

# AK PARTY

## YEARS IN TÜRKİYE

**DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY**



Editors

**Kılıç B. Kanat**  
**Burhanettin Duran**

SETA

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# CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>PREFACE</b>   | 7   |
| <b>TRANSFORMATION OF TÜRKİYE DURING THE RULE OF THE AK PARTY</b><br>KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT, BURHANETTİN DURAN   | 11  |
| <b>TRANSFORMATION OF DOMESTIC POLITICS DURING<br/>THE AK PARTY ERA</b>   |     |
| <b>CHAPTER 1</b><br><b>THE AK PARTY'S IDEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION</b><br>BURHANETTİN DURAN  | 17  |
| <b>CHAPTER 2</b><br><b>TURKISH POLITICAL SYSTEM: THE AK PARTY'S REFORM AGENDA</b><br>NEBİ MİŞ  | 45  |
| <b>CHAPTER 3</b><br><b>THE AK PARTY'S KURDISH POLICY</b><br>HÜSEYİN ALPTEKİN, TALHA KÖSE   | 77  |
| <b>CHAPTER 4</b><br><b>PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM TRAJECTORIES IN TÜRKİYE:<br/>AN EVALUATION OF THE AK PARTY ERA</b><br>ÖZER KÖSEOĞLU, M. ZAHİD SOBACI | 101 |

## **IMPACT OF THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT ON TURKISH POLITICS**

### CHAPTER 5

#### **THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT'S EFFECTS ON TURKISH POLITICS**

NEBİ MİŞ

131

### CHAPTER 6

#### **MEDIA'S ROLE IN THE FAILURE OF THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT**

SERDAR KARAGÖZ, PINAR KANDEMİR

159

### CHAPTER 7

#### **EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF COUPS IN TÜRKİYE**

KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT

179

## **SECURITY AND FOREIGN POLICY**

### CHAPTER 8

#### **NEITHER REALIST NOR LIBERAL: TÜRKİYE'S CHANGING FOREIGN AID POLICY SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR**

VEYSEL KURT

207

### CHAPTER 9

#### **TURKISH-AMERICAN RELATIONS DURING THE AK PARTY GOVERNMENTS**

KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT

225

### CHAPTER 10

#### **CHANGING DYNAMICS OF TÜRKİYE'S MILITARY ACTIVISM IN THE AK PARTY ERA**

MURAT YEŞİLTAŞ, SİBEL DÜZ

247

### CHAPTER 11

#### **TÜRKİYE'S HUMANITARIAN FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE AK PARTY**

KADIR ÜSTÜN

285

## PREFACE

The AK Party experience represents a major transformation of our beloved country, Türkiye, as a major democratic power in its region and globally. Our party's success over the past two decades owes itself to the fact that we have always listened to demands and aspirations of our citizens. We have always believed that we needed to serve the needs of our people. Our people's dreams and aspirations inspired us and guided our strategy.

We have always tied our party's political destiny to the will of our people. We have always believed in the supremacy of the national will that guided us through troubled times. As millions of our citizens entrusted us with the stewardship of their democratic choices, in election after election, we were determined to never let them down. The engine of AK Party's success has been nothing other than the manifestation of the popular will.

We believe that the success story of this great nation of ours has only started. We have been privileged and felt humbled to be the servants of our country in the cause of justice and equity. Our principled and uncompromising stance on the fulfillment of democratic will of the people has ensured the protection and strengthening of our institutions despite various threats against our democracy. We know that our people's determination is our guarantee against dark forces.

I would like to congratulate the SETA Foundation and the editors of this volume for producing such an important volume on the AK Party years. This book analyzes the domestic and foreign policy challenges we have faced over the past two decades in addition to shedding light on some of the less known issues. It is not only a unique contribution to the literature on Turkish political history but also a fundamental reference for researchers and opinion makers.

It is no secret that the story of our nation's struggle for democracy and its rightful place at the global stage is an under-researched topic. We often see that far too many researchers, specialists, and opinionmakers fail to spare enough time to learn



about our great country. This unfortunately paves the way for superficial analyses and lazy commentaries. I hope this volume and others in the future will at least remedy some of these deficiencies in the literature.

Turkish political history is not important only for a better understanding of our country. It is just as important to make sense of the geopolitical dynamics in multiple regions such as the Middle East, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Balkans, and the South Caucasus. It is not simply because of our country's geopolitical location but, more importantly, as a function of our country's ties with and critical importance for the destiny of these regions.

Türkiye has never been an isolated country. It is neither possible nor desirable for our people. We believe in common destiny with friendly nations and our neighbors. This is not simply about geography; it is a reflection of our people's aspirations. Turkish nation understands that they have a historic role to play in this region and securing peace and stability is in their national interest. As the AK Party, we have designed our foreign policy according to this perspective.

Over the years, we have experienced major regional challenges including terrorism, wars, civil conflict, economic crises, human displacement, effects of climate change among others. We have also experienced the best examples of humanity in the form of kindness, humanitarian help, mobilization in national disasters, cooperation, and simply affection and love for another. We have always believed in the goodness of our people to overcome any challenges.

In the past two decades, at every critical turn, Turkish people have opted for democracy and supremacy of their national will. They refused to give into any tutelary forces or anti-democratic putschists who tried to subvert our democracy. They have repeatedly recognized our party's unshakable commitment to the will of the people by giving us the privilege to serve them. We have always tried to live up to their expectations and will continue to do so.

We have also witnessed the regional turbulations that threatened the stability and peace in our region as well as within our borders. Once again, our people taught us that our unity and determination to overcome these challenges was our greatest asset. In the face of civil wars, terrorism and unprecedented human displacement, Turkish people showed their ability to contribute to a more peaceful future in our region.

The AK Party's story is Türkiye's story. Our struggle for justice, equity and peace is the struggle of our nation. For us, working in the service of our nation's aspirations is not a political choice nor is it limited to the formal mechanisms of a

political party. The AK Party's political success is not a cause but an effect of this commitment. Those who think in terms of simple political machinations and short-term calculations will fail to appreciate the meaning of our approach.

I recognize the challenge of analyzing the story of AK Party over two decades within the confines of a book. Once again, I want to commend the contributors and editors of this volume for this monumental effort. I recommend this book for anyone who is interested in a thoughtful analysis of our party and the dramatic transformation of our country over the AK Party years. I hope that this study will inspire many others and the story of our nation's democratic journey will be better understood by contemporaries and future generations alike.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan  
*President of Türkiye and AK Party Chairman*



# TRANSFORMATION OF TÜRKİYE DURING THE RULE OF THE AK PARTY

KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT\*

BURHANETTİN DURAN\*\*

November 2020 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the AK Party's rise to power in Türkiye. 20 years ago, the newly formed AK Party won a surprising victory in the general elections. The major political parties, including the parties of the coalition government, failed to surpass the ten percent threshold to gain entry into parliament, resulting in major parliamentary gains for the AK Party. Since then, it has won consecutive electoral victories and has ruled in Türkiye for the last 20 years, an unprecedented reality in Türkiye's history of multiparty democracy.

In this period, Türkiye has undergone a very unique transformation in its domestic and foreign affairs. Domestically, a series of political reforms were instituted under different AK Party governments. The first comprehensive peace process was launched in order to resolve the Kurdish problem, a significant transformation took place in terms of civil-military relations, important constitutional amendments were achieved, the governmental system was changed from a parliamentary system to an executive presidential one, the headscarf ban that had become a thorny issue for decades was abolished and the Turkish economy grew rapidly in this period.

However, this transformation was hardly a smooth one. AK Party governments during this period faced significant challenges as well. Some elements of the establishment in Türkiye, including the judiciary and military, challenged the rule of the democratically elected government at times. The Constitutional Court heard a case to shut down the AK Party and the military released an e-memorandum in

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order to force the government to capitulate. The failure of the peace process following the resumption of the attacks by the PKK brought a new wave of attacks and a spiral of violence from the seasoned fighters of the group. Both al-Qaida and DAESH organized deadly attacks in Türkiye. After consecutive electoral victories, AK Party has become the dominant party which led to the rise of party consolidation as well as the political polarization in the country. With the Gezi Park protests, opposition groups started to frequently utilize street politics, and, during the July 15th coup attempt, the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) who had infiltrated different institutions in the government declared a total war against the AK Party government. This coup attempt has become one of the most serious and dramatic incidents of the last 20 years.

The AK Party governments also faced significant challenges and opportunities in their foreign affairs. The beginning of the accession negotiations with the EU, the abandonment of the non-interference policy towards the Middle East and increasing visibility of Türkiye in different continents, the increasing proactive role of Ankara in international organizations, and increasing economic diplomacy were the high points of the AK Party's foreign policy. During this period, Türkiye became a major contributor to numerous international humanitarian programs. In addition to hosting more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees, Türkiye also sends humanitarian assistance to groups, such as Rohingya Muslims and Somali, and is actively involved in conflict resolution programs in different parts of the world. However, AK Party governments still face significant challenges. The conflict in Syria has exported insecurity to Türkiye, while the 2003 invasion of Iraq triggered all the ethnic, sectarian fault lines in the region, and the 2014 invasion of Crimea generated major tension in Türkiye's northern neighborhood. The relations between Türkiye and the US and Türkiye and Russia went through major highs and lows during this period, demonstrating significant instability in Türkiye's relations with superpowers. While AK Party governments were being tested by these challenges, the region around Türkiye and the international system also went through a serious evolution. Civil wars, the emergence of failed states and instability throughout the Middle East, and debates about the transformation of the international system.

While approaching the centenary of its foundation, Türkiye's transformation cannot be fully understood without a thorough analysis of the AK Party era. The 20 year-long government of the AK Party brought significant political, constitutional, and social changes to Türkiye. This transformation of Türkiye also deeply

impacted the surrounding neighborhood. Türkiye has become a relevant actor that needs to be studied and understood in the conflicts and crisis in the region, including the civil war in Syria and Iraq, the fight against DAESH, as well as the crisis in the European Union regarding the rise of far-right populism.

Especially in the last few years, due to Türkiye's increasing involvement in regional affairs and the developments within Türkiye, international observers are becoming increasingly interested in the country. Türkiye related news and analysis occupies academic journals and magazines with increasing frequency and volume. There is a large number of articles and analyses written on the AK Party and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. However, most of these studies neglect the structural particularities, social dynamics, and international context. This book intends to fill an important gap in a timely fashion and aims to provide a more comprehensive follow up of the previous studies in this field.

The book aims to shed light on key issue areas in Turkish politics and the developments in this field during the AK Party period. In addition to the issues mentioned above, considering the predominance of Erdoğan as a political character during this period, his leadership style and patterns will also be analyzed. So far, the AK Party as a political party has been discussed as the gathering of a politically and socially homogenous group of people. However, this book will provide an insight to the coalition of groups that form the AK Party. This perception of homogeneity was also relevant for the temporal dimension. The AK Party is not a party that represents an unchanging political group, but is a party whose approaches and policies evolved over the past 20 years. The book intends to cover this transformation as well. There will also be a separate section within the book on the July 15th coup attempt of 2016, which is still very much understudied and neglected.





FIRST

TRANSFORMATION OF  
DOMESTIC POLITICS  
DURING THE AK PARTY ERA







## CHAPTER 1

# THE AK PARTY'S IDEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

BURHANETTİN DURAN\*

The identity and ideology of the Justice and Development Party (Adelet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party), which came to power just one year after its establishment and has ruled Türkiye for 20 consecutive years, and more importantly, its transformation, has been the subject of heated debate. At home and abroad, there is an ongoing discussion about where the AK Party “wants to take Türkiye”. In this regard, a number of ideologically charged criticisms have been voiced over the years. The most extreme lines of criticism include the accusation that the movement was a sub-contractor of Washington’s “Greater Middle East Project” and the charge that Türkiye was turning its back on the West to join the Eurasian axis. It is important to note that the same critics identify the AK Party in various ways, describing it as “democratic Islamist,” “religious authoritarian,” “counter-revolutionary” and “religious Kemalist”. In the wake of the 2009 World Economic Summit in Davos, Switzerland and the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident, the AK Party was charged with “returning to Islamism” and “taking an authoritarian turn”. Since the 2013 Gezi Park protests, that narrative became commonplace in the Western media. Amidst those accusations, how the AK Party views its actions vis-a-vis its political platform and identity references is often ignored.

There is no doubt that the movement, whose self-declared goal is to create a “new Türkiye,” has brought about various changes in Turkish politics during its long tenure in power. Those changes are often discussed with reference to the AK Party’s position vis-à-vis ideological positions, such as Islamism, nationalism and Kemalism. Needless to say, it is necessary to discuss those changes with an eye on policies related

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to coming to terms with Kemalist modernism, the Turkish republic's founding ideology, the future of Türkiye's relations with the Western alliance, interactions with the Islamic world and the Middle East, and Türkiye's domestic issues.

Under successive AK Party governments, which overcame a number of major crises including the 2007 presidential crisis and the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, traditional avenues of Turkish politics underwent critical transformations. Over the course of 20 years, the comprehensive transformation regarding civil-military relations, the relationship between politics and religion, and the political system's reformation created new challenges and problems – which could be the subject of a large body of academic literature.

In this regard, this article has a more limited objective. It analyzes the ideological references and identity discourses employed by the AK Party in its efforts to shape and implement policies to transform Türkiye. In doing so, it takes into account how policy changes caused by international and regional developments and realities transform the movement's ideological discourse – with regard to change and continuity.

This article's main argument is that the AK Party relies on three interrelated discourses depending on circumstantial needs without fully adopting or abandoning any specific one: *conservative democracy*, *our civilization* and the *native-national* (*yerli-milli*). It is possible to argue that all three discourses, which represent the movement's responses to challenges over the past 20 years, rested on pragmatic and strong leadership.

The AK Party's ideological transformation corresponds to the movement's confrontation with challenges, three past and one current. Past challenges include (a) the National Outlook movement, of which many AK Party founders were members; (b) Kemalism, which shaped the Republican period; and (c) the regional order, which was born out of World War I and transformed by the Arab revolts.<sup>1</sup> It is possible to argue that the AK Party today faces a number of realities, including the post-Arab Spring chaos in the Middle East, efforts by the great powers to redesign the region and the power struggle between regional powers. We could add to that list the AK Party coming to terms with its own performance – vis-a-vis the July 15, 2016 coup attempt and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's pledge to “build Türkiye's century”.

<sup>1</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “Understanding the AK Party's Identity Politics: The Multi-Layered Civilization Discourse and Its Limits”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 15, No: 1, (2013).

Taking into consideration *conservative democracy*, *our civilization* and *native-national* in the ideological and political framework of those four confrontations, it becomes clear that the AK Party has been re-blending the various ideological currents of Ottoman-Turkish modernization: Islamism, nationalism, Westernism and Ottomanism.<sup>2</sup> The concepts and symbols of those political traditions are united around the idea of the *national (millilik)* with a level of dynamism required by changing circumstances. The AK Party seemed pro-Western when Türkiye had a real opportunity to integrate into the European Union. During the Arab revolts, the country stressed the importance of the *ummah*, or “community,” and being labeled as “Middle Eastern”. Finally, the movement has been described as “nationalist” as it underlined the themes of “unity, state and nation” while intensifying the struggle against terrorist organizations such as the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) and the PKK, especially after the July 15 coup attempt. In this sense, the AK Party tends to highlight certain points as required by the times without abandoning others.

Primarily, this article stresses the shared roots of the AK Party’s references to identity and ideology since its establishment and the extent to which they changed over time.

Secondly, it concentrates on the idea of *conservative democracy*, the circumstances under which it was shaped and the policies it informed.

Thirdly, it focuses on the discourse of *our civilization*, which was adopted by a confident AK Party amid the Arab Spring revolts.

Finally, this study engages in a discussion of the concept of *native-national*, a discourse that emerged in response to the turbulence of recent years. It questions whether the adoption of this discourse, which was born out of a sense of being under attack and made references to “survival,” means that the AK Party became “pro-state” or “nationalist”.

## **“CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRACY”: A SEARCH FOR HARMONY AND INTEGRATION**

Established in 2001, the AK Party set out to develop a new approach to politics. To be clear, the idea of “conservative democracy,” which features prominently in public speeches by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, did not exist in ear-

<sup>2</sup> Malik Müfti, “The AK Party’s Islamic Realist Political Vision: Theory and Practice”, *Politics and Governance*, Vol: 2, No: 2, (2014), pp. 28-42.

lier periods. It is a well-known fact that the movement did not prefer the term “Muslim democrat” due to its religious connotations. Instead, the party picked “conservative” in a nod to the Turkish people’s traditions and their continuity, and the word “democrat” to indicate their intentions to transform Türkiye’s political system and promote democratization.<sup>3</sup> As such, the AK Party adopted the idea of “conservative democracy” to bridge the gap between the local and the universal, and to reconcile its values with democracy.<sup>4</sup> Again, this discourse, which emerged against the backdrop of Türkiye’s push for European integration and the democratization process reflected the AK Party’s efforts to introduce itself to domestic audiences as well as the Western-centric international system.

The discourse of “conservative democracy,” which rejected the label “Islamist” for being too closely associated with the National Outlook tradition, was a testament to the AK Party’s originality as well as its eagerness to settle the score with the Kemalist establishment.

Instead of limiting the definition of conservatism to its own political tradition and local values, the movement sought to reproduce them in the form of a new brand of conservative politics that lived up to global standards.

As the initial concept developed by the AK Party, “conservative democracy” imagined the political arena as a space for reconciliation. It viewed diversity as a source of richness and identified “the national will” as the source of political authority. Moreover, this approach posited that Turkish politics must rest firmly on the principles of reconciliation, tolerance and integration – as opposed to confrontation, conflict and polarization.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of “conservative democracy” made it possible for the AK Party to bring to an end the February 28 process in Türkiye. The movement’s inclusive style sought to cleanse the political arena of polarization or, in other words, to facilitate normalization. As such, the main goals of this approach were to overcome financial crises, promote economic liberalization, spur robust growth and facilitate democratization by complying with European Union norms.

Between 2002 and 2007, the AK Party transformed Türkiye’s political system by employing the discourse of conservative democracy and using as leverage the

<sup>3</sup> Evangelia Axiarlis, *Political Islam and the Secular State in Turkey: Democracy, Reform and the Justice and Development Party*, (I. B. Tauris & Co., New York: 2014), p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Yalçın Akdoğan, “The Meaning of Conservative Democratic Political Identity”, in *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz, (The University of Utah Press, Salt Lake: 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Yalçın Akdoğan, *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi*, (Alfa Publishing, İstanbul: 2014), p. 16.

accession talks with the European Union and the harmonization process. Until the crisis-stricken 2007 presidential election, the movement stressed the importance of “reconciliation” in politics. It is important to note, however, that this *politics of reconciliation* entailed an unspoken confrontation with Kemalist tutelage through the gradual empowerment of civilian officials and the promotion of democratization through the EU membership process.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of fact, the Kemalist elite’s attempts to prevent the election of a president, whose wife wore the religious headscarf, and to remove the AK Party from power compelled the movement to respond to this *politics of tension* in kind. As such, settling the score with the Kemalist guardianship regime gained importance from 2007 onwards.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the AK Party continued employing the discourse of democratization and reform until the April 16, 2017 constitutional referendum – largely thanks to its commitment to responding to tensions by calling for elections and deriving power from the people.

The idea of “conservative democracy” created a useful and ambiguous framework that could facilitate the AK Party’s emphasis on *synthesis* from 2008 to 2010. With reference to this concept, the movement was able to accomplish several tasks, including reversing the secularist radicalization of the February 28 process, promoting economic liberalization and robust growth, pushing for integration with the European Union and making efforts towards democratization.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that the AK Party attempted to distance itself from the National Outlook movement by making references to “conservative democracy”. Some elements of this disengagement process included the abandonment of religion-based politics and third-worldist critiques of the West, making peace with the Republican legacy and limiting the state’s transformation to reversing Kemalist-secularist practices. By contrast, the service-oriented approach to local government, which the Welfare Party invented in 1994, remained part and parcel of the AK Party’s platform. It is no secret that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s successful performance as the mayor of Istanbul was influential on his movement’s emphasis on public ser-

<sup>6</sup> Ali Resul Usul, “The Justice and Development Party and The European Union: From Euro-Skepticism to Euro-Enthusiasm and Euro-Fatigue”, in *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, ed. Ümit Cizre, (Routledge, New York: 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “Whither the Justice and Development Party’s ‘New Politics’? Steering towards a Conservative Democracy, Revised Islamist Agenda or Management of New Crises”, *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, ed. Ümit Cizre, (Routledge, New York: 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Akdoğan, *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi*, pp. 106-107.

vice. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the ultimate source of legitimacy for successive AK Party governments was service, action and development.<sup>9</sup>

It goes without saying that the AK Party's definition of *conservatism* was always inclusive of the legacies of center-right parties of the past, such as the Democratic Party of Adnan Menderes and Turgut Özal's Motherland Party.<sup>10</sup> However, it went beyond that: Although the movement does not engage in religion-based politics, there is no doubt that it takes into consideration religious sensitivities. In this regard, the AK Party kept in mind the Virtue Party's transformation and sought to create a synthesis of several currents in Turkish politics – conservatism, nationalism, Islamism and Westernism.<sup>11</sup> At a time when Kemalists had grown increasingly skeptical of the European Union, the AK Party was thus able to advocate deeper integration with Europe. Attaching importance to meeting Islamic demands, such as religious education and lifting the headscarf ban, the movement clearly subscribed to the Anglo-Saxon interpretation of secularism.<sup>12</sup> As such, the AK Party carved out a significant position for itself in the political mainstream under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's leadership.

It is a well-known fact that *conservatism* also refers to efforts to preserve the Kemalist status quo in Türkiye. Although the AK Party assumed an identity closely linked to the goal of transforming the country's political system, this transformative agenda never sought to challenge the republic's founding principles. Instead, the movement was content with undermining Kemalist tutelage and elitism, prioritizing the people's needs in matters of state and transitioning into a milder, more Anglo-Saxon brand of secularism. Therefore, it is possible to make the case that the AK Party completely subscribed to a brand of conservatism while seeking to strengthen the state apparatus and pushing for the republic's *restoration*.

Prior to 2013, the movement viewed democratization and liberalization as ways to strengthen the state apparatus. As a matter of fact, the European Union

<sup>9</sup>Akdoğan, *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi*, pp. 91-113; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "Address to the AK Party Caucus", (speech, May 20, 2003), <http://www.akparti.org.tr/tbmm/haberler/basbakan-recep-tayyip-erdoganin-ak-parti-grup-toplantisinde-yaptigi-konusma/4715>; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "Address to the AK Party's 3rd Extraordinary Convention", (speech, May 21, 2017), <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/75276/3-olaganustu-kongre-ak-parti-icin-yeniden-dirilis-ve-kurulus-kongresidir.html>, (Access date: October 1, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Sabri Sayarı, "Political Parties", in *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, ed. Metin Heper and Sabri Sayarı, (Routledge, New York: 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Metin Heper, "Turkey: Between East and West", in *The Convergence of Civilizations: Constituting a Mediterranean Region*, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto and London: 2006), pp. 273-77.

<sup>12</sup> Akdoğan, *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi*, pp. 91-113.

accession process consolidated the government's support for democratization. Although the membership talks came to a screeching halt in 2006, the AK Party sought to keep the democratization process going by arguing that it was ready to reimagine the Copenhagen criteria as *the Ankara criteria*. The 2010 constitutional referendum took place within the same context. The systematic infiltration of state institutions by the Gülen movement (which has since come to be known as the Gülenist Terror Group or FETÖ) and the organization's attempt to overthrow Türkiye's democratically elected government through the proxy of the judiciary on December 17-25, 2013, created an urgent need to *cleanse* and *strengthen* those institutions. Under the circumstances, the AK Party was compelled to strengthen the state apparatus and step up counterterrorism operations to consolidate Turkish democracy.<sup>13</sup>

In a way, this process resulted in a clash between EU reforms and the realities on the ground. The July 15, 2016 coup attempt, in turn, presented the AK Party with the task of restructuring public institutions within the broader framework of Türkiye's transition to the presidential system of government. Obviously, this situation represented a serious dilemma: On the one hand, the AK party was being accused of supporting the status quo and becoming *neo-Kemalist* for seeking to protect the state apparatus. On the other hand, the movement was described by the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) as "destructive" for showing the courage to adopt a new system of government.<sup>14</sup>

In truth, this whole situation was the direct result of the AK Party's transformation of *conservatism* in Türkiye. In other words, it stemmed from the movement's synthesis of change and preservation. As a political player, the AK Party was motivated by perpetual action and struggle. The movement's quest for *synthesis* and *redefinition* had an impact on the concepts it invoked to define its identity. The AK Party tended to take a range of concepts in an ambiguous form and applied its own colors to them. It ensured in particular that the contents of those concepts were not rigid, radical, exclusive or alienating. For instance, the word *conservative* was redefined to entail integration with Europe and openness to the world by emphasizing the commonality between Turkish conservatism and Western tradi-

<sup>13</sup> "Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'dan Uluslararası Ombudsmanlık Zirvesi'nde Önemli Açıklamalar", *Aktüel*, September 25, 2017, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/aktuel/2017/09/25/cumhurbaşkanı-recep-tayyip-erdogan-uluslararası-ombudsmanlık-zirvesinde-onemli-aciklamalar>, (Access date: October 1, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> "Kılıçdaroğlu: Yapılan Bir Rejim Değişikliğidir", NTV, December 9, 2016.



tions of conservatism. This openness was not viewed as a radical break but a process that would eventually strengthen domestic/local values. When the movement stressed the idea of *civilization*, in turn, it was considered the shared accumulation of global and national values. The stress on “*strong national values*” was not a rejection of human heritage. On the contrary, it was regarded as a willingness to appropriate their global counterparts. Whether *nation* referred to *our civilization* or the *native-national*, it signified unity – which embraced, rather than excluded, the various ethnic groups. The emphasis on *singularity* – *one nation, one state, one flag, one homeland* – did not supersede the movement’s awareness of being under attack. As such, it was possible for the AK Party to switch back and forth between *conservative democracy* and *our civilization*, or return to the *native-national*. Erdoğan’s strong leadership and ability to persuade his base played a crucial role in those seamless transitions.<sup>15</sup>

In the wake of the Arab revolts, especially the Jasmine Revolution of late 2010 in Tunisia, the AK Party took a confident step by introducing a new theme, *our civilization*, without turning its back on *conservative democracy*.

## “OUR CIVILIZATION” DISCOURSE: A SIGN OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

When the Arab revolts broke out, the AK Party was in a comfortable position in Türkiye’s political arena and in its relations with powerful players in international politics. Türkiye’s declining relations with Israel, which were strained by what came to be known as the “one minute” incident at the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and the 2010 Mavi Marmara assault, had not yet evolved into anti-Turkish rhetoric in the Western media. As a matter of fact, Türkiye was largely considered a *model country*<sup>16</sup> in 2011, when then-U.S. President Barack Obama’s warm messages to the Islamic world coincided with calls for liberty and dignity by Arab protestors. In this particular discussion, the AK Party was credited for Türkiye’s accomplishments.

The argument went that the AK Party leadership served as an example to the Islamic world and its neighborhood – thanks to Türkiye’s economic development, democratization and good relations with the West. The so-called *former Islamists*

<sup>15</sup> Metin Hepar, “Islam, Conservatism, and Democracy in Turkey: Comparing Turgut Özal and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 15, No: 2, (2013), pp. 141-56.

<sup>16</sup> Burhanettin Duran and Nuh Yılmaz, “Islam, Models and the Middle East: The New Balance of Power following the Arab Spring”, *Perceptions*, (Winter 2013).

were also celebrated for making Islamic movements more moderate or democratic. Having attempted to resolve its problems with its neighbors, including Armenia and Syria, Türkiye built on its stability and relied on economic cooperation to launch new foreign policy initiatives and make new claims. At the time, many observers expected the successful revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt to spread to other Arab countries. It was not yet known that the Syrian conflict would morph into a bloody civil war. Against this backdrop, the AK Party's rhetoric was transformed into something more inclusive and daring that had regionwide appeal. Without abandoning the discourse of *conservative democracy*, which de-escalated domestic tensions and was harmonious with the outside world, the movement stressed another bold concept: *our civilization*. On September 30, 2012, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a speech at the AK Party's 4<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Grand Convention to associate the movement's new ideological discourse with the perspective of *civilization*. In that address, he used the term *conservative democracy* just twice, whereas there were 14 references to *civilization* – which could refer to national-spiritual values, Türkiye being part of the Middle East and the Islamic world, and humanity's values in general.

In his speech, which repeatedly referenced the historical symbols and religious-conservative values of “*the great nation*,” Erdoğan recalled the common past and long-standing unity of Kurds and Turks. He also talked about the 2071 vision – which brought to mind the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Manzikert. To be clear, this new direction did not represent a clear break with the AK Party's emphasis on *service* – specifically economic development and concrete projects – but it highlighted the *mission* that was “the new Türkiye”.<sup>17</sup>

It is possible to argue that the AK Party's *our civilization* discourse was an attempt to redefine the idea of *nation* within the context of Türkiye's claims and responsibilities towards the region. In addition to recalling the historical solidarity between Turks and Kurds, this definition reflected the movement's self-confidence – which translated into two rounds of disarmament talks with the PKK terrorist organization. Indeed, the AK Party had acknowledged the Kurdish community's identity rights, which had been denied by the Kemalist ideology's exclusive form of nationalism.

Erdoğan, who courageously initiated a “democratic opening” to meet the Kurdish community's demands, justified his efforts with references to the two eth-

<sup>17</sup> Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip, “Address to the AK Party's 4th Ordinary Grand Convention”, AK Party, September 30, 2012, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/basbakan-erdoganin-ak-parti-4.-olagan-buyuk-kongresi-konusmasinin-tam-metni/31771>, (Access date: October 1, 2022).

nic groups' long history of coexistence dating back to the Seljuk Empire and the Battle of Manzikert. It was also Erdoğan, however, who showed due determination to fight the PKK when the group returned to violence and the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) used politics to lay the groundwork for terror attacks. He opposed steps by the PKK and its Syrian branch, the YPG, to establish so-called cantons in northern Syria and exploit the peace process to stockpile weapons across southeastern Türkiye. In addition to cracking down on PKK networks at home and abroad, Erdoğan thus oversaw efforts to strip several HDP deputies of their parliamentary immunity.<sup>18</sup>

The movement's emphasis on *our civilization* reflected its desire to raise awareness about the international system's unfairness and to rearrange the country's relations with the West. As a matter of fact, Erdoğan condemned Israel's attacks on Gaza in November 2012 and criticized the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, including the United States, for their inaction. At the same time, he urged the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League to play a more active role and recalled Türkiye's *agency* in the Islamic world.<sup>19</sup>

The language of *civilization* used by the AK Party was considered by some observers as "the emergence of a new nationalism".<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that the movement was accused of being nationalist at every stage of its ideological transformation. The main problem with that line of criticism was that it associated the AK Party's efforts to create a sense of *us* with some kind of exclusive "nationalist" essence. With regard to belonging and the generation of identity, the AK Party tends to redefine the meaning of certain words, such as "nation," within the framework of original ideological concept sets. This content must not be confused with concepts used by other groups, with which the movement forms temporary alliances for political reasons. For example, the AK Party sought to use the concepts of liberal and Westernist groups, to which it was close during the EU negotiations, without abandoning the *native-national* approach.<sup>21</sup>

To be clear, the idea of *our civilization* was neither about being part of (or opposed to) the European civilization nor belonging to the Islamic civilization.

<sup>18</sup> Talha Köse, "Rise and Fall of the AK Party's Kurdish Peace Initiatives", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 19, No: 2, (2017).

<sup>19</sup> "Erdoğan'dan İsrail'e Mesaj", *Takvim*, November 19, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Soli Özel, "Anayasa MHP ile Yapılacak Gibi", *Habertürk*, October 1, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, "Turkey's Quest for a 'New International Order': The Discourse of Civilization and the Politics of Restoration", *Perceptions* Vol: 19, No: 4, (2014), pp. 43-76.

Quite the contrary, it was an interpretation that took into account Türkiye's strategic, historical, economic and cultural codes, which entailed both necessities and opportunities. In other words, it aimed for the best of both worlds. As such, the AK Party believed that it could simultaneously become a member of the European Union and become more integrated into the Islamic world. Therefore, it is impossible to consider the movement's earlier pro-EU statements a sign of *Euro-peanism* and its criticism against the European Union as an essentialist opposition to Europe. Instead, the movement sought to take advantage of all of Türkiye's connections and identities. To create this broad framework, it engaged in a series of confrontations. By coming to terms with the Islamist movement's third worldist language, it transformed Türkiye's relations with the West from essentialist opposition to what we could call *critical integration*. In this regard, the emphasis of *our civilization* on internationalization seeks to reach a new definition of the *universal* that rejects both Eurocentrism and third worldism.

This search for a new synthesis pointed to an effort by the AK Party to establish a new kind of relationship with the West. At the same time, the AK Party movement stressed the importance of Türkiye's alliances with Western nations, such as NATO and the European Union, and criticized the Western-centric international order. Noting that the existing international order was unfair to underdeveloped nations and Muslim countries, it demanded a new international order.<sup>22</sup> It is possible to criticize the AK Party's *civilization* perspective for having failed to acknowledge regional realities by trying to *transcend* national borders in the Middle East. As a matter of fact, one could make the case that Türkiye temporarily turned a blind eye to the PKK/YPG threat, which the Syrian civil war brought to its doorstep.

The *our civilization* discourse was closely linked to the positive atmosphere created by the Arab revolts and the peace process in Türkiye. Under the circumstances, many people believed that Türkiye could shape regional developments; hence the goal of creating the new Türkiye. In 2013-2016, a number of developments took place to the detriment of the Middle Eastern order imagined by Türkiye. The overthrow of Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, the Russian intervention in the Syrian civil war and the shifting of the balance of power in regime leader Bashar Assad's favor, efforts by the PKK/YPG to create a corridor in northern Syria

<sup>22</sup> Hakan Övünç Ongur and Hüseyin Zengin, "Transforming Habitus of the Foreign Policy: A Bourdieusian Analysis of Turkey as an Emerging Middle Power", *Rising Powers Quarterly* Vol: 1, No: 2, (2016), pp. 117-33.

under the pretext of fighting DAESH steps taken by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia and Egypt against Turkish interests and regional conflicts fueled by Saudi-Iranian rivalry immediately come to mind. Meanwhile on the domestic front, the Gezi Park revolts, the December 2013 judicial coup attempt, the events of October 6-8, 2014, political instability caused by the June 2015 elections, the PKK's return to violence in July 2015, the collapse of the peace process and the July 15, 2016 coup attempt were among the negative developments. Those domestic and international developments strengthened the conviction of AK Party supporters that the movement was under attack and, subsequently, deepened their sense of struggle and resistance. By extension, the sense that Türkiye was combatting three terrorist organizations and fighting a new War of Independence gave rise to the discourse of *the native-national*.

## THE DISCOURSE OF STRUGGLE AND RESISTANCE

The final stage in the AK Party's ideological transformation was the *native-national* discourse – which was expressed with the Rabaa symbol: one nation, one flag, one homeland, one state.<sup>23</sup> As a matter of fact, the Rabaa sign was incorporated into the movement's charter at its most recent convention. In both the *conservative democracy* and *our civilization* discourses, the word *native* referred to a commitment to local values. By contrast, the term came to be used more recently to express a sense of patriotism – uniting around the cause of Türkiye's survival. It assumed the dual meaning of withstanding attacks from the outside and cracking down on traitors and terrorists at home.

In this regard, it is possible to suggest that the AK Party's emphasis on the *native-national* dates back to the Gezi Park revolts<sup>24</sup> and the December 2013 judicial coup attempt. Needless to say, this sentiment reached its peak during the July 15 resistance. The idea that Türkiye was under Western attack resulted in the transformation of the *native-national* stance into an identity of resistance. This language, which was used against FETÖ during the peace process, became more common in the wake of the PKK's return to violence in July 2015. It was the July

<sup>23</sup> The Rabaa sign was originally invented to support the democratic resistance of the Egyptian people to the Sisi regime.

<sup>24</sup> Fahrettin Altun, "The Rising Criticism of Erdoğan During the Gezi Protests", in *The Turkish AK Party and Its Leader*, ed. Ümit Cizre, (Routledge, New York: 2016); Hatem Ete, "The Political Reverberations of the Gezi Protests", *Insight Turkey* Vol: 15, No: 3, (2013); Coşkun Taştan, "The Gezi Park Protests in Turkey: A Qualitative Field Research", *Insight Turkey* Vol: 15, No: 3, (2013).

15 resistance, however, that made the *native-national* discourse part and parcel of mainstream politics in Türkiye, as the various political parties and their leaders had to position themselves vis-à-vis this definition of the *native-national*. Moreover, the reluctant response of Western countries to the coup attempt effectively ended the hegemony of Westernist politics in Türkiye, which had been intact for more than a century. Questioning its alliance with the West, Türkiye has been moving to redefine that relationship.<sup>25</sup>

Another interesting point is that the word *native* became more and more important within the context of the fight against FETÖ between the December 2013 judicial coup attempt and the failed coup of July 15, 2016. During this process, it became clear that the organization served foreign intelligence agencies and therefore was not loyal to Türkiye, even though it presented itself as a religious movement. Moreover, the FETÖ movement drifting away from *native values* became its main difference from religious movements in Türkiye.<sup>26</sup> As such, putting Türkiye's interests first and loyalty to the state became key parts of *the native*.

The idea of *native-national*, which the AK Party developed by building on *the national spirit* at the Yenikapı convention after the July 15 coup attempt, gradually evolved into a shorthand reference to the alliance between the AK Party and the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP). In a sense, the two movements were able to form an unprecedented bloc in Turkish politics, as the MHP's support for President Erdoğan facilitated the adoption of presidentialism by the Turkish Parliament<sup>27</sup> and the passing of the relevant constitutional referendum on April 16, 2017. (The MHP chairman, Devlet Bahçeli, called on the AK Party to present its proposal for a presidential system to the Parliament because he believed that the country's future was at risk. In the end, 339 parliamentarians supported the constitutional reform bill, which was put to a vote in April 2017.) The presidential system, which was developed to address the shortcomings of Türkiye's parliamentary system, sought to meet the country's national needs. Advocates of presidentialism argued that the new system of government would not only preserve Türkiye's territorial integrity and ensure its security but also promote

<sup>25</sup> Ali Aslan, "Yerli ve Milli Siyaset", in *AK Parti'nin 15 Yılı: Toplum*, (SETA Publishing, İstanbul: 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Burhanettin Duran, "Gülen Hareketi ve Sünni Kodların Kaybı", *Star Açık Görüş*, December 28, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Nebi Miş and Burhanettin Duran, "The Transformation of Turkey's Political System and the Executive Presidency", *Insight Turkey* Vol: 18, No: 4, (2016); Nebi Miş and Burhanettin Duran, "Turkey's Constitutional Referendum and Its Effect on Turkish Politics", *Insight Turkey* Vol: 18, No: 4, (2017).

a diverse national identity. Again, ahead of the 2019 presidential election, the AK Party and the MHP referred to their alliance as *the native-national alliance* and *the popular alliance*.

As such, the *native-national* discourse has been used in a range of areas including counterterrorism operations, Türkiye's new system of government and a renewed sense of unity. It is able to describe an identity and a political position as well as develop an inclusive founding language. In this sense, the AK Party's latest discourse, like *conservative democracy* and *our civilization*, reflects the movement's commitment to transforming Türkiye and improving the country's international standing. It stands for the desire to transcend the limits of a single political party's identity and become part of a dream that brings together various social groups.

An important point here is that the emphasis placed on "one state" and "one nation" by senior AK Party officials does not necessarily exclude the Kurdish ethnic identity – although the peace process ended with a bitter note, when "trench wars" broke out in southeastern Türkiye with the support of the HDP. The idea of "one nation" stresses the importance of citizenship, which covers all communities in Türkiye. This emphasis did not translate into a reversal of the AK Party's reforms, which provided certain cultural rights to the Kurds as "equal citizens". Quite the contrary, it represents the movement's search for a "strong domestic identity," which would include the Kurds supporting the goals of "one homeland" and "one flag". In other words, it is a statement of the AK Party's determination to fight groups, such as FETÖ and the PKK, that place at risk Türkiye's independence:

If you want to be fully independent, you must implement 'domestic and national values' across the board. In truth, Türkiye's political history is the history of the struggle between the *native-nationals* and those who have been estranged from their people and their country.<sup>28</sup>

With the help of the *native-national* brand of politics, the AK Party seeks to improve Türkiye's standing in the international arena. There is no doubt that this effort reflects the search for a new balance of power within the Western alliance and in the region. At a time when the great powers enter a period of uncertainty, Türkiye must preserve its political stability and prepare for the challenges ahead.

The *native-national* discourse has been used since 2013 to respond to the threats that Türkiye encountered, to withstand attacks from the outside and, sim-

<sup>28</sup> Fahrettin Altun, "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan ile Söyleşi", *Kriter* 1, No: 1, (May 2016).

ply put, to define “the resistance”. At its core is the idea of putting Türkiye’s interests first. In this language of resistance, the PKK and FETÖ are considered proxies for foreign governments seeking to threaten Türkiye’s territorial integrity. Countries with links to said terrorist organizations, such as the United States and European nations, are accused of violating the rules of partnership and urged to revise their policies. Meanwhile, President Erdoğan makes the case that his country will take care of its own business – which reflects a realist approach that takes into account the failure of the European Union and NATO to show due support for Türkiye. At the same time, this language creates an emotional platform, which idealizes the country’s firm commitment to addressing all of its current problems and national aspirations.

It is possible to argue that the AK Party’s *native-national* discourse remains ambiguous at this time. However, as the movement has never expressed its identity through rigid ideologies since 2001, the current level of ambiguity is not considered a major problem. As a matter of fact, one could make the case that the AK Party, an inherently pragmatic movement, might thrive on that ambiguity. Still, it is no secret that various social groups, including the Kurds, closely follow the debate on the definition of *native-national*, which has been frequently invoked to justify key policies such as counterterrorism efforts. The AK Party’s most concrete step in this regard was the incorporation of the Rabaa sign into the movement’s charter. However, even this emphasis on *singularity* could not fully address the need for clarity. As such, who will identify the content of *native-national*, and how, remains a serious issue for the AK Party.

It is possible to argue that there is fierce competition in this area: If a brand of politics, which upholds the “national will,” fought against all forms of tutelage and spurred the July 15 resistance, ends up defining the *native-national* discourse, this process could contribute to the consolidation of Turkish democracy. Indeed, it is important to recall that there were multiple reasons behind the coup attempts failure, including the lack of support from the overwhelming majority of the Armed Forces, the National Intelligence Organization’s successful actions and various technical difficulties, yet the most significant reason was the popular reaction against the coup plotters – a civilian-democratic resistance, unprecedented in the history of Turkish democracy, that attracted citizens from all walks of life and attested to Türkiye’s democratic consolidation. Obviously, that reaction was mainly motivated by the people’s common sense and their awareness that a military coup would only lead to chaos and civil war. (Certain-



ly, the experience of having witnessed the plight of the people of Syria and Iraq had led the Turkish people to appreciate the importance of peace and stability and fueled their “democratic alertness”.) Specifically, the most significant error that the coup plotters committed was to believe that they could get secularists, leftists, neo-Kemalists and the Alevi community to support them on the streets. That the rogue military officers forced a journalist at TRT, the public broadcaster, to read out a statement by the Peace at Home Council, which was part of their effort to portray themselves as Kemalist officers, attested to that fact. However, their affiliation with FETÖ became clear shortly afterwards, as they bombed the Parliament and the Presidential Complex as well as opened fire on the civilian population.<sup>29</sup>

By contrast, the neo-nationalist/Eurasianist approach, which seeks to feed off the turbulence of recent years to further a specific ideological agenda with the help of state institutions, comes out on top, many people could end up feeling that they have been forced out of the system. Moreover, this approach threatens to deform the AK Party’s inclusive brand of politics, which has always been there since the movement’s formation. Pumping essentialist anti-Westernism/anti-Europeanism or ethnic nationalism into the *national* identity would mean that the AK Party would be taken over by a reactionary and singular agenda. Similarly, the AK Party must be wary about the risk of the security apparatus being taken over by ultranationalist Kemalists. Preventing this is not only a key requirement for the success of the war on terror but is also critical to preserve its electoral base among religious-conservative groups. Those ultranationalist groups could attempt to identify all religious communities as national security threats under the pretext of cracking down on FETÖ networks. Mitigating this risk is an inherent part of the AK Party’s new definition of secularism.<sup>30</sup>

Having secured the support of 50 percent of voters and reached out to various social groups, the AK Party must develop a local, pluralist, civilian and democratic definition of the *national* to ensure that it can carry itself into the future. It is a challenge that this concept must be defined at a time when Türkiye experiences the negative side effects of violent conflicts in Syria and Iraq as well as serious tensions

<sup>29</sup> *Demokrasi Nöbetleri: Toplumsal Algıda 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi*, eds., Nebi Miş, Serdar Gülenler, İpek Coşkun, Hazal Duran, M. Erkut Ayvaz, (SETA Publishing, İstanbul: 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “FETÖ’nün Yerli Kodlardan Kopuşu ve Geleceği”, in *FETÖ’nün Anatomisi*, eds. Enes Bayraklı and Ufuk Ulutaş, (SETA Publishing, İstanbul: 2017), pp. 174-81.

with some of its “allies” including the United States and the European Union.<sup>31</sup> At this point, the AK Party not only lacks the pleasant comfort of the *conservative democracy* and *our civilization* periods but also bears on its shoulders the burden of 20 years in power.<sup>32</sup>

The definition of the *native-national* discourse is closely related to the future direction of the political opposition. The opposition’s preoccupation with the radical and marginal narrative pushed by Türkiye’s adversaries is one thing. But there is also a very real risk of the opposition embracing some type of populist nationalism over the question of Syrian refugees. It is important to recall that the Turkish government has reiterated its commitment to host the victims of the Syrian civil war, whilst calling on the international community to shoulder the burden and taking steps to enable those Syrians, who wish to return to their native country, to be voluntarily repatriated. Yet the fact that many senior representatives of the main opposition CHP have been asking why Syrians live comfortably in Türkiye instead of going back to their country to fight is a clear indicator of said risk.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the AK Party’s definition of the *national* must counterbalance the opposition’s controversial remarks and prevent the alienation of Syrian refugees.

Another line of criticism is that the AK Party’s alliance with the MHP has made the movement more like the latter and resulted in the adoption of a Turkish-nationalist ideology. The assumption here is that the movement has replaced its emphasis on Islamism and the *ummah* with nationalist sentiments. As a matter of fact, the charge of nationalism against the AK Party has been made in other contexts as well. Today, some observers claim that two other types of nationalism (neo-nationalist/Eurasianist and Kemalist-secular) influence the movement’s identity and policies. This line of criticism is flawed for two reasons.

First, this isn’t the first time that the political tradition, of which the AK Party is a part, has been charged with taking a nationalist turn. In the past, critics made similar arguments when Islamist-nationalist politicians and intellectuals stressed the importance of the *national*. The adoption of the words *conservative* and *national* during the War of Independence, the emphasis on Turkish identity by Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Nurettin Topçu, and the National Outlook movement’s

<sup>31</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, *Turkey and the West: Fault Lines in a Troubled Alliance*, (Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC: 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “Milli ve Yerli Söyleminin İçini Kim Dolduracak?”, *Sabah*, September 9, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu: Suriyeliler Bütün Düzenimizi Bozacak”, *Habertürk*, March 12, 2016.

definition of *national* and its 1991 alliance with the National Labor Party (MÇP) immediately come to mind.<sup>34</sup>

Second, the AK Party is almost always portrayed as a passive participant in its interactions with various “nationalist” groups and identities. For some reason, the groups with which the movement interacts are generally considered the “dominant” side, whether they are Kemalists or the MHP. The AK Party’s identity is imagined as some type of mold to be reshaped by others. As a matter of fact, the Islamic legacy, from which the AK Party borrows much, has an impact on nationalist groups that interact with the movement. It is possible to argue that this influence is stronger among Turkish nationalists. Prior to the July 15 resistance, there was an understanding that the MHP was shifting towards a secular brand of neo-nationalism *akin to the* CHP. The alliance between the AK Party and the MHP not only stopped that drift but also highlighted the Islamic-Ottoman references of Turkish nationalists. The MHP leadership’s support for President Erdoğan’s reaction against U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision to relocate his country’s embassy in Israel to Jerusalem attested to that fact. Likewise, the MHP sided with the AK Party government in its criticism of the international order’s unfairness on behalf of Muslims around the world.

The AK Party’s relationship with nationalism has been shaped with reference to the July 15 resistance. At the heart of this approach lies a sensitivity towards the nation and the state, which is part of the political thinking and traditions of Islamic-conservative communities. Erdoğan’s description of Türkiye’s fight against three terrorist organizations as “the greatest struggle for independence and the future since the War of Independence” and his emphasis on *survival* must be viewed from the same perspective. Likewise, *resistance* and *struggle* rest on an inclusive approach akin to *our civilization* – as opposed to a narrow nationalist perspective.

As a matter of fact, President Erdoğan highlighted Türkiye’s civilizational heritage as the source of the spirit of resistance and struggle at the AK Party’s sixth Ordinary Provincial Convention in Eskişehir:

Although the AK Party is a 20-year-old movement, we are representatives of a rich civilization. You know that we are the contemporary representatives of a tradition, which has one eye in the past and another in the future, right? This movement is rooted in Mount Hira, Manzikert, Dumlupınar, Sakarya and Çanakkale. At the source of this cause is the last will of Sheikh Edebali, the courage of

<sup>34</sup> Gökhan Çetinsaya, “İslamcılıktaki Milliyetçilik”, in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce* 6, (İletişim Publishing, İstanbul: 2005), pp. 420-22.

Corporal Seyit [and] Hasan Polatkan's love of service. We are the grand children of Sultan Mehmed the Conquerer, who, at the age of 21, said 'whether I shall take Byzantium or it shall take me.' And, of course, we are the representatives of a conviction, which states that there is no victor but Allah.<sup>35</sup>

Another crucial aspect of the AK Party's new definition of *the national* is the changing nature of Türkiye's relationship with the West. Erdoğan's frequent criticism of the United States and the European Union in recent years gave rise to questions about where the AK Party government wants to take Türkiye. The Western media often criticizes Türkiye, which is obliged to take care of its own business in the fight against terrorism, for cooperating with the Russian Federation and Iran when necessary. Critics accuse the country of drifting away from the West and experiencing an axis shift. The Trump administration's efforts to redefine Washington's global role with reference to the U.S. president's campaign slogan, "*America First*," fueled uncertainty, instability and power struggles in the international arena. Under the circumstances, both the relationship between the great powers and trans-Atlantic relations underwent certain changes. Needless to say, Türkiye experienced the side effects of those processes more clearly than other U.S. allies. Consequently, the country had no choice but to create a new set of policies and discourse to ensure its survival at a time of uncertainty. Moreover, the AK Party, whose government faced serious challenges including security threats emanating from Syria and Iraq as well as efforts to redesign the Middle East,<sup>36</sup> was obliged to develop a new identity framework suitable to the high level of turbulence. It was absolutely crucial that this framework take into account the prediction that international and regional crises would continue for the foreseeable future and that it built the necessary capacity to turn crises into opportunities.

Türkiye's growing "autonomy"<sup>37</sup> in the realm of foreign policy has nothing to do with the perceived total abandonment of the West. It is clear that the country has no obligation to comply with policies that place its national interests at risk. At

<sup>35</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "Genel Başkan ve Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Yenikent Spor Salonu'nda Düzenlenen Eskişehir 6. Olağan İl Kongresi'nde Partililere Hitap Etti", (Speech, February 17, 2018), <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-eskisehir-6.-olagan-il-kongresinde-konustu/97422#1>, (Access date: October 1, 2022).

<sup>36</sup> Ufuk Ulutaş and Burhanettin Duran, "Ortadoğu'da Bölgesel Dizayn mı Bölgesel Rekabet mi?", in *AK Parti'nin 15 Yılı: Dış Politika*, eds. Kemal İnat, Ali Aslan and Burhanettin Duran, (SETA Publishing, İstanbul: 2017), pp. 61-84.

<sup>37</sup> Malik Müftü, "Turkey's Choice", *Insight Turkey* Vol: 19, No: 1 (2017); Ali Aslan, "Türk Dış Politikasını Anlamak İçin Kavramsal Bir Çerçeve: Otonomi Arayışı", in *AK Parti'nin 15 Yılı: Dış Politika*, eds. Kemal İnat, Ali Aslan and Burhanettin Duran, (SETA Publishing, İstanbul: 2017), pp. 17-40.

a time when Türkiye follows a policy of “critical integration” with the West, essentialist views of the West have been replaced by pragmatism and strategic choices. In the meantime, efforts by the United States to transform the PKK/YPG into a standing army as part of a statelet in northern Syria continue to fuel anti-Americanism in Türkiye. It is possible that the definition of the *native-national* could fuel certain sentiments, including a commitment to confront U.S. troops if Türkiye’s vital interests are at stake. Still, the perception that the United States and the European Union have been not only unhelpful but also openly hostile towards the country in its fight against FETÖ and the PKK could result in the emergence of a reactionary and exclusive brand of nationalism mixed with anti-Americanism. Indeed, Washington’s reluctant response to the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, coupled with the involvement of the Incirlik Air Base in the coup plot and the U.S. government’s failure to extradite Fetullah Gülen, the failed coup’s mastermind, perpetuated the doubt among the Turkish people about its direct or indirect involvement in the coup plot. Likewise, the European states adopted a problematic stance toward Türkiye after the coup attempt, as their lack of support for democracy in an EU candidate country was followed by harsh criticism over the response of the Turkish authorities, including the dismissal of FETÖ-affiliated individuals from public service.<sup>38</sup> To be clear, this type of nationalism would not fall within the limits of the AK Party’s ideology.

Looking into the relationship between the *native-national* discourse and Islamic thought in Türkiye would be helpful to make sense of the AK Party’s ideological transformation. Despite being a mass party, the movement’s senior leadership and popular base largely consists of Islamic conservatives. Unlike FETÖ, this group tends to put Türkiye’s interests first and looks out for the long-term interests of the *ummah*. Likewise, many mainstream religious movements are characterized by their compliance with local and Sunni values. Those values shelter those movements from outside ideologies such as Salafism and Shiism. Simply put, this “pro-state” approach, which could be described as refusal to turn one’s back on the state and national interests despite the control of Republican governments by secular Kemalists, provides ample support to the *native-national* discourse. In several periods of authoritarianism, including the single-party period and the February 28 process, the Islamic community adopted a “pro-state” approach that manifested

<sup>38</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “15 Temmuz Darbe Girişiminin Türk İç ve Dış Siyasetine Etkisi”, in *15 Temmuz Sonrası Türkiye*, eds. Burhanettin Duran and Cem Duran Uzun, (SETA Publishing, İstanbul: 2017), pp. 13-51.

itself as an effort to use democratic opportunities to expand their positions as opposed to total surrender to the state. In a way, it represents an effort to analyze and realize Islamic ideals and sensitivities from Türkiye.<sup>39</sup>

From this perspective, it is possible to note that Islamic movements, which were influenced by developments in Iran, Pakistan and Egypt, failed to adopt this “pro-state” approach for a long time – unlike Sunni orders and communities with Ottoman roots. Notwithstanding, the vast majority of Islamic movements in Türkiye adopted *native* and *pro-state* positions under the Welfare Party and the AK Party. To be clear, this transformation was largely influenced by Erdoğan’s political moves, which made valuable contributions to the National Outlook tradition. Erdoğan reached beyond mosque-goers and practiced an inclusive brand of politics that opened itself up to various social groups. Accordingly, Türkiye’s relationship with the West did not become the subject of ideological rejection. Instead, it was viewed as an interaction based on rational interests.

Finally, it is necessary to analyze the AK Party’s approach to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Türkiye. Some observers would recall that the enthusiastic participation of AK Party members in ceremonies to commemorate Atatürk on the anniversary of his death on November 10, 2017 fueled controversy in Türkiye. The AK Party’s appropriation of Atatürk as a shared value was described by certain journalists as “the Atatürk opening”. Others went further to argue that the AK Party had finally seen the truth and Atatürk was still right after all those years. It is necessary to analyze this debate in conjunction with other lines of criticism – specifically, that the AK Party surrendered to “statist reflexes” and generated some kind of “religious Kemalism”. Since its establishment, the AK Party adopted its own interpretation of Atatürk’s ideal of modernization, also known as “reaching the level of contemporary civilizations”. Again, in line with the traditional approach of Turkish conservatives, the movement viewed Atatürk, the leader of the War of Indepen-

<sup>39</sup> In the early Republican period, Islamists, who were forced out of the Parliament and politics, were frustrated by the secularist regime, yet carefully avoided a confrontation with the state. Despite a range of problems, they viewed loyalty to the state as part of being and staying “native”. Burhanettin Duran, “Cumhuriyet Dönemi İslamcılığı”, *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce* 6, (İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul: 2005), pp. 129-135.

The Islamists saw the rejection of any engagement with foreign agencies, which would hurt their state’s interests, as part of their commitment to their homeland, nation and *ummah*. This is what President Erdoğan meant when he said “the memory of this geography and this land is stronger than the memory of man. This land, which rewards those who love and serve it, shall punish those that sell [betray] it,” Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Türkiye Tarım ve Kırsal Kalkınma Hamlesi Proje Uygulamaları Tanıtım Programında Yaptıkları Konuşma”, (Speech, April 4, 2015), <https://www.tcceb.gov.tr>, (Access date: October 1, 2022).

dence, as a shared value. By contrast, it criticized the radical secularist practices of the single-party era by targeting the CHP and its chair, İsmet İnönü. Over the years, the AK Party has been critical of certain practices, such as the Law for the Maintenance of Public Order, the independence courts, the closure of the Progressive Party, the Turkish History Thesis and the Sun Language Theory.

In this regard, the AK Party's embrace of Atatürk should be considered a sign of Türkiye's normalization rather than proof of the movement's support for the status quo. Erdoğan, who believes that he settled the score with the Kemalist tutelage and took steps to transform radical secularism, acts out of the conviction that his movement has made the establishment recognize the people's Islamic demands – such as the religious headscarf and religious instruction. Moreover, it must be noted that the AK Party's emphasis on Atatürk represents an attempt to encourage resistance against outside attacks and mobilize support for the war on terror over the past four years. By invoking the Rabaa sign as part of the *native-national* discourse, Erdoğan brings together shared “Islamic” values and Atatürk as the leader of the War of Independence. It is noteworthy that this step seeks to prevent the AK Party's opponents from turning Atatürk into the symbol of a marginal resistance.<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Since 2001, the AK Party's most important asset has been its ability to stay ahead of other political parties in Türkiye with regard to implementing reforms.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the movement has been able to position itself as the driving force behind change and stability at the same time.<sup>42</sup> This self-proclaimed position directly stemmed from the eagerness of the AK Party and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to transform Türkiye. This transformative agenda stood the test of a dynamic process, featuring not just reforms, new initiatives and restoration but also confrontation and crises. Meanwhile, the party's discourse served to legitimize a range of policies, which came in response to this challenging process.

Over the years, the AK Party underwent several ideological/rhetorical changes. To be clear, those changes weren't random ruptures but variations of three interrelated discourses, whose emphasis changed based on a growing body of experience

<sup>40</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “Yeni bir Atatürkçülük mü Geliyor?”, *Sabah*, November 14, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> *Party Politics in Turkey: A Comparative Perspective*, eds., Sabri Sayarı, Pelin Ayan Musil and Özhan Demirkol, (Routledge, London and New York: 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Meltem Müftüleri-Baç and E. Fuat Keyman, “The Era of Dominant-Party Politics”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol: 23, No: 1 (January 2012), pp. 85-99.

and temporary needs: conservative democracy, the idea of “our civilization,” and the domestic/native approach. In this regard, the reform agenda that accompanied Türkiye’s push for European integration, the idea of the “new Türkiye” against the backdrop of the Arab revolts and the emphasis on domestic/native values in the wake of the July 15 coup attempt were parts of the same story of transformation. As such, the AK Party’s ideological transformation must be considered the result of 20 years in power. It rests on the experience of coming to terms with Kemalist tutelage, the movement’s Islamist past and the regional order. Thanks to its strong leadership, the movement has been able to easily legitimize policy changes over the years. For example, the AK Party government attempted to disarm the PKK terrorist organization twice between 2009 and 2015. Since July 2015, it has cracked down on PKK networks at home and abroad, specifically in Syria and Iraq, with vast popular support by deriving legitimacy from its earlier attempts. The dynamic shifts between the three discourses have been facilitated by Erdoğan’s strong leadership. After all, the AK Party’s founding leader has been able to borrow from three main avenues of Turkish politics – conservatism, nationalism and Islamism – depending on pressing needs and abilities. Viewed by his supporters as a leader who could bring together Türkiye’s national interests with the grievances of Muslims in Syria, Somalia, Myanmar and elsewhere, Erdoğan also came to be known as a vocal critic of the Western-dominated, deeply unfair world order. Simply put, the Turkish president has been able to tailor his political platform as a synthesis of pragmatism, which stems from knowing and deeply caring about power and ideals, which he continues to pursue.<sup>43</sup>

It is no secret that the three discourses employed by the AK Party and the extent to which they are emphasized are closely related to pressing problems at home and abroad. At a time when domestic and international politics are one and the same, the AK Party occasionally relied on foreign policy language to consolidate its domestic base. At critical junctures, such as the peace process, the July 15 resistance, Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch, international developments served to facilitate domestic consolidation. As such, the movement responded to the complex and dynamic needs of domestic and international politics by focusing on one of the three discourses at the expense of others. At times when emphasis had to be shifted, Erdoğan’s strong leadership and effective communication with the public played an important role.

<sup>43</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Kriterimiz Yerlilik ve Millilik Olmalı”, *Kriter*, No: 1, (May 2016).



The AK Party has been charged with “surrendering to Turkish nationalism” by opposition parties for stepping up counterterrorism efforts and declaring a state of emergency after the July 15 coup attempt. (In truth, the nationwide state of emergency was declared by the Council of Ministers, at the National Security Council’s July 20, 2016 recommendation, due to the nature of the threat against the country’s constitutional order – specifically, because the coup attempt was not perpetrated by a limited number of people within the Armed Forces but a secretive and sinister organization whose operatives had infiltrated all of Türkiye’s strategically important public institutions. The first of 32 decrees was issued on July 23, 2016 under Article 121 of the Turkish Constitution and subsequently approved by the Parliament, thus subjecting all the relevant decisions to judicial supervision.) This line of criticism is inherently weakened by the confusion of the AK Party’s elastic and inclusive approach to the various political concepts and the rigidity of certain groups, with which the movement happens to cooperate. As such, the current accusations bring to mind earlier claims that the movement had turned Kemalist, embraced the status quo or adopted Turkism. By contrast, the AK Party’s traditional emphasis on “the national” has merely been combined with conservatism, “civilization” and “the native”. However, it is important to note that the term “national” invariably differs from Kemalist nationalism and the MHP’s Turkish nationalism.

Ahead of the 2023 elections in Türkiye, the opposition’s continued inability to portray itself as a viable alternative represents a major opportunity for the AK Party. It is noteworthy, however, that there is need for a positive agenda to inspire hope among voters. Over the next months, the AK Party could highlight its ability to reinvent and update itself whilst building on key concepts like stability, economic development, national security, a fair distribution of welfare and playing a more active role in the international arena. In this regard, the main question, which next year’s elections will serve to answer, is which candidate will lead the Turkish Republic into its second century and what kind of vision they will have. It is necessary for that vision to take stock of the past and the present as well as fuel hope for the future. Whereas the opposition bloc, popularly known as the “table for six,” insists that the AK Party remaining in charge would pose a threat to Türkiye’s survival, the ruling People’s Alliance warns that the opposition lacks the skills needed to govern the country. Indeed, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan pledged in his address to the opening session of the Parliament in October 2022 to “build Türkiye’s century”.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> “21st Century to be Century of Türkiye, President Erdoğan Says”, *Daily Sabah*, September 28, 2022.

In light of the Coronavirus pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in political turmoil and energy and food crises around the world, the contest between those two visions must also relate to where Türkiye ought to position itself amid great power competition. Over the last two decades, the AK Party repeatedly stated that it was ushering in a new era in Türkiye's history. More recently, the country has been closely monitoring the pandemic's negative impact on world politics, the deepening competition between the United States and China, the emerging power vacuum in the Middle East due to the U.S. withdrawal, the European Union's shortcomings in foreign policy and the power struggle in the Eastern Mediterranean. That Türkiye successfully dealt with the Coronavirus pandemic, too, was a reflection of its experience with regional and global crises since 2013.

Another example of the AK Party government's determination to defend Turkish interests was its decision to block the NATO accession of Sweden and Finland in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Having traditionally supported the organization's open door policy and called for closer cooperation among the Allies, Türkiye insisted that neither country could join NATO unless and until they lifted restrictions on arms sales to Ankara and stopped supporting PKK and FETÖ. That principled stance resulted in the signing of a trilateral memorandum in the margins of the Madrid Summit, whereby Sweden and Finland recognized FETÖ as a terrorist organization and pledged to meet Turkish demands. In exchange, the Turkish government permitted the extension of an invitation to Stockholm and Helsinki, whilst stressing that they would not be admitted until its demands are met. Likewise, Türkiye responded harshly to an attempt by the Greek prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, to stop the United States from selling F-16 fighter jets to Ankara in May 2022, effectively derailing an ongoing normalization process between the two countries. The Turkish government subsequently warned Greece not to militarize the Aegean islands and argued that taking such steps would open to discussion Athens' sovereignty over the relevant areas under international agreements.

All those developments suggest that the 2023 elections in Türkiye will represent a choice between competing visions for Türkiye's future. The AK Party should be expected to build on its twenty years of experience and unprecedented success in promoting civilian oversight over public institutions and elevating Türkiye's position in the international system to chart the country's course as the Republic turns 100 years old – to make the next century "Türkiye's century".

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## CHAPTER 2

# TURKISH POLITICAL SYSTEM: THE AK PARTY'S REFORM AGENDA

NEBİ MİŞ\*

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) represents an exceptional political movement in Turkish politics. Established on August 14, 2001, the party won its first victory on November 3, 2002, by receiving 34.4 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections. Today, it remains the longest-ruling movement since Türkiye transitioned to multi-party democracy in 1950. Having won six general and four municipal elections, three referendums, and two presidential races, the AK Party will have been in power for almost 21 consecutive years when Türkiye holds elections in 2023. During this period, the movement's popular support never fell below its share of the vote in the 2002 parliamentary elections. In addition to winning every parliamentary and municipal election, the party was able to beat its competitors by a large margin. Although the AK Party failed to receive a large enough majority in the hung Parliament after the June 7, 2015, general elections to form a single-party government, it was able to recover its full strength in the repeat elections held shortly afterward. Taking into consideration the movement's track record, it is possible to argue that the AK Party qualifies as a "dominant party."

Over the past 20 years, the AK Party implemented a large number of reforms and amended various pro-tutelage and anti-democratic articles of Türkiye's 1982 Constitution. More importantly, the movement oversaw the country's transition from parliamentarism to the so-called "presidential system." As of April 16, 2017, Türkiye adopted a new system of government proposed jointly by the AK Party

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and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). In the constitutional referendum, which took place with an 85.32 percent turnout rate, 51.4 percent of the electorate voted in favor of proposed changes to the Constitution. The April 2017 referendum was the third such contest in the AK Party period and the seventh since 1950. The newly adopted constitutional reform package amended the 1982 Constitution for the 19th time. Whereas past amendments represented changes *within* the existing political system, the most recent amendments altered its very structure to create a new system of government.

This study analyzes how the AK Party was able to successfully transform Türkiye's political system, whose overhaul had been an important item on the nation's agenda for four decades. In this regard, it concentrates on the movement's 20-year legacy of political reform. The first part provides a summary of the arguments invoked in favor of and against the Turkish political system's transformation prior to the AK Party's rise to power. The second section attempts to answer the question of why change became possible under the AK Party, even though a number of other movements had attempted to take similar steps in the past. At the same time, it delves into previous attempts by the AK Party to draft a new constitution. The third section focuses on the AK Party's cooperation with the MHP in the wake of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye and how it facilitated political change. This section also deals with the various arguments that the two parties invoked to advocate constitutional reform and explains why some other movements opposed the proposed changes. Moreover, it provides information about the constitutional design of the presidential system. The final part concentrates on Türkiye's transition to its new system of government and the potential influence of this process on Turkish politics.

## **THE PRE-AK PARTY DEBATE ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF TÜRKİYE'S POLITICAL SYSTEM**

Türkiye's search for a new system of government started long before the AK Party came to power. Since the 1970s, right-leaning political parties had made the case that the country's political system was crippled by weak coalition governments and the crises that took place on their watch, and therefore must be changed. During this period, the National Salvation Party (MSP), the National Order Party (MNP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) emerged as the leading advocates of the presidential system of government. Between 1972 and 1980, a total of 11

coalition governments had been formed in Türkiye, but differences of opinion between coalition partners made it impossible for any of the coalition governments to work together in the long run. To make matters worse, eight out of the 15 coalition governments formed during the 19-year period when the 1961 Constitution was in effect ruled the country in 1961-63 and 1971-73 when the military guardianship regime was directly involved in all matters of state.<sup>1</sup>

In the wake of the September 12, 1980 coup d'état in Türkiye, the potential transition to presidentialism or semi-presidentialism was discussed as part of the deliberations on a new constitution. The public debate on presidentialism and semi-presidentialism largely revolved around the idea of introducing popular presidential elections. After all, it was the Parliament's failure to elect Türkiye's next president after 115 rounds of voting that created a major gridlock before the military seized power, which stressed the need for a new system of government. To be clear, most members of the Founding Assembly, which was established after the 1980 coup d'état to draft a new constitution, favored the preservation of the parliamentary system. In their opinion, the president needed to be able to dissolve Parliament if Türkiye's political system suffered from gridlock.<sup>2</sup>

The military administration, which drafted the 1982 Constitution, viewed the Office of the President as an ideological ally and protector of the guardianship regime. From their perspective, adopting a presidential or semi-presidential system of government could prove problematic, because it would entail the introduction of popular presidential elections. Having failed to keep popularly elected parliamentarians under control in the past, the military administrators feared that they would lose all control over Turkish politics if the people, as opposed to the Parliament, were to elect future presidents. In other words, they assumed that their self-proclaimed role as "guardians" would be at risk under those circumstances. It was therefore decided that Parliament must continue to elect Turkish presidents.<sup>3</sup>

The 1982 Constitution, which was drafted under military supervision, reflected an anti-democratic mindset. Under the parliamentary system, the civilian and military bureaucracy was considered part of checks and balances to keep ci-

<sup>1</sup> Nebi Miş and Burhanettin Duran, "Türkiye'de Siyasal Sistemin Dönüşümü ve Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sistemi," in *Türkiye'de Siyasal Sistemin Dönüşümü ve Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sistemi*, ed. Nebi Miş and Burhanettin Duran (SETA Publishing, Istanbul: 2017), 20-23.

<sup>2</sup> Serap Yazıcı, *Başkanlık ve Yarı Başkanlık Sistemleri: Türkiye için Bir Değerlendirme* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Publishing, 2013), 160.

<sup>3</sup> Nebi Miş, Ali Aslan and Abdullah Eren, "Türkiye'de Cumhurbaşkanlığı'nın Demokratikleşmesi," *SETA Analysis*, no. 103 (August 2014): 14.



vilian politicians under control. To be clear, the 1982 Constitution inherited its pro-guardianship spirit from the 1961 Constitution. Like its predecessor, the 1982 Constitution was drafted under military supervision and sought to redesign the Turkish state according to the needs of the national security establishment. Under this system, pro-guardianship bureaucratic elites could impose policy decisions on the popularly elected legislative branch. Moreover, public institutions such as the National Security Council (MGK) and the State Planning Organization (DPT) acted independently of elected officials and instead were part of the checks and balances on the power of elected officials. As such, Parliament was not at the center of the country's political system. As a matter of fact, the 1961 Constitution had created the Senate as the upper house of the legislative branch to counter-balance the popularly elected Parliament. Likewise, the Constitutional Court was tasked with keeping tabs on Parliament rather than protecting civil rights and liberties.<sup>4</sup>

In turn, political parties, which were a crucial part of democratic politics, were forced to operate in limited space. Military Chief of Staff Gen. Kenan Evren, who orchestrated the 1980 coup d'état before assuming the presidency, would later defend those restrictions as follows:

[Founder of the Great Türkiye Party] Ali Fethi Esener approached me. I told him not to form a political party or I would have to shut it down. He did not listen to me. He formed a political party and I shut it down. Then [Turgut] Özal visited me. I told him that we would permit him to form a political party. I said: "But you have a history with the National Salvation Party. If you let members of the National Movement Party or the National Salvation Party join your party, we will shut down your party." If we allowed one right-wing party and one left-wing party, the right would have won everything. We feared that, if we allowed a single right-wing party, they would have received enough votes to change the Constitution!<sup>5</sup>

## THE 1982 CONSTITUTION AND DEVIATION FROM PARLIAMENTARISM

The 1982 Constitution further strengthened the guardianship regime that was created in 1961. Although the text kept the parliamentary system intact, it granted broad power to the president that went far beyond the usual limits under

<sup>4</sup> Yazıcı, *Başkanlık ve Yarı Başkanlık Sistemleri: Türkiye için Bir Değerlendirme*; Ergun Özbudun, *Türkiye'de Demokratikleşme Süreci, Anayasa Yapımı ve Anayasa Yargısı* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Publishing, 2014); Ergun Özbudun and Ömer Faruk Genççaya, *Türkiye'de Demokratikleşme ve Anayasa Yapım Politikası* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> "Kenan Evren: Sağ partiler Anayasa'yı değiştirir diye korktuk," *Türkiye*, April 9, 2017.

democratic parliamentary systems. Under the new rules, the Turkish president became considerably more powerful than their counterparts in other parliamentary systems around the world. Therefore, it is worth noting that Türkiye's system of government under the 1982 Constitution was designed according to the parliamentary blueprint, but it was actually similar to the post-1958 semi-presidential system in France and could be considered "watered-down parliamentarism".<sup>6</sup> After all, the Turkish president exercised broader powers than many heads of state serving under semi-presidentialism. As a matter of fact, Turkish presidents were granted even broader power when political crises occurred over the following years which, in turn, tilted the country's system of government towards presidentialism.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, the system of government under the 1982 Constitution deviated from parliamentarism *par excellence* by significantly empowering the Office of the President.

Under the 1982 Constitution, the Turkish president had no political liability and did not answer to the people. In this regard, the Office of the President was positioned at the very top of the state apparatus to protect the guardianship regime. From May 27, 1960, onwards, the establishment compelled civilian politicians to elect presidents from among retired soldiers. Having no previous ties to civilian politics, Turkish presidents used their sweeping powers to mount pressure on elected governments, whose ideologies they did not share. Turkish presidents and prime ministers frequently disagreed over policies that fueled political crises. This problem of dual legitimacy gradually evolved into a systemic crisis.<sup>8</sup>

With the return of elected governments in 1983, disputes between President Kenan Evren and Prime Minister Turgut Özal rekindled the public debate on popular presidential elections. Upon assuming the presidency four years later, Özal brought up Türkiye's potential transition to presidentialism. In his view, the Turkish-style parliamentary system stalled key reforms. He argued that presidentialism, in contrast, was the driving force behind change and therefore the most suitable system for the country.<sup>9</sup> In his defense of the presidential system, Özal recalled that weak coalition governments were incapable of managing Türkiye's affairs effectively. He added that the country's political culture, with its emphasis on social

<sup>6</sup> Ergun Özbudun, *Türk Anayasa Hukuku* (Ankara: Yetkin Yayınevi, 2004), 338.

<sup>7</sup> Bakır Çağlar, "Anayasa Mahkemesi Kararlarında Demokrasi," *Anayasa Yargısı Dergisi* 7, (1990): 103-10.

<sup>8</sup> Miş, Aslan and Eren, "Türkiye'de Cumhurbaşkanlığı'nın Demokratikleşmesi."

<sup>9</sup> "Özal'dan farklı bakış," *Milliyet*, July 17, 1990, 11.

diversity, regional identities, and townsmanship, fueled fragmentation and argued that the adoption of presidentialism would contribute to Türkiye's unity. According to Özal, the presidential system was "a better fit for countries with multiple large ethnic communities."<sup>10</sup>

Turgut Özal did not just explain why presidentialism was necessary but also provided a framework for the proposed system of government. In his view, it was necessary to preserve the presidency's powers under the 1982 Constitution if Türkiye were to introduce popular presidential elections. Moreover, Turkish presidents would be elected for five years under a two-round system. Özal added that presidential and parliamentary elections must be held simultaneously and the president would have to stand for re-election if Parliament were to call for early elections.<sup>11</sup>

Süleyman Demirel, who originally opposed Özal's proposal by arguing that it would lead to "one-man rule," called for the adoption of presidentialism during his own presidency.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, he invoked the same arguments as his predecessor in his defense of the presidential system: "The presidential system is key to promoting political stability. The executive and legislative branches must be clearly separated. The presidential system is inevitable. Türkiye must adopt this system."<sup>13</sup> In this regard, both Demirel and Özal advocated presidentialism with reference to political stability, governability, democratic consolidation, and the introduction of popular presidential elections.<sup>14</sup>

## OBJECTIONS TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF TÜRKİYE'S POLITICAL SYSTEM

While political representatives of the periphery had traditionally advocated presidentialism in Türkiye, elite groups maintained a generally negative view of the system. For example, certain academics, who claimed that presidentialism was not suitable for Türkiye, argued that the system's success in the United States was an "exception." Arguing that the presidential system had failed to promote democratic governance in Latin America, they posited that Türkiye would end up in

<sup>10</sup> Mehmet Barlas, *Turgut Özal'ın Anıları* (Istanbul: Sabah Books, 1994), 141.

<sup>11</sup> "Özal Yeni Bir Türkiye önerdi," *Milliyet*, November 30, 1990.; "Üç parti üç anayasa," *Milliyet*, November 11, 1990, 9.

<sup>12</sup> "Türkiye, başkanlık sistemi ile yönetilmeli," *Hürriyet*, September 19, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> "Demirel: başkanlık sistemi tartışılmalı," *Hürriyet*, October 21, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Nebi Miş and Burhanettin Duran, "The Transformation of Turkey's Political System and the Executive Presidency," *Insight Turkey* 18, no. 4 (2016).

the same situation. With reference to the “virtues of parliamentarism”<sup>15</sup> and the “perils of presidentialism,”<sup>16</sup> they made the case that no developed country had been able to keep its democracy alive under a presidential system with multiple political parties.<sup>17</sup>

If Türkiye adopted presidentialism and successfully promoted the government’s stability, these critics maintained, political instability would become unavoidable. Another popular claim was that the presidential system would lean toward a one-man rule and cause a drift toward authoritarianism. Moreover, critics argued that if the same political movement controlled both the executive and legislative branches, the opposition would be rendered completely ineffective. Noting that Türkiye’s political culture was inherently compatible with parliamentarism, they claimed that the parliamentary system, despite its various shortcomings, had been consolidated since the late Ottoman period.<sup>18</sup>

Over the years, political parties and individuals that opposed Türkiye’s transition to presidentialism attempted to make the discussion personal. During the tenures of Turgut Özal, Süleyman Demirel, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan alike, opponents of the presidential system invoked arguments that were closely linked to those individuals. In this regard, a consistently popular argument among critics of presidentialism has been that adopting a new system of government would lead to a “one-man rule” by whoever was in power at the time.<sup>19</sup>

Despite voicing their opposition to the presidential system, however, critics failed to find ways to overcome the various crises of parliamentarism. Knowing that the people would support presidentialism in case of a referendum, they fueled several “political fears” to discredit the system. First, there was the claim that Türkiye would have a federal administrative system like the United States if it adopted

<sup>15</sup> Juan J. Linz, “Virtues of Parliamentarism,” *Journal of Democracy* 1, no. 4: 84-91.

<sup>16</sup> Juan J. Linz, “The Perils of Presidentialism,” *Journal of Democracy* 1, no. 1: 51-59.

<sup>17</sup> Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Teoman Egül, ed., *Başkanlık Sistemi* (Ankara: The Union of Turkish Bar Associations Publishing, 2005).; Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, “Başkanlık Rejimi Türkiye’nin Diktatörlük Tehdidiyle Sınava,” in *Başkanlık Sistemi*, ed. Teoman Egül (Ankara: Türkiye Barolar Birliği yayınları, 2005), 13-31.; Cem Aktaş, ed., *Kritik Kavşak: Parlamenter Sistem-Başkanlık Sistemi* (Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015).; Ergun Özbudun, “Başkanlık Sisteminin Olası Tehlikeleri,” in *Kritik Kavşak: Parlamenter Sistem-Başkanlık Sistemi*, ed. Cem Aktaş (Istanbul: Koç University Publishing, 2015), 61-77; Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, “Alaturka Başkanlık Rejimi ve Türkiye’nin Otoriterlikle İmtihanı,” in *Kritik Kavşak: Parlamenter Sistem-Başkanlık Sistemi*, ed. Cem Aktaş (Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015), 153-65.

<sup>19</sup> Nebi Miş, “Başkanlık Sistemi ve Kalıplaşmış İtirazlar,” *Star Açık Görüş*, February 22, 2015.

the presidential system of government. It was tailored to fuel fears that presidentialism would place at risk Türkiye's territorial integrity, specifically with reference to the Kurdish question. At the same time, the Kemalist elites and their political parties associated the question of political system reform with "regime change" in an effort to take the public debate out of context. By extension, they argued that the presidential system would mark the death of the Republican regime.

## **THE POLITICS OF RESISTANCE AGAINST THE AK PARTY AND THE CRISIS OF PARLIAMENTARISM**

The AK Party came to power on November 3, 2002, against the backdrop of a serious political crisis in Türkiye. Upon winning its first national election, the movement reconciled the middle class's demand for change with the European Union harmonization process to take a number of significant steps toward democratization. At the same time, it attempted to promote economic stability by focusing on public services and concrete action. The AK Party's politics of change and transformation across the board was met with resistance by the civilian and military bureaucracy, which represented the interests of the establishment, and certain groups that supported their views. In an effort to de-escalate tensions and avoid a governmental crisis, the party refrained from taking direct action against the civilian and military bureaucracy and other advocates of the status quo represented by the Republican People's Party (CHP). Instead, the movement concentrated on promoting economic stability and social welfare, and implemented democratic reforms in an effort to strengthen its rule.

Although the AK Party controlled nearly enough parliamentary seats to amend the Constitution after the 2002 elections, it faced fierce resistance from the old guard and the Kemalist bloc. At the time, representatives of the establishment were seriously concerned that the ruling party's majority in the Parliament meant it could single-handedly elect the next Turkish president. Provided that the Presidency was considered an extension of the guardianship regime under the 1982 Constitution, it was crucial which political party's candidate would control the top public office. In the past, the establishment had gotten results by forcing Parliament to support a hand-picked candidate that met their ideological criteria. In this regard, the fact that the AK Party could single-handedly name the next president was a historic turning point.

Within the framework of the 1961 and 1982 constitutions, Turkish presidents were unofficially required to meet certain ideological criteria. In this sense, the

establishment would prevent Parliament from supporting presidential candidates deemed not secular or nationalist enough. As a matter of fact, the election of Turkish presidents by Parliament served this particular purpose.<sup>20</sup> In an effort to stop the AK Party from supporting a candidate who did not fit the unofficial criteria, pro-establishment pundits started talking about the 2007 presidential election two years in advance. Various groups, whose interests were not aligned, joined forces ahead of the historic vote and severely criticized the government for various reasons. Step by step, the establishment created a crisis just to prevent Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, or another member of the AK Party, from being elected to the Office of the President.<sup>21</sup>

First, the establishment sought to persuade the people that it would be reasonable for Parliament to conduct the 2007 presidential election less than one year before the following general elections. Starting in 2005, then-CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal and other members of his party made the case in media appearances and parliamentary addresses that Parliament did not have the right to hold a vote for the presidency. The objective of this argument was to compel the AK Party to call for early elections and “hopefully” lose its parliamentary majority to prevent it from electing the next president.

The second line of attack was related to the idea that the AK Party would nominate a presidential candidate, whose wife wore a religious headscarf. Deniz Baykal famously claimed that the ruling party was trying to “make the headscarf official” as part of a broader struggle to “incorporate the headscarf into Türkiye’s official, constitutional order.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the establishment studied legal ways to put the future president on trial for treason if their wife wore the headscarf.<sup>23</sup>

The following step came to be known in Türkiye as the Republican rallies. At the time, Deniz Baykal stated that then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer ought to urge nongovernmental organizations to step up their efforts and called on the institutions in question to answer Sezer’s call.<sup>24</sup> In an address to the CHP’s parliamentary caucus, he further escalated tensions by telling Recep Tayyip Erdoğan not to run for president.<sup>25</sup> In the wake of those statements, the first Republican rallies

<sup>20</sup> Miş, Aslan and Eren, “Türkiye’de Cumhurbaşkanlığı’nın Demokratikleştirilmesi,” 15-23.

<sup>21</sup> Miş and Duran, “Türkiye’de Siyasal Sistemin Dönüşümü ve Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sistemi,” 27-32.

<sup>22</sup> “Çankaya’da Türban Türkiye’yi Krize Sokar,” *Radikal*, June 13, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> “Gül’ün Başörtülü Eşi Vatana İhanettir,” *Akşam*, February 5, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> “Gerekirse Sine-i Millete Döneriz,” *Hürriyet*, May 16, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> “Sakin Ha Cumhurbaşkanı Adayı Olma,” *haberler.com*, April 3, 2007.

took place on April 14, 2007, where participants urged the military to overthrow the country's democratically elected government.

At the same time, the establishment started a legal debate on the methodology of presidential elections. The "367 crisis," as it came to be known in Türkiye, kicked off when pro-establishment figures raised questions about certain details of the election process that had not applied to previous elections. Although the debate started in a newspaper column,<sup>26</sup> it was quickly picked up by the former chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals, Sabih Kanadoğlu. Parliament, according to his argument, could not hold a presidential election unless two-thirds of all parliamentarians, in other words, 367 parliamentarians, were present and voting.

To be clear, the general population and constitutional scholars did not take this claim seriously at first. After all, the 1982 Constitution clearly outlined the methodology of presidential elections and stipulated that the president would be elected after no more than four rounds of voting. Accordingly, two-thirds of all parliamentarians would have to support a given candidate for them to win the race in the first two rounds. In the third and fourth rounds, a simple majority would suffice. At the time, the AK Party caucus was large enough to secure a victory for their candidate in the third or fourth rounds.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the CHP leadership adopted Kanadoğlu's argument and assumed a political position accordingly.

On April 24, 2007, the AK Party officially nominated Abdullah Gül for president. Three days later, Parliament held the first round of voting. To ensure that less than 367 parliamentarians were present during the vote, the entire CHP caucus was absent. The Motherland Party (ANAP) and the True Path Party (DYP), which controlled a small number of seats yet could put the number of parliamentarians participating in the election over 367, were likewise outside the General Assembly. At the time, the military reportedly pressured ANAP Chairman Erkan Mumcu to not attend the parliamentary session.<sup>28</sup> Asked by a fellow party member why the ANAP caucus did not participate in the presidential election, Mumcu allegedly said that, "The military had already determined whom they would take and where those people would be forcibly taken if we attended the session and [Gül] became president."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ali İhsan Karacan, "Köşk seçiminde Anayasadaki püf nokta," *Dünya*, December 1, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Özbudun, *Türkiye'de Demokratikleşme Süreci, Anayasa Yapımı ve Anayasa Yargısı*, 87.

<sup>28</sup> "Askerler Gül'e Karşı Mumcu'ya Baskı Yaptı mı?," *Milliyet*, June 4, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Muharrem Sarıkaya, "Seni De Beni De Götürecekler," *Sabah*, April 26, 2008.

Provided that no parties, with the notable exception of the AK Party, were present during the first round of the presidential election, the number of parliamentarians ended up below 367. In the first round, in which a total of 361 parliamentarians participated, Abdullah Gül received 357 votes. In other words, the CHP leadership fulfilled the recently invented criteria to submit an application to the Constitutional Court to declare the vote null and void. In addition to asking the court to cancel the first round, CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal attempted to mount pressure on the country's top legal body by publicly stating that "Türkiye will witness a violent conflict if the Constitutional Court fails to enforce the 367 [criteria]."<sup>30</sup>

The final stage of the establishment's crisis scenario was reached when the military answered repeated calls to intervene in civilian politics. On April 27, 2007, just hours after the first round of the presidential election, an official statement was posted on the official website of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), which came to be known as the "e-memorandum." Suggesting that the military was prepared to meddle in civilian politics yet again, the infamous statement read as follows:

In recent days, the problems that emerged in the presidential election process have concentrated on a debate on secularism. This situation is being monitored by the Turkish Armed Forces with concern. It must not be forgotten that the Turkish Armed Forces are a party to said debate and a clear guardian of secularism. Moreover, the Turkish Armed Forces ... shall make perfectly clear its position and actions when necessary.<sup>31</sup>

As such, the military became part and parcel of efforts to prevent the AK Party from controlling the Office of the President. In the wake of this crisis, which was jointly orchestrated by various pro-guardianship groups, the Constitutional Court on May 1, 2007, canceled the first round of the presidential election citing Parliament's failure to meet the 367 criteria. Five days later, the first round of voting was repeated at Parliament yet proved inconclusive because less than 367 parliamentarians were present. In light of this gridlock, the AK Party government called for early elections on July 22, 2007.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, the AK Party reached an agreement with the ANAP leadership on a constitutional reform package, which would introduce popular presidential elections to prevent similar crises in the future. Those constitutional amend-

<sup>30</sup> "Utañ Bildirisi Hala Sitede," *Yeni Şafak*, April 27, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> "Genelkurmay'dan Çok Sert Açıklama," *Hürriyet*, April 29, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> "Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimlerinin 1. turu iptal," *Yeni Şafak*, May 1, 2007.



ments were adopted in the October 21, 2007 referendum with the support of 68.95 percent of the electorate. Under the new rules, future presidents would serve no more than two five-year terms, parliamentary elections would be held every four (as opposed to five) years and only one-third of all parliamentarians would have to be present for the Parliament to conduct any business.<sup>33</sup> This step marked the end of presidential elections by Parliament, which created crises, and the beginning of the Presidency's democratization process.<sup>34</sup>

## THE AK PARTY'S EFFORTS TO DRAFT A NEW CONSTITUTION

The introduction of popular presidential elections in 2007 effectively and unofficially transformed Türkiye's system of government into something akin to semi-presidentialism. The fact that Turkish presidents, who already exercised vast powers without an ounce of liability, would be elected by the people meant that the country's system of government strayed further away from parliamentarism.<sup>35</sup> The problem of dual legitimacy, which could arise in a system of government with two elected executives (the president and the prime minister), made it necessary for Türkiye's political system to undergo more comprehensive changes.

In this sense, the AK Party's newly formed parliamentary caucus identified the drafting of a new constitution and the transition to presidentialism as priority items on their agenda. The movement had drafted a new constitution ahead of the 2007 general elections and pledged to create a "civilian social contract" on the campaign trail. In line with this campaign promise, AK Party Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdoğan instructed a group of constitutional scholars to draft a new constitution. The said draft preserved popular presidential elections as well as parliamentarism.

Just as the AK Party took steps to share its draft constitution with the general population, the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals filed a lawsuit against the movement in March 2008, claiming that it had become a "focal point of anti-secular activities" and urging the Constitutional Court to shut it down. On July 30, 2008, the court ruled against the AK Party's closure. Although the majority of its members voted in favor of closure, their numbers failed to meet

<sup>33</sup> Özbudun, *Türkiye'de Demokratikleşme Süreci, Anayasa Yapımı ve Anayasa Yargısı*, 88.

<sup>34</sup> Miş, Aslan and Eren, "Türkiye'de Cumhurbaşkanlığı'nın Demokratikleştirilmesi," 15-23.

<sup>35</sup> Miş and Duran, "The Transformation of Turkey's Political System and the Executive Presidency," 21.

the constitutional criteria of a qualified majority. Meanwhile, the movement was banned from receiving financial assistance from the Treasury.<sup>36</sup> According to several constitutional scholars, the Constitutional Court's ruling did not comply with the standards identified by the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission and was even in violation of the Turkish Constitution. Therefore, it reflected an oppressive and authoritarian interpretation of secularism that did not exist in any Western democracy.<sup>37</sup>

In the wake of the closure case and the opposition's politics of resistance against the AK Party, the movement decided to halt its search for a new constitution. Having been weakened by democratic reforms, the guardianship regime attempted to use the judiciary, its final stronghold, against elected officials in 2008 to maintain its influence on civilian politics. At the time, the judicial bureaucracy was eager to fill the void left behind by the military and emerge as the guardians of the Republican regime to become part of the checks and balances. Under the circumstances, the AK Party attempted to defend itself from the establishment's attacks and weaken the bureaucratic oligarchy.<sup>38</sup> To do so, the movement created a constitutional reform package in 2010 and called for a constitutional referendum.

The AK Party's constitutional reform package did not just seek to make changes to the judiciary but also stated that positive discrimination toward women was constitutional, children's rights had constitutional standing, and that the authorities had to take necessary measures to protect personal data. It also eased restrictions on international travel, regulated union rights, introduced individual applications to the Constitutional Court, created the Office of the Ombudsman, and enabled the judicial review of Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) decisions and disciplinary actions against public officials. Another important part of the constitutional reform package related to holding accountable perpetrators of military coups in Türkiye for the first time.

Upon introducing the constitutional reform bill, the AK Party leadership initially hoped to reach an agreement with other parties represented in the Turkish Parliament. Such cooperation became impossible, however, since the various opposition parties offered conditional support. For example, CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal stated that his party would endorse the bill if the ruling party agreed

<sup>36</sup> "AK Parti kapatılmasın' kararı çıktı," *Milliyet*, July 30, 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Özbudun, *Türkiye'de Demokratikleşme Süreci, Anayasa Yapımı ve Anayasa Yargısı*, 95.

<sup>38</sup> Cem Duran Uzun, "Türkiye'nin Yeni Anayasa Arayışı ve Yüksek Yargı," *Çankaya Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi* 2, no. 1 (April 2017).

to take out sections related to the judiciary.<sup>39</sup> Unwilling to backtrack on judicial regulations, which were essential to the reform bill, the AK Party called for a parliamentary vote. On May 7, 2010, the Parliament passed the constitutional reform package with enough votes to hold a referendum. In addition to refusing to participate in parliamentary votes, the CHP leadership submitted an application to the Constitutional Court to cancel the constitutional amendments with immediate effect.<sup>40</sup>

Although the Constitutional Court turned down the main opposition party's request, it overstepped its mandate by conducting a substantial review of proposed changes and striking down parts of the text. Nonetheless, it conceded that the referendum was constitutional. In its detailed response, the court stated that "the judiciary shall cease to be an obstacle before the Justice and Development Party, which cannot fit within its legal limits and closure cases and the threat of being put on trial at the Supreme Divan shall fail to strike fear."<sup>41</sup> In other words, it openly criticized efforts to weaken the judiciary's influence over civilian politics. In this sense, the court's decision to cancel parts of the legislation represented a last-ditch effort to undermine the country's democratization process. On September 12, 2010, Türkiye held a constitutional referendum, which passed with 58 percent of the vote.<sup>42</sup>

## POPULAR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND UNCERTAINTY IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Representatives of the AK Party, particularly Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during his mayoral and prime ministerial tenure, frequently acknowledged the need to transform Türkiye's political system. In the wake of the movement's rise to power, Erdoğan shared his thoughts on the matter in a 2003 interview:

Semi-presidentialism is my wish in politics. I want and hope that it will be adopted. Of course, it is necessary for all institutions in the country to join the people to reach a consensus. Without such consensus, the transition would be unhealthy. I believe, however, that Türkiye will take a serious step forward as soon as we implement it. ... Of course, the ideal is the American model.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Murat Yılmaz, "2010 Referandumı: Siyasi Partilerin Tutumu," *SETA Analiz*, no. 28 (October 2010).

<sup>40</sup> "CHP, Anayasa Mahkemesi'ne gitti," *Radikal*, May 14, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> "Anayasa Mahkemesi kararını verdi: Referandum," *Radikal*, July 7, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> "2010'da Türkiye," *SETA Analiz*, no. 32 (January 2011): 34-35.

<sup>43</sup> Muharrem Sarıkaya and Okan Müderrisoğlu, "Ankara'da Sabah," *ATV*, April 20, 2003.

The introduction of popular presidential elections in 2007 reinvigorated the public debate on the political system's transformation in Türkiye. This step marked a clear break with parliamentarism and pushed it closer to semi-presidentialism. Under this system, it was probable that problems could arise between elected executive officials, the president and the prime minister. Although those problems could be managed if both officials were members of the same political party, disputes between members of rival movements would inevitably create serious crises.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the AK Party continued to make the case for presidentialism after the 2007 constitutional referendum.

The pledge to draft a new constitution was an important part of the AK Party's 2011 election campaign. The movement stated that its third consecutive term in power would be devoted to drafting a new constitution based on the amendments passed in 2004, 2007, and 2010.<sup>45</sup> Upon winning another landslide victory in 2011, the AK Party took important steps toward drafting a new constitution and transforming Türkiye's political system. The movement oversaw the formation of the Constitutional Reconciliation Commission at the Turkish Parliament, which was chaired by the Speaker of the Parliament and consisted of three representatives from each political party. According to the commission's working principles, each movement would enjoy equal representation regardless of their popularity, all decisions had to be unanimous, and the body would be dissolved if any party withdrew from the talks. Although the commission identified those principles as a token of goodwill, it became clear that drafting a new constitution through consensus was impractical even in the most homogeneous and conciliatory societies. In 2013, the commission was dissolved, having accomplished nothing.<sup>46</sup>

During the all-party talks, the AK Party called for the adoption of presidentialism and the restructuring of relations between the various branches accordingly. The movement drafted a new constitution, presented it to the commission and made it available to the general population.<sup>47</sup> The CHP, in turn, rejected presidentialism

<sup>44</sup> Burhanettin Duran, "Bir Süreç Olarak Başkanlık Sistemi Arayışı," *Sabah*, May 26, 2016.

<sup>45</sup> "AK Parti 2011 Genel Seçimleri Seçim Beyannamesi," accessed, December 21, 2017, 32-33, <https://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/2011-beyanname.doc>.

<sup>46</sup> Cem Duran Uzun, "Türkiye'nin Eskimeyen Gündemi Yeni Anayasa: Nerede Kalmıştık," *Star Açık Görüş*, January 3, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> The draft constitution submitted by the AK Party to the Turkish Parliament's Constitutional Reconciliation Commission in November 2012 stipulated that the president would be elected for five years. An individual could serve no more than two terms as president. The president was granted decree powers. Presidential candidates entered elections with their vice president of choice. Moreover, the draft stated that presidential and parliamentary elections would be held on the same day every five years.

and called for the preservation of the parliamentary system. In the end, the Constitutional Reconciliation Commission agreed on 59 articles. A proposal by the AK Party leadership to hold a general debate on those articles was turned down by the remaining parties. In light of those developments, Speaker Cemil Çiçek announced on November 18, 2013, that the commission had completed its work and concluded that the parties were unable to reach a consensus on the new constitution.

The 2014 presidential election, when the Turkish people elected the president for the first time, marked an important step in the transformation of Türkiye's political system. On August 10, 2014, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received 51.8 percent of the vote to win in the first round. Having stated that he would play an active role in politics<sup>48</sup> on the campaign trail, he started exercising all of his powers under the 1982 Constitution. Provided that the 1982 Constitution granted sweeping powers to Turkish presidents, it is possible to argue that Erdoğan's election represented the *de facto* transition of Türkiye's political system to semi-presidentialism.

As in 2011, the adoption of presidentialism was an important campaign promise made by the AK Party ahead of the June and November 2015 parliamentary elections. In its manifesto for the June 7, 2015 election, the movement recalled that Türkiye's political system had been tailored for the guardianship regime and warned that the introduction of popular presidential elections could create certain problems whose solution depended on the adoption of presidentialism.<sup>49</sup> In the same document, the party made the case for presidentialism as follows:

The existing system of government has the potential to fuel crises if the president and the prime minister come from different political backgrounds. Recalling that the current system's pro-tutelage design, the AK Party believes that the potential problems caused by popular presidential elections could be solved through presidentialism. As a matter of fact, we proposed the presidential system, which we have been advocating for a long time, at the Parliament's Constitutional Reconciliation Commission that was formed in 2011. ... In the public debate on presidentialism, there is an effort to hide the fact that a number of democratic countries with strong economies are being governed according to this model. In this sense, we must draw from the experiences of our political tradition and not make this debate personal in order to keep searching for a system compatible with our new vision for Türkiye and find a solution.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> "Terleyen Koşan Cumhurbaşkanı," *Milliyet*, April 9, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> "Yeni Türkiye Yolunda Daima Adalet Daima Kalkınma: 7 Haziran 2015 Genel Seçimleri Seçim Beyannameşi," accessed December 21, 2017, 39, <https://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/secim-beyannameşi>.

<sup>50</sup> "AK Parti 7 Haziran 2015 Genel Seçimleri Seçim Beyannameşim" accessed December 21, 2017, 39-40, [www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/2015-secim-beyannameşi-20nisan.pdf](http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/2015-secim-beyannameşi-20nisan.pdf).

Although the AK Party received approximately 41 percent of the vote in the June 7, 2015, parliamentary elections, it could not form a single-party government. Consequently, Türkiye experienced a period of coalition-building and, by extension, the crises caused by the parliamentary system. Provided that the election results ruled out a single-party government, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan asked Ahmet Davutoğlu to form a coalition government. Coalition talks started shortly afterwards. It is important to note, however, that it became possible on election night that there would not be a multitude of potential coalition governments. Hours after the ballots closed, the MHP and the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) announced that they would not form a coalition government with the AK Party. Nor was it the preferred coalition partner for the CHP. However, the inability of the three parties to form a coalition government among themselves meant that the AK Party had to reach an agreement with the CHP – which resulted in the so-called exploratory talks between the two parties. To be clear, the idea of a grand coalition was the result of the rest of the opposition's eagerness to form a government without the AK Party. Consequently, the two parties effectively agreed to hold repeat elections during the coalition talks.<sup>51</sup> It was therefore that the threat of political instability, which plagued Türkiye until the 2000s, made a comeback.

Provided that the coalition talks failed to yield results by the 45-day deadline, President Erdoğan announced that repeat elections would be held on November 1, 2015. Political instability and this brief period of chaos, however, revived old memories in Türkiye and served as a reminder that transforming the country's political system was a necessity.

In the wake of the November 2015 general elections, there was initial interest in bringing back the Constitutional Reconciliation Commission to facilitate dialogue on the new constitution. After two weeks, however, the body was dissolved due to the unwillingness of CHP representatives to discuss alternatives to parliamentarism and their decision to walk out of the third meeting.<sup>52</sup>

During the same process, there was a clear lack of coordination between President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. This problem was caused by their different reactions to political developments rather than an ideological dispute. Although their shared political background facilitated

<sup>51</sup> Mehmet Zahid Sobacı, "Erken Seçim Üzerine 'Koalisyon' ve Parlamenter Sistem," *Yeni Şafak*, August 20, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> "CHP, Anayasa Uzlaşma Komisyonu'ndan ayrıldı," *NTV*, February 16, 2016.; "Anayasa Uzlaşma Komisyonu dağıldı," *TRT Haber*, 16 February 2016.

the containment of this shortage of coordination and stopped it from evolving into a full-blown crisis, it became clear that the problem of dual legitimacy could fuel severe tensions between future executive officials and stressed the need for systemic change.<sup>53</sup>

The above-mentioned problems resulted in a change of leadership within the AK Party on May 22, 2016. Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, who replaced Davutoğlu, stated that making the *de facto* political situation fully compliant with the Constitution would be a priority item on his agenda.<sup>54</sup> Although the AK Party formed a single-party government following the November 2015 elections, it did not control enough parliamentary seats to single-handedly amend the Constitution. Provided that the remaining political parties were categorically opposed to the presidential system, the AK Party was compelled to suspend its constitutional reform efforts.

## THE CONSENSUS ON THE POLITICAL SYSTEM'S TRANSFORMATION

The public debate on the transformation of Türkiye's political system, which continued for decades, was revived in the wake of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. One of the most serious threats against Türkiye's national security in recent years, the failed coup stressed the need to crack down on FETÖ, the terrorist organization led by the U.S.-based Fetullah Gülen, and to restructure the state apparatus. At the same time, the event promoted dialogue among politicians and various social groups. In this regard, the coup attempt and its aftermath marked the beginning of a new chapter in Türkiye's political history, as many social groups came together and reconciliation became possible in the political arena.

Although the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) advocated the presidential system under its founding leader, Alparslan Türkeş, it sided with the establishment throughout the 2000s against the AK Party's attempts to transform the country.<sup>55</sup> As a matter of fact, the movement stated in its manifesto ahead of the November 2015 elections that "the problems stemming from the system's functioning must be addressed within the limits of the parliamentary system."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Nebi Miş and Burhanettin Duran, "Turkey's Constitutional Referendum and Its Effects on Turkish Politics," *Orient* 58, no. 3 (2017): 56.

<sup>54</sup> "Binali Yıldırım'dan İlk Grup Toplantısında Başkanlık Vurgusu," *Al Jazeera Türk*, May 24, 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Ali Aslan, "1 Aralık Mutabakatı ve Yeni Devletin İnşası," *Sabah Perspektif*, December 3, 2016.

<sup>56</sup> *MHP 1 Kasım Seçim Beyannamesi*, Ankara: 2015.

Having supported the government's post-July 15 efforts to declare a state of emergency, crack down on FETÖ and the PKK, and address foreign policy issues, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli turned over a fresh leaf<sup>57</sup> by reversing his position on constitutional reform. In an address to the MHP caucus at the Turkish Parliament, he called on the AK Party to introduce a bill on the proposed transition to presidentialism.<sup>58</sup>

The AK Party leadership welcomed Devlet Bahçeli's change of heart on the political system's transformation. On October 17, 2016, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım discussed future steps on the new constitution with Bahçeli at Çankaya Palace in Ankara. Shortly afterward, the AK Party started drafting a constitutional reform bill, which was shared with the MHP on November 15, 2016, for deliberations. Following discussions between the two parties, an agreement was reached and the draft bill was introduced at Parliament following a joint press conference on December 10, 2016. Accordingly, the proposed system of government was based on presidentialism and officially called the "presidency" system.

Consisting of 18 articles, the final version of the draft bill was passed by the Constitutional Commission. Following an intense and lengthy debate at the General Assembly, the draft bill was passed on January 26, 2017, with the support of AK Party and MHP parliamentarians. Having received more than 330 votes, the bill was submitted to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for approval. On February 10, 2017, the president signed the bill – which the Constitution required to be put to a popular vote. Finally, the Supreme Electoral Board (YSK) announced that the constitutional referendum would be held on April 16, 2017.<sup>59</sup>

## CONTRADICTING VIEWS ON THE PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM

The constitutional reform bill, which would facilitate Türkiye's transition to the presidential system, was jointly drafted by the AK Party and the MHP. Ahead of the constitutional referendum, both parties campaigned in favor of the proposed changes. On the campaign trail, the AK Party made its traditional arguments for a new system of government in greater detail and explained to voters why constitutional reform was critically important for the country's future.

<sup>57</sup> Burhanettin Duran, "Neden Yeniden Başkanlığı Tartışıyoruz?," *Sabah*, October 14, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> "Bahçeli'den Başkanlık Sistemine Yeşil Işık," *Ihlas News Agency*, October 11, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Miş and Duran, "Turkey's Constitutional Referendum and Its Effects on Turkish Politics." 52-60.



The AK Party campaign advocated the presidential system with reference to permanent political stability, speedy and active action, a stronger legislative branch and stronger political representation, and a strong and reliable Türkiye. Moreover, the movement pledged to address the problem of dual legitimacy, eliminate bureaucratic guardianship, put an end to weak coalition governments, strengthen the legitimacy of the executive branch through popular presidential elections, and deepen and consolidate democracy in Türkiye.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, it argued that the election of future presidents with a simple majority would promote political reconciliation and Türkiye would become more influential in the region and globally thanks to its stable government. The movement added that the perpetuation of political stability would undermine the guardianship regime, ensure the separation of powers to ensure that Parliament would concentrate on its legislative functions, promote a culture of reconciliation and contribute to the robust growth and the population's economic well-being.<sup>61</sup> Another important point made by the AK Party was that the new system of government would address the problem of dual legitimacy, which was caused by the introduction of popular presidential elections in 2007. Finally, the movement responded to critics, who claimed that the presidential system would undermine the separation of powers, weaken the principle of unitarism, lead to "one-man rule" and result in the "personification" of the government.<sup>62</sup>

The MHP, in turn, focused on the survival of the Turkish state and nation. Arguing that the question of the political system's transformation was a matter of national interest as opposed to ideology, spokespeople for the party adopted a more moderate nationalist approach and stressed that the country was under threat. On the campaign trail, the movement, therefore, adopted the slogan "Yes for the nation, yes for the state, yes for the Republic, yes for the survival of Turkishness, yes for Türkiye." In an effort to convince its supporters to support the proposed changes, the MHP made frequent references to Türkiye's survival in the wake of the July 15 coup attempt. Furthermore, it argued that Turkish democracy and politics would benefit from constitutional reform for various reasons.

<sup>60</sup> "Kararımız Evet: AK Parti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sistemi Kitapçığı," accessed December 21, 2017, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/kararimizevet/>.

<sup>61</sup> "Kararımız Evet: AK Parti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sistemi Kitapçığı."

<sup>62</sup> Abdülhamit Gül, "Milletin Özne Olduğu Sistem: Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sistemi," *Yeni Türkiye* 23, no. 94 (March-April 2017);: 129-60.

In the wake of the July 15 coup attempt, two large blocs emerged in Turkish politics. While the AK Party and the MHP ended up on one side, the opposite faction included the CHP and the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). The same division manifested itself ahead of the constitutional reform, as the latter parties emerged as leaders of the “no” campaign, which included several fringe parties including the National Outlook-based Felicity Party (SP) and the neo-Kemalist Homeland Party (VP). To be clear, the opponents of the constitutional reform weren't limited to political parties. In addition to the aforementioned movements, a number of nongovernmental organizations actively campaigned against the proposed changes. Moreover, presidents and senior executives of certain semi-official bodies, such as the Istanbul and Ankara bar associations, played an active role in the “no” campaign.

Traditionally, the CHP was always in favor of the parliamentary system. On the campaign trail, the party built on anti-Erdoğanism and charges of authoritarianism to claim that the new system of government would lead to “one-man rule.” At the same time, it employed neo-Kemalist language, including references to Türkiye's territorial integrity and political unity, in an effort to win over nationalist voters.<sup>63</sup> Incorporating economic and national security elements into its referendum campaign, the main opposition party accused parliamentarians who voted in favor of the constitutional reform bill of committing treason.<sup>64</sup>

Another supporter of the “no” campaign, the HDP demanded that the parliamentary debate on constitutional reform be suspended until several of its parliamentarians, who were under arrest, were released.<sup>65</sup> Joining forces with the CHP against constitutional reform, the movement's referendum campaign and rhetoric were notably similar to the main opposition party. Like the CHP, spokespeople for the HDP argued that the new system would lead to “regime change,” weaken the Parliament and result in “one-man rule.”

Opponents of the presidential system, furthermore, objected to the constitutional design of the proposed system of government. Accordingly, they were critical of simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections, the ability of the Parliament and the president to end each other's terms in office, the issuing of presidential decrees, and the constitutional mandate of the president.

<sup>63</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu: Koşullar 12 Eylül'den daha ağır,” November 1, 2016.

<sup>64</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu: Bu parlamento kendi tarihine ihanet etti,” *NTV*, January 21, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> “Müslüm Doğan: Alevilerin Anayasa değişikliği teklifine ilişkin bilgisi yok,” *hdp.org.tr*, April 5, 2017.

## THE CONSTITUTIONAL DESIGN OF THE PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM

Although the presidential system emerged out of the AK Party's long efforts, it was ultimately shaped by an agreement between two distinct political parties. Therefore, the final text does not necessarily reflect either side's approach in full. For example, the new system of government was designed after presidentialism, although it came to be called the "presidency" system.<sup>66</sup>

The constitutional reform bill primarily related to the adoption of a new system of government.<sup>67</sup> In this regard, it made changes to executive and legislative elections, repeat elections, the mandate of the executive branch, the judiciary, the methodology of trials of the president and Cabinet ministers, the appointment of vice presidents, presidential decrees, and the preparation of the annual budget. In contrast, the bill did not address the fundamental traits of the state apparatus, the principle of unitarism, fundamental rights and liberties, the structure of the legislative branch, or the mandate and selection of Constitutional Court justices.

Under the new arrangement, which was based on a system of government officially called the "presidency" system, Türkiye continues to have a unitary administration and unicameral Parliament. The main difference between past and present practices is the resolution of the problem of dual legitimacy. The constitutional reform bill stipulated that the president, who was the head of state, would also serve as the head of the executive branch. Moreover, the presidential mandate was expanded to include the appointment of vice presidents, Cabinet ministers and senior public officials along with the establishment and abolishment of ministries and the determination of their responsibilities.

Although the bill made it possible for the president to issue decrees, it is important to note that decree power is not unlimited. Under the new rules, the president may not issue decrees regarding fundamental rights, individual rights and responsibilities, and political rights and responsibilities. Likewise, presidential decrees may not be issued with regard to all matters that the Constitution requires to be regulated by law. If conflicts arise between decrees and laws, the law takes precedence. Moreover, Parliament may annul presidential decrees by passing laws on the same subject.

<sup>66</sup> Nebi Miş, "AK Parti'nin önerisinde siyasal sistem tasarımı," *Kriter*, December 2016.

<sup>67</sup> "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasasında Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Kanun," *TBMM*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k6771.html>

The constitutional reform bill states that the president shall serve no more than two five-year terms. Presidential elections take place under a two-round system and all political parties, which received at least 5 percent of the vote in the most recent elections, or a minimum of 100,000 individuals, have been declared eligible to nominate presidential candidates. Furthermore, it was decided that presidential and parliamentary elections would be held on the same day.

According to another newly introduced rule, the president may call for early parliamentary elections if the legislative branch faces a gridlock. However, the law states that the president must step down simultaneously. Likewise, three-fifths of all parliamentarians may terminate their term, along with the president's term, by calling for early elections. As such, the constitutional reform bill made it possible for both the executive and legislative branches to call for early elections if the country's political system is crippled by crises.

Under the new rules, the president is explicitly prohibited from participating in the legislative process. Instead, Parliament alone has the authority to draft new laws. The president, however, is permitted to request legal changes by issuing non-binding statements. Moreover, Parliament may conduct parliamentary inquiries, hold a general debate, or submit written questions to monitor the activities of the executive branch. At the same time, the legislative branch may, through the proxy of the Court of Accounts, conduct legal and financial audits on all institutions receiving public funds – including the Presidency and ministries.

At the same time, the constitutional reform bill struck down certain parts of the 1982 Constitution that were relevant to the severing of the president's ties to political parties. In other words, it became possible for the president to become a member of any political party or to serve as its chairperson. Furthermore, the new legislation imposed new limits on the president's legal immunity by increasing presidential liability and facilitating legal action against sitting presidents.

The most important changes regarding the judiciary related to the number and selection of the members of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK). The institution was renamed the Board of Judges and Prosecutors and the number of its members decreased from 22 to 13. Of those 13, seven members would be selected by Parliament and another four would be appointed by the president. The minister of justice and the undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice, in turn, are considered natural members. Although no changes were made to the selection methods and term limits of Constitutional Court justices, the constitutional reform bill reduced their numbers. Due to the abolishment of military

supreme courts, those institutions became ineligible to send representatives to the Constitution Court – which, by extension, meant that the total number of members was reduced to 15.

Finally, the following changes, which were not directly related to the presidential system, were made under the reform bill: The number of parliamentarians was increased from 550 to 600. The age of candidacy was decreased from 25 to 18. The judicial review of the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) decisions was made possible. Martial law was abolished. The General Commander of the Gendarmerie was removed from the National Security Council. An earlier exception to supervision by the State Monitoring Board (DDK) granted to the Turkish Armed Forces was revoked.<sup>68</sup>

## TRANSITION TO THE PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM AND ITS AFTERMATH<sup>69</sup>

The constitutional amendment package, which facilitated Türkiye's transition to the presidential system, was no ordinary piece of legislation. It represented the replacement of parliamentarism with the executive presidency, necessitating certain changes to laws related to the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. With the adoption of the “presidency” system, the popularly elected president, along with Parliament, was positioned at the heart of Türkiye's political system. Provided that the popularly elected president shall exercise executive power alone, all crises stemming from executive dualism will have been avoided automatically.

Under the new system of government, the president will assume a key role in the development, monitoring, and assessment of public policy. With the abolishment of the Office of the Prime Minister, which was part of the parliamentary system, the Council of Ministers will be transformed into an executive body tasked with assisting the president in the policy development process. By extension, the various ministries will be reformatted to concentrate on policy implementation. To formulate, monitor, and analyze public policy, and pitch new ideas in the areas of health care, education, agriculture, national security, and foreign relations, the

<sup>68</sup> Serdar Güleler and Nebi Miş, “Cumhurbaşkanlığının Anayasal Tasarımı,” in *Türkiye’de Siyasal Sistemin Dönüşümü ve Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sistemi*, ed. Nebi Miş and Burhanettin Duran (Istanbul: SETA Kitapları, 2017), 51-82.

<sup>69</sup> Legal and institutional changes and political transformation after 2018 are the subjects of another study. Because of this reason, in the title of the article, the framework in the first edition was adhered to in the revision.

Office of the President shall be restructured, as new and secondary departments must be created.

The constitutional reform bill facilitated a gradual shift toward the presidential system. As such, the constitutional amendments entered into force in whole following the 2018 presidential and 2019 parliamentary elections. Certain sections of the bill, however, became effective immediately after the official results of the April 2017 referendum were announced. Prior to the 2018 elections, the Parliament passed several harmonization laws related to the presidential system in a range of areas including electoral laws and the law on political parties.

One of the first arrangements that became effective immediately related to the Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK). Under the new rules, the number of the board's members was reduced from 22 to 13 – seven of whom were selected by Parliament and four others appointed by the president. The justice minister and the undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice, in turn, were considered natural members. Meanwhile, the constitutional reform bill entailed a similar reduction in the number of Constitutional Court justices. Since the Military Court of Appeals was abolished, the two military members of the court became redundant.

Another new rule related to the president's ties to party politics. In the wake of the April 2017 constitutional referendum, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan re-joined the AK Party on May 2, 2017, and was elected chairman at the party's Third Extraordinary Congress on May 21. At this point, it is important to analyze the relationship between the president and party politics with reference to Türkiye's political culture and party system. First of all, a new problem of dual legitimacy could arise if future presidents do not serve as leaders of their parties. Differences of opinion between the president and the chairperson of their political party could create gridlocks. After all, the party chairperson could influence its parliamentary caucus to block legislation deemed necessary by the president. As such, whether or not the president also serves as a leader of a political party directly affects several things, including party discipline, election campaigns, electoral behavior and the nomination of parliamentary candidates. Likewise, presidents who have strong ties to their political party are likely to play an active role in "get the vote" efforts and encourage party members to contribute more to election campaigns.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Miş and Duran, "Turkey's Constitutional Referendum and Its Effects on Turkish Politics," 52-60.

The adoption of the presidential system will surely reshape Türkiye's political culture for various reasons, including the transformation of the party system and voter behavior. One of the most notable contributions of the new system to Turkish politics is that the president must be elected with a simple majority. Provided that the leader of any single party is unlikely to receive such high levels of support by themselves, the Turkish Parliament passed a law in January 2018 to legalize inter-party alliances in presidential and parliamentary elections.<sup>71</sup> Under an agreement between the AK Party and the MHP, a legal framework was created to encourage political parties to join forces in national elections.

Under the new system, all presidential candidates, regardless of their political backgrounds, are compelled to run on a more moderate and conciliatory platform. In this regard, the presidential system strengthens mainstream politics through reconciliation rather than fueling polarization. To break the 50 percent mark, the various presidential candidates must adopt campaign rhetoric geared toward winning over multiple social groups. Political parties and candidates alike will have to form alliances ahead of elections. Provided that successful candidates shall stand for re-election, they will be compelled to respect democratic rules. Drifting toward authoritarianism or one-man rule, in this regard, would likely mean that the electorate will throw its support behind other candidates and punish the president's party at the ballot box. Moreover, the popularly elected president will require support from other political parties to pass key legislation. Therefore, they will be compelled to build bridges.

The transformation of Türkiye's system of government into an executive presidency created two large blocs rather than a two-party system. The population's ideological preferences, the impact of social divisions on voter behavior, historical data on electoral volatility, and society's tendency to become polarized support that claim. Looking at the history of party politics in Türkiye, it is possible to employ several concepts (i.e. center-periphery, left-right, and conservative-secularist) to identify the limits of the abovementioned blocs. The driving force behind the genuine two-party system between 1946 and 1960 was the political legacy of contemporary history. The two main traditions in Turkish politics and society reflected the same divisions. This trend, which translated into a competition between left and right politics from 1965 onward, continued with certain exceptions.

<sup>71</sup> Nebi Miş and Hazal Duran, "Seçim İttifakları," *SETA Analiz*, no. 232 (February 2018).

Within the limits of those blocs, several political parties emerged over time with different levels of proximity to the mainstream. What they had in common, however, were their ideological preferences and voter profiles. At the same time, electoral volatility tended to occur *within* (as opposed to *between*) those two blocs.<sup>72</sup> In other words, it was commonplace for voters with similar ideological convictions to change parties within the same bloc. As such, volatility between the two blocs remained consistently low. Regardless of the level of fragmentation within individual political parties, voters often remained within the limits of their respective blocs. Meanwhile, volatility within individual blocs remained consistently high, since military interventions reduced the lifespans of political parties and made it difficult for voters to identify with individual parties over long periods. Consequently, the average right-leaning conservative voter was more likely to vote for a number of right-leaning political parties, whereas it is quite rare for them to cross over to the opposite bloc.

Although the CHP's predecessors could never form single-party governments after Türkiye's transition to a multi-party democracy in 1950, the movement, under various names, formed the backbone of the leftist-Kemalist bloc. From this perspective, the multitude of political parties competing in elections did not change the fact that the CHP represented the opposition bloc over the years. The AK Party came to power in 2002 – which means that Türkiye's party system is headed toward a dominant party system. To be clear, the presence of a dominant party in the system makes it easier to highlight the two blocs.<sup>73</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Türkiye adopted a new system of government by passing the April 16, 2017, constitutional referendum. Transforming the country's political system had been a priority item on the AK Party's agenda at least since 2007. At the time, the pro-guardianship forces had created an artificial crisis in an attempt to prevent a member of the movement to assume the Presidency by forcing Parliament into a gridlock. During the same period, supporters of the old order and the military, which had a tradition of meddling in civilian politics, issued an e-memorandum to remove the AK Party government from power. Again, the Constitutional

<sup>72</sup> Ergun Özbudun, *Türkiye'de Parti ve Seçim Sistemi* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011), 57-87.; Ali Yaşar Sarıbay, "Political Parties, the Political Systems and Turkey," *Insight Turkey* 18, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 93-108.

<sup>73</sup> Miş and Duran, "Seçim İttifakları," 29-30.



Court, another supporter of the guardianship regime, sided with the military to uphold recently invented criteria to stop Parliament from electing Türkiye's next president. Moreover, the court deepened the political crisis by filing a closure case against the AK Party.

In an attempt to break the gridlock, the AK Party called for a constitutional referendum the same year to introduce popular presidential elections. In the aforementioned referendum, the Turkish people overwhelmingly voted in favor of an amendment, which would allow them to elect presidents in the future. Already equipped with significant power, the presidency thus became more influential – which represented a drift away from parliamentarism and toward semi-presidentialism. In 2014, Türkiye's president was elected directly by the people for the first time. As such, the executive branch was now formed by two elected officials, the prime minister and the president, whose constitutional mandate remained unclear. This problem of dual legitimacy, in turn, made conflicts more likely. To address that, the AK Party and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a special effort to promote the political system's transformation from 2015 onward.

In the wake of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, which was orchestrated by members of the terrorist organization FETÖ, it became possible for the various political parties to reach an agreement on key issues. Consequently, the MHP came out in support of the executive presidency, which the AK Party had been advocating for years. The two parties continued their cooperation following the April 2017 referendum that facilitated the transition to the “presidency” system and political alliance in the 2023 elections.

Türkiye's new system of government transformed its political culture and restructure political parties. Under the new rules, the popularly elected president assumed a central role in Türkiye's political system. Likewise, the balance of power between the legislature, the executive branch, and the judiciary shall be redefined according to the constitutional framework of the presidential system.

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## CHAPTER 3

# THE AK PARTY'S KURDISH POLICY

HÜSEYİN ALPTEKİN\*  
TALHA KÖSE\*\*

### INTRODUCTION

This study discusses the Justice and Development Party's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party) Kurdish policy from the November 2002 general elections to date. As one of the key issues, or rather the number one issue in Türkiye, the Kurdish question may be examined via four perspectives: economic, socio-cultural, security, and political (participation). The policies that have been developed in these particular areas by the AK Party governments since 2002 and the impact of these policies on Kurdish citizens of Türkiye and various Kurdish political and social organizations have varied sporadically during the AK Party's 20-year tenure. In times when political participation or security aspects have become more important, other aspects remained on and off the agenda. While these four areas are interrelated, examining them separately will make it easier to understand the implications of the policies developed by the AK Party to solve the Kurdish problem.

In brief, the policies developed in these four areas between 2002 and 2022 reveal that the AK Party governments consistently adopted an approach based on rights in economic and socio-cultural areas and prioritized the expansion of cultural and economic rights. The security and political dimensions remained effective even when the PKK's political offshoot parties increased their influence during the PKK's cease-fires because they soon found themselves quite limited—in terms of both narrowing popular support and hardening legal sanctions—

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at times when the PKK broke the cease-fires. Kurdish citizens of Türkiye have supported the AK Party both for the party's inclusive policies in the cultural and economic dimensions as well as its conservative-democratic identity.<sup>1</sup> For this very reason, the AK Party has maintained, so far, its position as the only national party to be an alternative to ethnic political parties in the southeastern and eastern Anatolia precincts.

The AK Party establishes direct and one-on-one communication with its electorates in economic and socio-cultural areas and has always competed with the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) and its predecessors for the support of Kurdish constituents. From this point of view, other than the HDP and its antecedents, the AK Party has mobilized the most Kurdish voters in terms of political participation. Even more so, Turkish citizens of Kurdish descent provided utmost support to the AK Party during its 20-year tenure in all local, parliamentary, and presidential elections, except the general elections held on June 7, 2015, in which the HDP attracted a bigger share of Kurdish votes.<sup>2</sup>

With reference to the security aspect, the AK Party governments and the military and civilian bureaucracy have confronted the PKK. Although the 20 years of the issue may be characterized as the period of the fight against the PKK, the AK Party governments tried to settle the issue through negotiations in 2007-2009 and again in 2013-2015 and exhibited a determination that no other government had before. However, the negotiations fell apart as the two actors' (the AK Party and the PKK) expectations from the process turned out to be irreconcilable. The PKK ended its cease-fire in the summer of 2015 and declared a "revolutionary popular war" against Türkiye.

Through the four dimensions mentioned above, this study examines the AK Party's approach and policies on the Kurdish question. The most important characteristic that separates the AK Party governments from their predecessors, as a whole, is that the ruling party has not approached the issue simply as a security matter but rather has made efforts to look into the socio-cultural, economic, and political aspects of it. The AK Party governments did not adopt a plain securitization approach to fight the PKK and its cohorts in different areas, but instead took political risks and made an unprecedented move to persuade the PKK to end its

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion over policies in such domains in the earlier years see. Hüseyin Alptekin, "Ethnic Incorporation Policies and Peripheral Reactions: How Are Turkey's Kurds Treated by the State and How Do They Perceive Their Treatment", *Afro Eurasian Studies*, Vol: 1, No: 2, (2012), pp. 97-119.

<sup>2</sup> For the general election results of the HDP and its predecessor in this period, see. Appendix 1.

armed campaign. Although previous governments had indirect contact with the PKK in the past, the AK Party governments conducted more direct and extensive negotiation processes in 2007-2009 and 2012-2015.<sup>3</sup>

In response to this discernable difference in the AK Party's approach, the PKK also changed its tactics and volume of violence considerably during the AK Party's 20-year rule. Since day one, the PKK has maintained strong foreign ties and seized any chance in many areas such as positioning its organization, sheltering, and training its militants in Syria and Iraq. The terrorist group obtained ample means after 2003, in particular, and has used every occasion resulting from the US occupation in Iraq in 2003 and the ongoing civil war in Syria since 2011 to expand. Unlike in the past, however, the PKK terrorist organization has evolved from simply being a proxy of mid-scale countries into a proxy backed by global powers as well.

Such a change on the PKK side, its growing self-confidence with external support, and its ever-increasing demands –therefore, resistance to laying down its arms– have created gridlock in the AK Party governments' search for a solution to the problem based on negotiations. This study will examine the AK Party's four-part Kurdish policy, a summary of which is already presented in the introduction. First, the status of the Kurdish question in Türkiye inherited by the AK Party in 2002 will be discussed, then the development of the AK Party's Kurdish policy regarding the socio-cultural, economic, security, and political participation aspects of the issue and the implications of that policy will be visited. A summary and future projections will be made in the conclusion.

## THE INHERITED KURDISH QUESTION IN TÜRKİYE

Before the AK Party's ascension to power in 2002, the security aspect of the Kurdish issue had topped the agenda of Turkish politics. The PKK declared its establishment in 1978 but hit the headlines in 1984 for attacking Turkish security forces. Since then, PKK militants have killed many people either in clashes with Turkish security forces or by targeting civilians.<sup>4</sup> The organization has topped the political agenda since then, which has led to numerous scholarly works on the causes of this violent campaign.

<sup>3</sup> For the efforts of negotiation with the PKK, see. Talha Köse, "Çözüm Sürecinin Yükseliş ve Düşüşü", *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi*, Vol: 4, No: 1, (2017), 13-40; Talha Köse, "Rise and Fall of the AK Party's Kurdish Peace Initiatives", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 19, No: 2, (2017), p. 139.

<sup>4</sup> The total death toll in 1986-2002 approached 39,000, see. Appendix 2.



The literature on Türkiye's Kurdish issue agrees, to a large extent, that the Kurdish identity was denied in principle and practice until the 2000s under the assimilation policies followed by past governments.<sup>5</sup> Although some politicians, such as the late President Turgut Özal and late Prime Ministers Necmettin Erbakan and Erdal İnönü, managed to discuss the issue beyond the deep-seated patterns in this period, the discourse did not bring about a change of policy until the 2000s. Upon its coming to power in 2002, the AK Party identified the Kurdish issue as Türkiye's main problem to be solved. Although the order of priority among the aforementioned four dimensions has changed from time to time, it is fair to say that the AK Party has followed a policy seeking a final settlement of the issue since 2002.

The problem known as the "Kurdish issue" is a complicated identity-driven matter. Scrutinizing the issue beyond "PKK terrorism" developing inclusive policies in that vein, discussing these policies in public institutions, and sharing them with the public are facets that have become the trademarks of the AK Party's Kurdish policy. However, the AK Party's solution-based policy, as of today, has not been sufficient to settle the security aspect of the issue, in particular; in other words, it has been unable to end PKK terrorism.

The PKK waged a terror campaign against Türkiye from 1984 to 1999, although the attacks were interrupted by occasional cease-fires. The PKK declared a cease-fire for about four years after the group's leader Abdullah Öcalan was forced out of Syria in 1998, eventually captured in Kenya in 1999 and brought back to Türkiye. The AK Party came to power during this cease-fire period. As the AK Party struggled to form an effective civilian government against the established military tutelage regime in Türkiye, the US invaded Iraq. As a result, the PKK seized the opportunity to spread its settlements in northern Iraq and created safe havens in Iraqi territory.

While Iraq was under US occupation, the PKK practically found a security blanket and managed to prevent disintegration within the group to overcome the leadership crisis arising from Öcalan's capture. It also transformed its organizational structure (through KADEK, KONGRA-GEL, and finally KCK hierarchy) both vertically and horizontally (with the PKK/HPG for Türkiye and Iraq<sup>6</sup>, the PJAK/

<sup>5</sup> Mesut Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu*, (İletişim Publishing, İstanbul: 2003); Hüseyin Yayman, *Şark Meselesinden Demokratik Açılıma: Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu Hafızası*, (SETA Publishing, Ankara: 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Although the group named its branch in Iraq "PÇDK", it did not see any reason to differentiate it from the branch in Türkiye in terms of organization and function.

YRK for Iran and the PYD/YPG for Syria). The PKK consolidated its structural transformation by benefiting from power vacuums in the region.

On the other side, the PKK signaled to international actors that the group could be of use to interested actors. In fact, following the escalation of the civil war in Syria, the PKK successfully created a framework in which it could work together with numerous actors, even those with conflicts of interest among themselves, such as the Syrian regime, the US, and Russia. As a consequence, the PKK and the political and social organizations around it have become more acceptable for local and international actors. This process has made it harder for political actors in Türkiye to successfully target the PKK in their efforts to resolve the PKK issue.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL POLICY CHANGES

Although ethnic identity is associated with a common bloodline, the concrete indicator of this imaginary common lineage usually appears to be the language or religion.<sup>7</sup> Kurdish ethnic identity in Türkiye, as well, differentiates itself in terms of language. While language marks Kurdish identity (as an ethnolinguistic ethnic group) that is different from the Turkish identity, religion cuts across the ethnic groups that are formed according to such linguistic fragmentation. Sunni and Alevi or even Shiite groups exist in both ethnolinguistic groups, whether they describe their ethnic identity through Turkishness or Kurdishness.<sup>8</sup> Apart from religion crosscutting social differences, intermarriages and the centuries-long fusion of ethnicity as a result of numerous interactions make it hard to trace these two ethnic identities in Türkiye.

Hence, some Sunni Kurds, for instance, feel that they share more of an identity with Sunni Turks than with Alevi or non-religious Kurds. The main reason behind this difference depends on whether these individuals identify their ethnicity based on language or religion. Thus, the socio-cultural aspect of the AK Party's Kurdish policy may be examined through religious and linguistic perspectives.

Concerning religious policies, AK Party's policies resemble those of past governments, but the AK Party's public emphasis on the religious brotherhood between Turks and Kurds is more convincing due to the AK Party's strong conserva-

<sup>7</sup> Alberto Alesina, Arnaud Devleeschauwer, William Easterly, Sergio Kurlat, and Romain Wacziarg, "Fractionalization", *Journal of Economic Growth*, Vol: 8, No: 2, (2003), pp. 155-94.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik*, (İletişim Publishing, İstanbul: 1999); Erdal Gezik, *Dinsel, Etnik ve Politik Sorunlar Bağlamında Alevi Kürtler*, (Kalan Publishing, Ankara: 2000); Ahmet Buran, "Kürtler ve Kürt Dili", *Turkish Studies*, Vol: 6, No: 3, (2011), pp. 43-57.

tive political identity. Through this emphasis, conservative Kurds are attracted to the AK Party since it is a conservative democrat party, whereas the PKK and the HDP are known for their secular and Marxist ideology.

The PKK and HDP's criticism of the established gender relationships and traditional family institution, their actions and discourses in favor of abortion and gay rights –none of which rhyme with conservative values in Türkiye– and the AK Party's growing public recognition due to its stance against anti-religion PKK practices have helped grow conservative Kurdish grassroots support for the AK Party. The criticisms of various PKK leaders, including Öcalan and Murat Karayılan, against the religion of Islam<sup>9</sup> and the glorification of Zoroastrianism –the PKK has recently abandoned it, but it still exists in print– have played a big role in the growing support among conservative Kurds for the AK Party.

The AK Party has repeatedly sparred with the HDP and its predecessors over religious and cultural issues. In 2011, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan countered the remarks of the Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP) about the headscarf issue, stating, “Can an understanding of the religion of Zoroastrianism really entertain any worry about this?”<sup>10</sup> Later, after the HDP, which was founded to replace the BDP, pledged on June 7, 2015, during the general elections campaign to eliminate the (general curricular) religion courses in primary and secondary schools and abolish the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), the AK Party criticized the HDP's discourse.<sup>11</sup> More recently, to combat the AK Party's rising popularity with conservative Kurdish voters, the HDP (and its predecessors) and the PKK, became more friendly toward Islamic discourse and revived religious and Kurdish historic figures such as Sheikh Said in the collective memory. Moreover, the HDP and the PKK nominated pious Kurdish politicians for the legislature, such as Altan Tan, former Diyarbakır Mufti Nimetullah Erdoğan, and several administrators of Mazlum-Der (The Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People). In doing so, the HDP and the PKK tried to brand the AK Party's conservative approach as Turkish conservatism to make room for Kurdish conservatism in their repertoire to counter the aforementioned moves of the AK Party.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> An example for the negative views of the PKK leaders against Islam and related reactions in the region, see. “PKK'nın Amacı İslam'dan Uzaklaştırmak”, Haber 7, May 15, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Hakkı Kurban, “Zerdüş'tün Başörtüsü Diye Bir Derdi Olmaz”, *Akşam*, October 15, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> “İşte HDP'nin Seçim Vaatleri”, *Milliyet*, April 21, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed information about the PKKs understanding of religion, see. Necati Alkan, “Dinin Araçsallaşması: PKK Örneği”, *Uluslararası Güvenlik ve Terörizm Dergisi*, Vol: 3, No: 2, (2012), pp. 17-26.

In response, the AK Party took several measures. For instance, the AK Party decided to appoint about 1,000 meles (who provide religious education and function as opinion leaders for Kurds) to the Presidency of Religious Affairs in late 2011.<sup>13</sup> In response, the “Democratic Islam Congress” upon the directive of Öcalan, was held in the southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakır.<sup>14</sup> Individuals from northern Syria also participated in the meeting.

Concurrently with its emphasis on a religious brotherhood that encompassed broad groups, AK Party governments after 2002 also made noteworthy reforms regarding language, which is another aspect of ethnic identity. Throughout the history of the republic, teaching Kurdish in schools or special language courses was strictly prohibited. Although the ban on producing Kurdish music was lifted under the initiative of President Özal in 1991, legal barriers regarding education and election campaigns in Kurdish were lifted only during the AK Party governments.

One of the hurdles preventing the use of the Kurdish language was the ban on giving newborns Kurdish names under the Population Registration Act, No. 1587, Article 16. The AK Party limited the ban by an amendment in 2003. An annotation was added to the fourth clause of Article 16 limiting the ban to “only names that are not in compliance with ethics and insulting the public”.<sup>15</sup> Under the “Regulation on Radio and Television Broadcasts in Different Languages and Dialects Used Traditionally by Turkish Citizens in Their Daily Lives” directive issued in 2009, the AK Party abolished the older laws forbidding languages and dialects other than Turkish for private radios and televisions.

As legal hurdles to using and learning the Kurdish language were removed one by one. Law No. 5767 was also ratified on June 11, 2008, and put into effect on June 26, 2008. Thus, the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) was granted authority for broadcasts in Kurdish, in addition to the “Law Concerning Amendments to the Turkish Radio and Television Law and the Law on the Establishment and Broadcasts of Radios and Televisions”<sup>16</sup> allowing that broadcasts can be made in different languages and dialects other than Turkish by the institution. Test broadcasts for a new channel dedicated to broadcasts only in Kurdish began

<sup>13</sup> “Diyaret’te ‘Mele’ Dönemi”, *Hürriyet*, December 12, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Zübeyde Sarı and Sinan Onuş, “Diyarbakır’da Demokratik İslam Kongresi”, *BBC*, May 10, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Law No. 4928, “Çeşitli Kanunlarda Değişiklik Yapılmasına İlişkin Kanun”, Article 5, *Resmi Gazete*, July 18, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Law No. 5767, “Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kanunu ile Radyo ve Televizyonların Kuruluş ve Yayınları Hakkında Kanunda Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Kanun”, *Resmi Gazete*, June 11, 2008.

on December 25, 2008, and were followed by -24-hour test broadcasts in the Kurmanji and Sorani dialects of Kurdish and in the Zaza language. The channel, launched as TRT Ses or TRT 6 and known today as TRT Kurdi, was officially launched on January 1, 2009.

As for education in the Kurdish language, which was available through private courses since 2004, the teaching of Kurdish officially began to be offered in the 2012-13 academic year as an elective course titled “Living Languages and Dialects” for students in the fifth grade and above. Additionally, Kurdish language courses were also offered in universities. The establishment of the first Kurdology institute in the history of the republic was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2009 and opened in Artuklu University, Mardin. Later, the name of the institute was changed to “Institute of Living Languages” and a Kurdish Language and Culture department was formed in this institute. Despite all these improvements, it cannot be said, as of today, that every demand for the Kurdish language from different segments of society has been met. The HDP’s demands for education in the mother tongue in primary and secondary schools and undergraduate-level Kurdish language and literature programs in universities have not been met yet.

## POLICIES ADOPTED IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE

The main reason that the AK Party has maintained its single-party rule since 2002 is the party’s emphasis on economic stability and growth, and its economic policies to support this emphasis.<sup>17</sup> There is also an economic aspect of the Kurdish issue in Türkiye. Throughout the history of the republic, the eastern and south-eastern Anatolia regions, heavily populated by Kurds, fell behind western Anatolia in terms of development and economic welfare.<sup>18</sup>

In regards to the economic aspect of the Kurdish issue, the policies developed by the AK Party may be examined under two headings: (I) the projects to improve the economic infrastructure of the region and increase employment, (ii) the compensation for material damages directly caused by terrorism to residents of the region. To stop the economic troubles of the region, infrastructure projects and

<sup>17</sup> Ali T. Akarca, “Putting Turkey’s June and November 2015 Election Outcomes in Perspective”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 17, No: 4, (2015), pp. 81-104.

<sup>18</sup> İsmail Beşikçi, *Doğu Mitingleri’nin Analizi*, (Yurt, Ankara: 1967); Ahmet İçduygu, David Romano, and İbrahim Sirkeci, “The Ethnic Question in an Environment of Insecurity: The Kurds in Turkey”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol: 22, No: 6, (1999), pp. 991-1010.

job creation have become the main agenda items of the AK Party governments' economic policies regarding the Kurdish issue.

As a matter of fact, the development projects set in motion by the AK Party to address the underdevelopment of the region precede both the AK Party period and the PKK. The most comprehensive and critical of these projects is the ongoing Southeastern Anatolia Project (SAP, or Turkish abbreviation, GAP). Launched in compliance with a Council of Ministers' decision dated October 27, 1989, the GAP project was designed to provide infrastructure, industry, mining, agriculture, energy, and transportation services to the region and to improve the education level of locals.

The GAP still stands as the most comprehensive and expensive project in the republic's history and covers the southeastern Anatolian provinces of Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa, and Şırnak. Although the program is aimed at the development of the region, the ongoing construction of 22 dams and multiple energy production facilities, some of which have already been completed, make the project important for the whole country. The latest action plan for the GAP, prepared by the AK Party for the period of 2014-2018, focuses particularly on sustainable development. Investment allocations, for this purpose, are listed in Table 1 as follows:

**TABLE 1. GAP ACTION PLAN**

- 1.628 billion Turkish liras to accelerate economic development
- 6.195 billion Turkish liras to strengthen social development
- 1.4 billion Turkish liras to increase liveability in cities
- 17.836 billion Turkish liras to improve infrastructure
- 25 million Turkish liras to increase institutional capacity
- Total 27.084 billion Turkish liras

Source: "GAP Eylem Planı Açıklandı", AK Party, March 8, 2015, <https://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/gap-eylem-planı-aciklandi/72187#1>, (Access date: October 7, 2022).

As new education projects, the construction of dams for irrigation, and energy production in the region continued and the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Development Organization (KOSGEB) offered government loans for the region, the PKK criticized and sabotaged these investments frequently. Viewing the increasing schooling rate as an activity to raise secret agents, the PKK murdered teachers working in the region while presenting the construction of dams as

the “construction of military dams”. These were among the main reasons for the PKK’s ending the resolution process in the summer of 2015.<sup>19</sup>

Ending the cease-fire in the summer of 2015, the PKK resumed the unrest in residential areas and terrorist attacks and mobilized personnel and vehicles of the Democratic Regions Party (DBP, the name the HDP uses in local politics of the eastern cities of Türkiye). In response, Ankara appointed trustees to many DBP municipalities. Most of the trustees were already civilian authorities (i.e., governors) in those regions, and they were appointed as new mayors. With this policy, the AK Party government adopted service-based municipal policies instead of ideological municipal policies and prioritized the use of municipality resources and services for anti-PKK propaganda, instead of allowing the terrorist group to spread its own propaganda.<sup>20</sup>

As part of the economic policies developed for the settlement of the Kurdish issue, the post-2002 AK Party governments paved the way for compensation by the state for terrorism-related material damages to natural and legal residents. To this end, the “Law on Compensation for Damages Due to Terrorism and the Fight Against Terrorism” was ratified on October 4, 2004.<sup>21</sup> According to the law, the government provides compensation for terrorism terror-related material damages arising from death, injury, and disability as well as the damages that occur to movable and immovable assets owned by natural and legal residents or people who are unable to retrieve their property.

Under the leadership of the deputy governors in relevant cities, commissions for damage assessment were established to meet the demands for material damages rapidly and justly. From the law’s date of enforcement in 2004 until August 2017, damage assessment commissions finalized 429,630 out of 429,630 applications and decided to pay compensation to 227,157 applicants. In this period, Türkiye paid total a total of 4,055,072,643 Turkish liras in compensation to victims affected by terrorism.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In an interview to the *Radikal* daily, then-HDP co-Chair Selahattin Demirtaş said regarding the dams under construction in southeastern Anatolia, “Yes, Mr. Prime Minister doesn’t get this. I want to explain. The dam under construction is not for irrigation or energy [production]. It is a military dam. It is a dam to prevent the guerillas to transit mountains and plains. It is a dam to fill these areas with water”.

<sup>20</sup> For further information on infra and superstructure investments of municipalities under trustees: Kayyumdan Haber, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/kayyumdanhaber?lang=en>, (Access date: September 21, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Law No. 5233, “Terör ve Terörle Mücadeleden Doğan Zararların Karşılınması Hakkında Yönetmelik”, *Resmî Gazete*, October 20, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> “5233 Sayılı Kanun’un Uygulanma İstatistikleri”, General Directorate of Provincial Administration, June 9, 2015, <http://www.illeridairesi.gov.tr/5233-sayili-kanun-uygulanmasi-istatistikleri>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

## SECURITY POLICIES

The PKK committed assassinations, planted bombs in city centers, and engaged in rural guerilla tactics before and after 2002, i.e., during the AK Party period. The PKK has attacked its non-state rivals in local areas, directly targeted the country's government, launched rural guerilla fights, and supported these fights with acts of terrorism in cities.

In this entire process, the PKK failed in its terror campaign it called the “strategy of the long-term people’s war”. In other words, the group could not bring the initial stage, called “strategical defense” up to the desired level and failed to jump to the second stage, called “strategical balance”. The PKK’s terror campaign could not sustain any concrete and durable gain and caused significant death tolls and economic setbacks in Türkiye. The PKK underwent a period of restructuring after Öcalan was captured in 1999 and resumed terrorist attacks against Türkiye in 2003.

In addition to the years of rural guerilla tactics used along with terrorist attacks in cities, the PKK adopted a method called “rural-based urban war” in the summer of 2015.<sup>23</sup> The group’s terrorism strategy was to create a sphere of dominance in cities by using rural-based urban war and establishing de facto autonomy in these cities. However, the PKK’s attempts hit a dead end thanks to counter-terrorism operations launched by Turkish security forces in the summer of 2015.

In their fight against the PKK, subsequent Turkish governments sometimes adopted military measures, and political means at other times. Despite the use of both measures, Türkiye found no final and permanent solution for the PKK to lay down arms. Subsequently, the PKK ended its cease-fire in July 2015 and left Türkiye no other choice but to fight against the group’s terrorism with military measures. Considering the number of terrorists killed, the terror activities prevented, and the decreasing participation in the PKK inside Türkiye since then, it is fair to say that Türkiye has been successful in its fight against the PKK.

The AK Party’s counter-terrorism strategy in the recent period may be examined under two headings: efforts to stop the PKK from committing attacks in Türkiye, and efforts to eradicate the PKK’s presence outside Türkiye. To put an end to the PKK’s acts of terrorism in Türkiye, Turkish security forces cleansed residential areas such as Sur and Silvan in Diyarbakır, Derik and Nusaybin in Mardin, and

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed analysis on the urban warfare launched by the PKK in the summer of 2015, see. Murat Yeşiltaş and Necdet Özçelik, “PKK Terörünün Yeni Dinamikleri: Radikalleşme ve Şehir Çatışması”, *SETA Analiz*, No: 157, (April 2016).



Silopi and Cizre in Şırnak of dug-up and fortified PKK ditches. Turkish security forces conducted Ditch Operations, filled them, and removed roadblocks, finally establishing public order in these regions in a short period.<sup>24</sup>

For this purpose, trustees were appointed to the municipalities that had declared autonomy in response to the PKK's call and had provided logistical support to the PKK before and during the ditch operations. The fight against the organization, which is nested in rural areas and in the mountains, has continued non-stop, the system of fortified military stations (*kalekol*) has been put in service, and national defense industry projects have been accelerated. Thus, Türkiye tried to guarantee the sustainability of its counter-terrorism campaign by increasingly using locally designed and produced equipment and resources. In this context, Türkiye, producing its own unmanned air vehicles, began to use them more effectively and built a wall along the Turkish-Syrian border to prevent PYD militants from Syria from crossing into Türkiye to join the PKK's Amanos units or providing logistic support to the PKK.

Türkiye prioritizing security in terms of the PKK issue is nothing new. However, even if the criticism that the “fight against the PKK cannot be won by using security measures alone” is accurate, the security aspect of this struggle is undeniably critical. Drones, *kalekols*, and border walls are new security measures that had not been tried before and have substantially worked. They were used in conjunction with new security methods that worked in favor of Türkiye during encounters with the PKK in rural areas. Meanwhile, the path to a political resolution is currently blocked, as the HDP remains subordinate to the PKK and is unable to influence the military wing to end its terrorism campaign, proving once again that no negotiations can be held with this organization for the foreseeable future.

As a further measure, Türkiye also launched cross-border military operations in Syria where the PKK, with its Syrian offshoot PYD, was expanding the territories under its control. The most critical example of such operations was Operation Olive Branch, which lasted from January 20 to March 24, 2018. The operation pursued a strategy of encirclement and the entire city of Afrin with its neighboring towns in northwest Syria fell in two months with minimum collateral damage.

<sup>24</sup> According to information about the Ditch Operations submitted by then-Interior Minister Efkan Ala during a session held at the Parliamentary Planning and Budget Commission, a total of 2,040 ditches and roadblocks were removed and 2,213 bomb set-ups were destroyed as of February 14, 2016. During the operations, 830 long-barrel weapons, such as BXC, Kanas, and Kalashnikov rifles; 47 rocket launchers, 645 rocket launcher projectiles, 1,000 improvised explosive devices, 431 hand grenades, and 98,650 munitions were confiscated, see. “Efkan Ala'dan Hendek Operasyonları Açıklaması”, *NTV*, February 14, 2016.

The PKK's military training camps and its schooling system where PKK founder Öcalan's texts were used as textbooks were all eradicated with the completion of the operation. Consequently, Ankara has put forward effective security measures against the PKK in Türkiye.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION POLICIES

The socio-cultural, economic, and security dimensions of the Kurdish issue are, in a way, subdimensions of the political dimensions. In this section, however, the policies developed, and the approaches adopted by the AK Party are discussed in terms of political participation, representation, and definition of the Kurdish question. One of the first steps the AK Party took in the political arena was to use its legislative authority based on its parliamentary majority to expand and deepen the political participation of Türkiye's Kurdish community. Thus, the AK Party amended Law No. 2911 on Meetings and Demonstrations<sup>25</sup> in 2008, 2010, and 2014, ratified Law No. 5253 of Associations in 2004,<sup>26</sup> and amended it in 2006 and 2009. Again, the AK Party expanded the limits of the non-parliamentary political sphere through the ratification of Law No. 6459, "Amendments Made in Some Laws within the Context of Human Rights and Freedom of Expression" in 2013. The most obvious expansion in this area occurred with the constitutional referendum held in 2010.

Through this popular vote in 2010, individuals were granted the right to appeal individually to the Constitutional Court, narrowing the sphere of the military judiciary. Additionally, obstacles to peaceful Kurdish mobilization were removed due to the impact the referendum had on party closure cases. Before 2010, Kurdish political parties such as the HDP suffered the most from lawsuits seeking the closure of political parties in Türkiye. The latest example of this was the closure of the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi, DTP) in 2009. Following the referendum, however, prohibitive decisions to close political parties or to deprive them of state funds required a larger majority among the Constitutional Court justices, 3/5 of votes compared to 2/3 previously.

Besides lifting political bans on legal entities, another significant difference between the Kurdish policies of the AK Party period and past periods is the initiatives that the AK Party has undertaken to find political solutions to the PKK prob-

<sup>25</sup> "2911 Sayılı Toplantı ve Gösteri Yürüyüş Kanunu", *Resmî Gazete*, October 8, 1983.

<sup>26</sup> Law No. 5253, "Dernekler Kanunu", *Resmî Gazete*, November 23, 2004.

lem. In this regard, the most critical negotiation process was launched in March 2013 after the PKK decided to agree to a cease-fire but ended in the summer of 2015. This two-year negotiation process is known as the Resolution Process, an initiative to find a permanent solution to the Kurdish issue.

The Resolution Process signifies all constructive efforts made after the 2013 cease-fire to find a peaceful political solution to Türkiye's Kurdish issue. The Resolution Process was a comprehensive plan addressing the legal, social, and economic aspects of the issue. Public diplomacy and communication strategies were other critical aspects of this process. Universal legal arrangements were made<sup>27</sup> through the democratization steps, taken before and during this process, to meet some expectations about rights for ethnic minorities; however, a constitutional amendment for local self-government and even for a confederation, both of which are demands of the Kurdish ethnonational movement, was never discussed. Despite all these hurdles, psychological and bureaucratic barriers to a comprehensive peace were eliminated during the Resolution Process.

## THE AK PARTY'S KURDISH INITIATIVE

Prior to the Resolution Process, the AK Party had launched a process publicly known as the Kurdish Initiative on July 29, 2009.<sup>28</sup> However, the Kurdish Initiative had been frozen due to the incidents that occurred upon the arrival of PKK militants at the Habur Border Gate on October 19, 2009. The Kurdish Initiative was based on a rationale and modus operandi different from those of the Resolution Process. When the AK Party government launched the “democratic opening/ouverture” process, widely known as the “Kurdish Initiative” then-Interior Minister Beşir Atalay was assigned to coordinate the relevant efforts. The opening policy, launched as a government initiative, focused on the Kurdish issue on the basis of democratization.

The Kurdish Initiative was later renamed the “National Unity and Brotherhood Project” in January 2010. To promote this project, the AK Party published and distributed a booklet entitled “The Democratic Opening Process with Questions and Answers: The National Unity and Brotherhood Project” in Jan-

<sup>27</sup> For a comprehensive collection of the steps taken toward democratization during the AK Party period, see the 4th version of the work printed by: *Sessiz Devrim: Türkiye'nin Demokratik Değişim ve Dönüşüm Envanteri 2002-2014*, Undersecretariat of the Public Order and Security, (Ankara: 2014).

<sup>28</sup> “Kürt Açılımı Start Alıyor”, *Vatan*, July 29, 2009.

uary 2010.<sup>29</sup> The Kurdish Initiative adopted the approach of “deliberative democracy” rather than a negotiation process and was an ex-parte democratization attempt by the government.<sup>30</sup>

Expectations from the Kurdish Initiative were much more limited compared to the Resolution Process. While the Kurdish Initiative failed to reach its expected targets, largely because the societal support was not sufficiently ready for such a process, it was not a completely ineffective or fruitless effort. On legal and political grounds, the Kurdish Initiative tried to create a proper environment to make more durable moves toward the resolution of the Kurdish issue; for this reason, public discussions formed a critical part of the process. The Kurdish Initiative was a process that prepared political, social, and psychological grounds for a comprehensive negotiation process. The initiative was unable to transform the foundations of the conflicted issue but made significant changes in the Kurdish community’s mentality.

The Kurdish Initiative demonstrated a paradigm shift in the official vision regarding the Kurdish issue. Official actors, for the first time, acknowledged that the Kurdish issue was not simply an issue of terrorism or violence and that other approaches should also be used in addition to the security policies. While the Kurdish Initiative failed to change the spirit of the conflict at the community level, discussions were very useful at the official level. Legal regulations granting further political rights for ethno-political mobilization were significant conciliatory steps.

Legal arrangements made in the context of the Kurdish Initiative aimed to permanently eliminate the reasons behind the emergence and rapid spread of the PKK. From this perspective, the adoption of a relevant policy sufficiently showed the remarkable change in the positions of official actors. Since the AK Party government refrained from directly engaging actors who are linked to the PKK, the process continued as a one-sided effort during this period.

## FROM THE KURDISH INITIATIVE TO THE RESOLUTION PROCESS

National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT) head Hakan Fidan met with Öcalan on İmralı Island on December 16, 2012.<sup>31</sup> The meeting

<sup>29</sup> “Sorularla ve Cevaplarıyla Demokratik Açılım Süreci: Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi”, The AK Party Publicity and Media Department, (January 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Sezen Ceceli Köse, “Müzakereci Demokrasi Kuramı ve Toplumsal ve Politik Dönüşümün İmkanları: Kürt Açılımı Üzerine Bir İnceleme”, *Spectrum*, Vol: 89, (2012), p. 115.

<sup>31</sup> Abdülkadir Selvi, “Öcalan’la Hakan Fidan Görüştü”, *Yenişafak*, January 1, 2013.

was publicly announced on December 29, 2012. A delegation of BDP members visited Öcalan on İmralı Island in early January 2013.<sup>32</sup> The Resolution Process was coordinated in consultation with Öcalan, leading some to refer to the initiative as the “İmralı Process”. As part of the process, a three-stage plan was prepared to end the conflict. The first stage would be the withdrawal of PKK elements from Turkish territory, the second stage would concentrate on the government’s democratic reforms, and the third stage would plan the re-integration of PKK elements into political and civilian life following their disarmament and demobilization.<sup>33</sup>

Negotiations were held with Öcalan through various representatives in this process. Ankara announced its direct meeting with Öcalan for the first time and its indirect meetings with the PKK leaders in Mount Qandil and with the PKK/KCK representatives in Europe. For the first time in the last three decades, the region experienced political, social, and economic normalization. Many psychological obstacles before peace were overcome during this process. The new environment paved the way for genuine talks, which might have made sustainable peace possible. However, the PKK’s terrorist attack that murdered two police officers in the town of Ceylanpınar, in Şanlıurfa, on July 22, 2015, went down in history as a move ending the process.<sup>34</sup>

Although the process ended unexpectedly after violence rapidly escalated with the Ceylanpınar attack, the Resolution Process is one of the most serious peace initiatives established to settle the Kurdish issue. The Resolution Process had a more extensive program than the Kurdish Initiative, yet it may be considered as the continuation of, or complementary to, the previous democratization process. Future peace initiatives will be based on the experiences gained under these processes.

## THE DECLINE OF THE RESOLUTION PROCESS

There were two principal reasons behind the weakening of the Resolution Process. The first was that the expectations of the Kurdish social segment who sympathize with the PKK constantly increased during the peace process. It was difficult for the government to meet these ever-increasing expectations. The PKK, in general, believed that the Gezi Protests in the summer of 2013, the wave of investigations and detentions of government officials and pro-government individuals by the

<sup>32</sup> “BDP ve HDP Heyeti İmralı’ya Gitti”, *NTV*, January 11, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> *Turkey’s Kurdish Conflict: An Assessment of the Current Process*, (Democratic Progress Institute, London: 2013).

<sup>34</sup> “Şanlıurfa’da İki Polis Memuru Şehit Oldu Saldırısı PKK Üstlendi”, *Habertürk*, July 22, 2015.

Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) affiliated officials in the police and the judiciary departments in 2014, the changing power balance in Syria's civil war, and the progress made by the PKK's Syria branch had weakened the AK Party government's bargaining power. That belief rapidly increased the expectations of the PKK. As a result, an assumption spread among the PKK ranks that the balance of power had changed to the detriment of the Turkish government during the Resolution Process.

The second reason was that the course of events that led to the general elections on June 7, 2015, in Türkiye caused the adoption of a polarizing discourse as part of the escalating tensions. The more polarized political environment in the country poisoned the atmosphere necessary for peaceful negotiations. On the other hand, different actors of the Kurdish Movement gave inconsistent messages while the government adopted a more consistent attitude. Notably, the AK Party's constituents have never overtly supported the process. It even strengthened national sentiments in the party.

Despite these negative developments during the process, the AK Party's chairman, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the party leadership spearheaded efforts to persuade the party's grassroots supporters to support the continuation of the process. The AK Party lost some votes to the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) as a reaction to the Resolution Process. The PKK used the process to collect more arms, re-organize and prepare its militants for urban warfare. Due to the ongoing civil war in Syria, the PKK had more opportunities to procure weapons and gained international legitimacy for fighting against DAESH. After the PKK ended the cease-fire in the summer of 2015, Türkiye considered other alternative measures against the PKK.

## CONCLUSION

The failure to end the terrorism problem and resolve the security aspect of Türkiye's Kurdish issue has stonewalled developments in other areas, such as political participation and socio-economic development. In regards to the security aspect of the issue, the most important reason behind the failure to reach a total and permanent end to the PKK's terrorism campaign is that since the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003, the PKK has gradually established itself as an international organization.

While the PKK was active in terrorist camps abroad before 2003, the group seized the opportunity presented by the power vacuum in Iraq, which emerged

after the American occupation in 2003. The PKK took control of Iraqi regions, naming them “Media Defense Areas”. The PKK settled down in those regions and provided not only training and shelter but also numerous public services, including public order and legal transactions. It also has become one of the dominant actors in the areas controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). All these developments have carried the PKK to a larger scale than ever.

With the outbreak of the civil war, or rather the proxy war, in Syria, the US began to use the Syria branch of the PKK, the PYD, as a combatant force against the DAESH terrorist group in 2014. The fight against DAESH brought prestige and propaganda opportunities to the group as its material capacity increased through the delivery of arms by the terrorist organization developed the capacity to arm thousands of young men and women among the Syrian and Iraqi Kurds, train them in camps outside Türkiye, and help them sneak into Türkiye for terrorist attacks through the Turkish-Iraqi and Turkish-Syrian borders.

As we have outlined in this study, the number one factor for rendering inadequate the political, economic, and socio-cultural reforms of the AK Party in Türkiye and the negotiations with the PKK in the years 2007-2009 and 2013-2015 is the fact that the PKK shifted its weight, more than ever, to territories outside Türkiye.

Even if the PKK cannot recruit militants from within Türkiye or find financial support in the country, the group has reached a level where it can maintain its presence through militants recruited from Iraq and Syria, the arms and logistic support provided to it by various countries, particularly the US, and the propaganda opportunities presented to it in the US and European countries. We do not mean that the PKK issue has totally left Türkiye and that it follows a course independent from the developments taking place within the country’s borders. Türkiye is already facing problems in the construction of an all-encompassing national identity, consolidating its democratic institutions, and lowering the differences among regions with respect to the distribution of economic wealth. Without a doubt, all these problems interrelate with the Kurdish issue. However, today the PKK is largely nurtured from outside Türkiye, and developments within Türkiye are not sufficient to eradicate PKK terrorism. Thus, the AK Party approaches the Kurdish issue through a multi-faceted and multi-layered policy. On one hand, it makes socio-cultural, economic, and political reforms in Türkiye, and on the other hand, it carries out a counter-terrorism strategy beyond its borders.

## APPENDIX 1.

| TABLE 2. ETHNIC KURDISH PARTY ELECTION RESULTS (2002-2015) |   |                        |             |              |                 |
|--|---|------------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|
| GENERAL ELECTIONS  | NAME OF THE PARTY                           | NUMBER OF CONSTITUENTS | VALID VOTES | PARTY'S VOTE | VOTE PERCENTAGE |
| 1995   | HADEP                                       | 34,155,981             | 28,040,392  | 1,171,623    | 4.2             |
| 1999   | HADEP                                       | 37,495,217             | 31,119,242  | 1,482,196    | 4.8             |
| 2002   | DEHAP                                       | 41,407,027             | 31,414,748  | 1,960,660    | 6.2             |
| 2007   | The Thousand Hope Candidates (DTP)          | 42,799,303             | 34,822,907  | 1,338,810*   | 3.8*            |
| 2011   | The Labor, Democracy and Freedom Bloc (BDP) | 52,806,322             | 42,813,896  | 2,439,605*   | 5.7*            |
| 2015 (June 7)  | HDP   | 47,507,467             | 46,163,243  | 5,847,134    | 13.12           |
| 2015 (Nov. 1)  | HDP   | 48,537,695             | 47,840,231  | 4,914,203    | 10.76           |

Source: For the data of 2002-2011: Hüseyin Alptekin, "Explaining Ethnopolitical Mobilization: Ethnic Incorporation and Mobilization Patterns in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Turkey, and Beyond", PhD Diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2014; For data after 2012: High Election Board results are used: "Milletvekili Genel Seçim Arşivi", YSK, <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/tr/milletvekili-genel-secim-arsivi/2644>, (Access date: October 7, 2022).

\* Candidates of block parties rather than individual parties joined the elections (depicted with asterisk), so the total of their votes are shown here.

## APPENDIX 2.

| TABLE 2. NUMBER OF DEATHS DUE TO THE PKK TERROR (1984-2016) |                                    |           |                                |                   |       |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| YEAR  | MEMBERS OF TURKISH SECURITY FORCES | CIVILIANS | TOTAL DEATHS CAUSED BY THE PKK | THE PKK MILITANTS | TOTAL |
| 1984  | 26                                 | 43        | 69                             | 28                | 97    |
| 1985  | 58                                 | 141       | 199                            | 201               | 400   |
| 1986  | 51                                 | 133       | 184                            | 74                | 258   |
| 1987  | 71                                 | 237       | 308                            | 95                | 403   |



|      |      |      |      |        |        |
|------|------|------|------|--------|--------|
| 1988 | 54   | 109  | 163  | 123    | 286    |
| 1989 | 153  | 178  | 331  | 179    | 510    |
| 1990 | 161  | 204  | 365  | 368    | 733    |
| 1991 | 244  | 233  | 477  | 376    | 853    |
| 1992 | 629  | 832  | 1461 | 1129   | 2590   |
| 1993 | 715  | 1479 | 2194 | 3050   | 5244   |
| 1994 | 1145 | 992  | 2137 | 2510   | 4647   |
| 1995 | 772  | 313  | 1085 | 4163   | 5248   |
| 1996 | 608  | 170  | 778  | 3789   | 4567   |
| 1997 | 518  | 158  | 676  | 7558   | 8234   |
| 1998 | 383  | 85   | 468  | 2556   | 3024   |
| 1999 | 236  | 83   | 319  | 1458   | 1777   |
| 2000 | 29   | 17   | 46   | 319    | 365    |
| 2001 | 20   | 8    | 28   | 104    | 132    |
| 2002 | 7    | 7    | 14   | 19     | 33     |
| 2003 | 31   | 63   | 94   | 87     | 181    |
| 2004 | 75   | 28   | 103  | 122    | 225    |
| 2005 | 105  | 30   | 135  | 188    | 323    |
| 2006 | 111  | 38   | 149  | 132    | 281    |
| 2007 | 146  | 37   | 183  | 315    | 498    |
| 2008 | 171  | 51   | 222  | 696    | 918    |
| 2009 | 62   | 18   | 80   | 65     | 145    |
| 2010 | 92   | 27   | 119  | 137    | 256    |
| 2011 | 128  | 50   | 178  | 211    | 389    |
| 2012 | 163  | 42   | 205  | 438    | 643    |
| 2013 | 3    | 0    | 3    | 435    | 438    |
| 2014 | 9    | 0    | 9    | 950    | 959    |
| 2015 | 218  | 39   | 257  | 3.764  | 4.021  |
| 2016 | 505  | 99   | 604  | 12.281 | 12.885 |

Source: For the data 1984-2012: Alptekin, "Explaining Ethnopolitical Mobilization: Ethnic Incorporation and Mobilization Patterns in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Turkey, And Beyond"; For the period from 2013 to June 2016: "İşte Yıllara Göre Etkisiz Hale Getirilen PKK'lı Sayısı", *Habertürk*, May 31, 2016.

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## CHAPTER 4

# PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM TRAJECTORIES IN TÜRKİYE: AN EVALUATION OF THE AK PARTY ERA

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In the 1980s, mounting criticism in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) against the welfare state in the political arena and the Weberian bureaucracy in public administration theory and practice gave rise to the reform movement known as New Public Management (NPM). The movement rapidly spread to various developing and developed countries around the world, where it affected many fields of the public sector. In the early 1990s, in turn, the idea of *governance*—along with its derivatives such as *good governance*, *democratic governance* and *network governance*—rose to prominence as part of efforts to overcome NPM's shortcomings and provide governments with a political agenda.

Criticism against NPM has increased globally in the first decade of the 21st century. During this period, the outcomes, and adverse effects of NPM reforms have become the subject of a comprehensive debate, as the idea of public administration reform has undergone certain changes. In this regard, a number of new approaches and alternative accounts, including *new public service*, *public value management*, the *whole of government*, and *new public governance*, have become more and more popular. Meanwhile, in recent years, scholars of public management have advanced “post-NPM” as an umbrella concept that drives a framework for addressing the outcomes of NPM reforms and alternative approaches.

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Against this background, focusing on Türkiye's public administration reform experience, it can be asserted that political and administrative systems have been transformed by new right policies and practices, such as privatization, deregulation, marketization, and decentralization, from the mid-1980s onwards. This reform process, however, was stalled by political and economic instability fostered by the weak coalition governments of the 1990s. Public management reform efforts have been revived under the political and relative economic stability ensured by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party), which took power in the 2002 parliamentary elections. Since then, comprehensive political, economic, and administrative reforms have been implemented by successive AK Party governments including both NPM and governance approaches aimed at transforming relations between the state and its citizens. Thus, on one hand public sector organizations in Türkiye have adopted modern management techniques from private companies including strategic management, performance measurement, total quality management, and human resource management. On the other hand, institutions of democratic governance such as the Ombudsman Institution, the Council of Ethics for Public Officials, and the Human Rights and Equality Institution have been established to rebuild citizen-government relations and strengthen trust in the government and new ways to address grievances and seek mediation have been carved out, including reconciliation, right to information, and consumer rights.

This chapter aims at analyzing the public administration reform attempts under the various AK Party governments from its coming to power in 2002 until the adoption of presidential system in 2017. We argue that it is possible to identify three distinct reform periods since the AK Party's rise to power: The first period covers reforms that the government implemented under the influence of NPM and governance to some extent. Starting in 2010, during the second period, the government took steps in line with the goals and values of the post-NPM framework. Finally, the third period of reforms refers to the restructuring of the state apparatus in the wake of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. In essence, the nature of the final set of reforms is significantly different from others. It is important to note that our periodization effort merely serves to unfold the AK Party's reform efforts in a systematic manner. Obviously, there are no rigid distinctions between the various periods and reform efforts. Today, the government maintains a number of intertwined reform efforts that encompass both NPM and post-NPM values as well as the reorganization of the state. In this sense, by taking into consider-

ation a variety of approaches to administrative reform and the challenges faced by successive AK Party governments, this study aims to analyze the future of public administration reforms in Türkiye.

In this regard, the first part of this study examines the dynamics that shaped public administration reforms since the 1980s. The second section concentrates on public administration reforms implemented in Türkiye in the 2000s. This part assesses the public administration reforms during the AK Party's first term (starting from 2002 to 2010) and the ideas behind those reforms. The final section takes into account emerging trends in public administration reforms around the world as well as the political and social challenges faced by successive AK Party governments to discuss the future of reforms.

## **NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE AS IMPETUS FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS AFTER THE 1980s**

In the early 1980s, a new movement began promoting public administration reform to overcome the economic and financial challenges that countries experienced, meet changing societal demands, and facilitate the bureaucracy's adaptation to shifting external conditions as well as technological and administrative innovations. In this regard, conservative governments in the US and the UK took initial steps, as the limits of the state and public administration's performance became the subject of fierce public debate. The Financial Management Initiative in the UK and the Reinventing Government Movement in the US were the first comprehensive public management reform initiatives in the modern world. To be clear, not only right-wing conservatives but also leftist governments in the Anglo-Saxon world supported similar programs. Moreover, reforms have rapidly spread across European countries and other developed and developing nations in addition to Anglo-Saxon countries.<sup>1</sup>

Despite certain implementation differences, NPM had become a global phenomenon by the early 1990s. Therefore, certain commonalities among various NPM applications became clearer in relevant academic studies and in reform practice. Some of NPM's fundamental principles and proposals include the following: (i) concentrating on outputs and results instead of inputs and procedures

<sup>1</sup> Jan-Erik Lane, *New Public Management*, (Routledge, London: 2000), p. 3.



in administrative processes; (ii) promoting decentralization and creating a flexible organizational structure and personnel system; (iii) creating a competitive setting between government agencies and non-state actors, defining the service users as “customers” and valuing their demands and expectations; (iv) preferring smaller-scale, horizontal, and autonomous agencies instead of large-scale, multi-purposed, and hierarchical structures; (v) measuring the performance of public services and personnel to manage organizational change; (vi) creating market-like structures in the provision and management of public services, relying more on market mechanisms and adapting private-sector management techniques; and (vii) letting managers manage, and rendering public officials accountable for their performance and results.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1990s, when NPM reforms became more widespread in post-Soviet Central and Eastern European countries and elsewhere, the idea of *governance*, which complemented NPM reforms, rose to popularity. Over time, the idea of governance assumed a broader meaning to represent a new political and administrative system. At the same time, it stressed the importance of a new administrative insight focused on redesigning the relations between public and private sectors as well as civil society organizations.<sup>3</sup>

In its political meaning, *governance* refers to principles including effectiveness, transparency, and accountability as well as a reform agenda related to democracy, a multi-party system, legitimacy of the government, rule of law, participation, civil society, human rights, press freedom, the state’s capacity to resolve problems and conflicts, administrative capacity, and citizen-centered provision of services.<sup>4</sup> As an administrative issue, *governance* rests on the principles of co-production, participation, and public-private partnerships. In this sense, *governance* replaces

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hood, “A Public Management for All Seasons?”, *Public Administration*, Vol: 69, No: 1, (1991), pp. 4-5; David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming Public Sector*, (Plume, New York: 1993), pp. 19-20; OECD, *Public Management Reform and Economic and Social Development* (OECD Publishing, Paris: 1998), p. 13; Christopher Pollitt, “Clarifying Convergence, Striking Similarities and Durable Differences in Public Management Reform”, *Public Management Review*, Vol: 4, No: 1, (2002), p. 474; Owen E. Hughes, *Public Management and Administration: An Introduction*, (Palgrave Macmillan, New York: 2003), p. 44; Walter J. M. Kickert, “Public Governance in the Netherlands: An Alternative to Anglo American Managerialism”, *Public Administration*, Vol: 75, No: 4, (1997), p. 733; Rosie Cunningham, “From Great Expectations to Hard Times? Managing Equal Opportunities under New Public Management”, *Public Administration*, Vol: 78, No: 3, (2000), p. 699.

<sup>3</sup> M. Zahid Sobacı, “Yönetişim ve Politika Transferi: Koşulluluk Bağlamında Bir Analiz”, *Yönetişim: Kuram, Boyutlar ve Uygulama*, ed. Akif Çukurçayır, H. Tuğba Eroğlu and Hülya Eşki Uğuz, (Çizgi Yayınevi, Konya: 2010), p. 313.

<sup>4</sup> Sobacı, “Yönetişim ve Politika Transferi: Koşulluluk Bağlamında Bir Analiz”, p. 314.

authority, the chain of command, and hierarchical-bureaucratic guidance with a democratic approach and multi-actor model based on co-production, bargaining, deliberation, and compromise.<sup>5</sup>

## REFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: A NEW REFORM AGENDA?

As noted, governments across the world have taken NPM principles and practices into consideration since the 1980s in the provision of public services, public policy-making processes, and training of public officials. NPM, however, has faced criticism since its emergence. In the second half of the 1990s, critics focused on NPM's philosophical arguments, convergence thesis, and the outcome of reforms.<sup>6</sup> In the early 2000s, in turn, the seemingly unshakable dominance of NPM in public administration theory came under attack by increasing criticisms and questions put forth about the outcomes of the reforms. These developments ultimately triggered a new conceptual and theoretical revival in the field of public administration over the past decade.

Several developments, new trends, and challenges emerged in the beginnings of the 21st century that influenced the idea of public administration and reform practices. Instead of concerns over economic efficiency, a number of social challenges that cut across local and national borders and could not be addressed by individual public bureaucracies or private organizations alone emerged, including global warming, international migration, human trafficking, corruption, and terrorism, emerged. Secondly, the surroundings of public administration have become more complex. In this complex world, public administrators must strive toward promoting public values, which focus on long-term outcomes rather than managerialism and short-term products. Moreover, mobilizing policy and administrative networks to promote the exchange of experience, risks, and results—as opposed to market-based governance—became an important item of the public administration agenda. In recent years, public administrators and institutions have been paying more attention to certain aspects of Web 2.0 and social media, which promote transparency, participation, and

<sup>5</sup> Nico Nelissen, "The Administrative Capacity of New Types of Governance", *Public Organization Review*, Vol: 2, No: 1, (2002), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Binod Atreya and Anona Armstrong, "A Review of the Criticisms and the Future of New Public Management", *Victoria University of Technology School of Management Working Paper Series*, No: 7, (2002); Steven Van de Walle and Gerhard Hammerschmid, "The Impact of the New Public Management: Challenges for Coordination and Cohesion in European Public Sectors", *Halduskultuur-Administrative Culture*, Vol: 12, No: 2, (2011), pp. 190-209.

democracy, at the expense of the idea of e-government with its concentration on the efficient provision of public services. Citizens, in turn, are considered co-producing partners rather than consumers to whom the authorities provide services.<sup>7</sup>

It seems unlikely that governments will be able to deal with those dynamics and developments using traditional bureaucratic methods. Provided that certain problems and challenges encountered by public administrations today were a by-product of NPM reforms, it is not possible to tackle them by employing NPM policies.<sup>8</sup> Hence a range of theories and approaches have emerged as alternatives including New Public Service, Joined-up Government, Whole-of-Government, Network Governance, New Public Governance, Neo-Weberian State, Public Value Management, and Digital Age Governance. The principles and proposals associated with those approaches have already been incorporated into the reform agendas and policies of many countries. In addition to reformist concepts such as networks, governance, joint production, cooperation, partnerships, negotiation, information technologies, Web 2.0, social media and public value, approaches opposed to or critical of NPM reflect traditional values, i.e. justice, equality, democracy, participation, public service and citizenship. Those concepts and values are often intertwined with various approaches and alternatives.

Today, elected and appointed officials must deal with simple, every day, routine public tasks along with increasingly complex “wicked problems” – which cannot be solved by unidirectional and hierarchical managerial structures and decision-making processes but instead require local, regional, and international cooperation, horizontal relations, partnerships, and the use, construction, and restructuring of networks among multiple players. Although NPM was considered the best method to provide and improve public services, including economic development, until the 1990s, it became unable to meet the demands of decision-makers in the face of the above-mentioned developments.

As Pollitt posits, however, this does not mean that NPM is dead or in a coma.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that none of NPM’s alternatives are strong

<sup>7</sup> Carsten Greve, “Whatever Happened to New Public Management?”, Danish Political Science Association Meeting, November 4-5, 2010, [http://openarchive.cbs.dk/bitstream/handle/10398/8548/Carsten\\_Greve\\_KonfPap\\_2010.pdf?sequence=](http://openarchive.cbs.dk/bitstream/handle/10398/8548/Carsten_Greve_KonfPap_2010.pdf?sequence=), (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Özer Köseoğlu and M. Zahid Sobacı, “Kamu Yönetiminin Geleceği: Yeni Kamu İşletmeciliğinden Hibritleşmeye Doğru”, *Kamu Yönetiminde Paradigma Arayışları: Yeni Kamu İşletmeciliği ve Ötesi*, ed. Özer Köseoğlu and M. Zahid Sobacı, (Dora Publishing, Bursa: 2015), p. 298.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Pollitt, “The New Public Management: An Overview of Its Current Status”, *Administration and Public Management Review*, Vol: 8, (2007), p. 113.

enough to be considered paradigms.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, it is possible to see the new approaches as new advances in the NPM menu or, at the very least, developments linked to NPM.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, it is possible to argue that multiple approaches and reform movements co-exist today in a complex, layered, and hybrid field of public administration and reform agenda – as opposed to one approach replacing another to become the dominant paradigm. Today, public management refers to a domain comprised of layered reforms and approaches, wherein incompatible, rival, and contradictory concepts, principles, and structures co-exist and the various interests and values are kept in balance.<sup>12</sup> Post-NPM as a conceptual framework, is employed to address the recent developments in public management literature. The idea of post-NPM can be considered a “shopping basket”, which contains non-NPM reform elements, including the prevention of fragmentation through institutional integration, re-centralization, and re-regulation, the strengthening of central political and administrative capacity, and public-private partnerships.<sup>13</sup> It is still ambiguous whether post-NPM will represent a separate “paradigm” or an “umbrella term” covering the common principles and proposals of competing approaches such as Whole-of-Government, Network Governance, or Public Value Management.

In the face of growing fragmentation and decentralization fueled by managerial reforms, post-NPM advocates the strengthening of central capacity and control through greater integration and coordination. In this regard, it prescribes the use of horizontal governance and partnership models, such as inter-agency councils and committees, temporary and permanent networks, cooperation units within and among ministries, and cross-sector programs and projects, as opposed to vertical organization and hierarchy.<sup>14</sup> Post-NPM reforms do not mean a return to traditional public administration however. In essence, post-

<sup>10</sup> Jouke De Vries, “Is Public Management Really Dead?”, *OECD Journal on Budgeting*, Vol: 1, (2010), pp. 1-5; B. Guy Peters, Jon Pierre, and Tiina Randma-Liiv, “Global Financial Crisis, Public Administration and Governance: Do New Problems Require New Solutions?”, *Public Organization Review*, Vol: 11, No: 1, (2011), p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Henk Ter Bogt, Tjerk Budding and Jan Van Helden, “Current NPM Research: Digging Deeper and Looking Further”, *Financial Accountability & Management*, Vol: 26, No: 3, (2010), p. 241.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Christensen, “Post-NPM and Changing Public Governance”, *Meiji Journal of Political Science and Economics*, Vol: 1, (2012), p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Christensen, “Post-NPM and Changing Public Governance”, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Christensen, “Post-NPM and Changing Public Governance”, pp. 1-11.

NPM reforms represent an effort to cope with the administrative and democratic problems caused by NPM, and to re-establish balance between decentralization and recentralization, fragmentation and coordination, hierarchy and networks, and autonomy and central control – rather than a wholesale rejection of NPM. In this regard, the post-NPM framework is built on and intertwined with elements of NPM reforms.

## ANALYZING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM WAVES IN TÜRKİYE

The history of public administration reforms in Türkiye dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a number of French institutions and practices were transferred to the Ottoman administrative system. Following initial attempts under Selim III (1761-1808) to reform the military, Mahmud II (1785-1839) expanded the reform agenda by restructuring the public personnel regime and the central administration. The proclamation of the Imperial Edict of Reorganization (*Tanzimat Fermanı* in Turkish) in 1839, in turn, marked the beginning of a new period, when efforts to reform the central administration continued and modern local administrations, courts, and bodies of the high judiciary were created. This public personnel regime and public administration system, along with administrative traditions and the bureaucratic culture, were inherited by the Republic of Türkiye, which was established in 1923.

During the Republican period, public administration reform remained an important item on the governments' agenda. From the single-party period until the 1960s, Türkiye's public administration reform attempts were shaped by the reports of foreign experts. At the time, reform policies were limited to efforts by administrators to address day-to-day and routine problems they encountered through legal arrangements and administrative restructuring.<sup>15</sup> From the 1960s onwards, public administration reforms were designed by the central organs and implemented by public administrators within the framework of planned economic development. It is important to note, however, that those reform attempts were both devoid of theoretical depth and unsystematic. Moreover, reform policies were largely focused on intra-organizational problems, such as “red

<sup>15</sup> Özer Köseoğlu and Göktuğ Morçöl, “Democratization of Governance in Turkey: An Assessment of the Administrative Reforms in the 2000s”, *Challenges to Democratic Governance in Developing Countries*, ed. Gedeon M. Mudacamura and Göktuğ Morçöl, (Springer, New York: 2014), p. 139.

tape”, reorganization and the creation of a rational personnel system. In other words, they lacked a holistic approach.<sup>16</sup>

The 1980s marked a turning point in the history of administrative reform in Türkiye. From that decade onwards, liberal policies, which disseminated around the world, became more influential over Türkiye’s administrative domain as well as economic and political life. The first reform wave beginning in the early 1980s, which reflected the core values of economic liberalism, stressed the importance of shrinking down the state, economic liberalization, privatization, and deregulation.<sup>17</sup> It is not possible, however, to assert that those reforms efforts were thoroughly accomplished.

In the 1990s, when the average government survived for less than 18 months and political and economic instability were widespread, there was plenty of talk about public administration reform but almost none of those ideas translated into action. However, from the mid-1990s until the 2000s, governments maintained NPM-style reform efforts, specifically establishing new independent regulatory agencies.<sup>18</sup> In the wake of the 2000 and 2001 economic crises, the AK Party came to power in the 2002 parliamentary elections. In addition to promoting political stability and enjoying vast popular support, successive AK Party governments reconciled their agenda with the European Union’s vision, implementing a large number of reforms at the legislative and institutional levels. Within the framework of this reform wave, which relied upon NPM and “governance” principles, the government took important steps to reorganize the central administration, strength local governments, restructure public financial management, empower citizens to audit public administrations, and to promote a culture of transparency and ethics. In this regard, the AK Party governments made significant progress towards implementing overdue reforms.

As such, the economic liberalization reforms of the 1980s and the 1990s were followed by managerial reforms in the 2000s. It is possible to argue that those reforms were –at least on a formal level and in terms of their instruments– compatible with the core components of NPM and, to some extent, the “governance”

<sup>16</sup> Kenan Sürğit, *Türkiye’de İdari Reform*, (TODAİE Publishing, Ankara: 1972); Tacettin Karaer, “Kamu Yönetimini Yeniden Düzenleme Girişimleri ve Sonuçları Üzerine Bir Deneme”, *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, Vol: 20, No: 2, (1987), pp. 25–46.

<sup>17</sup> Bilal Eryılmaz, “Kamu Yönetiminde Değişim”, *II. Kamu Yönetimi*, (Hacettepe University Publishing, Ankara: 2004), pp. 62-63.

<sup>18</sup> Yılmaz Üstüner and Nilay Yavuz, “Turkey’s Public Administration Today: An Overview and Appraisal”, *International Journal of Public Administration*, Vol: 40, (2017), p. 3.

paradigm.<sup>19</sup> Notwithstanding, it is necessary to take a closer look at a number of new reform policies and strategies, which were described as post-NPM and became popular in developed countries ahead of and after the 2008 financial crisis. As a matter of fact, NPM and governance reforms, which Türkiye implemented under the AK Party's leadership, remained an important item on many countries' institutional agendas. At the same time, there has been greater emphasis on new approaches, such as digitalization, coordination, cooperation, and partnership, in efforts to address complex and multi-dimensional social problems. To understand to what extent and at what level successive AK Party governments have been affected by the changes of the reform agenda, it is necessary to take a closer look at the reforms implemented over the past 20 years.

## **INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF NPM AND GOVERNANCE IN TÜRKİYE: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS IN THE 2000s**

Having come to power in Türkiye following the 2000 and 2001 economic crises, the AK Party issued an Emergency Action Plan to translate the ideas it expressed on the campaign trail into concrete policies and actions to combat poverty, corruption, and prohibitions. In this regard, the newly elected government remained committed to policies of economic liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and decentralization, whose groundwork was laid by previous governments, and adopted a new political agenda to expand the domain of political and economic liberties.

During this initial period of reform under the AK Party, Türkiye launched a holistic, comprehensive, and long-term public administration reform program in line with economic, political, and social changes that was closely associated with NPM. During this period, the government identified compatibility with needs, participation, governance, citizen-orientation, transition to strategic government, performance, effective monitoring, ethical rules, confidence in people, and sub-

<sup>19</sup> M. Zahid Sobacı, *İdari Reform ve Politika Transferi: Yeni Kamu İşletmeciliğinin Yayılışı*, (Dora Yayınevi, Bursa: 2014), p. 196; Seriyeye Sezen, "International Versus Domestic Explanations of Administrative Reforms: The Case of Turkey", *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol: 77, No: 2, (2011), pp. 322-46; Süleyman Sözen, "Recent Administrative Reforms in Turkey: A Preliminary Assessment", *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol: 3, No: 6, (2012), pp. 168-73; Hüseyin Gül and Hakan M. Kiriş, "Democratic Governance Reforms in Turkey and Their Implications", *Public Administration and Policy in the Middle East*, ed. Alexander R. Dawoody, (Springer, New York: 2015), pp. 25-60; Üstüner and Yavuz, "Turkey's Public Administration Today", pp. 3-4.

sidarity in public service provision as the main principles of reform.<sup>20</sup> In 2003, the government introduced a Draft Legislation on the Basic Principles and Restructuring of Public Administration at the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, TBMM). The bill included a number of proposals geared toward shrinking the state, limiting the central government and empowering local governments, promoting market values and tools, and adapting private sector management techniques into the public sector – which were largely aligned with NPM and governance. When it became apparent that the draft law could not be passed because of the cancellation of the Constitutional Court, the AK Party developed a strategy of piece-meal reforms.<sup>21</sup>

In the early 2000s, Turkish public administration was characterized by secrecy, lack of transparency, and “red tape”. The administrative system lacked mechanisms to facilitate the participation of citizens in decision-making processes. The public was dissatisfied with the quality of public services and suspicious of the public officials’ performance.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the political instability of the 1990s and the tradition of military interventions forced policymakers to concentrate on short-term societal problems, resulting in the spread of maladministration and corruption throughout the bureaucracy.<sup>23</sup> In order to address the aforementioned problems, successive AK Party governments adopted a large number of legal regulations and implemented a series of reforms.

## RESTRUCTURING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND DECENTRALIZATION

Local governments have a rather important position in the AK Party’s tradition. Therefore, the movement paid special attention to local governments since its initial term in power, and believing that democracy and development start at the local level, attempted to change the centralist nature of the Turkish public administration. Those efforts, which were compatible with the goal of EU membership, represented a step toward decentralizing the administrative structure of the state.

<sup>20</sup> Ömer Dinçer and C. Geray, *Değişimin Yönetimi için Yönetimde Değişim: Kamu Yönetiminde Yeniden Yapılanma 1*, (Başbakanlık, Ankara: 2003), pp. 127-35.

<sup>21</sup> Sobacı, *İdari Reform ve Politika Transferi*, pp. 196-204.

<sup>22</sup> TÜSİAD, *Kamu Reformu Araştırması*, (TÜSİAD Publishing, İstanbul: 2002).

<sup>23</sup> M. Zahid Sobacı, “Türkiye’nin Avrupa Yerel Yönetimler Özerklik Şartı’na Uyum: Özerklik Miti”, *SETA Analiz*, No: 120, (April 2015), pp. 162-166.



In this regard, considering the need to comply with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the government implemented a new wave of local government reform in the early 2000s. Within the framework of this reform program, the Turkish Parliament passed Law No. 5216 on Metropolitan Municipalities in 2004, as well as Law No. 5393 on Municipalities and Law No. 5302 on Special Provincial Administrations in 2005. This reform initiative was aimed at rendering Türkiye's local governments more democratic. The legal arrangements, which were made as part of the reform program, entailed important changes to the responsibilities, organizations, monitoring and democratic features of local governments. Those changes effectively invalidated Türkiye's several reservations to the European Charter on Local Self-Government and contributed to the government's shift from centralism to decentralization.<sup>24</sup> Local government reforms were comprised of two main streams: (i) enhancing local democracy, autonomy, and participation by establishing City Councils in provinces, abolishing the requirement that municipal councils' decisions be subject to the approval of governors, and so on, and (ii) adapting market mechanisms such as privatization, strategic management, performance measurement, and human resource management in municipalities.

Another institution, which emerged out of the European Union (EU) harmonization process, was the Regional Development Agencies (RDA). The development Agencies, which played an important role in the implementation of the principles of regional development and governance, were established by Law No. 5449 in 2006. Operating on the principle of governance with the participation of local and regional stakeholders, the RDA's financed local development projects in an effort to realize local and regional potential.<sup>25</sup> The creation of new public agencies in Türkiye facilitated the transition from top-down economic development to bottom-up development with the support of local and regional dynamics.

## **PUBLIC FINANCE REFORM: TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

Under the Law of Public Financial Management and Control (No. 5018 of 2003), public financial management and budgeting processes were modernized through integration with new managerial techniques. The new public financial system was built on four pillars: financial transparency, accountability, strategic planning, and

<sup>24</sup> Sobacı, "Türkiye'nin Avrupa Yerel Yönetimler Özerklik Şartı'na Uyumu: Özerklik Miti", p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> M. Zahid Sobacı, "Regional Development Agencies in Turkey: Are They Examples of Obligated Policy Transfer?", *Public Organization Review*, Vol: 9, (2009), p. 58.

performance-based budgeting. To implement those principles and practices, the Turkish government issued a number of circulars and took multiple administrative measures to rebuild the legal infrastructure of public financial management.

The main purpose of reforming the public financial management was to rationalize the processes of the drafting and implementing public agencies' budgets and monitoring their use of public funds. Moreover, it sought to distribute public resources in a more rational and effective manner through strategic planning. Adopting principles of modern public financial management such as effectiveness, efficiency, financial transparency, and accountability, Türkiye aimed to change its administrative culture.

Law No. 6085 on the Court of Accounts, which was passed in 2010, facilitated legal and financial audits of public agencies and authorized auditors to carry out performance measurements. As a result of constitutional amendments enacted during this period, the jurisdiction of the court, which monitors public properties, incomes, and expenses, and delivers final decisions on responsible public officials, was expanded.

## **TACKLING BUREAUCRATIC SECRECY: THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE GRIEVANCE LAWS**

The right to information, a useful tool in combating secrecy, creates opportunities to consolidate democracy, strengthen the rule of law, and boost citizen's trust in the government. The concept, which was intensively debated in Türkiye in the 1990s, was a high priority on the AK Party government's reform agenda and was implemented with the passage of Law No. 4982 on the Right to Information in 2003.<sup>26</sup>

The Law on the Right to Information stipulated that all citizens had the right to obtain personal information and documents from government agencies (Article 4) and added that the relevant public institutions must share the requested information or documents with applicants within fifteen days (Article 11). In the 2010 constitutional referendum, the right to information was inserted in Article 72 of the 1982 Constitution and became an inalienable right for all citizens.

<sup>26</sup>T. Ayhan Beydoğan, "Gizlilik, Bilgi Edinme ve Demokrasi", *Yeni Türkiye Dergisi Demokratikleşme ve Yeni Anayasa Özel Sayısı*, Vol: 29, (1999), pp. 217-223; Musa Eken, "Kamu Yönetiminde Gizlilik Geleneği ve Açıklık İhtiyacı", *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, Vol: 27, No: 2, (1994), pp. 25-54; İl Han Özyay, *Günüşiğinde Yönetim*, (Alfa Publishing, İstanbul: 1996).

As part of the policy of administrative transparency, Law No. 6698 on Personal Data Protection was enacted, and the Personal Data Protection Institution was created as an autonomous body in 2016 to protect the fundamental rights and liberties of all citizens and identify the obligations of all parties storing personal data.

## COMBATING CORRUPTION

Ahead of the 2002 parliamentary elections, the “war on corruption” formed the backbone of the AK Party’s campaign. In the initial years of AK Party rule, the Turkish government ratified a number of international conventions on combating corruption and bribery, joined the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) in 2004, adopted the Strategy for Promoting Transparency and Strengthening the Fight Against Corruption in 2010, and established an Executive Committee to implement reforms in the same year.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, the government established the Council of Ethics for Public Officials by passing Law No. 5176 in 2004. This was the first time that the country created a council to identify unethical behavior in the public sector, investigate alleged ethical violations, and promote ethical codes in public service. The Council publicly identified the principles of ethical behavior by which public officials were expected to abide and conducted audits and inspections in response to complaints or out of its own discretion.

A significant aspect of bureaucratic corruption relates to “red tape”. Until the 1980s, combating excessive procedures was considered the most important part of public administration reforms by successive governments and the bureaucracy. Nonetheless, it is difficult to claim that considerable progress was made in this area by the 2000s. Within the past decade, however, Türkiye took notable steps toward reducing “red tape” in the bureaucracy.

In this sense, the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye enacted a law in 2007 that abolished a number of laws that could not be implemented. The purpose of the law was to strike down obsolete regulations, address conflicts within the body of law, and improve the quality of legislation. Two years later, the Circular on the Principles and Methods Applying to the Provision of Public Services was issued to introduce a series of measures and practices, including the use of information technologies and the internet, intended to deliver public services in a more rapid, high-quality, simple, and low-cost manner. In this regard, public agencies set cer-

<sup>27</sup> Köseoğlu and Morçöl, “Democratization of Governance in Turkey”, p. 143.

tain standards for the provision of public services and created service inventories that were published on their respective websites. At the same time, Türkiye amended a total of 84 circulars in 2012 to reduce red tape and simplify transactions.

To draft laws, decrees, statutes, circulars, and other regulations in a more participatory and qualitative manner, the Prime Ministry issued the Circular on the Methodology and Principles of the Drafting of Legislation in 2006. The document aimed to standardize regulatory activities by public institutions, facilitate the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, and professional associations, along with public agencies in regulatory processes, and the measurement of the impact of regulations. The Prime Ministry also published the Guide on Regulatory Impact Assessment to define practical processes and methods – which would be used in the analysis of regulatory activities.

An important measure against corruption in public administration and the protection of citizens from maladministration was the creation of the Ombudsman Institution, which operates independently of the executive and legislative branches, reviews and investigates complaints about public institutions and agencies, and reports its findings to the relevant authorities and the public. The growing interest in human rights, gridlocks in the judicial system, and efforts to institutionalize democratic reforms were among the reasons why the institution was established in Türkiye.<sup>28</sup> Lacking enforcement power, it serves as a mediator between the government and the citizens.

Although the AK Party government's efforts to create the Ombudsman Institution date back to the early 2000s, it was not established until 2012. In the 2010 constitutional referendum, the right to complain to the ombudsman was recognized as a constitutional right. Subsequently, the Turkish Parliament adopted Law No. 6328 to create the Ombudsman Institution in 2012. The ombudsman in Türkiye seeks to review and investigate all actions, behavior, and manners of the public administration from the standpoint of human rights, justice, and compliance with the law, and to make suggestions to the relevant agencies.

Moreover, the Human Rights Institution was established in 2012 as part of a broader agenda to promote a citizen-oriented approach in public administration. In 2016, the institution was restructured and renamed the Human Rights and Equality Institution. It seeks to protect and promote human rights, prevent discrimination against various groups in their enjoyment of legally recognized rights

<sup>28</sup> M. Zahid Sobacı and Özer Köseoğlu, "Türkiye'de Etkin Bir Ombudsman için Medya Desteği", *SDÜ İİBF Journal*, Vol: 19, No: 4, (2014), p. 26.

and liberties, and actively combat torture and ill-treatment. The institution as a public corporate body enjoys administrative and financial autonomy, allowing the institution to act freely to prevent violations on human rights and liberties.

## IMPROVING E-GOVERNMENT FOR BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES

The e-Government initiative has been a substantive part of reform efforts in Türkiye since the beginnings of the 2000s. Within the 20-year AK Party period, the e-transformation project has been a milestone in that it fostered the following e-Government initiatives. Starting in 2006, Strategies for Knowledge Society and related Action Plans have been issued every four years.<sup>29</sup>

Under the framework of the strategy and plans, reforming public administration and transforming public services in a citizen-centered way through the employment of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in official operations has always seen as a strategic priority. It is also expected from e-Government to support the prevention of red tape. Moreover, a range of laws and administrative regulations have been put into force for completing legal infrastructure of practices of e-Government. A number of e-Government projects have been implemented in various public agencies and hundreds of public services have been gradually delivered through the e-Government gateway.<sup>30</sup>

## TRANSITION TO HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SECTOR: TOWARD A MORE PERFORMANCE ORIENTED CULTURE

One of the most important developments related to the public personnel regime in the 2000s was the transition from the traditional personnel administration system to a private sector-based human resource management (HRM). During this period, HRM practices, including performance management, rational staffing practices, career management, and work analysis spread to various institutions and organizations such as local governments and the healthcare sector. We must note, however, that Law No. 657 on Public Officials, which was adopted in 1965 as the chief legislation regulating the public personnel system, remains in effect.

<sup>29</sup> M. Zahid Sobacı and Özer Köseoğlu, “AK Parti ve Türk Kamu Yönetiminde Reform Serüveni: Demokratikleşme Yolunda Atılan Adımlar”, *AK Parti'nin 15 Yılı-Siyaset*, ed. Nebi Miş and Ali Aslan, (SETA Publishing, İstanbul: 2018), p. 174.

<sup>30</sup> E-Devlet Kapısı, <https://www.turkiye.gov.tr/>, (Access date: March 22, 2018).

Therefore, Türkiye's personnel system has not been completely transformed in accordance with the HRM approach. Instead, the public authorities attempted to implement HRM reforms in various parts of the public administration through piece-meal legal changes and administrative measures.

## **NEW CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN TÜRKİYE**

Until 2010, Türkiye took important steps and made significant progress toward improving its public administration. Starting in 2010, however, the country encountered a host of new problems and challenges due to political, economic, and societal developments in the region and around the world. Serious challenges, including immigration and refugees, terrorism and national security, and the negative side effects of the 2008 economic crisis that could not be addressed through the short-term solutions and managerial techniques of the 1980s, have been on the agenda of the Turkish government and society. Moreover, the country foiled a coup attempt on July 15, 2016.

The above-mentioned developments have changed the nature of public administration reform in Türkiye. As such, from 2010 onward, it seems that new reform attempts carried the traces of post-NPM tenets, and the government moved from managerial reforms to the restructuring of the state. We will elaborate how these two accounts have affected the trajectory of public management reforms after 2010.

### **THE TRACES OF POST-NPM**

Türkiye's laws and administrative measures continue to form a strong basis for NPM and governance based reforms. The country's public agencies still purchase services from the market and employ market-based management techniques. Moreover, it is necessary to review the mandate, responsibilities, and status of institutions, such as the Public Monitoring Institution, the Council of Ethics for Public Official, and RDAs, which were established as part of the EU harmonization process, to increase their role within the system. Furthermore, policy-makers should reassess the outcomes of NPM reforms, such as public finance management, the public procurement system, strategic planning, and performance management, and HRM practices in the public sector, and address the technical problems caused by lack of institutional capacity. Therefore, deepening the NPM and governance based reforms of the early 2000s and strengthening the imple-

mentation capacity of public agencies could be an important item on Türkiye's reform agenda.

It is possible, however, to identify certain "deviations" from NPM practices in post-2010 reform efforts which suggest that the government seeks to implement post-NPM reforms. Recent modifications of the Independent Regulatory Agencies (IRAs), which have been established by a series of governments after 1980s in Türkiye, seems like an example of such tendencies. Over the years, regulatory institutions in Türkiye have been criticized by various governments mainly due to their independence and the ambiguity of their accountability mechanisms. A 2011 legislation stipulated that the ministries would monitor all activities and operations of IRAs. As such, agencies have become administratively and financially accountable to the relevant ministries. This legislation seems to comply with post-NPM principles of strengthening of central capacity and increasing accountability.

The process of restructuring ministries, which took place in Türkiye in 2011, serves as an example of re-centralization and inter-agency coordination – two important principles of post-NPM. In the context of central administration reforms, the government issued a decree in the same year to abolish state ministries and create new ministerial posts. In this regard, the six agencies responsible for social services were united under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the government established a number of administrative boards, in line with the post-NPM perspective, to develop strategies and policies to address critical problems such as immigration, counterterrorism, the economy, regional development, and the war on drugs, and to promote horizontal coordination and cooperation between the relevant institutions. The Council of Economic Coordination, the Council of Coordination of Counter-Terrorism, the High Council on Regional Development, the Council of Immigration Policy, the High Council on the War on Drugs, and the Council on the Coordination of Reforms and Monitoring of Investments come to mind.

At the same time, there has been an uptick in public-private partnerships (PPP), which rose to prominence concurrently with post-NPM reforms due to their reliance on cross-sector cooperation in Türkiye since 2010. PPP projects, which amounted to 7.2 billion dollars in 2010, peaked three years later at \$23.1 billion. In 2016 and 2017 respectively, 3.9 billion dollars and 4.4 billion dollars was invested in PPPs projects in the energy, roads, ports, healthcare, and air trans-

<sup>31</sup> Sabrina Kayıkcı, "643 Sayılı Kanun Hükmünde Kararname Çerçevesinde Türkiye'de Bakanlık Örgütlenmesinde Yeniden Yapılanma", *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, Vol: 47, No: 1, (2013), pp. 23-51.

portation sectors.<sup>32</sup> The data indicates that successive AK Party governments had a clear-cut strategy after 2010 to provide key public services, such as energy, transportation, and healthcare, through PPP practices, which strengthened cooperation between the various sectors.

One of the main lines of criticism against NPM was that it split public institutions into smaller organizations and thereby undermined central authority. This situation resulted in the presence of multiple institutions which must work together and coordinate their actions. As mentioned above, one of the most important principles of post-NPM was integration. With the spread of ICTs in public institutions, reintegration is expected to take place. ICTs facilitate vertical and horizontal coordination of public administration and expedite decision-making processes. Moreover, advanced e-Government portals make it possible for citizens to access public services, delivered by various institutions, regardless of working hours.<sup>33</sup>

Türkiye's e-Government portal, which became operational in 2006, came to offer an increasing number of public services to a rapidly growing number of registered users. As of 2018, close to 37 million individual users could access more than 3,000 services offered by 428 institutions.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Türkiye creates integrated management systems in certain areas of public service to promote cooperation and coordination between institutions and departments, and to provide public services more rapidly and in considering the necessities of the users. Those reforms appear to be in line with post-NPM tenets.

## RESTRUCTURING THE STATE: THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT AND TÜRKİYE'S TRANSITION TO PRESIDENTIALISM

The July 15, 2016 coup attempt marked a turning point in the history of reforms under the AK Party. Although Türkiye's domestic security and intelligence policies had been changed in the wake of terrorist attacks in 2015-2016 and the security bureaucracy had been reformed, the July 15 coup attempt, which was orchestrated by the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ), changed the nature of reform

<sup>32</sup> Kalkınma Bakanlığı, *Kamu-Özel İşbirliği Raporu 2016*, (2017), p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Patrick Dunleavy, Helen Margetts, Simon Bastow, and Jane Tinkler, "New Public Management Is Dead – Long Live Digital Era Governance", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol: 16, No: 3, (2006), pp. 467-94.

<sup>34</sup> E-Devlet Kapısı, <https://www.turkiye.gov.tr/>.



programs. To be clear, the failed coup established that FETÖ had infiltrated not just the military but virtually all critical public agencies in Türkiye. Therefore, it became necessary to develop a system of government that would eliminate the risks associated with weak coalition governments, prevent the emergence of power vacuums, and promote long-term stability. At the same time, reform proposals focused on the need to restructure the entire state apparatus.<sup>35</sup>

As such, Türkiye's military institutions underwent a process of restructuring in the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt. At the same time, the authorities took steps to dismiss FETÖ members from the civilian and military bureaucracy. In this regard, the Turkish government launched a reform program geared towards promoting the complete civilian oversight of security institutions, establishing a balancing security mechanism to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a single individual or group, diversifying the personnel hiring system, and preventing the emergence of ideologically-motivated autonomous groups.<sup>36</sup> It is possible to suggest that those reforms concentrated on the restructuring of the state rather than depending on narrower NPM principles.

Another important item on Türkiye's reform agenda after the July 15 coup attempt was the transformation of its political system. Advocates of reform argued that the country's tutelary parliamentary system generated weak and short-lived coalition governments that fueled instability and facilitated military interventions in civilian politics and intensified bureaucratic power over political institutions. Reform advocates proposed a new system of government based on presidentialism to promote the stability and effectiveness of future governments and to end the tradition of military coups and bureaucratic guardianship.<sup>37</sup> As a result of the subsequent constitutional referendum, which passed on April 16, 2017 Türkiye adopted a presidential system of government. This transition from parliamentarism to presidentialism revived the reform agenda, as the public administration system had to be re-designed in accordance with the new system – which renders certain legal and institutional changes to the Turkish public administration inevitable.

The presidential system places the popularly elected president at the heart of the political and administrative system. The president, who exercises executive power alone, has become the main actor in the development, monitoring, and

<sup>35</sup> Sobacı and Köseoğlu, "AK Parti ve Türk Kamu Yönetiminde Reform Serüveni", p. 177.

<sup>36</sup> Nebi Miş, "Devlet FETÖ ve Darbecilik Zehrinden Temizleniyor", *Kriter*, Vol: 2, No: 15, (2017), p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Sobacı and Köseoğlu, "AK Parti ve Türk Kamu Yönetiminde Reform Serüveni", p. 178.

assessment of public policies. At the same time, the President's Office underwent a process of institutional restructuring to formulate, monitor, and analyze the outcomes of public policies in a range of areas, including healthcare, education, agriculture, national security, and foreign policy, as well as develop new policies. Moreover, new administrative units have been created in the President's Office to facilitate those processes as in the United States and in other presidential systems. At the same time, the Prime Ministry was abolished, and the various departments and administrative units within the Prime Ministry were shut down or transferred to other offices, especially to the President's Office. The Council of Ministers, in turn, have been transformed into a consultative body that facilitates the development of public policies by the president. Under the new system of government, ministries have become executive units concentrating on the implementation of policies.<sup>38</sup> The switch to the presidential system entailed changing not just to the executive branch but also the Turkish Parliament. To accomplish the main goal of the new system, which is to increase the effectiveness of the government, it was necessary to reform the legislative branch in order to increase the Parliament's legislative capacity and to ensure that it functions without delay.

Keeping in mind the post-July 15 reform process and the changes required by Türkiye's new system of government, it is possible to claim that the government's focus has shifted from managerial reforms to a comprehensive restructuring of the state apparatus. The restructuring process provides critical opportunities for the Turkish public administration to overcome its pathologies and function more rationally.

## CONCLUSION

Since the AK Party came to power in 2002, public administration reform has been an important item on the agenda of the Turkish government, which consistently opted for change in the face of the status quo. After all, the AK Party understood that it would be unable to raise Türkiye's democratic standards without transforming the public administration first. Therefore, successive AK Party governments since the early 2000s promoted key democratic values, including effective public administration, efficiency, transparency, participation, and accountability, by implementing NPM and governance-based reforms. The implementation of those

<sup>38</sup> Özer Köseoğlu, "Kamu Politikalarında Yeni Aktörler ve Değişen Roller", *Kriter*, Vol: 2, No: 13, (2017), p. 14.

principles in the Turkish public administration will presumably contribute to the transformation of state-society relations.

From 2010 onward, in particular, it became clear to AK Party governments that Türkiye could not address problems with regard to immigration, refugees, terrorism, national security, intelligence, drug and human trafficking, crises, and natural disasters with its traditional notion of public administration or the NPM approach. After all, those problems were extremely complex and the outcome of multiple internal and external factors. Moreover, it was impossible for any single public agency to address them alone, provided that a multitude of stakeholders, public institutions, and organizations should work on the same issues. Furthermore, those problems needed solutions comprised of contributions from multiple actors, which would involve various international, national, and local partners including non-governmental organizations and market actors. Starting in 2010, the various institutions in Türkiye appear to have developed policies akin to post-NPM.

The July 15 coup attempt marked a turning point in the history of public administration reform under the AK Party. The failed coup changed the nature of reforms in Türkiye and facilitated a transition from managerial reforms to the complete restructuring of the state apparatus. In the immediate aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt, the Turkish government implemented comprehensive reforms in the Armed Forces and the security bureaucracy and stressed the need for a new political system. The presidential system, which represents a new reform, provides opportunities for the restructuring of the country's public administration. During this restructuring process, reform policies should be expected to have the following in common: increasing the capacity and expanding the control of the central administration, the provision of public services through integrated methods, promoting greater accountability for autonomous and independent bodies within the state apparatus, strengthening vertical and horizontal coordination within and among ministries, and promoting cross-sector partnerships and cooperation.

It remains to be seen whether Türkiye will develop a reform framework or program comprised of post-NPM or whole of government reforms that are being adopted by developed countries, which currently implement NPM reforms in depth. We must note, however, that the by-products and negative outcomes of the NPM reforms, which more or less developed countries also witnessed, and the complex and multi-actor nature of challenges faced by the AK Party government such as terrorism, immigration, national security, and economic development,

make it absolutely necessary to implement future public administration reforms within a certain framework or as part of a comprehensive program. The powers granted to the president under Türkiye's new system of government could make it possible for the country to implement public administration reforms in a more holistic manner.

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**SECOND**

IMPACT OF THE JULY 15  
COUP ATTEMPT  
ON TURKISH POLITICS





## CHAPTER 5

# THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT'S EFFECTS ON TURKISH POLITICS

NEBİ MİŞ\*

The bloodiest coup attempt in the history of modern Türkiye was perpetrated on July 15, 2016, by a group of undercover Gülenist Terror Group (*Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü, or FETÖ*) operatives, who had secretly infiltrated the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and other state institutions since the 1980s. To be clear, the 2016 coup attempt was not unprecedented. A closer look at the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish republic reveals that several efforts were made since the New Army's establishment in 1826 to change the country's political leadership by force. Since Türkiye's transition to multi-party democracy, military coups took place once every decade following the May 1960 coup d'état to interfere in civilian politics. The March 1971 memorandum, along with the 1980 coup d'état, the February 1997 "post-modern" coup, and the 2007 e-memorandum, were attempts by the military to maintain the guardianship regime's control over the political process and to reproduce the "junta" mindset.

Although the July 15 coup attempt was inspired by the methodology of previous attacks against Turkish democracy, it was distinguished by the junta's organizational structure, the perpetrators' ideology, the assault's goals, and the coup attempt's motivations and implementation. Unlike others, the most recent coup attempt was designed as a rebellion intended to lay the groundwork for Türkiye's occupation. To ensure their success, the coup plotters borrowed from the terrorists' playbook to hijack F-16s, helicopters, and tanks to massacre innocent people with heavy weapons and air bombardment. Furthermore, Türkiye's strategically

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important state institutions, including Parliament, the Presidential Complex, the intelligence headquarters, and police stations came under attack. The coup plotters also dispatched a Special Forces team to assassinate President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The coordinated attacks were planned by a covert organization that adheres to a distorted interpretation of the Islamic faith.

In the wake of FETÖ's coup attempt, President Erdoğan and several prominent Turkish politicians appeared in the media to call on all citizens to resist the coup plotters. It was the people's peaceful resistance, coupled with the determination of politicians, media personalities, and civil society that thwarted the attempted coup. The bloodiest coup attempt in Türkiye's history claimed 251 lives and left at least 2,734 people injured. The Turkish people's extraordinary reaction to the coup attempt culminated in the "democracy watch" events, which attracted thousands of people across the country every night until August 10, 2016.

This study analyzes the major developments in Turkish politics since the July 15 coup attempt. It concentrates on the impact of the failed coup on Türkiye's political landscape and state institutions. As such, it looks for an answer to the question of why military coups could succeed until the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AK Party*) years, while at least two coup attempts have been thwarted since the movement rose to power in 2002. The main purpose of this discussion is to better appreciate the nature of the anti-coup attitudes among Türkiye's major political parties, civil society, and the general population.

This study also focuses on the political parties' reactions to the coup attempt, efforts by politicians to reach a new consensus after the coup plotters' failure, and how political parties approached the fight against FETÖ. Thirdly, it analyzes how a political and social consensus was reached on constitutional reform, which made it possible for Türkiye to adopt a presidential system of government. Needless to say, the attitudes of both advocates and opponents of constitutional reform are also described at length to provide context. Finally, this study discusses how the transition to presidentialism has impacted efforts to restructure the state.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF POLICIES UNDER AK PARTY GOVERNMENTS IN PREVENTING THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT**

Regardless of their level of success, military interventions in Turkish politics created a culture of tutelage and perpetuated the mechanisms of guardianship. By fueling social tensions and promoting political fragmentation, coup plotters depended

on conflicts of interest between rival identity groups to reach their goals. Likewise, they formed coalitions with likely supporters of their rule to ensure that they could overthrow democratically elected governments and legitimize junta rule. Keeping in mind Türkiye's level of political and economic development along with Turkish efforts to strengthen their democracy, the country's confrontation with coup plotters and the guardianship regime started later than similar nations. One of the reasons behind this delay was undoubtedly Türkiye's political culture – which was a product of the interaction between society and political institutions. Political parties, in particular, play an important role in this process. Failure to seek compromise and differences of opinion about the guardianship role between political parties clearly encouraged would-be juntas and coup plotters.

In the aftermath of the May 1960 coup d'état, certain factors contributed to the institutionalization of the political culture surrounding military interventions in civilian politics, which ultimately led to the recurrence of military coups every decade. Until the AK Party took steps particularly to weaken the military guardianship regime and confront the culture of military interventions in civilian politics, the likelihood of military coups set the boundaries of the political and social domains.

One of the factors that made it possible for the military to interfere and intervene in civilian politics was the suspension of the Constitution after each coup d'état to create extraordinary circumstances. Once extraordinary measures were taken, which became ordinary in later coups, the military found ways to meddle in the political process constantly. Secondly, the perpetrators of military coups created safeguards against their prosecution in the future. Moreover, legal and institutional safeguards introduced after military coups enforced a ban on all forms of criticism directed against the coup plotters and military rule. At the same time, the bureaucracy, the media, and intellectuals developed a language that legitimized and perpetuated the military's control over civilian politics to break the cycle of insecurity. Finally, certain political parties and their leaders implemented policies on structural, circumstantial, or pragmatic grounds that ultimately facilitated the practices of military junta governments.<sup>1</sup>

Policies implemented by the AK Party, in contrast, largely eliminated the military's tutelage over civilian politics and confronted the legacy of the military guard-

<sup>1</sup> Nebi Miş, "Türkiye'de Güvenlikleştirme Siyaseti 1923-2000," (unpublished PhD dissertation, Sakarya University Institute of Social Sciences, May 2012).

ianship regime.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, one of the most important factors behind the July 15 coup attempt's failure was the negative perception of coup plotters among the general population. Moreover, the fact that each military coup since the 1960s negatively affected a variety of social groups made it easier for the population to unite against military interference in the political process. The AK Party's efforts to facilitate an overhaul of Turkish politics and to raise awareness at the popular level about the military guardianship regime compelled all political parties to take a stand against the coup plotters on July 15.

At the same time, the transformation and increasing diversity of the media, coupled with developments in communication technologies, made things more difficult for coup plotters. Likewise, the transformation and diversity of the bureaucracy and the ability of various intellectual circles to exert influence over the public domain deprived the coup plotters of crucial sources of support. Furthermore, the empowerment of the middle classes, along with the increased self-confidence among Türkiye's conservatives, created a civilian force that could stand up to military tanks at public squares across the country. The AK Party's ability to handle political crises, including the April 2007 e-memorandum and the December 2013 judicial coup attempt that was planned again by FETÖ, played a crucial role in the thwarting of the coup attempt because political players learned from crises and increased their strength. Finally, the fact that the coup plotters had to launch their attacks earlier than planned, the Turkish National Police emerged as a security force capable of balancing out the coup plotters, and the fact that the chain of command had been broken contributed to the failure of the coup attempt.

The large number of civilians who left their homes to peacefully resist the coup plotters coupled with the efforts of the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) and the Turkish National Police, the resistance of certain units within the Turkish Armed Forces, and the joint efforts by the media, political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and local governments all played an important role in the failure of the coup attempt. However, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's political leadership ultimately made it possible for all of the above efforts to yield results. The fact that Turkish society, politicians, and leaders had overcome many challenges in the past created a rapid response to the coup attempt. Erdoğan's ability to deal with crises served as an example to the entire society. If the decision by ordinary citizens to take to the streets to kick off the resistance, their fight against the coup

<sup>2</sup> Nebi Miş, Serdar Gülener ve vd. "Democracy Watch: Social Perception of 15 July Cuop Attempt, SETA Publication, İstanbul, 2017

plotters, and their willingness to stand guard for days are analyzed with reference to Erdoğan's leadership skills, two things immediately stand out.<sup>3</sup>

The first important development was that Erdoğan appeared on national television to urge all citizens to gather in public squares and airports. In light of his message, millions of people left their homes to gain a psychological advantage over the putschists. It was this strategic move that shook the coup plotters' confidence and reassured the resistance movement. Erdoğan's decisive and determined attitude and appearance at Istanbul's Atatürk Airport further strengthened the population's resolve. Furthermore, tactical moves, such as the recitation of the call to prayer at mosques across the nation all night, sent the message to ordinary citizens that the country's independence and future were at risk.

The second issue is related to the political leadership Erdoğan has demonstrated since 2002, not just during the coup attempt.<sup>4</sup> Upon coming to power 15 years ago, Erdoğan practiced a brand of politics that made it possible for Turkish society and politics to change. When the general population became more confident in the fact that they did not support anti-democratic guardianship regimes, political parties, bureaucratic classes, and media outlets – which supported military coups in the past – were compelled to revise their positions. In previous decades, intellectuals took it upon themselves to legitimize military rule, which was endorsed by certain political parties and publicized by the media. The civilian bureaucracy, including the judiciary, often cooperated with coup plotters to serve the junta's agenda. Military coups were thereby presented to the public as ordinary events, as civilian politics was confined to a limited domain. Under the circumstances, the people tended to keep silent since the masses were deprived of the self-confidence necessary to stand up to coup plotters.

Erdoğan's response to the April 2007 e-memorandum, too, was similar to his stand against the July 15 coup attempt. The elected government's strong reaction to the threat of a military coup was arguably a turning point in the history of military interventions in Türkiye. Provided that the AK Party faced a series of major challenges over the years, it is safe to assume that the movement learned from past crises. Consequently, it has become more experienced and self-confident.

<sup>3</sup> Nebi Miş and Burhanettin Duran, "Turkey's constitutional referendum and its effects on Turkish politics," *Orient* 58, no. 3 (2017): 52-60.; Burhanettin Duran and Nebi Miş, "The Transformation of Turkey's Political System and the Executive Presidency," *Insight Turkey* 18, no. 4 (2016): 11-27.

<sup>4</sup> Nebi Miş, "Darbenin Önlenmesinde Erdoğan Liderliğinin Rolü," *Kriter*, no. 4 (August 2016): 32-33; Nebi Miş, Serdar Gülenler, İpek Coşkun, Hazal Duran and M. Erkut Ayvaz, *Demokrasi Nöbetleri: Toplumsal Algıda 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi* (Istanbul: SETA, 2016).



After the December 2013 attacks by FETÖ operatives in the judiciary against his government, Erdoğan considered the fight against the Gülenists a matter of life and death for the Turkish state. Over the next months and years, he personally informed the public about the “parallel state” structure, the threat posed by FETÖ, and Fetullah Gülen’s perverse interpretation of religion. Consequently, he was able to convince the masses that it was necessary to combat the group and continued his efforts despite the unwillingness of opposition parties to support him and the presence of certain people even from his own movement who failed to appreciate the gravity of the situation. To be clear, the fact that a large number of high-ranking Gülenists had been dismissed from the judiciary and law enforcement had been identified and removed from public institutions prior to July 15 significantly contributed to the successful resistance against the coup plotters. Moreover, Erdoğan took steps against the organization’s supporters in the media to mitigate popular support for the Gülenists as well as precautions to hurt FETÖ’s revenue stream. As such, he ensured that the group was weakened in due time. Had Erdoğan not led the effort to introduce safeguards against Gülen’s organization, the coup attempt would have probably led to more serious problems.<sup>5</sup>

## DECODING THE RESPONSE OF TÜRKİYE’S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE TO THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT

During and in the immediate aftermath of the failed coup, the leaders of Türkiye’s major political parties issued public statements against the assault on Turkish democracy. Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım was the first to appear on national television on behalf of the country’s elected government. In his initial remarks, Yıldırım confirmed that there was a coup attempt underway and pledged that the perpetrators would be “punished as severely as possible.”<sup>6</sup> Needless to say, a driving force behind the coup attempt’s failure was a series of statements by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who called on the people to take to the streets and resist the coup plotters. The AK Party base had largely mobilized as soon as the media started to report the news of an attempted overthrow of the government. Erdoğan’s call, in turn, led large groups of people to gather in public squares, at the airports, and other places occupied by the coup plotters. In the end, their response and resistance thwarted the attempted coup.

<sup>5</sup> Nebi Miş, “Millet FETÖ’yü Bitirdi,” *Star*, July 23, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> “Başbakan Binali Yıldırım’dan açıklama,” *NTV*, July 15, 2016.

Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, or MHP) Chairman Devlet Bahçeli was the first opposition leader to come out against the coup attempt. While the coup plotters were still on the streets, he unequivocally announced that his movement was “on the side of the political leadership against the coup plotters.”<sup>7</sup> Noting that a group of rogue officers within the Turkish Armed Forces were trying to suspend democracy, Bahçeli made it clear that such attacks were unacceptable.<sup>8</sup> As a result, mostly AK Party and MHP supporters with some other groups from different social and political backgrounds joined forces against the coup plotters and resisted on July 15 and in the failed coup’s aftermath.

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the chairman of the main opposition Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), in turn, issued a written statement later in the night to pledge to “protect the Republic and democracy” yet failed to make any additional announcements against the coup plotters. The CHP’s delayed response to the attempted coup was received critically by the general population. Finally, the Peoples’ Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, or HDP) became the last opposition party to condemn the coup attempt by announcing on social media that the movement was “opposed to all types of coups as a matter of principle.” However, the HDP leadership’s position on July 15 has been far from coherent and clear. For example, spokespeople for the party attempted to discredit the people who peacefully resisted the coup attempt, citing their use of religious references in their opposition to military rule. Although the HDP leadership failed to take a clear stand against the coup plotters, the conservative wing of the party base nonetheless was more openly critical of the failed coup.

In addition to issuing statements, the representatives of Türkiye’s largest political parties gathered at the Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, or TBMM) to keep Parliament in session. Over the next hours, the coup plotters attempted to crack down on the parliamentarians’ protest by bombing the building. On July 16, Parliament convened for an emergency session to issue a joint declaration against the coup attempt signed by the leaders of the AK Party, the CHP, the MHP, and the HDP along with İsmail Kahraman, the speaker of the Turkish Parliament. The text highlighted the importance of solidarity and joint efforts against the coup plotters:

<sup>7</sup> “Devlet Bahçeli darbe girişiminin olduğu gece ne yaptı?,” *Hürriyet*, July 19, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> “Bahçeli: Türkiye gayri meşru bir durumla karşı karşıya,” *NTV*, July 15, 2016.

The fact that the various political groups represented in Parliament took a common stand and used a common language to oppose the coup attempt was a historic development. It was a valuable act that will go down in history. This common stand and language will further strengthen our nation and the national will. As [the representatives of Türkiye's] four [largest political] parties, we stand in solidarity with the national will along with our parliamentarians and all local organizations, we stand up for the national will and shall forever do so despite our differences of opinion.<sup>9</sup>

On July 25, President Erdoğan hosted AK Party Chairman Binali Yıldırım, CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, and MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli at the Presidential Complex in the Turkish capital Ankara. This historic meeting of Türkiye's political leaders created an expectation among the general population that a new social contract could be in the making – which was further strengthened by Prime Minister Yıldırım's announcement that an agreement had been reached to work on constitutional reform. The parties' solidarity against the coup attempt paved the way for the Democracy and Martyrs Rally, which took place on August 7 in Yenikapı, Istanbul, and brought together President Erdoğan and the leaders of all major political parties except the HDP.

## THE 'YENIKAPI SPIRIT' AND POLITICAL CONSENSUS AGAINST THE COUP ATTEMPT

In the failed coup's aftermath, politicians and ordinary citizens alike united and expressed solidarity against FETÖ. Under the leadership of President Erdoğan, the "Democracy and Martyrs Rally" took place in Yenikapı-Istanbul on August 7, 2016. Having been invited to speak at the event, the leaders of the AK Party, the CHP, and the MHP attended the historic rally and stressed the importance of unity and solidarity against coup plotters. At the same time, several senior officials, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Hulusi Akar, joined the millions of citizens. The atmosphere that day was later called the "Yenikapı Spirit" – which was centered around the theme of fighting all terrorist groups together. In his address to the passionate crowd, Prime Minister Yıldırım famously described the thwarting of the coup attempt as Türkiye's second war of independence. MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli, in turn, recalled that the Gülenists were "a bloody terrorist organization" and announced that his party would fully support the government's efforts to bring coup plotters to justice.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "TBMM darbe girişimine karşı ortak bildiri yayınladı," *Anadolu Agency*, July 16, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> "Devlet Bahçeli kimdir? 15 Temmuz darbe girişimindeki rolü," *Yeni Şafak*.

Following the July 15 coup attempt, the main opposition party CHP held “Republic and Democracy Rallies” at Istanbul’s Taksim Square and in the western Turkish city of İzmir to express their opposition to coup plotters. In light of the aforementioned events, many people expected the CHP leadership to attend the Yenikapı rally.<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, whether or not CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu would attend the event remained unclear for some time. Although the main opposition party initially announced that it would send a delegation of party officials to Yenikapı, repeated requests by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, along with popular demand for unity, led the CHP chairman to state that he accepted the invitation.<sup>12</sup>

In the failed coup’s aftermath, announcements by Türkiye’s major political parties that they would join forces against the coup plotters and were open to the prospect of cooperation were welcomed by the general population. Almost overnight, the pre-July 15 tensions between the country’s political leaders gave way to consensus.

Among the political parties represented at the Turkish Parliament, the only movement that wasn’t present at the Yenikapı rally was the HDP. When the HDP leadership co-signed an all-party declaration against the coup attempt on July 16, there was an expectation that the party could distance itself from the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the United States and the European Union, along with other terrorist groups. However, statements made by party officials and their failure to take convincing steps led the HDP to miss a historic opportunity.<sup>13</sup>

President Erdoğan invited the chairmen of the AK Party, the CHP, and the MHP to the Presidential Complex to thank them for their response to the coup attempt and their support for the legitimate, popularly elected government. The HDP leadership, however, was not invited. Likewise, the HDP was excluded from the Democracy and Martyrs Rally in Yenikapı-Istanbul, while the leaders of the CHP and the MHP were asked to address the crowd. When asked why the HDP leadership wasn’t invited, President Erdoğan recalled that a spokesman for the party had “insulted the people who resisted the coup plotters in an interview with a FETÖ-linked newspaper.” “I do not distinguish between the various terrorist organizations,” Erdoğan noted. “I do not treat the PKK and FETÖ differently. Nor can I forgive anyone who would cooperate with such organizations. If I were to

<sup>11</sup> Miş, Güleler, Coşkun, Duran and Ayvaz, *Demokrasi Nöbetleri: Toplumsal Algıda 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi*, 44.

<sup>12</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu Yenikapı’da yapılacak mitinge katılacak,” *Anadolu Agency*, August 5, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> “Erdoğan HDP’yi neden çağırmadığını açıkladı,” *Sabah*, August 7, 2016.

invite [the HDP leadership to Yenikapı], I could not explain to the wounded and the martyr [s' families] why I did it.”<sup>14</sup> The HDP's brand of politics after the June 2015 parliamentary elections, coupled with the party's failure to distance itself from the PKK and open support to the terrorist organization, and its inability to unequivocally condemn acts of terrorism by the PKK were the main reasons why it could not be part of the pro-democracy front.

The post-Yenikapı environment made it possible for all opposition parties, especially the CHP to part ways with their existing brand of political opposition, which reduced their respective platforms to anti-Erdoğanism.<sup>15</sup> Claiming that the state of emergency, which was declared to facilitate the dismissal of FETÖ operatives from public service and the ongoing fight against terrorist groups, had been unjustly expanded in scope, however, the CHP and the HDP quickly returned to their pre-July 15 positions.

CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's decision to abandon the language of reconciliation was seen as an effort to prevent President Erdoğan from reaching out to a new voter bloc against the backdrop of the post-July 15 unity. In addition to revitalizing the war on terror, the failed coup had given rise to a new form of patriotism dubbed the “Yenikapı spirit.” While President Erdoğan successfully adapted to this new political reality, the CHP leadership proved largely unable to control the narrative – which left the CHP concerned that the emerging political climate would hurt their interests. In the end, the CHP quickly returned to staunch opposition.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Devlet Bahçeli and his MHP remained committed to the post-July 15 unity. Unlike Kılıçdaroğlu, the MHP chairman refrained from publicly challenging the narrative on the coup attempt and adopted a harsh tone against Fetullah Gülen and his operatives in Türkiye. At the same time, he called for the preservation of the “Yenikapı spirit.”<sup>17</sup>

## THE BATTLE AGAINST FETÖ: A LOOK AT WHERE POLITICAL PARTIES STAND

On July 21, 2016, President Erdoğan held a press conference following a historic meeting of the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*, or MGK) to an-

<sup>14</sup> “Erdoğan: Bu işin bittiğine inanmıyorum, rehavete kapılmayacağız,” *Türkiye*, August 6, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “Siyasetin yeni trendi Yenikapı ruhu!,” *Sabah*, August 6, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “Yenikapı Kodları CHP’yi Zorluyor,” *Sabah*, September 2, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> “MHP Lideri Devlet Bahçeli: Yenikapı ruhundan vazgeçmeyeceğiz,” *Sabah*, February 21, 2017.

nounce that the government had recommended declaring a state of emergency for three months. The Council of Ministers, acting on the MGK's recommendation, agreed to declare a three-month state of emergency. The decision played a crucial role in efforts by the Turkish authorities to dismiss FETÖ operatives from public institutions, which they had been infiltrating for four decades, and to fight against a number of terrorist organizations that placed Türkiye's national security at risk.<sup>18</sup> As the state of emergency went into effect, President Erdoğan and spokespeople for the AK Party government stressed that the emergency powers would be used to facilitate efforts against FETÖ's undercover network within the bureaucracy and other terrorist groups as opposed to imposing restrictions on the everyday lives of ordinary citizens.<sup>19</sup> Over the next months, the government issued a series of decrees to take measures against not just the Gülenists but also the PKK, DAESH, the DHKP-C, and other terrorist organizations.

The fact that FETÖ operatives had been infiltrating various public institutions at home and abroad for a long period meant that the struggle against the group would take some time.<sup>20</sup> While the AK Party government highlighted the need to continue the fight against FETÖ in a determined manner, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım made it clear that all decisions regarding the dismissal of public employees would be made after careful review.<sup>21</sup>

What came to be known as the “Yenikapı spirit” in Türkiye, which referred to unity and solidarity against the coup plotters, gradually died down after the declaration of a state of emergency and decrees were issued by the government. The first politician to challenge the post-July 15 narratives was Kılıçdaroğlu, who claimed that the coup attempt had been “under control” all along and suggested that the “real” coup had taken place when the government declared the state of emergency on July 21.<sup>22</sup> In truth, the first person to publicly claim that the July 15 coup attempt was “a controlled coup” and therefore resembled a “theater play” was FETÖ leader Fetullah Gülen himself. As such, a majority of the Turkish people criticized the main opposition leader for pushing this narrative and accused Kılıçdaroğlu of

<sup>18</sup> Serdar Güleler, “Dünyada Arındırma Politikaları ve Devletin FETÖ'den Arındırılması,” *SETA Perspektif*, no. 142 (September 2016).

<sup>19</sup> “Başbakan Yıldırım'dan OHAL açıklaması,” *NTV*, July 21, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “FETÖ tasfiyesinde iki kritik husus!,” *Sabah*, July 23, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> “Kamudan ihraçları belirleyen 16 kriter,” *Yenişafak*, September 3, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Cansu Çamlıbel, “CHP Lideri Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu: Demokrasiyi Savunuyoruz”, *Hürriyet*, December 19, 2019

downplaying the gravity of what happened by turning a blind eye to the death of 251 innocent people and the suffering of thousands of survivors. The CHP leadership, furthermore, petitioned the Constitutional Court to declare the decrees null and void. The fact that a large number of public employees with ties not just to FETÖ but also to other terrorist organizations were dismissed by the government formed the basis of the main opposition party's objections.

As CHP chairman, Kılıçdaroğlu gradually turned his back on the post-July 15 social and political consensus and adopted a language that served the interests of FETÖ operatives. This was considered a return by the main opposition party to its comfort zone – anti-Erdoğanism.<sup>23</sup> The CHP leader's increasingly vocal criticism and speculations about the “true” nature of the July 15 coup attempt at a time when FETÖ operatives started to appear in court, in particular, supported this view. As a matter of fact, the CHP leadership published a report on the failed coup in addition to downplaying the bloody assault on Turkish democracy and presented it as their dissenting opinion to the official report authored by the Investigative Commission on the July 15 Coup Attempt. The publication came under attack by AK Party officials and President Erdoğan, who complained that the main opposition party was providing rhetorical ammunition to FETÖ operatives on trial.<sup>24</sup>

Devlet Bahçeli and his Nationalist Movement Party, by contrast, offered their full support to the AK Party's plans to combat terrorist groups, including FETÖ, in the July 15 coup attempt's aftermath. For Bahçeli, the fight against the Gülenists was crucial to the survival and future of the Turkish state. As such, the MHP leader repeatedly urged the authorities to continue the anti-FETÖ campaign until all undercover operatives would be removed from public institutions. Unlike Kılıçdaroğlu, Bahçeli threw his weight behind the government's decrees by stressing that the members of all terrorist organizations, not just the Gülenists, had to be dismissed from civil service.<sup>25</sup>

Although the MHP leadership has been generally supportive of the AK Party government's steps against the FETÖ network in Türkiye, it did not refrain from raising certain issues with the authorities. Specifically, Bahçeli and the members of his party either complained that the government's steps were not bold enough or suggested that there were certain problems with the implementation of the

<sup>23</sup> Ali Aslan, “CHP ‘Yenikapı Ruhu’nu Terk Mi Ediyor?,” *Star Açık Görüş*, October 2, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Nebi Miş, “CHP raporu ve FETÖ'nün savunma taktiklerine etkisi,” *Türkiye*, June 15, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> “MHP Lideri Devlet Bahçeli grup toplantısında konuştu,” *Sabah*, November 22, 2016.

anti-FETÖ strategy.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, they called on the authorities to complete the FETÖ trials in a reasonable time frame and urged the government to act with due care to prevent grievances and, if necessary, address them retrospectively. Another criticism by Bahçeli related to the public perception that the FETÖ operatives targeted the government and the AK Party leadership alone. Recalling that the Gülenists had been targeting his movement since 2009 by leaking illegally obtained information and visual materials involving MHP executives, Bahçeli maintained that efforts by the intra-party opposition, including former Interior Minister Meral Akşener, to hold an emergency congress to replace him were part of a conspiracy by the FETÖ operatives. Furthermore, he argued that FETÖ operatives within the judiciary had been complicit in efforts to undermine the Nationalist Movement Party and reshape Turkish politics.

In the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt, spokespeople for the AK Party and the MHP alike continued to criticize the HDP for failing to distance itself from the PKK. This line of criticism played an important role in the exclusion of the HDP leadership from the post-coup consensus in the political arena. As such, the HDP was the only major political party that wasn't invited to the Democracy and Martyrs Rally in August 2016 – which became a symbol of unity. HDP representatives were also among the staunchest opponents of the state of emergency, which was declared by the government to facilitate the fight against FETÖ and other terrorist organizations. Clearly, at the heart of their objections lay the concern that the state of emergency, in particular the decrees, would hurt the interests of the PKK and its affiliates. As such, the movement was extremely critical of the fact that several HDP members were arrested over their organic ties to the PKK.<sup>27</sup> Having failed to condemn the PKK's acts of terrorism and, by contrast, publicly stated that he did not see PKK assaults as terrorist attacks, HDP co-Chairman Selahattin Demirtaş was stripped of parliamentary immunity along with a number of other parliamentarians, which fueled more aggressive criticism from the party.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the replacement of several HDP mayors over their ties to the PKK terrorists by decree further radicalized the movement's political discourse.<sup>29</sup>

With the public debate on the replacement of HDP mayors with trustees still underway, all parliamentarians with pending subpoenas were stripped of their im-

<sup>26</sup> "Bahçeli'den flaş açıklamalar," *Hürriyet*, May 23, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> "Demirtaş: Darbe senaryo değil ama...", *Al Jazeera Türk*, October 4, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> "HDP Eş Genel Başkanı Demirtaş PKK'ya "terör örgütü" demedi," *Hürriyet*, September 2, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> "DBP'nin kazandığı 106 belediyeden 33'üne kayyum atandı," *Milliyet*, November 17, 2016.



munity by the Turkish Parliament. Among those deprived of legal immunity were members of the AK Party, the CHP, and the MHP along with the HDP. Although AK Party, CHP, and MHP parliamentarians appeared in court, the HDP caucus decided to collectively refuse to obey the court orders. Those who failed to appear in court were subsequently detained to obtain their testimony, while some of the HDP parliamentarians were arrested on terrorism charges.<sup>30</sup> Facing legal action, the HDP leadership continued to voice its criticism of the state of emergency, which was declared after the coup attempt to combat FETÖ and other terrorist groups more effectively and incorporated the CHP's claim that the July 15 coup attempt was a "controlled coup" into their own narrative.<sup>31</sup> Criticizing the government's decisions to extend the state of emergency during trips to Europe, HDP politicians called on the European Union to take action against Türkiye. The AK Party government, in turn, responded to the criticisms of European governments by recalling the state of emergency in France and charging the Europeans with distinguishing between terrorist organizations.<sup>32</sup>

## THE FAILED COUP'S IMPACT ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF TÜRKİYE'S POLITICAL SYSTEM

The similarities between the perspectives of the AK Party and the MHP on the July 15 coup attempt created new dynamics in Turkish politics.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, the failed coup raised awareness about the threats against Türkiye's national interests among political elites and ordinary citizens alike.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, it became clear that the state institutions had to be restructured to identify and dismiss undercover operatives of terrorist organizations that had been infiltrating public institutions for decades.<sup>35</sup> In light of these developments, Bahçeli revisited his position on constitutional reform and co-sponsored a bill that would eventually transform Türkiye's political system. Speaking at Parliament in October 2016, he conceded that there were certain problems with the parliamentary system of government

<sup>30</sup> "2016'da Siyaset," *SETA Yıllık*, December 31, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Mehmet Metiner, "Aktif FETÖ hücrelerinin son yalanı," *Star*, June 15, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> "Fransız Bakanın OHAL eleştirisine tokat gibi cevap!," *Sabah*, October 24, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Miş and Duran "Turkey's constitutional referendum and its effects on Turkish politics," 52-60.

<sup>34</sup> Miş, Gülener, Coşkun, Duran and Ayvaz, *Demokrasi Nöbetleri: Toplumsal Algıda 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi*.

<sup>35</sup> Nebi Miş, "15 Temmuz Sonrası Yeni Anayasa İhtiyacı," *Kriter Dergisi*, September 2018.; Ali Aslan, "15 Temmuz ve Başkanlık Sistemi'nin Önemi," *Sabah*, October 15, 2016.

and warned that parliamentarianism's structural flaws could lead to serious political crises in the future:

Türkiye needs a new social contract and the responsibility falls on all our shoulders. ... In our view, this need became more urgent especially since July 15. Nothing in Türkiye can or will be the same as it was on July 14. The nation's requests and demands for a new breath [of air and] a new legal consensus are visibly clear. We cannot ignore it nor turn a blind eye to it.<sup>36</sup>

Since the early 2000s, the MHP leadership had been staunchly opposed to the presidential system of government. Ahead of the November 2015 parliamentary elections, the party issued a manifesto that called for "the solution of the problems related to the system's functioning within the limits of parliamentarianism."<sup>37</sup> In this regard, the MHP was willing to acknowledge the shortcomings of parliamentarianism prior to the coup attempt. However, the movement's leaders feared that the proposed transition to a presidential system could place Türkiye's territorial integrity at risk, divide the nation and lead to regime change.<sup>38</sup>

The July 15 coup attempt led the MHP leadership to endorse an overhaul of Türkiye's political system. In Bahçeli's opinion, the failed coup had irreversibly altered the situation in the country. Having noted that the nation needed a new social contract, the MHP chairman announced that he was prepared to negotiate terms if the AK Party committed to keeping the first four articles of the 1982 Constitution unchanged and to refrain from taking any steps that could place Türkiye's territorial integrity at risk.<sup>39</sup> In the wake of the failed coup, there were two options available to Bahçeli: he would either ally himself with the old Kemalist elite, which wanted to regain control over the bureaucracy, or work with President Erdoğan and his AK Party to contribute to the new system of government.<sup>40</sup> Had the MHP leader opted for the former, there was a good chance that the conservative wing of his party's base would throw their weight behind the AK Party in the next election cycle. By deciding to cooperate with the ruling party, the movement chose to effect change and fix the country's structural problems. To be clear, the AK Party would not have secured enough votes in Parliament to pass the constitutional reform bill had it not been for the MHP's support.

<sup>36</sup> "Bahçeli'den başkanlık sistemi çıkışı," *NTV*, October 11, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> *MHP 1 Kasım Seçim Beyannamesi*, (Ankara: 2015).

<sup>38</sup> "Bahçeli'den grup toplantısında 'başkanlık' açıklaması," *Hürriyet*, May 24, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> "Bahçeli'den Başkanlık Sistemi Çıkışı."

<sup>40</sup> Ali Aslan, "MHP ve başkanlık sistemi," *Star Açık Görüş*, October 30, 2016.

In light of Bahçeli's remarks, Prime Minister Yıldırım hosted the MHP chairman at Çankaya Palace in Ankara to discuss constitutional reform plans. On November 15, the AK Party presented the first draft of the bill to the MHP, which marked the beginning of formal negotiations between the two movements. Following an initial review by the MHP's working group on the constitutional reform, the issue was discussed at the party's executive council on November 21 with a focus on the 1982 Constitution's first four articles, the preservation of unitary government and the accountability of the president under the proposed system.<sup>41</sup> The MHP delegation then met with AK Party officials to present them with certain suggestions – according to which the original text was revised. Meanwhile, the MHP leadership announced that the first four articles of the 1982 Constitution were going to be preserved and that the new system of government would be called “presidency” [cumhurbaşkanlığı] rather than “presidential” [başkanlık] system. The constitutional reform bill, which was jointly drafted by AK Party and MHP lawmakers, was presented to the public at a press conference on December 10.<sup>42</sup> Although the two parties officially agreed on the name “presidency system,” the new system of government was actually inspired by presidentialism. The main opposition party, the CHP, in turn, stated early on that it won't even engage in negotiations.<sup>43</sup>

The constitutional reform bill, which was presented to the Parliament's Constitutional Commission as a 21-item proposal, was amended by the commission's members and delivered to the General Assembly with 18 articles. After fierce debate in the General Assembly, the bill cleared the 330-vote threshold thanks to the support of the AK Party and the MHP and was delivered to the president, who had to call for a constitutional referendum. At the same time, Bahçeli announced that his party's support for constitutional reform would continue in the referendum. The CHP and the HDP, in turn, staunchly opposed the parliamentary proceedings on the bill.

Ahead of the April 16 referendum, the AK Party leadership coordinated their campaign schedule with President Erdoğan. While Erdoğan toured Türkiye's major cities, Prime Minister Yıldırım covered the less populous cities. Although the AK Party held no joint campaign events with the MHP, there were certain simi-

<sup>41</sup> “MHP Başkanlık Divanı anayasa değişikliğini görüştü,” *Yeni Şafak*, November 21, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> “AK Parti ve MHP'den Anayasa Değişikliği Açıklaması,” *Anadolu Ajansı*, December 10, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu'ndan şaşırta Başkanlık açıklaması,” *Akşam*, June 9, 2016.

larities between the two movements' talking points. The AK Party concentrated on informing the public about the constitutional reform bill and focused on what the new system of government would entail. In this sense, the ruling party made the point that democracy and Parliament's monitoring role would be strengthened, the separation of powers would become clearer, legislative powers would be safeguarded, and the problem of dual legitimacy would be addressed. As the opposition pushed the narrative that the referendum was an attempt to create a one-man rule, the attacks made it necessary for the AK Party leadership to inform the public about the proposed changes.

On the campaign trail, the MHP leadership highlighted the importance of constitutional reform for the future of the Turkish state and nation. Noting that constitutional reform was not an ideologically charged endeavor but a question of national interest, Bahçeli warned that the state's very existence had been threatened by the July 15 coup attempt and adopted a more inclusive nationalist language. According to Bahçeli, it was unacceptable that there was chaos across the country's political system at a time when the state itself faced existential threats. He added that the debate on constitutional reform could not be reduced to individuals, political parties, or ideologies.<sup>44</sup> Ahead of the referendum, the MHP adopted a nationalist and pro-state language to make the case that the proposal was an attempt to empower the national will rather than push an ideological agenda. At the same time, the movement used a number of other arguments, including the MHP's role as a "lockpick" that protected the state and earned the public's trust by breaking deadlocks. In this sense, Bahçeli used the political crises of the past to his advantage and claimed that he made the right decisions in the 2007 showdown between the elected government and military commanders and by voting against the constitutional reform bill in 2010. Furthermore, the MHP leadership stressed that Turkish democracy and politics would benefit from the passage of the constitutional reform bill. In this respect, Bahçeli highlighted that the country's democracy and the Parliament's monitoring capabilities would become stronger, the president would become liable for his actions, the legislative powers would be safeguarded, the separation of powers made clearer and the problem of legitimacy would be over.

While the CHP and the HDP assumed the leadership of the "no" campaign, a number of fringe parties –including the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*, or *SP*), which

<sup>44</sup> "MHP Genel Başkanı Devlet Bahçeli: Türk milletinin istiklalini korumak mecburiyetindeyiz," *Milliyet*, February 21, 2017.

comes from the National Outlook movement, and the neo-Kemalist Homeland Party (*Vatan Partisi*, or *VP*) – opposed constitutional reform. Moreover, various nongovernmental organizations contributed to the “no” campaign independently of the aforementioned political parties. As a matter of fact, the executives and heads of the Istanbul and Ankara bar associations – effectively semi-official institutions – actively opposed the proposed changes by holding campaign events all around the country.

Anti-Erdoğanism was the ideological backbone of the CHP’s no campaign in the referendum, as the main opposition party tried to fuel fears of authoritarianism and dictatorship.<sup>45</sup> By incorporating the famous line by HDP co-Chairman Selahattin Demirtaş, “We won’t let you become president!” into his campaign speeches, Kılıçdaroğlu re-embraced anti-Erdoğanism, which he had temporarily shelved after the July 15 coup attempt. By taking back the leadership of the anti-Erdoğan front from the HDP after the arrests of several HDP politicians, the main opposition party attempted to win over parts of the HDP base.<sup>46</sup> On the campaign trail, the CHP leadership implemented a two-track communications strategy: while using very strong language at the local level, their national campaign was dominated by mild rhetoric designed to appeal to likely “yes” voters.<sup>47</sup> Acting on the recommendations of the various components of the “no” campaign, including the media and nongovernmental organizations, the CHP refrained from advertising its role within the broader movement in the early days of the campaign.

Instead, spokespeople for the CHP often complained about “one-man rule” and “authoritarianism” in an effort to fuel anti-Erdoğan sentiments.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, the movement borrowed from the neo-Kemalist playbook to suggest that the presidential system would place Türkiye’s territorial integrity at risk and lead to the adoption of federalism and the destruction of unitary government, which could potentially confuse nationalist voters. Similar efforts included claims about PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan’s alleged support for presidentialism<sup>49</sup> and the AK Party’s supposed cooperation with the PKK. In paid ads for the “no” campaign, the CHP used the operative word (“no”) together with economic crises, terrorism, and disintegration. Kılıçdaroğlu also accused parliamentarians who had supported

<sup>45</sup> “Niye Meclis’ten korkuyorsunuz?,” *Milliyet*, January 18, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Fahrettin Altun, “2007 Öncesine Özlem Duyanlar İttifakı,” *Sabah*, February 22, 2017.

<sup>47</sup> “CHP anayasa değişikliğini Anayasa Mahkemesi’ne götürmeyecek,” *Habertürk*, February 14, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> “Niye Meclis’ten korkuyorsunuz?”

<sup>49</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu: Koşullar 12 Eylül’den daha ağır,” *Al Jazeera Türk*, November 1, 2016.

the constitutional reform bill during the parliamentary proceedings of “treason.”<sup>50</sup> Although the CHP leadership initially announced that it would challenge the bill in court, it changed its position soon after.

As the “no” campaign kept trailing the supporters of constitutional reform over the following weeks, the CHP leadership adopted a more speculative approach. For example, Kılıçdaroğlu claimed just days before the historic vote that the government was going to grant citizenship to 4 million Syrian refugees if the referendum passed. He also claimed that the July 15 coup attempt was actually a “controlled coup” in an effort to help the “no” campaign gain momentum.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, in the days leading up to the referendum, certain CHP politicians resorted to threats against proponents of constitutional reform.<sup>52</sup>

The HDP, in turn, demanded that the parliamentary proceedings on constitutional reform be suspended until all members of the party, who had been arrested on terrorism charges, were released.<sup>53</sup> The movement’s campaign events closely resembled CHP rallies in terms of messaging strategy – with an emphasis on “regime change,” “one-man rule” and the supposed weakening of the Parliament. During this period, HDP co-Chairman Selahattin Demirtaş and other HDP politicians, who were under arrest, made various accusations against the AK Party and President Erdoğan with no obvious ties to the constitutional reform bill and tried to discredit the court’s decision to hold HDP parliamentarian on terrorism charges.<sup>54</sup> Although some supporters of the HDP called for a boycott of the constitutional referendum, party executives refused to consider their recommendations.

## THE FAILED COUP’S IMPACT ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF STATE INSTITUTIONS

On April 16, 2017, Türkiye replaced its parliamentary system of government with the “presidency system”. The constitutional reform bill, which included several amendments including the adoption of presidentialism, was passed by the Turkish Parliament thanks to the support of the AK Party and the MHP. A referendum was held on April 16, in which 58,366,647 eligible voters – including those who

<sup>50</sup> “Kılıçdaroğlu: Bu parlamento kendi tarihine ihanet etti,” *NTV*, January 21, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> “15 Temmuz kontrollü bir darbe,” *Milliyet*, April 4, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> “CHP ‘evet’i Yunan belledi: ‘Denize dökceğiz,’” *Yeni şafak*, April 3, 2017.; “Baykal skandalı: Hayır çıkarsa düşmanı denize dökmüş gibi sevineceğiz,” *Yeni şafak*, April 2, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> “Müslüm Doğan: Alevilerin Anayasa değişikliği teklifine ilişkin bilgisi yok,” *hdp.org.tr*, April 5, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> “Demirtaş: Bu gidişatı ancak HDP durdurabilir,” HDP, (Accessed date: April 5, 2022).

live overseas – participated. 25,157,025 voters, or 51.4 percent of the electorate, voted in favor of the proposed changes, while the remaining 23,777,091 individuals – who constituted 48.6 percent – voted against. The turnout rate reached 85.3 percent. The April 16 referendum was the third constitutional referendum during the AK Party era and the seventh since Türkiye became a multi-party democracy in 1950.

President Erdoğan, the AK Party leadership, and spokespeople for the MHP, in particular, repeatedly stressed that the restructuring of the Turkish state in the failed coup's aftermath had become a vital necessity. In their view, the July 15 coup attempt, which was actually an attempted occupation of the country through acts of terrorism, represented *the* most serious threat that the Turkish Republic had encountered since the 1920s. As such, they called for an urgent and comprehensive restructuring of the country's crisis-prone system of government and the national security bureaucracy. In this regard, progress has been made in two areas since the attempted coup.

In the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt, the first area of government reform related to the need to create a new executive structure that could promote the political system's long-term stability by promoting strong political leadership. In this sense, the April 16 constitutional referendum facilitated the permanent replacement of Türkiye's parliamentary system, which empowered the guardianship system by fueling political instability, with presidentialism. The constitutional amendments passed in April 2017 were primarily related to the system of government. In this sense, changes were made to the various parts of the 1982 Constitution pertaining to legislative and executive elections, repeat elections, the responsibilities of the executive branch, the functioning of the judiciary, the investigation and trials of presidents and Cabinet ministers, the appointment of vice presidents, presidential decrees, and the drafting of the government budget. No changes were made regarding the fundamental principles of the Turkish state, the principle of unitary government, fundamental rights and liberties, the structure of the legislature, the responsibilities of the Constitutional Court, and the selection of Constitutional Court justices.<sup>55</sup>

The most significant changes to the 1982 Constitution related to the problem of dual legitimacy – which was a product of the parliamentary system.<sup>56</sup> Under the

<sup>55</sup> Serdar Gülener and Nebi Miş, "Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sistemi," *SETA Analiz*, no. 190 (February 2017).

<sup>56</sup> Nebi Miş, "AK Parti'nin Önerisinde Siyasal Sistem Tasarımı," *Kriter*, no. 8 (December 2016).

new system, the popularly elected president –who doubles the head of state – has become eligible to exercise executive powers, while the Office of the Prime Minister has been abolished. The 2017 constitutional amendments stipulate that Turkish presidents can serve a maximum of two five-year terms. Presidential elections will take place in two rounds. If a deadlock occurs due to severe disagreements between the executive and legislative branches, the president can call for early elections. However, it is important to note that the president must terminate his/her own term in office to hold parliamentary elections. Likewise, three-fifths of parliamentarians can call for early presidential and legislative elections.

Unlike the president, parliamentarians have the right to draft legislation. Under the new system, Parliament will be able to use additional instruments, such as official investigations, to monitor the activities of executive officials. In April 2017, the Constitution's articles related to the severing of the presidency's ties to political parties were amended to make it possible for Turkish presidents to join and lead any political party.

The main changes in the judiciary are related to the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors, which was renamed the Board of Judges and Prosecutors. The number of the board's members decreased from 22 to 13. While the justice minister and the Justice Ministry's undersecretary are considered natural members of the board, seven members are appointed by parliamentarians and the remaining four are picked by the president.<sup>57</sup>

Although the constitutional reform bill made a direct impact on 18 articles of the 1982 Constitution, including the sections related to the system of government, approximately 70 articles were indirectly affected. While some articles were effectively abolished, others have been partially changed. In this sense, the amendments made in April 2017 were not ordinary changes but a complete overhaul of Türkiye's political system and the functioning of the executive branch. As such, the constitutional reform bill made it necessary for the Turkish Parliament to update a number of laws pertaining to the judiciary and the executive and legislative branches.<sup>58</sup>

The second area of transformation was the restructuring of Türkiye's national security bureaucracy. The July 15 coup attempt revealed that the national security bureaucracy, including the Turkish Armed Forces, were largely autonomous enti-

<sup>57</sup> Cem Duran Uzun, "Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sisteminde Yargı," *SETA Analiz*, No: 193 (March 2017).

<sup>58</sup> Mehmed Zahid Sobacı, "'Evet' sonrası devletin yeniden yapılandırılması," *Sabah Perspektif*, April 22, 2017.



ties with little or no civilian oversight.<sup>59</sup> This sense of autonomy arguably made it impossible for civilian authorities to identify covert structures among the military's ranks. Completely immune to civilian oversight, this institution was able to use its access to classified information to mislead elected governments. Moreover, the Armed Forces did not share information with the public about the threat posed by a terrorist organization whose infiltration of the military for the past four decades was known to military commanders but kept secret from the public.<sup>60</sup>

A closer look at the national security bureaucracy, however, reveals that not only the Armed Forces but also the Turkish National Police and intelligence agencies were infiltrated by undercover FETÖ operatives. Although the Gülenists within the military led the coup attempt, it is important to recognize that they received assistance from FETÖ members in the rest of the national security bureaucracy. Had law enforcement and the intelligence community not been cleared from Gülenists after the December 2013 attacks, the July 15 coup attempt would have been more likely to succeed and violent clashes within Türkiye's borders would have become more probable. As such, there were two reasons why restructuring national security institutions became an urgent matter after the failed coup. First, all institutions and agencies had to be cleansed of FETÖ operatives. The second step was related to addressing the structural problems of the security bureaucracy and making it more effective against domestic and international threats.

In the immediate aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt, the Turkish government took a series of important steps designed to restructure the national security bureaucracy. As part of this plan, the authorities intended to establish full civilian oversight over the security forces, create a more balanced security mechanism to prevent the accumulation of excess power by any single individual or institution, and diversify the recruitment system to stop the emergence of autonomous entities within the bureaucracy along ideological lines.

Some of the most crucial steps taken in this regard are as follows:<sup>61</sup> The Supreme Military Council (*Yüksek Askeri Şura*, or YAŞ) was restructured to empower the civilian administration. While the interior minister, minister of foreign affairs, justice minister, and deputy prime ministers became new members of the council, the commander-general of the Gendarmerie, along with the commanders of the

<sup>59</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, "Sivil-Asker İlişkilerinde Statükocu Değişim mi, Demokratik Dönüşüm mü?" *Sabah Perspektif*, August 6, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, "15 Temmuz Sonrası İçin Yol Haritası," *Siar Açık Görüş*, July 24, 2016.

<sup>61</sup> "TSK'da yeniden yapılanma," *Sabah*, August 1, 2016.

Navy and the Land Forces and other four-star generals, were removed from the crucial decision-making body. At the same time, the YAŞ secretariat was transferred from the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (*Genelkurmay Başkanlığı*) to the Ministry of National Defense (*Milli Savunma Bakanlığı*, or MSB), which also assumed the command of the land, air, and naval service commands. The General Command of the Gendarmerie and the Coast Guard Command were transferred from the Turkish Armed Forces to the Interior Ministry.<sup>62</sup> The war academies were abolished and replaced with the National Defense University. All military medical centers, including the Gülhane Training and Research Hospital in Ankara, were transferred to the Ministry of Health. All high school graduates were declared eligible to apply to military schools. Moreover, the Ministry of National Defense staff was transferred from the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to the ministry itself. Under the new rules, the appointments of senior and junior military officers will be subject to the ministry's approval and military barracks located in town centers will be relocated to the countryside. Also, the executive, legislative and judicial branches experienced certain changes regarding their organizational structures and functions. While the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (Hakimler Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu, or HSYK) has been restructured, an effort was launched to reform Parliament's bylaws to increase the legislature's efficiency. At the same time, certain steps were taken to transform the bureaucratic structure of the executive branch. Meanwhile, the re-establishment of the Presidency's ties to party politics already initiated a period of "partisan presidency." Finally, the Military Supreme Administrative Court and the Military Court of Appeals were abolished.<sup>63</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of the July 15 failed coup attempt, the Turkish authorities started to implement lustration policies and took a series of steps to restructure the state. It was clear all along that the lustration policies needed to extend beyond the Turkish Armed Forces. Although a group of undercover FETÖ operatives within the military led the effort to violently overthrow Türkiye's democratically elected government, the organization had a more powerful and widespread civilian wing. Within and outside the Turkish military, the Gülenists had created a messianic

<sup>62</sup> "Jandarma ve Sahil Güvenlik İçişleri'ne bağlandı," *Yeni Şafak*, July 27, 2016.

<sup>63</sup> "Askeri Yargıtay ve AYİM kaldırıldı," *Milliyet*, April 29, 2017.

organization whose power was maximized by pragmatic players that adhered to the ideologically motivated and perverted interpretations of the Islamic faith. As such, the lustration policies had to be implemented in a number of areas including the security forces, the civilian bureaucracy, the economy, education, and civil society. In other words, the Turkish government launched a comprehensive effort to identify and dismiss FETÖ operatives from public service. To expedite the process of lustration and prevent future attacks by the group, a state of emergency was declared in July 2016.

At the same time, the July 15 coup attempt established that the Turkish state ought to be restructured in two ways. First, the authorities had to make significant changes to the structure and functioning of the security forces, wherein the culture of military interventions remained dominant and could not be eliminated. In light of pressing challenges, the restructuring effort was made with due urgency. Secondly, the political system had to be transformed. Following the coup attempt, the various political parties could agree to reform Türkiye's system of government, which created major crises over the years, after years of unfruitful discussions.

In the end, Parliament passed a constitutional reform bill introduced by the AK Party and supported by MHP – which entailed, among other things, the replacement of the country's parliamentary system with presidentialism. Finally, despite the CHP and HDP's resistance, voters accepted the new system in the 2017 referendum. Thanks to that, Türkiye's search for a stable political system since the 1970s came to an end. As a result, it is possible to accept that the major effect of the July 15 coup attempt was this.

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## CHAPTER 6

# MEDIA'S ROLE IN THE FAILURE OF THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT

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PINAR KANDEMİR\*\*

July 15, 2016 made history as the night of new beginnings in Türkiye. Without any sliver of doubt, the most significant amongst these new beginnings was that, for the first time ever in the nation's history, the people resisted a coup attempt en masse. Equally as impressive, was the symbol of rebalancing of media-military relations, the roots of which can be traced back over the last decade to the empowerment of civil society against the paternalism of bureaucratic and military power in the Turkish public sphere. During the night of the July 15, the support from the media for democracy and its resistance against the military played a crucial role in subverting the coup. Indeed, the media, often referred to as the fourth estate in a democracy,<sup>1</sup> is not a neutral observer of politics and public life according to Geoffrey Craig. Rather, it is an arena “where politics and public life are played out, the sites where the meanings of public life are generated, debated and evaluated”.<sup>2</sup>

From the moment that the July 15 coup was publicly declared, press freedom was given an acid test: either the press would be co-opted and used to legitimize the coup, as had usually been the case in Turkish history, or it would maintain its independence and stand by democracy. On the night of July 15, almost every media outlet broadcasted the message against the putschists, thus passing this historic test.

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<sup>1</sup> Julianne Schultz, *Reviving the Fourth Estate: Democracy, Accountability and the Media*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Craig, *The Media, Politics and Public Life*, (Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest: 2004).



To understand why the media was so crucial that night, it is necessary to recall how media outlets were traditionally seized by the armed forces and the deep state to disseminate the messages of the military during previous coups. By referring to the historical role of media in Turkish politics, this article discusses the stance of the media outlets during the July 15 failed coup attempt.

## THE MILITARY AND MASS MEDIA IN TÜRKİYE: A BRIEF HISTORY

Although there have been many coup attempts in Türkiye, a total of four of the takeovers were successful. In 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) arbitrarily intervened in civilian politics to remove elected governments from power through the use or threat of violence.<sup>3</sup> On each occasion, military officers identified the media as an important target to deliver messages that discredited elected leaders to justify the actions of the military and, upon the removal of the government, legitimize a military regime.

The first coup d'état in modern Turkish history took place on May 27, 1960, when a group of soldiers led by 37 mid-ranking military officers arrested their superiors, stormed government buildings, and seized full control of the media to announce the coup to the Turkish nation and the world. Over the following months, a biased trial took place on the small barren island of Yassıada to discredit the Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti, DP) leadership. Though the logic of the main charges was tenuous, deposed Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, along with two other Cabinet ministers, were executed in September 1961. President Celal Bayar, a hero of the War of Independence, who was also removed from his position, was offered clemency, although the coup effectively ended his political career. This process established the supremacy of the military over civilian politicians,<sup>4</sup> legalizing and perpetuating a fixed role for the army over civilian institutions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis on the role of the military in Turkish politics see: Frank Tachau and Metin Heper, "The State, Politics and the Military in Turkey", *Comparative Politics*, Vol: 16, No: 1, (1983), pp. 17-33; İlhan Üzgel, "Between Praetorianism and Democracy: The Role of the Military in Turkish Foreign Policy", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, Vol: 34, (2003), p. 179; Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, "The Anatomy of the Turkish Military's Political Autonomy", *Comparative Politics*, Vol: 29, No: 2, (1997), pp. 151-166.

<sup>4</sup> William Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military*, (Routledge, London: 2013), pp. 312-313.

<sup>5</sup> Bertil Videt Knudsen, "The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics", *Department of Political*, (2005), p. 7.

The 1960 coup marked the beginning of a long-term symbiotic relationship between the military and mass media. Having informed the public via local radio that the government had been overthrown, the previous DP government was discredited, the party itself outlawed and the junta was praised by national newspapers which hailed the military officers as saviors of the Republic. According to Mustafa Arıkan, the military, media and universities were all supporters of the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) against the DP during the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Anti-coup media personnel were gunned down and some critical media outlets decided to go with a black slate as the front page of newspapers. However, military command headquarters soon announced new rules for the media which determined basic features such as the color and print sizes of newspapers.<sup>7</sup>

Over the following decades, the relationship between the press and military leaders became much closer as the armed forces discovered how media campaigns could be utilized to further their interests. Many reporters, columnists and editors retrenched, allowing complacency to creep into their work by reducing their journalistic standards, backtracking from their commitment to democratic values to collaborate with coup plotters and the new self-declared guardians of the republic. In 1971 and 1980, the mainstream media's support for military intervention in civilian politics made it possible for the generals to create an echo chamber that eventually marginalized all critical voices.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the monopoly the public broadcaster Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) had over the media landscape at the time made it easier for the military regime to dominate and guide public opinion in the direction of its choice.

At this point, the brief liberalization between the non-democratic period that reached its peak with the 1980 coup and the chaotic years of the 1990s should not be noted. Because these years of change, which had the most positive impact in terms of democracy after the DP years, albeit for a short time, and can be considered the precursors of the steps taken by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party). In this sense, the victory of Turgut Özal, who represented the liberal right in the first democratic election in 1983 just after

<sup>6</sup> Mustafa Arıkan, "27 Mayıs'a Damgasını Vuran Söz ve Beyanlar", *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, No: 4, (1997), p. 299.

<sup>7</sup> Gökçer Tahincioğlu, "Askeri Darbeler Öncesi ve Sonrası Medya Özgürlüğü", (Master Thesis, Gazi University, Ankara: 2004), pp. 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> Murat Erdin, *Silahsız Kuvvetler Medya: Darbelerde Basının Ayak Sesleri*, (Destek Publishing, İstanbul: 2010).

the 1980 coup d'état, marked the beginning of many firsts in Türkiye. Following the other liberalization steps, with the second half of the 1980s under Özal and parallel to the rise of a burgeoning independent press, the media in Türkiye started to change by diversifying not only its brands but also in perspectives. The number of media outlets rosen dramatically, especially in the early 2000s.

Here, media economics plays a crucial role.<sup>9</sup> The development of the private media sector in Türkiye has broken the media monopoly. This rapid evolution regarding different ownership and operational structures created an open forum for democracy and pluralism within the general narrative of media. Additionally, innovation in communications technology has made it easier for ordinary citizens and marginalized voices to connect, discuss, organize, and influence public opinion through the web and social media.<sup>10</sup>

Today's media in Türkiye is multifaceted, ever-expanding and representative of media structures in advanced economies. The proliferation of outlets, services and novelties in the media sector has ushered Türkiye into the class of liberal economies, where media is a unique forum within public life. These aspects are invaluable as Türkiye continues its forward trajectory toward further advancement and liberalization in all spheres, with media acting as the shepherd of the process. It is important to note that the infrastructure of all these was formed by the steps taken while Özal was in office

However, in light of these relatively liberal developments, the mainstream media's cooperation with the Turkish Armed Forces continued to strengthen in the 1990's.<sup>11</sup> In fact, journalists played an active role in 1997, when the generals issued an ultimatum to the coalition government led by the Welfare Party's (Refah Partisi, RP) Necmettin Erbakan at a meeting of the National Security Council. What distinguished the February 28 process, dubbed the "postmodern coup," from other interventions by the military into civilian politics, was the military's decision to rely on the media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to use relatively soft power to alter the status quo in place of using hard power. At the time, both mainstream (e.g. *Hürriyet*) and Kemalist (e.g. *Cumhuriyet*) newspapers pioneered

<sup>9</sup> Sadık Ünay, "Medya-Ekonomi: Medya-Sermaye İlişisini Yeniden Yorumlamak", *Anlayış Dergisi*, No: 79, (2009), pp. 51-52.

<sup>10</sup> Ceren Sözeri and Zeynep Güney, *The Political Economy of the Media in Turkey*, (Tesev Publications, Istanbul: 2011).

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed analysis of military-media relations in Türkiye see: Ragıp Duran, *Apoletli Medya*, (Belge Publishing, Istanbul: 2000).

a media campaign designed to turn public opinion against the elected government through fabricated stories and the use of provocative images.<sup>12</sup> As discussed above, this very trend has persisted well into the 2000s and it took years for the AK Party to change this situation.

One should understand that the arrival of the AK Party as a new political power in 2002 altered and rebalanced not only Turkish politics but also the civil-military relations in Türkiye. The Turkish military tried to play an overreaching role in Turkish politics even during AK Party governments, but many of the AK Party leaders had learned to be prudent and cautious following their previous experiences and reinvented their democratic politics. The AK Party worked to address human rights issues and normative principles of democracy to challenge the hegemony of the military establishment and its civilian allies.<sup>13</sup> A major shift in political discourse followed the AK Party's attempts to prevent the involvement of the military in politics.

Before discussing the nature of this change, the process towards of the change should be discussed in detail. During the initial AK Party years, the tipping point that ushered in this new paradigm was the response of the people and the government to a memorandum issued by the Turkish Armed Forces, dubbed the e-memorandum since it appeared on the military's official website ahead of the 2007 presidential election.

Citing concerns over secularism, the generals, emboldened by Kemalist political parties, the mainstream media and non-governmental organizations, attempted to strongarm the AK Party government into replacing the Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül with another presidential candidate.<sup>14</sup> In addition to launching a coordinated campaign to discredit the elected government, major media outlets openly used language betraying their sympathy and at times support for a military intervention in an effort to promote and legitimize military action if all other options failed. During this period, certain publications such as the ultra-secular *Cumhuriyet* newspaper also played a central role in organizing massive pro-coup demonstrations.<sup>15</sup> These protests, called the Republican Rallies, claimed that the

<sup>12</sup> "Kronoloji: 28 Şubat'a Giden Yol", Al Jazeera, December 27, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Cemil Aydın, "Between Occidentalism and the Global Left: Islamist Critiques of the West in Turkey", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol: 26, No: 3, (2006), pp. 446-461.

<sup>14</sup> M. Michael Gunter, and M. Hakan Yavuz, "Turkish Paradox: Progressive Islamists Versus Reactionary Secularists", *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol: 16, No: 3, (2007), p. 290.

<sup>15</sup> Yaprak Gürsoy, "The Changing Role of the Military in Turkish Politics: Democratization through Coup Plots?", *Democratization* 19, no. 4 (2012): 735-60.

AK Party government was a danger to Turkish secularism and that it was the army's duty to ensure a secularist government was at the helm of the country. The main tool used to back these appeals was the army, as always, but this time more it was forceful than ever.

In this regard, the government's resistance to the military's demands and the support of ordinary citizens for civilian leadership marked a breakthrough in the transformation of civil-military relations in Türkiye. The strong leadership of then the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan proved instrumental in mobilizing the opponents of another military power grab or any undue military influence in civilian politics. Having promoted a national conversation on civil-military relations since 2002, the AK Party had made the case that no coup d'état was legitimate, no junta was a viable alternative to an elected government and that the only way governments should rise to and fall from power is through elections. In 2007, one of the main accomplishments of the liberal political environment was to utilize the emerging new media to bypass the mainstream outlets, which traditionally supported the military, to directly reach different segments of the society.

Following the 2007 confrontation between the elected government and the *status quo*, even Kemalist hardliners in the journalistic community slowly turned their back on "the coup option" at least in front of the cameras and instead adapted to the changing circumstances partly due to their desire to maintain good relations with the West, which sided with the civilian leadership against the military. During this time, although the AK Party successfully changed the nature of the relationship between the military and the civilian government to reduce the military's tutelary role in politics, it pushed the change in the media's *modus operandi* when it came to legitimizing coups. It is important to note that advocates of military interventions in civilian politics have been marginalized, as the vast majority of Kemalist intellectuals and journalists –traditional allies of coup plotters– have started paying lip service to the illegitimacy of all coups, which itself indicates that Turkish politics has reached a new milestone.

In addition to these developments, one should not forget that Erdoğan was one of the strongest voices criticizing the coup executed in Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings. He fiercely resisted the anti-democratic intervention, provided his support for victims and criticized other leaders who remained silent during the bloodshed in Egypt. During the July 15 coup attempt in Türkiye, Turkish people, having learned from the coup in Egypt and their very own experiences in Türkiye, successfully resisted the military forces and defended Türkiye's democracy at the

cost of their lives. When it comes to the reaction of the media, having revised its position on civil-military relations, the mainstream media reacted to the July 15 coup attempt in an unprecedented manner by openly opposing the power grab.

## RESISTING THE COUP: THE ROLE OF CONVENTIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE ARAB UPRISINGS

The role that the media played during the Arab Uprisings has been the subject of numerous articles and studies. According to some authors, it was new media, as opposed to conventional media, that expanded the social base of revolutionary political movements in Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia.<sup>16</sup> In fact, several revolutionary movements in recent years have been called “Twitter Revolutions” paying homage to social media’s central role in resistance against authoritarian regimes. While democratization facilitated by social media opened new spaces to resist authoritarian regimes, some have lamented its role in the wave of populism that led to Brexit in the United Kingdom and the election of Donald Trump in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Regardless, it is important to acknowledge that new platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the blogosphere have made possible the free flow of information in places where the mainstream media is censored.

The claim that social media or mass media were the driving force behind the Arab Uprisings or the Turkish people’s resistance to the July 15 coup attempt would be an oversimplification. Media did play an important role in mobilizing the masses and generating a higher level of awareness. However, the active use of Facebook and Twitter by protestors to communicate must not lead observers to overlook the significance of the extent to which the idea of democracy was internalized and institutionalized, serving as the driving force motivating the resistance. In this regard, *The Guardian’s* Maeve Shearlaw certainly provides a more nuanced picture when she says, “despite Western media’s love affair with the idea, the uprisings did not happen because of social media. Instead, the platforms provided opportunities for organization and protest that traditional methods could not”.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Philip N. Howard, Aiden Duffy, Deen Freelon, Muzammil M. Hussain, Will Mari, and Marwa Maziad, “Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media during the Arab Spring?”, *SSRN*, (2011); Adrienne Russell, “The Arab Spring: Extra-National Information Flows, Social Media and the 2011 Egyptian Uprising”, *International Journal of Communication*, Vol: 5, No: 10, (2011).

<sup>17</sup> Sergio Sismondo, “Post-Truth?”, *Social Studies of Science*, Vol: 47, No: 1, (2017), pp. 3-6.

<sup>18</sup> Maeve Shearlaw, “Egypt Five Years on: Was It Ever a ‘Social Media Revolution?’”, *The Guardian*, January 25, 2016.

Cyber activism, or “the act of using the Internet to advance a political cause that is difficult to advance offline” opened a new chapter in politics and media. Thus, the horizontal connectivity established between people and citizen journalism aroused interest during the Arab Uprisings. Over a short time, social media attained such power and influence that many conventional media outlets started covering stories due to their popularity online.<sup>19</sup>

After all, the rise of digitalization has become a trendy topic, both at the point of strengthening and spreading of social movements and becoming a driving force affecting the mainstream media’s coverage. Of course, this does not mean that the general view on social media presented the majority’s approach to political issues. In other words, the assumption that social media remains independent and uncensored is misleading.<sup>20</sup> As experienced in different cases, it is open to manipulation and fake news is one of the main problems in the digital age. Today, the post-truth discussion has become an integral part of political discourses. Nonetheless, online news remains attractive because it is disseminated through a platform that encourages, and is built upon, popular participation. Social media enables ordinary people to share their own opinions, photos, and videos with other people freely and quickly.

## MEDIA’S GREAT TEST DURING THE NIGHT OF THE RESISTANCE

In Türkiye, social media remains widely popular. Roughly 46 million people, or 58 percent of the population, are active internet users. There are 71 million cell phone lines, and the average Turk spends almost twice as much time on social media than watching television, 4 hours and 14 minutes versus 2 hours and 35 minutes, respectively.<sup>21</sup> As a natural outcome of the popularity of social media in Türkiye, during the night of the July 15 coup attempt, many people in Türkiye became aware of the coup attempt through social media and the internet.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Richard Hanna, Andrew Rohm and Victoria L. Crittenden, “We’re All Connected: The Power of the Social Media Ecosystem”, *Business Horizons*, Vol: 54, No: 3, (2011), pp. 265-73.

<sup>20</sup> In May 2016, a former Facebook employee claimed that the company had misled the public to believe that an impartial algorithm picked stories to be featured in the “trending news” sidebar. See: Nellie Bowles and Sam Thielman, “Facebook Accused of Censoring Conservatives, Report Says”, *The Guardian*, May 9, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Simon Kemp, “Digital in 2016”, *We Are Social*, January 27, 2016, <http://wearesocial.com/uk/special-reports/digital-in-2016>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> “July 15: Gülenist Coup Attempt”, *Daily Sabah Centre Report*, No: 3, (2016).

At roughly 9.30 p.m., people started messaging one another via WhatsApp, asking whether something was wrong. In the following hours, citizen journalists started sharing what they saw or heard on the streets. Meanwhile, Ankara-based social media users posted footage of F-16s flying low over residential areas, while Istanbulites spread the word that soldiers in Beylerbeyi, a residential district on the Asian coast, were stopping cars and blocking bridges with tanks. Before pro-coup soldiers stormed the public broadcaster TRT to force an anchor to read their statement, a video showing a military commander had begun circulating on social media: “Go back home! The military has seized power!”

Coup plotters took over media outlets including Türkiye’s national public broadcaster TRT with the goal of declaring a premature victory, informing the country of their usurpation of political power. They wanted people to believe the coup was a forgone conclusion. In a previous era, the typical strategy of seizing Parliament, blocking major bridges and airports, and occupying TRT would have been sufficient. They forced TRT anchor Tijen Kardeş to read out a coup declaration at gunpoint on air at 12.04 a.m. on Saturday. The Istanbul office of TRT World, the international news platform of TRT, was invaded by coup plotters at 12.30 a.m. soldiers forcibly halted broadcasting and damaged cables and equipment. Of course, the reason why TRT World was one of the first stopovers of the coup plotters was to cut off communication between Türkiye and the rest of the world.

Other media outlets were also under attack; pro-coup soldiers raided the studios of CNN Turk at 4 a.m., but they were only able to keep the building under control for a short time. Soon after, the Turkish police, with the support of civilians, took control of the building back from the soldiers. A helicopter carrying soldiers tried to land on the rooftop of the Turkuvaz Media Group building but failed due to the satellites placed on top of the building. A group of soldiers shot at the fourth and fifth floors of the same building. From A Haber and CNN Turk to NTV, almost every media outlet in Türkiye showed a hardline stance against the coup attempt and did not back down from a brave broadcasting policy even under harsh pressure.<sup>23</sup>

Digital distribution platforms were also under attack. Thirteen armed pro-coup soldiers raided the Gölbaşı Ground Station of the TÜRKSAT compound, Türkiye’s state-run satellite operator, before 1.30 a.m. and tried to flush out the

<sup>23</sup> “The Night: Uncovering Details of the Failed Coup”, *Daily Sabah Centre Report*, No: 4, (2016).



officers inside, telling them the compound would be bombed. As staff members resisted, two of them were killed and three were injured. Later, an F-16 bombed the compound four times and two Cobra helicopters shot at the building and people around it.

The coup plotters also tried to invade the Turkish Telecommunications company office located in Istanbul at 4 a.m. Later in the day, coup plotters, by now facing firm resistance from civilians, shot at civilians, killing, and injuring many. Around the same time, other soldiers raided Turkish digital broadcasting platform provider Digitürk. Following clashes, the compound was recaptured by Turkish police forces.<sup>24</sup>

While all this was happening, with the proliferation of private media outlets, and particularly the widespread ownership of mobile phones and access to new media mediums, the public was almost immediately mobilized at an unprecedented scale. Numerous live broadcasts were made through applications such as FaceTime, Facebook Live and Periscope. People informed each other about the whereabouts of military forces, where rebels were located and where civilians could gather through applications like WhatsApp.

It took only a few minutes for social media chatter to be picked up by mainstream news outlets in Türkiye and around the world. On an otherwise slow-news night, TV stations broke the news of an unusual movement of troops in Istanbul and Ankara and informed the public that there was “possibly a coup underway”. It was the individuals who responded to the news by taking to the streets in an effort to resist that eventually thwarted the coup attempt.

At 10.20 p.m., then Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım appeared on national television to acknowledge that there was a coup attempt underway. He pledged “not to allow it to succeed”. Echoing the prime minister’s remarks, a commander of the Second Army stated that the coup attempt was illegal and noted that the coup plotters had broken the chain of command. In other words, the Turkish people, and perhaps more importantly soldiers, bureaucrats and politicians received word early on that the Turkish military was opposed to the power grab. In this regard, the media played an important role in the resistance by helping legitimate authorities communicate their message to the public.

A few minutes past midnight, pro-coup soldiers stormed TRT, the public broadcaster, to hold an anchorwoman at gunpoint and force her to read a writ-

<sup>24</sup> “The Night: Uncovering Details of the Failed Coup”.

ten statement on air. In addition to announcing that the government had been removed from power, the putschists ordered all TV channels to circulate the statement – an order these channels disobeyed. This was a trick out of the junta playbook, seizing official media was a classic move intended to strike fear in the hearts of ordinary citizens. In the past, this strategy had worked primarily because there were a limited number of media outlets. Although the incident confirmed that a coup d'état was indeed underway, it also strengthened the people's resolve to resist the plotters.

Seventeen minutes after the coup statement was read on TRT, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan addressed the nation via FaceTime and called on the people to take to the streets and defy the coup plotters. “There is no power higher than the power of the people” he said. “Let them do what they will at public squares and airports. I will join the nation there”.<sup>25</sup> It was later learned that the president had held a press conference outside his hotel in Marmaris earlier, only to find out that there was a technical problem with the satellite connection. When it became clear that his message had not been broadcast, Erdoğan opted to appear on national media via FaceTime. Right after his address to the public through FaceTime, Erdoğan's messages were repeated on his personal and official presidential Twitter accounts. In retrospect, Erdoğan's address to the nation proved to be a crucial factor behind the peaceful resistance. Many participants in the nationwide protest stated that they left their homes after the iconic FaceTime call and that they were encouraged by his personal appeal to them. The live broadcast from the president's phone also helped clear up rumors circulating about his possible assassination.

In essence, there were two fundamental contributions made by both conventional and social media during the coup attempt. First, politicians, military personnel and bureaucrats who opposed the coup plotters were able to communicate their messages to the general population – thereby encouraging activists and forcing plotters to reconsider. Secondly, social media, in particular, made it easier for activists to share updates and coordinate their actions. In many cases, reports on social media about attacks against civilians, government buildings and TV channels were met by an influx of protestors to affected areas in an attempt to help their fellow activists.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, chat groups on messaging

<sup>25</sup>“Erdoğan'ın Darbe Girişimi Gecesi Yayınlanamayan Konuşması”, *Habertürk*, July 23, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Yusuf Devran and Ömer Faruk Özcan, “15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi: Gelenekselden Yeniye Medya Araçlarının Kullanımı”, *AJIT-e: Online Academic Journal of Information Technology*, Vol: 7, No: 25, (2016).

applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram were used by protestors to convince their friends and colleagues to take to the streets and defy the junta-imposed curfew. In addition to ordinary citizens, members of the security forces, including soldiers and police officers, as well as bureaucrats and politicians, used WhatsApp to communicate easily.

Twitter was one of the most used social media platforms throughout the night. It should be noted there was a throttling of connections to Facebook and Twitter in Türkiye on Friday night after 10.50 p.m. on July 15. The global public policy team at Twitter announced in a tweet that “We have no reason to think we’ve been fully blocked in #Turkey, but we suspect there is an intentional slowing of our traffic in country”. While 6 million tweets are posted daily on average in Türkiye, when Twitter was back to normal after 1 a.m. the following morning, 18.66 million tweets were posted on July 16 alone.<sup>27</sup>

The hashtags that were the most widely used during the coup night were #NoCoupInTurkey, #TurkeyCoup and #TurkeyCoupAttempt. More than 7 million messages were posted under these titles in rapid succession. The tweets that were posted on July 16 increased 223 percent, and from July 15 to 17 there were 34,818,329 total tweets posted. These tweets reached an audience of 15 billion people.<sup>28</sup> The uncensored visuals from the anti-coup protests, such as videos and photos, were perhaps the strongest and most positive motivators that drove the people that night. In particular, messages of unity raised the number of people who went out onto the streets. In this regard, social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Periscope were the most widely used applications. When compared to the use of social media, mainstream media like television, radio and newspapers lagged behind. President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Yıldırım asked citizens via Twitter not to leave the streets until the coup attempt was completely over on Twitter. People were able to gather on streets and squares using the hashtag #MilletçeMeydanlardayız (We are on the streets as a nation).

“Twitter and social media may have prevented the coup from taking place” Andrew Selepak, director of the social media master’s program at the University of Florida, told CNBC.<sup>29</sup> He emphasized that there are more than 1.6 billion users

<sup>27</sup> Şükri Oktay Kılıç, “Sosyal Medya Nasıl Darbeye Direnişin Aracı Oldu?”, Al Jazeera Turk, July 19, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Kılıç, “Sosyal Medya Nasıl Darbeye Direnişin Aracı Oldu?”.

<sup>29</sup> Uptin Saiidi, “For Someone Who Doesn’t Like Social Media, Erdogan Used It Effectively to Put Down Coup”, CNBC, July 18, 2016.

on Facebook, saying “No traditional media outlet can broadcast to that size of an audience at one time where world leaders and politicians can directly reach the people unfettered by traditional media”.<sup>30</sup> Other experts also emphasized the impact of social media on the prevention of the coup. “Twitter and the like enabled he [Erdoğan] and his followers [military included] to counter-punch and react effectively” said Former FBI assistant director Chris Swecker. “Time and time again we see situations around the globe” he continued, “Where normal communication modes are compromised, and social media comes through as a vehicle for mass communication”.<sup>31</sup> In a nutshell, the awareness of the importance of civil politics, which had already been formed by the supervision of the AK Party governments for years, found the opportunity to touch the practice that night with the communication advantage provided by the digital tools.

Despite all the efforts of coup plotters to stop people from communicating with each other on the night of the coup attempt, numerous people weew live-streaming across the country through Facebook Live and Periscope. Traditional methods that had been used to censor mainstream media did not work this time. Clay Shirky, an American writer on the impact of new internet technologies and journalism says that when there is a discrepancy between what is going on and the messages the authorities wish to deliver to the public, the traditional response would be censorship; however, this is becoming less and less effective in silencing citizens who have access to social media.<sup>32</sup>

## THE OTHER SIDE: FETÖ’S MEDIA AND ITS LONG ARM

Before jumping to conclusions about the significance of messaging applications and social media, it is important to recall that the same applications/tools were used by coup plotters to discuss operational details, receive instructions and share information with others.<sup>33</sup> To understand the significance of digital tools, one should remember that the use of encrypted messaging applications among the coup plotters dates back to 2014, when the terrorist organization led by Penn-

<sup>30</sup> Saiidi, “For Someone Who Doesn’t Like Social Media, Erdogan Used It Effectively to Put Down Coup”.

<sup>31</sup> Saiidi, “For Someone Who Doesn’t Like Social Media, Erdogan Used It Effectively to Put Down Coup”.

<sup>32</sup> Clay Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere and Political Change”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol: 90, No: 1, (2011), pp. 28-41.

<sup>33</sup> “Darbecilerin WhatsApp Konuşmaları”, *Milliyet*, July 18, 2016.

sylvania-based Fethullah Gülen started using By Lock, another application that requires an eight-digit password to sign up, to avoid scrutiny and communicate securely. This information is important in terms of showing that Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) members already have a very high level of digitalization practices.

As a matter of fact, WhatsApp was one of the most important communication tools for the coup plotters during the July 15 night. From the beginning of the coup attempt, the putschists organized each step through instructions given in the WhatsApp groups. In their conversations, the plotters discussed how to intervene and issue orders to cut off all lines of communication in the country to prevent the protestors from coordinating their actions. When they tried but ultimately failed to slow the speed of social media to hinder the resistance, the pro-coup soldiers moved to seize control of conventional media outlets.

From examining the power and speed of social media in mobilizing the masses, it can be concluded that the coup plotters and their supporters also had a specific social media strategy of their own. As such, it is crucially important to properly analyze the ways in which propaganda was utilized by the coup plotters, primarily on Facebook and Twitter, when the people took to the streets to resist the coup. In doing so, the focus should not only be on the supporters of the coup, as this group by and large were silent. Rather, the important focus must be on those who did not necessarily openly support the coup, but subtly assisted in creating an air of confusion by releasing fake news to demoralize those resisting. It is quite clear why the supporters of the coup remained largely silent, as they were aware of the general anti-coup sentiment in Türkiye.

Due to the country's turbulent past, the public in Türkiye has developed a very negative perception of anything coup related, especially since 2002. As such, even anti-government opposition does not have a favorable view of coups, and this was clearly demonstrated in the national unity Türkiye saw when resisting against the putschists. This explains the logic behind the coup plotters' propaganda strategy to release rumors and photos to demoralize the civilians resisting the plot. One major photo circulating on social media claimed that the anti-coup civilians were torturing the "soldiers of the nation" in an attempt to cause alarm and justify the coup or alternatively, to instill doubt or the illusion of a moral high ground using the argument "I do not support the coup, but one should not attack soldiers of this country". Though, for the most part, they failed in disuniting the people and galvanizing them in support of the coup, they did succeed in creating some sort of

discussion and speculation – which led some people, particularly those who were already anti-government, to sit on the fence and have second thoughts.

## COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The question that begs to be answered, however, is how and why the concentrated social media campaigns supporting and legitimizing the coup attempt failed on July 15. As was seen previously during the Gezi Park protests and other anti-government movements, it is generally easy to create and develop campaigns and discourses against the government via social media. Why is it that, in this particular case, the careful propaganda efforts failed to create the desired effect, and if anything, further motivated the people to resist? Perhaps the answer is in the strength of collective memory, which renders the Turkish people more aware of the detrimental effect of the coup – regardless of how they might feel about the government. This is ironically also in addition to the silence of coup supporters, who were afraid of voicing their support given that coups are criminalized in Türkiye.

Although ultimately this anti-coup sentiment influenced people's decision to take to the streets, to claim that it is the only reason would be underestimating the entire resistance. Naturally, in events like this there would be many causes – however it must be noted that a major motivation for the people was the trust in Erdoğan and his strong leadership. This is of course fundamentally tied to the protection of democracy, which the Turkish people went through much pain and effort to achieve. There is no doubt that the safeguarding of this value that cost the nation many years and lives, would be a great motivation against any threat of harming it.

As an indicator of the conscious resistance, in the following days, after the coup attempt failed, millions of citizens continued to gather on the streets for “democracy watch” events every night for almost a month. The events were often covered by media outlets, which produced and aired documentaries about the failed coup as well as the experiences of those who helped thwart the attempt. Citizen journalists continued to document their experiences with amateur videos and photos taken with their phones. They often published their own photos on Facebook and Twitter and invited their friends to join them. As a result, like-minded individuals came together through social media while cyber activists launched blogs to tell the world what happened and share videos, photos, and news articles online.

Ultimately, the people challenged traditional sources of information and used social media to advance the views of alternative voices, mobilizing and organizing

to challenge the coup. People were proactive participants in the fight against the coup instead of being passive recipients, which was the plan of coup plotters. At this point, it should be noted that the collective memory was activated by many social media users throughout the night who shared easy and quick content reminding the public about the results of previous coups. This point, where strong content is combined with the power of social media, is one of the main pillars that strengthened the resistance. It is not difficult to predict that it would take days to produce similar content with more quality to be used on TV channels or other mainstream communication tools. This is an important proof in terms of showing that the social media platforms, where the non-professional is the norm, is more useful and practical than the mainstream communication channels, despite their simple feature.

## CONCLUSION

It is important to recall Craig's comments on the nature of media as being a part of public life, rather than a neutral observer. In this regard, specifically when reflecting on media during and after coups in Türkiye, Turkish media is deeply relevant as an arena where political and public life intersect. As such, the role of media in July 15 is an apt example that can be used to illustrate the role of new media.

This article has outlined how the Turkish media experienced a symbiotic relationship developed between the military and the mainstream media establishment in Turkish political history with many reporters, columnists and editors acquiescing to the paternalistic, hegemonic role played by the military in politics and public life, creating an echo chamber that marginalized dissenting voices. This article has further elaborated on how the power of social media highlighted a new reality. The necessity of new policies in a new world to guide new media was clearly seen that night. The main argument of this article is that developments in digitalization played an important role in the resistance of civilians to the July 15 coup attempt although the main dynamic behind it is the political awareness and steps in the direction of demilitarization in Türkiye during the 2000s.

The proliferation of private media outlets, the introduction and availability of new technologies and platforms made possible by smartphones, further facilitated interactions among civil society actors and democratization in Türkiye. Decentralized in nature, the more interactive social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp shifted media patterns in Türkiye from being primarily a consumer activity to making individuals content producers. This shift from the

vertical to horizontal, created reciprocal and interactive communication patterns, making it easier for citizens to share views in free spaces, organize themselves and mobilize in a space where, as Clay Shirky reflects, their voices could not be easily censored. On the night of July 15, audiences all around the world, with access to various social media platforms, witnessed the actions of the coup plotters in Türkiye. While the international media's reporting on the coup in its aftermath was biased, it was ordinary citizens who accurately reported on the events of that night and it is how the details of the coup attempt were heard in different parts of the world as well as Türkiye.

Regarding the role of media, one might claim that although the media in the July 15 case was not the main actor, it was an important tool of resistance against the coup. However, while social media played a vital role as a medium and platform to organize resistance to the coup, it remains a means through which Turkish citizens took the initiative and exercised agency. Türkiye's new media landscape facilitated this direct challenge in a way that the media of previous generations could not. However, this development would not have been possible without a desire by Turkish citizens to mobilize and protect their democracy, a view which clearly had the sympathy of existing independent media platforms. What the July 15 coup attempt demonstrates is a rebalancing of existing relations between a media often co-opted and used to legitimize coup attempts, and a new media, where Turkish citizens play an active role in protecting the integrity of civilian institutions in Türkiye's modern democracy. As such, it is a good example that can be used to illustrate the role of new media in a global world.

As a final but vital note, while manipulations and fabricated news were met with a poor response on July 15, it is still worth considering the opposite scenario. Despite social media's positive role on the night of July 15, the lack of limits on what you post, for example, can carry its own risks. In this sense, it is crucial to specify the legal infrastructure in a more comprehensive manner.



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## CHAPTER 7

# EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF COUPS IN TÜRKİYE

KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT\*

The July 15 coup attempt was one of the most dramatic turning points in the history of the Turkish Republic. Since the establishment of the multiparty system, Türkiye has encountered several different types of military interventions. Some of them were successful while others failed. Some took the shape of a memorandum issued to force the democratically elected government to adopt certain measures determined by the military or otherwise resign while others were full military interventions that overthrew the democratically elected government and dismantled the political and social structures in the country. In most instances, the military was very strategic in terms of the timing of their interventions and waited until the moment was ripe in order to gain the consent and support of the ordinary people. During such interventions, even those who were against the coup often acquiesced to the coup attempt. The political leaders were mostly obedient to the coups and did not resist the intervention or arrests. There were not any calls to resist the demands of the putschists. In the 1980 coup, the leaders of major political parties, including Suleyman Demirel, Bulent Ecevit, and Necmettin Erbakan, were detained on the morning of the coup. The only leader of a major political party who resisted the junta to surrender was Alparslan Türkeş, who went into hiding in Ankara before surrendering two days after the coup. This is as a pattern in civil-military relations of Türkiye. While the politicians avoided making comments about the coup even after the junta, the public usually waited until the first

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elections after the military intervention to respond to the coup makers by voting against the military's preferred candidates.

However, the July 15 coup attempt represented a significant aberration in terms of the reactions of the political leaders and the broader society. For the first time on July 15, the coup attempt was prevented and stopped by the Turkish people through nonviolent resistance. The rapid civilian mobilization against the coup attempt was probably one of the most defining characteristics of that night together with the reactions of the political leaders. Citizens who had never attended public rallies or demonstrations, even before the call of the political leaders, occupied the streets, bridges, squares and key transportation hubs of major Turkish cities in order to prevent the coup attempt. This kind of mobilization and heroic resistance surprised many analysts of Türkiye. Although there were debates in regards to the increasingly active civilian control of the military in the political realm, there was not much discussion on the potential societal reaction to coups and military interventions in politics in Türkiye. In most previous coups, the Turkish public did not contest the declaration of martial law by the junta and obeyed the curfew. In the case of the 1980 coup, those who faced the danger of being detained or prosecuted and did not want to surrender preferred to go into hiding and leave the country in the first opportunity.

There are different potential explanations for the rapid civilian mobilization during the July 15 coup attempt and the public resistance to the coup attempt by the mostly Gülenist members of the military. In another piece about the July 15 coup attempt, I mentioned some of these issues.<sup>1</sup> Social media and its effective use during the coup attempt certainly played a major role on July 15.<sup>2</sup> The first calls to resist the coup attempt came from social media users. Especially after the escalation of the situation, social media users were very effective in spreading information about the coup attempt to the world and later they again effectively used social media platforms, such as Twitter, to organize, assemble, and launch rallies against the coup. President Erdoğan's message through Facetime, broadcast by CNN Turk, also had a major impact, emboldening and mobilizing large segments of the Turkish people against the coup attempt. For a little while after the coup attempt began, the putschists tried to give the impression that Erdoğan had

<sup>1</sup> Kılıç Kanat, "Understanding the July 15<sup>th</sup> Failed Coup," in *Turkey's July 15th Coup: What Happened and Why*, ed. Hakan Yavuz and Bayram Balci (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Yasmeen Abutaleb, "Coup bid in Turkey carried live on social media despite blockages," *Reuters*, July 15, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-socialmedia-idUSKCN0ZV2OY>.

left the country and was seeking asylum from other countries, such as Germany and Britain. The emergence of President Erdoğan on TV during the critical hours of the coup gave hope and determination to the people. In the meantime, several other political and military leaders used media and social media in order to express their opposition to the putschists.<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned in the chapter in this volume by Pinar Kandemir and Serdar Karagoz, the recent coup in Egypt and the violence and repression that took place during the coup and in its aftermath also played a significant role in the rapid mobilization of the Turkish society.<sup>4</sup> When the Egyptian coup took place in the summer of 2013, the Turkish people watched the violent suppression of the rallies against the coup by the military of Egypt. There were widespread demonstrations in Türkiye against the military intervention and the massacre that took place in the streets of Cairo and other cities. During this time, Türkiye was cited as the country that demonstrated the strongest reaction against the coup in Egypt both through its society and its political leaders. The reaction of the Turkish people was not only against the putschists in Egypt, but equally against those Western countries who did not react to the coup strongly and even avoided using the “c” word in order to describe what happened in the country.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the symbol of Rabia became a very popular gesture in Türkiye not only because of the coup in Egypt but also as a result of the silence of the international community. The coup in Egypt and the Western reaction to it resulted in a widespread belief that the people of a country will be on their own during a military intervention while Western countries will try to continue business as usual with the junta regime. When the coup attempt took place on July 15, the memories of the coup in Egypt were still fresh in the social psyche of the Turkish people.

In addition to the impact of these factors, there were several other important reasons for the active participation of thousands of individuals in the resistance against the coup attempt in Türkiye. The confrontation that took place on the night of July 15 can also be interpreted as a result of the delayed social response to previous military interventions in Türkiye. As mentioned previously, the Turkish public typically responded to coups with silence and obedience to the orders of the

<sup>3</sup> Jared Malsin, “This Is What Istanbul Was Like As Turkey’s Attempted Coup Played Out,” *TIME Magazine*, July 16, 2016, <http://time.com/4409152/turkey-coup-istanbul-army-police-explosions/>.

<sup>4</sup> Cite Pinar and Serdar’s article here

<sup>5</sup> Kılıç Buğra Kanat, “Vice President Biden’s visit to Turkey,” *Daily Sabah*, August 19, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/kilic-bugra-kanat/2016/08/20/vice-president-bidens-visit-to-turkey>.

junta councils. For instance, even after the execution of charismatic Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in 1960, who had received almost 50 percent of the votes, there were no protests against the coup. Following the 1980 coup, the reaction of Turkish public society was more or less the same. Despite the detention of all of the political figures that had the support of millions of people in Türkiye, the public did not demonstrate an immediate resistance to the coup in September 1980. Witnesses of the coup commonly described it as if they had woken up and the military was in power. There was a general understanding that it would be futile to attempt to resist the orders of the military.

During and in the aftermath of the February 28 ‘postmodern coup’ in 1997, there were some rallies against the “recommendations” of the National Security Council. However, the number of demonstrators remained limited and tended to only come from certain groups. More significantly, these demonstrations took place after the adoption of security measures accepted at the National Security Council. For instance, when the military sent tanks in the town of Sincan to threaten the democratically elected civilian government through a show of force in the streets, there was no open confrontation with these tanks and military servicemen. During this process, high ranking members of the military also became very visible social actors. In different social gatherings, including concerts and receptions, higher echelons of the military regularly showed up and made statements against the civilian government. During these public appearances, there were no protests or reactions to the military’s intervention in Turkish politics. Later, Sevket Kazan, who was a deputy of the Welfare Party, which was the main target of the February 28 coup, reported a conversation between himself and Necmettin Erbakan, who had been the prime minister during the soft coup. According to Kazan, he had asked Erbakan to make a speech to call the supporters and sympathizers of the Welfare Party to the streets to demonstrate against the ‘recommendations’ of the National Security Council. However, Erbakan reminded Kazan that during the 1960 coup and after the execution of Menderes, the Turkish people had displayed inaction to the coup and thus such a call would be futile to stop the influence of the military in the politics in Türkiye. Later, the organizers of the coup characterized their actions as a ‘postmodern coup’ in which the military utilized public mobilization, the media, and institutions of the state in order to force the democratically elected government of Türkiye to resign.<sup>6</sup> In the various coups

<sup>6</sup> “28 Şubat post-modern darbesine giden süreç,” *Sabah*, February 28, 2016, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/galeri/turkiye/28-subat-postmodern-darbesine-giden-surec>.

prior to 2016, the people's reactions to the coups had presented a clear pattern of acquiescence to military interventions in Türkiye.

The July 15 coup attempt represented a dramatic deviation from this pattern of silence, obedience, and consent to the rule of the military. A large segment of the Turkish society went out into the streets to stop the military takeover of the government. Although social media and the impact of President Erdoğan were important factors in stopping this attempt, another important factor in this process was the growing public awareness of the historical trend of coups, a development that emerged particularly in the early 2000s. This awareness and debates took place in part as a result of significant political reforms that took place within the framework of the EU integration process after the Helsinki Summit. In this period, the Turkish government took important steps to create conditions guaranteeing active civilian control of the military by changing some institutions that were established by the junta regime in order to provide full control of the civilian government. For instance, the structure of the National Security Council was changed in order to place civilians in the majority of positions.

Another major factor was the increased recognition of the detrimental effects of coups on social and political life as a result of the production of movies and TV series about the previous coups. Starting in the early years of the 2000s, there was almost a sudden explosion of cultural products such as movies and TV series that dealt with the previous coups. Although the last successful coup was considered to be a "postmodern coup," since the architects of this coup were still alive and occupied key positions of power, the producers of these movies and TV series preferred to focus on the 1960 and 1980 coups. Previously, documentaries had been produced on the coups in Türkiye and its political history which became extremely popular. However, the new wave of coup related popular culture products involved in particular movies and TV series that gathered large audiences.

For Turkish people of different generations, these products of popular culture represented different meanings. For the generation who actually experienced the coup and its aftermath, these movies and series recalled memories from the past and the trauma of military interventions. The interruption of their lives by the coup was probably the most significant dimension of this remembering. For the younger generation, on the other hand, the movies and TV series visualized the impact of coups on social life. For many years, this impact had been discussed in different circles but these movies helped the trauma become more understandable



particularly for the younger generation.<sup>7</sup> These films and TV series contributed to the public's understanding of the years of military interventions and junta regimes, even among those who had never lived through those periods.

The topic of the coup was initially more prevalent among the more conservative segments of the society, which had been the target of the last two military interventions; the February 28 postmodern coup and the April 27 e-memorandum. However, other groups in Türkiye increasingly became interested, especially with the diversification of these popular culture products. Initially, predominantly former leftists and liberals started to show interest in these movies as the main protagonists tended to be leftist young men and women who were brutally beaten and tortured under military rule. Later, other victims of the coups in Türkiye also started to provide their own narratives of their suffering under the same junta regimes. As a result, a deeply coup-sensitive population emerged in Türkiye prior to the July 15 coup attempt, which aroused a widespread sentiment of “never again” in regards to military interventions in Turkish politics. The stories were violent, harsh, and disruptive to the lives of ordinary people and the junta regimes were depicted as unfair, repressive, dark, and full of torture and inhumane treatment. This dark picture of the coup periods was crucially important in uncovering and remembering the negative legacy of the successful military interventions. In this article, some examples of products of popular culture and the related emergence of the anti-military intervention discourse will be discussed in order to explain the rapid reaction of the people against the coup attempt on July 15.

## **TURKISH PUBLIC'S ATTITUDE TOWARD PREVIOUS COUPS**

The coups have been an important determinant of social and political life in Türkiye. Since the beginning of multiparty democracy in Türkiye, the military interventions have been a constant phenomenon of political life. The military involved itself in Turkish politics under numerous different circumstances for various reasons, leading to a traumatized society which had different type of memories in regards to the coups and junta regimes in Türkiye. The inhumane treatment of political prisoners and violation of the rights of individuals under martial law left

<sup>7</sup> See Ozan Tekin, “Factories of Memory: Remembering the 12 September Military Coup In Beynelmillel and Bu Son Olsun,” (2012), for further discussion.

deep scars in the minds of the Turkish people.<sup>8</sup> Political figures who went through torture and mistreatment often talked about their experiences and memories from the days of the military junta. From both the political left and right, almost all of the major political figures experienced some form of this treatment. Yet, this trauma had been often a less visible part of social life. For many years, memories of the junta years seldom found a large audience. Some of the movies that depicted the violence and repression of the coups and the junta regimes were either prohibited by the state or found only a limited audience, often among more educated classes of Turkish people. Debates and discussions about the coups and the junta regimes did not constitute a predominant issue for the ordinary people. Of course, this also had something to do with the strength of the institutions that the coup makers established following the 1980 coup. The state apparatus made it difficult for the people to commemorate junta days. Years of dramatic change along with economic development and growth during the tenure of Turgut Ozal in the 1980s contributed to this period of amnesia. Thus, closure about the trauma of the coup did not happen for many years.

The fact that the 1980 coup took place after a civil war that cost the lives of thousand from both the right and the left made some citizens even willingly adopt this selective amnesia. In fact, the trauma of the civil war in the 1970s mostly overshadowed the coup and the junta regime that came in its aftermath. When most people spoke of the coup, they inadvertently started to talk about the 1970s and often commended the military for stopping the “bloodshed” and “anarchy” of these years. Many people compared the chaos of 1970s with the stability of 1980s and considered the coup to be the lesser evil. This situation was of course in part a result of the indoctrination of the public by the instruments of the state. As a result of the successful adoption of this policy, for a long time after the coup, Turkish society could not directly come to terms with the trauma of the coup. There were not many products of popular culture during this period about the coup and its aftermath. The outflow of intellectuals from Türkiye also contributed to this lack of productions. Many prominent political elites from the left and right wing of the Turkish political spectrum left and settled in different countries around Europe. Although they did not have to confront the military in person, they told the stories of their friends and other victims of the coup in these countries. Thus, they carried

<sup>8</sup> See Elifcan Karacan, “Remembering the 1980 Turkish Military Coup d’État,” (2016), for further discussion.

the trauma of the coup to these countries and formed groups to support each other in the diaspora.

The failure to confront the military once more during the postmodern coup of February 28, 1997, generated yet another major shock to Turkish society. Yet again, the military intended to engineer social and religious life in Türkiye by establishing strong regulations. The National Security Council's "recommendations" generated a new trauma particularly for the more conservative segments of the society. The adoption of a strict ban against wearing headscarves in the colleges and the regulation of the Imam Hatip schools forced a generation, in particular female students, to drop their dreams for their future.<sup>9</sup> The Western world's silence against the coup and military interventions only further alienated the Turkish public from the Western world. According to many in Türkiye, the Western countries endorsed the military by failing to criticize the intervention by the military, which strengthened the already existing skepticism in regards to the Western countries' position about coups and their commitment to democracy. During this period, another debate started about how long the period of military tutelage would continue. The Chief of Staff Kivrikoglu responded to these debates by stating that the effects of the February 28 intervention would continue for "1000 years," indicating the military's intention to exert influence over civilian politics endlessly.<sup>10</sup>

After the beginning of the EU integration process following the Helsinki Summit in 1999, Türkiye entered a new era of democratization and political reform. Most of the EU's requirements for active civilian control of the military were fulfilled by the Turkish government in a very short period of time. The military found itself in a serious dilemma. For years, the military had considered itself to be the bastion of modernity and Westernization in Türkiye. The military not only presented itself as the first Westernized institution in the country but also considered Westernization to be its institutional mission, and at the same time, the source of its legitimacy. With the EU reform process, the military found the Westernization process at odds with its corporate interests. The changes in the composition of the National Security Council and several other political reforms that took place during this period brought active civilian control of the military into the legal

<sup>9</sup> Bülent Arınç, Yılmaz Ensaroğlu, Avni Özgürel, and Fehmi Kuru, "Bin Yıllık Darbe": 28 Şubat," *The SETA Foundation*, no. 5 (February 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Abdullah Kılıç, "Kıvrıkoğlu'dan Ecevit'e: '28 Şubat daha bitmedi!'," *Haberturk*, February 28, 2012, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/720006-kivrikoglundan-ecevite-28-subat-daha-bitmedi->

framework, though the military demonstrated that it still had expansive influence in Turkish politics. At critical junctures of the political reform process, the Turkish military made sure that its voice was heard and its opinions were taken into consideration by the civilian government.

One of the most pivotal confrontations between the Turkish military and the civilian government in the new millennium took place during the 2007 presidential elections. Amid demonstrations by those who opposed the election of a president from the AK Party, the military once again stepped in and released a memorandum expressing “sensitivity and concern” of the Turkish military about secularism in Türkiye.<sup>11</sup> There was general surprise among large segments of Turkish society, because the political reforms were thought to have ended the military’s superior role in Turkish politics. While such an intervention was hoped for by some, a great majority of the society thought that the period of military interventions was over. The government’s response to the memorandum was very assertive, describing the situation as unacceptable in a democracy. The response also reiterated that the Chief of Staff was supposed to be an institution under the control of the civilian government and that its roles and mission were described in the constitution, including the fact that the Chief of Staff takes their orders directly from the government.<sup>12</sup> This was the first time that a Turkish government reacted so strongly to a military intervention. While the societal reaction followed the reaction of the government, it was not definitive in confronting the military’s involvement and interference in the presidential elections. Instead, the Turkish public preferred to go with the standard reaction and waited until the referendum and early elections to respond.

In the elections, the AK Party increased its vote share by 12 percent from 34 percent in 2002 to 46 percent. Following this, the government decided to take up the issue of presidential elections, which had become one of the bottlenecks of the Turkish parliamentary system in Türkiye and had previously provided the military grounds for interventions. Especially before the 1980 coup, the inability of the parliament to elect a president was considered a serious cause of the coup by the putschists. In order to prevent another instance of military intervention, the government took action by calling a referendum on an amendment to the

<sup>11</sup> “Excerpts of Turkish Army Statement,” *BBC News*, April 28, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6602775.stm>.

<sup>12</sup> “27 Nisan Bildirisi’ne tepkiler nasıldı?,” *Dunya Bulteni*, April 27, 2012, <http://www.dunyabulteni.net/haber/207705/27-nisan-bildirisine-tepkiler-nasildi->

constitution to directly elect the president by a popular vote. 69% percent of the people voted “yes” in this referendum, which was interpreted as the Turkish people’s opposition to military intervention and a direct response to the April 27 memorandum.

## EVOLUTION OF POPULAR CULTURE AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF COUPS

In the ten-year period between the military intervention in 2007 and the coup attempt of July 15 there were obviously significant changes in the behavior of the Turkish public. As mentioned above, while the Turkish public avoided a direct confrontation with the Turkish military following the publication of the memorandum in 2007, the Turkish public of 2016 chose to confront the tanks and artillery of the putschists. Whatever changed in the sociology of the Turkish people during this period indicated a dramatic transformation of civil-military relations in the country. While the elected officials resisted the coup attempt and led the Turkish public in 2007, large segments of society came out in direct resistance against a more direct military coup attempt even before politicians made statements in 2016. Social media and the impact of Erdoğan’s call for the mobilization of masses were important determinants of this sudden outpour of the people to the streets. However, there was also more widespread recognition among the Turkish people in regards to the impact of coups on society. One of the most significant instruments that made this recognition possible were the products of popular culture that were produced in Türkiye and widely circulated in these first years of the new millennium. Although they were not the only determinant of this change, these movies and series generated serious discussions about the effects of coups over the society.

Coups and military interventions have been an important topic in the movies of many countries that have suffered under junta regimes. The movies on coups in Latin America have been an especially important subgenre of this field. Movies such as Andres Wood’s *Machuca* (2004), Luis Puenzo’s *The Official Story* (1985) and Costa Gavras’s *Missing* (1982) reached audiences numbering in the millions. In Türkiye, this genre blossomed in a much later period. The boom period of movies on coups and military interventions overlapped with the sudden growth in the film industry in Türkiye. During this period, different TV series became one of the most important export goods of Türkiye. Due to the immense volume of audience and viewership in other countries, some scholars even started to call

Turkish soap operas the new “soft power” of Türkiye.<sup>13</sup> They were also considered by some scholars as instruments of public diplomacy.<sup>14</sup>

Movies and TV series also played different social functions in Türkiye. Especially in regards to the political history of Türkiye, some TV series became the most significant source of remembering and commemorating. These movies also impacted the public perception of the coups and the significantly impacted the relationship of Turkish society with the military juntas. One of the most significant of these roles was in changing the public perception of the junta commanders and shaping the perception of the military coups. The military and its interventions were long considered to be “red lines” that should not be violated by any other institution or sector of the society. Large segments of society avoided any direct criticism of the coups and the generals that were involved in the coup, allowing the putschists to enjoy relative immunity from criticism. In addition to the constitution crafted after the 1980 coup, the norms that were established as a result of society’s fear of the putschists played a role in shaping these standards. Some of the movies of this period played an important role in destroying the threshold of fear over the society and normalizing civil-military relations in the country. Instead of being an object of fear and silent grievance, the putschists and elements of the junta regimes turned out to be an element that could even be ridiculed by the Turkish society.

The comedy movies whose scripts revolved around the periods of military interventions played an important role in this process. These comedy films, such as *Vizontele Tuuba*, which tells the story of a town in Anatolia before and during the coup of 1980, became instrumental in presenting the ridiculousness of the attitude and mode of thinking of those who claimed to save the state by organizing the military coup. In this movie, the military and the repressive state apparatus before the coup became a source of comedy and an object of satire. This repression was ridiculed together with the ignorance of the people representing the state in this town. For instance, a political dissident from a big city was sent to serve as the head librarian in a town without a library. In another scene, the commander of the military post in the town, after arrest of the leftists due to the infighting among

<sup>13</sup> Owen Matthews, “Turkish Soap Operas Are Sweeping the Middle East,” *Newsweek*, September 5, 2011, <http://www.newsweek.com/turkish-soap-operas-are-sweeping-middle-east-67403>.

<sup>14</sup> B. Senem Cevik, “Turkish soap opera diplomacy: A western projection by a Muslim source,” *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy* 5, no. 1 (2014): 6, <http://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=exchange>.

the different fractions in the town, had a conversation with the elected mayor of the city who came to ask that the detainees be pardoned.

Mayor: Be generous and sort this out without going to the court. Most are from the leading families of our city.

Commander: What are they thinking? Both the local small-town jokers and the big city ringleaders. Who do they think they are? They want socialism. God. If it was any good, the state would create it!

*Commander then turns to the librarian*

Commander: You're the library director?

Librarian: That's right.

Commander: What kind of books do you have?

Librarian: We don't have any yet.

Commander: Then there is nothing for me to worry about. Even you will do a decent job there.<sup>15</sup>

The commander in a short scene was portrayed as a person that lacked basic reasoning with a very bad temper. In other parts of the movie, some other putschists were also represented as paranoid and ignorant. Towards the end of the movie, the coup of 1980 took place. Immediately after the coup, most of the political figures in the town were rounded up by the military. As the librarian was also among those who were arrested, his wife and his daughter had to leave for Istanbul. The joker of the town Deli Emin (Mad Emin), who had a crush on the librarian's daughter, wrote her name TUUBA on the mountain while she was leaving the town. At the end of the movie a bunch of soldiers try to decipher the name since they think it is an abbreviation of a political group.

Soldier: Commander, our friend fixed it up right. "The Turkish National Civilized Peace Academy."

Commander: Letters have to go or else you will go.

*Beynelmilel (International)*, which was produced in 2006, is another example of movies that satirized the post-coup period and the rule of junta regime. Set in Adiyaman during the rule of the junta council in 1982, a group of local musicians who used to "illegally" perform were detained and forced to perform in the parade welcoming the members of the junta council. In one of the tragi-

<sup>15</sup> The translation is from the subtitles on Netflix.

comic scenes, after the martial law command center prohibited some of the most popular local songs most probably because they are in the Kurdish language, the locals insist that the musicians play these songs at a wedding. As a solution, the musicians try to play these songs “silently” and those who want to dance with these songs dance “silently” as well. There is a prevalent fear among everybody in town including the musicians. So, the moment they see some soldiers patrolling in town they start playing national marches loudly in order to avoid the anger of the commanders. The scene brings to mind the anthropological case studies of other authoritarian regimes that found that people try to act as if they obey the rules regardless of how ridiculous it sounds but in the meantime they also find different ways to demonstrate resistance to the repression and at the same time not to be caught by the authorities.<sup>16</sup> The situation that the martial law created in the movie leads to a similar form of symbolic politics by the citizens of the town as they try to find different ways to maneuver around the limitations and prohibitions adopted by the junta regime and live normal lives. The tragicomedy of the movie provides a clear-eyed portrayal of the junta regime in Türkiye in the 1980s.

The commander of the martial law in *Beynelmilel* also decreed that the local folk music was prohibited and asked the musicians of the town to become “an orchestra” and to play “modern music” in town, even making the local musicians play tango for military balls. The paradoxical relation of the military regimes in Türkiye with the modernization and Westernization was a frequently repeated issue that was raised by scholars of civil-military relations in Türkiye. The movie also portrays this awkward situation of forced cultural westernization of the people of Anatolia. The movie also portrays the negligence of the commanders in town in the midst of this forced westernization. In a critical part of the movie, the local musicians played the “International”, a left-wing anthem at the march welcoming the junta council. After they claimed that they composed the music and dedicated it to the council, they received no protest from the commander, who obviously did not know about this song. When the council members arrived, they figured out the music is actually a leftist anthem and considered it to be a conspiracy against the military council in Türkiye.

These portrayals of the junta regimes generated an important factor for breaking the threshold of fear over the society. Just like in other instances,

<sup>16</sup> Lisa Wedeen, “Acting “As If”: Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 3 (1998): 503-23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/179273>.



humor became an important instrument of resistance in movies against the junta regimes.<sup>17</sup> This definitely played an important role later in the societal perception of putschists in Türkiye. Another frequent topic of these movies was the interruption of the lives of ordinary people during coups. Although few movies of the previous decade made about the coups focused on the lives of the political characters and their suffering under the military junta, the new generation of movies focused on the lives of ordinary people during this period. One of the most popular among those has been the TV series called *Seksenler*, which has been running on Turkish televisions since 2012. Directed by Murat Aras and Birol Guven, the series presents the lives of ordinary Turkish people in an ordinary town in Türkiye in the 1980s. Most of the characters are from the lower middle class of Turkish society and most are fairly apolitical. Until the coup of September 12, other than the seldom appearance of several political figures from the left and right of the political spectrum, everybody is merely trying to make ends meet in the neighborhood. However, the coup on the night of the September 12 significantly altered the lifestyles of the people. In addition to the political figures, some apolitical personalities in the movie were also detained by the police. The martial law and curfew altered the general atmosphere of the town. The coup ended the cheerfulness of the people as the prohibitions even limited the celebratory gatherings, darkening the mood in the neighborhood. The families with young children became extremely concerned following the arbitrary arrests of young men without any form of political or ideological allegiance. For the commander who started to run the affairs in the town, everything became cause for suspicion. The name of books and the shape of the beards of individuals could be a cause for the arrest. The houses of the ordinary people were searched and since all political books were considered illegal, people started to burn their books. The questions of the martial law commanders became increasingly unreasonable and illogical, making it difficult for people to respond. The tragicomedy becomes obvious when one of the theatre students from the town, Niyazi, who did not know that the coup had occurred, was arrested as a result of arbitrariness and ignorance of the commander.

<sup>17</sup> Majken Jul Sorensen, "Humor as a Serious Strategy of Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression," *Peace & Change: A Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 2 (2008): 167–190, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2008.00488.x/abstract>.

Commander: Give me your ID? What are these books all about?

Niyazi: These books are all Shakespeare. The sonatas of Shakespeare.

Commander's aide: Commander, the face resembles to a communist.

Commander: Whose face?

Commander's aide: Shakespeare's.

Niyazi: Commander no. Shakespeare is not a communist. He is a humanist.

Commander's aide: What is humanist.

*Niyazi tries to explain humanist. While explaining he reads the 66th sonata of the Shakespeare. There are "dangerous" words in this sonata such as poverty, labor and cowards.*

Commander's aide: He said poverty and he claimed that we are cowards.

Commander: Did he tell coward to us?

Commander's aide: Yes sir. He is definitely a separatist. Shall we arrest him? The lieutenant asks us to arrest at least 150 today.

Commander: Arrest him.

Niyazi's desperation and the commander's carelessness represented a picture of Turkish society during the coup. Among the people in town, there was a silent opposition to what was happening. Many in the neighborhood were very critical in private but in front of the soldiers they became very obedient. For more than a season, the series told stories of the changes in the lives of ordinary people. Those who were detained were interrogated and most of them were tortured or faced enhanced interrogation techniques. When they left the prison, many came back with significant psychological scars. The people in town all witnessed this change in the life of these political prisoners.

In *Vizontele Tuuba* and *Beynelmilel*, the lives of the people following the coup were never the same due to the dramatic impact of the coup on almost every aspect of their lives. One of the most notable movies of this genre was *Babam ve Oglum* (2005), directed by Cagan Irmak, which presented the effect of the September 12 coup on the life a single family. In the movie, the wife of the leftist political character had to deliver her baby in a park on the night of September 12 because of the curfew and impossibility of finding a car or an ambulance. During the delivery, she died and shortly after that the husband was imprisoned because of his political background. He left the prison extremely ill and had to leave his child to his parents, with whom he did not have

relations because of his political activities before he died. The movie depicts the loss of a generation - both wife and husband- because of the military coup of September 12.<sup>18</sup>

This impact of the coup and junta regime on the daily life of the people was also presented in the movie *Bu Son Olsun* (2012), directed by Orcun Benli, which told the story of five homeless people living on the streets during and after the coup. The homeless five find themselves in an awkward position when they are arrested accidentally and sent to prison because of their violation of the curfew. They try to survive in the prison by following different tactics. In a short period of time, it became a comedy of errors. The military regime was once more presented as violent, aggressive, and harsh.<sup>19</sup> This notion is also seen in some other movies such as *Hukümet Kadın* (2013), directed by Sermiyan Midyat, although it did not deal directly with the military coup. At the end of the movie, the impact of the coup over the lives of the people in the village turns out to be dramatic. The dynamism of social and political life in the village was dramatically disrupted following the coup.

Produced concurrently with these movies were an increasing number of TV series on the coups which also had significant effects on the perception of the military coups in the minds of the Turkish people. These long-running series generated a great deal of debate and discussion among the Turkish people. The increasing quality of the film industry in Türkiye drew a broad audience that was reintroduced to the subject matter. Especially for the younger generation who did not witness the coup of September 12, these series were a way of learning about the coup and junta regime. In addition to *Seksenler*, which is mentioned above, there was a number of similar TV series that were broadcast during this period. *Cemberimde Gul Oya* (2004-2005), directed by Cagan Irmak, was one of the first TV series in this genre. Although the series primarily focused on the lives of people in the late 1970s, it also demonstrated the impact the coup had on their lives. The fear of the people during the coup of 1980 made the rounds in different debates and in discussion platforms, forcing people to rethink the political developments of the 1970s.

*Hatirla Sevgili* (2006-2008), directed by Ummu Burhan and Faruk Tebes and produced shortly after *Cemberimde Gul Oya*, became a major hit in Türkiye.

<sup>18</sup> See Ozan Tekin, "Factories of Memory: Remembering the 12 September Military Coup In Beynelmül and Bu Son Olsun," (2012), for further discussion.

<sup>19</sup> See Ozan Tekin, "Factories of Memory: Remembering the 12 September Military Coup in Beynelmül and Bu Son Olsun," (2012), for further discussion.

*Hatırla Sevgili* was the story of several families during the most tumultuous periods of Turkish history during the last years of the Adnan Menderes' term as Prime Minister. It covered the coup of 1960 and the execution of Adnan Menderes and his colleagues in Yassıada in the first season. In the following seasons, it covered the 1970s and the civil war that Türkiye went through. The series eventually covered the coup of 1980, drawing major attention to this period of Turkish history and the coups in Türkiye. It was watched by millions, and like *Cemberimde Gul Oya*, it launched major debates on the political history of Türkiye. It sparked a further recognition of the legacy of the coups and their impact on ordinary families as well as raising serious questions about political developments in those years.

Shortly after the end of *Hatırla Sevgili*, “*Bu Kalp Seni Unutur mu?*” (2009), directed by Aydın Bulut, was launched due to high demand from Turkish audiences. “*Bu Kalp Seni Unutur mu*” aimed to present the years between the junta regime and the new millennium. Although the series was cut short due to production problems, the first episodes of this drama focused on the repression and violence under the junta regime. Throughout the series, the torture detainees experienced was a prominent topic. All of these TV series were followed by large audiences in Türkiye and each episode generated major discussions about the coups.

Through all of these movies and TV series, Turkish people were able to understand the potential impact of the coups over their daily life. They realized that one does not need to be actively involved in politics in order to be a victim of the repression of the junta regimes. The unfairness and unruliness of the coups made everyone in the country a potential usual suspect. A high number of people during this period were wrongly accused by the military courts and sentenced to years of prison terms. Those who were detained were never the same again. The physical and psychological scars of the coup to the society and individuals became a frequently addressed topic in these movies.

## REJECTION OF TORTURE AND INHUMANE TREATMENT

Another very important feature of these movies and series on the coup during this period was the torture and inhumane treatment of political prisoners. As in *Seksenler*, *Bu Son Olsun*, and other movies, the torture of political prisoners became a very frequently repeated phenomenon. While the lives of the ordinary people in the movies were disrupted, the mental and physical health of the imprisoned people went through dramatic deterioration. Torture scenes and graphic imagery of interrogations became common in these movies. For instance, in

one of the first scenes of *O... Çocuklari* (2008), directed by Murat Saracoglu, there is a graphic image of political prisoners being tortured, threatened, and killed by the interrogators. The movie takes place in Istanbul in 1981, shortly after the coup. It is a story of a young couple wanted by the police who are trying to flee Türkiye. The movie starts with a torture scene in which one of the prisoners cannot take it anymore and dies in the interrogation room. The interrogators then throw him from the balcony of the police station in order to present it as a suicide. Although the second prisoner does not appear again, it is obvious for those who are running from the security forces that his fate will not be much different.

In another movie *Eve Donus* (2006), directed by Omer Ugur, the torture and inhumane treatment under the junta regime was the main focus of the movie. The movie not only presented a very dramatic and graphic picture of torture in the prisons during this period but also demonstrated tortured people's trauma even after they left the prisons. It is a story of a wrongly detained prisoner and the torture he went through during his detention. After his release, he became a broken personality and went through significant signs of post-traumatic stress syndrome with hallucinations and dreams. The movie was released on the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the September 12 coup. It was intended to remind the millennials of the violence and challenges that the previous generation went through under the junta regime. When a similar movie, *Gulum Bittigi Yer* (1999), which also focused on the torture of a wrongly detained prisoner, was released in 1999, it was censored shortly after its release. However, the theme of torture became a very frequently mentioned theme in the movies in 2000s.

Most of these movies portrayed the leftists in Türkiye as the primary victim of the 1980 coup and its aftermath. Although the audience of these movies were the general public, the more nationalist segments of the society preferred to stay away from these movies. However, the nationalists were also among the victims of the military coups in Türkiye. The September 12 coup and the junta regime caused significant trauma for Turkish nationalist groups also, and it was sometimes more dramatic than the shock to the leftists. For many years, the violence and torture that the detained nationalists experienced was not common knowledge. While there were some low budget movies which portrayed the torture and mistreatment that the leftists went through by the 1990s, the nationalists of the 1980s usually told their stories in private gatherings. One of the most dramatic and widely circulated of these was the torture of Muhsin Yazicioglu in Ulucanlar

prison.<sup>20</sup> He frequently told the stories of his prison days to the media, arguing that the nationalists went through the same form of inhumane treatment by the junta regime as the leftists did.

More recently, popular culture products that focus on nationalists during and after the coup have also been produced. One such movie is *Kafes* (2015), directed by Mahmut Kaplan. The torture and inhumane treatment of nationalist prisoners by the junta regime in Ulucanlar Prison is the focal point of the movie. Although the movie did not get a very positive critical reception, it was one of the first to demonstrate the impact that the junta had on the lives of many nationalists and their families, an important milestone collective remembrance of the military regime by the nationalists in Türkiye. While the nationalists thought that they were fighting against the leftists in Türkiye in order to protect the state, the military junta turned the oppressive apparatus of the state against the nationalists as well. Thus, in addition to the trauma of the torture and imprisonment of the junta regime, the nationalists felt betrayed by the state.

## **COLLAPSE OF THE MYTH OF SEPTEMBER 12, 1980 COUP**

In another movie *Ankara Yazı- Veda Mektubu* (2016), directed by Kemal Uzun, the main theme was the story of Mustafa Pehlivanoglu, the first nationalist victim of the junta council who was executed in the aftermath of the coup. Although he maintained on numerous occasions that his statement was taken under harsh torture during the interrogation and that he was innocent, the judge gave him the death penalty. The junta council approved this harsh punishment immediately after the coup. Later in a documentary on the coup, the leader of the coup General Evren argued that they were trying to be fair in the executions by maintaining a form of “balanced executions,” one left and one from the right. Later, other documentaries also focused on the nationalists in Türkiye and the impact of the junta regimes on them. Because of the investigations of the nationalists in the 1940s and the torture they went through during their interrogations, the nationalists were familiar with the issue. However, the debates around the September 12 coup further raised the issue of torture and inhumane treatment they experienced.

<sup>20</sup> “Yazıcıoğlu’na yapılan işkenceler,” *Sabah*, June 15, 2012, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/06/15/yaziciogluna-yapilan-iskenceler>.

Both the widespread torture and inhumane treatment at the prisons became a symbol of the September 12 coup for all political groups across the spectrum. It was an important moment for these groups when Ulucanlar Prison was converted into a museum to commemorate the victims of the September 12 coup. Since September 12 and its aftermath had been reintroduced into the collective memory of Turkish society, the junta and the coup had been remembered only temporally as a period of violence, repression, and torture. However, with the beginning of the commemorations of September 12 and the opening of different exhibitions and Ulucanlar Museum, it gained a spatial dimension as well.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Yassiada, where the victims of the 1960 coup, most prominently former Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, were imprisoned and executed, was converted in a site of remembrance for those years. Later, when their bodies were moved to Istanbul, a memorial was erected to memorialize these victims of the 1960 coup.

## HIJACKING OF THE TURKISH PUBLIC'S ANTI-COUP ATTITUDE

Of course, an important development in these years was the referendum of 2010 which took place on the anniversary of the September 12 coup attempt. The constitutional amendment that was voted on in the referendum changed the institutions and rules that had been established in order to consolidate military control of the civilian government. The jurisdiction of the military courts was constrained and the decisions of the Higher Military Council were made subject to judicial review following the referendum. Most importantly, the temporary Article 15 of the constitution, which made it impossible to prosecute the officers that led the coup of September 12, was annulled as a result of this referendum. Although most members of the council had already passed away, the symbolic dimension of the decision was very important for the Turkish public. During the campaign for the constitutional amendment, then Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan read the last letter of Mustafa Pehlivanoglu and mentioned other victims of the coup from both the political left and right.

This period also overlapped with the beginning of several different coup investigations in Türkiye. During this period, it was revealed that some of the generals within the military were planning to organize a coup against the government,

<sup>21</sup> See Elifcan Karacan, "Remembering the 1980 Turkish Military Coup d'État," (2016), for further discussion.

which was reportedly stopped by then Chief of Staff General Hilmi Ozkok. Later, when asked about the reports, General Ozkok neither confirmed nor denied the allegations of a coup plan prepared by former General Sener Eruygur.<sup>22</sup> A large investigation was launched during this period, called Ergenekon, in which people from different sectors of society, including former generals, were prosecuted. The process of the investigation attracted a lot of interest from the Turkish public and gained huge support from large segments of the society. It was considered an important instance of societal reckoning with the coups and military intervention into Turkish politics. Most of the prosecutions at that time were run by the Gülenist prosecutors and police officers who gained public recognition and praise from large segments of society.

However, the investigation soon lost its earlier motivation and started to become more controversial. The public started to react to the waves of arrests and allegations of the wrongdoings of the prosecutors began to be reported in the media. Although it was initially believed to be a reckoning with the history of military coups, the investigations disappointingly turned into power play by the Gülenist prosecutors. Later, it was revealed that some of the investigations into a number of the officers were intended to pave the way for the fast track promotion of Gülenist officers within the military. In addition to the coup planners, some other officers were put in the same basket and arrested by the courts.

This hijacking of the coup investigations hurt the opportunity of the Turkish people to settle their accounts with the coup plotters in Türkiye. In a paradoxical turn of events, when the Gülenists were regarded as a national security threat by the Turkish government, those who had taken advantage of the Ergenekon trials and were promoted rapidly became the organizers of the coup attempt on July 15, 2016. It turned out that the group was organized within the military and formed a separate chain of command that critically hurt the integrity and harmony of the Turkish military. On the night of the coup attempt, they faced the very strong reaction of the Turkish people against the coups, coup attempts, and any grouping that aimed to generate a parallel structure outside to run the affairs of the state. The investigations into the FETO structure within the military and other state institutions, established in the wake of the coup attempt, are still ongoing.

<sup>22</sup> Fikret Bila, "Hilmi Özkök: Ne vardır, ne yoktur derim," *Milliyet*, July 9, 2008, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-/fikret-bila/siyaset/siyasetyazardetay/09.07.2008/891400/default.htm>.



## CONCLUSION

The Turkish people's brave reaction to the coup on July 15 will be discussed and studied for the foreseeable future by scholars. For those scholars who study and write about the nonviolent resistance to repression and tyranny, the sudden, unorganized, and unplanned reaction of the Turkish people against the putschists of July 15 will be an important case to study. The fact that the Turkish people continued to resist the coup through nonviolent means despite armed assault from the putschists and constant provocations was an emblematic instance of nonviolent resistance around the world. Just like the "Tank Man" of the Tiananmen Square incidents, the Turkish people that night stood in front of tanks with their bare hands and demonstrated with utmost courage to protect their rights and their children's future. The interviews with those who attended these rallies and demonstrations show genuine motivations of the ordinary people in regards to democracy and their rights. As many foreign observers privately or publicly admitted, nobody was expecting such resilient resistance against the putschists from the Turkish people.

The commitment of the Turkish people to their rights and their support for the democratically elected government during such a critical time will be a landmark case in terms of civil-military relations in countries with histories of coups and military interventions. This "never again" moment demonstrated that in addition to legal and constitutional reforms, constraints and limitations, there is a need for the civil society to oppose military interventions in the political sphere. The reaction of the people demonstrated that the Turkish people reached a point where it no longer considered coups to be legitimate actions and instead saw them as something that needed to be averted as soon as possible. Instead of waiting to respond in the first elections for the first time Turkish people decided to stop it even before it could succeed.

There will be many debates in regards to this sudden outpouring of the people to defend their democracy. As mentioned above, social media and the president's exhortation for public mobilization will be among the most frequently stated causes of it. However, there are also some other causes of the resistance of the Turkish people. The impact of the products of popular culture on the coups and military interventions which were released over the last two decades in Türkiye is one of those causes that may not be mentioned as much. Collective remembrance of the junta periods in the movies and TV series made their dangers easier to recognize and understand for people, even those who did not witness previous coups. As argued in this chapter, through their portrayals of the putschists as characters with

significant defects and ridiculousness, these movies made their into less fearsome personalities. This helped the Turkish people overcome the threshold of fear in order to stand against the coup on July 15. Secondly, the impact of the coups on the lives of ordinary people in these movies made it easier to understand the possible aftermath of a coup and the emergence of the junta regime. Because of that mothers and fathers were on the streets in order to protect the future of their children on the night of July 15. Finally, recognizing the torture and inhumanity of the behavior of the putschists against the Turkish people left a major mark on the people in Türkiye. It was a past that was reproduced by the popular culture and a past that people in Türkiye does not want to live or experience again. Understanding of this history made the Turkish people more determined in their resistance against the coup.

It should also be remembered that for Turkish people, the resistance against the putschists was more than their reaction to the coup. Turkish people that night fought against all forms of the tutelage system that held Turkish politics hostage for decades. The tutelary regime in previous decades used different instruments of the state in order to shape public opinion and engineer popular will in the country. In the 1990s, the judiciary shut down political parties and tried to punish political leaders that earned the votes of millions of citizens. The military coups used the judiciary to try and even execute political leaders in the coups. The intervention of outside actors in Turkish politics generated serious reactions among the people. When the December 17-25 operations took place against the government, the operations were perceived by the society as a political intervention of the judiciary and police and an attempt to overthrow the democratically elected government of Türkiye. The debates about the parallel state structure became prevalent as a result of these operations. It was never considered an acceptable form of intervention. The state's attempt to eliminate any form of parallel structure within the government elicited major support from society during this period. Soon after, many investigations that were run by the same group came under skepticism. When the July 15<sup>th</sup> coup attempt took place, the actions of the Gülenists became suspect even before the investigations against the coup plotters started. The fact that a predominant majority of Turkish society resisted the coup and opposed the Gülenists' intervention in politics demonstrated that there is no tolerance among the Turkish people for the tutelage system. Participation by the relatively low number of officers in the coup attempt demonstrates that large segments of the military also understood Turkish people's broad opposition to coups and military interventions.

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THIRD

SECURITY AND  
FOREIGN POLICY





CHAPTER 8

**NEITHER REALIST NOR LIBERAL:  
TÜRKİYE'S CHANGING FOREIGN AID POLICY SINCE  
THE END OF THE COLD WAR**

VEYSEL KURT\*

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most important indicators of Türkiye's increasing activeness in foreign policy in the past 20 years is its performance in foreign aid. With factors such as competition, conflict, alliance, and power accumulation as the underlying aims of international politics, a serious increase can be noted in Türkiye's development and humanitarian assistance. The increasing trend in Türkiye's foreign aid did not slow down dramatically during the Covid-19 outbreak despite economic constriction around the world. Türkiye has sent aid, medical supplies, and protective equipment to five continents, including countries badly hit by the virus, such as the United Kingdom (UK), Italy, and Spain, the United State (US), Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, and many others.

Foreign aid is an issue that is debated on both theoretical and practical levels of international politics. This article aims to evaluate Türkiye's foreign aid strategy in reference to the questions below. Would one country help another without expecting any benefit in return? If so, what is the reason for this? Is foreign aid an aspect of foreign policy or is it an act that should be assessed independently due to its humanitarian dimension? In this regard, how should Türkiye's rapidly increasing foreign assistance be assessed?

Because of its geographical location and historical ties, Türkiye maintains intense relations with the Islamic or Turkic, or in a narrow understanding, old Ot-

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toman geography. Besides the fact that these countries under this category are important in terms of global geopolitics, they are also positioned as Türkiye's hinterland. From the aspect of foreign aid, it is not right to position this region or countries in the same context. Especially countries in the Middle East that are rich in terms of oil and natural gas have remained outside of the scope of foreign aid. However, due to the civil wars and conflicts that have occurred in the Middle East in the past years and need for urgent humanitarian assistance, Türkiye has also deployed a helping hand to countries such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and its official development assistance (ODA) are two important references for research on the issue of foreign aid. The scope of the ODA is expressed in the following way: Provided by any official state agency, the assistance made is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of the receiving country, the aid is concessional and conveys a grant element of at least 25 percent. The assistance is made through international organizations.<sup>1</sup> There is little difference between humanitarian assistance and development aid in terms of intent. However, assistance for development is made for the long term and is concerned with the technical, social, and economic developments of a country. Humanitarian assistance, on the other hand, aims to compensate for the emergency need required during events such as natural disasters or wars. However, the re-structure of infrastructure after such disasters or the assistance made in areas such as health also falls under the heading of development aid. Thus, it is necessary to state that although these two headings are observed separately from time to time, the ODA also includes data from humanitarian assistance. Development aid can be said to have three main objectives:<sup>2</sup>

- To ensure that citizens in developing countries reach a basic social standard,
- To bring the income and welfare of disadvantaged countries closer to developed ones,
- To help and support the developing country to access international goods and services

<sup>1</sup> "Official Development Assistance-Definition and Coverage", OECD, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm>, (Access date: June 20, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> "What is Development Cooperation?", *2016 Development Cooperation Forum Policy Brief*, Vol: 1, No:11, (February 2015).

The development aid provided by Türkiye is divided into two –official and private– and encompasses many different types of assistance under these two headings.<sup>3</sup> When looked at from the different objectives pursued, while urgent/humanitarian assistance aims to help solve the humanitarian crises that occur after a natural disaster, development aid aims to, for instance, develop infrastructure in the long and short term and ensure sustainability and continuity in services such as health.

## THE CONCEPT OF FOREIGN AID

There are various definitions of foreign aid. Morgenthau defines foreign aid as a modern invention under foreign policies and breaks down the types of foreign aid under six headings: humanitarian assistance, subsistence help, bribery, military assistance, prestige assistance, and economic development assistance. Morgenthau describes the intersection point of these different types of assistance as “the transfer of money, goods, and services from one nation to another”. We could also add a different definition and new headings could be created. Technical assistance, projects, programs, grants, and credit are a few of the possible additional headings. Assessing all these headings may make it difficult to analyze a country’s foreign aid strategy from an institutional perspective. Having been accepted as a tool of global development after the end of the Cold War, foreign aid has been attributed significant importance.

The fact that foreign aid is used as a factor of foreign policy is not new.<sup>4</sup> Foreign aid provided by the US to Venezuela in 1812 and the UK to its colonies in 1929 and 1940 are examples of assistance in the modern age. Nevertheless, the term entered the literature at the start of the Cold War. Foreign aid especially became a mechanism utilized by the two superpowers at the time – the US and Soviet Union – with the aim to increase their sphere of influence. During this time, foreign aid was administered under a security axis. The most striking example is the Truman Doctrine, launched to prevent the European continent from falling into the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. As part of the Truman Doctrine, most of it being military, Türkiye and Greece were to receive \$400 million over

<sup>3</sup> For the Technical Differences of Assistance; Nurçin Yıldız, Emre Yüksek, Enver Resulođluarı et al., *Türkiye Kalkınma Yardımları Raporu 2015*, (TİKA Publishing, Ankara: 2016).

<sup>4</sup> The relationship between foreign aid and foreign policy; Meliha Benli Altunışık, “Turkey as an ‘Emerging Donor’ and the Arab Uprisings”, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol: 19, No: 3, (2014), pp. 335–337.

three years.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this prevented the two countries from becoming close to the Soviet Union and prevented them from engaging in a conflict with each other. The Marshall Plan also aimed at preventing European countries from falling into the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. In addition to granting assistance to prevent countries in Europe from engaging in conflicts with each other and to promote cooperation<sup>6</sup> the assistance provided by the US as the first milestone for stability and consolidation in the region.

Likewise, during the Cold War, another important aid that comes to the forefront in terms of US regional strategy was the aid provided to Egypt. The fact that the US has since been providing Egypt \$1.3 billion in military assistance and around \$500 million in economic assistance on an annual basis should not be assessed from a humanitarian or development aid perspective, but rather from the axis of security.<sup>7</sup> This is because the aid provided by the US to Egypt was directly related to the peace deal with Israel.<sup>8</sup> As it can be understood from these examples, the foreign aid provided by the US during the Cold War era is directly related to the country's security strategy.

Due to the fact that Türkiye's economic and foreign affairs positions differed, the country was not at the fore of foreign aid until the 1990s. One of the steps taken toward Central Asia states that gained independence with the end of the Cold War was foreign aid. The establishment of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı, TİKA) in 1992 was an important step in the institutionalization of foreign aid. Being a recipient of aid during this time, Türkiye was not in a position to provide foreign aid due to its economic and political circumstances. However, it is still possible to speak of embassy missions during the republic years. For instance, in 1957, military aid was provided to Algeria. The first planned foreign aid packet came in 1985 with newly regulated laws and was regulated for Africa. The fact that the packet was prepared

<sup>5</sup> Barış Ertem, "Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerinde Truman Doktrini ve Marshall Planı", *Balıkesir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Vol: 12, No: 21, (June 2009), p. 387.

<sup>6</sup> Yavuz Güler, "II. Dünya Harbi Sonrası Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri (1945-1950)", *Gazi Üniversitesi Kırşehir Eğitim Fakültesi*, Vol: 5, No: 2, (2004), p. 220.

<sup>7</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, "Egypt: Background and US Relations", *Congressional Research Service Report*, June 5, 2014, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Fuat Sekmen, "Dış Yardım ve Ekonomik Büyüme Arasındaki Karşılıklı İlişkinin Eşbütünlüşme ve Granger-Nedensellik Testleri Çerçevesinde İncelenmesi: Mısır Örneği", *Ortaoğu Yıllığı 2006*, eds. Kemal İnat, Muhittin Ataman, (Nobel Publishing, Ankara: 2008), pp. 500-501.

and coordinated by the State Planning Organization points to the institutionalization in the field.<sup>9</sup>

## THE THEORETICAL DIMENSION OF FOREIGN AID

The main approaches in international relations have conceptualized foreign aid under three headings. Accordingly, while realists argue that foreign aid should reduce the security risk of the donor country, liberals emphasize humanitarian values.<sup>10</sup> Constructivist perspectives evaluate the issue based on identity. To individually evaluate the positions held by these three paradigms on foreign aid is out of the scope of this study. Therefore, this study will only summarize what foreign aid comes to mean for the main arguments of these paradigms and then will assess Türkiye's foreign aid strategy accordingly.

Realists believe that foreign assistance, whether pursued under humanitarian or development aid, is a tool of foreign policy and therefore assess this from a profit/security perspective.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, idealists assess foreign aid in terms of the development of humanitarian values, economic development, and democratic values.<sup>12</sup> Constructivist approaches emphasize the role of identity and culture in shaping foreign policy and thus argue that foreign aid comes to the forefront with its identity dimension as part of foreign policy.<sup>13</sup>

Foreign aid has extended "power" as a term and has led to its redefinition with different tools.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, foreign aid has been assessed within the scope of "power". In this regard, foreign aid can be evaluated within the framework of "soft power" and "smart power". In his study on evaluating the power of the US via a new perspective, Joseph Nye assesses power within the framework of new tools. According to this, power and the ability to influence cannot be defined only

<sup>9</sup> "Turkey's Development Cooperation: General Characteristics and the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Aspect", MFA, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey\\_s-development-cooperation.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-development-cooperation.en.mfa), (Access date: July 2, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Peter J. Schraeder, Steven W. Hook and Bruce Taylor, "Clarifying the Foreign Aid Puzzle: A Comparison of American, Japanese, French, and Swedish Aid Flows", *World Politics*, Vol: 50, No: 2, (1998), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Gilles Carbonnier, "Official Development Assistance Once More under Fire from Critics", *International Development Policy*, Vol: 1, (March 2010), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> John P. Tuman, Craig F. Emmert and Robert E. Sterken, "Explaining Japanese Aid Policy in Latin America: A Test of Competing Theories", *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol: 54, No: 1, (2001), p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Tuncay Kardaş and Ramazan Erdağ, "Bir Dış Politika Aracı Olarak TİKA", *Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi*, Vol: 7, No: 1, (2012), p. 184.

<sup>14</sup> Talha Köse, "Türkiye'nin Kuzey Afrika ve Ortadoğu Bölgesindeki Gücü: Zorlayıcı Olmayan Gücün İmkân ve Sınırları", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol: 11, No: 41, (Spring 2014), pp. 32-35.

through traditional military techniques. In addition, Nye's argument claims that in the new era, besides the state, the alliances made with non-state actors, transnational networks, and multifaceted interactions are all tools of global influence. While states remain the main actors of the international system, the functionality of civil society is not denied. Thus, media, art, tourism, education, and trade relations have become new tools and interacting factors.<sup>15</sup> What needs to be emphasized here is that these factors are not alternatives to military and economic power, but instead should be assessed as completing factors.<sup>16</sup> From this point of view, foreign aid is a feature of "transformational diplomacy". Pointing to the transformation of diplomacy, this perspective argues that foreign aid should be considered a supporting factor in diplomatic relations and aims to add functionality to diplomacy by doing so.<sup>17</sup>

## FROM THE COLD WAR TO THE AK PARTY ERA: TÜRKİYE'S FOREIGN AID

An interesting table emerges when we look at the course of aid that Türkiye has provided to other countries in terms of development or humanitarian assistance. During the immediate aftermath of World War II, Türkiye was a recipient of aid through the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Türkiye carried on receiving aid until the early 2000s under the status of "developing country".

The systematic change that occurred after the Cold War created new empty gaps and allowed international actors to pursue new foreign policy instruments. In this sense, foreign aid was not only an activity for big powers but became a function of middle-sized powers too. The establishment of the TİKA in 1992 –during a time when Türkiye's economy was deteriorating– reflects the fact that foreign aid had become utilized on an institutional basis. The TİKA's establishment during this date is not a coincidence. It can be interpreted as Türkiye's opening to Central Asia and an attempt to help develop newly formed Turkic states after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "The Future of American Power", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol: 89, No: 6, (December 2010), pp. 2-13.

<sup>16</sup> Talha Köse, Mesut Özcan and Ekrem Karakoç, *Türkiye'nin "Arap Baharı Sonrası" Yumuşak Gücünün Etkisi ve Boyutları*, (ASAV, İstanbul: 2013), p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Engin Akçay, *Bir Dış Politika Enstrümanı Olarak Dış Yardımlar*, (Turgut Özal University Publishing, Ankara: 2012), pp. 9-10.

**TABLE 1. THE AMOUNT TÜRKİYE SPENT ON FOREIGN AID (IN MILLION USD):  
1992-2002\***

| 1992  | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998  | 1999  | 2000  | 2001  | 2002   |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1.182 | 283  | 54   | 149  | 188  | 383  | 400.8 | 446.5 | 202.2 | 139,6 | 144.76 |

Source: Akçay, *Bir Dış Politika Enstrümanı Olarak Dış Yardımlar*, pp. 73-79.

As seen in the table above, the amounts of foreign aid made during 1992-2002 varied. After exceeding \$1 billion in 1992, in the following years, this figure rapidly decreased and saw \$54 million in 1994. While rapidly increasing after 1996, the amount of foreign aid issued was \$446.5 million in 1999 yet rapidly decreased once again after the economic crisis. The amount of foreign aid a year before the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party) came into power (2002) was \$144.7 million. According to the table above, though Türkiye took steps in this regard following the end of the Cold War, the country failed to sustain its motivation. Focusing on helping Central Asian states during these years, throughout the 1990s, Türkiye was a recipient and contributing country of aid.

During this era Türkiye's foreign aid was geographically focused on Central Asia and was pursued within the framework to help these countries develop. In other words, during the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, Türkiye helped fill the space left by the Soviets as part of the rhetoric and political opening in the region. However, Russia's strategic attempt to keep these countries under its influence and the US's increasing involvement in this region limited the influence of Turkish foreign policy. Another factor limiting Türkiye's ability to put its foreign policy discourse into practice was the political and economic instability that the country was facing during the 1990s.<sup>18</sup> This is the fundamental reason why the TİKA only had 12 offices and was only active in 28 countries between 1992 and 2002.<sup>19</sup> However, it cannot be stated that all foreign assistance made was dysfunctional. In short, foreign aid remained in the framework created by foreign policy rhetoric and practices.

## TÜRKİYE'S FOREIGN AID POLICIES DURING THE AK PARTY ERA

In comparison to previous years, after 2002, an increase in the amount of foreign aid made, an increase in the geographies this aid was provided to and the difference in

<sup>18</sup> Cemalettin Haşimi, "Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy and Development Cooperation", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 16, No: 1, (2014), p. 131.

<sup>19</sup> "TİKA Faaliyetleri ve Resmi Kalkınma Yardımları", No: 1, (August 2013), p. 4.

the level of institutionalization is seen. The new initiatives pursued in Turkish foreign policy since the early 2000s have had a direct influence on the institutionalization of the TİKA and the number of offices that it runs. The number of Program Coordination Offices, which was 12 in 2002, increased to 25 in 2011 and 33 in 2012. Today, the TİKA operates with 56 Program Coordination Offices in 54 different countries.<sup>20</sup> While the amount of official development assistance in 2003 was \$91.7 million, this figure increased to \$395 million in 2004.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the change in figures is a clue in regard to the change that occurred during these years. After undertaking a role during emergencies after crises and the responsibility of refugees, though Türkiye still receives aid from some countries and international organizations, the country has also become an aid supplier. In 2013, Türkiye was listed as one of the OECD's "donor countries" an organization that it was already a member of.<sup>22</sup> The question arises: Should this change be evaluated alone, be evaluated as part of Türkiye's economic growth, or be argued within the transformation of Turkish foreign policy?

## FOREIGN POLICY ACTIVISM AND FOREIGN AID

In the last 20 years, Turkish foreign policy has been the subject of many different studies. The main focus of these arguments is the transformation of Türkiye's foreign policy during these years. By presenting choices within an institutional framework, foreign policy decision-makers created the foundation for such debates to increase and vary from institutional perspectives.

To be able to put its foreign policy choices into practice and to obtain more effective results, the AK Party governments also made changes in different areas. From this point of view, the changes made in the statutes of institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the TİKA can be underlined. In addition, Ankara also symbolically declared "opening years" for South America or Africa to improve relations with these regions. In parallel, the variety of instruments used in foreign policy has become varied. In addition to classical diplomacy and the pursuit of bilateral or multilateral cooperation, the most important instrument added to the circuit was the potential of "non-coercive power".<sup>23</sup> In this sense, human diplomacy, conflict resolution, economic integration, and foreign aid were all used especially within the potential power parameter in these new changes.

<sup>20</sup> TİKA, <http://www.TİKA.gov.tr/tr/sayfa/hakkimizda-14649>, (Access date: July 3, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> "Net ODA", OECD, <https://data.oecd.org/oda/net-oda.htm>, (Access date: July 3, 2017).

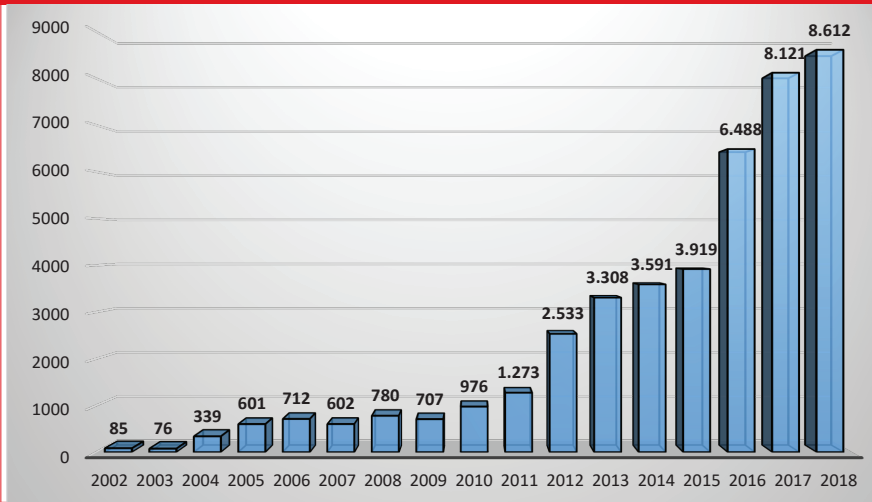
<sup>22</sup> Gül Kireklo and Tuna Çam, "Türkiye Donör Ülke Oldu", *Sabah*, March 30, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Talha Köse, "Türkiye'nin Kuzey Afrika ve Ortadoğu Bölgesindeki Gücü: Zorlayıcı Olmayan Gücün İmkan ve Sınırları", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol: 11, No: 41, (2014), p. 30.

Following the regional instability after the Iraq invasion in 2003 and the US's settlement in the Middle East, Türkiye displayed "medium-sized power activism".<sup>1</sup> Instruments such as foreign trade, human diplomacy, mediation, and foreign aid opened the way for new gains in foreign policy and economics. Türkiye's increasing foreign aid in the past 20 years is taken into consideration with the "transformation of foreign policy capacity"<sup>2</sup> that occurred during the same time.

Between 2002 and 2010, Türkiye's humanitarian assistance, human diplomacy, and mediation were particularly active in the Middle East, North Africa, and African countries. The increase in trade volume between Türkiye and these states, the increase in the number of visits from these regions alongside the increase of Turkish Airlines flights, and finally, the increase of diplomatic missions are all concrete evidence in this regard. In addition to this, the establishment of the Prime Ministry's Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı, YTB) in 2010, the increase of scholarships provided for foreign students via the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), and the institutionalization of this are also other important indicators.

**TABLE 2. TÜRKİYE'S OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: 2002-2018  
(MILLION DOLLARS)\***



Source: Ersin Çopur, M. Fatih Sever, Said Serkan Kara vd., *Türkiye Kalkınma Yardımları Raporu 2018*, (TİKA Report, Ankara: 2019), p. 15.

<sup>1</sup> Bruce Gilley, "Turkey, Middle Powers and the New Humanitarianism", *Perceptions*, Vol: 20, No: 1, (Spring 2015), p. 37.

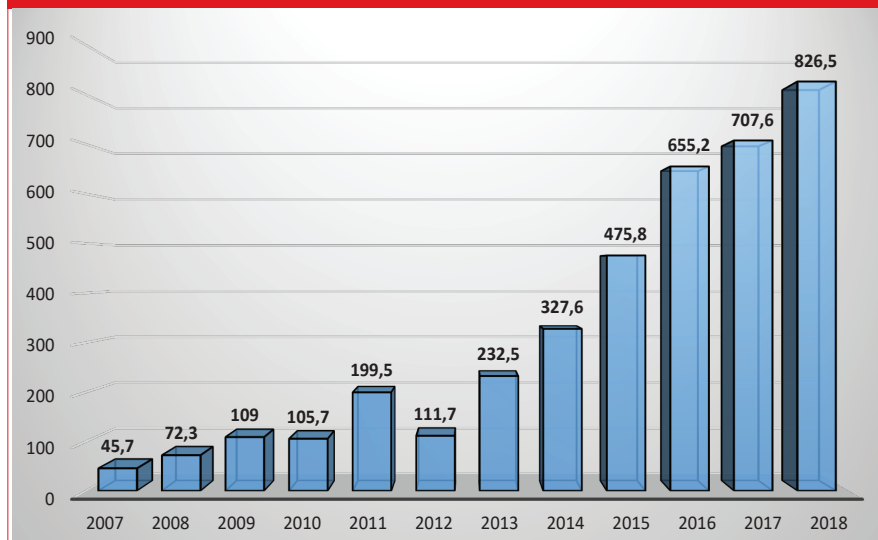
<sup>2</sup> Kemal İnat, "Türk Dış Politikasının Kapasitesinin Dönüşümü: AK Parti Dönemi", *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi*, Vol: 1, No: 1, pp. 1-24.



Diversity within the institutions that are involved in coordinating humanitarian and infrastructure assistance and delivering it to relevant regions can also be discussed. Although since 2005 the coordination of foreign aid has been handled by the TİKA, the services and activities Türkiye provided within foreign aid are not only limited to public institutions. These services are also provided with the help of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. While public institutions kept in line with foreign policy, the dynamism and mobilization experienced within society helped civil society organizations to assume important initiatives.

Thus, when analyzing foreign aid as an important foreign policy instrument, nongovernmental organizations should also be mentioned as significant factors. Alongside public institutions such as the TİKA, the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay), the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi, AFAD), the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), and the Housing Development Administration of Türkiye (Toplu Konut İdaresi, TOKİ), charitable funds related to NGOs also work as aid providers and practitioners. It can be argued that in some cases of emergencies, NGOs can act quicker than public institutions. However, it is difficult to locate the exact amount of aid provided by NGOs. The table below illustrates the level of aid provided by such organizations, according to data received from the TİKA.

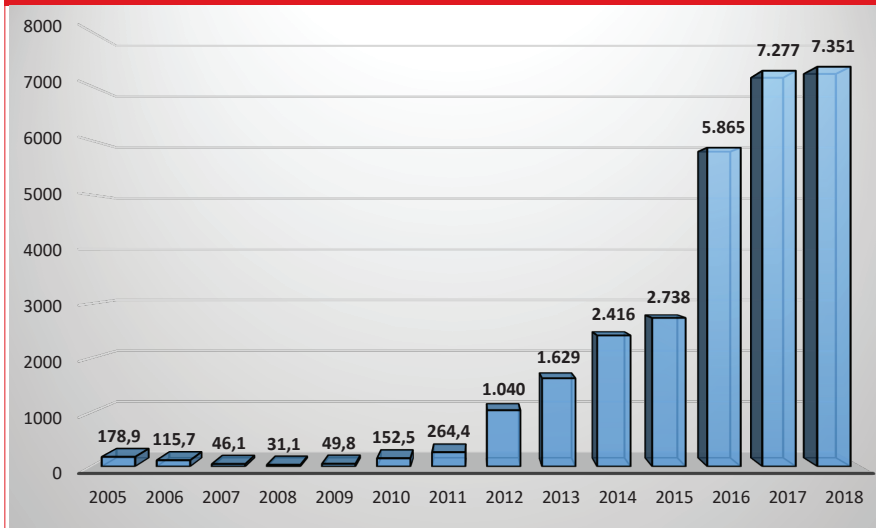
**TABLE 2. THE AMOUNT OF DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY NGOS: 2007-2018 (MILLION DOLLARS)\***



Source: Çopur, Sever, Kara, et al., *Türkiye Kalkınma Yardımları Raporu 2018*, p. 26.

The chaos and conflict that have occurred in recent years due to military power and direct interventions have restricted Türkiye's non-coercive power parameters. Nevertheless, the direction Türkiye has pursued in regard to foreign aid has not changed. The fact that the country has taken on the responsibility of refugees, which has become a global issue due to the Syrian crisis, is a reflection of this. The strategy that Türkiye has pursued in foreign aid has gained the country much more attention.

**TABLE 4. AMOUNT OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE:  
2005-2018 (MILLION DOLLARS)\***



Source: Çopur, Sever, Kara, et al., *Türkiye Kalkınma Yardımları Raporu 2018*, p. 22.

As can be understood from the table, Türkiye's figures in development and humanitarian assistance have generally increased. The effect of the humanitarian crisis that increased with the Arab Spring in 2011 cannot be denied. According to the amount of aid provided, Türkiye's listing within OECD countries had not changed much until 2015. However, in the report published in 2016, Türkiye was listed sixth in the general list in regards to its assessment in 2015 and was listed first according to its gross domestic product (GDP). Referencing the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, a statement made by the AFAD announced that in 2016 by providing \$6 billion worth of aid, Türkiye had become second in the international arena after the US, which had provided \$6.3 billion of aid.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "En Cömert Ülke Yine Türkiye", AFAD, July 21, 2017, <https://www.afad.gov.tr/tr/19319/En-Comert-Ulke-Yine-Turkiye>, (Access date: July 12, 2017).

It is difficult to analyze the performance Türkiye has displayed in humanitarian diplomacy, mediation, and foreign aid in the past 20 years within the framework of international relations theories. It cannot be argued that Türkiye has transformed its foreign aid moves into military or political profits as realist theory indicates. While it can be observed that relations developed between states that received aid, this did not occur within a realist framework. Likewise, it is difficult to argue that the foreign aid provided only remained as humanitarian assistance and did not provide other outcomes. Thus, the liberal perspective is also limited in its explanation. Constructivist approaches, however, give reference to historical rhetoric and provide a coherent framework for some regions. However, this approach also falls short of explaining all the foreign aid made to different regions, within the same argument. Therefore, a theoretical explanation is only able to offer an eclectic framework and in essence, is moving away from being theoretical.

The Somalia example stands out as a striking case in this sense. After the disasters that occurred due to the drought in 2011, the campaign that Türkiye began targeting Somalia without any conditions<sup>4</sup> led to the revival of economic, political, and social relations between the two countries. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Somalia with a large delegation when he was prime minister<sup>5</sup> and when the health and security risks in Somalia had not yet been thwarted. The amount of aid that Türkiye provided stood out on the international agenda. From that day onward, the projects and assistance that Türkiye put into practice<sup>6</sup> opened the door for the “re-structure of Somalia without using force”.<sup>7</sup> While Türkiye’s attempts to establish a military base in Somalia continue, the relationship was not originally based on security concerns. However, concrete outcomes have been produced in both economic and security terms.

Former Special Representative to the US and Somalian foreign policy analyst Abukar Arman emphasized the effectiveness of Türkiye’s foreign assistance provided to Somalia and argued that Türkiye’s approach was different from the incoherent and degenerate international model. Arman based his argument on concrete

<sup>4</sup> “Türkiye Somali için Seferber Oldu”, *Dünya Bülteni*, August 19, 2011, <http://www.dunyabulteni.net/m/haber/171602/turkiye-somali-icin-seferber-oldu>, (Access date: July 10, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> “Başbakan Somali’de”, *Sabah*, August 19, 2011, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2011/08/19/basbakan-somalide>, (Access date: July 10, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> For a wide analysis see: Mehmet Özkan, *Turkey’s Involvement in Somalia Assessment of a State-Building in Progress*, (SETA Publishing, Istanbul: 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Gilley, “Turkey, Middle Powers and the New Humanitarianism”, p. 38.

evidence. According to this, while the \$55 billion of aid provided to Somalia by the United Nations and associated organizations lacked concrete achievements, the \$500 million in aid provided by Türkiye created effective and sustainable infrastructures in areas such as health, security, and emergency needs. Arman also argues that the relationship that has been developing between the two states has become one of strategic partnership.<sup>8</sup> In short, the humanitarian assistance model that Türkiye has pursued in Somalia and across Africa has not been interpreted as soft or hard power but rather as “virtuous power”.<sup>9</sup>

As the country’s economy developed, the budget Türkiye had for foreign aid also increased. Another important fact regarding economic factors is that economic relations also steadily developed and increased with countries that foreign aid was provided to. For instance, there is a parallel between the increasing political initiatives, economic relations, and the development and humanitarian assistance provided to the African continent.<sup>10</sup> The following statement made by a former TİKA coordinator in 2007 illustrates how aid made by Türkiye contributes to the receiving country and how it develops the relationship between the two countries: “With the aid that Türkiye is providing, the country is gaining a serious foundation ... we are also bringing them up to a better standard”.<sup>11</sup>

Addressing the parliament during his visit to Gabon in 2013, President Erdoğan’s statement, “we didn’t come here for gold or diamonds like others”<sup>12</sup> reflected that bilateral relations were pursued within a framework of mutual profit. Again, during his visit to Guinea in 2016, the president made similar statements. During the visit in which fifty buses were given as grants, the countries’ two presidents openly expressed that they aimed to increase the volume of trade between the two countries.<sup>13</sup> It is well known that Türkiye’s selection as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in 2008 was due to the aid pro-

<sup>8</sup> Abukar Arman, “Erdoğan: The Hero of Somalia”, Al-Jazeera, January 21, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Julia Harte, “Turkey Shocks Africa”, *World Policy Journal*, Vol: 29, No: 4, (2012), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Mehmet Özkan, “Does “Rising Power” Mean “Rising Donor”? Turkey’s Development Aid in Africa”, *Africa Review*, Vol: 5, No: 2, pp. 139-147.

<sup>11</sup> “TİKA Hakkında”, *Telekom Dünyası*, (September 2007), pp. 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> “Başkaları gibi Altın Elmas için Gelmedik”, Türkiye, January 8, 2013, <http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/Genel/a560833.aspx>, (Access date: July 3, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> “Erdoğan’ın Otobüs Hediyesi Gine Devlet Başkanını Duygulandırdı”, YouTube, March 4, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pCiC9Y1fWg>, (Access date: July 3, 2017).

vided to countries in the Middle East and the Balkans.<sup>14</sup> In relation to gaining the support of countries in Africa, alongside foreign aid, the effect of Türkiye's soft power is also great.

## COVID-19 AND TÜRKİYE'S FOREIGN AID

Türkiye's foreign aid activism continued even after the Covid-19 outbreak. The country's deputy foreign minister stated that "Türkiye met the help requests of 131 countries worldwide amid pandemic around the globe to help their fight against the coronavirus outbreak" – with these numbers Türkiye is the third-largest medical aid and support country in the world.<sup>15</sup> Türkiye has provided medical equipment including masks, medical gloves, ventilators, and other protective equipment. The Balkans, where Türkiye has emerged as a key player since the AK Party took the power, has been one of the primary regions that received medical aid from Türkiye. In addition, Türkiye also provided help to nations on several continents, including developing countries. Türkiye's aid to less developed countries is in line with its traditional foreign aid policy.

Some researchers have evaluated Türkiye's aid diplomacy amid the pandemic as an effort to end the isolation in foreign policy and "improve its shattered image".<sup>16</sup> These comments ignore Türkiye's traditional soft power aspirations. Türkiye's tension with France and other Western countries is a clue that its foreign aid policy is not yet strong enough to improve its relations. President Erdoğan's statement, "nothing will be the same after the pandemic"<sup>17</sup> reflects his expectation of change in world politics and traditional relations. Türkiye offers a new beginning and new form of relations with other countries based on equality and mutual solidarity.

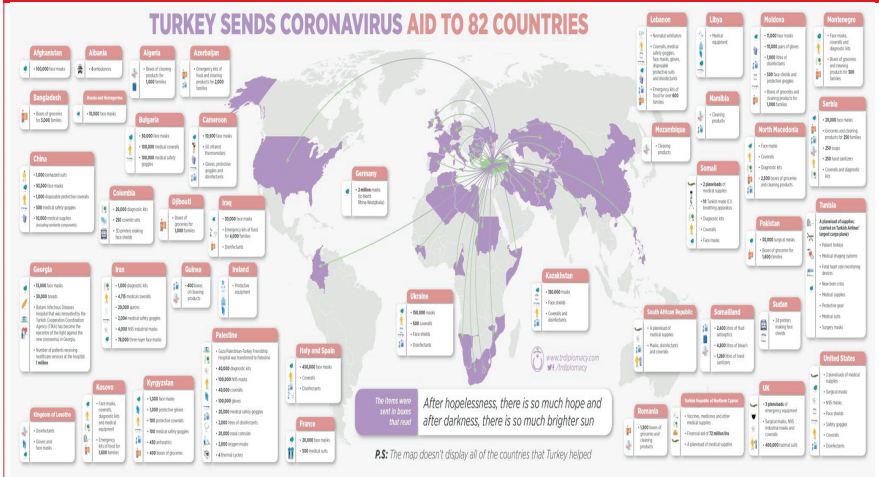
<sup>14</sup> "Türkiye BM'de Geçici Üyeliğe Seçildi", CNN Türk, October 17, 2008, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2008/dunya/10/17/turkiye.bmde.gecici.uyelige.secildi/497124.0/index.html>, (Access date: July 4, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Muhammet Tarhan "Dışişleri Bakan Yardımcısı Kıran: Dünyanın Üçüncü En Büyük Tıbbi Yardım ve Destek Sağlayıcı Ülkesiyiz", Anadolu Ajansı, June 22, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Gönül Tol and Dimitar Bechev, "Can Corona Diplomacy Cure Turkey's Foreign Policy Isolation?", MEI, April 29, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/can-corona-diplomacy-cure-turkeys-foreign-policy-isolation>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Dilara Hamit, "Turkey Ready for All Scenarios: Erdogan", Anadolu Agency, March 25, 2020.

**TABLE 5. MEDICAL EQUIPMENTS PROVIDED BY TÜRKİYE AND RECIPIENT COUNTRIES\***



Source: TR Diplomacy, <http://trdiplomacy.com/>, (Access date: October 2, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

Within the foreign policy activism that Türkiye has witnessed in the last 20 years, power instruments that are defined as “low politics” in international relations come to the forefront. These include economic relations, human diplomacy, and foreign aid. There are many reasons for this. However, the primary reason is the fact that these were convenient instruments that Türkiye could utilize for the areas that it wanted to open up in. It is well known that Türkiye was more disadvantaged than developed countries in terms of its arms industry, technology transfer, and military engagement up until the 2000s. Even after the end of the Cold War, at the start of the 2000s, Türkiye’s foreign policy coalitions, the instruments it adopted, and its rhetoric had not changed much from the Cold War era. Even though new discourses and rhetoric were adopted regarding Central Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is accepted that these did not produce the expected influence and result. The sole reason for this was that Türkiye did not have the political and economic capacity to fulfill aims, such as “from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China, the Turkish world” or “Türkiye’s big brother role”.

With the political and economic stability that began with the reign of the AK Party, the foreign policy position that was drawn in line with the hegemonic position of the US and the transformation of the mentality of foreign policy made it

easier to use new instruments. In this regard, projects began to be put into practice in regions ranging from the Middle East, South America, the Balkans, and Africa – areas that were neglected during the Cold War and throughout the 1990s. Alongside the development of trade relations, human diplomacy, and soft power, foreign aid also comes to the forefront as an important instrument.

Foreign aid increased during the AK Party governments and this trend has not stopped amid the pandemic despite the economic difficulties that Türkiye faced. It has been observed that the increase in aid has created economic and political outputs in some countries. Especially in countries where Türkiye has pursued an opening initiative and increased the amount of aid given, sincere respect for Türkiye has emerged within those societies. However, the extent to which this respect has extended to the state and -decision-making level is still unclear. For example, it can be stated that in Somalia, both on the public and -decision-making levels, there are positive stances about Türkiye, and with the contribution of the foreign aid made, Türkiye and Somalia developed economic, political, and strategic relations. In comparison to countries such as Iraq and others, although there is a positive stance about Türkiye within the public, decision-makers hold a different perspective. Therefore, Türkiye should search for ways to deal with this dilemma.

The second aspect that needs to be watched out for is the false belief that soft power instruments will be enough on their own. Hence, theorists that introduced this conceptualization have revised their works to argue that soft power will only be effective alongside instruments of hard power. The conflict and civil wars that have been occurring in proximity to Türkiye confirm this approach. Therefore, concrete results that are obtained from foreign aid ought to be transformed into political and strategic partnerships.

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## CHAPTER 9

# TURKISH-AMERICAN RELATIONS DURING THE AK PARTY GOVERNMENTS

KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT\*

Turkish-American relations during the AK Party has been one of the most often discussed, debated, and analyzed issues in Türkiye in the past 20 years. Bilateral relations during this period went through a significant degree of instability. The best period of the relationship and the worst crisis in the history of bilateral ties both occurred during the last twenty years. The relations during this period were impacted by several factors including the decline of US power around the world, transformation in the international system, changes in the politics of the Middle East and the rise of Türkiye as a regional actor in the Middle East. However, it is safe to say that the most significant developments in bilateral relations during this period were related to the convergence and divergence of the two countries' interests in the Middle East. This 20-year period is marked by both Türkiye's increasing involvement in Middle Eastern politics and economics and the US military intervention in Iraq in 2003.

The beginning of the AK Party's tenure in government following the November 2002 elections overlaps with the beginning of debates regarding the US invasion of Iraq. Since then, Ankara and Washington have tried to find common ground between their policies in the Middle East. The fact that both US and Türkiye started to pay more close attention to the developments in the Middle East was an important overlap and generated an initial optimism about the enduring geopolitical relevance of Türkiye and the emergence of a strategic partnership between two countries. Especially the close cooperation between two countries about the war against global

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terror and Turkish support for the US in the war in Afghanistan were considered as the next linchpin of the security partnership between two countries. However, that initial optimism about the future of bilateral relations turned out to be short lived. In the last twenty years, the developments in the Middle East generated the biggest and most consequential fault lines in bilateral relations.

The most significant crises in bilateral relations have been caused by disagreements in the region. The fallout before and during the Iraq War, the disagreement over the Tehran Declaration in 2010, the rifts in relations because of the Turkish-Israeli relations, and later, the divergences about the 2013 coup in Egypt and the civil war in Syria led to critical tensions in bilateral relations. Although both countries constantly reiterate their commitment to NATO, work together to fight against terrorism, and cooperate on some significant geopolitical areas, including Afghanistan and crisis in Ukraine, strategic differences in their approaches to important issues in the Middle East determined the nature of the relations. In addition, there were significant public diplomacy crises between two countries. Anti-Americanism in Türkiye and anti-Türkiye attitudes in Washington reached new heights and legal problems including the extradition of Fethullah Gülen and Halk Bank cases brought the relations to their lowest point in decades. In this chapter, the critical turning points of the bilateral relationship in the last twenty years will be provided. Analysis of the past two decades reveals an important pattern for bilateral relations which will be discussed in the conclusion.

When the AK Party won the November 2002 general elections with an overwhelming majority, none of the political analysts working on Türkiye were expecting such a significant transformation in the composition of the parliament and among the actors of the Turkish political life. In a rather short period after its foundation, the AK Party was able to form a single party government in Türkiye. The 2002 Turkish elections overlapped with debates in the United States over the impending invasion of Iraq. Despite protests from its major allies around the world, the Bush administration showed determination to launch a military operation against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In this invasion plan, Türkiye was considered as a key country to launch US troops from its soil to form a northern front against the Iraqi army. However, just like in different parts of the world, Iraq War was not very popular at the public level in Türkiye.<sup>1</sup> There were large scale demonstrations

<sup>1</sup> Carol Migdalovitz, "Iraq: Turkey, the Deployment of U.S. Forces, and Related Issues," *Congressional Research Service*, May 2, 2003, [https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs8186/m1/1/high\\_res\\_d/RL31794\\_2003May02.pdf](https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs8186/m1/1/high_res_d/RL31794_2003May02.pdf).

organized by groups belonging to different segments of the political spectrum. This public opposition against the war reflected itself in the political arena in Türkiye. Moreover, the newly formed AK Party government had inherited the most serious financial crisis in the history of Türkiye and destabilization in the region could make it difficult for it to recover from the economic crisis. After the first Iraq War, Türkiye had faced significant economic losses due to the sanctions placed on Iraq and another war in the region could generate another blow to Türkiye's trade relation in the region.

There were also the concerns about the revival of the PKK attacks following the invasion of Iraq. In the aftermath of the First Gulf War, the PKK took advantage of the lack of central government and started to use northern Iraq to launch attacks into Türkiye.<sup>2</sup> During the 1990s, these attacks became the most significant national security concern of Türkiye.<sup>3</sup> Thousands of Turkish citizens died because of PKK attacks and millions were traumatized because of these incidents. The PKK issue turned into a major fault line between Türkiye and the US. Turkish government asked the US administration to take more decisive action against PKK activities in northern Iraq, however, the US steps were considered not satisfactory by the Turkish government. This situation generated skepticism especially among the national security elites about northern Iraq in the immediate aftermath of the US invasion and the potential empowerment of the group in the region. In addition, Türkiye had become host to waves of refugees fleeing from the Saddam regime following US operations during the First Gulf War and there was not much appetite to be the destination for large numbers of refugees amid the worst financial crisis in the country. Thus, while the US was planning a war against Iraq in late 2002 and early 2003, Türkiye was considering the political, economic, and humanitarian outcomes of such an operation for Türkiye.

The debates between Türkiye and the US over Turkish support for the operation generated major turbulence in bilateral relations. The Turkish government, despite public protests, sent a proposal for the transit of US troops to

<sup>2</sup> Ahmet Demir, Özgür Özmen, and Areej Rashid, "An estimation of Turkey's export loss to Iraq," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, no. 150 (2014): 1240 - 1247, [https://ac.els-cdn.com/S1877042814051891/1-s2.0-S1877042814051891-main.pdf?\\_tid=0cea97cd-fcc7-4438-a32b-6d8c3b-f3e38f&acdnat=1527179759\\_61b036b55b3fa822d76a765fcdc43575](https://ac.els-cdn.com/S1877042814051891/1-s2.0-S1877042814051891-main.pdf?_tid=0cea97cd-fcc7-4438-a32b-6d8c3b-f3e38f&acdnat=1527179759_61b036b55b3fa822d76a765fcdc43575).

<sup>3</sup> Soner Cagaptay and Ali Koknar, "The PKK's New Offensive: Implications for Turkey, Iraqi Kurds, and the United States," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 25, 2004, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-pkks-new-offensive-implications-for-turkey-iraqi-kurds-and-the-united-s>.

the Turkish parliament for a vote. However, the negotiations between Turkish and US officials regarding details about Türkiye's position on the war and its reflection in the US media generated intense debates. Following these debates, the government sent the resolution to the parliament for approval. However, the Parliament unexpectedly voted against the resolution by a close margin, causing a major crisis in bilateral relations between Türkiye and the US.<sup>4</sup> While the Bush administration made statements expressing their respect for the constitutional procedure in Türkiye, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz criticized the Turkish military for not showing "sufficient leadership" in the process.<sup>5</sup> This statement generated a huge reaction among the Turkish public and was considered proof that the US preferred the continuation of the tutelage system and military rule in Türkiye.

The negative reaction of the Turkish public to the US decision to go to war continued as the war in Iraq began and the Turkish public witnessed the killing of civilians and growing sectarian violence in Iraq. The Turkish government also raised concerns about PKK activity in northern Iraq which was directly targeting and threatening the national security of Türkiye. However, the US administration's priority was the civil war and Sunni insurgency in the country and the Turkish government's requests as a NATO ally fell on deaf ears in Washington. In the meantime, one of the worst crises in bilateral relations took place when the headquarters of Turkish military personnel in Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq was raided by American soldiers and hoods were placed on the heads of Turkish soldiers. The incident came to be known as the 'Hood incident' and became a critical juncture in the rising anti-Americanism in Türkiye.<sup>6</sup> The initial lack of any action on the part of Washington for two days after the raid heightened tensions over the incident. Large demonstrations were organized in front of the US embassy in Türkiye. Although the Turkish military personnel were released in a few days, the attitude of the US military left a serious dent on the US image in Türkiye. Popular culture, including movies such as *Kurtlar Vadisi, Irak*, was filled with references to the US treatment of Turkish soldiers. Later, following the release of the photos

<sup>4</sup> Dexter Filkins, "Threats and Responses: Ankara; Turkish Deputies Refuse to Accept American Troops," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/02/world/threats-and-responses-ankara-turkish-deputies-refuse-to-accept-american-troops.html>.

<sup>5</sup> "Wolfowitz: Accept your mistake, our partnership shall continue," *Hürriyet*, May 7, 2003, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/wolfowitz-accept-your-mistake-our-partnership-shall-continue-145127>.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Howard and Suzanne Goldberg, "US arrest of soldiers infuriates Turkey," *The Guardian*, July 7, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/08/turkey.michaelhoward>.

of from the Abu Ghraib prison, the mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners also created massive damage on the US public image in Türkiye. Although Türkiye passed another resolution in the fall of 2003 to allow the Turkish soldiers to contribute to the stabilization efforts in Iraq, this did not fix the emerging crisis of trust between two allies. As the US forces failed to find weapons of mass destruction and Al-Qaeda entered Iraq, the Turkish public became much more anxious about the end goal of the US in the region and potential outcomes of the war for the security and stability of Türkiye.

People in different parts of the world reacted negatively to the Iraq War and US relations with numerous countries around the world were strained because of the Iraq War. For Türkiye, however, the 2003 decision to invade Iraq was not just an irresponsible invasion that generated a major civil war and humanitarian disaster on Türkiye's border, it also raised serious concerns about the future of the PKK and its activities in northern Iraq. The regional destabilization that ensued from the invasion also threatened to derail Türkiye's ambitious goal of economic integration with the region. After the March 1<sup>st</sup> crisis, the US administration constantly approached Türkiye with skepticism. As the cost of the war increased, some in the Bush administration even accused Türkiye of causing the extended duration of the war because of the parliament's decision not to allow the US to launch its troops from Türkiye. The divergence between the US and Turkish policies in the Middle East accelerated following the beginning of the war in Iraq and it would later come to encompass several other issues in the region.

Following the fallout in relations about the war in Iraq, foreign policy makers on both sides attempted to control the damage in bilateral ties. Despite deep disagreements between Türkiye and the US, there were substantial issues where the two countries want to further their cooperation, including the war in Afghanistan and the war against terror. Türkiye also wanted the US to continue to support Türkiye's membership to the EU. At the 2004 NATO Summit in Istanbul, Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Bush made it clear following their meeting that Turkish and US interests in Iraq were parallel.<sup>7</sup> Both leaders reiterated the "strategic partnership" between two countries. However, this did not ameliorate Türkiye's concerns over the deteriorating situation in Iraq. Because of that, Türkiye launched initiatives to peacefully resolve conflicts among differing fighting groups

<sup>7</sup> Susan Sachs and Eric Schmitt, "Bush Meets With Leader of Turkey Ahead of NATO Summit," *The New York Times*, June 27, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/27/international/europe/bush-meets-with-leader-of-turkey-ahead-of-nato-summit.html>.

in Iraq and organized the “Neighbors of Iraq” to contain the crises and prevent its spillover to the whole region.

The optimism about the Turkish-American relations continued when the foreign ministers of two countries signed “The Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue to Advance the Turkish-American Partnership.”<sup>8</sup> Following the extremely destructive first three years of the Iraq War, the two countries agreed to increase dialogue to contain potential crises and resolve the existing challenges between two countries. This was followed with the appointment of General Joseph W. Ralston as the special envoy to counter the PKK.<sup>9</sup> However, despite this appointment, defeating the insurgency in Iraq remained the top US priority, and despite targeting some Kurdish groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda, the US avoided directly attacking the PKK in Iraq. This decision by the US contributed to the existing distrust between the two countries throughout the Iraq War.

## THE OBAMA YEARS

President Obama’s election in 2008 was considered a welcome development in Türkiye due to the problems that had remained unresolved throughout the Bush administration. The bad chemistry that had started over the Iraq War had continued and the two countries had also disagreed over several additional issues in the Middle East, including Syria and the Israel-Palestine issue. Regarding Syria, Turkish foreign policy makers launched a major rapprochement following the crisis with Syria in 1999, which had resulted in the signing of Adana Protocol. Türkiye and Syria restored their relations in economic and political matters. However, the Syria opening of the Turkish foreign policy generated skepticism in Washington. Although Syria was not regarded one of the “axis of evil” during the Bush administration, the US adopted a new set of sanctions against Syria. This policy divergence between the US and Türkiye over their policies on Syria generated a low intensity tension between two countries. In a similar way, Türkiye’s policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict generated another fault line in the relations. Over the years, Ankara became more vocal in its criticism of Israel about the treatment of Palestinians. Particularly, the visit of a Hamas delegation to Ankara following the

<sup>8</sup> “Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue to Advance the Turkish-American Strategic Partnership,” *US Department of State Archive*, July 5, 2006, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/68574.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Sean McCormack, “TURKEY: Special Envoy for Countering the PKK,” *US Department of State Archive*, August 28, 2006, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/71563.htm>.

elections in Gaza showed the extend of disagreement between Türkiye and the US regarding the Palestinian-Israeli issue.<sup>10</sup>

Obama was expected to provide a different perspective regarding the Middle East and the US-Türkiye relations. During his campaign for Presidency, he signaled potential changes in US foreign policy if he were elected. Most significantly, his opposition to the Iraq War found an audience among the Turkish public. When it was announced that in his first foreign trip, President Obama would visit Türkiye, many in Türkiye thought that it would mark a new beginning in the bilateral relations between two countries.<sup>11</sup> During his visit to the Turkish capital, President Obama made a speech at the Turkish National Assembly and offered the concept of “model partnership” in order to describe the nature of partnership between two countries.<sup>12</sup> His visit to Istanbul after Ankara as well as his engagements with Turkish audiences generated a rather positive atmosphere among the Turkish public. Later, his messages during his speech in Cairo also generated a very positive vibe among the observers of Turkish-American relations. Many interpreted these speeches as the beginning of a new era in US foreign policy and its relations with the region.

In a very short period after his visit to Ankara, the relations between Erdoğan and Obama improved and President Obama named Erdoğan as one of the leaders that he most frequently interacted and communicated with in 2012.<sup>13</sup> This was an important development for the relations between two countries. Since the beginning of the official ties, the leader-to-leader diplomacy has been the backbone of the relations. The rapid improvement of the ties between two leaders were considered as another reason to be optimistic about the future of bilateral ties. However, this warm atmosphere between the two leaders did not mean that there were not any problems. One of the most significant rifts took place because of a Turkish attempt to broker a deal over Iran’s nuclear program to prevent another military confrontation in the region that could destabilize the entire Middle East. After

<sup>10</sup> “ Hamas leaders visit Turkey,” *United Press International*, February 16, 2006, <https://www.upi.com/Hamas-leaders-visit-Turkey/42871140112629/>.

<sup>11</sup> Scott Wilson, “Obama Trip to Include Turkey Visit,” *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/07/AR2009030701788.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Barack Obama, “President Obama’s Remarks in Turkey,” *The New York Times*, April 6, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/06/us/politics/06obama-text.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “Inside Obama’s World: The President talks to TIME About the Changing Nature of American Power,” January 19, 2012, <http://swampland.time.com/2012/01/19/inside-obamas-world-the-president-talks-to-time-about-the-changing-nature-of-american-power/>.



the US refuted the Tehran Declaration, which had been mediated by Brazil and Türkiye with Obama's encouragement, Türkiye voted against further sanctions against Iran at the UN Security Council in 2010.<sup>14</sup> A second incident during the first term of the Obama presidency was the Mavi Marmara crisis. Although the crisis took place between Türkiye and Israel because of an attack by Israeli Defense Forces against the flotilla while it was sailing in international waters, it caused a significant point of tension between Ankara and Washington.

The beginning of the Arab Spring in the Middle East during the Obama presidency challenged bilateral relations between Türkiye and the US more than ever. First, the sudden rise of people's movements in the Middle East was not expected neither in Ankara nor in Washington. When the mass protests started to spread to different parts of the Arab world, most countries around the world were surprised by the rapid progression of events. Second, since the first Gulf War, Türkiye and the US had yet to adopt a new common strategy to deal with the challenges in the Middle East. The lack of a long-term US strategy and its dependence on tactics instead of a comprehensive strategy left US allies in the region in limbo regarding the regional crises. In the face of the Arab Spring, as with every prior crisis throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the two NATO allies had to try to establish a working relationship from scratch. When the Arab Spring started, the two countries tried to make sense of the events and attempted to adopt a common tone. Following some initial discord, both countries supported the people's movements and regime change in Tunisia and Egypt. In Libya, the first signs of the difficulty the US and Türkiye faced in coordinating their reactions emerged when the Turkish government initially opposed a NATO intervention in Libya, though it eventually came to support the operation.<sup>15</sup> However, the rapidly changing situation on the ground in some countries put two allies at odds with each other. For instance, in the aftermath of the toppling down of the Qaddafi regime in Libya, the emerging uncertainty and chaos created some divergences in the approaches of the US and Türkiye. However, the real disagreement took place about the crisis in Syria.

More than any of the other Arab Spring revolutions, the crisis in Syria paved the way for the most significant strategic divergence between the two countries.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Migdalovitz, "Turkey: Selected Foreign Policy Issues and U.S. Views," *Congressional Research Service*, November 28, 2010, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34642.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Ayla Jean Yackley, "Turkey opposes any NATO operation in Libya," *Reuters*, March 14, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-turkey-idUSTRE72D49D20110314>.

The disagreement between two countries on Syria policy continued to impact bilateral relations in the next two administrations in the US. When the protests started in Syria in 2011, both countries took similar steps regarding their reactions to the crackdown on these protests. While both countries had invested in relations with Syria during the previous years, Türkiye had become especially invested in improving relations with Syria after the Adana protocol was signed by the two countries in 1999 following the Ocalan crisis.<sup>16</sup> Since then, customs duties had been eliminated, minefields along the border had been cleared, and the two governments had organized joint cabinet meetings. Türkiye even tried to broker a peace agreement between Syria and Israel.<sup>17</sup> The trade volume and economic interactions had also increased. The Obama administration meanwhile considered Syria an important linchpin of its policy goals in the Middle East. Immediately after President Obama's inauguration in 2009, the administration established diplomatic contacts with the Syrian regime.<sup>18</sup> By the end of 2010, President Obama had appointed an ambassador to Damascus, the first since 2005.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Senator John Kerry, then the chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited Damascus and met with Bashar Assad in April 2010.<sup>20</sup> When protests broke out, both Türkiye and the US were in favor of convincing Assad to reform Syria's political systems.<sup>21</sup> For the first few months of the crisis, both Turkish and US policymakers tried to persuade the Syrian President to stop the use of force against peaceful demonstrators. However, all the calls from Türkiye and the US were ignored by Bashar Assad and the violence intensified.

<sup>16</sup> "Statement Made By İsmail Cem, Foreign Minister, On The Special Security Meeting Held Between Turkey And Syria October 20, 1998 (Unofficial Translation)," *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, October 20, 1998, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/\\_p\\_statement-made-by-ismail-cem\\_-foreign-minister\\_-on-the-special-security-meeting-held-between-turkey-and-syria\\_br\\_october-20\\_-1998\\_br\\_\\_unofficial-translation\\_\\_p\\_.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/_p_statement-made-by-ismail-cem_-foreign-minister_-on-the-special-security-meeting-held-between-turkey-and-syria_br_october-20_-1998_br__unofficial-translation__p_.en.mfa).

<sup>17</sup> Cam Simpson, "Israel, Syria Reveal Indirect Peace Negotiations," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2008, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121136419354110263>.

<sup>18</sup> David Kenner, "Tough love for Syria from Obama," *Foreign Policy*, March 3, 2009, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/03/03/tough-love-for-syria-from-obama/>.

<sup>19</sup> Perry Bacon Jr. and Karen DeYoung, "Obama names ambassador to Syria," *The Washington Post*, December 30, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/29/AR2010122904631.html>.

<sup>20</sup> George Baghdadi, "U.S. Sees Talks with Syria as a Priority," *CBS News*, April 1, 2010, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-sees-talks-with-syria-as-a-priority/>.

<sup>21</sup> "Readout of the President's Call with Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey," *The White House Archives - President Barack Obama*, August 11, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/11/readout-presidents-call-prime-minister-erdogan-turkey>.

By late 2011, however, both the Turkish government and the US government had lost their hope for reforms. In August, the US called for Assad to step down,<sup>22</sup> a demand Türkiye similarly expressed in November.<sup>23</sup> This coordination of reactions led many to believe that there was a long-term joint strategy between the two countries. But it soon became obvious that the US had no strategy in Syria and President Obama's statement about Assad was mostly a rhetorical one with no action to follow. However, such a statement by the US President could and did generate repercussions throughout the Middle East. The statements of President Obama generated both disappointment and confusion among large segments of the attentive public in the Middle East. One of the most significant disruptions in bilateral relations regarding Syria took place following the chemical weapon attack by the Syrian regime against the suburbs of Damascus. When the first reports of the movement and use of chemical weapons in Syria were published, alarming not only Türkiye but also most of the neighboring countries to Syria, President Obama made a statement and described such a movement of chemical weapons or use of them as a red line for his position on Syria. President Obama's "red line" statement was seen by Türkiye as a serious warning to the Assad regime. However, in early 2013, there was an increasing number of reports of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime.

In May 2013, despite the evidence of the use of chemical weapons in Syria provided by the Turkish delegation during Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to Washington, President Obama preferred to take no immediate action.<sup>24</sup> When the use of chemical weapons became undeniable following the Ghouta attack in August 2013, the US administration openly raised the potential use of air strikes against targets in Syria for the first time. Türkiye, like several US allies, offered support for possible military operations against the Assad regime.<sup>25</sup> There was a high expectation among the countries in the region and members of the Syrian opposition that this would be considered a violation of Obama's "red line", and it would force

<sup>22</sup> Steven Lee Myers, "U.S. and Allies Say Syria Leader Must Step Down," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/19/world/middleeast/19diplo.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathon Burch, "Turkey tells Syria's Assad: Step down!," *Reuters*, November 22, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-idUSL5E7MD0GZ20111122>.

<sup>24</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, "Joint Press Conference by President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey," *The White House Archives - President Barack Obama*, May 16, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/16/joint-press-conference-president-obama-and-prime-minister-erdogan-turkey>.

<sup>25</sup> Ayhan Simsek, "Turkey weighs military options in Syria," *Deutsche Welle*, August 28, 2013, <http://www.dw.com/en/turkey-weighs-military-options-in-syria/a-17050564>.

him to change his policy of inaction. However, despite all expectations, President Obama announced that he had decided not to strike Syria at that point and ask the Congress for the authorization.<sup>26</sup> Not only did the US not follow through on a red line statement made by its president, but President Obama also made the decision not to attack without informing US allies and partners around the world.

The real divergence of the US and Turkish strategies started following this decision by President Obama. The US allies in the region as well as members of the Syrian opposition came to believe that the US would not provide any long-term strategy about the future of Syria. This diversion of interests later deepened with the rise of DAESH in Syria and Iraq. The two countries' approach to the conflict in Syria dramatically changed following the rise of DAESH. While Türkiye considered DAESH to be a product of the larger conflict in Syria and believed that a comprehensive plan was the best way to resolve the problem, the US saw DAESH, and eventually the broader Syria issue, as a counter terrorism problem. These differing understandings of the Syrian conflict led Türkiye and the US to adopt drastically different policies from one another in Syria. The disagreement over how to address the conflict in Syria was not limited to the one issue but impacted broader US-Türkiye relations. Following the realization that the US administration was not willing to make a serious effort to resolve the conflict, the Turkish government continued its endeavors to find a diplomatic solution to alleviate the humanitarian tragedy in Syria. At that point, Türkiye started to host many Syrian refugees in its borders and with the increasing intensity of the conflict, the numbers of refugees continued to increase. Türkiye did not receive sufficient international support to handle the refugees in its borders and this generated a high degree of frustration among Turkish policy makers.

The real turning point in bilateral relations took place following the emergence of a US policy to deal with DAESH. The Obama administration following the killing of American journalists by the terror group decided to take decisive action against DAESH. However, the administration knew that air strikes would not be sufficient to exterminate the terror group from the region. The administration was also adamant not to send "boots on the ground" to deal with the terrorist threat in Syria. The US administration following the formation of the international coalition against DAESH decided to find a local ally to deal with the group. While Türkiye was suggesting the arming and training of the Free Syrian Army elements

<sup>26</sup> Paul Lewis, "US attack on Syria delayed after surprise U-turn from Obama," *The Guardian*, August 31, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/31/syrian-air-strikes-obama-congress>.

in Syria, the US side took a different position and started to arm and train a group that Türkiye considered a terrorist organization. The YPG was the Syrian branch of the PKK, which was in fact recognized as a terrorist organization by the US. Ankara argued that supporting a terrorist organization against another terrorist organization was not acceptable for Türkiye. However, Washington insisted on arming and training YPG elements.

The support by the US-led international coalition for the YPG generated one of the most serious crises between Türkiye and the US. This crisis was different than previous tensions in bilateral relations. Since the AK Party's rise to power, the two countries had had serious disagreements over various issues pertaining to the Middle East, including the 2003 Iraq War and the Iranian nuclear program. However, none of these issues had been directly related to the core national security concerns of Türkiye. When the Obama administration decided to support the YPG to defeat DAESH, the crisis reached new heights. Now the disagreement between Türkiye and the US was about a core national security issue for Türkiye.<sup>27</sup> Although the US officials described the relationship between the YPG and the US as temporary and tactical, this explanation was far from providing a satisfactory answer for Türkiye's concerns about the future of this relation.

Following the initial US support for the YPG in the battle in Kobani in the fall of 2014, the partnership between the US and the YPG continued to grow as the YPG served as a partner force on the ground in Syria for the US air forces. A new name was invented for the group, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and some Sunni Arab elements were also added to this group to quell the criticisms about the demographic composition of the group and potentially alleviate Turkish concerns. The US side maintained its previous explanations about the cooperation between the YPG and the US forces. Türkiye maintained three key objections to the US explanations for the cooperation with the YPG. First, the attempts to present the YPG as a separate organization was totally unacceptable for the Turkish government. Turkish side has enough intelligence and information to demonstrate that YPG was only a Syrian branch of the PKK. There was the overlap between the YPG and the PKK in terms of ideology and human resources. The artificial distinction drawn by the US administration was not considered acceptable by the Turkish government who was concerned that the empowerment of a proxy of a

<sup>27</sup> "Kobane: US drops arms and aid to Kurds battling IS," *The BBC*, October 20, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29684761>.

terrorist organization would generate serious security problems for the Turkish government. Considering the relaunching of terrorist attacks by the PKK in 2015, any military assistance for the YPG was regarded as a major national security problem for Türkiye.

Second, the policies of the YPG in the northern Syria that aimed to change the demographic composition of the region generated serious concern about the future of the region. This ethnic engineering attempt by the YPG, according to Türkiye, could destabilize the whole region by bringing about a new civil war between Kurds and Arabs. This conflict would lead to repercussions for the border security and national security of Türkiye. Third, one of the critical problems for Turkish foreign policy makers was the lack of a long-term comprehensive US strategy about Syria. The focus was primarily on defeating DAESH. The lack of a strategy provided a condition that the tactics on the ground shape the strategy and policy of the US administration. This has generated a major confusion and unpredictability in bilateral relations. Many Turkish commentators in these days argue that there was a lack of the “day after” plan about the cooperation with the YPG. For instance, it was not clear what would happen to the military equipment that US provided for the YPG after the defeat of DAESH. The responses provided by the US administration did not convince the Turkish side.

The US insistence about the military assistance to the YPG created further distrust and skepticism about the US objectives in the region. When Türkiye declared that the west bank of the Euphrates River would be its “red line” and any YPG incursion towards the West would be considered a security threat for Türkiye, the US administration mostly underestimated Türkiye’s warnings.<sup>28</sup> The Manbij operation, where the US once more used YPG forces to defeat DAESH, led to another crisis in relations. Contrary to reassurances by the US administration, the YPG did not return to the east of the Euphrates River following the capture of the city.<sup>29</sup> Together with the presence of DAESH in Jarablus, the YPG presence in Manbij meant Türkiye’s southern borders were occupied by terrorist groups. After several warnings, Türkiye launched the Operation Euphrates Shield in 2016 to

<sup>28</sup> Humeyra Pamuk, “Turkey struck Kurdish militia in Syria twice: PM Davutoglu,” *Reuters*, October 27, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-kurds/turkey-struck-kurdish-militia-in-syria-twice-pm-davutoglu-idUSKCN0SL0SP20151027>.

<sup>29</sup> “Turkey expects Syrian Kurdish forces to withdraw after Manbij operation: minister,” *Reuters*, August 15, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-manbij/turkey-expects-syrian-kurdish-forces-to-withdraw-after-manbij-operation-minister-idUSKCN10Q11R>.

eradicate these threats from its border regions.<sup>30</sup> The day that Operation Euphrates Shield started, Vice President Biden visited Türkiye where he reiterated the US commitment to send the YPG forces east of the Euphrates.<sup>31</sup> He openly stated that if the YPG forces did not return to the eastern side of Euphrates, the US would stop all military assistance. However, these promises and commitments were never fulfilled. This situation contributed to the growing mistrust between two capitals. The Turkish government expressed its disappointment for the unfulfilled promises of the US administration and decided to take more unilateral steps in its fight against terrorist groups in northern Syria.

## THE TRUMP YEARS

The US policy on the YPG did not change despite the new American administration's drastically different foreign policy approach, as the Trump administration continued the policies that were designed by President Obama. This was yet another major disappointment for Türkiye, as many Turks expected a major rupture in US policy in Syria and the Turkish government expected the new administration to be more sensitive and considerate to Türkiye's national security concerns. However, the Trump administration did not only continue the Obama era policies towards the YPG but also started to directly arm the YPG with heavy weapons.<sup>32</sup> In May 2017, just days before President Erdoğan's trip to Washington for his first meeting with President Trump, the US administration announced its decision to arm the YPG for the capture of Raqqa, the capital of DAESH in Syria. Türkiye's suggestions to organize the offensive to Raqqa together with the US forces was ignored by the US administration.<sup>33</sup> For the Trump administration, the capture of the city was regarded as a major victory against the terror group and a source

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Markey, "U.S. seeks to soothe Turkey ties, press fight against Islamic State," *Reuters*, August 26, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-usa/u-s-seeks-to-soothe-turkey-ties-press-fight-against-islamic-state-idUSKCN1112BN>.

<sup>31</sup> Office of the Vice President, "Remarks by Vice President Joe Biden and Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım at a Press Availability," *The White House Archives - President Barack Obama*, August 24, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/08/25/remarks-vice-president-joe-biden-and-turkish-prime-minister-binali>.

<sup>32</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "Trump to Arm Syrian Kurds, Even as Turkey Strongly Objects," *The New York Times*, May 9, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/09/us/politics/trump-kurds-syria-army.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Humeyra Pamuk, "Turkey sets out Raqqa operation plans to U.S.: report," *Reuters*, February 18, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-syria/turkey-sets-out-raqqa-operation-plans-to-u-s-report-idUSKBN15X0C7>.

of credit for administration's counter terrorism policy. The use of YPG units to capture a Sunni Arab dominated city increased the skepticism towards the US goals in the region.

In the meantime, especially CENTCOM caused very serious public diplomacy crises with Türkiye. The pictures of Brett McGurk with YPG members in Kobani was a shocking development for US-Turkish relations. When CENTCOM made American soldiers on the ground to use YPG armbands, it created a huge reaction in Turkish society. In addition, CENTCOM irked the Turkish government by constantly glorifying YPG members and promoting the group as the only solution for the problems in Syria. Its tweets about the group generated different diplomatic crises between two countries. While Ankara expressed its dismay about the attitude of CENTCOM and protested it during meetings with US officials, the Trump administration did not take any meaningful steps to change the course of this policy. As mentioned above, the lack of any comprehensive strategy of the US administration made CENTCOM as the most important actor in policy making in the region. The attempts of some other actors in the US to resolve this problem failed to end the crisis between two countries. Particularly the failure of the Manbij roadmap agreement signed by two countries to resolve the crisis generated a huge disappointment. The crisis over the city of Manbij continued until the withdrawal of the US forces from the town following President Trump's decision to pull US troops out of Syria. However, it did not end the crisis between two countries. Particularly following the beginning of the Turkish military operations in the East of Euphrates, the relations went through the worst times in its history. The negative reaction against Türkiye from the US Congress and CENTCOM created a major counter reaction from the Turkish side. Although two governments tried to manage the crisis, the tension between left a major scar in the bilateral relations.

As this article is being written, the issue of the YPG still constitutes one of the most serious problems between Türkiye and the US. The withdrawal of the US forces from some parts of the region did not totally change the situation as the US support for the YPG continued during the last years of the Trump administration. The incoming Biden administration also did not bring any new policy to the table regarding the conflict in Syria. While Türkiye's negotiations with Russia and Iran about northwest Syria generated a lot of criticism and skepticism in Washington regarding Türkiye's goals in Syria and its foreign policy orientation, Washington did not offer any policy to mend ties with Ankara regarding the YPG. President Erdoğan continued to mention Türkiye's concerns



to its counterparts in the US but there was not any policy or initiative in Washington to resolve the crisis.

The YPG has generated the biggest problem in trust between two allies in recent years. Public opinion in Türkiye has become increasingly negative in reaction to the US military assistance to a group that is recognized as a terrorist organization. The artificial distinctions, the explanations by the US – the tactical, temporary, and limited nature of partnership with the YPG- did not fix the situation. As the Trump and Biden administrations continued the policies that were initiated by the Obama administration, the Turkish government has started to look for potential resolution of the problem through unilateral military operations against the YPG. For most of the observers of the US-Türkiye relations, the YPG issue is the most significant crisis in bilateral relations.

## THE UNRESOLVED TENSIONS IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

The tension in bilateral relations between Türkiye and the US reached a new height following the failed coup attempt by the fringe elements within the Turkish armed forces loyal to Fethullah Gulen. The coup attempt was thwarted by the rapid mobilization of the Turkish society and the Turkish government against the putschists. This coup attempt impacted Turkish-American relations in two different ways. The reaction of the US government to the coup attempt generated a major disappointment in Türkiye. In its first statement after the beginning of the coup attempt, Secretary of State John Kerry, instead of denouncing such an attempt, stated that US is expecting stability and continuity in Türkiye.<sup>34</sup> Considering the recent memory of the US disregard to the coup in Egypt, the statement was interpreted as the US support for the coup or insensitivity to an attack against the democratically elected government in Türkiye.<sup>35</sup> While the US tried to fix this mistake with another statement in the same evening, this time the fact that the statement did not include the word “coup” became a reminiscent of the 2013 Egyptian coup, in which the US administration avoided using the c word to describe the situation. The critical issue following the coup attempt was to iden-

<sup>34</sup> Nolan D. McCaskill, “Kerry: I hope there will be ‘stability, peace, continuity’ within Turkey,” *Politico*, July 15, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/john-kerry-turkey-coup-225632>.

<sup>35</sup> Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, “Turks Can Agree on One Thing: U.S. Was Behind Failed Coup,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/03/world/europe/turkey-coup-erdogan-fethullah-gulen-united-states.html>.

tify and prosecute those responsible for the coup attempt. After determining that Gulen's followers were responsible for the attempt, Türkiye asked the US administration to extradite Gulen to Türkiye. In addition to the coup attempt, there were multiple different indictments prepared by the prosecutors holding Gulen and his group, referred to as FETO, responsible for different crimes and criminal enterprises in Türkiye. However, despite multiple attempts by the Turkish government, the US administration failed to extradite Gulen or start investigations against his group's activities in the US. This has generated a serious tension in relations. Especially at the public level this has fueled the rise of anti-Americanism in Türkiye. Turkish public perceived this situation as a support for the coup makers by the US. Together with the US support for the YPG the anti-Americanism in the country rose to an all-time high.

During the last five years of the bilateral relations, another major issue was the defense industry relationship between the two countries. The US refusal to sell armed drones to Türkiye to be used against the PKK in the first years of the new millennium, the US defense companies' refusal to transfer technology in Türkiye's bid to purchase air defense systems, the US decision to exclude Türkiye from the F35 program following Türkiye's purchase of S400 air defense systems from Russia, and the US adoption of CAATSA sanctions against Türkiye hurt the backbone of the relationship between Türkiye and the US. In the last few years, the positive response by the US administration to Türkiye's request to purchase F16 lowered the level of tension, however, both countries need to work hard in the coming years to resolve the main issues in defense industry cooperation. Especially the voices from the US Congress opposing Türkiye's purchase of the F16 has been raising concerns about the future of bilateral relations between two nations.

## CONCLUSION

Turkish-American relations during the AK Party era have always been in a volatile state. Shortly after the 2002 Turkish elections, the US invasion of Iraq generated a serious crisis in bilateral relations which continued for years as the war turned into a civil war. The lack of US focus on the PKK in Iraq, the Hood incident, and human rights violations in Iraq generated a major reaction in Türkiye against the US, both at the public and government levels. Later, attempts to fix ties between two countries during the first years of the Obama administration failed after the Arab Spring. The conflict in Syria generated the biggest strategic divergence between two countries in decades. Following the rise of DAESH and the US assistance to

the YPG, the strategic divergence reached a whole new level. Following the July 15 coup attempt, relations reached a new low from which the two countries have yet to recover.

Following these repeated blows to US-Turkish ties, Türkiye started to diversify its foreign policy, including increased cooperation with Russia in Syria and in the defense industry, a move that generated anxiety in Washington. Although the US has so far failed to respond to the demands of Türkiye, any attempts by Türkiye to diversify its relations have caused concern in the US capital. The ties between the leaders of two countries, which has been an important determinant of bilateral relations for decades, also could not resolve the problems. Despite the positive chemistry between President Trump and Erdoğan, the two leaders failed to reach an agreement on significant issues. With the increasing unilateral inclinations in US foreign policy, such as the Jerusalem decision, and Türkiye's increasingly proactive and assertive foreign policy as well as its readiness to use military instruments when its national security is threatened, it has become harder to manage the relations between the two countries. The descriptions of bilateral relations such as "strategic partnership," "enduring partnership," and "model partnership" have become less meaningful when the mutual trust is so low in Türkiye about US intentions in the region.

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## CHAPTER 10

# CHANGING DYNAMICS OF TÜRKİYE'S MILITARY ACTIVISM IN THE AK PARTY ERA

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SİBEL DÜZ\*\*

Türkiye's security and foreign policies have experienced significant transformations regarding the country's changing regional and international role since the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party) came to power in 2002. The transformation in Turkish foreign policy has been widely studied in relation to the concept of "foreign policy activism".<sup>1</sup> This concept has indeed become the central component of the AK Party's foreign policy program in the post-2002 agenda of Türkiye's international affairs.<sup>2</sup> Following the AK Party's accession in 2002, Türkiye's security policy has also evolved to the point that its armed forces started engaging in different types of national and international military operations not only to deter the regional threats against Türkiye but also to recalibrate the country's hard power as an integral part of Turkish foreign policy. Despite the fact that a considerable amount of research has been conducted regarding Turkish foreign policy activism<sup>3</sup> under the AK Party rule, not enough

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<sup>1</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş and Ali Balcı, "The Dictionary of Turkish Foreign Policy: A Conceptual Map", *SAM Policy Papers*, No: 7, (2013), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Burhanettin Duran, Ali Aslan and Kemal İnat, *AK Parti'nin 15 Yılı: Dış Politika*, (SETA Publishing, İstanbul: 2018); Murat Yeşiltaş, "The Transformation of the Geopolitical Vision in Turkish Foreign Policy", *Turkish Studies*, Vol: 14, No: 4, (2013), pp. 661-87; Ziya Öniş, "Multiple Faces of the "New" Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 13, No: 1, (2011), pp. 47-65.

<sup>3</sup> Ali Balcı, *Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası: İlkeler, Aktörler ve Olaylar*, (Alfa Publishing, İstanbul: 2017); Burhanettin Duran, "Understanding the AK Party's Identity Politics: A Civilizational Discourse and Its Limitations", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 15, No: 1, (2013), pp. 91-109.



attention has been paid to the military aspect of Türkiye's foreign policy activism. This article focuses on "Turkish military activism" in relation to the military and security aspects of Turkish foreign policy in the AK Party era. The concept of military activism underlines the rise of Türkiye's extra-territorial military presence and strategies and its contribution to international peace operations.

In the scope of Turkish foreign policy activism, when compared to the previous eras in the regional and international context, there has been a shift in scale.<sup>4</sup> Turkish foreign policy has transitioned from a territorial and nationally defined geopolitical vision determined by its national boundaries to an expanded vision that includes wider regions such as the Middle East, Caucasus, the Balkans, and North Africa. More importantly, unlike defensive foreign and security policies, which tended to emphasize the intra-territorial conceptualization of the geopolitics of Türkiye, the new foreign policy activism emerged with a distinctive vision as a result of the country's regional and international expansion.<sup>5</sup> The new foreign policy activism encompasses a dramatically different vision of Türkiye's international position and marks a remarkable break from the previous foreign policy discourses and practices.

Compared with foreign activism, not enough attention has been paid to the increasing role of Türkiye's military activism in the last decade. Türkiye is an important NATO ally that has often engaged in international military operations, especially peace operations since the Cold War. Türkiye has also become an important geopolitical player in maintaining regional and international stability and security by contributing with its military forces in the post-Cold War era. The AK Party administration had also paid close attention to Türkiye's role in international peace operations before the Arab Spring as part of its foreign policy activism in international politics. In addition, Türkiye has contributed to international peace

<sup>4</sup> Ali Balcı and Murat Yeşiltaş, "Turkey's New Middle East Policy: The Case of the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Iraq's Neighboring Countries", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol: 29, No: 4, (2006), pp. 18- 37.

<sup>5</sup> Ziya Öniş, "Multiple Faces of the "New" Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 13, No: 1, (2011), pp. 47-65; Ahmet Sözen, "A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transition and Challenges", *Turkish Studies*, Vol: 11, No: 1, (2010), pp. 103-23; Faruk Yalvaç, "Strategic Depth or Hegemonic Depth? A Critical Realist Analysis of Turkey's Position in the World System", *International Relations*, Vol: 26, No: 2, (2012), pp. 165-80; Güneş Murat Tezcür and Alexandru Grigorescu, "Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy: Balancing European and Regional Interests", *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol: 15, No: 3, (2014), pp. 257-76; Ali Balcı and Nebi Miş, "Turkey's Role in the Alliance of Civilizations: A New Perspective in Turkish Foreign Policy?", *Turkish Studies*, Vol: 9, No: 3, (2008), pp. 387-406.

operations as part of its objective to acquire a new international role.<sup>6</sup> When it comes to fulfilling its new role, Türkiye seeks to achieve this through its military strategy by countering security threats such as the PKK and DAESH terrorist organizations. The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) have been actively engaging in counter-terrorism operations abroad, particularly in northern Iraq. However, since the Arab Spring, and due to the changing security landscape of the Middle East-North African region (MENA), Turkish military activism has become more assertive to gain greater strategic autonomy and flexibility in containing security and geopolitical obstacles emanating from violent non-state, international, and other regional actors. This has led the TAF to engage in direct and indirect military operations to support Türkiye's regional and international interests.

In order to contextualize the rise of military activism under the AK Party administration within Turkish politics, it is necessary to examine the main contributing factors behind Türkiye's strategic ambition of becoming a regional player and an influential international actor by increasing its military capacity. Here, military capacity not only refers to the ability to achieve a desired effect in a specific operational environment, such as combat readiness, sustainable capability, and force structure,<sup>7</sup> it also highlights the importance of defending Türkiye against all adversaries, foreign and domestic, while simultaneously enabling the country to pursue whatever interest it wishes within and beyond its borders. This article examines how Türkiye's military activism manifested through different types of military operations, including international peace operations, combating terrorism, contributions to regional and international security, and post-conflict stability operations. The article argues that the increasing military activism of Türkiye stems both from the post-Arab Spring era and the changing security environment, especially in the Middle East. The reasons behind the increasing military activism of Türkiye also include a desire to gain political influence in the international arena and improve Türkiye's military capabilities to deter emerging security threats near its borders and abroad.

In the first section, the article contextualizes the concept of military activism in relation to Turkish military history in the context of the post-2002 geopolitical period. In the second section, it historically analyzes Türkiye's military activism

<sup>6</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, "Turkey's Quest for New International Order", *Perception: Journal of International Affairs*, Vol: 9, No: 4, (2014), pp. 43-75.

<sup>7</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, Janice Bially, Christopher Layne, and Melissa McPherson, *Measuring National Power in the Postindustrial Age*, (CA: RAND Corporation, Santa Monica: 2000), pp. 133-76.

under the AK Party administration and empirically examines Türkiye's military activism regarding its strategic missions. In the last section, the article sheds light on the main findings to coherently define the main driving factors that shape Türkiye's military activism.

## MAKING SENSE OF THE RISE OF TÜRKİYE'S MILITARY ACTIVISM

Even though Türkiye has militarily contributed to international peace operations abroad since the end of the Cold War, its military strategy, which also includes military activism, has undergone a remarkable change, especially in the post-Arab Spring geopolitical landscape of Türkiye in the Middle East region. One of the main driving forces behind the rise of military activism within the Turkish strategy has emerged as a result of a combination of several factors.

In the early years of the AK Party administration, Turkish foreign policy was constructed around the idea that Türkiye could only redefine its international role by transforming its foreign policy stance toward regions located nearby and farther abroad. In that context, the main aim was to reevaluate Türkiye's international activism and transform it from a "central country" into a "global player".<sup>8</sup> According to this foreign policy goal, Türkiye's central role in the regional and global geopolitical picture is crucial and its cultural heritage is also an inseparable and powerful aspect considering the vast historical experience of Türkiye.<sup>9</sup> Gaining Türkiye's "strategic autonomy" was the primary goal of this new foreign policy understanding,<sup>10</sup> thus, the reconfiguration of Türkiye's proactive and multi-dimensional foreign policy required its involvement in international peace operations to construct an emerging power identity.<sup>11</sup> During this time, Türkiye's national security concerns were heavily influenced by the actions of the PKK, a terrorist organization that has been conducting irregular attacks against the country since the 1980s. The

<sup>8</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı", *Radikal*, February 26, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Küresel Barış Vizyonu*, (Meydan Publishing, İstanbul: 2012); Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 10, No: 1, (2008), pp. 77-96.

<sup>10</sup> According to S. Kalyanaraman strategic autonomy "denotes the ability of a state to pursue its national interests and adopt its preferred foreign policy without being constrained in any manner by other states"; "Aravind Devanathan asked: What is 'strategic autonomy'? How does it help India's Security?", Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, January 20, 2015, [https://idsa.in/askanexpert/strategicautonomy\\_indiasecurity](https://idsa.in/askanexpert/strategicautonomy_indiasecurity), (Access date: October 05, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> Nil. S. Satana, "Peacekeeping Contributor Profile: Turkey", Providing for Peacekeeping, September 2012, <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/2014/04/03/contributor-profile-turkey/>, (Access date: March 20, 2018).

main objective of the new security strategy was to contain the threat of terrorism on a domestic and regional level by redefining Türkiye's military strategy. With the reformulation of Türkiye's relations, especially with Middle Eastern countries, the AK Party government aimed to undermine the PKK's outside support by minimizing its military capacity and delegitimizing the terrorist organization's ideology and politics on the regional level.

While the formation of the new foreign policy was one of the essential elements of the AK Party government's platform, the strategic evaluation of international politics and the reformulation of Türkiye's military and defense strategies have become necessary components of the post-2002 goal of obtaining a new role in the international arena.<sup>12</sup> The military and defense objectives manifested themselves through protecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country. The main security priority of the AK Party government in this period was to contribute to the establishment of regional and international stability. However, the new security landscape after the Arab Spring and the emerging security threats, especially emanating from state and non-state armed actors, shifted Türkiye's national security concerns dramatically and forced Türkiye toward a more offensive security and military strategy. This also reconstructed Türkiye's military activism, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). The rise of DAESH and the PKK's changing strategy in Türkiye and Syria accelerated and reshaped Türkiye's military activism. More importantly, in this period, the rising regional geopolitical antagonism among regional countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran and the steady escalation and diversification of the Syrian civil war engendered a shift in Türkiye's perception of military power as a tool of foreign policy.

The Turkish military and defense strategy is defined as the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the aforementioned policy objectives. This encompasses several dimensions, including increasing military capacity and deterrence by investing in the national defense industry. These new objectives encapsulated the compartmentalization of defense policies in accordance with Türkiye's changing role in international politics. This was accomplished by contributing to international peace operations to consolidate Türkiye's place in the international system and through cooperation with NATO and other regional and international alliances. Overall, this new military strategy perspective sought to stabilize Türkiye's forward defense to detect national and regional threats across borders and

<sup>12</sup> Merve Seren, "AK Parti Döneminde Savunma Sanayinde Yerlilik ve Millilik", *AK Parti'nin 15 Yılı: Dış Politika*, eds. Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Ali Aslan, (SETA Publishing, İstanbul: 2018).

carry out preventive interventions before threats reach Turkish territory. In this regard, with the rise of threat perception, Türkiye has begun to reassert its material capacity with military and defense means, not only to contain the security threats but also to redefine the politics of power projection in the near abroad. As stated earlier, the politics of military activism in Turkish strategy can be examined through the power projection principle. Accordingly, military activism can also be interpreted as “the ability of a nation to apply all or some of its elements of national power –political, economic, informational, or military– to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain forces in and from multiple dispersed locations to respond to crises, to contribute to deterrence, and to enhance regional stability”.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the increasing diversification of Türkiye’s politics of military activism, three interrelated factors shape Türkiye’s strategy under the AK Party administration. The first one is security-related factors at the regional and international levels, which mainly changed Türkiye’s perception of military politics. Historically, security-related factors have shaped Türkiye’s formulation of its military influence for different reasons. For example, international systemic changes throughout the Cold War and the post-Cold War era shifted from a solid understanding of bipolarity to multipolarity and multilateralism.<sup>14</sup> This shift in the international system also changed Türkiye’s perception of military politics. On the other hand, the emergence of new values and norms such as human security, responsibility to protect, and humanitarian intervention have influenced the degree of Türkiye’s commitment to international peace operations.<sup>15</sup>

The new security environment as well as the transformation of the political and strategic landscape of Eastern Europe and the MENA region have also transformed Türkiye’s role in international and regional military operations. Up until the Korean War, Turkish foreign policies were determined by Türkiye’s need for a security alliance in the western bloc and against the impending security threat from the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Following Türkiye’s membership in NATO in 1952, Türkiye’s contribution to international peace operations began to revolve around NATO’s strategic priorities. Nevertheless, its participation in international peace

<sup>13</sup> The US Department of Defense, “Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms”, February 15, 2016, <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp102.pdf>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Uğur Güngör, “The Analysis of Turkey’s Approach to Peace Operations”, (Doctoral Dissertation, Bilkent University, Ankara: 2007), pp. 133-75.

<sup>15</sup> Güngör, “The Analysis of Turkey’s Approach to Peace Operations”, pp. 133-75.

<sup>16</sup> William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774*, (Routledge, London and New York: 2014).

operations has become an integral part of Türkiye's strategic competition with the countries in the region and its ambition for strategic leverage in regional politics.<sup>17</sup> This strategy has evolved throughout the Cold War and in the post-Cold War periods toward a strategy of finding the appropriate opportunity to exercise its military capability. However, the diversification of security issues and the increasing ambiguity within the structure of the NATO alliance have affected Türkiye's perception of military activism as the commonality of the threat perception has transformed. Therefore, while the common understanding within the NATO alliance of the increasing security threats provides greater opportunities for Türkiye to become a multilateral partner of international military operations, threats that are not equally interpreted as such by Türkiye and Western countries have increased Ankara's independently initiated military operations.

The second explanation concerning the driving factors behind Türkiye's policy of military activism can be examined within the context of organizational factors, through which the Turkish military tries to improve its military capacity. During the AK Party era, with the advancement of the Turkish Armed Forces' operational capabilities, a more professional army capable of high mobility and more high-tech military units were desired. In that context, as the second largest army within the NATO security structure, maintaining Türkiye's military prestige has become one of the important components of Ankara's military activism, and it is determined to earn a reputation among other countries' armies by acquiring international experience and skills.<sup>18</sup> In addition to organizational factors, certain operational factors have also shaped Türkiye's military perception since September 11 (9/11), as well. In this regard, Türkiye's normative and institutional commitment to the international fight against terrorism as well as the maintenance of its close strategic security relations with the European powers within NATO are the main determining factors in formulating Türkiye's military activism in line with the operational dimension.<sup>19</sup>

The third driving factor that shapes Türkiye's approach to military activism can be explained through the domestic political concerns and the perception of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) within Turkish society. In this regard, public opinion and security elites play an important role in evaluating Türkiye's mil-

<sup>17</sup> GÜNGÖR, "The Analysis of Turkey's Approach to Peace Operations", pp. 133-175.

<sup>18</sup> GÜNGÖR, "The Analysis of Turkey's Approach to Peace Operations", pp. 133-175.

<sup>19</sup> GÜNGÖR, "The Analysis of Turkey's Approach to Peace Operations", pp. 133-175.

itary activities abroad.<sup>20</sup> The protection of the Turkish Muslim minorities in conflict zones as well as the historical/cultural perception of the Turkish people toward conflict zones may become the main driving forces behind Türkiye's involvement in international peace operations. The legacy of the Ottoman Empire as well as ethnic and religious ties have played a critical role in Türkiye's contribution to international peace operations. As a result, Türkiye has taken on a mediator role in conflicts between Christian and Muslim societies. It is possible to argue that Türkiye's presence among the multinational peacekeeping forces has become a *sine qua non* for operational success. Reframing Türkiye's international role regarding its Muslim identity under the AK Party administration has also become the main reference point in defining Türkiye's involvement in international peace operations and was seen as an asset by Western international organizations for the missions conducted in countries such as Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Sudan. Considering the cultural ties with these Muslim communities, Türkiye calculates that these peace operations could influence the regional stability and legitimacy of the government in the eyes of its people and that the government could take advantage of this perception to pursue its strategic goal in redefining its international role.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the peace initiatives that Türkiye has contributed to and conducted, especially during the post-Cold War era, should be seen both as an instrument of foreign policy and a source of inspiration in contributing to regional and international stability.

In this context, Türkiye's military activism can be divided into three domains of military activities in regional and international politics. The first group of military activity, as part of Türkiye's strategy, is security cooperation with international or regional organizations to enhance partner willingness to participate in coalition operations, which strengthens existing partner capabilities and provides training benefits from security cooperation activities. These operations are mainly carried out via international organizations such as NATO and the UN. During the AK Party era, Türkiye's commitment to NATO's international peace operations has been diversified and intensified due to the increasing number of security threats, especially in the post-9/11 period. As the number of interna-

<sup>20</sup> Güngör, "The Analysis of Turkey's Approach to Peace Operations", pp. 133-175.

<sup>21</sup> Tarkan Oğuzlu and Uğur Güngör, "Peace Operation and the Transformation of Turkey's Security Policy", *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol: 27, No: 3, (2007), pp. 472-488; Hüseyin Bağcı and Şaban Kardaş, "Exploring Turkey's Role in Peace Operations", *Contemporary Issues in International Politics*, (FPI, Ankara: 2004); Uğur Güngör, *Why States Contribute to Peace Operations: Motivations Behind Turkey's Involvement*, (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011).

tional peace operations has increased since the 9/11 incident, Türkiye's contribution to international military operations aimed at improving regional stability and security is crucial to understand Ankara's military activism. The second category of Türkiye's military activism strategy is its fight against terrorism, which has been the main component of Türkiye's historical security strategy. However, the new understanding of combating terrorism through the lens of military activism assumes a natural offensive security rationale and employs new military tools due to the changing character of warfare and the operational environment. The main rationale behind this new military strategy is to combat and deter terrorism and asymmetric threats by demonstrating a dedicated commitment to the operational environment.<sup>22</sup>

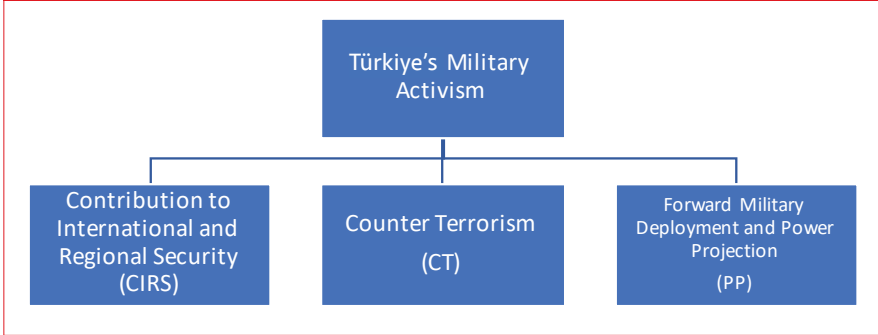
The third category in Türkiye's rising military activism is the forward military deployment in the context of military base politics. Base politics is defined as the interaction between "basing nations" and "host nations" on matters relating to the status and operation of local military facilities in the host nations, together with related transnational interactions involving non-state actors".<sup>23</sup> The strategy of establishing bases in the near and far abroad is the most significant and tangible strategic move in Turkish military politics and should be examined as an integral part of Türkiye's new strategic priorities in its Middle Eastern and North African foreign and security policies.<sup>24</sup> Türkiye also seeks to build a sphere of political-military influence to calibrate or proclaim its foreign policy objectives. Türkiye's policy on establishing military bases has many dimensions. In this case, it can mainly be understood under the pretext of the country's security and political commitments meant to prevent the possibility of destabilization of the balance of power in a competitive geopolitical environment. Forward military deployment is also an integral part of Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy, especially since it has gained prominence and become a main tangible change in the post-Arab Spring era.

<sup>22</sup> Burhanettin Duran, "Turkey's New Security Concept", *Daily Sabah*, October 26, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Kent E. Calder, *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, "Turkey's Forward-Basing Posture", *EDAM Foreign and Security Policy Series*, No: 4, (2017), pp. 1-23.



**TABLE 1. DIMENSION OF TÜRKİYE'S MILITARY ACTIVISM**

## TÜRKİYE'S MILITARY ACTIVISM IN THE AK PARTY ERA: CAUSES, CONTEXT AND CONSEQUENCES

This section explores Türkiye's military activism by focusing on three different yet interrelated transfrontier military missions that the TAF conducted during the AK Party era. This section deals with the causal and contextual dynamics as well as the strategic consequences of Turkish military activism abroad. In this context, Türkiye's military activities are examined in terms of the structure/nature of the operations that the TAF is involved in (i.e. low-intensity, medium-intensity, high-intensity, and no-intensity), and the main strategic missions of Türkiye's military activism are categorized as combating terrorism (CT), contribution to international and regional security (CRIS), and power projection (PP). Mainly, this section considers the following variables: the number of military personnel involved, the duration and scope of the military operation, the type of military involvement (independent or multilateral), and the strategic consequences of the military presence. Within the scope of this research, a total of 49 military operations<sup>25</sup> were examined to explore how the AK Party government defines Türkiye's national interests regarding its military activism strategy.

### MISSION TYPE 1: CT

CT is one of the most important components of Türkiye's military activism in its immediate surroundings. Over the last 40 years, the fight against terrorism has become a significant security concern for Ankara. The country has been combating terrorist groups, such as the PKK (1980), the YPG/PYD (2012), DAESH

<sup>25</sup> Please see Appendix Table 11.2: List of Military Operations in the AK Party Era.

(2013), al-Qaida (2001), and others that threaten the security of the country and its allies; out of those listed, in particular, the PKK and DAESH stand out in Ankara's efforts to eliminate terrorist threats.<sup>26</sup> In the most basic sense, CT refers to the actions taken by nations to prevent and eliminate terrorism and related activities on a national, regional, and global scale. Given the rapidly escalating nature of terrorism in the Middle East, it is possible to argue that the CT mission has become a stronger motivation for the transfrontier operations of the Turkish military in Iraq and Syria. Türkiye has been carrying out its CT missions within the scope of both global counter-terrorism coalitions as well as independent military initiatives. The United Nation (UN), NATO, and multilateral international ad-hoc alliances, such as the Global Coalition against DAESH, constitute some of the global examples.

Conversely, Operation Euphrates Shield (OES),<sup>27</sup> Operation Olive Branch (OOB), Operation Peace Spring (OPS), Operation Spring Shield (OSS) and Türkiye's Claw operation series in northern Iraq against the PKK are excellent examples of independent military initiatives in which the TAF acted as the main military body. These operations demonstrate how the military has become a central component of Türkiye's foreign policy and counter-terrorism strategy. While legally based on the right of self-defense included in Article 51 of the UN charter, the military, political, and strategic reasons put forward by Türkiye regarding OES, OOB, and OPS add even more weight to the legal right to self-defense.

## OES

In conformity with Article 51 of the UN Charter, Türkiye exercised its "right of self-defense" and launched OES on August 24, 2016.<sup>28</sup> OES set a precedent in

<sup>26</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, Rifat Öncel and Bilgehan Öztürk, "Turkey's Fight Against DAESH", *SETA Policy Analysis*, No: 23, (November 2016); Necdet Özçelik, "Fighting Terrorism and a Clashing Alliance: The Case of Turkey-US Security Relations", *SETA Perspective*, No: 29, (May 2017); Necdet Özçelik, Sibel Düz and Rifat Öncel, "One Year After July 15: Turkey's Fight Against Terrorism", *SETA Policy Analysis*, No: 36, (July 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, Merve Seren and Necdet Özçelik, *Operation Euphrates Shield: Execution and Lessons Learned*, (SETA Policy Report, İstanbul: 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Türkiye remarked that Operation Euphrates Shield was conducted in the scope of the UNSC resolutions for the fight against DAESH as stated in Article 51 of the UN Charter. See "Başbakanlık Koordinasyon Merkezinden 'Fırat Kalkanı Operasyonu' Hakkında Yapılan Basın Açıklaması", The Prime Ministry of the Republic of Türkiye, [https://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/\\_Article/pg\\_Article.aspx?Id=2a0e4e31-1a6d-4d65-9074-cc8b7097d0f6](https://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/_Article/pg_Article.aspx?Id=2a0e4e31-1a6d-4d65-9074-cc8b7097d0f6), (Access date: August 11, 2017); For Article 51 of the UN Charter, see. "Birleşmiş Milletler Antlaşması ve Uluslararası Adalet Divanı Statüsü", Ombudsman, <https://www.ombudsman.gov.tr/contents/files/6535501-%20Birlesmis-Milletler-Antlasmasi.pdf>, (Access date: August 11, 2017).

Turkish foreign policy on Syria and for the TAF, as it was something new, comprehensive, and a crucial success that changed the security environment in Syria. Not limited to military objectives, its mission statement also included a humanitarian aid perspective, the coordination of international and local alliances, and elements to ensure stability. The primary objectives of Türkiye in OES, however, were to strengthen border security, push DAESH away from the border (and, therefore, to disrupt the organization's center of gravity and prevent DAESH attacks, particularly against border provinces),<sup>29</sup> and block the PKK/YPG from carving out a corridor by taking control of the east-west line in northern Syria.<sup>30</sup> Türkiye conducted OES in an operational environment that can largely be described as a “futuristic operational environment” with an increased velocity and momentum of human interaction and events, demographics and operations among populations.<sup>31</sup> Being a joint combined arms operation, it enabled officers to take initiative and impose the conditions of the operation on the opposing forces and create opportunities to eliminate the reactionary capabilities of the opposing forces. Mechanized infantry, armored and artillery units, unmanned aerial vehicles and air force platforms, as well as engineering and signal units, joined the operation.<sup>32</sup> In the aftermath, the Turkish military identified shortcomings in the implementations of target acquisition and fire support, in close air support to counter irregular and unexpected targets as well as the need for increased cooperation between armored vehicles and light infantry and commando units.

Türkiye has accomplished its prioritized goals: It removed the DAESH threat from its borders and hampered the PKK's westward territorial expansion and attempts to position terrorist elements in the area stretching from Kobani to Afrin.

<sup>29</sup> Between April and May 2016, DAESH intensified rocket attacks (mostly the Katyusha type), almost daily by targeting Kilis with 54 Katyusha rockets. As a consequence, 19 people died –12 Turkish nationals and seven Syrian nationals– and 67 were wounded. Although Katyushas have about a 20-kilometer target range, the group increased the range by modifying these rockets and, therefore, further increasing the threat against Türkiye's southern border. Arda Mevlütöğlü, “Katyuşa'lar, HIMAR'lar ve Ötesi”, *Siyah Gri Beyaz*, April 29, 2016, <https://www.siyahgribeyaz.com/2016/04/katyusalar-himarslar-ve-otesi.html#more>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>30</sup> “30 Kasım 2016 Tarihli Toplantı”, Turkey National Security Council General Secretariat, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/30-kasim-2016-tarihli-toplanti>, (Access date: August 11, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Jeff Jager, “Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield: An Exemplar of Joint Combined Arms Maneuver”, *Small Wars Journal*, October 17, 2016, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/turkey%E2%80%99s-operation-euphrates-shield-an-exemplar-of-joint-combined-arms-maneuver>, (Access date: October 05, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> Can Kasapoğlu and Sinan Ülgen, “Operation Euphrates Shield and the al-Bab Campaign: A Strategic Assessment”, *EDAM Foreign Policy and Security Paper Series*, (2017).

## OOB

Following OES, OOB was launched on January 20, 2018. Türkiye carried out OOB along with the Syrian National Army (SNA), which was previously known as the Free Syrian Army (FSA), to curb the PKK's influence, "de-territorialize" it in northern Syria and consolidate Türkiye's strategic gains from OES. Türkiye wanted to recalibrate its hard power to enhance its role in the slated negotiations on Syria's future, aiming to demonstrate its military power to convince the US to stop backing the PYD.<sup>33</sup> Previously mostly focused on international CT operations, with OOB, Türkiye's military activity spread to a wider geographical area on the western bank of the Euphrates, centered on the prevention of terrorist attacks against Turkish territory from the outside.<sup>34</sup> The TAF effectively employed a multi-front tactic forcing the PKK/PYD to spread their forces and thus diminishing their effectiveness.<sup>35</sup> With the improvements in target acquisition, the heavy kinetic strikes conducted in the first three days of the operation were of particular importance as they eliminated over a hundred targets and protected the troops on the ground. The operation also made increased use of indigenously produced systems such as the ANKA, Bayraktar, and ATAK systems as well domestically produced munitions and sensors. The factors showcase that just like OES, OOB was also carried out with a joint approach that combined different military capabilities. The operation forces included units of the Turkish Air Force, Army, and Special Forces, as well as SNA elements.<sup>36</sup>

In general, OES and OOB were carried out through operational and tactical initiatives, gaining a physical and psychological edge over DAESH and the PKK/YPG through actions such as synchronous engagement, deep operation, and operational sustainability. With OES and OOB, the TAF tested its capacity for combat readiness,

<sup>33</sup> Can Kasapoğlu and Sinan Ülgen, "Operation Olive Branch: A Political – Military Assessment", *EDAM Foreign Policy and Security Paper Series*, (2018), pp. 11-13.

<sup>34</sup> An offshoot organization of the PKK, the YPG controlled 65 percent of the Türkiye-Syria border and used its position to attack Türkiye before the operation was launched by the TAF. More importantly, the YPG was playing a vital role in the PKK's ongoing terrorist attacks inside Türkiye. It is also widely known that the YPG is tactically used by the PKK as an integral part of its irregular warfare strategy both in terms of manpower and military equipment in the fight against the Turkish Armed Forces in the southeastern part of Türkiye. Therefore, first and foremost, Operation Olive Branch (OOB) is an integral part of Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy, which Turkish security forces have adopted against the PKK since 2015; Kyle W. Orton, "The Error of Arming the Syrian Kurds", *The New York Times*, June 6, 2017; Murat Yeşiltaş and Necdet Özçelik, "Turkey, US and PYD: Strategic Ally or Local Partner?", *Daily Sabah*, February 17, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, "Deciphering Turkey's Assertive Military and Defense Strategy: Objectives, Pillars, and Implications", *Insight Turkey*, No: 22, (2020), pp. 89-114.

<sup>36</sup> Can Kasapoğlu and Sinan Ülgen, "Operation Olive Branch: A Political-Military Assessment", *EDAM Foreign Policy and Security Paper Series*, (2018).

realizing the need for developing its mobility at tactical, operative, and strategic levels. Both operations have proven the capability of the Turkish military to perform joint offensive operations in a multi-domain, high-intensity conflict while cooperating with irregular local partners. In the aftermath, the Turkish military identified shortcomings in the implementations of target acquisition and fire support, in close air support to counter irregular and unexpected targets as well as the need for increased cooperation between armored vehicles and light infantry and commando units.<sup>37</sup>

## OPS

After the US decided to withdraw from northeast Syria, the TAF launched OPS to create a 30-kilometer-deep safe zone for Syrians who wanted to return and to clear the zone of the terrorist threat originating from the PKK/YPG.<sup>38</sup> On the first day of the operation, the Turkish forces focused their efforts on airstrikes, artillery and multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) strikes in the vicinity of the towns of Ayn Issa, Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ayn, destroying around 200 targets in those areas.<sup>39</sup> The moment the targets were neutralized was captured by Turkish combat drones (UCAVs) and the footage was published by the Turkish Ministry of Defense.<sup>40</sup> One of the most significant events of the operation was the capture of Ras al-Ayn by Turkish troops on October 12, 2019. This gave Türkiye access to the strategically important M4 highway, which was used by the PKK as a major supply line, connecting Fays Khabur, a border crossing between Syria and Iraq, all the way to Qamishli and then Manbij. At the same time, the PKK and the Assad regime reached an agreement stating that the PKK/PYD was going to withdraw from Manbij, Ayn al-Arab, and Ayn Issa and that the regime troops would take their place. Shortly thereafter, it was confirmed that the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and regime militia forces had been deployed to Tabqa, with the news arriving that the SAA had entered Ayn al-Arab on October 16.<sup>41</sup> Signing a Memorandum of

<sup>37</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, Merve Seren and Necdet Özçelik, *Operation Euphrates Shield: Execution and Lessons Learned*, (SETA Policy Report, Ankara: 2017), pp. 43-49.

<sup>38</sup> "Operation Peace Spring Starts in N Syria: Erdogan", Anadolu Agency, October 9, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Can Kasapoğlu and Emrah Kürşat Kaya "Operation Peace Spring Situation Report 10/10/2019", EDAM, October 10, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Cumhurbaşkanlığı Milli Savunma Bakanlığı, Twitter, October 11, 2019, <https://twitter.com/tcsavunma/status/1182725342747856896?s=20>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>41</sup> Arda Mevlütoğlu, "Barış Pınarı Harekatı-13-15.10.2019", Siyah Gri Beyaz, October 16, 2019, <https://www.siyahgribeyaz.com/2019/10/bars-pnar-harekat-13-15102019.html>, (Access date: October 05, 2022).

Understanding (MoU) on October 22, 2019, Türkiye and Russia agreed to push the YPG 30 kilometers away from the Turkish border and henceforth would conduct joint patrols in that area at depth of 10 kilometers from the Turkish border.<sup>42</sup> Making strategic gains in a short time without the heavy involvement of armor and mechanized infantry, the results can be attributed in part to the coordinated command and control structures between the SNA and Turkish Special Forces as well as fire and close air support by air and artillery assets. OPS thus not only successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of Türkiye's tactic of partnering with local armed groups and the military prowess of the SNA, but it also provided a direct example of the effective cooperation by deploying it against the so-called "most effective fighters" of the SDF,<sup>43</sup> the YPG.

## OSS

OSS was launched in retaliation to an airstrike conducted by Syrian regime forces against a convoy of Turkish troops in Balyun, Idlib, killing 33 Turkish soldiers.<sup>44</sup> However, the stated goals of the operation also included the halting of the advance of SAA troops and the prevention of a new refugee wave that would arise if the advance of Syrian troops was not slowed. When OSS concluded, 3,400 regime troops had been killed in action, 3 aircraft (two Su-24s and a L-39), 8 helicopters, 8 air defense systems (such as a Pantsir S-1, and Buk missile system), 156 tanks (including T-55s, T-62s, and T72 MBTs), 108 cannons and MLRS, 172 vehicles (24 armored, 49 improvised, and 99 military), 10 ammunition depots and two airports had been destroyed.<sup>45</sup> A cease-fire agreed upon on March 5, 2020, by Russia and Türkiye created a secure 6-kilometer-deep corridor on both sides of the M4 highway. This secure corridor was then to be patrolled jointly by Russian and Turkish troops deployed in the region.<sup>46</sup> As part of OSS and after the operation, Türkiye deployed its domestically Hisar-O Medium Altitude Air Defense Missiles System in the region for testing purposes while also

<sup>42</sup> "Full Text: Memorandum of Understanding between Turkey and Russia on Northern Syria", *Defense Post*, October 22, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> "Allies or Terrorists: Who Are the Kurdish Fighters in Syria?", *The New York Times*, January 25, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> "Syria War: Alarm After 33 Turkish Soldiers Killed in Attack in Idlib", BBC News, February 28, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> "Erdoğan: İdlib'de 59 Şehit Verdik", *Sözcü*, March 8, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> "Joint Turkish-Russian Patrols to Begin on March 15: Latest Updates", TRT World, March 7, 2020.

increasing its military presence.<sup>47</sup> The operation was a successful demonstration of Türkiye's domestically built Bayraktar TB2 and ANKA-S UCAVs, a variety of electronic warfare systems, and the country's mastery in conducting coordinated network and electronic warfare.<sup>48</sup>

**TABLE 2. TÜRKİYE'S CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS IN SYRIA**

|     | NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL | OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT | CONFLICT STRUCTURE | TARGET              | MISSION TYPE | FRAMEWORK OF OPERATION | MAJOR PARTNER | MAJOR SUPPORTIVE COUNTRY    |
|-----|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| OES | 5,000 +                      | Multi-domain            | High-intensity     | DAESH               | CT           | Independent            | FSA           | Global anti-DAESH Coalition |
| OOB | 10,000+                      | Multi-domain            | High-intensity     | PKK, DAESH          | CT           | Independent            | FSA           | Russia                      |
| OPS | 15,000+                      | Multi-domain            | High-intensity     | PKK                 | CT           | Independent            | SNA           | Russia                      |
| OSS | 15,000+                      | Multi-domain            | High-intensity     | Syrian Armed Forces | -            | Independent            | SNA           | -                           |

## MISSION TYPE 2: CRIS

CRIS constitute a crucial component of Türkiye's military activism. Each one of the military operations examined for the purpose of this article has revealed a motivation to comply with the CRIS strategic mission. In the most basic sense, the CRIS mission can be described as a significant aspiration of Turkish military activism, which is conducted through intergovernmental coalitions and independent military initiatives to ensure security on regional and global scales. It is fair to argue that Türkiye prioritizes security issues that take place in its immediate surroundings. Hence, in collaboration with regional and international coalitions, as a highly capable and geographically suitable regional state actor, the Turkish military addresses a variety of regional security threats in the Middle East, the

<sup>47</sup> "TSK İdlib Sınırına Sevk Etti: Atılan Sistemleri Hangi Görevleri Yapabilir?", *Yeni Şafak*, February 24, 2020; "Hisar-O hava Savunma Füze Sistemi de Suriye'ye Konuşlandırıldı", *Defence Türk*, June 21, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Sibel Düz, "The Ascension of Turkey as a Drone Power: History, Strategy, and Geopolitical Implications", *SETA Analysis*, No: 65, (July 2020).

Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Balkan Peninsula.<sup>49</sup> During its past decade under the AK Party, Türkiye has become a much more prominent international actor and transformed its intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) oriented international security and peace approach into a more independent national strategy. Consequently, its international peace and security efforts have expanded beyond these regions and gained a global perspective.

Cooperation with established IGOs, such as the UN, NATO, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as well as leading international actors, such as the US, has long been at the heart of Türkiye's international and regional security perspectives. In the AK Party era, multilateral anti-terror platforms gained vital importance for Türkiye due to the emergence of various domestic, regional, and international terrorist organizations that threaten Turkish national security and territorial integrity. Today, Türkiye participates in a number of anti-terror coalitions, including the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, the Committee of Experts on Terrorism (CODEXTER), and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).<sup>50</sup> Apart from these IGOs and anti-terror coalitions, Türkiye has independently conducted military initiatives, such as the operations Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, Peace Spring, and Spring Shield, aimed at countering security threats directly concerning Türkiye and projecting Türkiye's power as an international actor.

As a founding nation of the UN and a member of NATO, Türkiye continues to participate in international peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations under the AK Party administration. Türkiye's current approach to peace operations emphasizes non-conditionality and favors bilateralism.<sup>51</sup> A newly emerging trend is that independent military actions carried out by the Turkish military abroad also aim at improving bilateral relations with non-NATO members and traditional allies.

The CRIS mission consists of a wide range of military activities including high-intensity conflict operations, post-conflict stabilization initiatives, and hu-

<sup>49</sup> "Turkish Military Forces, 'Mission'", TSK, <http://www.tsk.tr/AboutTaf/Mission>, (Access date: March 14, 2018).

<sup>50</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Turkey's Contributions to International Community's Efforts to Fight Terrorism", Electronic Visa Application System, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey\\_s-contributions-to-international-community\\_s-efforts-to-fight-terrorism.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-contributions-to-international-community_s-efforts-to-fight-terrorism.en.mfa), (Access date: August 11, 2017).

<sup>51</sup> Gizem Sucuoğlu and Onur Sazak, "The New Kid on the Block: Turkey's Shifting Approaches to Peacebuilding", *Rising Powers Quarterly*, Vol: 1, No: 2, (2016), p. 73.



manitarian assistance efforts. From Türkiye's point of view, peacebuilding encompasses a vast range of activities from development projects to humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping operations.<sup>52</sup> To demonstrate a better outline of the CRIS mission type, it is possible to break these military activities down into two broad categories: combatant and noncombatant. The combatant category covers jointly or independently conducted high, medium, and low-intensity military operations waged against international state or non-state actors. Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya and Operation Ocean Shield (OOS)<sup>53</sup> in the Horn of Africa constitute great examples in that regard. The non-combatant category mostly incorporates Post-Conflict Stability Efforts (PCSE) and Humanitarian Assistance (HA) missions executed overseas by the Turkish military staff.

PCSE efforts include a wide range of military activities conducted by Turkish military personnel to provide security and stability, promote shared values, and project Türkiye's soft power abroad, specifically in areas vulnerable to conflict. These activities generally aim at capacity building, social and economic development as well as political stability. The Turkish military's involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo best demonstrates the relevance of these PCSE efforts to the CRIS mission. Türkiye has been actively engaged with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan since 2001. With the "Afghanistan for Afghans"<sup>54</sup> motto in mind, Türkiye has made enormous efforts to provide security and stability in this country through Turkish military channels. After the 9/11 incident, Türkiye sent troops to Afghanistan on the condition that they would not take part in combatant operations.<sup>55</sup> Under the ISAF and RSM frameworks, Türkiye assumed regional command of Kabul twice, trained the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Police (ANP), launched a comprehensive sustainable assistance program, and made remarkable contributions to the infrastructural reconstruction and social development in the country.<sup>56</sup> Likewise,

<sup>52</sup> Sucuoğlu and Sazak, "The New Kid on the Block", p. 72.

<sup>53</sup> Operation Ocean Shield is NATO's counter piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden and off the Horn of Africa. NATO has helped deter and disrupt pirate attacks, while protecting vessels and increasing the general level of security, in the region since 2008; NATO Allied Maritime Command, "Operation Ocean Shield", Operations Archive, <https://mc.nato.int/missions/operation-ocean-shield.aspx>, (Access date: March 18, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> Niliüfer Karacasulu, "Reconstruction of Afghanistan and the Role of Turkey", *USAK*, Vol: 5, No: 10, (2010), p. 48.

<sup>55</sup> Karacasulu, "Reconstruction of Afghanistan and the Role of Turkey", p. 49.

<sup>56</sup> Karacasulu, "Reconstruction of Afghanistan and the Role of Turkey", p. 50.

in Iraq and Kosovo, Türkiye trained domestic security forces and made significant efforts to provide security through the NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I) and NATO Kosovo Force. It is important to mention that the PCSE efforts of the Turkish military are not limited to these operations. Türkiye has also provided personnel support and military equipment to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Georgia, East Timor, Palestine, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the AK Party era.

Türkiye has long carried out its humanitarian efforts through its military channels, which have greatly contributed to the image of the Turkish military abroad. In 2015, Türkiye became the second largest provider of humanitarian assistance with a total expenditure of \$3.2 billion while ranking first in generosity with a ratio of 0.37 percent in terms of the proportion of humanitarian aid provided to gross national income.<sup>57</sup> Humanitarian aid is described by the OECD Development Assistance Committee as assistance and actions designed to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, within the scope of this research, the HA missions also incorporated basic humanitarian aid incentives in the military operations –in which the establishment of safe zones and no-fly zones (NFZs) also took place.<sup>59</sup> Türkiye’s participation in Operation Unified Protector (OUP) is worth discussing in that regard: Due to the fact that the turmoil in Libya created security issues in the region, Türkiye joined the NATO Operation Unified Protector in 2011, which was authorized by UN Security Council resolutions to impose an arms embargo against the Gadhafi regime and to establish a no-fly zone to protect Libyan civilians and civilian populated areas. Türkiye contributed to OUP with four frigates, a submarine, two tanker aircraft, and four F-16s fighters; and the operation was successfully concluded on October 31, 2011.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup>“2015 Turkish Development Assistance Report”, TİKA, (2015), <http://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/2017/YAYINLAR/TKYR%202015%20ENG/KALKINMA%20.pdf>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>58</sup>“2015 Turkish Development Assistance Report”, TİKA, p. 72.

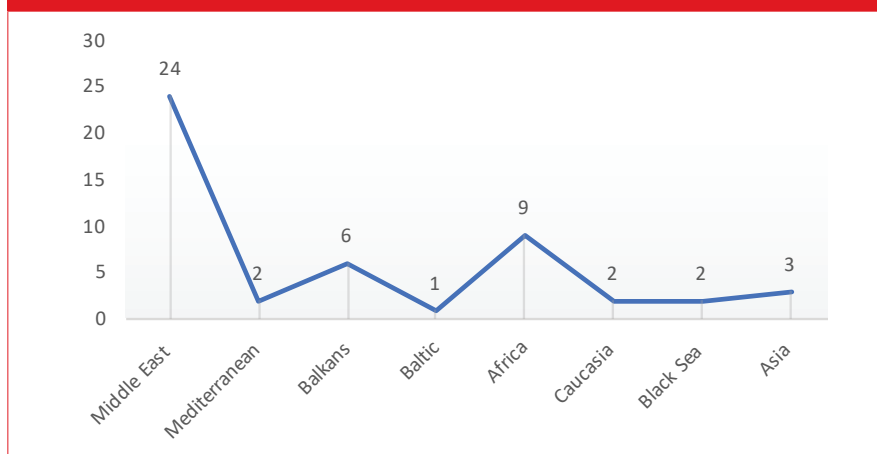
<sup>59</sup> For further information on Humanitarian Intervention and Humanitarian Assistance, please visit: Humanitarian Intervention, Oxford Public International Law, May 2011, <http://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e306>, (Access date: October 05, 2022).

<sup>60</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “IV. Turkey’s International Security Initiatives and Contributions to NATO and EU Operations”, Electronic Visa Application System, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/iv\\_european-security-and-defence-identity\\_policy\\_esdi\\_p\\_en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/iv_european-security-and-defence-identity_policy_esdi_p_en.mfa), (Access date: March 14, 2018).

Humanitarian action has always been a highly political activity.<sup>61</sup> It is possible to argue that the AK Party administration has utilized the HA mission to sustain and strengthen its global foreign policy objectives. Today, along with providing humanitarian and developmental aid, Türkiye has established independent military bases overseas. Among the international community, Türkiye currently maintains one of the highest numbers of diplomatic missions in Africa, for instance.<sup>62</sup> Constituting one of the strongest pillars of the AK Party's Africa policy, Türkiye continues to carry out a great deal of humanitarian assistance in Somalia, which not only provides help for Somalis affected by the ongoing instability in their country but also contributes to Türkiye's rising global influence as an international actor. In addition, it is important to highlight that the Turkish military also conducted various HA missions in Sudan, Lebanon, and Afghanistan in coordination with the UN.

Under the AK Party administration, the Turkish military has engaged in attempts to provide security for vulnerable religious, ethnic, and even political minority groups overseas. Specifically, in the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea, the Turkish military has been involved in various operations to support international efforts to enhance peace and stability throughout the AK Party era. The charts below illustrate the geographical distribution of Türkiye's military engagements that were subject to this research:

**CHART 1. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF TÜRKİYE'S MILITARY ENGAGEMENT**

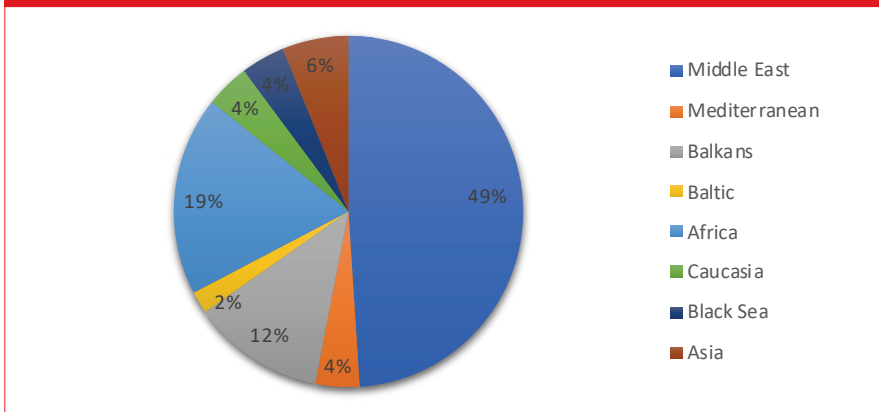


Source: NATO, OSCE, UN, TAF, Turkish Naval Forces

<sup>61</sup> Joanna Macrae and Nicholas Leader, "The Politics of Coherence: Humanitarianism and Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era", *Humanitarian Policy Group*, No: 1, (2000).

<sup>62</sup> Sinem Cengiz, "What Is at Stake for Turkey in Somalia?", *Arab News*, October 20, 2017.

**CHART 2. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF TÜRKİYE'S MILITARY ENGAGEMENT [%]**



Source: NATO, OSCE, UN, Turkish Armed Forces, Turkish Naval Forces

### MISSION TYPE 3: PP<sup>63</sup>

The third characteristic of Türkiye's military activism is PP, defined as "the ability of a nation to apply all or some of its elements of national power to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain forces to respond to crises, to contribute to deterrence, and to enhance regional stability".<sup>64</sup> In other words, while power projection is the self-perception of Türkiye's short and long-term military objectives and capabilities, it is also a means of projecting Türkiye's national power through both soft and hard power. It should also be understood that power projection is a strategy that is integral to Türkiye's desire to become a regional power. In this context, power projection has been instrumental in displaying Türkiye's national power by advancing Türkiye's political and economic interests through the TAF, discrediting nation-states targeting Türkiye, and contributing to Türkiye's national security objectives via coercive measures.<sup>65</sup>

In compliance with the political objectives involved and level of force deployment, military power projection missions can be examined in two categories: op-

<sup>63</sup> This section was previously published in *Insight Turkey's* special issue on Türkiye's Defense Industry, see. Murat Yeşiltaş, "Deciphering Turkey's Assertive Military and Defense Strategy: Objectives, Pillars, and Implications", pp. 89-114.

<sup>64</sup> "Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms", The US Department of Defense, [https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp1\\_02.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp1_02.pdf), (Access date: March 16, 2018).

<sup>65</sup> Gábor Vörös, "US Global Power Projection: Is the World's Policeman still Credible?", *Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade*, No: 8, (2016).

erations that utilize soft military power, and operations that utilize hard military power. The protection of sea lanes, the evacuation of non-combatants from a state in turmoil, humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of natural catastrophes, and peacekeeping operations constitute soft power projection missions. On the other hand, the symbolic military presence showing political interest, the threat of military force to deter potential adversaries, and the punitive or offensive use of force and military interventions illustrate hard power projection missions.<sup>66</sup> Türkiye's military deployment strategy is also the most significant and tangible strategic move in Türkiye's power projection, which should be examined as an integral part of Türkiye's strategic priorities in the near and far abroad.

Located in geography surrounded by various irregular and conventional threats, Türkiye has conducted a wide range of PP missions. One of those missions is the Combined Naval Task Force 151 (CTF 151), in which the Turkish Navy has been participating in counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and Somalia since 2009. There has been an increase in piracy activity in the region following the political turmoil in Somalia. Aspiring to build capacity for partner countries to preserve global maritime commerce and secure freedom of navigation, CTF 151 was initiated under the authority of Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), based in Manama/Bahrain.<sup>67</sup>

The Horn of Africa has become a theater of strategic competition between Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. These countries have shaped regional politics through their competitive political, economic, and military assets. The early interactions between Turkish and Somali administrations were based on Türkiye's regional investment policy.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, since 2011, Türkiye, as a strong and active

<sup>66</sup> Walter C. Ladwig III, "India and Military Power Projection: Will the Land of Gandhi Become a Conventional Great Power?", *Asian Survey*, Vol: 50, No: 6, (2010), pp. 162–183.

<sup>67</sup> Combine Maritime Forces (CMF), "CTF 151: Counter-Piracy", <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/ctf-151-counter-piracy/>, (Access date: March 18, 2018); Turkish Naval Forces took the responsibility of commanding the mission between May 3-August 13, 2009; September 1-December 1, 2010; September 19-December 13, 2012 and August 27-December 21, 2015. Türkiye participated in countering piracy efforts by assigning frigates in the region and embarked helicopters and Turkish Navy's Amphibious Assault Team stationed onboard. The Turkish Navy handed over the command of CTF 151 to the Royal Bahrain Navy in November, 2017; Turkish Naval Forces, "Combined Task Force (CTF-151)", February 8, 2016, [https://www.dzkk.tsk.tr/icerik.php?icerik\\_id=19&dil=0&ctf=1](https://www.dzkk.tsk.tr/icerik.php?icerik_id=19&dil=0&ctf=1), (Access date: March 14, 2018); "Turkey Hands over to Bahrain in CTF 151 Change of Command Ceremony", *Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)*, November 2, 2017, <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/2017/11/02/turkey-hands-over-to-bahrain-in-ctf-151-change-of-command-ceremony/>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>68</sup> Timothy Williams, "The Middle East's Scramble for Africa: Building Bases and Instability", *RUSI*, February 26, 2018, <https://rusi.org/commentary/middle-east%E2%80%99s-scramble-africa-building-bases-and-instability>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

ally, has contributed to Somalia's efforts against disease, drought, and famine.<sup>69</sup> Signaling Türkiye's soft power projection, Türkiye has conducted a range of trade and aid programs in Somalia, which is considered to be the geopolitical gate to the Horn of Africa. However, this interaction has gradually turned out to be the manifestation of Türkiye's proactive foreign policy.<sup>70</sup>

The construction of a military training facility in the Wadajir district of Jazeera in Somalia began in March 2015 amid security and development-related bilateral agreements with Mogadishu.<sup>71</sup> In August 2017, the first group of Turkish military personnel responsible for training the Somalia National Army arrived in Wadajir. The Turkish military facility in Somalia is Türkiye's first and largest overseas base in Africa. Türkiye has deployed over 200 officers and soldiers as trainers, who will contribute to the improvement of relevant capabilities of the Somali National Army against the threat of the terrorist organization al-Shabab. Despite the fact that it has been targeted by al-Shabab several times, Türkiye perceives Somalia as a projection of Ankara's enlarged geopolitical and economic presence in the Horn of Africa, in particular.<sup>72</sup> In other words, Türkiye's forward military presence in Somalia is the extension of a diplomatic approach to Africa, projecting Türkiye's both soft and hard power influence. Characteristically, it can be said that the Somalia initiative is a security partnership built around the objective of partner capacity-building.<sup>73</sup>

The Qatar move is another military initiative that boosts Türkiye's soft power-driven stature in the Gulf region via hard power features. Türkiye established a military complex in Qatar, as a consequence of a military deal between the two countries in 2014, following a diplomatic dispute in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) relations.<sup>74</sup> This strategic move of Türkiye, first and foremost, is an integral part of Türkiye's changing strategic approach to its power projection tools in the Middle East.<sup>75</sup> It is also about the fundamental challenges that have negatively

<sup>69</sup>Shaul Shay, "Turkey Set to Launch Military Base in Somalia", *Israel Defense*, September 4, 2017, <http://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/node/30971>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>70</sup>Williams, "The Middle East's Scramble for Africa".

<sup>71</sup>"Turkish Government to Construct a Modern Military Training Base for Somali Army", *Horn Observer*, February 18, 2018, <http://hornobserver.com/articles/754/Turkish-Government-to-Construct-a-Modern-Military-Training-Base-for-Somali-Army>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>72</sup>Shay, "Turkey Set to Launch Military Base in Somalia".

<sup>73</sup>Can Kasapoğlu, "Turkey's Forward-Basing Posture", p. 8.

<sup>74</sup>Birce Bora, "Analysis: Why Is Turkey Deploying Troops to Qatar?", *Al Jazeera*, June 11, 2017.

<sup>75</sup>Murat Yeşiltaş, "Making Sense of Turkey's Strategy Towards the New Gulf Crisis", *Al Jazeera*, June 22, 2017.

influenced Türkiye's national and regional security priorities due to the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars. As a consequence of these experiences, Türkiye has acknowledged that diplomatic efforts and Türkiye's soft power alone are not enough to address Turkish national security interests in the region. Türkiye has changed its course of action concerning the regional crises by gradually considering the military dimension to effectively tackle the many security threats it faces. Therefore, it can be argued that the Turkish way of utilizing military means was heavily shaped by the Arab Spring experience, in which maintaining the balance between diplomatic and military means was a vital necessity. This perspective emerged during the Qatar crisis, especially; and Türkiye perceived the crisis in July 2017 as the continuation of the new regional struggle among the major regional powers.<sup>76</sup>

The initial Turkish troop deployment to Qatar was in 2015,<sup>77</sup> and it was expected that the military facility would eventually host more than 3,000 personnel, including ground troops, special operations teams, and military trainers.<sup>78</sup> Following that, the December 2015 deal allowing a military drill as well as the April 2016 deal on Turkish military deployment were ratified in the Turkish Parliament in June 2017.<sup>79</sup> It was also reported that Türkiye and Qatar agreed upon the construction of a naval base, which will include a training center to primarily take on maritime patrols and monitoring duties.<sup>80</sup> It appears that the alignment of foreign policy issues, such as support for the Egyptian revolution and similar attitudes toward the regional conflicts, e.g. Syria and Palestine, sparked an emerging mutual defense culture between Türkiye and Qatar.

While the Qatar move symbolizes Türkiye's recalibration of its foreign policy priorities to play a larger role in the Middle East, and a balancing act to prevent prospective regional clashes, it also provides Türkiye a forward military position to project power in the Gulf.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, this assertive and strategic military

<sup>76</sup> "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan Qatar Krizi Konusunda Açıklama", *Milliyet*, June 6, 2017.

<sup>77</sup> "Turkey Sends More Troops to Qatar", *Al-Jazeera*, December 27, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Heather Murdock, "Turkey Opens First Middle East Military Base in Qatar", *VOA News*, May 10, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> "Turkey Sends More Troops to Qatar".

<sup>80</sup> "Qatar Signs Turkey Naval Military Base Agreement", *Middle East Monitor*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180314-qatar-signs-turkey-naval-military-base-agreement>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>81</sup> Muddassir Quamar, "The Turkish Military Base in Doha: A Step towards Gaining 'Strategic Depth' in the Middle East", *Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses*, September 26, 2017, [https://idsa.in/idsacomments/the-turkish-military-base-in-doha\\_mmquamar\\_260917](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/the-turkish-military-base-in-doha_mmquamar_260917), (Access date: October 4, 2022).

posture allowed Türkiye to capture a share of the Gulf defense market, which was a part of Türkiye's long-term Gulf strategy.<sup>82</sup> Qatar has ordered various land, naval, and air military equipment and systems produced by Türkiye such as the Bayraktar TB-2 armed UAV, the Ares 150 Hercules, two training warships, armored combat vehicles, and multi-radar and electro-optic camera systems to secure its borders.<sup>83</sup>

In brief, by positioning a brigade-level joint force by the 2020s and constructing a naval base, Türkiye has enlarged its realm of political activity in the Gulf. Moreover, the Turkish-Qatari strategic partnership is expected to provide Türkiye and Qatar with a mutual understanding regarding key defense issues. Secondly, with its military presence in Qatar, Türkiye can operate in a key center of military activity, one in which the US also has a strong air and naval posture.<sup>84</sup>

On the other hand, while the planned Turkish troop deployments to Qatar and Somalia were announced in early 2015 as components of a proactive Turkish foreign policy, the Turkish military presence in Bashiqa, Iraq is mostly related to the preservation of Turkish national security interests in the Middle East. Türkiye's military presence in northern Iraq is a continuation of a shift from a defensive strategy to actively searching and destroying the PKK threat. Cross-border counter-terrorism operations in the 1990s resulted in a brigade-level presence in northern Iraq.<sup>85</sup> Today, the main Turkish army facilities are located in the Bashiqa region of Iraq, about 30 kilometers from northeastern Mosul. These facilities were established in 2015 as a product of the cooperation with the KRG and Sunni Arabs, under the leadership of Atheel al-Nujaifi for a training mission against the DAESH threat.<sup>86</sup>

In northern Iraq, the initial motivation behind the Turkish military presence in the 1990s was the adoption of a low-intensity conflict strategy against the asym-

<sup>82</sup> "Turkish Defense Industry Showcases Products at Defense Fair in Doha", *Daily Sabah*, March 13, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> Dylan Maylasov, "Qatar Received Batch of New Ejder Yalcin Armoured Vehicles from Turkey", *Defense Blog*, December 18, 2017, <http://defence-blog.com/army/qatar-received-batch-of-new-ejder-yalcin-armoured-vehicles-from-turkey.html>, (Access date: October 4, 2022); "Exportation de 85 Blindés turcs vers le Qatar", *TRT Français*, March 13, 2018; "Turkey to build 2 Training Warships for Qatar Navy", *Anadolu Agency*, March 14, 2018; Mohammed Najib, "DIMDEX 2018: Qatar Coast Guard Orders More Ares Vessels", *Jane's 360*, March 13, 2018, <http://www.janes.com/article/78532/dimdex-2018-qatari-coast-guard-orders-more-ares-vessel>, (Access date: October 4, 2022); "Milli SİHA İlk Kez İhraç Edildi: 6'sı Katar'a Satıldı", *Yeni Şafak*, March 14, 2018.

<sup>84</sup> Kasapoğlu, "Turkey's Forward-Basing Posture", pp. 4-7.

<sup>85</sup> Kasapoğlu, "Turkey's Forward-Basing Posture", pp. 15-17.

<sup>86</sup> "Turkish Forces Go into Iraq to Train Forces Fighting ISIS", *The Guardian*, December 4, 2015.



metric threat of the PKK. The changing nature of the operational environment from a low-intensity conflict to a more small war-like crisis led Türkiye to re-think its forward military presence in northern Iraq.<sup>87</sup> Türkiye's military posture in Bashiqa has served Türkiye's objectives to stabilize the volatile region disputed among the main Kurdish factions, reassure Türkiye's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) partners, deter potential rivalries with Iran and the PKK, secure logistics and defense communication lines during counter-terrorism operations,<sup>88</sup> and most recently after the independence referendum in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), to establish ties with the Baghdad administration.<sup>89</sup>

In contrast to Qatar, Somalia, and northern Iraq, Türkiye's involvement in Libya, which is a theater of an active conflict, is both a part of Türkiye's national geostrategic calculations regarding the Eastern Mediterranean conundrum and Türkiye's unilaterally imposed regional stabilization efforts. Initial stabilization efforts started with Türkiye's participation in the NATO Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in 2011, which was authorized by UN Security Council resolutions to impose an arms embargo against the Gadhafi regime and a no-fly zone to protect Libyan civilians and civilian populated areas. Türkiye contributed to the OUP with four frigates, a submarine, two tanker aircraft, and four F-16s fighters; and the operation was successfully concluded on October 31, 2011.<sup>90</sup>

Since 2019, Türkiye has deployed UAVs and sent soldiers to Tripoli in an advisory capacity to support the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) under the framework of the MoU signed between Türkiye and Libya. Moreover, it was claimed that approximately 2,000 members of the SNA were sent to Libya alongside an array of air defense systems including medium-range MIM-23 Hawk missile systems, Hisar short-range SAMs, and Korkut anti-aircraft guns.<sup>91</sup>

Moreover, with the help of the kinetic air power provided by Bayraktar TB2s, Türkiye's military assistance to the Libyan GNA brought about strategic gains on

<sup>87</sup> Can Kasapoğlu and Soner Çağaptay, "Turkey's Military Presence in Iraq: A Complex Strategic Deterrent", *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, December 22, 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-military-presence-in-iraq-a-complex-strategic-deterrent>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>88</sup> Kent E. Calder, *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey: 2007).

<sup>89</sup> "Turkey's Foreign Minister Strengthens Bilateral Ties in Baghdad", *Rudaw*, January 22, 2018.

<sup>90</sup> "IV. Turkey's International Security Initiatives and Contributions to NATO and EU Operations".

<sup>91</sup> "Exclusive: 2,000 Syrian fighters deployed to Libya to support government", *The Guardian*, February 15, 2020; "Turkey Is Deploying Lots Of Air Defense Systems in Syria And Libya", *Forbes*, July 7, 2020.

the ground, such as the capture of Mitiga International Airport, previously controlled by Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), and Watya Airbase; the shooting down of an Antonov An-26 cargo plane carrying ammunition for LNA forces near Tarhuna; the destruction of Pantsir-S1 air defense systems along with the Krasukha Electronic Warfare System provided for the Russian private military company Wagner to support their activities in Libya.<sup>92</sup>

In brief, Libya, one of the multiple theaters of war that the TAF engaged in, illustrates how the advancement in expeditionary warfare capabilities of the TAF may affect Türkiye's future course of military action and presence. Such that, at the time of writing this paper, the military cooperation between Ankara and Tripoli is moving to the next phase.

## CONCLUSION

Türkiye has been trying to recalibrate its hard power as part of its foreign policy activism since the AK Party came to power in 2002. From a wider perspective, Türkiye has a strong military presence in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Libya, and Qatar. Each military mission outlined in this article has its own political and military goals. As mentioned earlier, it can be argued that there are three broad categories in Türkiye's military activism. CT is, perhaps, the most important component of Türkiye's military activism, especially in its immediate surroundings. It symbolizes the changing nature of the country's Türkiye's threat perception concerning the increasing role of terrorist organizations in the wider Middle East region. It also demonstrates Türkiye's changing approach to the use of military power in deterring terrorist threats abroad. OES, OOB, OPS, OSS, and Türkiye's military involvement in northern Iraq are the main examples of how Türkiye operationalizes its military power and projects its military capacity in the fight against terrorism. In the mid-term, some of the main outcomes of Türkiye's military activism in terms of counterterrorism will be the institutional reconstruction of the TAF, which will contribute to Türkiye's regional

<sup>92</sup> "Libya: Turkish-Made Bayraktar TB2 UAV Seen at the GNA-Held Airbase", African Military Blog, June 11, 2019, <https://www.africanmilitaryblog.com/2019/06/libya-turkish-made-bayraktar-tb2-uav-seen-at-the-gna-held-airbase?v=65d8f7baa677>, (Access date: October 4, 2022); "Libyan Army Hits Cargo Plane Carrying Arms for Haftar", Anadolu Agency, May 7, 2020; "Rus Medyası: Pantsir- S1 Libya'da Bayraktar TB2'nin Şöhretine Ciddi Zarar Verdi", Defence Turk.Net, May 2020, <https://www.defenceturk.net/rus-medyasi-pantsir-s1-libyada-bayraktar-tb2nin-sohretine-ciddi-zarar-verdi>, (Access date: October 4, 2022); "Air Bridge between Libya and Turkey", Defence Turk. Net, June 1, 2020, <https://en.defenceturk.net/air-bridge-between-libya-and-turkey/>, (Access date: October 5, 2022).

power projection, especially in Syria and Iraq. In terms of the military reconstruction process, Türkiye needs to reformulate its civil-military relations, as well as the TAF's organizational structure in accordance with the changing nature of the security environment and dynamics in its region.

All 49 military operations examined for the purpose of this article have shown proximity to the CRIS mission, which plays a significant role in Turkish military activism. Türkiye, along with established IGOs, has played a vital role in contributing to regional and international security since the Cold War. When it comes to Türkiye's regional and international security efforts in the AK Party era, it is possible to argue that the new military activism wave has broken the mold in Ankara's peacebuilding approach through the bilateralized PCSE and HA efforts abroad. There is no doubt that the TAF has moved beyond its robust military involvement and adopted a multidimensional and civilian-oriented strategy in its peacebuilding operations, as can be seen in the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, and Somalia. The TAF is highly capable of expanding its peacebuilding efforts to new regions while effectively addressing security threats directed at Turkish national security. However, it is important to note that Türkiye still lacks effective monitoring and evaluation programs that can ensure the sustainability of Turkish CRIS efforts overseas.

The PP mission is the third form of Türkiye's ascending military activism. Each military base is an ingredient of a larger and more complex defense ecosystem that creates a shared strategic culture with the host nations. Türkiye's current base politics, alongside its security partnerships, foster common interests and solidarity between Türkiye and the host states akin to an alliance relationship. In addition, Ankara's overseas approach serves as a buffer between military force and diplomatic efforts as a means to intelligently manage power,<sup>93</sup> establishing a less costly form of political-military influence. In other words, Türkiye may be able to achieve the optimum mix of hard and soft power across several regions via a carefully planned strategy and force generation. Last but not least, with power projection missions as an identity-constructing tool, Türkiye has legitimized its image as a security-provider country, that is, Türkiye has emerged as a proactive contributor to peace, as well as a guarantor against antagonistic regionalism.

In conclusion, it can be safely argued that in the AK Party era, Türkiye's military activism has emerged as a consequence of Ankara's quest for a new regional

<sup>93</sup> Alan Chong, "Smart Power and Military Force: An Introduction", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol: 38, No: 3, (2015), pp. 233-44.

and international role, which has also affected its reformulation of military power. Following the rise of threats to regional stability emanating from the 2003 Iraq War and the Syrian crisis in 2011, Türkiye's participation in international military missions has considerably risen as the TAF's military activities diversified. Secondly, the TAF's fight against terrorism has deepened as Türkiye's new national security strategy has transformed. Finally, the power projection aspect of military activism has gained an even more strategic aspect for Türkiye's new role in regional and international politics as part of its foreign policy activism under the AK Party administration.

## APPENDIX 1.

| TABLE 3. LIST OF MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE AK PARTY ERA |  |                        |             |
|--|--|------------------------|-------------|
| MILITARY OPERATIONS                                      |  |                        |             |
| COUNTRY  | MILITARY ACTIVITY                                      | DURATION               | FRAMEWORK   |
| Iraq<br>Palestine  | UN Iraq-Kuwait Military Observation Mission (UNIKOM)   | 1991-2003              | UN          |
|  | NATO Training Mission Iraq (NTM-I)                     | 2004-2011              | NATO        |
|  | Operation Sun  | 2008-2008              | Independent |
|  | Bashiqa Military Base a Bilateral Security Partnership | 2014-P                 | Independent |
|  | Operation Tigris Shield                                | 2018-2019              | Independent |
|  | Operation Claw 1-2-3                                   | 2019-2019              | Independent |
|  | Operation Claw Eagle and Tiger                         | 2020-2020              | Independent |
|  | Operation Claw Eagle-2                                 | 2021-2021              | Independent |
|  | Operation Claw Lightning and Thunderbolt               | 2021-2021              | Independent |
|  | Operation Claw Lock                                    | 2022-P                 | Independent |
| Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH)        | 1997-2008  | Intergovernmental Org. |             |

|                                |  |           |                        |
|--------------------------------|--|-----------|------------------------|
| Syria<br>Syria & Iraq          | Operation Euphrates Shield                                       | 2016-2017 | Independent            |
|                                | Operation Olive Branch   | 2018-2018 | Independent            |
|                                | Operation Peace Spring   | 2019-2019 | Independent            |
|                                | Operation Spring Shield  | 2020-2020 | Independent            |
|                                | The Global Coalition to Defeat DAESH                             | 2014-P    | Intergovernmental Org. |
| Lebanon                        | UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)                             | 2006-2013 | UN                     |
|                                | UN Interim Force in Lebanon Maritime Task Force (UNIFIL MTF)     | 2006-P    | UN                     |
| Libya                          | Operation Unified Protector (OUP)                                | 2011-2011 | NATO                   |
|                                | Memorandum of Understanding on Security and Military Cooperation | 2019-P    | Independent            |
| Qatar                          | Qatar Military Base a Bilateral Security Partnership             | 2014-P    | Independent            |
| The Mediterranean Region       | NATO Maritime Group-2 (SNMG-2)                                   | 1992-P    | NATO                   |
|                                | Operation Active Endeavor  | 2001-P    | NATO                   |
|                                | Operation Allied Harmony   | 2002-2003 | NATO                   |
| North Macedonia                | Operation Concordia  | 2003-2003 | EUFOR                  |
|                                | Operation Proxima  | 2003-2005 | EUPOL                  |
| Bosnia-Herzegovina             | EU Operation ALTHEA  | 2004-P    | EUFOR                  |
| Kosovo                         | NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR)   | 1999-P    | NATO                   |
| Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania | UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)              | 2010-P    | UN                     |
|                                | NATO Baltic Air Policing   | 2006-2006 | NATO                   |

|                               |   |           |              |
|-------------------------------|---|-----------|--------------|
| D.R. of Congo                 | UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC)                        | 2006-2006 | UN           |
| Sudan                         | EUPOL Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (EUPOL KINSHASA)                | 2006-2007 | EUPOL        |
|                               | UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)   | 2005-2011 | UN           |
| Somalia                       | UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)                                       | 2006-2011 | UN           |
| Gulf of Aden,                 | United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)                              | 2013-P    | UN           |
| Somali                        | Military Base   | 2017-P    | Independent  |
|                               |   |           |              |
| Basin and the Indian Ocean    | Combined Task Force (CTF-151)   | 2009-P    | UN           |
| Gulf of Aden & Horn of Africa | Operation Ocean Shield (OOS)  | 2009-2016 | NATO/ UN     |
| Georgia                       | UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UN- OMIG)   | 1997-2009 | UN           |
|                               | OSCE Border Monitoring Operation in Georgia (OSCE BMO)                            | 2000-2009 | OSCE         |
| Black Sea                     | The Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR)                          | 2001-P    | BLACK-SEAFOR |
| East Timor                    | Operation Black Sea Harmony   | 2004-P    | OBSH         |
|                               | UN Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET)                                    | 2000-2004 | UN           |
| Afghanistan                   | International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Resolute Support Mission (RSM) | 2001-2021 | NATO         |
|                               | United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)                          | 2012-2022 | UN           |

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## CHAPTER 11

# TÜRKİYE'S HUMANITARIAN FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE AK PARTY

KADİR ÜSTÜN\*

Türkiye's foreign policy has adopted humanitarianism as a major cause under successive Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party) governments since 2002. Turkish foreign policy activism and its humanitarian aid efforts globally have often gone hand in hand, creating an aid model that refused to impose political conditionality while serving national interests. Türkiye responded to regional instability quickly and effectively, developing a humanitarian response capacity on par with most developed nations. Ankara developed a robust national humanitarian aid policy and passed comprehensive legislation focused on creating a progressive and humanitarian approach to migration. In addition to building capacity and improving its legal infrastructure, Türkiye pursued a “humanitarian diplomacy” approach to foreign policy that provided unprecedented levels of foreign development aid to countries in need.

When confronted with international humanitarian crises, most specifically in Syria, Türkiye refused to treat the humanitarian challenges as the problem of the international community only. Instead of deferring the burden and responsibility to the international organizations and finding an unmanageable situation in its hands as many countries around the world have tended to do, Türkiye set out to assume direct responsibility to care for the refugees with its own resources. The overall international failure in burden sharing<sup>1</sup> has been coupled with failed attempts to find a political solution to the civil war.

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<sup>1</sup> Kemal Kirişçi and Elizabeth Ferris, “Not Likely to Go Home: Syrian Refugees and the Challenges to Turkey and the International Community”, *Brookings Institution*, September 29, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/not-likely-to-go-home-syrian-refugees-and-the-challenges-to-turkey-and-the-international-community/>, (Access date: October 5, 2022).

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Türkiye has emerged as a major player in providing aid to more than 70 countries around the world. Even the major powers found it difficult to provide enough medical equipment and supplies to their own people, let alone other countries. Türkiye, however, was able to gear up its domestic manufacturing capabilities to produce much-needed medical supplies, including masks and other critical medical aid. Once again, Türkiye's existing international aid experience helped raise the country's profile during the early part of the pandemic when Turkish planes delivered critical help to some 70 countries around the world, including Italy, Egypt, South Africa, China, Brazil, Mexico, and even the United State (US) Türkiye's emergence as a major medical supply donor elevated the country's foreign policy profile when most countries struggled to provide sufficient medical help to their own citizens.

This chapter analyzes the intersection between Türkiye's evolution from an aid recipient to a major international donor since the early 2000s. By examining Turkish humanitarian and development aid policies, Somalia and the Syrian refugee issue as case studies, this analysis demonstrates an organic convergence of foreign policy and humanitarian goals. The overarching argument presented here is that Türkiye pursued a humanitarian foreign policy not simply out of goodwill but because it defined humanitarianism as a genuine component of its national interest. This approach has provided Türkiye with prestige as a major international actor while developing political clout around the world, especially in aid-receiving countries.

## FROM AID RECIPIENT TO DONOR COUNTRY

Türkiye's transformation from an aid recipient country to a major donor competing with traditional donor countries in recent years has been remarkable. Türkiye had been an aid recipient country since the end of World War II, receiving technical assistance and development aid from the US as part of the Marshall Plan. By December 2005, Türkiye had received a total of \$12.5 billion in economic aid. Japan, Germany, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were the other national and international major donors to provide technical assistance and economic development aid to Türkiye. In 1985, by starting its own development aid program directed toward African countries, Türkiye became both a recipient and a donor country.

According to the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided by Türkiye, which was \$85 mil-

lion in 2002, reached \$3.919 billion in 2015, representing a 45-fold increase.<sup>2</sup> Türkiye ranked as the second largest donor country in the world in 2015 with a total ODA of \$3.2 billion.<sup>3</sup> In terms of the ratio of total humanitarian aid to gross national income (GNI), Türkiye could be considered the most generous donor country in the world based on the 2015 figures.<sup>4</sup> In 2016, Türkiye spent 0,75 percent of its GNI on humanitarian assistance while the US –with the highest volumes of funding– spent only 0,03 percent of its GNI.<sup>5</sup> In 2020, this indicator increased to 0,86 percent as Türkiye continued to host more than 4 million refugees.<sup>6</sup> Beyond hosting millions of refugees, Türkiye provides aid to many countries around the world without imposing political conditions, which distinguishes the Turkish humanitarian aid approach.

The 1999 earthquake in Türkiye led to the rise of humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the wake of the government’s serious shortcomings in disaster response. This disaster exposed the vulnerabilities and the level of unpreparedness that essentially catalyzed Turkish society’s overall disaster management awareness and humanitarian response. Many NGOs that emerged in the wake of the 1999 earthquake started operating in various disaster regions around the world.<sup>7</sup> In fact, this does not appear to be an exception when compared to the emerging powers’ (Brazil, Russia, India, China, Mexico, Indonesia, and South Africa) rapid and forceful entry into the humanitarian aid arena in the 2000s. These countries’ interest in international disaster response was at least partly due to the “high disaster risk with which many of these countries are confronted themselves”.<sup>8</sup> Having experienced it themselves, the Turkish public has become ever more sensitive about natural disasters beyond the country’s borders, and it has

<sup>2</sup> “Turkish Development Assistance Report 2015”, *TİKA*, (2015).

<sup>3</sup> “Turkish Development Assistance Report 2015”.

<sup>4</sup> See Figure 18.5. It should be noted that Türkiye lides the domestic humanitarian aid spending on Syrian refugees, such as the maintenance of refugee camps inside the country, in these calculations.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Initiatives: Global Humanitarian Assistance, “Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2017”, *United Nations*, (2017), p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Türkiye includes its humanitarian assistance to refugees in its international humanitarian assistance numbers. “Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022”, Development Initiatives, (2022), [https://devinit.org/documents/1193/GHA2022\\_Digital\\_v8\\_DknWCsU.pdf](https://devinit.org/documents/1193/GHA2022_Digital_v8_DknWCsU.pdf), (Access date: October 04, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> “Turkey and Somalia: Making Aid Work for Peace”, *Briefing, Saferworld & Istanbul Policy Center at Sabancı University*, March 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Stacey White, “Emerging Powers, Emerging Donors”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)*, February 2011, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/emerging-powers-emerging-donors>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).



become commonplace to mobilize resources through the organization of aid campaigns at home and abroad.

In the 2000s, Türkiye virtually competed in and distinguished itself as a major donor and relief provider in the wake of various natural disasters and conflicts. Some of these were the 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran, the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami, the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, the 2008 Gaza war, and the 2010 Pakistan floods.<sup>9</sup> In the 2010s, the Arab Spring produced the biggest humanitarian crisis of the 21st century in Syria, next door to Türkiye. Türkiye's humanitarian aid grew exponentially both in the form of taking care of internally displaced people (IDPs) inside Syria and taking in millions of refugees.

Much of the Turkish response was focused on emergency aid but as the conflict continued, Turkish humanitarian aid especially in northern Syria became a sustained activity. Türkiye established and helped run camps for IDPs inside Syria, and built hospitals, schools, and even small factories to meet the essential needs of displaced populations. These activities may not appear as part of a traditional development aid model, but they helped many local populations sustain themselves in the middle of a conflict zone for years. Various international humanitarian crises since the 2000s and the wars in Iraq and Syria have led to Türkiye assuming the role of a major humanitarian actor and an international development aid mega-donor.

## DEVELOPMENT AID

The Turkish development and humanitarian aid model significantly differ from the traditional economic development aid models of established donors. It is no secret that traditional economic development aid and humanitarian assistance have been criticized for a variety of reasons. The most significant of these has been the fact that established donors have tended to tie humanitarian aid to specific political and even military conditions. They have required concessions from the aid recipient countries that were focused on “nation building” in conflict-ridden regions. Türkiye's humanitarian aid model has been unique in the sense that it “does not tie its aid to political, military, economic conditions”<sup>10</sup> unlike other traditional donors. Even when compared to other emerging players in development

<sup>9</sup> David Lapeska, “Turkey's Rise from Aid Recipient to Mega-Donor”, *Al Jazeera English*, April 25, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Fuat Keyman and Onur Sazak, “Turkey as a Humanitarian State”, *Policy Paper (Project on the Middle East and the Arab Spring (POMEAS))*, No: 2, (2014).

aid, “Türkiye does not primarily pursue foreign economic interests with its development cooperation, even if the interest in new export markets plays a certain role alongside humanitarian and foreign policy concerns”.<sup>11</sup>

As opposed to the nation-building model that tends to impose political conditions and national security interests, Türkiye is committed to “state building”<sup>12</sup> prioritizing the local needs and capacity for long-term sustainability. Furthermore, preferring the bilateral model, Türkiye avoids the pitfalls of multilateral aid structures, resulting in a more dynamic response focused on local priorities. For instance, when local conditions require more peacebuilding efforts instead of infrastructure building, Türkiye has been able to shift its focus to bringing “conflicting parties together in order to transform the conflict”<sup>13</sup> resulting in more sustainable stability. It can be argued that this flexibility and know-how is owed to the fact that Türkiye’s development aid included a sustained and comprehensive engagement with the least developed countries (LDCs), many of which had been severely impacted by conflict and natural disasters.<sup>14</sup>

The Turkish humanitarian aid model is not without its pitfalls. The absence of an interagency structure makes coordination difficult and can result in the duplication of similar activities. The TİKA as the coordinating agency fulfills this role to a large extent but coordination of aid activities remains a challenge. The addition of a civilian component to the aid process through the utilization of universities and think tanks to better identify strengths and weaknesses have been suggested as one way of overcoming this challenge.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, striking a healthy balance between bilateralism and multilateralism can potentially strengthen the Turkish humanitarian aid model. Türkiye has justifiably insisted on the benefits of the bilateral aid model as a dynamic one able to respond to the real-life needs of the recipient country; however, the multilateral aid model has well-established “pre-deployment analyses and strategies”<sup>16</sup> which can strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of Turkish humanitarian aid activities. It should also be noted

<sup>11</sup> Jeannine Hausmann, “Turkey as a Donor Country and Potential Partner in Triangular Cooperation”, *Discussion Paper, German Development Institute*, No: 1, (2014).

<sup>12</sup> Keyman and Sazak, “Turkey as a Humanitarian State”, pp. 6–7.

<sup>13</sup> Keyman and Sazak, “Turkey as a Humanitarian State”, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> “Turkey’s Development Cooperation with the Least Developed Countries: A Report on the Turkey’s Economic and Technical Cooperation Package for the LDCs”, *TİKA*, (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Keyman and Sazak, “Turkey as a Humanitarian State”, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Keyman and Sazak, “Turkey as a Humanitarian State”, p. 12.

that Türkiye's institutional coordination challenges appeared virtually nonexistent during the pandemic. Türkiye's main agencies involved in humanitarian and development aid such as the TİKA, the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay), and the Ministry of Health<sup>17</sup> effectively coordinated to deliver medical aid to other countries.

However, while Türkiye appears interested in strengthening its aid model through engagement with traditional donors, it does not "wish to be tied too closely to the traditional Western donors" to maintain its "freedom of action".<sup>18</sup> It has also been suggested that Türkiye should focus more on "long-term development challenges" in addition to the much-needed urgent emergency aid delivery to "institutionalize peace" in fragile state environments.<sup>19</sup> Yet again, it seems that prioritizing emergency aid is tied to Türkiye's conscious choice to maintain its rather effective bilateral model based on local needs as opposed to distributing aid according to a preset model with limited maneuverability and adaptation. It has been suggested, based on a case study of Türkiye's aid activities in Somalia, that this sort of dynamic and conditions-based approach makes it difficult to identify a "clear-cut Turkish development policy".<sup>20</sup> Türkiye's development aid policy's inherent flexibility and adaptability allow it to provide aid to corners of the world that would otherwise be unreachable if strict conditions were imposed. This approach appears to be a deliberate choice by Turkish policymakers, which distinguishes Turkish development aid from many other traditional donors.

## HUMANITARIAN AID

Türkiye has promoted humanitarianism as a central tenet of its foreign policy and diplomacy. As the host of the United Nation's World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, Türkiye's position paper stated that it views humanitarian diplomacy as a "human-centered and conscience-driven policy with particular attention to human dignity and development".<sup>21</sup> This perspective has dominated the government agencies' declarations and aid practices. This approach became part of Turkish

<sup>17</sup> Buğra Güngör, "Foreign Aid During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Evidence from Turkey", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol: 21, No: 3, (2021), pp. 337-352.

<sup>18</sup> Hausmann, "Turkey as a Donor Country and Potential Partner in Triangular Cooperation", p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Deniz Göle, "Turkey's Development Assistance to Fragile States: From Sporadic Actions to System Building Practices", *Turkish Journal of International Relations*, (2014).

<sup>20</sup> Mehmet Ozkan, "The Turkish Way of Doing Development Aid? An Analysis from the Somali Laboratory", *South-South Cooperation Beyond the Myths: Rising Donors, New Aid Practices?*, eds. Isaline Bergamaschi and Phoebe Moore, (Palgrave Macmillan, London: 2017).

<sup>21</sup> "Turkey Position Paper", World Humanitarian Summit 2016, Istanbul, 23-24 May 2016.

public diplomacy efforts with aid agencies participating in a collective, albeit imperfect, effort in building Türkiye's positive image at home and abroad.<sup>22</sup> Türkiye's humanitarian aid profile was heightened to unprecedented levels during the earlier part of the pandemic because of critically needed Turkish medical aid to dozens of countries around the world. Türkiye rushed to help countries of different religious and cultural backgrounds as well as political systems on all continents. This performance undermined the argument that Turkish foreign aid was strategically targeted at countries for foreign policy purposes.

Dissenters have argued that Türkiye's humanitarianism was selective in practice and did not go beyond being a discursive tool, as the country still has not had a comprehensive integration policy guaranteeing the permanent residence of Syrian refugees in Türkiye.<sup>23</sup> However, it should be recognized that the humanitarian discourse surrounding the issue of refugees has been effective in creating goodwill and sympathy for the plight of the Syrian refugees in Turkish public opinion and for international audiences. More importantly, difficulties in crafting and implementing a comprehensive integration policy should not be considered an overriding factor in the effectiveness of humanitarian discourse either for public diplomacy or for foreign policy purposes. Humanitarian discourse can be a discursive tool as well as serving to promote humanitarianism among the public, and these two cannot be considered mutually exclusive.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the foreign policy outlook of the country, in general, has had an impact on the public perception of humanitarian activities. Scholars have scrutinized the correlation between the positive policies on immigration and asylum policies and the overall foreign policy approach. It has been suggested that Türkiye's "assertive" foreign policy, especially at the beginning of the Arab Spring, resulted in an open-door stance toward refugees. However, as the Syrian crisis turned into a prolonged conflict, the emphasis shifted toward a more security-based discourse underlining "non-arrival" "temporary protection" "voluntary return" and "burden sharing".

Yet, the conclusion that "security concerns and the isolation in international relations along with the growing burden of refugees necessitated Türkiye to reca-

<sup>22</sup> Senem Çevik, "Turkey's State-Based Foreign Aid: Narrating 'Turkey's Story'", *Turkey in Global Governance: Searching for Alternatives Between the West and the Rest*, Vol: 1, No: 2, (2016), pp. 55-67.

<sup>23</sup> Umut Korkut, "Pragmatism, Moral Responsibility or Policy Change: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Selective Humanitarianism in the Turkish Refugee Regime", *Comparative Migration Studies*, Vol: 4, No: 1, (2016), p. 2.

liberate its immigration policy towards a more traditional direction<sup>24</sup> falls flat. If anything, Türkiye had to take an in-depth look at its immigration and asylum policies and passed legislation that was more progressive in certain respects when compared to the existing laws in Europe. Despite the continuing deterioration of the situation along the border in terms of security and the rise of terrorism, Türkiye continues to receive refugees from Syria. The Syrian refugee issue has indeed sparked different reactions from the various segments of Turkish society and the state. Nevertheless, Türkiye has not adopted an anti-immigrant or anti-refugee policy like many European states. Türkiye continued to keep its doors open, a policy the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) applauded and pointed out as an example for other countries and regions, including the European Union (EU) and the Gulf countries.<sup>25</sup>

Türkiye's humanitarian aid policy has been shaped by civil society organizations in addition to the government's policies. Civil society played a significant role in providing development and humanitarian aid both at home and abroad alongside various government agencies. Turkish humanitarian NGOs continue to play a prominent role and their activities are often seen, at times, as complementary to the government's aid policy. Scholars have pointed out that Turkish government officials and NGOs participate in a virtual "division of labor" in which the government focuses on "high-level peacebuilding" and the NGOs focus on "low-level peacebuilding" efforts, such as rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development.

Among these civil society organizations, the central problem seems to be a lack of effective coordination and planning despite some of the advantages they enjoy, such as flexibility, aid non-conditionality, and reliance on private donations as independent organizations.<sup>26</sup> It is also pointed out that the perception among many Turkish NGOs that they are representing and promoting Türkiye abroad carries with it the risk of politicizing humanitarian aid.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the ab-

<sup>24</sup> N. Ela Gökalp Aras and Zeynep Şahin Mencütek, "The International Migration and Foreign Policy Nexus: The Case of Syrian Refugee Crisis and Turkey", *Migration Letters, Special Issue: Syrian Crisis and Syrian Movers*, Vol: 12, No: 3, (2015).

<sup>25</sup> "UNHCR Says West Should Follow Turkey 'Example' on Syria Refugees", Yahoo News, June 18, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/unhcr-says-west-turkey-example-syria-refugees-154926556.html>, (Access date: March 6, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Bülent Aras and Pinar Akpınar, "The Role of Humanitarian NGOs in Turkey's Peacebuilding", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol: 22, No: 3, (2015), p. 237.

<sup>27</sup> Aras and Akpınar, "The Role of Humanitarian NGOs in Turkey's Peacebuilding", pp. 241-42.

sence of conditionality of humanitarian aid is a common practice across Turkish government agencies and civil society organizations, rendering the country's aid policy significantly less political compared to traditional donors of the international community.

Despite the complaints from both the state institutions and civil society actors about failures in coordination and effective aid delivery, overall, humanitarian responsibility discourse has broadly been adopted by both state and civil society actors. The virtual explosion in the number of humanitarian organizations in Türkiye in recent years has been deeply impactful, as it has created a "humanitarian aid culture" so to speak. It has become commonplace to see humanitarian aid campaigns organized constantly for both domestic and international humanitarian crises. The discourse of humanitarianism has become prevalent, making it easier to call for humanitarian action.

## AFRICA

In line with a bold new foreign policy opening to the continent, Türkiye's foreign aid to Africa reached unprecedented levels under the AK Party governments. Türkiye had already drafted a policy document titled, "Opening up to Africa" in 1998 but its true opening to the continent came into full force in 2005 with Türkiye's announcement of that year as the "Year of Africa". Türkiye acquired an "observer" status to the African Union (AU) in April 2005, and by 2008, the AU declared it a "strategic partner".<sup>28</sup> Türkiye's trade volume with African countries more than doubled from \$5.4 billion in 2003 to over \$12 billion in 2007.<sup>29</sup> Gearing up its presence in the continent starting in 2003, the TİKA was already supporting development projects in 37 countries by 2008.<sup>30</sup> After having virtually abandoned the African continent for more than a century, and in line with its growing economy as a rising power, Türkiye has significantly increased its development aid profile in Africa.<sup>31</sup>

Türkiye's humanitarian aid to Somalia has been the most significant in its outreach to Africa. In August 2011, then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made

<sup>28</sup> Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey Discovers Africa: Implications and Prospects", *SETA Policy Brief*, No: 22, (2008).

<sup>29</sup> Özkan, "Turkey Discovers Africa", p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Özkan, "Turkey Discovers Africa", p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Mehmet Özkan, "Does 'Rising Power' Mean 'Rising Donor'? Turkey's Development Aid in Africa", *Africa Review*, Vol: 5, No: 2, (2013), pp. 139-47.

a historic visit to Mogadishu and announced the opening of an embassy at a time when the country was suffering from the worst famine in 60 years, travel to the capital was considered highly dangerous, and most international actors, including NGOs, were avoiding the country. In contrast, Türkiye established a presence in Mogadishu and Turkish Airlines started to operate flights when international actors would not even travel to the country. Moreover, by appealing to the international community, Turkish leadership continued to draw international attention to the plight of the Somalis.<sup>32</sup>

Türkiye's forceful entry into Somalia was generally well-received as a peace-building activity but there were also some warnings. For example, the International Crisis Group (ICG) recommended in 2012 that Türkiye should remain impartial in the internal politics of the country and manage high Somali expectations about how much aid it could provide.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Turkish attention to Somalia was sustained and visits to the country by Turkish leaders have become frequent, especially in times of difficulty. For instance, in the wake of a terrorist attack on a hotel, President Erdoğan visited Mogadishu in 2016, producing police training, education, and energy agreements. Somalis' expectations from Türkiye have been high as the ICG report predicted. On the Turkish side, reports even indicated "Somalia fatigue" among Turkish NGOs<sup>34</sup> as the engagement was so strong and consistent for a few years.<sup>35</sup> Despite such warnings, however, it can be argued that Türkiye's long-term commitment to the country has mitigated risks that could emanate from a mismatch of expectations on both sides. Both sides benefited from the relationship. Türkiye boosted its image and soft power while Somalia received humanitarian and development aid as well as projecting stability due to Turkish willingness to deploy staff in the face of security risks.<sup>36</sup>

Türkiye's humanitarian investment in Somalia led to the establishment of strong political and security relations with the African country. In 2017, Türki-

<sup>32</sup> "Turkey PM Visits War-Torn Somalia", *BBC News*, August 19, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> "Assessing Turkey's Role in Somalia", *International Crisis Group*, October 8, 2012, <https://www.crisis-group.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/assessing-turkey-s-role-somalia>, (Access date: October 5, 2022).

<sup>34</sup> Kathryn Achilles, Onur Sazak, Thomas Wheeler, and Auveen Elizabeth Woods, "Turkish Aid Agencies in Somalia: Risks and Opportunities for Building Peace", *Saferworld and Istanbul Policy Center*, (2015), p. 44.

<sup>35</sup> "Turkey and Somalia: Making Aid Work for Peace".

<sup>36</sup> Gizem Sucuoğlu and Jason Stearns, "Turkey in Somalia: Shifting Paradigms of Aid", *South African Institute of International Affairs and NYU Center on International Cooperation*, (November 2016), <http://cic.nyu.edu/publications/turkey-somalia-shifting-paradigms-aid>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

ye established a military base in Mogadishu to train Somali soldiers, taking the relationship to a new level. It is hard to miss the connection between Turkish humanitarian diplomacy and military capacity-building activities. It would be a stretch to argue that Türkiye intended from the beginning to establish military ties with Somalia, but Turkish leaders understood that running to the aid of a fellow Muslim country in Africa could produce foreign policy gains in the future. At the same time, it is difficult to argue that humanitarian aid was simply a tool of foreign policy, particularly because it carried so many risks that it may not have led to a positive political outcome at all.

## SYRIAN REFUGEES

Türkiye is the largest refugee-hosting nation in the world today. Since the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011, Türkiye has implemented an open-door policy toward Syrian refugees. This policy has protected millions of Syrians from being caught in the middle of fighting between the Assad regime and the opposition as well as various terrorist groups fighting for control of territory in northern Syria. Türkiye's open-door policy has been challenged multiple times by serious security issues, which required a limited suspension of refugee crossings. However, Türkiye prioritized the humanitarian needs on the ground and recognized that the Syrian refugees had nowhere else to go. Türkiye's frustration with the international community's attitude, especially the rise of anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments in the West, has not prevented the country from continuing to admit refugees.

Today, Türkiye hosts more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees. This number does not include refugees from other nations, including Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Receiving and hosting such a large number of refugees as a result of the Syrian civil war has pushed Türkiye to make dramatic changes in many areas such as security, legal framework, education, and health services. Türkiye has long been a major transit as well as a target destination for international refugee movements but with the Syrian civil war, the overall scale of the challenge has been overwhelming. Meeting this challenge has required nothing short of a national mobilization effort led by the government and state bureaucracy in cooperation with civil society organizations.

To respond effectively, Türkiye had to increase its capacity to handle the safe passage and registration of millions of refugees into its territory. The country's capacity to host refugees in camps has increased but stabilized over time as Türkiye recognized that hosting the refugees in camps was neither feasible



in the long run nor humanitarian in principle. Today, around 15 percent of the Syrian refugee population lives in camps.<sup>37</sup> Back in September 2013, when the number of registered Syrian refugees reached nearly half a million, Türkiye was hosting around half of this number in camps.<sup>38</sup> Despite calls for sealing its border due to potential spillover risks,<sup>39</sup> Türkiye insisted on its “open-door policy” largely on humanitarian grounds by admitting all the refugees headed for the Turkish border.

At the same time, instead of building more refugee camps, which often exceeded international standards, Türkiye tried its best to implement an effective registration system, which allowed the refugees to benefit from government services in the cities they were registered in. This, in turn, ensured both that the inflows of Syrian refugees could be managed in an orderly manner and that they could benefit from health and education services. Through the coordination of the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), Turkish state institutions have participated in providing services to Syrian refugees, preventing social and economic isolation or the exclusion of refugees from the rest of society.

Türkiye insisted on managing the overall response in Turkish territory on its own. Treating the Syrian refugees as “guests” at first, Türkiye did not immediately resort to the international aid regime. The downside to this approach was receiving little international humanitarian assistance. At the same time, Türkiye exceeded international standards to the extent that its approach has been described as “far more humane and practical” especially in comparison to Lebanon and Jordan where the international aid programs have been much more active.<sup>40</sup>

Türkiye has also made fundamental changes to its immigration law by passing the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in April 2013.<sup>41</sup> The law introduced various reforms and especially focuses on “integrating immigrants into

<sup>37</sup> “Syrian Refugees in Turkey Surpasses 3.5 million”, *Daily Sabah*, 15 February 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Ferris, Kemal Kirişçi, and Shaikh Salman, “Syrian Crisis: Massive Displacement, Dire Needs and a Shortage of Solutions”, *Brookings*, September 18, 2013, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/syrian-crisis-massive-displacement-dire-needs-and-a-shortage-of-solutions/>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> “Blurring the Borders: Syrian Spillover Risks for Turkey”, *International Crisis Group*, April 30, 2013, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/blurring-borders-syrian-spillover-risks-turkey>, (Access date: October 5, 2022).

<sup>40</sup> Dawn Chatty, “The Syrian Humanitarian Disaster: Disparities in Perceptions, Aspirations and Behaviors in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey”, *IDS Bulletin*, Vol: 47, No: 3, (2015).

<sup>41</sup> “Turkey: New Law on Foreigners and International Protection”, *Global Legal Monitor*, April 4, 2013, <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/turkey-new-law-on-foreigners-and-international-protection/>, (Access date: February 12, 2018).

the country and treating asylum seekers and irregular migrants in accordance with international norms".<sup>42</sup> The law also established the General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM), which would gradually assume all migration-related policies and implementation, including refugee registration and inter-agency coordination between various ministries.<sup>43</sup> The law not only modernized and updated the Turkish migration laws but also allowed for a more rational division of labor between government agencies by allowing the AFAD, which had hitherto been the lead agency, to return to its main function as the disaster and emergency management authority.

With full support and resources from the government, the AFAD quickly developed capacity and expertise on refugees while effectively coordinating the government response. Its efforts put the agency on the map in terms of international humanitarian aid and made it a leading voice in humanitarian efforts around the world. At the same time, experts have argued that most of the refugees would likely stay and Turkish hospitality needed to be coupled with a broader policy.<sup>44</sup> It was clear that the Syrian refugee issue had to be handled through a comprehensive policy with political, social, economic, and security dimensions.<sup>45</sup> The constantly changing dynamics on the ground and failed attempts at finding a political solution to the conflict in Syria have made the devising of a comprehensive policy difficult, to say the least.

Relative calm achieved in certain pockets in northern Syria, such as those liberated through Türkiye's Euphrates Shield Operation, resulted in the return of tens of thousands of refugees.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Turkish public opinion largely favored Syrians' return to their country although many also recognized this was not going to be readily possible. Despite occasional and localized tensions against the Syrian refugees, particularly in larger cities with sizeable refugee populations, inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions have remained manageable. At the very beginning of

<sup>42</sup> Ahmet İçduygu, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Long Road Ahead", *Migration Policy Institute*, (2015).

<sup>43</sup> Laçin İdil Öztuğ, "The Syrian Conflict and Turkey's Humanitarian Response", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol: 15, No: 3, (2016).

<sup>44</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, "Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges: Going Beyond Hospitality", *The Brookings Institution*, (May 2014), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/syrian-refugees-and-turkeys-challenges-going-beyond-hospitality/>, (Access date: October 4, 2022).

<sup>45</sup> Kılıç Buğra Kanat and Kadir Üstün, *Turkey's Syrian Refugees: Toward Integration*, (SETA Report, Istanbul: 2015).

<sup>46</sup> "Turkey Facilitates Repatriation of Syrian Refugees", *Anadolu Agency*, December 21, 2017.

the crisis, there was very little public debate about the refugees, with predominant perceptions being generally positive.<sup>47</sup>

As the conflict transformed into a protracted civil war and refugees appeared here to stay, relatively neutral or positive perceptions have changed over the past six years after real-life experiences and interactions with large numbers of refugees. Today, neither the Turkish government nor the public seems ready to accept that Syrian refugees are in Türkiye for the long haul, which appears to be the main obstacle to developing a comprehensive “adaptation” policy toward Syrian refugees.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, it needs to be noted that the public’s changing views on the refugees over time have not resulted in significant violence, a fact attributable to efforts by the government and the NGOs to further an understanding of the plight of the Syrian refugees couched within a humanitarian discourse.

## A HUMANITARIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party has emphasized humanitarianism as a core principle and attempted to make it a central tenet of its international activities as well as foreign policy. Especially in the wake of the Arab Spring, Türkiye based its foreign policy discourse around the theme of humanitarianism as well as humane approaches. When the uprisings reached Egypt, Türkiye called on then-President Hosni Mubarak to “listen to the people” and avoid harsh measures against protestors. In Libya, Türkiye sought common ground between the Muammar Qaddafi regime and the international coalition citing humanitarian consequences and prioritizing the evacuation of 20,000 Turkish nationals from the country. In Syria, Türkiye tried, for nine months, to convince the Assad regime to implement meaningful reforms to avoid bloodshed and warned against a potential conflict with humanitarian consequences. Much of this was treated as simply “rhetoric” but it needs to be recognized that humanitarianism and the human costs of foreign policy issues have become a central concern for Turkish policymakers.

As some scholars have argued, this brand of foreign policy can be understood within the context of Türkiye’s ambition as an emerging power to become

<sup>47</sup> Juliette Tolay, “Türkiye’de Mültecilere Yönelik Söylemler ve Söylemlerin Politikalara Etkisi”, *İltica, Uluslararası Göç ve Vatansızlık: Kuram, Gözlem ve Politika*, eds. Özlem Çelebi, Saim Özcürümez and Şirin Türkay, (Birleşmiş Milletler Mülteciler Yüksek Komiserliği, Ankara: 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Due to the problematic history of the term “integration” in migration debates in Europe and the West more broadly, Turkish officials prefer the term “adaptation” or “harmonization.”

a key contributor to global security and international peacebuilding.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, Türkiye's humanitarian diplomacy has contributed to increasing the country's political influence, which brings with it the potential criticism of being perceived as simply being a tool of foreign policy goals.<sup>50</sup> For some scholars, there is no difference between the goals of emerging nations like Türkiye and traditional developed country donors. For example, Türkiye increased its foreign aid to African nations when it sought a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council. Türkiye also prioritized its immediate neighborhood and Turkic countries in its foreign aid programs.<sup>51</sup> There is a strong connection between Turkish foreign policy goals and its stated humanitarian approach, but this is true for many countries. More importantly, it does not make Turkish foreign policyless humanitarian to be accomplishing national interests and humanitarian goals at the same time.

Foreign aid programs are broadly political in nature, especially in terms of their goals, priorities, and target countries. Türkiye's humanitarian aid policy is no exception as humanitarian diplomacy has become a centerpiece of foreign policy. For instance, Türkiye's rather liberal open-door policy in hosting millions of Syrian refugees has enabled it to demand recognition of its new status as a "responsible" regional power.<sup>52</sup> It has also been argued that the risks and the security issues emanating from the Syrian civil war pushed Türkiye to recalibrate its security needs and humanitarian diplomacy to adopt a policy of "forced humanitarianism".<sup>53</sup> It is true that especially in the wake of the rise of the DAESH terrorist organization, Türkiye focused on border security and terrorism risks. However, Türkiye continued to admit Syrian refugees despite security concerns, particularly because its humanitarianism continued to hold significant sway over its overall approach to the conflict.

<sup>49</sup> Reşat Bayer and E. Fuat Keyman, "Turkey: An Emerging Hub of Globalization and Internationalist Humanitarian Actor?", *Globalizations*, Vol: 9, No: 1, (2012), pp. 73–90.

<sup>50</sup> Federico Donelli, "Features, Aims and Limits of Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy", *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, Vol: 11, No: 3, (2017), pp. 59–83.

<sup>51</sup> Ferda Karagöz, "Bir Kalkınma Reçetesi Olarak Dış Yardım: Türkiye'nin Verdiği Resmi Kalkınma Yardımlarının Değerlendirilmesi", *Türkel Minibaşa Armağan-Kriz, Kalkınma ve Türkiye Ekonomisi Seçme Yazılar*, ed. Emine Tahsin, (Derin Publishing, İstanbul: 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Juliette Tolay, "Mass Migration and Images of State Power: Turkey's Claim to the Status of a Responsible Rising Power", *Rising Powers Quarterly*, Vol: 1, No: 2, (2016), pp. 135–49.

<sup>53</sup> Ariel Gonzalez Levaggi, "Forced Humanitarianism: Turkey's Syrian Policy and the Refugee Issue", *Caucasus International, Displacement, Refugees and Migration in the Caucasus and Eurasia*, Vol: 5, No: 1, (Spring 2015).

It can be argued that Türkiye has sought to leverage its humanitarian outlook in achieving some foreign policy goals. However, the country's foreign aid model is rather exceptional in the sense that it refuses to tie aid to political conditions. Turkish foreign aid remains focused on achieving, first and foremost, humanitarian goals on the ground. The political "perks" that would come with developing friendly relations through the springboard of humanitarian diplomacy are assumed but not imposed upon when delivering humanitarian aid to refugees or aid-receiving nations. Thus, Turkish foreign aid differs substantially from the model used by the developed nations in that there is no conditionality, which is often criticized as a mechanism that tends to strengthen the aid institutions of the aid-giving nations, rather than those at the receiving end. Türkiye has committed much of its foreign aid to capacity building and economic development to help aid-receiving nations sustain themselves in the long run. In the meantime, good political relations are developed but they are not conditionally tied to aid.

There is no denying that Türkiye reaped political benefits from its humanitarian activism, especially in Africa. The continuously strengthening political ties with Somalia are a good example of this. Prioritizing the local needs and political realities and refusing to tie aid to political conditions, Türkiye has gained a lot of goodwill among the Somalis. Sustained long-term engagement with the country and addressing its specific needs have distinguished the Turkish humanitarian model in Somalia. The success story in Somalia helped economic and political engagements with other African nations, turning Türkiye into a serious and credible partner in the sub-continent. Türkiye has adopted humanitarianism as an integral part of its foreign policy and pursued a confluence between foreign policy goals and humanitarian needs.

## CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic definitively showed Türkiye's strong humanitarian aid capacity and commitment to providing international support to other countries. The pandemic came at a time when Türkiye and the US were struggling to stabilize their bilateral relationship because of their disagreements over defense issues. The shock that came with the pandemic pushed both countries to set aside their differences for the time being. Türkiye's strong manufacturing capacity and ability to deliver medical aid to so many countries showed that Türkiye's commitment to humanitarian aid was not only driven by foreign policy priorities. It certainly elevated Türkiye's profile and provided the country with international prestige but

the fact that it ran to the aid of countries regardless of their political, cultural, and ideological differences proves that Türkiye has become a major and mature humanitarian actor in the international system.

This chapter has shown that Türkiye has emerged as a major international donor and a humanitarian actor as a result of several factors. Türkiye's domestic experience dealing with natural disasters and humanitarian challenges in its neighborhood allowed it to develop capacity and acquire experience over the past two decades. As a result of making humanitarianism a central theme domestically and in devising its foreign policy, Türkiye made a concerted effort to integrate humanitarian causes as part of defining its national interest. NGOs have played a large role in the development of Turkish humanitarianism, particularly beginning with the 1999 earthquake. Successive AK Party governments certainly played a critical role in raising awareness, mobilizing government resources, coordinating aid campaigns, and prioritizing humanitarian concerns in conducting foreign policy.

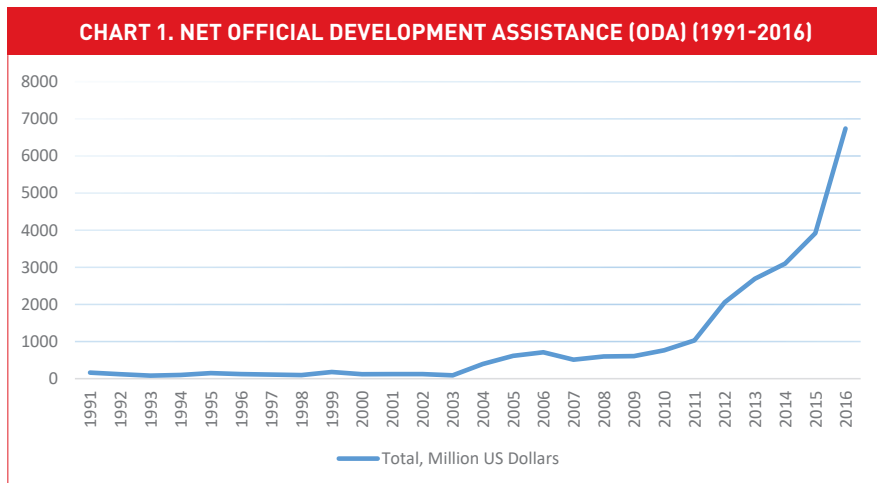
The biggest challenges for Turkish humanitarianism came with the prolonged conflicts in Syria and Iraq. By hosting more than 3.5 million refugees today, Türkiye has become the nation hosting the most refugees in the world. While conducting military operations in northern Syria against the PKK-linked YPG, Türkiye continues to receive refugees and deliver humanitarian aid across the border. It also creates local governance structures based on its development model that focuses on local capacity building. By refusing to place conditions on aid, Türkiye developed a rather flexible approach that took into consideration the local context, including political dynamics and socioeconomic differences on the ground. Thanks to this approach, Türkiye was able to deliver aid directly and rapidly while committing to the region—be it in Syria or Somalia—for the long haul.

Early in Turkish humanitarian activism, Türkiye's commitment and sustainability of its aid in the long run were questioned. Yet, we see today that they have proven durable precisely because—this chapter argues—humanitarianism has become a genuine component of Turkish foreign policy. It is difficult to find an example of Turkish foreign policy activism without a serious humanitarian commitment. Most crucially, this kind of convergence of humanitarianism and foreign policy has distinguished itself from the humanitarianism and development aid models of the traditional donor countries.

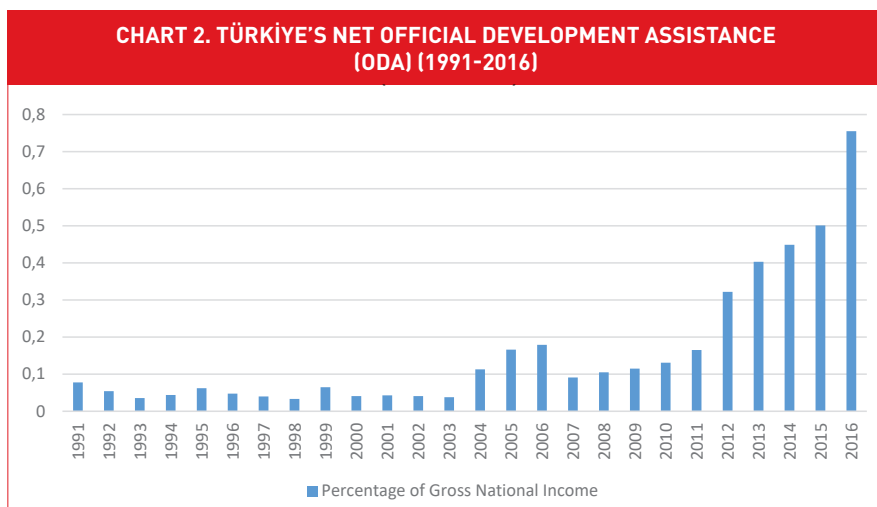
What remains to be seen in the coming years is whether traditional donors will adopt some of the unique aspects of the Turkish model or if Türkiye will end up revising its aid based on the traditional donors' models. Further research is

also needed to explore specific practices of Turkish humanitarian foreign policy to answer questions of sustainability, capacity building, and public opinion, among others. If Türkiye continues to insist on humanitarianism as a central tenet of its foreign policy in the coming years, it might present a unique case study of the risks and opportunities of pursuing a humanitarian foreign policy.

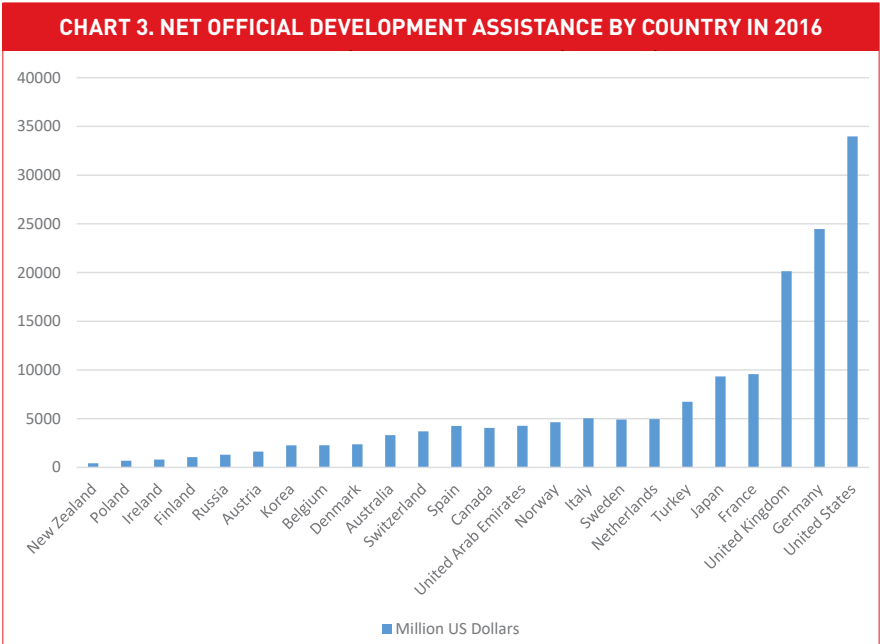
## APPENDICES



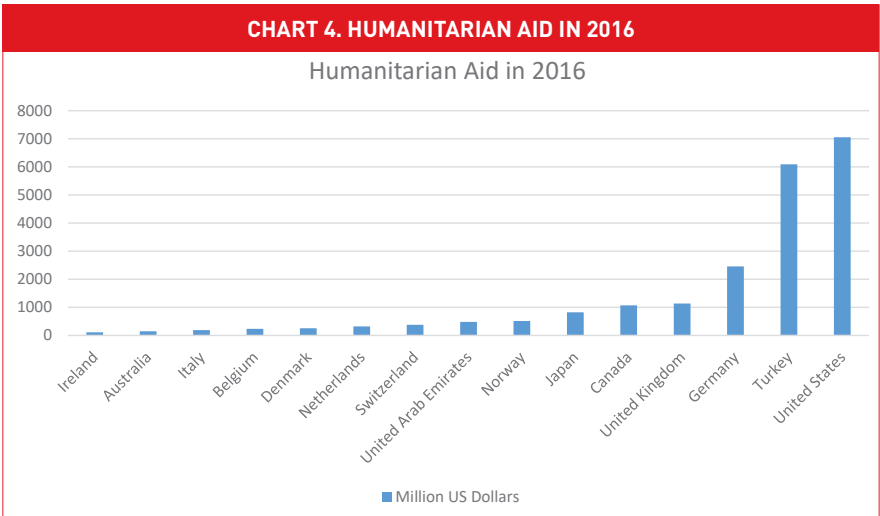
Source: OECD (2018), Net ODA (indicator). doi: 10.1787/33346549-en (Accessed on 20 February 2018)



Source: OECD (2018), Net ODA (indicator). doi: 10.1787/33346549-en (Accessed on 20 February 2018)

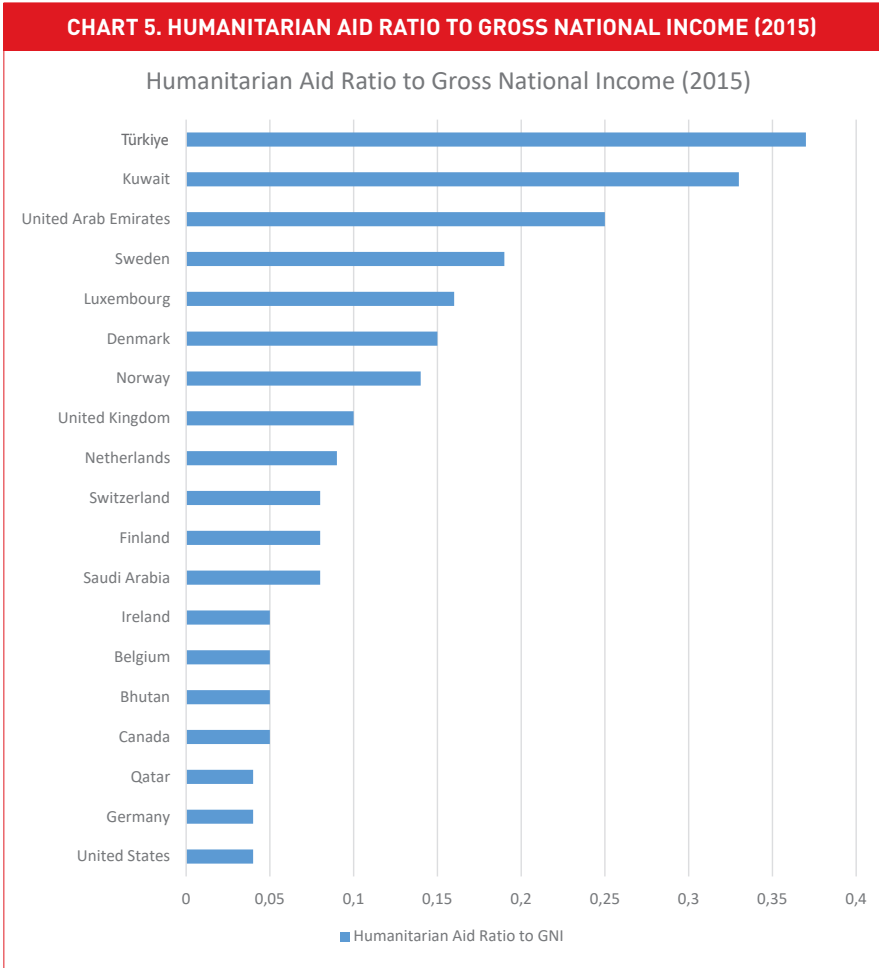


Source: OECD (2018), ODA (2018).



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Source: "Turkish Development Assistance Report 2015", TİKA, (2015).

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**T**he AK Party years in Türkiye have been truly transformational. When the party was established in 2001, the country was going through major economic and political crises. Today, under the leadership of President Erdoğan, Türkiye is a middle power with serious global ambitions. In the nearly two decades since its inception, the AK Party has been confronted with major domestic and foreign policy challenges. At home, major improvements in religious freedoms, ethnic relations, and cultural rights have been realized. Abroad, Türkiye has emerged as a major power to reckon with in the region while playing a role as a critical partner in global issues. From tackling the Kurdish issue to daring to take on authoritarian regimes during the Arab Spring, the AK Party under President Erdoğan's leadership has already left the most significant mark on Turkish modern political history.

This volume addresses the domestic and foreign policy transformations in Türkiye that took place over the course of the past two decades under the AK Party.

