

# Conclusion

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Developments since 2002 in Turkey lend support to the argument that there are basically two forces that have enhanced the JDP government's capacity to attempt to alter the power balances through a serious reform program. The first is the accumulated effect of globalized ideas on democracy, quality of life and the markets, which have gathered force over the last 20 years and have established in people's minds the unquestionable standards of democratic rule. Against the backdrop of the penetration of such globalized reflections, since the mid-1990s, in Turkey, there has been a threshold shift in the definition of national security from external to internal threats to Kurdish separatism and political Islam. That is, although threat levels are perceived to be particularly high around Turkey's immediate strategic environment, major threats are considered domestic. The political autonomy of the Turkish military in its self-identified role as the custodian of secular-Western parameters of the regime has been raised to a level which allowed it free entry into public policy making via the National Security Council. The regime's preoccupation with national security policies in the last two decades produced rigidity and fetishization in the official values of the state, the most prominent ones being a monist interpretation of Turkish identity and secularism. Consequently, state-centered politics considered politics as a zero-sum-game with no room for negotiation and compromise as the basis of effective governance.

Second, the JDP's ascendance to power came at a juncture when international perception has highlighted Turkey's usefulness to a Euro-Atlantic partnership. This has helped the JDP government abandon an Islamic model. Operating in a country with a long-held Western/secular identity while sharing some history, culture, borders and religion with the Muslim Middle East, the JDP's 'moderately' Islamic character created a useful combination with Turkey's time-tested electoral democracy and staunch defense of secularism. Moreover, there was the effect of the learning curve of the JDP, which developed as a reaction to the establishment's serious crackdown on the predecessor party (WP) of Necmettin Erbakan in 1997, which was subsequently closed and created disenchantment among the party faithful. Synthesized together in the minds and memories of the JDP's

founders, these factors helped them to pass the critical threshold for change toward a 'better' democracy, political system and character and functions of Turkey's political Islam.

By appropriating the basically secular-Republican dream of 'catching up with the West' through membership in the EU project, the JDP government adopted a conservative-democrat as opposed to Muslim-democrat identity and hoped to deflect any possible opposition that might come from secular quarters. Simultaneously, it also bolstered the social and political aspirations of upcoming social groups. This identity also appealed to the Westernized liberal sectors that are not averse to a moderately Islamic political party provided it has an overarching loyalty to liberal freedoms. Additionally, it would also offer the JDP's conservative voter base increased religious and personal freedoms, not forgetting the fact that the EU project would also make the principle of popular will effective.

What is original about the JDP's adoption of a religious, conservative, democratic, reformist and pro-European identity is not just its juxtaposition of the central values of the Republic with conservative democratic standards. In the initial plan of action, its transformative politics also aimed at dramatically altering the political power balance that has sustained the ancient regime's prominence, most notably that of the leading actor, the Turkish military's unusual political influence. Democratic reform requirements for entry into the EU would provide the JDP with the means to break that stagnant pattern.

Another key feature of adopting a 'Europeanist' foreign policy and a 'reformist' internal one was the strategies it offered to underpin effective governance. The 1990s were marked by unclear, chaotic and failed policies, as well as politicians incapable of coping with the social disparities, dislocations and identity claims created by the globalizing economy and society. As the 'creeping Islamization of Turkey' is attributed to the strategies of irresponsible, weak and inefficient political agents, politics was understood as needing a dose of Kemalist moral injection. Regime questions were brought to the fore and concrete political issues and problems were pushed aside. Public interest was framed as the 'good' forces against 'evil,' the victory of secularism against the creeping threat of Islamization, or the feudalization of life. Politics relied on establishing legitimacy by focusing on 'internal threats.' The remaining energy in politics was spent on political opportunism and the mechanics of staying in power, which involved not upsetting the status quo. The massive economic and social crisis that the country was plunged into in February 2001 sapped even further the strength of centrist politics and paved the way to more conservative policies and politicians until the elections of November 2002 declared the bankruptcy of all spectrums.

It is true that in the last 20 years, most voters voted for change but in a nebulous way, not really agreeing on a specific agenda but expecting an efficient output, a convincing story that brings positive results to their own

lives. In contrast, the JDP's focus on accession to the EU has helped to transform the negative inertia of the 1990s into a positive discourse relevant for effective governance. With center-left and right in a coma, in the new era, which began with the November 2002 elections, to be able to have staying power, the JDP politicians had to do more than just deliver jobs and prosperity. Their primary focus would have to be on advancing a new project—not challenging the hegemonic Kemalist one—in order to build effective governance. The JDP's EU-focused pro-Western policy priorities, however, have served to provide a single coherent policy platform with parallel goals to that of the Kemalist modernization paradigm. This was the first time in two decades that politics had refused to become an appendix to neo-liberal market reforms. The procedural requirements of democratic rule in line with the EU's 'good practices' and popular democratic support were used to add credibility to the government's desire to circumscribe especially the Turkish Armed Forces' sphere of political influence. This was done through a series of reforms rolling back the functions and authority of the National Security Council in August 2003.

As important as strong policy performance is, the new government had to cope with social disparities, displacements, and despair caused by the process of opening up and integrating with the world. This need was translated into the language of effective governance in the form of policies of 'equity' and corresponded to the 'conservative' streak in the party. The 'political entrepreneurship' approach to politics, which indicates that the elected politician appropriates an issue and deals with it to bring results, was, to some extent, also influential in shaping the new agenda.

A genuine de-Islamization of the JDP was the crux of reshuffling Turkey's political players: indeed, in the first few years of its political life in office, prioritizing democracy over security concerns did overcome the traditional powerlessness of the civilian politicians. The question has arisen of whether the Islamic pedigree of the party, the religious background of its leaders, and the conservative-pious and sometimes conservative-Islamist voter constituency would infuse Turkey's secular public realm with more Islamic symbols and practices. One way of answering this question is to look at the core Islamist demands from the government. They have been reduced to two areas: the alleviation of the grievances of headscarf-wearing students who are banned from entering universities and granting freedom of education for the graduates of Prayer Leader and Preacher Schools in terms of allowing them to continue their education in universities. In other words, rationalist and hedonistic perspectives derived from global capitalism created the basis for bottom-up and de facto incentives for removing Islam from the center stage of the reformist JDP. In addition, notwithstanding the government's 'political'—not religious—practice of distributing patronage, Turkish public administration is unequivocally framed in Westernist ideas and secular values. Increased religious and personal freedoms cannot and have not provided a new standard for the public administration.

All this is not to ignore the politico-cultural values and convictions that underpin the secular sectors' intense fear and distrust of the political profile of the JDP. Turkey's history as well as the state-reforming promises of the new identity of the JDP have caused tremendous fears and concerns in the secular establishment, as well as in the secular-modern segments, about an Islamic 'hidden agenda' of the government. These doubts and nervousness have been translated into an effective campaign to undermine the government's attempts to habituate the secular-modernists to its political existence. There is a historical foundation for this: If one major problem throughout the Republic was the fear of a breakup by the pull of non-Turkish ethnics, the other has been the perceived threat of reaction, obstruction, and subversion of the secular principle of the Republic by Islamists. However, we need to also stress that the perception of Islamic values and norms as the 'negative other' of the Republic were handed over from the past as well as constructed by the whole socialization/education system, which is overwhelmingly dominated by the Kemalist paradigm. Therefore, it is quite right to say that the Islamic 'threat' amounts to more than just the 'objective presence' of it.

However, in the history of the Republic, there have been changes in the perceived threat, which have affected the strategy and nature of the response by the secular establishment, showing that Kemalist political tradition and practice are not fixed legacies with fixed strategies toward political Islam. The history of the Republic has demonstrated a repertoire of diverse strategies, ranging from political negotiation and compromise to repression toward political Islam in upholding the fundamental aspects of the Kemalist ideology. In other words, the two sides have deployed different strategies at different phases. The question is with what incentives and purposes.

Since 2005, as negotiations with the EU proceeded, politically difficult reforms on the expansion of democracy brought out the fault lines of the JDP government and accelerated its rent-gathering activities that elicited support from its power base. Criticism from the secular block, the EU leaders/bodies and Turkey's liberal sectors has served to demonstrate the severe contradictions, 'true conservative colors' and reversals in the ruling party's policies. The party leaders turned to maintaining a 'negative peace' with ultra-conservative and chauvinistic elements and to converging with the secular establishment's policies of promoting state interests at the expense of individual freedoms. The policy shift from a democratic and peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem and from upholding freedom of expression are perhaps the best examples of the JDP's departure from its initial focus on democracy promotion and its turn to a more pragmatic/safe/defensive approach. The overarching objective being to promote its chances of winning the double elections—presidential and parliamentary—in 1997, this policy shift brought out the JDP's system-supportive tenets and made clear that the pursuit of a democratic agenda for the party was in fact more difficult than it seemed.

One can speak of a precarious balance of forces in Turkey in 2007: while the historical roadmap of Turkey is acknowledged by all sides as pointing at some kind of integration with Europe, the traditional power center's concern with revolving politics around state-centered and state-defined security, identity, unity and foreign policy priorities remain intact. The interesting paradox lies in the fact that the picture of 'Turkey-as-resistance' is juxtaposed to another cheerful picture of 'Turkey-as-adaptability' to the democracy-centered security architecture in post-Cold War Europe. The JDP stands at the intersection of these two impressions. It stands at a historic point of deciding whether to reverse its conservative right-wing shift back to a direction in which the EU-generated democratic reforms are once more the centerpiece of its discursive and policy achievements and are normalized as a way of life for all actors inclusive of secular or anti-secular beliefs.