



TÜRKİYE'S VISION FOR ITS NEW CENTURY

EDITORS

KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT

BURHANETTİN DURAN

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INTRODUCTION

2023 stands out as a momentous year and chapter in the annals of the Turkish Republic, marked by both historic milestones and profound challenges. Commemorating the centenary of its foundation, Türkiye found itself confronting one of the most devastating disasters in its history: the twin earthquakes that rocked the nation on February 6th. With a staggering toll of more than 50 thousand lives lost and the impact reverberating across 11 cities, the earthquakes unleashed an unparalleled tragedy, casting a somber pall over the anticipated celebrations of the Republic's centenary. Yet, amidst the rubble and grief, the resilience of the Turkish people shone through as they rallied together in the face of adversity. However, the seismic events not only claimed lives but also overshadowed planned meetings and festivities, serving as a stark reminder of the fragility of human existence and the unpredictable nature of natural disasters.

In a year fraught with both catastrophe and significance, Türkiye embarked on a journey of democratic expression with unprecedented twists. For the first time in recent memory, the nation witnessed two rounds of presidential elections, a testament to its commitment to democratic processes. Emerging victorious in both rounds, President Erdoğan cemented his name in the annals of Turkish history with a string of consecutive electoral triumphs. Central to his electoral campaign was the vision of “the Century of Türkiye” which signaled a forward-looking agenda aimed at navigating Türkiye through a turbulent era marked by global crises and transformative shifts in international relations.

This strategic vision, articulated by President Erdoğan during the pivotal year of 2023, encapsulates Türkiye's aspirations to assert itself as a leading force for progress, stability, and prosperity in the modern era. At its core, “the Century of Türkiye” represents a bold and forward-looking agenda that seeks to harness Türkiye's vast potential and historical legacy to shape the course of the 21st century. It is a vision of Türkiye embracing its potential and assuming its rightful place among the community of nations, as a leader for progress, stability, and prosperity in an

increasingly interconnected world. Central to this vision is the pursuit of economic growth and development, propelled by a commitment to sustainable practices, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Türkiye aims to leverage its strategic geographical location, vibrant economy, and dynamic workforce to emerge as a regional economic powerhouse, driving growth and prosperity not only for its own citizens but also for its neighbors and partners.

Furthermore, “the Century of Türkiye” embodies a commitment to proactive and constructive engagement in international diplomacy. Türkiye recognizes the interconnectedness of the modern world and the imperative of cooperation in addressing global challenges. As such, it seeks to deepen its involvement in multilateral forums, forge strategic partnerships, and mediate conflicts, thereby contributing to global peace, security, and development. By leveraging its diplomatic prowess and regional influence, Türkiye aims to foster dialogue, bridge divides, and build bridges of cooperation among nations.

In addition to its economic and diplomatic endeavors, Türkiye aspires to be a beacon of stability and leadership in its immediate neighborhood and beyond. The region surrounding Türkiye is fraught with complexities and conflicts, from the war in Ukraine to the turmoil in Syria and the tensions in the Gulf. In the face of these challenges, Türkiye remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting peace, security, and cooperation. Through initiatives to resolve conflicts, enhance security cooperation, and facilitate dialogue, Türkiye aims to foster a more stable and prosperous region, where nations can thrive and prosper together.

Moreover, “the Century of Türkiye” encompasses a cultural and soft power dimension, recognizing the importance of cultural diplomacy and mutual understanding in building bridges between nations. Türkiye boasts a rich cultural heritage, spanning millennia and encompassing diverse traditions, languages, and customs. By promoting Turkish culture, language, and values, and supporting educational and cultural exchange programs, Türkiye aims to enhance its influence and projection on the global stage, fostering goodwill and cooperation with other nations.

In this comprehensive volume, a diverse group of authors, each an expert in their respective field, delves into the intricacies of Türkiye’s evolving domestic and foreign policy landscape. The book presents a multifaceted analysis of Türkiye’s new strategic direction, articulating a detailed and nuanced understanding of the significant shifts and developments in the region. It is thoughtfully structured into two main sections: domestic policy and foreign policy. Each section comprises a series of chapters that offer in-depth perspectives from different specialists.



ONE

DOMESTIC POLICY



WHAT DOES THE CENTURY OF TÜRKİYE VISION SAY TO TÜRKİYE AND THE WORLD?

BURHANETTİN DURAN*

INTRODUCTION

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party), which holds a prominent position in Turkish political life with nearly twenty-two years of uninterrupted rule, approached the May 2023 and March 31, 2024 elections with a vision titled “The Century of Türkiye”. This vision which aimed at charting a course for Türkiye in the second century of the Republic, represents the AK Party’s commitment to renewal and the development of inclusive policies. Prior to the formulation of “The Century of Türkiye” vision, the AK Party had already introduced the “2023 Vision” in various documents which guided state institutions to establish key targets for the year 2023 in their policies. By aligning the significant milestone of Türkiye’s centennial in 2023 with other symbolic dates, such as 2053 in reference to the Conquest of Istanbul in 1453 and 2071 in reference to the Victory of Malazgirt in 1071, the AK Party underscored its forward-looking perspective. For instance, during a speech commemorating the 19th anniversary of his party’s founding, President Erdoğan expressed Türkiye’s commitment to assuming a leading role “for regional and global peace and justice” with the following words: “I sincerely believe that we will build a Türkiye in line with our 2023 goals and our 2053 and 2071 vision hand in hand as a nation.”¹ Thus, the conceptualization of “The Century of Türkiye” for the Republic’s second century can be seen as an extension of the AK Party’s 2023 vision, reflecting its tenure in power.

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¹ “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Cuma Namazını Hazreti Ali Camii’nde Kıldı”, 13 June 2020, TCCB, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/121803/-2023-hedeflerimiz-2053-ve-2071-vizyonumuza-uygun-bir-turkiye-yi-milletce-el-ele-insa-edecegiz>, (Access date: 20 April 2024).

Undoubtedly, numerous factors contributed to the AK Party's enduring tenure in power. Chief among these factors is President Erdoğan's charismatic leadership and the party's ability to continually refresh its narrative and story. The formulation of new objectives in response to changing conditions, both domestically and internationally, is an integral component of the party's success.

Founded in 2001 amidst the economic, political, and social crises caused by the February 28th process, the AK Party entered its first-ever elections in 2002 with a vision to address governance challenges in Türkiye. It presented urgent action plans focused on democratization, development, and justice to the electorate. Until the 2011 elections, its vision emphasized combating the established tutelage system, strengthening political institutions, and democratizing the political sphere. Viewing electoral success as a legitimizing force for reforms, the AK Party has driven critical transformations in Turkish politics under its "conservative democratic" identity.²

The AK Party has consistently navigated crises by expanding the political landscape and by effectively implementing its strategy to combat the tutelage system. This approach bore fruit during the 2007 presidential election crisis which was marked by the unprecedented claim that 367 members were needed in parliament for the election to proceed. The party also confronted the E-memorandum issued by the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces in April 2007 and the subsequent closure case in 2008. Throughout these challenges, the AK Party prioritized broadening its support base by engaging with diverse segments of society and adapting its policies to evolving social dynamics. Beyond domestic considerations, the party closely monitored international political developments as well.

During the Arab uprisings in 2011, the AK Party lent support to democratic movements in the Middle East and North Africa. Türkiye's transformation under AK Party leadership garnered global attention, sparking debates about its potential as a "model"³ for predominantly Muslim countries seeking democratization and economic development while preserving their Islamic identities. By demonstrating a commitment to regional integration and addressing the Kurdish issue, the AK Party promoted a vision of a "shared civilization" to the society. This inclusive

² Yalçın Akdoğan, *AK Parti ve Mubafazakâr Demokrasi*, (Alfa: İstanbul, 2014).

³ Burhanettin Duran and Nuh Yılmaz, "Whose Model? Which Turkey?", *Foreign Policy*, 8 February 2011; "Ortadoğu'da Modellerin Rekabeti: Arap Baharından Sonra Yeni Güç Dengeleri", *Türk Dış Politikası Yılığ 2011*, eds. Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and A. Resul Usul, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2012), p. 15-87.

discourse, drawing from both Ottoman history and the Republic, faced challenges in domestic and foreign policy. The pro-status quo Gulf powers' intervention in the Arab revolutions⁴ transformed them into civil conflicts and coups which also affected the political atmosphere in Türkiye. The convergence of the Gezi protests with the December 17-25 judicial coup attempt in 2013, which aimed at removing the then-Prime Minister Erdoğan and his party from power, was not regarded as a coincidence. The termination of the Solution Process in 2015 due to PKK terrorism⁵ marked another pivotal moment in the tumultuous period which extended from 2013 to 2016. The resurgence of terrorism by Kurdish nationalists involved in the "Rojava revolution" in Syria prompted Türkiye to implement a proactive counter-terrorism and security strategy.

In elections following 2013, the AK Party prioritized a politics of resilience which aimed at safeguarding and advancing the reforms and democratic progress achieved up to that point. Vigorously combating new tutelage groups like the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO), the AK Party asserted in its political rhetoric its commitment to preventing Turkish society's gains from being manipulated or undermined by self-serving elite factions. Consequently, the party has consistently advocated for continuing its struggle across all fronts against threats and assaults stemming from global and regional shifts, aiming to elevate Türkiye's role in global politics through steadfast policies. Undoubtedly, the suppression of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt was attributed to President Erdoğan's leadership and the resolute civilian resistance of the Turkish nation.⁶ Following the coup attempt, state institutions underwent purges to eliminate the Parallel State Structure, and a presidential system of government was introduced.⁷

During the same period, military operations in Syria underscored Türkiye's proactive security stance. Amidst these operations, serious tensions flared between Türkiye, the US, and the EU countries. These operations aimed at bolstering Tür-

⁴ Burhanettin Duran, "Arap İsyânlarında On Yılın Muhasebesi ve Türkiye'nin Yeri", *Arap Devrimleri: Değişim ve Süreklilik*, ed. Ramazan Yıldırım and Mahmut Alrantsi, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2021), p. 15-36.

⁵ On the PKK's urban terror, see: Murat Yeşiltaş and Necdet Özçelik, *When Strategy Collapses: The PKK's Terrorist Campaign*, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2018); For further information on the Resolution Process, see: Talha Köse, "The Rise and Fall of the AK Party's Kurdish Peace Initiatives", *Insight Turkey*, Vol: 19, No: 2, (2017), p. 89-115.

⁶ For the social perception of the July 15 resistance, see: Nebi Miş et al. *Demokrasi Nöbetleri*, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2016).

⁷ For the impact of the July 15 coup attempt on Turkish politics, see: *15 Temmuz Sonrası Türkiye*, eds. Burhanettin Duran and Cem Duran Uzun, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2022).

kiye's military presence in Syria, Iraq, the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya, and Karabakh, and Türkiye's narrative around these new policies emphasized the concepts of "struggle in domestic and foreign policy" and "domestic-national".⁸

In the lead-up to the 2023 elections, marking the completion of the first term of the presidential government system, President Erdoğan unveiled his vision of "The Century of Türkiye". While initially presented as a non-partisan appeal to the electorate, this vision was enthusiastically embraced by the AK Party and evolved into the dominant narrative for the 2023 and 2024 elections.⁹

This article first explores the necessity for parties and candidates to articulate a vision in Turkish politics as the Republic enters its second century. Secondly, it delves into the circumstances that enabled the AK Party to introduce its vision of "The Century of Türkiye" as "a blueprint for the future and the overarching framework for forthcoming policies." Third, it examines the political rhetoric and policy initiatives encapsulated within this vision, as articulated in the 2023 and 2024 election platforms. Finally, it assesses how the concept of The Century of Türkiye perceives the international landscape and discusses the foreign policy outlook it presents for the country.

THE QUEST FOR A VISION FOR THE SECOND CENTURY OF THE REPUBLIC

The 2023 elections, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the Republic, were fiercely contested and was deemed of "critical" significance for all political factions in Türkiye. In the initial round of voting on May 14, President Erdoğan, representing the People's Alliance, garnered 49.5 percent of the votes, while Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the candidate of the Nation Alliance, received 44.9 percent. Also, the People's Alliance secured a parliamentary majority with 323 seats. Subsequently, in the second round of elections on May 28, President Erdoğan clinched re-election with 52.18 percent of the votes. In the second round of elections on May 28, President Erdoğan was re-elected president with the 52.18 percent of the votes.

⁸ Burhanettin Duran, "AK Parti'nin İdeolojik Dönüşümünün Kodları", *Kuruluşundan Bugüne AK Parti: Siyaset*, eds. Nebi Miş and Ali Aslan, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2018), p. 47-74.

⁹ While the 2023 election manifesto was titled "The Right Steps for the Century of Türkiye" the March 31 local election manifesto was presented to the public with the title "Real Municipalism for the Cities of the Century of Türkiye". For both manifestos, see: *Türkiye Yüzyılı için Doğru Adımlar: Seçim Beyannamesi 2023*, AK Party, www.akparti.org.tr/media/dwyd05pu/tu-rkiye-yu-yzili-ic-in-dog-ru-adimlar-2023-sec-im.pdf, (Access date: 20 April 2024); *Türkiye yüzyılı Şehirleri için Gerçek Belediyecilik: 2024 Yerel Seçimleri Beyannamesi*, www.akparti.org.tr/media/ms2bfyi0/2024beyanname.pdf, (Access date: 20 April 2024).

In the lead-up to the May 2023 elections, all aspects of Turkish political life, from preferences in governance systems to the Kurdish issue, took center stage and debate over what vision of the Republic would shape the new century emerged prominently. While lively discussions on party programs and visions have been a staple of Turkish politics during election periods, the heightened intensity of these debates ahead of the 2023 elections stemmed from the recognition that politics and politicians play pivotal roles in determining the country's destiny. The clash of visions between parties, each claiming to represent the "new Türkiye," while the other represented the "old Türkiye", extended across various domains, including governance systems, foreign policy, and Türkiye's position in the international arena.

The People's Alliance underscored its commitment to solidifying the presidential government system in its second term, whereas the opposition, dubbed the 'Table of Six' due to the frequent round table meetings of the six opposition leaders, advocated for a constitutional amendment to establish a reinforced parliamentary system.¹⁰ The prolonged discussions among candidates within both the ruling and opposition camps highlighted numerous challenges for political parties.

The first challenge confronting parties in preparing for the election was the imperative to secure 50+1 percent of the vote. The simultaneous holding of parliamentary and presidential elections presented the second challenge to be managed. The third challenge pertained to the possibility of a run-off in the presidential election and the campaigning process in such a scenario. Indeed, the undisclosed agreement Kılıçdaroğlu entered into with the Victory (Zafer) Party in the May 28th runoff election played a role in his loss of the CHP presidency. Finally, the extent to which strategic voting behavior would be influenced by the evolving sociology of the electorate, the degree to which voters would differentiate their presidential and parliamentary votes within this context, and the ongoing relevance of traditional electoral divisions such as right-left in Türkiye were also of paramount importance. Ultimately, it was observed post-election that many polling companies, having published surveys before this challenging election, encountered difficulties in accurately gauging voter tendencies, resorted to explanations such as last-minute shifts in voting intentions or "tidal wave".

The central question of the 2023 elections revolved around which candidate would lead the Republic of Türkiye into its second century and with what vision.

¹⁰ Elif Er ve Canberk Öztürk, "6'lı Masanın Anayasa Değişikliği Önerisi Açıklandı", *Milliyet*, 28 November 2022.

This vision was anticipated to articulate a discourse that comprehensively evaluated the past and present while offering a perspective on the future. The inclusion of a diverse array of debates, spanning topics from lifestyle and identity to the economy, the refugee issue, and foreign and security policies, on the election agenda, and the intense polemics among presidential candidates underscored the pivotal significance of the 2023 elections in Turkish political life.

“Survival” (*beka*) has been a significant issue in Turkish political discourse since the November 2015 general elections. Both the government and the opposition have criticized each other using different conceptualizations of survival. While the opposition bloc of the ‘Table of Six’ framed the continuation of the current AK Party government as a threat to the country’s survival, the People’s Alliance emphasized that a potential rule by the disorganized opposition would lead Türkiye into significant problems and fail to effectively govern it. Therefore, it’s not surprising that Türkiye witnessed competing discourses of “betrayal,” “threat,” and “survival” in the 2023 elections. However, given that threat and survival discourses are negative themes, the bloc aimed to differentiate itself by offering hope to the electorate and proposing a vision for the future. Considering the consequences of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, as well as the energy and food crises and political conflicts resulting from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, rival parties and candidates in the 2023 elections had to articulate their views on Türkiye’s position in a world dominated by competing great powers in their vision documents. It can be argued that vision presentations that assuage survival concerns and promise hope for the future served as a response to the critical question of “Which republic?” before the 2023 elections. The fact that this need for vision coincided with the beginning of the second century of the Republic of Türkiye held symbolic significance.

FACTORS WHICH SHAPED THE PROPOSAL FOR THE VISION OF THE CENTURY OF TÜRKİYE

Throughout its twenty-one years in power, the AK Party has consistently prioritized development policy across various sectors, including local development, education, transportation, and infrastructure investments.¹¹ Despite facing criticism from the opposition, the party has remained steadfast in its pursuit of mega-project initiatives and in each election cycle, it has presented to the electorate its targets for significant development and investment endeavors to be completed until the

¹¹ Yunus Şahbaz, *Türkiye’de Sağ Kalkınmacılık ve AK Parti*, (SETA Report, İstanbul: 2022).

next elections. Also, despite political turbulence following 2013, the AK Party has persisted in realizing strategic investments aimed at reaching milestones by the 100th anniversary of the Republic and propelling Türkiye to new heights. It has successfully implemented major projects spanning from the domestic automobile industry to advancements in defense, nuclear technology, and the exploration and exploitation of underground resources.

Emerging into power amidst a political landscape defined by critical decisions made by coup plotters, the AK Party has emerged as a profoundly influential force in Türkiye's political arena, showcasing the transformative potential of politics. The thwarting of the July 15 coup attempt and the transition to a new government system stand as unprecedented milestones in the multi-party era. Through these actions, the AK Party not only safeguarded itself from the fate suffered by the Democrat Party which was overthrown by a military coup d'état in 1960 but also steered clear of the pitfalls encountered by other right-wing parties such as the Motherland Party (ANAP) and the True Path Party (DYP).

Drawing on its experience of implementing significant reforms which can be described as "a silent revolution," the party has endeavored to bolster Türkiye's influence in the international arena through its proactive foreign policy and security approach in the post-2016 years. President Erdoğan's adeptness at bridging foreign policy with domestic politics presents a crucial opportunity to engage with the electorate. This opportunity has been effectively utilized by Erdoğan amidst transformative periods marked by EU reforms, the upheavals of the Arab uprisings, and tensions with Western capitals after 2013 and 2016. Similarly, during the coronavirus pandemic, President Erdoğan emerged as one of the most prominent figures in diplomacy, notably for his role in securing the Black Sea Grain Initiative and orchestrating a prisoner swap between Russia and Ukraine. Additionally, his stance against Israel's massacres in Gaza after October 7, 2023, garnered significant attention on the international stage.

One of the most intriguing aspects is President Erdoğan's adeptness at elucidating both the tensions and the normalization efforts in foreign policy to the electorate.¹² He can compellingly articulate the pursuit of integration with the EU, the tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the efforts towards rapprochement

¹² For the process of the quest for normalization in the Middle East and Türkiye's policy, see: Burhanettin Duran, "Ortadoğu'da Normalleşmenin Geleceği ve Türkiye", *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2021*, eds. Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2022), p. 11-36.

with Russia.¹³ While the AK Party has emphasized the goal of strengthening the “new Türkiye,” liberated from tutelage and elevating its international stature, the CHP and other opposition parties have advocated a different discourse of the “new Türkiye,” championing the slogan of “now is the time for democracy” in the 2023 elections.¹⁴

The example below illustrates the AK Party’s synthesizing approach to identity issues. The celebration program for the 100th anniversary of August 30 Victory Day at the Presidential Complex in Ankara was replete with symbols reflecting the AK Party’s vision of a “strong Türkiye”. The recitation of the Holy Quran, the display of the Turkish flag, the presence of Mustafa Kemal’s photograph, patriotic marches, and the performance of the Mehter Band—all showcased in the complex’s garden—served as shared values and symbols of Turkish national identity. These symbols, bridging the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, underscore the AK Party’s efforts to reconcile the challenging debates of Turkish modernization. Moreover, the live video link to Turkish soldiers stationed in Azerbaijan, Libya, Qatar, Somalia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina—engaged in peacekeeping efforts—highlighted Türkiye’s newfound and impactful role in the international arena. The symbols of the celebration program aptly demonstrated that a century after its struggle for independence, the Turkish nation has evolved into a stabilizing force, bringing security and stability to its neighboring regions.¹⁵

THE POLITICAL LANGUAGE OF THE “CENTURY OF TÜRKİYE” VISION

Commencing the 2023 election campaigns ahead of schedule, President Erdoğan expanded his political influence through initiatives like the Alevi initiative and the constitutional regulation of the headscarf, while simultaneously shaping the discourse with his vision of the “Century of Türkiye”. On October 28, 2022, one day before the 99th anniversary of the Republic, Erdoğan unveiled the Century of

¹³ President Erdoğan’s outstanding leadership qualities can be listed as charismatic leadership, the capacity to renew himself without ever losing touch with the electorate, the politics of service/work, the fight against tutelage, implementation of reforms, the effective use of the transformative function of foreign policy, crisis management skills, and the ability to adapt by reading the domestic and foreign political conjuncture well. See: Burhanettin Duran, “Türkiye Yüzyılı Vizyonu Nedir, Ne Değildir?”, *Kriter*, Vol: 7, No: 74, (December 2022), p. 6-8.

¹⁴ “Altılı Masadan Tanıtım Filmi: ‘Şimdi Demokrasi Zamanı’”, *Cumhuriyet*, 28 November 2022.

¹⁵ “Büyük Zafer’in 100. Yılı Dönümü... Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Mazlumların da Umudu Olan Türkiye’nin İnşası Engellenemeyecektir”, *Hürriyet*, 30 August 2022.

Türkiye vision. On October 27, a video was released on his social media account and shown during his speech was accompanied with a text which provided important clues about the vision document. The film recounts the untold narrative of Şakir Zümre, a trailblazer in the Turkish defense industry, who acted on the request of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It was presented with the following sentence: “With the vision of the Century of Türkiye, which we will raise on the achievements of our country and civilization, centuries-old moves will be realized and our dreams will hopefully come true.” This short film hinted at a framework that views Turkish modernization as a continuum while emphasizing the revolutionary breakthroughs of Erdoğan’s era. It underscored that the dreams of the Republic’s founder were being realized during the AK Party’s more than two decades in power. The narrative of “the rising Türkiye” was portrayed through various facets including the defense industry, foreign policy, education, and technology by drawing a line connecting Atatürk to Erdoğan.¹⁶

On one hand, President Erdoğan’s vision of the Century of Türkiye can be characterized as a call to “complete the construction of a great and powerful Türkiye together.” On the other hand, inclusiveness stands out as the cornerstone of the vision speech:

The Century of Türkiye signifies a shift from identity politics to unity politics, polarization politics to integration politics, denial politics to embrace politics, domination politics to freedom politics, and hate politics to love politics. It heralds a new era where we will bring together genuine actions with sincere acceptance, where humanitarian values take precedence over ideological fanaticism, and righteousness prevails over bigotry and will guide those who veer from the truth back toward it, fostering a collective journey toward greater aspirations.¹⁷

Once more, it was prominently announced that diverse contributions to this vision were encouraged, and everyone was invited to “talk, discuss, and propose” until October 29, 2023. President Erdoğan, while making this call, suggested initiatives such as “building together, forging a new foundation of national consen-

¹⁶ It was observed that the music played, and the visuals displayed before the start of President Erdoğan’s speech at the Ankara Arena, where he shared his vision of the “The Century of Türkiye”, appealed to different colors of the country, but especially to the youth. The main call of the visuals, which were the reflections of the search and discourse for a new beginning was as follows: “Come, let us turn our faces both to the East and the West, but essentially towards the truth.” See: “‘Türkiye’nin Yüzyılı’ için Büyük Gün! Başkan Erdoğan Vizyon Belgesini Açıkladı: İlk Hedefimiz Yeni Anayasa”, *Sabah*, 28 October 2022.

¹⁷ “Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’ın ‘Türkiye Yüzyılı’ Tanıtım Toplantısı Konuşması”, TCCB, 28 October 2022, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/assets/dosya/2022-10-28-turkiye_yuzyil.pdf, (Access date: 31 December 2022).

sus, bestowing Türkiye with the identity of a participatory democratic republic, realigning the political focus on labor and work, ushering in an era of positive freedom and progress, embracing diversity, and breaking free from echo chambers”.¹⁸

In his address on the vision of the Century of Türkiye, President Erdoğan underscored the AK Party's two-decade endeavor to “address the deficiencies of the first century of our Republic and lay the groundwork for the second century.” These remarks reflect a resolute commitment to a robust commencement for the aspiration of the Century of Türkiye. The objectives outlined include elevating our nation to the forefront of contemporary civilization, establishing it as a wise, just, and sovereign power, and positioning it among the top ten most influential countries. It also aims to ensure that Türkiye, standing at a pivotal juncture, leads from the forefront of the global stage.¹⁹

In his vision speech, President Erdoğan established a continuity from the Seljuk era to the Ottoman Empire and then to the Republic, signaling his intention to “fulfill” Turkish modernization: “I stand before you, representing a legacy extending from Sultan Alparslan to Osman Bey, from Mehmed the Conqueror to Sultan Selim the Stern, from Abdulhamid Han to Gazi Mustafa Kemal, and to the present day.”²⁰

The essence of his speech can be summarized as the aspiration to embrace the ideals of the Republic and usher in a new era of ascendancy. With this vision speech, President Erdoğan articulated his belief that his political struggle lies at the heart of the Republican project initiated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He outlined the objective of elevating Türkiye into a global player by liberating it from both internal and external tutelage, referring to this endeavor as the “new red apple: “We share with all humanity the good news that the Century of Türkiye represents a revolution that will bring democracy, development, peace, and prosperity to all corners of the world, beginning with our country and region.”²¹

With the conceptualization of the Century of Türkiye, the AK Party expressed its intention to move beyond political polarization rooted in “ideology, identity,

¹⁸ “Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’ın ‘Türkiye Yüzyılı’ Tanıtım Toplantısı Konuşması”.

¹⁹ Duran, “Türkiye Yüzyılı Vizyonu Nedir, Ne Değildir?”, p. 6-8.

²⁰ “Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’ın ‘Türkiye Yüzyılı’ Tanıtım Toplantısı Konuşması”.

²¹ “Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’ın ‘Türkiye Yüzyılı’ Tanıtım Toplantısı Konuşması”; The opposition criticized the vision of the Century of Türkiye on the basis of “credibility”. The criticisms centered around the argument that “you cannot convince anyone after this time” and argued that the performance of the twenty-year AK Party government did not fit the proposal of “Let’s replace the politics of polarization with the politics of integration”.

religion, and ethnicity,” aiming to base its politics on “values, labor, work, and contribution.”²² This declaration signifies the party’s commitment to presenting “a new vision of politics, society, and the state,” contrasting with the opposition’s “Second Century of the Republic” program, which seeks to revert to the old system. Moreover, the transition to the presidential government system was initially perceived as a measure to fortify politics, “ensuring Türkiye’s political stability in the new century”.²³

The AK Party’s election manifestos for May 2023 and March 2024 were also rooted in the conceptualization of the Century of Türkiye. Titled “The Right Steps for the Century of Türkiye” and “Real Municipalism for the Cities of the Century of Türkiye,” these manifestos underscored the party’s focus on democracy, the creation of a new civilian constitution, development, reformism, inclusiveness, the fight against internal and external tutelage, full independence, embracing a vision of civilization, and the promotion of strong family values.

The 2023 manifesto, issued following the February 6, 2023 earthquakes, underscored the importance of “risk and crisis management against disasters,” while also dedicating significant attention to the AK Party’s recurring themes of reform and democracy. Notably, the declaration which consists such titles as “Democracy with High Standards” and “The Century of Freedoms,” introduced the concept of reform across three complementary phases: transformative, protective, and complementary.

The policies enacted from November 3, 2002, when the AK Party assumed power, until 2013 are referred to as “transformative reforms” in the declaration. During this period, it is asserted that the foundation of democratic rule of law was fortified, the deficit in democracy was addressed, governance rooted in national will was prioritized, efforts were made to combat bureaucratic influence, individual rights and freedoms were broadened, the principles of a social state were fully realized, and social harmony was fostered.²⁴

The 2023 declaration characterizes the coup attempts of December 17-25, 2013, and July 15, 2016, as “attacks” on the Turkish state, nation, and democracy, and depicts the policies enacted in response as “protective reforms”

²² Ertan Aydın, “Türkiye Yüzyılı Değeri ve Doğruyu Esas Alan Bir Vizyon”, *Kriter*, Vol: 7, No: 74, (December 2022), p. 15.

²³ Nebi Miş, “Cumhuriyetin Yeni Yüzyılında Karşılaştırmalı Siyaset”, *Kriter*, Vol:: 7, No: 74, (December 2022), p. 19.

²⁴ *Türkiye Yüzyılı için Doğru Adımlar*, p. 336.

aimed at solidifying democratic gains.²⁵ With this perspective, the declaration labels the democratization measures it pledges to undertake after 2023 as “complementary reforms.” The goal is to “usher in the Century of Türkiye with a more liberal civilian constitution” and achieve “high-standard democracy” to address the evolving political, social, cultural, and economic demands in a changing world.²⁶

FOREIGN POLICY OF THE VISION: THE TÜRKİYE AXIS

During its uninterrupted twenty-one years in power, the AK Party’s foreign policy has consistently been viewed as pivotal for Türkiye’s transformation. This perception has placed foreign policy debates at the forefront of both domestic political discussions and academic analyses. In the initial decade, these debates revolved around the concept of “the model in harmony with the West,” while the subsequent decade saw a shift in focus towards the discourse of “axis shift.”

Indeed, AK Party’s vision of the Century of Türkiye sparked debates concerning “identity and the question of where Türkiye belongs.” Similarly, in the lead-up to the March 31 local elections, discussions arose following the Turkish Parliament’s approval of Sweden’s NATO membership, President Erdoğan’s visit to Cairo, which marked a new chapter in Türkiye’s relations with Egypt, and the involvement of Yaşar Güler, Türkiye’s Minister of National Defense, in the European missile shield initiative. These events reignited debates surrounding the “axis of Turkish foreign policy,” “strategic autonomy,” and the “normalization” policy. Particularly, tensions between Türkiye and the US and the EU after 2013, the deterioration of relations with certain Arab countries, and the deepening cooperation with Russia after 2016 (including the purchase of the S-400) were criticized by the opposition using discourses of “isolation” and “axis shift.”²⁷

The intense debates regarding the “direction” of Turkish foreign policy stem from AK Party’s integration of foreign politics with domestic politics, spanning from discourse to practical implementation, as well as Türkiye’s endeavors to re-define its position within the international system. Central to this approach is

²⁵ *Türkiye Yüzyılı için Doğru Adımlar*, p. 337.

²⁶ *Türkiye Yüzyılı için Doğru Adımlar*, p. 338-350. A similar discourse applying the vision of the Century of Türkiye to cities was repeated in the AK Party’s local election manifesto for March 31, 2024.

²⁷ Burhanettin Duran, “Çok Kutuplu Dünyada Türkiye’nin Yeri”, *Sabah*, 20 February 2024.

Türkiye's aspiration to emerge as a significant player through a reassessment of its geopolitical standing.²⁸

During its extended tenure, AK Party's foreign policy underwent various phases dictated by the prevailing circumstances. From 2002 to 2010, AK Party focused on integrating with the EU and maintained full membership as a strategic objective throughout the 2010s and 2020s, despite the suspension of Türkiye's membership negotiations. The "zero problems with neighbors" policy gave way to instability prompted by the Arab uprisings (2010-2011), civil conflicts, and the imperative to combat terrorist organizations.

In the second decade of the 2000s, Türkiye encountered internal turmoil and strained relations with allies and neighbors abroad. Confrontation with regional and global challenges led Ankara to formulate new security-oriented foreign policy initiatives, resulting in tensions with several countries (including the US, Israel, Greece, Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia). Following the 2016 coup attempt, Türkiye emphasized its hard power, particularly through military operations in Syria and Iraq, to safeguard its national security. Disputes arose with Washington over Syria, the PKK-YPG, and FETO,²⁹ with Athens over maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean, and with EU capitals over military operations.³⁰ Additionally, differences emerged with some Gulf capitals regarding regional strategies during Trump's presidency (2017-2020). During this period, Türkiye contributed to resolving regional issues by establishing military presence in non-bordering regions like Qatar, Libya, and Somalia.³¹ In the post-2021 era, with the escalation of global power competition, the faltering of regional initiatives, the limits of tension politics being reached, and

²⁸ For the identity, motivations and engagements of Turkish foreign policy in the AK Party era, see: Murat Yeşiltaş, "AK Parti Döneminde Türk Dış Politikasında Jeopolitik Söylemin Dönüşümü", *AK Parti ve Türkiye'nin Dönüşümü*, eds. Nebi Miş, Burhanettin Duran and Abdurrahman Babacan, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2022), pp. 217-240. For an assessment of a century of Türkiye's foreign policy, see: Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Dış Politikamızın Yüzyılı: Süreklilik ve Değişim", *Cumhuriyet: Asırlık Bir Muhasebe*, ed. Mehmet Ö. Alkan, (İletişim, İstanbul: 2023), p. 181-224.

²⁹ For a discussion on the ups and downs of the Turkish-American relations, see: Kılıç Buğra Kanat, *Mapping The Fault lines in Turkey-US Relations: Making the Vulnerable Partnership*, (I.B.Tauris, London: 2024); "Turkish-American Relations during the AK Party Governments", *AK Party Years in Türkiye*, eds. Kılıç B. Kanat ve Burhanettin Duran, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2022), pp. 225-246.

³⁰ For an examination of the partnership between Türkiye and the EU which proposes a new model, see: *Türkiye-AB İlişkilerini Yeniden İşler Kılmak*, ed. Talha Köse, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2023).

³¹ Kemal İnat and Burhanettin Duran, "Bölgesel ve Küresel Meydan Okumalar Karşısında Türk Dış Politikası", *AK Parti ve Türkiye'nin Dönüşümü*, eds. Nebi Miş, Burhanettin Duran and Abdurrahman Babacan, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2022), pp. 241-262.

the US withdrawal from Afghanistan under President Biden, a new dynamic has emerged in the Middle East.³²

In this new phase, Türkiye, prioritizing a policy of normalization, seized the opportunity to solidify the achievements of its active security-defense model and recent advancements in the defense industry. Demonstrating willingness to turn a new leaf in bilateral relations with the US, Greece, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, Türkiye has worked towards elevating its cooperation with numerous neighboring countries to a “strategic” level. Adopting a balanced stance in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Türkiye has assumed a significant position on the global diplomatic stage through its involvement in the signing of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and its efforts to facilitate negotiations among the involved parties.

AK Party has legitimized both the period of strained relations with certain countries and its ongoing normalization policy through three key discourses: transforming bilateral and alliance relations to safeguard Türkiye’s national interests, adapting to evolving global-regional dynamics, and enhancing strategic autonomy. The primary goal is to redefine Türkiye’s position and role in the international system. Within this framework, the overarching objective is to enhance Türkiye’s effectiveness as one of the rising powers, both within its region and on the global stage, ultimately elevating it to the status of a prominent global actor.³³

Türkiye’s May 2023 elections occurred amid discussions surrounding the breakdown of the norm-based international order, chaos, multipolarity, the emergence of a new Cold War, and the potential for a nuclear conflict. Additionally, coinciding with the onset of the Republic’s second century, this election provided AK Party with the platform to unveil its vision for the Century of Türkiye. The foreign policy implications of this vision are encapsulated in AK Party’s May 2023 election manifesto, notably under the heading “the Türkiye Axis.”

The conceptualization of the “Türkiye Axis” serves the dual purpose of contextualizing AK Party’s foreign policy legacy across various epochs and solidifying Türkiye’s status as a regional powerhouse with global impact in the new era of the international system. Rejecting a passive approach to its geopolitical position, AK Party has defined the primary objective of foreign policy in the Republic’s second century as “sustaining the construction of Türkiye”:

³² See: Nurşin Ateşoğlu Güney, “AK Parti Döneminde Türk Dış Politikası”, *AK Parti ve Türkiye’nin Dönüşümü*, eds. Nebi Miş, Burhanettin Duran and Abdurrahman Babacan, (SETA Publications, İstanbul: 2022), pp. 321-338.

³³ *Türkiye Yüzyülü için Doğru Adımlar*, p. 393.

To confront the risks and challenges of an increasingly chaotic world, we will persist in taking innovative measures to bolster our genuine military and diplomatic capabilities, while also strengthening our position within the NATO alliance and the EU on a realistic basis. Through our effective foreign policy and deterrent security measures, we will continue to forge our own path in the Century of Türkiye. Our objective is to establish the Türkiye Axis based on the principles of multilateralism, enhanced cooperation, peaceful conflict resolution, fostering stability, activating international organizations, and engaging in humanitarian diplomacy. While our country is oriented towards both the West and the East but our fundamental alignment remains rooted in truth, reality, and justice.³⁴

Türkiye stands apprehensive of the trajectory of the international system, staunchly opposing polarized bloc politics, trade wars, or the emergence of new cold wars.³⁵ President Erdoğan and AK Party representatives advocate for reform within the UN system, which they deem dysfunctional, while expressing dissatisfaction with the erosion of norms, values, and international institutions while at the same time presenting their proposals to remedy these deficiencies. Ankara's emphasis on "strategic autonomy" in foreign policy and security should not be misconstrued as contradictory to its commitment to global governance, international organizations, and cooperation.³⁶ On the contrary, Türkiye asserts its role in alleviating the uncertainties of a multipolar world and upholding peace and collaboration on both global and regional scales.

In this regard, AK Party's conceptualization of "the Türkiye Axis" does not hinge on narrow national interests, revisionist aspirations, or a quest for regional hegemony.³⁷ Instead, it places Türkiye's independence at the forefront, seeks to bolster economic prosperity, and reinforces democracy through a comprehensive

³⁴ *Türkiye Yüzyülü için Doğru Adınlar*, p. 389.

³⁵ That the international system is undergoing a major transformation and great power competition is bringing new uncertainties and conflicts to the world, and that in such a world of chaos, proxy conflicts and hybrid threats, Türkiye is an actor which contributes to stability and peace is frequently expressed by President Erdoğan's close working team. See: Hakan Fidan, "Turkish Foreign Policy at the Turn of the 'Century of Türkiye': Challenges, Vision, Objectives, and Transformation", *Insight Turkey*, (Summer 2023), Vol: 25, No: 3; Fahrettin Altun, *Türkiye as a Stabilizing Power in an Age of Turmoil*, (Academica Press, Washington: 2021); İbrahim Kalın, *Hybrid Threats and Strategic Foresight in the Age of Uncertainty*, MİT, https://www.mit.gov.tr/en/duyuru_milli-istihbarat-teskilati-baskani-sn-ibrahim-kalinin-mitin-97-kurulus-yil-donumu-konusmasi_25.html, (Access date: 20 April 2024).

³⁶ Nurşin Ateşoğlu Güney, "Türkiye'nin Yeni Yüzyıl Vizyonu, Batı ve Liberal Dünya Düzeni Tartışmaları", *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2022*, eds. Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner, (SETA Publications, İstanbul, 2023), pp. 25-42.

³⁷ For Türkiye's policy on neighboring countries and peripheral regions, see: M. Akif Kireççi, "Türkiye'nin Bölgesel Politikaları: Fırtınada Güvenli Liman", *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2022*, eds. Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner (SETA Publications, İstanbul, 2023), pp. 43-66.

foreign and security policy. It asserts reliance on principles such as stability, security, peace, equitable sharing, common interests, and a collaborative ethos. The 2023 election manifesto underscores the objective of foreign policy as “contributing to regional stability and sustainable order” and “cultivating a peaceful, just, and stable international order” by building upon the accomplishments of the past two decades.³⁸ In the Century of Türkiye, national priorities in foreign policy, security, and defense aim to be realized through three strategic belts: i) Establishing a zone of peace, prosperity, and stability around Türkiye, ii) Institutionalizing continental expansions with innovative initiatives, and iii) Pioneering the establishment of a more equitable global order.³⁹ A comprehensive examination of these objectives suggests that the Century of Türkiye vision is a blueprint aimed at “design to build a strong Türkiye”.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

After twenty-one years of continuous governance, in the centenary year of the Republic, the AK Party has unveiled a “vision for the future” under its leadership with the Century of Türkiye initiative. This vision, grounded in an inclusive and ambitious discourse, seeks to both establish a framework for the Republic’s second century and provide stability, assertiveness, and self-assurance during a period of significant uncertainty in the international system.

The vision of the “Century of Türkiye” which enables a discursive power to transform Türkiye by President Erdoğan, seeks to reconcile the idealism of values with the realism of adapting to circumstances. While highlighting the aspiration to foster prosperity, freedom, and justice for all, this vision acknowledges the harsh realities of international competition. Objectives such as “establishing a shared interest through an order grounded in values and fairness” reflect not only a quest for compromise but also a realism that necessitates the capacity to manage tensions.

The AK Party has weathered multiple threats to its power throughout its tenure. From the E-memorandum of 2007 to the closure case of 2008, the Gezi protests in 2013, the December 17-25 judicial coup attempts of the same year, and the FETO coup attempt on July 15, 2016, the party has faced and overcome

³⁸ *Türkiye Yüzyılı için Doğru Adımlar*, p. 392.

³⁹ *Türkiye Yüzyılı için Doğru Adımlar*, p. 421.

⁴⁰ Muhittin Ataman, “Türkiye Yüzyılı: Türkiye Ekseninin inşası için Yeni bir Dış Politika Vizyonu”, *Türk Dış Politikası Yılığ 2022*, eds. Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner, (SETA Publications, İstanbul, 2023), pp. 85-86.

these challenges with steadfast support from the electorate. These experiences have shaped President Erdoğan's vision of the "Century of Türkiye" which he unveiled before the 2023 elections and continued to champion in the 2024 elections.⁴¹

The vision of the Century of Türkiye asserts its aim to solidify Türkiye's achievements in foreign policy and security, alongside strengthening inclusive policies domestically. It underscores the aspiration to forge a "new national consensus" with the active involvement of identity groups like Kurds and Alevis. A key objective of this vision is to sustain "revolutionary" advancements in strategic sectors such as technology, defense, and energy.

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⁴¹ In the run-up to the March 31 local elections, President Erdoğan stated that he sees the vision of the Century of Türkiye as marking end of the old Türkiye that he has been fighting against: "The Century of Türkiye is just beginning. We are closing the old Türkiye era completely. We are putting the Türkiye of one-party fascism, coups, juntas, oppression, coalitions and crises on the dusty shelves of history, never to return. Now it is the era of the Century of Türkiye." "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Türkiye Yüzyılı Yeni Başlıyor", Anadolu Agency, 26 February 2024.

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“Türkiye'nin Yüzyılı' için Büyük Gün Başkan Erdoğan Vizyon Belgesini Açıkladı: İlk Hedefimiz Yeni Anayasa”, *Sabah*, 28 October 2022.

President Erdoğan's statement in March 2024, "neither the world is the old world nor Türkiye is the old Türkiye", encapsulates the essence of the Century of Türkiye vision, which aims to transform Türkiye in accordance with both internal and external requirements. Over the past two decades of AK Party rule, Türkiye has achieved remarkable and enduring progress across its social, cultural, political, and economic spheres. Freed from various forms of tutelage, Türkiye's democracy has grown stronger, supported by well-functioning institutions. The AK Party pledges to further solidify these democratic gains by drafting a new and democratic constitution.

Additionally, Türkiye has made significant advancements in its defense technology and capabilities which are essential in the face of threats posed by various terrorist organizations and the security risks from conflicts near its borders. Türkiye's regional and global significance has also grown, as it strives for "a fairer world" where human rights, freedom, and dignity are upheld without discrimination, in line with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As President Erdoğan once declared, Türkiye's "responsibility extends beyond securing our own safety and prosperity. Our strength lies in our resources, actions, and the aid we provide to the afflicted and oppressed worldwide, beginning with our immediate surroundings". As such, the Century of Türkiye addresses a broad spectrum of domestic and international challenges, aiming for a future where Türkiye stands as a democratic, secure, and prosperous nation, exerting a constructive and influential role on the global stage.

