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Turkey's summer fever: symptom of a changing political system?

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ABSTRACT: Turkey has experienced a turbulent year with one abortive and one completed presidential elections, a parliamentary election that returned the Justice and Development Party of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to office with almost fifty percent of the popular vote. The military felt compelled to intervene in the political process on a number of occasions in order to prevent the election of an 'Islamist' as President of the Republic or in an attempt to influence the government agenda on Iraq and the Kurdish issue. Hundreds of thousands of citizens took to the streets to protest against the 'creeping' Islamization of the country or the army's deadly embrace of the country's fledgling democracy. This article attempts to bypass conventional interpretations of the 'crisis' the Turkish political system is thought to be undergoing and to propose an alternative way of approaching the current political conjuncture, arguing that the political turbulence witnessed in Turkey over the summer and well into the autumn of 2007 can be alternatively understood as a dramatic attempt on the part of the Kemalist establishment to retain its power within the Turkish political system. To this end, I am going to look more closely at the secularism v Islamism controversy as well as a set of other significant fissures in contemporary Turkish politics. In doing so, I will distinguish between the rhetoric framed by the discursive universe policed and maintained by the state bureaucracy and military that claim to be the guardians of Turkey's secular Kemalist tradition and the political 'realities' on the ground and will focus on the social construction of the 'crisis'.

Turkey's existential crisis

Turkey has attracted considerable international attention over the past few months as the country's Grand National Assembly convened five times (two in the spring of

2007 and three in the autumn) to elect a new President of the Turkish Republic to succeed the then incumbent Ahmet Necdet Sezer and, in July, its electorate took part in what has probably been the most intensely contested parliamentary election in Turkey's history.

What seasoned analysts of Turkish politics consistently point out is the increasing polarization of the Turkish political class and elites as well as of the society as a whole along a number of interconnected faultlines. The most visible tensions are between the Kemalist establishment and the AKP government, as well as between the Turkish establishment and the country's Kurdish population. Indeed the latter has also acquired an international dimension as the chief of the Turkish Armed Forces has engaged in an exchange of threats with the government of Iraqi Kurdistan and called for parliamentary approval for operations within Northern Iraq. Other issues that have left their imprint on the political landscape over the past few months have been the obsessive concern that parts of the Turkish establishment have been expressing regarding the perils of (a) the *minoritization* of parts of Turkish society - with the Armed Forces leading the way on this, (b) the increase in political violence and (c) the nationalization of the universe of political discourse in Turkey today.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 2007 western and mainstream Turkish media reports, focussing on the protracted showdown between the Armed Forces and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government over the presidential election of 28 August 2007, have been fixated on the division of the country between secular and anti-secular forces – indeed some referred to the latter as an essentially fundamentalist administration, insinuating that Turkey was sliding towards the abyss of Islamic fundamentalism.

The BBC's flagship news channel BBC news 24 presented the confrontation between the Chief of Staff General Yasar Büyükanıt and the AKP Government as Turkey's ideological struggle between secularism and Islam and its website carried the relevant story under the title 'Turkey's Anguish' (Rainsford 2007), while Suna Erdem, Istanbul correspondent of the Times reported the events in April 2007 under the title 'Turks protest amid fears of secret plan to overturn secular state' (Erdem 2007) thus reproducing the paranoid definitions of the situation cultivated by the state bureaucracy and their Republican Party allies.

More sober analysis also reflected the suspicion that an AKP President of the Republic would essentially be an unknown quantity and would have to prove his adherence to Turkey's constitution, disregarding in the process the fact that the crisis

was initiated by a blatant intervention of the military in the presidential election process. This way of coverage of the political crisis in Turkey seemed to be considering such an intervention a deed of far lesser gravity than the potential democratic election of a President with an Islamic background

The predominance of such themes in media discourse reflects the existence of inertia in our ability to comprehend the complexity of political Islam or 'Islamism' in Turkish politics. As I intend to demonstrate in the course of this article, academic discourse and research share some degree of responsibility here as they, too, have not adapted as Islamism in Turkey (and possibly elsewhere) has evolved and adapted to new realities. Indeed, both the general literature on Islamist political movements and the literature on Turkish Islam, shares an underlying Orientalist thread. Of the estimated two hundred books published each year in English on Islamic politics since 1980 (Haddad, Voll, et al. 1991: 13) a considerable proportion considers Islamism equivalent to Islamic fundamentalism and relegates it to the realm of pre-modernity and irrationality. Premised on the assumption that modern societies are marked by intensive and generalized secularization, such contributions to the debate on Islamism are incapable of integrating the study of Islamic movements into the broader area of New Social Movement Research and see these as essentially modern phenomena. Islamic movements, in this context are therefore seen as dysfunctional actors from another, bygone era. Their persistent presence in the national and international arena is considered to be an escapist solution due to the inability of the developmentalist third world states to confront the societal insecurity of the politically and economically disenfranchised populations they administer (Haddad, Voll, et al. 1991: 33-40). In most cases, escapism and irrationality seem to be the preferred attributes of Islamic politics in the bulk of the literature. What is more, the use of such a stereotypical view of political Islam in Turkey has been employed in attempts to construct a sense of a political crisis, one that is unprecedented and exceptional.

In this article I would like to suggest that the political situation in Turkey is far more complex than the media (and academic discourse) seems to indicate. I will attempt to propose an alternative way of approaching the current political crisis in Turkish politics, arguing that what the political turbulence we have witnessed in Turkey over the summer and well into the autumn of 2007 can be alternatively understood as a dramatic attempt on the part of the Kemalist establishment to retain its power within the Turkish political system. To this end, I am going to look more closely at the secularism v Islamism controversy as well as a set of other significant fissures in contemporary Turkish politics. In doing so, I will attempt to distinguish between the rhetoric framed by the discursive universe policed and maintained by the state

bureaucracy and military that claim to be the guardians of Turkey's secular Kemalist tradition and the political 'realities' on the ground.

Islamism since the 1990s: rhetoric and 'reality'

One of the foremost experts on Turkish politics, Jacob Landau, reflecting on the emergence of Islamist forces in Turkey back in 1997 singled out the *secular v islamist* dichotomy as the most significant aspect of the Turkish political system that was to challenge the basic tenets of Turkish secularism and modernism. Referring to the prominence of Necmetin Erbakan's Islamist *Prosperity or Welfare Party (Refah)* in the shortlived coalition government of 28 June 1996 – Erbakan himself was appointed Prime Minister at the time - Landau (1997) warned;

The Islamists have resorted there [in Turkey] to achieving power via participation in competitive elections, shunning violence (except for a few rare cases). This affects but little, however, the feelings of frustration of the secularist majority, who fear lest the Islamists succeed in turning Turkey into an Islamic theocracy, distanced from the West and its civilization. Many feel that the military, who have already intervened to seize power three times in the last generation, form the last line of defence against Islamism, with their innate interest in Western technology and hardware. It is a commonly known secret in Turkey that they have vetoed Erbakan's attempt at a close military alliance with Iran as well as his demands for cancelling Turkey's arms deals with Israel. However, the armed forces are in a difficult dilemma. A new military coup would undoubtedly damage Turkey's move to join the European Union, by tarnishing its democratic image. So the future is open at a time which seems crucial for Turkey's fate.

In 2002, only five short years after the dramatic events that led to the hasty resignation of the then Prime Minister Erbakan and the dissolution of his Refah-led government, a new Islamist reformed party named *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party - AKP) emerged as the major political force in the Turkish political scene under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and, since then, it has proved to be one of the most resilient features of the Turkish political system despite the frequent attempts of the bureaucratic elites and the military to marginalise it.

Undeniably the AKP has its roots in earlier attempts to introduce Islamism as a credible force in the political arena, including the consecutive political organizations led by the traditional leader of political Islam in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan which were invariably banned by the Turkish judiciary and the country's National Security Council that constituted the main means of institutionalized interference of the Turkish military into the political domain (see Sofos 2001 and Özkırımlı and Sofos 2007). Like its predecessors, the AKP has been a product of the political opportunity structure that was opened up in the immediate aftermath of the 1980 coup. The coup had taken place at a time that the Cold War affected Turkey's domestic politics, and was largely informed by the intense anti-communist ideology and right-wing leanings of the Turkish military and the regime felt compelled to seek a political formula that would provide it legitimacy and have the capability of containing the perceived threat of a resurgence of the Turkish Left.

Islam appeared to provide a sound source of popular legitimacy as, despite the secular Kemalist reforms it had proved to be resilient and inextricably linked with the quotidian life of many Turks. This very resonance of Islam made it a reliable and effective means of countering the 'danger' of communism. It is in this context that the military regime embarked on a systematic attempt to develop a Turkish-Islamic synthesis, that is, to reconceptualise Islam as an important ingredient of Turkish national identity and institutionalize it. As a result, in order to depoliticize and homogenize Turkish society (Taşpınar 2005: 205) the military government encouraged the fusion of Sunni Islam and national solidarity and co-opted Islamic movements to this end. Obviously, such a deadly embrace with Islam went against the grain of Turkey's Kemalist heritage. The pragmatic political formula of the military amounted to considerably diluting Kemalist secularism to accommodate the presence of Islam in official discourse and ideology.¹

Stemming from the discourse of 1940s and 1950s, the popular idea of *Aydınlar Ocağı* (Intellectuals' Hearth)² of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis, was turned into a state

¹ Having said that, it is important to point out that this type of compromise has not been alien to Kemalism even at the height of republican secularism. It needs to be noted, in passing, that the first republican constitution still described Islam as the official religion of the country; but as Mustafa Kemal would say in 1926, these were 'superfluous formulations, incompatible with the modern character of the new Turkish state and of the republican regime, even though the revolution and the republic saw no harm in allowing them as a concession at the time' (quoted in Mango 1999: 407). Before too long, with a parliamentary decision on 10 April 1928, the second article of the constitution which stated that 'The religion of the Turkish state is Islam' was abolished (Özkırımlı and Sofos 2007: 59).

² The Intellectuals' Hearth was officially founded by a group of academics and professionals from various disciplines in 1970, though its roots went back to the *Aydınlar Kulübü* (Intellectuals' Club) of 1962. The Hearth was politically situated between the centre-right

strategy to contain both communism and revolutionary universalist Islamism. In the suffocating atmosphere of the 1980s, where all political organizations were disbanded, the relatively small but highly influential *Intellectuals' Hearth* was able to continue to function and to submit its draft proposal for a new constitution to the military-controlled National Security Council governing the country (Bora and Can 1999: 156, 161-4). The leading figures of the Hearth later claimed that 75-80 per cent of the final 1982 Constitution was based on their draft, which drew on a book called *Milli Mutabakatlar* (National Concord) by Muharrem Ergin. This book dwelt on the issue of the 'survival of Turkey', surrounded by enemies on all sides. For Ergin, Turkey could only counter this formidable challenge by jealously guarding its national culture, which was the hallmark of its historical superiority. The chaos of the pre-1980 period, he claimed, was caused by the failure of state elites to pursue a 'national policy'. According to Ergin, the 1980 coup provided a golden opportunity to reassert the predominance of Turkish culture and thus to set in motion the second 'Turkish renaissance'—the first being that of Mustafa Kemal (Ergin 1988: 237-46, 380).

The views of Muharrem Ergin, in particular the model of authoritarian regime he sketched, were well suited to the objectives of the military junta. Religion had the potential to provide the legitimacy it was in dire need of, and to counter the anti-systemic ideologies which they believed had led the country into a deep chaos in the second half of the 1970s. Hence article 1924 of the 1982 Constitution made religious education compulsory in primary and secondary schools, which became the main channel through which the tenets of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis were propagated (Bora and Can 1999: 174-5; Üstel 2004: 290). The door was open for the, admittedly controlled, integration of Islam in the Turkish body politic.

Justice Party (AP), the successor to the Demokrat Partisi (Democrat Party), and the radical right Nationalist Action Party (MHP), but pretended to be 'above' party politics, and projected the image of a committee of experts. The Hearth's rather narrow membership contributed to that image—in 1985, the fifteenth anniversary of its foundation, the Hearth only had 130 members (Poulton 1997: 179-80; Özdoğan 2001: 279). The declared aim of the Hearth was to counter the alleged communist threat by reasserting Turkish nationalism; its underlying objective, however, was to restore the 'rightful' place of Islam within official ideology, thereby bridging the gap between Turkish History Thesis and the Ottoman past (Bora and Can 1999: 151, 153-4; Taşkın 2003; Alper and Göral 2003). The ideological formula called the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis was initially expressed in a conference in 1972 by İbrahim Kafesoğlu, the first president of the Hearth, and adopted by the Hearth in 1975. According to Kafesoğlu, the Turks did not hesitate to convert *en masse* to Islam as its precepts were particularly suited to the Turks and their value-systems. This was also a blessing for Islam which was on the verge of disintegration when the Turks accepted it (Kafesoğlu 1970: 5-6, 269-70; Ergin 1988: 200-1). Congruent with this argument was also the group's popular slogan 'the best Turk is a Muslim Turk - the best Muslim is a Turkish Muslim'.

In this new political context, 1983 saw the emergence of the *Welfare Party (Refah)* which, in many ways constituted the direct successor of the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*), the Islamist party of the late 1970s. It was led largely by the same people, published the same print media, and its discourse was almost identical with that of the banned National Salvation Party. The Refah became quite active in some of the poorest parts of the country such as the shantytowns of the big cities, providing key services to populations that had been marginalized and disenfranchised by the regime and turned its attention to the recruitment of members and activists among the young, especially those attending the newly reconstituted religious schools. The strategy seemed to pay dividends as the party managed to steadily increase its popularity in certain localities and convert this legitimacy into municipal election gains over the 1980s until, in 1991, it succeeded in obtaining 43 seats in the 450-seat Assembly as part of a coalition with another small party. The 1995 elections, saw a dramatic improvement in the party's fortunes as, contesting them alone, it came out first with 21.5 percent of the vote and 158 seats. *Refah* eventually lead a coalition government which, albeit shortlived and undemocratically disbanded after a military ultimatum in 1997, had signalled the potentially irrevocable transformation of the political landscape in Turkey.

Its critics point out to a number of initiatives such as the closure of many of the country's gambling establishments in line with the party's Islamic ideology which was against gambling, or in the domain of foreign affairs, the cautious and largely cosmetic and rhetorical attempts of the Erbakan government to break ranks with its allies and attempt a rapprochement with Iran by signing an energy treaty with the neighbouring Islamic Republic. Nevertheless the Refah government, although opposed in principle to the privileged relationship of Turkey with its key regional and global partners, Israel and the US respectively, did little to reverse the established relationships with them.

Clearly Refah was a beneficiary of the unprecedented political opportunity structure which gave Islam a place in the political arena and of the profound social injustices that the Turkish population of the periphery and the shantytowns of major metropolitan areas experienced at the time. But there were a number of other important structural transformations of Turkish society, economy and culture that turned political Islam into a resilient feature of the political landscape of the country.

During the late 1980s, the liberal and export-oriented economic development model adopted by the then Prime Minister Turgut Özal - which constituted yet another departure from the Kemalist heritage - gave rise to a new middle class and business

elite (Narli 1999, Tuğal 2002), mainly of a provincial background. Many of these new white collar workers, professionals and business leaders entered the economy having graduated from the *Imam Hatip* (Prayer Leader and Preacher) schools, reintroduced by the 1982 Constitution, and progressively claimed their place alongside the established economic elite and the state bureaucracy. The new business elite desired to assert their provincial identity and preserve their values and traditions gaining the nickname *Anadolu Aslanlari* (Anatolian Lions). Their desire to make their mark in Turkish civil society, while at the same time differentiating themselves from the more traditional and connected with the state business elite represented by TUSIAD (The Turkish Businessmen's and Industrialists' Association) led to the formation of the latter's pro-Islamist equivalent MÜSIAD (Independent Businessmen's and Industrialists' Association). As Sencer Ayata (1996) points out, it is these new social groups that embraced, and were embraced, by Turkish political Islam and formed its most valuable electoral and financial base. What is more, Tuğal (2002: 107-8) points out that this new 'Islamic' capital has played an important role within the Islamic movement and has led the way towards a progressive reorientation of political Islam from an antisystemic movement to a much more mainstream political force. Indeed, the continuous interventions by the judiciary, invariably resulting in the dissolution of a succession of Islamist parties from the National Order, to the National Salvation Party, to the Welfare Party have prepared the ground for the intra-hegemonic struggle in the conceptualization of Islamism, which has culminated in the foundation and later electoral success of the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

It is evident that contrary to the attempted simplification of the current political situation into one characterised by the irreconcilable conflict between a monolithic and fundamentalist Islamist camp bent on introducing Şeriat (sharia law) and Turkey's secular forces, the reality is much more complex. Political Islam in contemporary Turkey is an incredibly diverse phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the traditional label of religious fundamentalism. In this vein, the AKP should be seen as a multifaceted, internally diverse movement that comprises old Islamist political forces, to be sure, but increasingly, the new middle class and business elite that emerged in the 1980s due to the transformation of the official Kemalist discourse into one that had room for Islam and, indeed, depended on the latter for its own legitimacy and effectiveness. As such, it purports to represent both the urban and provincial poor who see in Islam the promise of social justice and of what Tuğal (2002: 101) has called 'moral anticapitalism' and the aspiring economic elites who consider that the party's Islamic discourse has room for what Tuğal once more calls alternative, or 'moral capitalism'. As it has also been pointed out, (Cornell 1999; Sofos 2001: 259) Islamic political forces have been very successful in attracting the

young, especially those disaffected with the impasses of Turkey's tutelary democracy, corruption and Turkey's state bureaucracy. It is this, additional, dimension of political Islam in Turkey, its ability to attract considerable numbers of young and disgruntled voters and to articulate their disenchantment, that has been largely ignored by commentators and politicians alike.

Constructing the crisis

In many ways, the particular framing of Islamism in Kemalist political discourse is exemplary of the regime's attempt to marginalize this phenomenon and transform it into an internal 'Other'. This is indeed not exclusive to the case of political Islamism but extends to a number of key areas which seem to be threatening the regime's legitimacy and monopoly of power. Over the past few months Kemalist political discourse, as articulated by the military, the state bureaucracy and the Republican People's Party (CHP) has been attempting to link within the idiom of 'crisis' that it first deployed in the run up to the Presidential election in the Spring of 2007 the 'threat' of Islamism with that posed by the Kurdish minority or, more generally, minority issues in Turkey. It is this construction of this multifaceted crisis that I would like to focus in the remainder of this article in order to look critically at the ways in which Kemalist discourse attempts to deal with the challenges these pose to the political system.

The Kurdish issue

Widely perceived within the Turkish Kemalist political class as the country's major security problem, the Kurdish issue has been present at the top of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy agenda. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Sofos 2001: 252) the paranoia that has marked political debate on this issue has affected the human rights of the country's Kurdish population and its political representatives as, the closure of several Kurdish parties by the country's Constitutional Court over the past decade or so reflected the dire situation on the ground in South East Turkey where a long war against the forces of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) was waged not only against them but against a population that had more modest and practical aspirations falling short of the PKK's separatist vision. Nevertheless, the polarization of political discourse on the Kurdish issue has made it possible to 'exceptionally' restrict a number of basic civil and human rights relating to the respect to human life, prohibition of torture and other violations of the person, freedom of movement, belief, association, expression and non-discrimination as far as Turkey's Kurdish

citizens are concerned. For the same reasons, despite the fact that the AKP government's legislative record on human rights in line with the *acquis communautaire* constituted a major breakthrough in this stagnant terrain, progress has been precarious and often countered by insufficient policy implementation. Inaction in the field of human rights and the increasing hardening of the Kemalist establishment vis a vis Turkey's Kurds have led to the transformation of Kurdish politics in Turkey. The moderate Kurdish voices that campaigned for human rights protection within Turkey, or for some sort of limited autonomy have either been marginalized or converted to more hard line positions and the ideal of intercultural dialogue has given its place to separatism (Özkırımli 2006). The growing social unrest in Southeastern Turkey has intensified since the Semdinli events of 9 November 2005, when Jandarma (Gendarmerie) intelligence officers were revealed to have been involved in the bombing of a bookstore. In a brazen act of defiance of the public outcry, General Yasar Büyükanıt, the then chief of the Turkish Land Forces, publicly referred to one of the non-commissioned officers implicated in the Semdinli bombing as a 'good soldier'. As, in this highly polarized climate bridges between Turkish and Kurdish progressive forces are destroyed, the widespread use of separatist symbols and the emergence of a non-compromising Kurdish nationalism have provided the opportunity to the Armed Forces to launch an all out offensive against the PKK but also to call for what is effectively the internationalization of Turkey's Kurdish problem. For several months, senior military officers have been making noises regarding the need to avert the attachment of oil-rich Kirkuk to Iraq's Kurdish region, and prompted a host of defiant statements by Iraqi Kurdish leaders, particularly Massoud Barzani and Kemal Kerkuki, the president and vice-president of the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq respectively. On Thursday 12 April Chief of General Staff Büyükanıt took the opportunity of an address to military commanders to call for parliamentary approval of a cross-border operation in Iraqi Kurdistan to protect Turkey's interests. By a small or large-scale invasion to northern Iraq, the Turkish army aims to clamp down on PKK forces who have found a safe haven there, but also to deliver the Iraqi Kurdish leadership a warning that Turkey has the capacity and the will to safeguard its interests. But more importantly, the Turkish military seeks to preserve an impression of domestic and international crisis and to exert pressure on the AKP government. Turkey has bitter experience of military interventions 'in response to crisis situations' and the military has considerable expertise in 'crisis talk'.

What is obvious in the discourse of the military as exemplified by General Büyükanıt's interventions is that human rights issues need to be displaced by the 'national interest' which largely consists in countering the Kurdish separatist threat. But what

is more significant here is that Kemalist discourse attempts to conflate the 'threat' of Islamism with that of Kurdish separatism: the persistent calls for the AKP government to authorise incursions in Northern Iraq have the secondary function of reminding to the public that part of the AKP electoral basis is concentrated in the Kurdish areas of Southeastern Turkey and of delegitimizing the government's effort to safeguard the ground it has covered in its drive to pursue EU membership as any attempt to wage war in Northern Iraq may mean jeopardising the modest reforms that have been made in the fields of human rights and improving daily life in Southeastern Turkey. As the political crisis around the presidential succession and the calls for a military intervention in Northern Iraq coincided in terms of timing and were integrated within the same discursive framework stressing the exceptional character of the situation, it is clear that Islamism and Kurdish separatism are linked as equivalent parts of the broader crisis Turkey is purported to be undergoing.³

Minorities

Closely related to the Kurdish issue is Turkey's relationship to its minorities which has always been turbulent. The historically conditioned fears of Turkish nation builders that minorities and the protection of their rights have often been used as a means of dismembering the Turkish homeland have, as it has been pointed out (Sofos 2001: 251, Özkırmıli and Sofos 2007: 160-75), given rise to a long tradition of mistrust towards them which was often translated into assimilationist and homogenizing policies and even reached the point of expulsion or physical extermination. Although the 1990s witnessed a period of positive yet superficial interest in some of Turkey's minorities, past and present (Laz, Circassians, Albanians and Bosnians but also Greeks, Armenians and Jews), Turkish nationalism remained deeply suspicious towards attempts to recover Turkey's multiethnic past. Turkey's president Ahmet Necdet Sezer and senior military officers have repeatedly expressed discomfort with European Union accession negotiations as they saw the EU emphasis on minority rights to be challenging the unitary character of the Turkish Republic. In his address mentioned earlier, General Büyükanıt accused the EU of 'inventing' minorities in Turkey, reflecting the perceived incompatibility between Turkey's unitary status and minority rights.

The crisis framework is similarly useful in the integration of the panic over minoritization into the political discourse but also of establishing additional fundamental binary divisions in the Turkish political system as the ALP government is

³ For the notion of equivalence, see Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 127-34.

represented to be succumbing to European Union demands and, by extension, foreign interests while the military and the state bureaucracy attempt to claim the moral high ground and to safeguard the national interest.

Consequences: the nationalization of the universe of political discourse

In addition to the ongoing conflict, latent or overt, in predominantly Kurdish Southeastern Turkey, other forms of violence have been becoming a not negligible feature of the country's political landscape. First, the Semdinli events that prompted such a public outcry for the methods utilized by those involved in the activities of the deep state in Turkey have indicated that certain quarters of the country's political establishment still condone and possibly orchestrate political violence to achieve their aims. But a series of other events such as the assassination of the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in January this year by a 17-year-old nationalist who had, allegedly, been encouraged by other ultranationalists from his home town, or the torture and murder of three Christians in Malatya, in April, or, finally, the systematic terror campaign against liberal intellectuals, minority activists, or anyone who may be considered to be offending the Turkish nation indicate that the universe of political discourse in Turkey is increasingly becoming much more restricted as tolerance for the expression of certain opinions that are challenging either the Kemalist establishment or the nationalist version of what Turkey is, and indeed challenging the dominant nationalist interpretations of the country's history, is minimal and transgression is often met with threats or even more drastic action.

Not only official discourse but also popular culture in Turkey today are permeated by nationalism. The entire political spectrum from the staunchly Kemalist elites to the mainstream left, from the nationalist MHP to the liberal political parties and even the moderate Islamist AKP share the vocabulary, fears, aspirations, and the taboos of contemporary Turkish nationalism. Even moderate politicians out of necessity adopt the uncompromising idiom of an embattled Turkey facing all sorts of historical enemies such as the Armenians and the Kurds while having to endure the pressure of an ever demanding European Union. Any attempt to cast a critical look at Turkey's past and present is almost unanimously repudiated. Even the debate on whether the Ottoman Armenian population was the victim of a genocide or not has been banished to the universe of the undiscussed, despite the fact that modern Turkey did not perpetrate the atrocities it in strict legal terms (Özkırımlı 2006). Laws for the prosecution of 'insulting the Turkish nation' or 'the name and memory of modern Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal' are not seen as an anomaly, as infringing civil

liberties by a substantial part of the population or by the majority of the political class. Meanwhile popular culture reproduces not only the veneration of Mustafa Kemal but also a more generalized pride in being Turkish as the box office success of *Kurtlar Vardisi Irak*, a Rambo-like film celebrating Turkish sense of honour and courage as a Turkish commando avenges the real life detention by US forces of a Turkish unit in Mosul and fights against the Americans to liberate Iraq. This popular nationalism echoes the popular anti-Americanism prevalent in Turkey today but also the favourite themes of official discourse: an embattled Turkey's right to dictate developments in Iraq, Turkish pride and resistance against western pressure to reform and the militaristic culture that the Armed Forces want to preserve.

There is no doubt that Turkish society is undergoing profound transformations that will have definitely have an impact in the future course of the country. Change has undoubtedly increased societal insecurity as cracks have started to appear on the edifice of Kemalism that has provided a frame of reference for generations of Turks since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. But the faultlines that are formed in the country's social and political landscape are not necessarily those that separate secularism from Islamism as several analysts and journalists have been arguing. Without wanting to underestimate the significance of such fissures in modern Turkey, I would argue that one needs to look more closely at the dynamics at play.

Kemalism, that is, the ideology that the military and bureaucratic elites claim to be inspired by and, more importantly, the hierarchy of power and privilege that this has sustained for just under ninety years has been facing considerable challenges. Already during the presidency of Turgut Özal, who succeeded the mastermind of the last 'conventional' bloody coup d'etat, General Kenan Evren, in the highest political office, the political system started to undergo a slow and painful transformation. Indecisive steps towards the liberalization of the political and economic system; a more visible role for Islam in the public domain, albeit under the watchful and anxious supervision of a suspicious military were already in evidence during the early 1990s. A new affluent and fairly religious and conservative middle class has benefited from the liberalization of the economy and has claimed a stake in the running of the country. Islamists and nationalists embarked on a transformation of their image and, some would argue, their politics. The nationalist MHP and the Islamists in various incarnations after consecutive bans and the delivery of a military ultimatum that has remained in memory as Turkey's first postmodern coup have achieved control of a host of municipalities in local elections and a series of national electoral successes which culminated in Necmettin Erbakan and currently Recep Tayyip Erdoğan becoming prime ministers between 1996-7 and 2002 to present respectively. Indeed,

the AKP governments led by Erdoğan have been highly successful and quite cautious in their management of the country. A reasonably successful economic policy and a non confrontational policy towards education, civil rights and the initiation of Turkey's accession process to the European Union have deprived the military of opportunities to intervene to the political process and contributed to the resilience and durability of the AKP. The apparent paradox of a political party with Islamist roots presiding over the liberalization of the country's economic and political system and advocating and working towards Turkey's accession to the European Union has destabilized the bipolar logic upon which the official Kemalist discourse had been based over the best part of the last ninety years in Turkish politics. No longer could Kemalists claim a monopoly over the country's modernization as a political movement they sought to marginalize by representing it as regressive, anti-modern and by banning it or barring its leaders from political office proved capable to spearhead the 'Europeanization' of Turkey's legal system, politics and economy. What is more, many Turkish voters, impatient with the corruption and fragmentation of the 'Kemalist' political forces saw in AKP a more reliable political force, able to seek and provide effective solutions to many of the pressing problems confronting Turkish society. Even the military, which still enjoys unusually high respect and support in Turkey has been affected by this shift in the Turkish political landscape. AKP has also made inroads within the large Kurdish minority in the southeast of the country as it has been considered not to be tainted by the repressive and violent policies of the military although recent research indicates that, it too, has paid the price of an increasing polarization between Turkish majority and Kurdish minority.

As the 'Europeanization' of Turkey's legal and political system as well as the country's economy advances, albeit increasingly stumbling upon obstacles set by Turkey's prospective EU partners and by powerful interests in the country itself, the tutelary model of limited democracy institutionalized by the Army and the Kemalist bureaucracy is undermined slowly but surely. The response of these forces is varied. The Army has shown relative restraint and caution until its recent intervention in the political process through its website. This 'e-coup' marks an interesting departure from more traditional military interventions in Turkey as it has not entailed any actual military mobilization, not even the limited and highly symbolic movements of military units in Ankara during 1997 that have been described by many commentators as Turkey's 'postmodern' coup and which forced the then Islamist Prime-minister Necmettin Erbakan to resign. Another notable novelty in the Army's recent intervention has been the call of the Chief of Staff to the 'unarmed forces' of Turkish society, that is, Kemalist or more broadly anti-Islamist citizens as well as businessmen and politicians to express their concern over the 'Islamic turn' that

Turkey is allegedly experiencing. This appeal indicates that the Armed forces are seeking more sophisticated and subtle ways to exert their influence in Turkish politics and are actively engaged in a process of forging alliances with political forces and of gaining authority through the mobilization of the popular 'voice'. Having said that, however 'postmodern' or 'electronic' the latest military intervention may have been, it has still forced a constitutional crisis and the call of parliamentary elections in late July. What is more, General Büyükanit's often abrasive statements and outspokenness mark an intensified obsession of the military with politics that was not that explicit or pronounced before his ascendance to the top military position in the country. The frequent references to the Kurdish threat, the calls for an intervention in Iraq and, of course, the cultivation of a moral panic over the alleged islamization of Turkey indicate that the Army is engaged in the construction of a framework that might 'justify' an actual, violent intervention.

As I have pointed out in an earlier discussion of the ideology of the Kemalist establishment in Turkey, including the military (Sofos 2001), it is a mistake to conflate its modernizing and aggressive secularist discourse with a commitment to a secular liberal democracy as many commentators do. Kemalism in most of its permutations over the life of the Turkish Republic has been characterised by a selective interest in what one could call technical and instrumental aspects and a disregard towards the critical aspects of western modernity that underpin liberal democracy, pluralism and multiculturalism, however imperfect and incomplete these projects may be.

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