guide to Sledgehammer in 15 questions', accessed at <http://cdogangercekler.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/faq-sledgehammer.pdf>

<sup>166</sup> Rodrik, 'Ergenekon and Sledgehammer', 104.

Balyoz.<sup>167</sup> Instead, on 7 March, Dogan told the following to a group of 162 senior military officers that had come together for a two-day war-game exercise:

As a result of the most recent elections, a party has come to power that does not comply with the basic principles of the Republic. It is clear that they intend to take over the state, destroy the secular principles and adjust the constitution according to their own values . . . . Therefore, we have to get rid of the domestic threats first, and after creating the right conditions we can take necessary measures against any external threat . . . .

Our intervention should be punitive. We should be aware of the role of the Turkish Armed Forces. The Turkish Armed Forces do not confront the people who claim that they are hungry but those who are subversive against the state. We should not use our guns to create a massacre, but instead to exercise a punitive function . . . .

When martial law becomes effective, we are planning a situation in which the gendarmerie and the security forces are under our command. Therefore we need to formulate our plan with great detail and base it on concrete information. We have to take measures that prevent the social situation from becoming uncontrollable.<sup>168</sup>

A recurring theme was the question how the army could control the police. During the debates Dogan told his audience: 'There is considerable disunity inside the police. Evidently we have to control the police in this case . . . . They

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<sup>167</sup> The tapes of this seminar were leaked to the press in early 2010 and confirmed as genuine by participants. See also C. Dogan, *Iddianamem – Balyoz ve Gercekler* [My Indictment – Sledgehammer and Truths], (Istanbul: Destek Publishing, April 2011).

<sup>168</sup> Dogan, *Iddianamem – Balyoz ve Gercekler* [My indictment – Sledgehammer and Truths].

have new guns, news instruments and equipment. Have you taken any measures or do you possess a recipe partly to bring this—divided—police under our control?’<sup>169</sup>  
This court case is still ongoing in early 2012.

## Consolidation

### A Military Besieged

A few weeks after his resignation in summer 2011 former chief of the General Staff Isik Kosaner made headlines again when a secret recording of his meeting (still as chief of staff) with military colleagues surfaced in the Turkish media.<sup>170</sup> The recording, confirmed by Kosaner himself, offered a glimpse of a military hierarchy that felt itself under siege. Here Kosaner made clear that he was no dove when it came to his views on the responsibilities of the armed forces. He referred to Article 35 of the Armed Forces Internal Service Law,<sup>171</sup> one of the legal provisions evoked in the past to justify military interventions:

They, for example, say that Article 35 has to be abolished and replaced with another one. Abolish it or not, this is why we, as the Turkish Armed Forces, exist. This is our natural historical duty. No one should tell us

<sup>169</sup> This was recorded at the March 2003 seminar. The transcript of the third audio cassette can be accessed at <http://cdogangercekler.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/3ncu-kaset-a-ve-b-yuzu.pdf>, 55.

<sup>170</sup> The first tape was published on Tuesday 23 August, the second one on Thursday 25 August.

<sup>171</sup> The full text of the law may be accessed at <http://www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/1044.html> (Original in Turkish). Article 35 states that ‘the duty of the Turkish Armed Forces is to protect and preserve the Turkish homeland and the Turkish Republic as defined in the constitution.’ The law entered into force shortly after the military coup in 1960.

anything else . . . As we have done until now, we will stand together and hold our heads high.

Kosaner shared his frustration that the military was no longer able to rein in even its own members. Referring to documents central to the indictment and the seminar organised in March 2003 by the then commander of the First Army, Cetin Dogan, he complained:

My friends, since every document regarding this matter, the seminar, has been destroyed, we weren't able to find anything when this matter appeared in the news . . . We let them steal every piece of information we have regarding the seminar, including our conversations. They are in the hands of unauthorised people now . . . Our own great First Army is responsible for the faults and the damage caused. It cannot be the case that when a planning seminar is initiated, all of the documents including their details end up being accessible to everyone. This is another disgrace.

Kosaner discussed a series of other recent attacks on the military in its battle with the PKK in South East Anatolia, and a public debate about mistakes that might have cost the lives of conscripts. Kosaner admitted that some of this criticism was justified: 'How would the responsible people react if I were to say that our people [of the army] planted mines over there ten or twenty years ago and they just left the mines there?' He referred to the accidental shooting of 'innocent conscripts' ( 'mahsum er'):

Look, another example, I actually don't even want to say it. If a unit doesn't have someone who is really in charge, then the members will randomly fire their guns all over the place after they hear a single shot. We shot one of our own privates in his forehead just like this. Didn't we? Have you heard about this? You did, right?

He also warned his colleagues never to trust the press: 'We should not consider journalists to be our friends. The task of the press, of a journalist, is to report a story and they are prepared to sell their own mothers to achieve this. A journalist is merciless when it comes to these matters . . . Therefore, avoid contact with all journalists.'

The Kosaner tape highlighted the extent to which senior generals had been put on the defensive by recent events. The Turkish armed forces had become an institution no longer in control of its own staff, unable to control an outflow of documents, helpless in the face of charges against its officers.

In 2009 news emerged about another plot against the government which appeared to come from the psychological operations department of the Office of the General Staff. In early 2010 there was renewed talk about another case involving the forced closure of political parties. All this stopped with the arrests in 2010. As veteran Turkish journalist, Memet Ali Birand, who had lost his job in the late 1990s after a smear campaign coordinated by the military, was asked in 2011 about the evidence of the Sledgehammer case, he answered: 'Life is a bitch.'<sup>172</sup> If political parties could be closed down and their leaders arrested with impunity in the past, many appeared to argue, then it was

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<sup>172</sup> Mehmer Ali Birdan on *Al Jazeera*, 2011.

now the turn of the generals. There was a price to pay for regime change. And by 2010 this appeared to be under way.

A protocol (EMASYA) which had expanded the influence of the military and gendarmerie in domestic security, originally signed in 1997 following the toppling of the government, was revoked in early 2010. The impunity of the military from prosecution in civilian courts was lifted following constitutional amendments passed through a referendum in September 2010. Court cases across the country began to look into crimes connected to JITEM as well as into the role of the military during previous interventions. Prosecutors prepared an indictment against the coup leader of 1980, Kenan Evren, who was questioned in 2011. Prosecutors also started to look into the role of the military in the intervention in 1997. Court cases in Ankara and Diyarbakir revisited unsolved crimes of the 1990s. The gendarmerie officials caught in the Semdinli operation in 2005 found themselves arrested again in 2011 and brought—once again—before a civilian court.

The cumulative impact of recent arrests and trials has indeed been enormous. As of November 2011, more than five hundred people are standing trial in cases involving former and current members of the armed forces. As things stand there is no end in sight to these trials. And yet, while successfully intimidating the military opposition, there is also a growing sense that many of the specific claims and accusations in the Balyoz case in particular are weak. This makes it all the more vital for Turkish institutions to address all specific doubts surrounding the current trials.

## Completing the Transition

At this stage the reform of civil-military relations is still far from complete. Civilian control of the armed forces is currently ensured not through a system of controls or a shared vision of the role of a modern army, but through fear of judicial prosecution within the military. Turkish politicians (and citizens) learn about developments within the armed forces through leaks. Military documents and secret recordings find their way into the media and then into indictments drafted by civilian prosecutors. Relying on institutional failures is problematic. Civilian control of the military is still not institutionalised but based on the popularity of a strong prime minister at a time of high economic growth. Today civil-military relations in Turkey remain a world apart when compared to the situation in other NATO members. The state of affairs resembles Spain—not the Spain of 2011 but the Spain of 1981—a country emerging from a failed coup attempt but yet to carry out the series of reforms that would eventually bring it in line with other European democracies. In the present context the task of reform has shifted from preventing military interventions in politics to ‘preventing the military establishing functional and organisational autonomy.’<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Narcis Serra offers an excellent description of the state of civil-military relations in Spain in *The Military Transition: Democratic Reform of the Armed Forces*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 158.

This leaves the following concrete recommendations:

- In Turkey today the military still establishes its strategy largely independently. The National Security Policy Document (NSPD), known as the Red Book, which identifies the major threats, is not even shared with parliament, nor is Turkey's National Military Strategy paper (Turkiye'nin Milli Askeri Stratejisi, TUMAS), the implementation plans (the Strategic Goal Plan—Stratejik Hedef Planı SHP) or the programs (such as the Ten-Year Procurement Program, On Yıllık Tedarik Programı—OYTEP) which are based on these. None of these documents make their way to the defence committee or parliament floor. None are even discussed seriously by the government. This should change.
- As Narcis Serra, former minister of defence in Spain, has written, in the case of the Spanish transition the creation and development of a strong ministry of defence was absolutely crucial. There is still no such strong ministry in Turkey. In fact the only small structural change in the ministry that has taken place in the past decade has been a reform that allowed the minister (since 8 August 2011) to have seven ministerial advisors of his choice. Legal changes are needed to allow the civilian minister to reorganise and staff his own ministry. Only once this is done may it even be possible to put the military under the effective control of the ministry and integrate it into the public administration. This should be a top priority for the Turkish government.

- Civilian representatives directly accountable to parliament should also have full authority over decisions regarding the promotion and the appointment of high-ranking officers, i.e. generals and admirals. At the present time, neither the office of the Turkish president nor that of the prime minister has a staff of experts with sufficient knowledge and skills which is independent of military authorities. They cannot effectively verify if political guidance actually prevails and whether civilian objectives are even translated into plans, programs or budgets. It would be crucial to provide support – the training of civilian experts in Turkey in matters of defence policy, budgeting and planning – in order to help build such expertise.
- At the same time, the capacities of parliamentary committees (such as the defence and budget committees) should be strengthened to allow them to play a role which they have never played before. Here an exchange of experiences with European parliaments and the respective committees should be further developed.
- To advance the cause of defence reform there is a need to develop educated public opinion leaders who understand defence issues. It is also vital that political parties build up this expertise. The efforts of Turkish NGOs, such as Tesev, have been crucial in recent years in changing the Turkish debate.
- The military justice system needs to be reformed so that it cannot be used as an instrument to pressure military personnel. The enduring duality in the national judicial system remains one of the big issues to be addressed by the government's judicial reform strategy.

The threat which Turkey's generals posed until very recently to the development of a normal democracy in Turkey was real. The goal of moving towards civil-military relations in Turkey similar to those in the rest of Europe is legitimate and the process long overdue. Ending the legal impunity of soldiers is also a crucial step forward in strengthening the rule of law. Finally, dealing with serious crimes committed by security forces in the past is also vital.

Turkish democracy has emerged strengthened from the recent confrontations between civilians and generals. At the same time the Turkish judiciary continues to be seen by many, including supporters of civilian rule, as a political instrument (now of a civilian government) within a power struggle. At this moment the ongoing trials do not meet the triple objectives of transitional justice: deterrence (of future military interventions in democratic politics); just retribution (fairness to the accused and respect for victims); and reconciliation. This makes it all the more important that those charged with conspiring against the state are not spending long periods in pretrial detention even before any judgements are made, that the rights of all defendants are protected and that all proceedings are fully transparent. This remains a serious challenge both for the judiciary and for the current government.

At this moment many countries in North Africa and the Middle East face issues of institutionally limiting the power of generals, dealing fairly with crimes committed by state institutions in the past while also leaving behind traditions of political justice. A successful Turkish example of dealing with both challenges would be a valuable inspiration. It would also be a crucial step forward for Turkish democracy.

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# A Sceptical Commentary on the Possibility of Turkey's Accession

**Manfred Scheich**

The potential accession of Turkey to the European Union should be viewed above and beyond strategic ambitions and judged in light of its possible effects on the character, internal situation and future development of the Union. In this context, the following considerations, academic as they may seem, should be useful.

A key point touches on the functioning of the Union, its ability to decide and act effectively to fulfil its basic objectives: to shape and decide common policies over an expanding range of issues and to speak with one voice on the international scene based on the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

To achieve this objective, a significant and increasing degree of internal cohesion is crucial, especially since the Union is and will remain for the foreseeable future a multinational construct based on sovereign states, dependent on their political will and on states' national, though hopefully enlightened, interests. If cohesion is weak or non-existent, the functioning of the Union will suffer and centrifugal forces may gain the upper hand. (This trend is already discernible in the current Union of 27 countries).

The notion of cohesion has multiple dimensions: cultural in the widest sense, political and socio-economic, and historical. These elements determine the degree to which the necessary politically effective understanding of a

common interest and fate exists among the partners in the integration process.

These considerations have fuelled a debate on the Union's capacity to absorb further members and on its geographic borders. It is no accident that the debate arose in the context of the latest enlargement—the Eastern enlargement in 2004 and 2007—which practically doubled membership and inescapably deepened the divisions among Member States, damaging internal cohesion.

It is worthwhile to take a brief look at the issue of the 'absorption capacity' of the EU, first in general terms and then as it applies to the case of Turkey. What impact might a candidate for membership have on the European project, for instance the movement towards an 'ever closer Union' with (increasingly?) federal elements, or on the functioning of the Union, that is on the development of a European identity and feeling of community? These are prerequisites for the necessary spirit of compromise in the decision-making processes, as is the readiness of governments and citizens to share in order to achieve the aim of 'economic and social cohesion' included in EU treaties.

There are still other matters that need to be considered:

1. What degree of compatibility exists between a candidate's values, attitudes and structures and those of Member States and the Union as a whole?
2. Should the accession of a candidate be accepted by at least a strong majority of EU citizens? This question touches on the basic political legitimacy of the European project.
3. What impact would a candidate have on the internal balance of the Union with regard to size and population?

4. What are the financial implications for agricultural and structural policies, and what financial transfers might be necessary?
5. What are the implications of extending the Union's borders for its internal and external security?

Applied to Turkey, all these considerations raise important questions. Do Turkey and its people share the European dream of the founding fathers? Should they? (It can, of course, be argued that this dream of an ever closer Union with growing federal elements has already been overtaken by history; in that case, one should honestly say so.) Or is it Turkey's goal to sit with Europe's dominant powers—France, Germany and Great Britain—at the same table, with equal rights to determine Europe's future, an objective that can be seen as legitimate and rooted in history.

Given the predictable reactions of a majority of EU citizens to Turkish membership, it would have significant consequences for the desired strengthening of a European identity and for the Union's cohesion. Turkey's size and its rapidly growing population would undoubtedly affect the balance of power within the EU.

Turkey is a regional power bordering on a very unstable part of the world and it carries out its specific functions with growing assertiveness and initiative. It may be in a better position to execute its regional functions outside the structures and institutional limitations of the Union, a possibility that could also be in the EU's interest.

A general argument in favour of enlargement, occasionally heard from different EU quarters, is that the Union's weight on the international scene, in particular vis-à-vis countries like China and India, would automatically grow with the extension of its territory and population. This is erroneous

if not dangerous. The Union is, as has been mentioned, a multinational concept already struggling with its numerous and sometimes deep internal divisions. It does not enjoy unified governance. Limitless extension can only weaken or destroy its effectiveness and put the very objective of the integration project at risk.

In the case of Turkey there are also, of course, a number of valid arguments in favour of eventual accession. It is legitimate to ask nonetheless that the considerations set out here be taken into account in the analysis and discussion among the Union's political actors as well as in a transparent and candid public debate. To avoid such a discussion by focusing 15 or 20 years ahead and to calm public opinion by referring to eventual referenda does not do justice to the importance of the question and its possible consequences, and may not be fair in the case of Turkey. Wherever the balance of arguments finally falls, in favour of Turkey's accession or another form of close partnership, the decision must be taken in full awareness of what is at stake.

## About the authors

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**Gerald Knaus** is the founder of the European Stability Initiative (ESI), a Berlin-based think tank working on South-Eastern Europe, Turkey, the Caucasus and European enlargement. He studied in Oxford, Brussels and Bologna. He was director of the Lessons Learned Unit of the EU Pillar of the UN Mission in Kosovo. He is a founding member of the European Council on Foreign Relations and associate fellow at the Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy at the Harvard University Kennedy School.

**Manfred Scheich** was Austria's Ambassador to Algeria from 1974 to 1978. Between 1983 and 1986 he was the country's Ambassador to the European Communities and from 1987 to 1992 Head of the Section for Integration and Economic Policy at the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was Austria's chief negotiator for the EC accession negotiations, Permanent Representative of Austria to the EU from 1995 to 1999 and Austria's chief negotiator for the Treaty of Amsterdam.



Turkey's growing assertiveness on the international stage, difficulties with EU accession, rapidly rising economy, and the long and controversial reign of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) are all necessitating a need for analysis. The present study of the Centre for European Studies presents two papers which look at Turkey and the AKP from different perspectives. Svante Cornell's paper argues that AKP has moved away from democratic reforms and that Turkey's 'zero problems with the neighbours' approach to international relations has failed. Gerald Knaus maintains that the AKP and the EU's influence on Turkey have effected radical changes in the balance of power between the military and civilian actors, thus bringing Turkey somewhat closer to Western democratic standards. Both authors advocate continued EU engagement with Turkey, irrespective of the progress of accession negotiations.