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Mission Unaccomplished: Turkey after Erdoğan's Referendum

2017 has not been a good year for European-Turkish relations, nor has it been particularly propitious for Turkey itself. Divisions between Turkey, on the one side, and the European states and international organizations, on the other, have been widening, and positions hardening. The rhetoric on both sides has intensified, and more differences than commonalities are evident. The lowest points were the referendum to amend the Turkish constitution, the arbitrary imprisonment of persons who were also citizens of a European state, and the personal intervention of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the German election campaign. Anyone who thought the Gezi Park protests had revealed fissures in the Turkish power structure or that Erdoğan had already passed the zenith of his power was mistaken. In the meantime, Erdoğan has again clearly sharpened the tone of his comments directed at the West, while tightening the reins domestically following the attempted coup in the summer of 2016.

Erdoğan's election as president of Turkey in 2014 and the 2017 referendum to amend the constitution and transform the political system into a presidential system were major political turning points. Both votes were observed by the OSCE, which delivered critical reports on each. In this contribution, I begin by considering the OSCE's criticisms of the two votes. I then analyse the strategies of repression and legitimation that Erdoğan is using to strengthen his grip on power. Finally, I argue that, despite clear evidence of authoritarian tendencies, it is nonetheless smarter for the West to avoid direct confrontation with Erdoğan or cutting Turkey loose, but rather to systematically cultivate the section of Turkish civil society that is well disposed towards Europe, while remaining critical of political developments in the country.

Turkish for Democracy

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was prime minister of Turkey from 2003 until 2014, was elected as Turkey's head of state in August 2014 with 52.2 per cent of the votes cast. The office of president had previously been held by Abdullah Gül. Erdoğan received just under 69 per cent of votes cast by Turkish citizens living in Germany, though turnout among German Turks was

merely 8.15 per cent.¹ Given that Erdoğan was able to secure a relatively large proportion of the German Turkish vote, it can be assumed that his campaign was positively received in Germany. Indeed, with the noteworthy exception of the United Kingdom, Erdoğan generally received a large number of votes in Western European countries – a higher share than in Turkey itself.

The elections were relatively fair and democratic standards were respected, as confirmed by international monitors. In the words of the OSCE observers: “The campaign was characterized by a general respect for fundamental freedoms and contestants were generally able to campaign without hindrance.”² Nevertheless, a certain imbalance among the candidates arose from the fact that, as prime minister, Erdoğan enjoyed significantly more political visibility than his rivals. “While all three candidates actively campaigned, the campaign of the Prime Minister was the most visible. The misuse of administrative resources and the lack of a clear distinction between key institutional events and campaign activities granted him an undue advantage (...)”³ In 2014, Erdoğan had already used his power over the media to play to the gallery.

Erdoğan’s two opponents, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the joint candidate of the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) and the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), and Selahattin Demirtaş of the left-wing Peoples’ Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP), criticized the unfair conditions under which the campaign was run. The national public broadcaster, TRT (*Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu*), granted Erdoğan far more time than his opponents to make statements relevant to the election. Erdoğan enjoyed a total of some 533 minutes of broadcast time to get his message across, while the CHP/MHP candidate had to make do with 23 minutes, and the HDP candidate with only 45 seconds. According to the OSCE: “The overall disproportionate television coverage, the main source of political information, in favour of the Prime Minister, including live broadcasting of his events and speeches, coupled with the limited amount of political advertising of the other two candidates, gave the Prime Minister a distinct advantage and limited pluralistic information on political alternatives for voters.”⁴

In contrast to his predecessors, Erdoğan has been more active in defining the role of the president and shaping his activities, and, in doing so, has occasionally exceeded his powers. According to its constitution, Turkey is still a parliamentary democracy in which the executive is the ultimate govern-

1 Cf. Nermin Abadan-Unat/Volkan Çıdam/Dilek Çınar/Zeynep Kadirbeyoğlu/Selcan Kaynak/Bahar Özay/Sercan Taş, *Voting Behaviour of Euro-Turks and Turkey’s Presidential Elections of 2014*, December 2014, p. 18.

2 OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Republic of Turkey, Presidential Election, 10 August 2014, OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission, Final Report*, Warsaw, 18 November 2014, p. 1, available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/126851>.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

mental authority, while the president possesses “merely” symbolic powers. Under Erdoğan, however, the balance of power has changed fundamentally. As president, he has acted more as a head of government and less as a politically neutral head of state.⁵ This is only possible because the prime ministers – Ahmet Davutoğlu until May 2016, Binali Yıldırım thereafter – were willing to subordinate themselves to Erdoğan, who informally picked and finally confirmed their cabinets. Since Erdoğan’s election, Turkey has effectively had a presidential system. Since not even Erdoğan could permanently contradict the spirit of the constitution, it was thus necessary to change the form of government.

Erdoğan’s plan to introduce a presidential system in Turkey can be considered a very calculating strategic move. If the change is accomplished in time for the next elections in 2019, the actions he currently performs as head of state that exceed his powers will no longer be in breach of the constitution. At the same time, he will be able to act with even more political independence from other political actors.⁶

The referendum on amending the Turkish constitution was held on 16th April 2017. Voters were asked to decide whether Law No. 6771, whose 18 points would change a total of 72 articles of the constitution, should be adopted to come into force at the next elections in November 2019. The referendum was as close as it could be, with 51 per cent voting “yes” and 49 “no”. Virtually all the interior Anatolian provinces were in favour of the amendments, while the coastal provinces, the European part of Turkey, and the areas with a majority Kurdish population were against. The result is all the more remarkable given how hard Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AK Parti, AKP)⁷ campaigned in favour of the amendment, even resorting to extortion and intimidation. The OSCE report on the constitutional referendum did not mince words, stating that the referendum “took place on an unlevel playing field and the two sides of the campaign did not have equal opportunities. Voters were not provided with impartial information about key aspects of the reform, and civil society organizations were not able to participate. Under the state of emergency put in place after the July 2016 failed coup attempt, fundamental freedoms essential to a genuinely democratic process were curtailed. The dismissal or detention of thousands of citizens negatively affected the political environment. One side’s dominance in the coverage and restrictions on the media reduced voters’ access to a plurality of views.”⁸

5 Cf. Emre Erdoğan, *Erdoğan’s Final Countdown to Absolute Power?* The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Analysis, 19 February 2015, available at: <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/Erdoğans-final-countdown-absolute-power>.

6 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 2.

7 The abbreviation AK also means “white” or “pure” in Turkish.

8 OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Republic of Turkey, Constitutional Referendum, 16 April 2017, OSCE/ODIHR Limited Referendum Observation Mission, Final Report*, Warsaw 22 June 2017, p. 1, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/324816>; the same statement was already made in: OSCE, Office for

The fact that the “yes” campaign had access to state resources and the implicit support of state institutions – above all the security forces – while the “no” campaign faced active opposition, including dirty tricks and even violence, sheds a troubling light on the political situation in the country. The OSCE, too, “observed the obstruction of efforts of several parties and civil society organizations to support the ‘No’ campaign. The campaign rhetoric was tarnished by a number of senior officials equating ‘No’ supporters with terrorist sympathizers. In numerous cases, ‘No’ supporters faced bans of their campaign activities, police interventions and violent scuffles at their events.”⁹

In view of the clear intervention by state institutions, it appears almost miraculous that Erdoğan won by such a narrow margin. In 2017, Erdoğan’s exercise of influence is significantly stronger than it was three years ago, and the autocratic character of his regime is becoming increasingly evident.

Erdoğan’s Radicalization

The rise of the AKP goes hand-in-hand with a series of reforms on a scale unique in Turkish history. Under the AKP, who were first elected to govern in 2002, Turkey moved gradually closer to the European Union (EU).¹⁰ The AKP’s greatest achievements include: abolishing the death penalty, banning torture, and extending freedom of speech, and the rights of minorities, women, and children.¹¹ In the light of these reforms, the European Commission agreed to officially commence negotiations on Turkey’s full membership in the EU on 3 October 2005.¹² One feature of the reform process initiated by the AKP was that representatives of Islamic-conservative and Kurdish circles were also included in Turkey’s new more moderate and pro-European direction. Despite the AKP’s embrace of “European values”, the party’s plans were driven by the desire for a new ethical order in society, one that has its origins in the Ottoman period. To bring about this renewal, it was necessary to break those Kemalists who had suppressed the renaissance of political Islam ever since the founding of the Turkish republic. The AKP

Democratic Institutions and Human Rights/Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, *International Referendum Observation Mission, Republic of Turkey – Constitutional Referendum, 16 April 2017, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, p. 1, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/311721>.

9 OSCE/ODIHR *Limited Referendum Observation Mission, Final Report*, cited above (Note 8), p. 2.

10 Cf. Olaf Leiß (ed.), *Die Türkei im Wandel. Innen- und außenpolitische Dynamiken* [Turkey Transformed. Shifts in Domestic and Foreign Policy], Baden-Baden 2013.

11 Cf. Asiye Öztürk, *Der innenpolitische Kontext des außenpolitischen Wandels der Türkei* [The Domestic Context of Turkey’s Foreign Policy Transformation], Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, Discussion Paper 5/2009, p. 12.

12 Cf. Olaf Leiß, The Permanent Candidate: Turkey’s Europeanization under the AKP Government, in: Annette Freyberg-Inan/Mehmet Bardakci/Olaf Leiß (eds), *Growing Together, Growing Apart: Turkey and the European Union Today*, Baden-Baden 2016, pp. 35-53.

therefore took aim at one of the foundational principles of Kemalism, seeking to reform Turkey's commitment to secularism.

This plan was justified by the government in the name of a more pluralistic approach to policy-making. AKP leaders claimed that their intended reform of Kemalism did not seek to abolish secular principles directly, but merely to loosen their application, in order to make Turkey's political system more democratic. In the academic literature and among the population as a whole, the AKP's strategy was perceived as progressive and modern. The effects of this modernization were felt, above all, in the economy. The AKP was also wise enough to distance itself from earlier Islamic movements, learning from their failure.¹³ To achieve political success in Turkey, the AKP needed to adopt a more moderate posture and, in contrast to precursors such as Necmettin Erbakan's banned Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) in the 1990s, assume the role of a centrist party.

From a European point of view, however, by the time of Erdoğan's election to the presidency in 2014, at the latest, the party could no longer be considered moderate or centrist. Erdoğan and the AKP are increasingly pursuing a programme consisting of a mixture of neo-Ottoman nostalgia, conservative Islamic morals, and nationalism. During this period, Erdoğan has also come to assume a far more central position. More than any of his predecessors, he knows how to portray himself as the guarantor of the stability of "the people and the nation". Erdoğan personally embodies the fusion of state and nation into a single entity, with him at the centre as the highest representative of the state. By seeking to transform the political system into a presidential system in 2019, he shows he is willing to undermine the current structure of the Turkish state just to maintain and expand his own power. At the same time, Erdoğan and the AKP are also showing increasingly authoritarian tendencies. This kind of high-handed government is naturally also concerned with public recognition and support. Domestically, the government takes a hard line in pursuing its agenda, using surveillance, repression, and even violence. In the following, I focus on four means used by the regime to cement its hold on power.

Media and Press Freedom

The Turkish media is dominated by corporate interests, and corporate interlinkages play an extremely important role in news reporting.¹⁴ When the AKP came to power following the 2002 elections they initially enjoyed the support of most of the media. Yet this changed after the 2004 elections, after

13 Cf. E. Fuat Keyman/Sebnem Gumuscu, *Democracy, Identity and Foreign Policy in Turkey. Hegemony through Transformation*, Basingstoke 2014, p. 41.

14 Cf. Dilek Kurban/Ceren Sözeri, *Caught in the Wheels of Power: The Political, Legal and Economic Constraints on Independent Media and Freedom of the Press in Turkey*, TESEV Democratization Program Media Studies Series 3, Istanbul 2012, p. 49.

which a number of media company owners and politicians attempted to put the government in a bad light. Turkey's largest media organization, the Doğan Media Group, was particularly critical of the AKP's reform plans. The zenith of the Doğan Media Group's power came in 2008 during the struggle over the government's attempt to lift Turkey's ban on the wearing of headscarves in public institutions.¹⁵ A year later, an enormous fine was imposed on the Doğan Media Group with the aim of severely restricting the group's criticism of the government.¹⁶ This and further repressive measures limited the freedom of journalists to perform their work and led to greater self-censorship.¹⁷ Self-censorship can be traced back to both the state and to corporate interests. The media companies are interested in maintaining good relations with the state, which leads to reporting that is pro-government.¹⁸ Journalists are also scared of losing their jobs or being publicly discredited and socially ostracized.¹⁹

Discussions on press freedom in Turkey reached their peak during the Gezi Park protests, drawing national and international attention. At the start of the unrest, the protests were largely ignored by the Turkish media. During the first protests in Istanbul's central Taksim Square, CNN Türk, which belongs to the Doğan Group, ignored the events, broadcasting instead a documentary about penguins.²⁰ This failure on the part of the media led to penguins becoming a symbol of the protest movement.²¹

In addition, journalists and other people in the public sphere were publicly discredited for their participation in the Gezi protests.²² Following the protests, 384 journalists lost their jobs.²³ Can Dündar, one of Turkey's most prominent journalists, spoke after his firing: "Everyone knows why; I'm not the first, and I won't be the last."²⁴ In late 2014, 24 people, including three journalists, were arrested during raids. Most of those arrested had a connection with Fethullah Gülen and his movement – exactly one year after the cor-

15 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 50.

16 Cf. Sebnem Arsu/Sabina Tavernise, Turkish Media Group Is Fined \$2.5 Billion, in: *The New York Times*, 9 September 2009, at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/10/world/europe/10istanbul.html>.

17 Cf. Kurban/Sözeri, cited above (Note 14), p. 51.

18 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

19 Cf. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Media Barometer. Turkey 2014. A home grown analysis of the media landscape in Turkey*, Istanbul 2014, p. 17.

20 Cf. Kerem Oktem, Why Turkey's mainstream media chose to show penguins rather than protests, in: *The Guardian*, 9 June 2013, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/09/turkey-mainstream-media-penguins-protests>.

21 Cf. Pelin Turgut, As Turkey's Protests Continue, Attention Falls on Failures of Turkish Media, in: *Time*, 6 June 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/06/06/as-turkeys-protests-continue-attention-falls-on-failures-of-turkish-media/>.

22 Cf. Turkish actor threatened over his Gezi Park support, in: *Hürriyet Daily News*, 10 June 2013, at: <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/turkish-actor-threatened-over-his-gezi-park-support-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=48568&NewsCatID=341>.

23 Cf. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, cited above (Note 19), p. 16.

24 Cited in: Serkan Ocak, Ve Can Dündar da gitti [And Can Dündar Left too], in: *Radikal*, 2 August 2013, at: http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/ve_can_dundar_da_gitti-1144521 (author's translation).

ruption scandal that had discredited Turkey's government in 2013, which Erdoğan had blamed on Gülen. After the July 2016 coup attempt, the security forces got even tougher. More than 100 journalists were arrested and 150 media outlets closed down. Many journalists had to leave the country, including Can Dündar, who moved to Germany. At the time of writing, 43 journalists remain in custody, including Deniz Yücel and the translator Meşale Tolu. This is the highest number of journalists in prison in any country worldwide. The World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders now placed Turkey 155th of 180 countries – and falling.²⁵

These acts indicate that politics in Turkey are moving in an undemocratic direction. In a democracy, where power stems from the people, the public media are an indispensable means of opinion forming among the citizens. Restrictions on reporting deny the Turkish people precisely this right to independently form their own opinions.

Restricting the Right to Demonstrate and Security Policy

As well as press freedom, the right to demonstrate is also being strictly restricted and controlled in Turkey. Following the Gezi protests, a comprehensive package of security measures was adopted in February 2015, granting the police enhanced powers. The police are now permitted to shoot on armed demonstrators at their own discretion, with the definition of “armed” including the carrying of rocks. This also endangers peaceful demonstrators who might find themselves in the line of fire.²⁶ The new security laws largely target demonstrators, expanding the powers of the police by, among other things, allowing controversial methods of investigation. For instance, the police may now detain demonstrators for up to 48 hours. A law banning masks at demos is also planned, with infringement carrying a penalty of up to five years' imprisonment.

After the 2016 coup attempt, basic rights were suspended. Over 150,000 state employees lost their jobs, and 15 universities were immediately closed. Some 55,000 people are still held on remand, and the state plans to extend the permissible length of pre-trial custody to seven years. Demonstrations in opposition to this tough line are met with the concentrated and arbitrary application of state power. Despite these repressive measures, demonstrators have not allowed themselves to be deterred entirely. On 8 March 2017, over 10,000 women took to the streets in Istanbul to mark International Women's Day. At the demo, organized by a feminist group, women criticized the dominant patriarchal structures via anti-Erdoğan slogans.

25 Cf. Reporters without Borders, *2017 World Press Freedom Index*, at: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>.

26 Cf. Mustafa Akyol, The No-More-Mr-Nice-Guy law, in: *Hürriyet Daily News*, 25 February 2015, at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/the-no-more-mr-nice-guy-law.aspx?pageID=449&nID=78807&NewsCatID=411>.

The Role of Women in the Current Policies of the AKP

In November 2014 at a meeting on the subject of “women and justice”, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated the following: “You cannot put women and men on an equal footing. It is against nature.”²⁷ As this quote makes clear, Erdoğan is not in favour of promoting equality. He also made it clear that the nature of this event would not stop him from publically propounding his conservative view of women. Erdoğan is more interested in promoting the idea that women and men have specific roles. On International Women’s Day 2008, he called upon Turkish women to have at least three children each – for the benefit of the nation. In July 2014, Bülent Arınç, along with Erdoğan one of the founders of the AKP, caused a media furore when he stated that women should not laugh loudly in public – an example of what he called the decline of public decency in Turkey.²⁸

In 2012, the AKP had also taken it upon itself to seek to tighten up Turkey’s abortion law. Yet this idea was quickly dropped on account of harsh criticism. During the public discussion around this issue, Erdoğan equated abortion with murder, and, by calling it treason, made his already questionable plan to ban abortion in all cases even more incomprehensible and his line of argumentation even more incoherent. His argument was that abortion is treason because it reduces population growth, thereby damaging the country as a whole. Those who supported Erdoğan’s position included the then Health Minister Recep Akdağ, who argued that abortions should only be carried out when the pregnancy endangered the health of the mother. Akdağ was thus also against allowing the termination of pregnancies resulting from rape, arguing that, if the mother did not want the resulting child, it should be raised by the state. It is worth noting that this debate is being held almost entirely among men, with leading AKP politicians among those calling most vehemently for more restrictive abortion laws. Nor does Erdoğan place much faith in contraception, which he has called the products of foreign enemies seeking to damage Turkey.²⁹

Given such statements, it is hardly surprising that Turkey fell to 130th of 144 countries in the 2016 Global Gender Gap Report.³⁰ The government seeks to subject every area of life to the discipline of conservative Islamic gender segregation. Student halls of residence are now strictly segregated by sex, and Erdoğan has announced that he plans to take action against cohabiting students. Tattoos, piercings, and dyed hair have been banned from class-

27 Cited in: BBC News, *Turkey president Erdogan: Women are not equal to men*, 24 November 2014, at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30183711>.

28 Cf. The Guardian, *Turkish deputy prime minister says women should not laugh out loud*, 29 July 2014, at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/29/turkish-minister-women-laugh-loud-bulent-arinc>.

29 Cf. Çiğdem Akyol, *Der bekümmerte Bruder* [The Troubled Brother], in: *Die Tageszeitung*, 25 November 2014, at: <http://www.taz.de/15027795/>.

30 Cf. World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2016*, Geneva 2016, at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR16/WEF_Global_Gender_Gap_Report_2016.pdf.

rooms, and, as if to compensate, girls are now permitted to wear hijab from the fifth year of school. Conservative circles are also calling ever louder for the abolition of mixed-sex education.

These examples of how the AKP sees the role of women should make clear that they are perceived as anything but equal. This view of women is not based on modern, Western thinking, but on a traditional Muslim approach, one that, thanks to the policies of the AKP, is having a deep effect on Turkish life and society. Women's freedoms are being restricted, while motherhood is held up as the key contribution a woman can make to the well-being of the nation. At the same time, the state has taken steps to reduce the number of women in work, despite Turkey's currently booming economy, which should actually lead to more women joining the workforce. The fact that such views are not only represented in Erdoğan's ideology and the political programme of the AKP, but are also being turned into specific policies that influence the everyday life of the Turkish people, is yet more evidence of the repressive nature of the government. The civil rights and political freedoms of a large part of the population are being restricted in the name of the conservative Islamic norms and values of the political elite, which are being enforced using the power of the state.³¹ The AKP's view of women is heavily influenced by a value system that is totally incompatible with modern conceptions of equality.

AKP Infrastructure Projects and Their Effect on Voters

Major building projects are a favourite concern of autocrats, as they are a direct expression of political power and serve to immortalize their rule. Erdoğan is no exception and has supported numerous major infrastructure projects that demonstrate Turkey's economic boom for all to see. When a passenger rail tunnel under the Bosphorus, built as part of the "Marmaray" project, was opened, Erdoğan personally drove one of the first trains to pass through, and this was, of course, widely reported in the media. He also had his own official residence, the Presidential Complex (formerly White Palace) built in a protected area in Ankara, despite court rulings forbidding this. This building is many times larger than Buckingham Palace in London or the Élysée Palace in Paris. Above all, it is larger than the parliament building in Ankara and is an embodiment of Erdoğan's rule. Moreover, by ignoring the rulings of the courts, Erdoğan made evident that he was the real power in Turkey. He also broke with the tradition, extant since Atatürk's time, that the president should live in the Çankaya district of Ankara. Critics consider this a

31 Cf. Leah Gilbert/Payam Mohseni, *Beyond Authoritarianism: The Conceptualization of Hybrid Regimes*, in: *Studies in Comparative International Development*, September 2011, pp. 270-297.

further effort to distance himself from Atatürk's legacy and to establish a "new Turkey".

Other major projects include the construction of a third bridge across the Bosphorus, an enormous mosque in Istanbul, and a huge airport, credited as the world's largest. Erdoğan's construction projects underline the supposed benefits of AKP policies for the Turkish economy. With these projects, the governing party is signalling that it is continuing to plan for the future, and that Turkey will continue to prosper in international comparisons. The party uses prestige projects of this kind to mobilize broad support among the electorate and, thus, gain legitimacy. Erdoğan and the AKP seek to appeal to voters who are interested in seeing Turkey prosper economically. They are creating jobs, claim to be working to solve the traffic problems that plague the city of Istanbul, which is bursting at the seams, and demonstrate a tangible ability to achieve political results. Additional legitimacy is created by linking such projects to Erdoğan's cult of personality charismatic character – he has made these infrastructure projects his personal responsibility and has publicized their benefits. However, megaprojects are not only a means of symbolizing Turkey's growing prosperity, they are also intended to demonstrate the superiority of the conservative Islamic ideology. A gigantic mosque, visible from every district of Istanbul, stands as a visible symbol of the major role religion plays in Turkish society.

Turkey's Relations with Europe

Under Erdoğan, Turkey's domestic politics have become more unpredictable than ever. On the one hand, society has become more pluralistic: The military and Islamists, conservatives and modernizers, Kemalists and liberals, Alevis and Sunnis, Kurds and Armenians, feminists and imams, the courts and the bureaucracy are all vying for political influence and participation. On the other hand, the AKP and Erdoğan still dominate Turkish politics. The years-long struggle between the AKP and the Turkish armed forces – sometimes carried out in the open, sometimes invisible – is now largely over. Following a series of measures taken in the aftermath of the attempted coup d'état, which drastically reduced the army's privileges, the Turkish military and, with it, Kemalism, are in decline. As Erdoğan has cemented his hold on power, particularly since becoming president, his governing style has become increasingly authoritarian.³² His favourite methods, as already mentioned, include control of the media, restricting human rights, promoting Islamist and ultra-conservative values with regard to issues, such as women's rights, and manufacturing legitimacy by means of major infrastructure projects, which raise his prestige and associate his name with national development.

32 Cf. Johannes Gerschewski, The three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression and co-optation in autocratic regimes, in: *Democratization* 1/2013, pp. 13-38, here: p. 28.

Right now, Turkey finds itself further from the values of the European Union than ever. This has further reduced the likelihood of its joining the EU.³³ But where will the journey of a Turkey, that is increasingly self-confident and insistent on its sovereignty, end? Early on in his career, Erdoğan gave a speech that earned him a ten-month prison stretch in 1998 for “religious agitation”. He had spoken lines he claimed to be from a 1912 poem by the Turkish nationalist Ziya Gökalp, comparing democracy to a tram: “You ride it until you arrive at your destination, then you step off”.³⁴ As early as 1994, speaking to the newspaper *Milliyet*, he had said “Thank God almighty, I am a servant of Sharia.”³⁵

How should Europe react to Erdoğan’s transformation of Turkey into an authoritarian state? There is certainly no easy answer, though there are plenty of false ones. It should not be forgotten that, despite all the repressive mechanisms and application of political carrots and sticks, and despite the fact that Erdoğan has been in power now for almost 15 years, segments of Turkey’s civil society still look towards Europe. Islamic values may be spreading rapidly, but Europe’s secular influence remains. Breaking off relations with Turkey would only strengthen the hardliners in the country, those who support conservative values and Islamic rigorism. This cannot be the aim of the European states. Europe absolutely has to stop Turkey from drifting off towards the Middle East.

At the same time, Erdoğan is not the invulnerable macho figure he likes to present himself as. Turkey’s foreign relations are not prospering. The “Zero-Problems” policy Turkey has pursued with its neighbours, as introduced by the then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in 2009, has failed spectacularly. The attempt to achieve reconciliation with Armenia has faltered; Syria has collapsed into civil war; Iraq is breaking up; the Turkophone states are keeping their distance; and Turkey’s European neighbours remain wary. Turkey’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab states frightens their rulers. Erdoğan’s recent attempt to ally himself with Russian President Vladimir Putin and his support for Qatar hint at a desire to play great power politics, but that ambition already appears to be exhausted with this step. Genuine political, social, and economic reforms come from the West, not from the East. Erdoğan therefore needs his connections with the West.

Minor inconveniences, such as the suspension of government loan guarantees, the tightening of credit lines offered by public development banks, and the issuing of official travel warnings to tourists and business travelers

33 Cf. Nathalie Tocci, *Europeanization in Turkey: Trigger or Anchor for Reform*, in: *South European Society and Politics* 1/2005, pp. 71-81; Heinz Kramer, *Ist der türkische Beitrittsprozess am Ende? [Is Turkey’s Accession Process Dead?]* In: Olaf Leiße (ed.), *Die Türkei im Wandel. Innen- und außenpolitische Dynamiken [Turkey Is Changing. Domestic and Foreign Policy Dynamics]*, Baden-Baden 2013, pp. 75-100.

34 Cited in: Cüneyt M. Serdar, *Turkey’s disintegrating democracy*, in: *Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 2008, at: <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-oe-w-serdar28mar28-story.html>.

35 Cited in: *ibid.*

can and should make clear to Erdoğan that the West is deeply concerned by developments in Turkey. The hope that things might change after Erdoğan should, nonetheless, not lead to the severing of all ties. Turkey's deputy prime minister, Mehmet Şimşek, who is responsible for economic issues, has proposed a way to resolve the impasse over Turkey's possible accession to the EU: "If Turkey does everything necessary to become a member, it is ultimately unimportant whether we really join or not. We can be like Norway or Switzerland."³⁶ This has to be the aim of European policy – to encourage the open, prosperous, pluralistic section of Turkish society that welcomes debate and is flexible with regard to both domestic and foreign policy. Then maybe Turkey really can become the Switzerland of the East.

36 Cited in: Christian Geinitz, Sanktionsdrohungen lassen die Türkei kalt [Threats of Sanctions Leave Turkey Cold], in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 September 2017 (author's translation), at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/tuerkei-von-sanktionsdrohungen-unbeeindruckt-15188200.html>.