

# **Doctoral (PhD) dissertation**

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**A Critical Analysis of the Rule of the AKP Governments in Turkey  
between 2002 and 2019**

Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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## **A Critical Analysis of the Rule of the AKP Governments in Turkey between 2002 and 2019**

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

To understand the present situation of Turkish politics, two major sets of theories are to be revisited. On one hand, the analysis has to cover the description and examination of the nature of the Turkish state, and its evolution after the declaration of the republic in 1923. On the other hand, the analysis is necessary to outline the similarities and differences of Turkish democracy compared to the Western models, ideologies and policies. Furthermore, it is vital to comprehend the internal dynamics of a strategically significant country such as Turkey and to analyse broader regional and global political shifts. The unique geographical location and cultural dispositions of the country are essential in viewing the country as an important player in the global affairs and geopolitical arena. Namely, Turkey is a bridge between Europe and Asia that balances secular republican traditions with Islamic conservatism, and navigates between authoritarian tendencies and democratic aspirations.

The thesis's main research question is to explore scholarly explanations of the rise of the Turkish Justice and Development Party power under democratic circumstances. There have been many attempts by many scholars to answer this question with their varying approaches to explain it. Therefore, the author of this dissertation offers an assessment of existing scholarly explanations of Turkish politics via an analysis of the literature on Turkish politics analysing the existing discourse in the literature. In this line, the author of this dissertation employs Process Tracing methodology to evaluate and assess the value and validity of the existing explanations via specific examination tools and tests. Importantly, the author of this dissertation does not aim to de-value the existing scholarly explanations of the subject matter. On the contrary, the author aims to evaluate the value of the available competing theoretical explanations in an attempt to arrive at the most comprehensive one.

This dissertation is structured as follows. First, the dissertation begins with Introduction chapter one where the author defines the topic and poses research questions. The chapter sets the

context where the study is situated and explains the importance and relevance of the topic in the field of international relations. Specifically, in the Background section the study introduces the reader to the context of the study, illustrates the historical development and illuminates the significant trends from the historical, economic, political, and cultural aspects related to the research. Given that, the research then states the problem to investigate that this dissertation attempts to address.

Next, the dissertation discusses previous scholarship on the topic of democracy and the development of the Turkish republic post-1923. To position this study as a comparative one, the dissertation contrasts the development of the Turkish state post-1923 with Western Democratic Models. To achieve this aim, the author uses a historical approach of time and space widely used in other disciplines () to shed light on the study as a dynamic one. Moving on, the dissertation continues with the Theoretical Framework sub-chapter. This sub-chapter depicts main theories used to comprehend the development of the Turkish state and the development of democracy in the unique country such as Turkey. The following theories are used in this study. First, a historical examination of the Turkish Republic's development since its founding by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is essential. This includes understanding how the early republican ideals of secularism, nationalism, and modernization shaped the institutional framework and political culture of the state. The legacy of Kemalism, military interventions, and bureaucratic centralism all inform today's political structures and leadership styles. Second, Turkish democracy must be situated in relation to Western liberal democratic frameworks. While Turkey has adopted democratic procedures such as elections and party pluralism, the application and quality of democratic governance diverge significantly from Western norms. Investigating these similarities and divergences—in institutional design, civil liberties, and rule of law—provides insight into Turkey's classification as an "illiberal" or "hybrid" regime.

Third, the chapter begins with highlighting research questions and moves to explaining the choice of research methods underpinned by the philosophical paradigm and the methodology on the whole. To support the reader with understanding of the research flow, this dissertation illustrates the research process focusing on major aspects of this scientific work. Namely, the dissertation portrays data collection, data analysis, data management, data interpretation and

knowledge dissemination stages. The chapter then reflects the author's positionality and personal motivation of studying this topic.

Fourth, the dissertation presents results of the analysis of textual data synthesizing insights constructed on the basis of the secondary sources used in this study. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the implications of these findings for policy, practice, and future research, emphasizing the study's contribution to the field of international relations, public policy, and democracy studies.

This introductory chapter states a purpose of this study (Section 1.1), outlines the background and rationale (Section 1.2), states a research problem and poses research questions (Section 1.3) followed by the significance of this study (Section 1.4)

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

This doctoral research aims to analyse the structural and sociopolitical factors that contributed to the emergence of a context in which the Turkish electorate increasingly prioritised political stability and economic development. These aspirations were perceived as achievable through the prolonged rule of a conservative political party whose ideological orientation resonated with the values of the Muslim majority. The study further investigates how this alignment influenced patterns of electoral support and contributed to the consolidation of power within a single-party framework.

### **1.2 Background and Rationale of the Study**

The long lasting rule of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP) started in 2002 after a decade long political and economic turmoil in Turkey. As the AKP is still in power and has a visible though quickly decreasing popular support, it is valid and scientifically interesting to ponder over the dynamism this political formation has shown during the past two decades. In fact, from 2002 to 2005, the AKP successfully dealt with a number of economic problems and launched a new currency, the New Turkish Lira (Yeni Turk Lirasi, YTL), this way strengthened the economic situation and paved its way for both political popularity among the poorer masses, electoral success on the occasion of the next elections and starting a new political and economic philosophy based on the investment in the Turkish infrastructure. At that time, the situation of the Turkish roads, railroads, hospital, housing etc. was really poor, so a

minimum of advancement in this field attracted public attention and made the AKP even more popular. Having said so, it is crucial to underline that the productive sectors were not developed at all. So, there was a spectacular evolution on the level of visible investments, but there was not the necessary reserve and provision for further development in the Turkish economy.

Around 2013, the first signs of a setback have been observed by independent researchers and opposition figures. A forced infrastructural investment project concerning the emblematic Gezi Park of the European side of the city of Istanbul spelled the beginning of the decline. The idea of destroying this beautiful and central green area and replacing it with the reconstruction historical building to be used as a shopping plaza provoked outrage by both environmentalists, human right activists and European-minded Left wing activists. The response of the AKP was an extensive use of force by what they were capable of stabilizing their position in power.

The political and economic crisis was deepening as in December 2013 a corruption scandal erupted and destabilized those in power. After 2013, the problems did not stop accumulating. Besides the terrorist attacks by Left wing extremists, Kurdish nationalists and radical Islamist and the misadventure of the intervention into the Syrian Civil War, a growing dissatisfaction was characterizing the public in general and the military in particular. All these hardships culminated on 15th July, 2016 when certain units of the army tried to overthrow the AKP government. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called its partisans to the street to defend his regime and, as in 2013, in 2016 as well, he could defend his rule. Erdogan and the AKP reacted to the failed coup with mass arrests and imprisonment of the critics. To further solidify its position, the AKP launched an accelerated policy to reform the republic and make it a fully presidential system.

After 2013, an illiberal or hybrid regime was being installed followed by an increasing number of signs predicting the current political, social and economic crisis.

### **1.3 Problem Statement and Research Questions**

Over the past two decades, Turkey has experienced a dramatic transformation in its political system, transitioning from a parliamentary democracy into a centralized presidential regime under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). While the party initially rose to power on a platform of democratic reform, European Union accession, and economic modernization, it gradually adopted more authoritarian tendencies. These include sweeping legal

reforms that curtailed judicial independence, restructured state institutions to enhance executive control, and limited the autonomy of civil society and the media. This trajectory raises a fundamental question: how can a government elected through ostensibly democratic means systematically dismantle the institutional foundations of liberal democracy? The paradox of electoral legitimacy coexisting with democratic erosion necessitates a deeper inquiry into the mechanisms through which democratic processes can be used to legitimize and entrench autocratic governance.

This study also interrogates the conditions under which political hegemony can be sustained in a formally electoral framework. The AKP's ability to maintain public support despite widespread allegations of corruption, the suppression of dissent, and economic volatility suggests that traditional indicators of democratic accountability may not fully apply in this context. Instead, identity politics, populist narratives, and institutional restructuring appear to play an increasingly central role in legitimizing prolonged one-party rule. The research thus explores critical questions such as: What role do historical legacies and societal expectations play in sustaining hegemonic governance? How do populist regimes cultivate electoral loyalty while diminishing democratic pluralism? To what extent can democratic institutions be repurposed to serve authoritarian ends without fully abandoning electoral procedures? These questions are crucial for understanding the resilience of the AKP's rule and, more broadly, the emerging global trend of competitive authoritarianism.

To help guide the study, the following research questions (RQs) have been developed and are detailed in Chapter 3:

1. How does the rise of AKP explain how to remain in power under democratic circumstances?
2. To what extent are centralization and hegemonic rule interrelated?
3. How did AKP impact Turkish democracy?

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for scholars of political science, comparative politics, and Middle Eastern studies for several reasons. First, it offers an analysis of a ruling party that has successfully transitioned from democratic reformism to institutional authoritarianism while retaining electoral

legitimacy. The Turkish case provides a valuable lens through which to examine broader theoretical debates on democratic backsliding, hybrid regimes, and the strategic use of democratic institutions for autocratic consolidation. As such, the study contributes to a growing body of literature exploring how modern authoritarianism functions not through the outright abolition of elections, but through the erosion of democratic norms, judicial independence, and institutional accountability from within.

Second, the Turkish case invites scholars to reconsider the assumed dichotomy between democracy and authoritarianism. It raises pressing questions about the conditions under which democracy can persist in form but collapse in substance. Specifically, the study provokes reflection on: How resilient are democratic institutions to manipulation by ruling parties? What factors make electorates tolerant of, or even complicit in, authoritarian consolidation? And how do constitutional reforms, such as the shift from a parliamentary to a presidential system, alter the balance of power and the role of checks and balances in practice?

In this context, the significance of the study extends beyond Turkish politics. It provides a comparative framework for understanding the global rise of illiberal democracies and populist regimes, especially in contexts where leaders gain and maintain power through majoritarian appeals rather than overt authoritarian coercion. For scholars, this analysis not only enriches empirical understanding of a key regional actor, but also informs theoretical models of regime change, political legitimacy, and democratic resilience in the 21st century.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **Overview**

This chapter provides a comprehensive chronological review of the academic literature related to the political evolution of the Turkish Republic and the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The aim is to examine how the AKP ascended to power and maintained electoral dominance while gradually centralizing authority. Particular attention is given to the interplay between economic performance, institutional reforms, sociopolitical dynamics, and electoral strategies that have enabled the party to remain dominant under formally democratic conditions.

### **2.1 Literature Review**

#### **2.1.1 Historical background of the evolution of democracy in Turkey**

The present day Turkish Republic was declared in 1923 by its founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a reaction to the slow downfall of the Ottoman Empire. The main force behind this great change in Turkish history is modernization, a drive that already existed in the Ottoman State but was from time to time blocked by certain monarchs or politicians. Modernization in the thinking of the Turkish policy-makers was built on two main pillars: westernization and rationalism. The Ottoman way of governing the country and framing the political system was far from the ideals of modern western democracy and proved to be much less efficient than the states of Western Europe. One of the reasons why the Ottomans were defeated in World War I is that they were unable to cope with the challenges of the time and with their careful reforms they were not capable of radically revising their attitude and work style. (Seker 2007:49)

“Both for the Ottoman and Republican modernizers, the aspiration was to make Turkey a part of the family of European societies by ‘attaining European standards.’ (Kaliber, 2013:10). It might sound like an example of inferiority complex but from the 1820s and 1830s on, the Ottomans increasingly considered themselves backward compared to the Western nations. For centuries, the Ottomans were the allies of the French and the enemies of certain other European nations such as Austria, Hungary or Poland (it is to be noted that Austria-Hungary became a



close ally of the Ottomans only at the very end of the existence of these empires). These intense connections to the Western World greatly influenced the Ottoman State and the Ottoman elites as well. This can be stressed especially as far as the Franco-Turkish relationships are concerned as the French politics, diplomacy, and even the French language and culture had an incredible impact on Turkish politics, and even the current form of the Turkish language. The Ottoman elite viewed French culture and civilization as an example and a role model, but did not want to apply these examples and role models as they were afraid of two important issues. First, the Ottoman State was governed based on the Islamic principles and the Islamic rule of law known as the Sharia, and the French political system and the post-revolution French democracy followed the teachings of very different religious and philosophical heritage, namely the Christianity and the *Lumières* a school of thought that greatly shaped what democracy is today. Second, though the elite was effected by French culture and civilization, the masses, especially the mainly rural and Muslim inhabitants of the empire were absolutely not in touch with this other type of reality. It is not surprising that the only segment of the Ottoman population that was aware of the importance of the Western cultural and political influence was the Christian minorities living in urban areas. It is ironic that a large group of the urban Christians preferred to cooperate with other Eastern countries such as Russia and only few of them really supported a radical westernization of the empire.

One of the main philosophical features of French culture and civilization is its rationalism. Rationalism started as a school of thought but evolved into a form of way of life. The Ottomans, especially the rural and Muslim populations, even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were governed by a certain type of mysticism derived from the Islamic religion. These fundamentalists and mystics often made non-rational choices. As Islam as a religion includes all spheres of life and human interaction, these non-rational choices have been also made in the field of politics and governance. Those who wanted to modernize the Ottoman Empire wished to impose on this population a way of thinking that opposed the traditional Muslim understanding of society. The modernizers considered religion as an obstacle while educating the masses over democracy and modern western forms of governance. They were not necessarily the enemies of Islam and they were not apostates but viewed Islam as a philosophy that prevents the spread of modern governance.

The declaration of the republic in 1923 by Ataturk is often described as a “definite rupture”. In this understanding, there are two Turkeys, an old and a new one. This means that there is a visible dichotomy in Turkish history as far as westernization and modernization are concerned. As history proved that the old Ottoman structure cannot be efficiently reformed and the Ottoman masses would not easily leave behind their belief system and habits, a group of nationalists and reformists finally bestowed their own understanding of western democracy on the Turks. The motive behind the political act of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was to promote the sovereignty of the Turkish people and the establishment of a new order based on a new legal system inspired by the Western legislation patterns. (Unsal, 1979:32) This kind of definite rupture is extremely rare in history and a complete generation of Turks felt either unable to deal with the changes and overwhelmed by them, or cut off their past and cultural heritage. (Seker, 2007:49) Though 97 years have passed since the declaration of the republic, this latter feeling is still common among a large segment of the population as they think they cannot read the old Ottoman inscriptions and books, and if they can read the Arabic scripts used in the Ottoman era, they do not understand as the modern Turkish language was stripped of its layer of Arabic and Persian terms (though lots of Arabic and Persian words are still in use) and the influence of Arabic and Persian grammar that makes almost impossible for present day Turks to describe an old Ottoman tombstone for example.

The emerging Turkish nationalism has two principal goals according to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. It aims at preserving the Turkish nation as it has to struggle to survive the war of independence and the diplomatic debates following it, and changing its character by adopting Western manners and habits. A nation after the definition given by the head of state himself necessitates a common bond. For ethnic nationalists, this is very often the common blood, the common origin of the individuals and their adherence to the shared past. Nevertheless, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk does not require the Turkish citizens to have Turkish ancestry in order to be a Turk, he rather argues that accepting the basic tenets of his version of Turkish nationalism is sufficient. One can say that Ataturk’s nationalism is a special ideology linked to the concept of political nation rather than ethnic nation. (Unsal, 1979:35).

It is also important to note that nationalism in Turkey and in the revolutionary discourse of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk is not only a nation building experience but is also a product of centuries long quest for identity of the ethnic Turkish element of the population of the Ottoman

Empire. In fact, during the Ottoman era, everybody –both Jews, Christians and Muslims of all possible descent- was an Ottoman subject, then they belonged to a so-called “nation” (or millet in Turkish) that was not an ethnic but a religious criteria. In the Ottoman era, there was no place for a comprehensive ethnic identity. (Morin and Lee, 2010:490).

The transformation of Turkey from an Islamic empire into a secular republic is a strange revolution in itself. Revolutions in the West were mostly powered and supported by masses, whereas in Turkey a nationalist and republican elite, latecomers in this regard compared to Europe, wanted to reshape the entire society. This means that while in the West discontented social groups such as the peasantry or the bourgeoisie used to be behind the claims of a modern revolution, in Turkey, these social strata were either happy with their situation or completely absent, or, again, if one takes into account the urban Christian populations, they left the country (sometimes of their own will, sometimes deported) or died during the war, left the picture. The Christians missed to play the role of the sourdough while they were still on Ottoman soil. Instead of them, the Turkish reformists were people of Muslim descent greatly impacted by some western Christians. (Seker, 2007:50).

The newly forming Turkish democracy was championing three important ideological features of the western concepts of democracy (Seker, 2007:50). The first such ideology is nationalism. Nationalism is a political ideology that can be blamed for the destruction caused by World War I that also led to the end of the Ottoman Empire. This ideology in the 1920s seemed to be exceeded and transcended in the West. At the same time, in Turkey this “outdated” way of thinking was the very basis of democratic transition from a multiethnic empire to a nation state. In fact, the historic processes made it almost compulsory to Turkey to promote a nationalistic ideology, and they were also forced by certain deeds of the Ottomans. These were precisely the Ottomans who indulged in displacing the ethnic Armenian population of Eastern Anatolia to heavily Arab populated regions of the empire that constitute today’s Syria, Lebanon and Jordan following a rebellion of this minority against the Ottoman rule assisted by the Russians. These were also the Ottomans who fought the war against the Greeks and agreed upon the population exchange with them after the armed conflict was over.

These and similar interventions of the Ottomans made Anatolia and Eastern Thrace an ethnically homogenous territory ideal for a future Turkish nation state. Having said so, ethnic minorities professing the religion of Islam are still to be found throughout present day Turkey.

There is no exact data available but they might have represented up to 40% of the Muslim population of the country around its formation. We should not only think of the Kurds, but also of other groups such the Laz, the Zaza, the Circassian and others to whom was added the Muslim refugees from the Balkans who were sometimes ethnic Turks, sometimes Bosnians or Albanians. Though there is a patchwork of ethnic groups, the identity as a Muslim facilitated their integration and, in many cases, complete assimilation during the first two decades of the republic. Turkish nationalism often promoted by people who belonged to Muslim ethnic minorities such as Ziya Gökalp who was ethnically speaking half Kurdish, half Zaza unified the nation though it is also to be admitted that in some cases local identities have been suppressed by force. One can quote here the reaction of the various revolts of South Eastern Anatolia like the Sheikh Said and the Dersim rebellions in 1925 and 1937-38. These insurgencies can also be interpreted as occurrences of Kurdish religious pride. Some more conservative Kurdish nationalists really believed that they could achieve their dream by establishing a Sharia-governed Kurdish nation state in the Middle East. (Evans, 2016:59).

The second new ideology to reshape the Turkish political and social landscape is secularism. Often perceived in the West as an anti-Islamic and anti-clerical movement copied on the ideals of French *laïcité*, Turkish *laiklik* is rather a form of removal of the obstacles of modernization. Islam, in fact, prohibits blind following a teaching and asks the believers to research the proofs of their belief system. This means that, in theory, each and every Muslim is required to learn the basic tenets of the religion on his or her own and should practice Islam with wisdom and full understanding. In reality, in many parts of the Muslim world, for several centuries, blind following of masters and teachings was the norm and the everyday Islamic practice did not coincide with the real values of the holy book of Islam, the Quran and that of the Prophet Muhammad. Turkish secularism aimed at removing all those habits that were no more in relation with the original spirit of Islam and stopped the ordinary citizens from adhering to the democratic development. As many people, especially in the more rural areas were blindly following habits instead of certified religious proof, the practical measures taken by the reformists seemed to be brutal and they feared that Islam would be fully annihilated in the republic. One has to add that the new republic also wanted to introduce new habits. One of them is the confirmation that nationalism and secularism were completely intertwined. The call to prayer, known as *ezan* in Turkish- is performed five times daily from the towers of the mosques

throughout the Islamic world in Arabic language regardless of the local tongue and culture. The young republic imposed the ezan to be read in Turkish in 1941. This move, this new habit that contradicts the logic of Islam shocked many, and this practice was halted in 1950 when the first freely elected government took office. If it is bad to continue an old habit that is unrelated to Islam, it is also not good to introduce new ones in them under the flag of secularism. These exaggerations put in danger the success of Turkish secularism as it could effectively alienate the practicing Muslim masses from the very concept of democracy.

As an integral part of the secular transition to the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk proceeded to the abolition of both the sultanate and the caliphate. The first move is obvious as his aim was a secular republic, and in a republic, there is no need for a ruler. The second one was more evidently directed against the power of Islam and Muslim in governance and worldwide. Muslims around the globe, the *umma* as the global community of Muslims is described by the technical terms of Islam, was under a serious shock as the caliphate both symbolized the unity of the Muslims and acted as the main protector of them on the international scene (Rahman et al., 2015:203). Atatürk with the complete secularization of Turkey removed Islam from the public sphere. The following quotation from one of his parliamentary speeches confirms that his intention was to destroy the Islamic superstructure to both let Turkey become a Western type secular nation state and to alter to Muslims' approach to the social and political mission of their religion. "to liberate and to elevate the Islamic religion ... from its position of being a tool of politics" (Koker, 2010:28).

The third new ideology that had a fair share in reforming Turkey and introducing Western-style democracy is progressive modernization. The starting point for the progressive modernization of Turkey is education. The early reform of the Turkish education system is closely related to the previous point: secularism. Most schools in Turkey prior to the establishment of the republic were *medrese* style Islamic centers of scholarship. Though the medreses in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were also dispensing non-religious knowledge, too, they were basically old fashioned and did not suit a democratic transition. Atatürk had taken three important measures in order to build a modern and secular education system basically by taking both the religious and worldly education under the full control of the government. A new body has been formed to manage all the establishments that were until that moment in the hands of private individuals or foundations (known as *vakıf* to the Turks.). This new organization called

in Turkish Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi is a government body that now oversees all religious activities in the country. The foundation of the Diyanet was needed as other religious authorities -such as the Shaikh-al-Islam, who was the top religious scholar under the Ottomans- were abolished and caused considerable confusion among the Muslims. (Rahman et al., 2015:204). All funds allocated to the vakifs earlier were given to the Ministry of Education, so all the schools in Turkey were centrally financed by the state. Besides centralizing the whole education system the training of religious scholars and teachers became also a duty of the government. This move ensured a central control over the content of religious teachings. This was important in order to promote democracy to the more religious social strata and to prevent all fundamentalist agitations. After the modernization of the overall structure of education, Ataturk started to introduce various cultural reforms as well as proceeded to the secularization of the curriculum. The most possibly the most controversial and the most debated move was the introduction of the use of the Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic scripts. This direct change was for sure a brutal move for certain but it can also be said that the progressive modernization of the Turkish education system and the re-education of the masses was a must to promote the progressive modernization of the political system as well as the economy of the country.

After reforming the education system the more educated population could accept further changes or even reclaim them for their own benefit. Not only the political frame was altered but the Turkish economy could also undergo a profound modification between the two world wars. Generally speaking, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was obliged to prefer more liberal economic policies during his early years as head of state following the crucial economic forum held in 1923 in the port city of Izmir. Turkey between 1923 and 1929 was mostly excluded from the global trade and exchange, and that was the only way to ease the overall Turkish economic situation. “However, after the clearance of the restrictions of Lausanne (1929), it can be observed that the country headed towards conservatism and later on, an active and condensed etatism.” (Takim and Yilmaz, 2010:550).

One of the obvious proofs for the claim that early liberalization of the Turkish economy did happen is the land reform. During the Ottoman Empire period local landlords and chieftains were basically the only ones who could own a piece of land. In the 1930s and 1940s, in different regions of the Turkish Republic lands were allocated to local farmers. In 1945, a new law on land reform was drafted and allowed millions of peasants to have their own land. Still today,

some 20 million rural families own the vast majority of the lands in Turkey. The new republic did not only let the farmers own land but also helped them with special pilot projects; model farms were personally proposed by Ataturk himself.

In the field of industry the first two or three decades of the republic were characterized by nationalizations. Successful private businesses were rare. Before World War I many of them were in the hands of Christian entrepreneurs. “Undercapitalization, absence of a qualified labor force, and a lack of entrepreneurs prevented private sector development.” (Takim and Yilmaz, 2010:552). To manage these assets and to train a new local and loyal business class, nationalization seemed to be the logical solution. On a global level, the most fruitful sector was the Turkish tobacco industry. In this case, the nationalization meant that the two leading companies were in the hands of French investors and the Turkish government wished to control this strategic business itself. This is to say that in certain cases the progressive modernization of Turkey signified the decrease of western economic influence. In other words, political westernization did not always please the Western economic actors.

The banking sector was reformed and liberalized in 1924. Before the declaration of the republic, the Ottomans assured the functioning of the finance system through an imperial bank launched in 1863 by the sultan Abdulaziz. This centralized body was unable to cope with the changes, so Ataturk established the Turkish Labor Bank (Turkiye Is Bankasi in Turkish). Though founded by the president of the republic, the Turkish Labor Bank was and is the largest private bank in Turkey with the highest number of local branches throughout the country and interests overseas. Further liberalization of the bank sector happened in the 1930s when more specialized private banks came into existence.

The above reforms spelled a radical transformation of the society, politics and economy that was really hard to cope with for certain elements of the society. It is natural that reaction came from those who considered themselves the losers of the change. The need for calming down these radical reforms surfaced during the late 1940s and helped the establishment of a multiparty political system and the organization of the first free and fair elections in 1950 where ballots casted favored the Democrats and Adnan Menderes. Menderes who ruled the country between 1950 and 1960 with a program of political conservatism, cautious revision of the reforms by Ataturk and economic liberalism openly supporting privatization and foreign



investment, was overthrown by a military coup in 1960, and eventually executed by the putschists.

## 2.1.2 Brief history of the evolution of political parties in Turkey

### 2.1.2.1 Origins of Kemalist policy-making

In many respects, Turkey has followed a different path of political development compared to Western countries. First of all, it is worth emphasizing that the Turkish Republic established in 1923 broke with the past in every sense and essentially did not take over anything from the state organization and political system of the Ottomans. Secondly, it is important to note that a complete new system with structure, ideologies and parties was not immediately born with the proclamation of the republic, but rather it has evolved and changed dynamically over the past hundred years. Thirdly, it should be pointed out that in the initial era of the republic, the person of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Kemalist ideology marked by his name were the basis of this dynamic. The political culture focusing on the person of Atatürk and derived from his personality and views still has an effect, is considered a reference, and even his critics cannot separate themselves from it 85 years after his death. Fourthly, it is important to highlight that, although Western political and ideological struggles influenced Turkey, the 100-year-old republic cannot be described from the perspective of class struggle or Western state organization principles. The fifth essential element is that Turkey was never colonized, only occupied for a short time by the Western powers at the end of World War I, so the decolonization characteristic of other countries and the struggle against colonial oppression cannot give rise to national unity either. The national independence movement against the occupiers is an important event in Atatürk's struggles, but the political organizing principle of today's republic cannot be derived from it. Sixthly, it is necessary to describe that the goal of the Turkish state was a kind of westernization already in the beginning and still is today. During Atatürk's time, this meant copying the Western way of life, forced industrialization and democratic functioning, and later approaching and allying with the Euro-Atlantic power centers in order for Turkey to gain a regional leadership role politically, economically and militarily. (Aydin and Keyman, 2004:3).

In the early republican era, democratization and westernization took place in parallel. This meant that the construction of the republic's political system was a complicated process, for which



the appropriate specialists were not available, only the useful Western models. Although Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself definitely wanted to break with the Ottoman past and build something completely new in Turkey, he himself was brought up in the Ottoman era, as were the other members of the new political elite. The patterns of behavior that were characteristic of the political leaders of the republic were imprinted during the old system and ensured the partial survival of the old mechanisms. One such old reflex was that democratic political reforms should be introduced from above. These were Atatürk's so-called revolutionary deeds. At the same time, it is important to note that in the 1920s, a grassroots mass democracy was not established in the young Republic of Turkey, but rather an elitist democracy where mainly Atatürk's will prevailed. (Bagce, 2017:6).

In the early decades of the republican era, Kemalism was not just an ideology, as it is today, when it is strongly influenced by Western leftist and liberal ideals, but a nation-shaping and nation-creating force. Since Kemalism founded the modern and westernized Turkish nation-state, it could not remain the ideological framework of a group or a party, but rather gained exclusivity and for a while even broke into exclusivity. Kemalism was therefore a state ideology that lent a Western framework to the young republic and encouraged the entire nation to imitate Western models. If one thinks of Kemalism as a kind of "thought process", then it actually appears as a project to create a nation, which is based on certain epistemological and normative procedures. If one claims that Kemalism means envisioning the Republic of Turkey in its fullest form as a nation-state, we are actually acknowledging a project of modernity behind it—an initiative to create a modern nation that accepts the 'modern' universality of knowledge framework. If one interprets Kemalism as a kind of social formation project of modernity, then we recognize that it wants to create a modern nation in a social structure where the material and institutional basis of the concept of a modern nation with a full form of nation-state was missing. (Aydin and Keyman, 2013:3).

The Kemalist political elite of the 1920s and 30s insisted on this state ideological framework for two reasons and dismissed the possibility of Turkey developing into a multi-party democracy between the two world wars. One of the challenges was that a modern, Western nation-state had to be built on the ruins of a huge empire based on an absolute monarchy. The Ottoman sultan was a one-man leader whose personal will was the only policy forming force, i.e. only what the ruler decided could happen in the state. Although Atatürk was also a tough leader

and led a fairly centralized state, many people had a say in its operation - at least on a theoretical level. Another challenge was that the Ottoman state operated entirely according to the precepts of the Islamic religion, while Ataturk's dream was to create a secular nation-state where the Seyh-ul-Islam, the supreme religious authority did not decide what was right and what was wrong, but laws that follow Western models, reflect a rational way of thinking, and follow the principle of legal equality (Aydin and Keyman, 2013:4). In the long run, secularization became the key to the Kemalist way of thinking, as a significant part of Turkish society remained practicing Muslims despite the strong measures to restrict religion. Ataturk and the Kemalists knew well that the Islamic religion and the religious elite could resist change for three reasons. On the one hand, it stems from the nature of Islam, that is, from the fact that it regards divine revelation as the only legitimate authority, that political Islam openly opposes secularization and the secular political elite. On the other hand, Islam gives believers a strong identity, so they can position themselves as opponents of the secular state. Thirdly, the history of the Ottoman Empire showed that the Islamic political leadership and the Muslim masses were able to successfully resist modernization efforts. (Aydin and Keyman, 2013:6).

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the state, and Ismet Inonu, who succeeded him as president of the republic, were both very strong characters. Although both Ataturk and Inonu considered it necessary to introduce radical reforms, the Turkish cultural patterns did not really change, only their character did. The Ataturks abolished the old ranks linked to the feudal system, titles such as aga or pasha could no longer be used, but the paternalistic way of thinking remained in place, the only thing that changed was that it adapted to the new political system. The padishah, the Ottoman ruler, became outdated, but both Ataturk and Inonu began to be referred to as "Milli sef", i.e. national leader, a title that is somewhat similar to the situation of a sultan. Instead of the abolishment of the leader-centered thinking, this mentality was transposed to the new controlling elite. (Bagce, 2017:7).

Another important feature of early Kemalism was that it not only wanted to modernize the state and adopt the modern technological tools developed by the West, but also wanted to copy the cultural framework that led to the West becoming capable of these for production. Ataturk was convinced that modern technical development is inseparable from the Western way of thinking and way of life. Thus, it is necessary for Turkey to simultaneously adopt advanced methods and the philosophical, political and economic achievements that underpin them. In one

word, the creation of a secular nation-state was also a large-scale civilizational project, where the management of reforms was more important than the plural discussion of them. (Aydin and Keyman, 2004:4). “

The multiparty system has been continuing since 1945–46 and it is the longest parliamentary experiment in Turkish history” (Kabacam, 2020:236). For the masses of the people, the real political change became perceptible only with the multi-party system introduced after 1945. Up until then, the Turkish population in the countryside had only perceived the republic so much that the local leaders no longer had to be addressed as aga or pasha, but the old feudal reflexes lived on. The introduction of the multi-party system and especially the extension of the right to vote, the introduction of secret and multi-party elections was the sign from which everyone could understand that the average person now has a say in the development of politics and local affairs. At the same time as democratization, other positive changes were felt in the countryside. The gendarmes, who had behaved in a rather oppressive manner until then, stopped tormenting the people, in the 1950s everyone could feel a little more free and the standard of living began to rise, i.e. the life of the Turkish people became easier both materially and spiritually with the appearance of real mass democracy. (Bagce, 2017:9).

#### 2.1.2.2 Introduction of the multi-party system

With the introduction of the multi-party system in the second half of the 1940s and the free and democratic elections after 1950, Kemalism gained serious opponents. The alternative movements that emerged in the 1940s and 50s and the Democratic Party itself, which ruled between 1950 and 1960, forced the Kemalists to redefine their own identity, political goals, and lend their own movement an image. It is important to note that the party system of the 1950s was not necessarily based on a great ideological competition, but rather a battle of political methods and styles. The main difference between the Republican People's Party (CHP), which followed Ataturk's principles, and the Democratic Party (DP) was not that one was right-wing and the other left-wing, or that one was more liberal while the other was more conservative. The real difference was that the DP relied much more on the masses and tried harder to involve the Turkish people in democratic changes. This was the first period in the history of Turkish

democracy, which was really about the emergence of the germ of grassroots mass democracy. (Bagce, 2017:10).

Although the leading echelon of the Democratic Party came from among the cadres of the CHP, they were also able to appeal to social strata which until then had no representation in Turkish politics. Among them were the merchant class of western Turkey, the village peasantry and the religious-conservative bourgeoisie. The DP did not fundamentally differ from the CHP in its ideology, but in its social embeddedness (Sunay and Sayari, 1986:74). Referring to the broad social base of the DP, it began to perceive itself more and more as the party of the Turkish people, while it tried to portray the CHP as some kind of corrupt elitist formation. Celal Bayar, the founder of the DP and then the President of the Republic of Turkey between 1950 and 1960, dared to the extent that, before the 1950 elections, he once said that whoever opposes the DP is the enemy of the entire Turkish people. (Uyulur, 2020:310).

The DP also referred to the people when they tried to disable their political opponents, i.e. the CHP, during the 1950s. In 1953, for example, a law was passed to confiscate the CHP's so-called illegally acquired assets and properties, and the People's Houses system was abolished, which was a network of non-governmental organizations where the Kemalist party trained people loyal to their party (Uyulur, 2020:311). The democrats who politicized against Kemalism became open, Western and liberal, while the Kemalists of the time seemed conservative. After the military coup of 1960, the execution of the leaders of the Democratic Party and the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, this turn occurred as the 1961 constitution, a new leftist political creed defined Turkish political development and the work of the parties for two decades. (Aydin and Keyman, 2004:7).

The development of today's modern and democratic Turkish political system was not formed by the continuous reform of Kemalism, but by a change in the economic model and another military coup. In the 1960s and 70s, the Turkish economy and industry within it underwent a major structural change. As already mentioned, forced industrialization is one of the characteristics of Kemalism. On the basis of the 1961 constitution, a party system similar to Western democracies has already emerged in Turkey. This was mainly contributed by the fact that the Kemalist CHP was finally willing to define itself as a moderate, center-left party according to the classic description of political parties. And this meant that anyone who wanted to appear as the main counterforce to the Kemalists in Turkish domestic politics had no choice

but to opt for the center-right side. The first half of the 1960s was spent with the rivalry of these two formations, however, in the second half of the 1960s, and even more so at the beginning of the 1970s, the fragmentation of the Turkish party system took place, in addition to the two leading parties, a series of smaller formations, more radical parties were created (Bagce, 2017:11). The fanatical Kemalist wing within the army could not accept the 1961 constitution and the liberal democracy created on its basis. In 1962 and 1963, a small number of officers grouped around Talat Aydemir tried to overthrow the Justice Party government and divert Turkey's development from the path set by the former coup junta (Esen, 2021:211).

#### 2.1.2.3 Political scene based on the 1961 constitution

Based on the 1961 constitution, the Democratic Party could not be re-established, however, several political parties were created that continued the spirit of Bayar and Menderes' party. For example, a retired commander close to the coup junta created a party called the Justice Party (Adalet Partisi, AP), which for a while was the main rival of the CHP. The CHP's opposition includes the New Turkey Party (Yeni Turkiye Partisi, YTP), led by Ekrem Alican, who was forced to leave the DP in 1955 when he quarreled with Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. By the way, Alican founded the Freedom Party (Hurriyet Partisi) at that time, but since they did not get a mandate in the 1957 election, the party dissolved itself in 1958 (Ahmad, 1985:242).

The 1961 elections already proved that parties supporting strong political ideologies have a visible voter base. This was also the case with the later banned Workers' Party of Turkey (Turkiye Isci Partisi, TIP). (Rizki, 2021:28) One of the significant changes at the end of the 1960s was the emergence of radical left-wing parties. Groups sympathizing with the Soviet Union and the international communist movement, such as the Workers' Party of Turkey, were viewed with suspicion by the public and the military, which at that time still had considerable political power. Several factors contributed to the rise of the extreme left. One of these was the growing anti-Americanism. Although Turkey was a member of NATO, its relations with the United States had been strained since 1964 because they imagined the future of Cyprus in different ways. The Turks demanded their own territory for the Turkish minority on the Mediterranean island country, which is ethnically divided and characterized by both Greek and

Turkish populations. The conflict led to an open war in the 1970s. This foreign policy debate came in handy for the extremists, who were against the USA, and could agitate against the so-called imperialist capitalism. TIP was able to reach the masses thanks to its extensive network system, in addition to the flaring emotions regarding Cyprus. They created their own trade unions and youth groups. Seeing the strengthening of the extreme left, the military issued a memorandum on March 9, 1971, as a result of which TIP and the organizations forming the network of non-governmental organizations linked to it were banned. This direct intervention in the Turkish party system brought calm to Turkish domestic politics, but it also showed that the army still has more power than the political elite, foreshadowing the fear of further coups (Erdemir, 2007:148). The 1971 memorandum not only resulted in the suppression of the extreme left, but also overthrew the ruling government at the time. The democratically elected leadership was replaced by the army with a technocratic cabinet (Jang, 2006:52).

After the far-left threat was averted, the far-right part of the political palette became more and more active in the 1970s. Two important parties emerged at this time, one of which is still one of the defining forces of Turkish domestic politics. It is the National Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) that was led by Alparslan Türkeş at that time. After the establishment of the MHP, it presented itself as a radical and secular nationalist party. His political communication was marked by anti-Westernism and the condemnation of the policy of the Zionist State of Israel, but at the same time, the idea of Turanism, i.e. the cultivation of kinship with the Turkic peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia, was also considered important. The MHP called for Turkey to act decisively against the Soviet Union, as the guarantor of the rights of the Turkish and Muslim minorities living there. In addition, it is apparent that Türkeş and his party denied the same to members of Turkey's ethnic and religious minorities. The other radical right-wing party was the National Salvation Party (Millî Selamet Partisi, MSP), founded by Necmettin Erbakan, which can be considered the first moderately Islamist party in Turkish party history. Erbakan, who later served as prime minister for a short time, also tried to prove his ideological motivation through his foreign policy demands, since the Turkish domestic political system was entirely secular and a religious turn was unthinkable. Erbakan advocated cooperation with Islamic countries for this very reason, because he expected that politics based on Islam would no longer remain a taboo in Turkey. (Erdemir, 2007:151).

Until the 1960s, the Turkish industry, which was built in this way, basically aimed to be able to produce all products that the country could only import until then. However, the development led to the fact that after a while Turkish industry no longer produced only for the domestic market, but also for export, which increasingly brought with it the spread of liberal thinking, first in economic policy and then in party politics. Although the military coup of 1980 broke this political-economic development, the 1982 constitution formulated by the soldiers still defines the legal framework of Turkish politics. Although Turkey became a presidential republic in the 2010s, the new system was introduced by amending the 1982 constitution and no new basic law was adopted (Aydin and Keyman, 2004:8).

By the end of the 1970s, everyday life in Turkey became more and more chaotic. More political murders took place every day and more and more victims were taken by the far-left and separatist terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK. The escalation of the domestic political situation was not ultimately led by political murders and the resurgence of terrorism, but rather by a rally of the MSP in Konya. In Konya, perhaps Turkey's most conservative big city, at the demonstration of the religious radical party, not only anti-Western and anti-Israel slogans were heard, but they also allegedly openly demanded the introduction of the Islamic legal system, Sharia, in Turkey. Cited by the Turkish army, on September 12, 1980, they decided to overthrow the democratically elected government and restore law and order based on the 1961 constitution. After the 1980 coup d'état, political parties were not allowed to operate openly for three years, and the country was governed by a military junta based on Articles 110 and 111 of the then constitution (Erdemir, 2007:151). The military coup of 1980 was condemned by the entire Turkish political elite. Not only the leader of the right, Suleyman Demiral, refused to cooperate with the generals, but also Bulent Ecevit, who led the CHP founded by Ataturk. As a result, General Kenan Evren's military junta banned all political parties, including the CHP, and banned Demirel and Ecevit from further politics. (Rizki, 2021:29).

The junta led by Evren, i.e. the National Security Council (Milli Guvenlik Konseyi) essentially led Turkey until December 13, 1983 based on a kind of government by decree. During this period, hundreds of far-right politicians were imprisoned. 250 members of the MSP were put behind bars, they were accused of organizing to overthrow the secular state order. Even more MHP politicians were imprisoned. The military junta declared 587 members of the MHP



to be members of a nationalist armed movement, the "gray wolves", and therefore each of them was punished with 6 years of imprisonment. The junta also acted decisively against far-left groups. A total of 1,243 communist sympathizers were sent to penal institutions, some of them received up to 11 years in prison. Many did not wait to go to prison. Mass migration of Turkish politicians started towards Western Europe, where around 30,000 Turkish citizens applied for refugee status citing political persecution (Erdemir, 2007:154).

#### 2.1.2.4 Political parties after the 1980 coup

After the 1980 military coup, the CHP and the MHP were re-established but the MSP could not save its old structures. At the same time, based on the ideology of the MSP the National Vision (Milli Gorus) and under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan several moderate Islamist parties operated in the two decades following the coup. The Prosperity Party (Refah Partisi, RP) became the dominant political force of the 1990s and was even part of the coalition governments until Erbakan was forced to resign by the army with another memorandum in 1997. The fall of Erbakan also led to the demise of Refah. After that the Milli Gorus movement operated briefly under the name Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi, FP) until it was banned in 2001 (Jang, 2006:52). After the banning of Fazilet there was a break in the movement promoting religion-based politics. Calling on the radical minority, Erbakan established the Happiness Party (Saadet Partisi, SP) which still operates today while the moderates centered around the current president of the republic, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who created his party under the name of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP). This new political formation has governed Turkey without interruption since 2002.

The government of the AKP for more than two decades stabilized the Turkish party system for a long time. Parliamentary elections and public opinion polls show that Erdogan's party has a massive supporter base of at least 35%, which flexibly accepts the party's and the leader's changes in direction and, despite unpopular government measures, is not eroded as much as the AKP itself from which moderate right-wing parties break out from time to time but they do not find supporters even if they are led by prominent former AKP leaders, former presidents or ministers such as Abdullah Gul, Ahmet Davutoglu or Ali Babacan. (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:3).



The ossification of the party system is partly due to the fact that the opposition of the AKP is weak, fragmented and not really capable of renewal. The Republican People's Party shows all of this in the most spectacular way. The Kemalist political formation was led by the same person, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, from 1995 to 2023, i.e. for 28 years, despite the fact that he did not achieve any serious success in Turkish domestic politics and was unable to widen the circle of political supporters of the CHP. Kilicdaroglu was a great political survivor, but with the 23 to 25% he appealed to, it was impossible to squeeze Erdogan and his party. (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:4).

The AKP's stay in power was also helped by the MHP's change of direction and the split in the party. After the failed military coup in 2016 the radicals led by Devlet Bahçeli reconciled with Erdogan and his party in order to preserve the nation. From 2018 until now, the increasingly moderate MHP has become a coalition partner of the AKP, and under the name Republican Coalition (Cumhur Ittifaki) even put up joint candidates in the elections. The opposition-minded politicians of the MHP could not bear to watch this change passively and under the leadership of Meral Aksener created a breakaway moderate right-wing but opposition party under the name Good Party (IYI). However, the appearance of the IYI on the political stage did not bring a breakthrough, they only continued to slice the "opposition pie" (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:4).

The emergence of the so-called pro-Kurdish political party, the People's Democratic Party (HDP), was also a major change in Turkish domestic politics though its appearance further destabilized the opposition. In 2015, the HDP crossed the very high threshold of 10% to enter the parliament thanks to the fact that they were able to appeal to minorities other than the Kurds and to win over a part of the urban intelligentsia with their ultra-liberal program. At the same time, the HDP finds itself largely quarantined in Turkish politics, since the AKP excludes all contact with them, while the moderate opposition is also suspicious, since the HDP is often accused of maintaining contact with the PKK terrorist organization. (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:4).

## **2.2 Specificities of Turkish democracy**

### **2.2.1 Turkey as an existing democracy**

Besides westernization, secularization and progressive modernization, the Turkish variant of democracy has a certain number of other specificities, too. Surprisingly enough, the first such feature is that Turkish democracy, indeed, exists. Many analysts and journalists argue that this system of governance either never existed in Turkey or is dying out. Turkey –by international

standards- is still to be considered a democracy. One can say that it is an atypical or an illiberal democracy, but –at least- in its form and spirit, there is a democratic rule and a fierce political competition in the country. Though the first opposition party has been authorized as early as 1946 and the first democratic elections causing the victory of the opposition in 1950, it is often quoted that there is not a continuous democratic development ever since as the national defense force intervened in politics on several occasions. Having said so, these frequent military coups did not stop Turkish people from reconstructing their democracy. One has to say that democracy does not only exist but is being regularly updated and rejuvenated. The existence of Turkish democracy comes from a popular need for democracy. Turkish citizens have 75 years long history and experience with multiparty democracy, it is not that easy to take it away from them.

Those who think that the democratic forms of Turkish society and governance underline that outlook only serves the reproduction of the ruling elite. “President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is engaged in a familiar pattern of leveraging and reengineering Turkey’s political and legal institutions to ensure that he and the AKP remain in power.” (Cook, 2019). One has to admit that, indeed, Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants to stay at the top of the republic such as his Justice and Development Party. This is a normal attitude from a politician and a political party. It is also to be acknowledged to be natural that a politician and a political party is trying to use all the inherent options in a political system to do so. Politicians and political parties, even in the most advanced Western democracies often misuse their opportunities and illegal means also contribute to their political successes. So all these cases –of course, illegal interferences in the democratic processes have to be investigated in all countries and under all circumstances- are examples of the traditional functioning of democracy. Politicians want to remain in power. One can call a system non-democratic in the moment when this wish of the politician is ensured by the legal system and the laws do not permit the rising to power for another candidate. Whereas in Turkey, the shift in the political landscape is not only a theoretical possibility but an actual opportunity as proved by the recent victory of the opposition in the local elections in key cities such the capital, Ankara and the largest urban center, Istanbul.

Certain experts on democracy call this form an electoral democracy with regular, competitive and multiparty elections that are regularly won by the most influential political actor. The leading force opt for this system mainly to preserve the impression of winning under democratic conditions to gain international legitimacy and recognition but also to give a limited

chance to the opposition. Sharing the power with the opposition forces is also an ambush for them as they get corrupted by participating in what many perceive as a limited democracy or a democracy that does not perform well. (Cinar, 2019:9). Generally speaking, opposition forces can be badly influenced by “collaborating” with these dominant political forces but it certainly is not the case for each and every one of them. In the current Turkish situation, for instance, the only really endangered actor is the National Movement Party as Devlet Bahçeli’s political community became a very close ally of the Justice and Development Party and lost a part of its unique identity and electorate in order to gain more influence in politics and to push the AKP to become increasingly nationalistic.

Critics of the Turkish model of democracy believe that certain institutions that are supposed to work independently from the governing political party came under a very close control of the ruling Justice and Development Party. Cook underlines, referring to invalidation of the mayoral election results in Istanbul that “the election council has, however, ceased to function as a neutral arbiter of the electoral process. Instead, through appointments to the judiciary, it has become an instrument of the AKP and Erdogan.” (Cook, 2019). An election council, of course, should be neutral but in reality in none of the Western democracies it is fully neutral as it is composed of individuals with political preferences. An election council is an instrument if it acts after getting a direct order from one of the political parties. As of now, there is no evidence for such interference and, indeed, there were a certain number of irregularities around the election in Istanbul. The repetition of the local election in the greatest Turkish metropolis, at the end, was an important lesson for the Justice and Development Party as well as a historic defeat as the electors themselves punished the AKP a second time and the margin between its candidate and that of the opposition increased in a very spectacular way. In fact, Turkish democracy exists and works, and punishes all those who are not content with the democratic outcome.

Critics also push the argument that seemingly legal decisions are basically politically motivated (Cook, 2019). In the western understanding of the separation of the pillars of democracy as described already by Aristotle in the Antiquity and Montesquieu from among the philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, it is clear that the executive and the judiciary parts of the power have to work separately. Again, members of the Supreme Election Council that ruled that certain ballots are to be considered to be correct during the referendum on the changes in the constitution

can be partial, but their decision, though it clearly favors Erdogan and his party, remains the criteria of legality.

While founding the claim that the Turkish democracy does not exist is completely baseless, these above cases clearly show that the Turkish democracy does not perform perfectly well due to the human factor. These examples rather show that certain members of the elite prefer to serve the interests of the ruling Justice and Development Party, or what they perceive as its interest as the repetition of the mayoral elections, one can see nowadays, were absolutely not in the interest of the AKP.

### 2.2.2 Democracy in Crisis or Crisis Democracy

The previous point argues that though democracy in Turkey exists it does not perform well on international standards. If saying that Turkish democracy is inexistent is inaccurate, one can state that it is in a deep crisis. Regarding the last two decades, and especially the history of Turkey after the 2013 Gezi park events, it is also acceptable to say that not the democracy itself is in crisis but the democracy is willingly built on crises which can be also called a crisis democracy.

What are the sources of this crisis of democracy? The litmus paper of the ongoing moral and political crisis is the situation in the media. The way the ruling Justice and Development Party handles the question of press freedom demonstrates the gravity of the situation. According to the independent civil watchdog, the Reporters Without Borders, in Turkey, there is a massive purge in the media and the country scores very low in global comparison. Out of 180 countries Turkey ranks 154<sup>th</sup> in 2019 (Reporters Without Borders, 2019).

The media outlets throughout the World are connected to political actors or ideologies. Some of them post it openly, some of them hide it, but, in fact, they both serve political interests and influence the decision-makers as well as the ordinary voters. Media is interconnected with politics, for some, it is in itself a pillar of modern democracies. So, political influence on the media in itself is not harmful but forceful political intervention is. The 2013 Report of the Freedom House, another well known global civil society organization points out how politicians and political forces, basically Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party interfere with the free working of the press. The main methods include intimidation. According to the civil activists Recep Tayyip Erdogan (prime minister at that time) frequently criticizes or even openly attacks journalists (Corke et al. 2013:1). Though a politician has the full right to criticize and the

political actors linked to the executive branch of power to supervise the media, intimidation cannot be accepted. A speech by Erdogan might not be intimidating but what follows, indeed, can. It is to be observed that if Recep Tayyip Erdogan indulges in heavy criticism directed towards the press, the reaction of the bureaucracy is harsh. This criticism is often followed by mass firing of journalists and even a massive campaign of closing down media outlets as it was seen after the 2016 military coup.

Another form of intervention can be seen on the economic level. The Turkish government tries to buy off shares and property to enforce its own political interest and the wish to remain in power. It is normal that a national government supports the national bourgeoisie. As it was presented earlier, this was exactly the method used by the founding father of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It is in the best interest of all governments to create or to empower a local entrepreneurial social strata, on one hand, on the other, governments are not supposed to do so to ensure their own political survival. The Turkish government of the AKP intervenes in economics in three ways in order to serve their own political interest and puts in danger the democratic nature of the system. First, it helps the companies loyal to them with huge contracts. Second, critical companies and media outlets are often targeted by different legal procedures such as tax investigations. Third, the government tries to obtain shares in companies running critical voices in the media, and this way downturn these unwanted negative appreciations. (Corke et al., 2014:2).

The third form of political intervention in the media causing widespread crisis in Turkish democracy is imprisonment of critics of the government. The pretext to do so is terrorism. Indeed, unfortunately Turkey is one the most threatened countries as far terrorism is concerned. Frequent attacks are carried out by home grown terrorist organizations such as the Left wing separatist Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) or various communist and Islamist groups, as well as international networks such as the militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). So, terrorism is, indeed, a major source of insecurity in everyday life in Turkey, but, at the same time, it is also an excuse for the Justice and Development Party led government to justify the imprisonment of journalists and others. (Corke et al., 2014:2) This practice is increasingly visible after the 2016 military coup attempt as the putschists are quoted as alleged members of an organization, formerly known as Hizmet and declared terrorist by the Erdogan administration.

Crisis democracy in Turkey is a special form of democracy. There are signs of popular unrest since the 2013 Gezi park events both in the society and the field of economy, but crisis

democracy is not a special crisis management scheme by the Turkish political elite to deal with these issues but causing further crises in order to aggravate the situation of the opposition and, therefore, to ensure their remaining in power.

### 2.2.3 Structural crisis of Turkish democracy

At first sight, the introduction of the presidential system (*baskanlik sistemi* in Turkish) is a form of structural transition from one democratic model to another, but a deeper analysis can prove that this change is a product and motivated by the crisis of Turkish democracy. The above mentioned 2013 Gezi park events will be detailed later in the present chapter. It will be evident from its description that this popular uprising was not simply a sign of discontentment with an urbanization plan that might have endangered the urban landscape and the environment of the famous Taksim square in Istanbul but a profound manifestation of a societal crisis. At the same time, it was an open expression of power concentration will by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It is to discuss whether the political crisis pushed Erdogan to further centralize the system or he had planned an authoritarian shift earlier and his reaction to the Gezi park events was in parallel with this desire, but it is sure that after 2013 the occurrences showing Erdogan's power control tactics are numerous. After winning the 2014 presidential elections by 52% of the popular vote, Erdogan has selected his former minister of foreign affairs, Ahmet Davutoglu for the position of the prime minister. Davutoglu's policies, especially in foreign affairs, were driven by a Neo-Ottoman nostalgia and eventually fail in Syria and Iraq, but it was not this misstep that caused Davutoglu's political decline but the fact that Erdogan could support next to him a strong and charismatic politician who could have been a potential threat to his rule. (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:3).

Another evident example of the structural crisis is the way the Erdogan administration handled the 2016 missed coup that was blamed on the Hizmet movement and the officers linked to it, a religious association lead by Fethullah Gulen, a senior Islamic scholar who lives in the United States of America. Gulen used to be a close ally of the AKP and Erdogan but while collaborating with the government, he also tried to put his own loyalists to key positions causing competition between the supporters of Gulen and Erdogan, eventually provoking a brutal split between the two camps. If Davutoglu was a potent competitor, Gulen was equally dangerous for Erdogan's centralization plans. A harsh conflict between the two leaders was already going on and could have led to major social change even without the military intervention in Turkish politics

that finally reinsured Erdogan's position as the leading political figure in Turkey. (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:3).

After the transition into a proper presidential system in 2017, Erdogan was effectively spared of a potential competitor as the position of the prime minister was abolished. The new system resembles the one in place in the United States of America where the president is also leading the cabinet. Indeed, there are vice presidents, but they are there to enforce and not to criticize or alter the central political will. Another feature of the presidential system further empowering the head of state is that this person can issue decrees and, effectively, rule by decrees on special occasions (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:3). Nowadays, it is not very difficult in Turkey to find an excuse for declaring a state of emergency. As it was said earlier, terrorist activities are, unfortunately, intensified and especially in the Southeast of the country attacks on civilians and army personnel are a daily routine of the separatists and other extremists.

Among the elements of the structural crisis, one can mention the weak, diverse and divided opposition while the ruling Justice and Development Party has its close allies among the political parties and civil society organizations. A big and important difference between the ruling party and its opposition on the political scene is that AKP has its solid electorate that associates with the Justice and Development Party on the basis of shared values. According to estimates 35% of the voters tend to be religious and conservative and opt for the ruling political force under all possible circumstances. On elections, to this basis one can add those who are not religious or conservative but who are happy with the results of the government as until recently the AKP successfully finished a great number of spectacular social and infrastructural investment projects. Those impressed by these improvements and forget about the economic hardships they cause might make 10 to 15% of the Turks. If this latter category does not erode, these social groups can ensure the majority for the AKP.

The opposition parties are not only divided among various political break lines but also lack such a solid popular support. The main opposition party, the Republican Peoples' Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi or CHP) has a precise ideological basis known as Kemalism, a revised and updated version of the world view of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. One should not forget that Kemalism is not only a political ideology but an active "missionary work". Kemalists in the past and in the present took on themselves the spread of secularism in an active manner. (Yilmaz et al., 2018:51). Though this political approach is constantly adjusted to the current reality, and to be



contemporary (*cagdas* in Turkish) is a key element in this perspective, it is not evident to transmit a modern message to the masses while all the time referring to a leader who died in 1938 but whose personality cult still exists and attracts less and less. During the 2000s and the 2010s, this political offer coincided with the wishes of 25% of the Turkish voters. In 2018, the presidential candidate Muharrem Ince got almost 31% of the popular vote, a record high popular support for a CHP politician during the last two decades. Ince's relative success demonstrates that the core voting group of the republicans can be rejuvenated and increased with an authentic personality. (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:4).

The third important political force in Turkish politics are the nationalists. Erdogan's power concentration efforts caused a spectacular split within this movement. Those remaining loyal to the president of the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetci Hareket Partisi or MHP) entered a close alliance with the ruling AKP along some national issues whereas those who were not happy with this change congregated in a new part called Good Party (IYI) that is headed by a lady, Meral Aksener. (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:4) This unprecedented division within the nationalist "family" of Turkish politics does not only reflect a political struggle between politicians approaching the question of governance in different manners but also a fundamental break line dividing the Turanists, those who believe in the unity of all Turkic people. The main division line, in fact, is religion. Some of the Turanist nationalists are prone to a complete return to the roots of the Turkish people. In their eyes Arabs and Muslims are fiercest enemies whereas the ideal religious stance is Tengrism, which is thought to be the pre-Islamic belief system of the Turks they left behind as Arabs –according to this worldview- forced Turks to convert by sword. Other Turanists acknowledge Islam as an important part of the Turkish cultural heritage, they might or might not practice Islam but they consider this religion to be an integral part of Turkishness and a necessary tool to unite the Turkish citizens with diverse ethnic backgrounds. The former group tends to support IYI, the latter Devlet Bahçeli's MHP. The renaissance of Tengrism within the Turkish nationalists is not always a religious choice though as it is often a vocal opposition to the more and more Islamic-oriented rhetoric of the politicians of the Justice and Development Party.

An interesting structural question of Turkish democracy is whether the system can support or not a pro-Kurdish political force (Kirisci and Sloat, 2019:4). To prevent an efficient political representation of ethnic Kurdish nationalists and to facilitate a one party rule in a multiparty national assembly (and also to avoid the political confusion of the always shifting coalitions back



in the 1990s) in the 2000s a strict entry criteria to the parliament was accepted. This means that only those parties can have MPs in Ankara that exceed 10% of the popular vote nationwide. The elections at the end of 2010s have proved that a pro-Kurdish party, namely the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi or HDP) could do it if they choose to represent other minorities, too. This revelation forced the HDP to become a more European-style liberal party than a classical nationalist and separatist political movement. HDP nowadays speaks also for various other ethnic minorities, as well as religious groups and LGBT people. With this new viewpoint in Turkish politics, HDP could gain considerable support within the liberal bourgeoisie in the upmarket neighborhoods of the large urban centers, as well as in the small ethnic minority-populated villages of Southeastern Anatolia.

#### 2.2.4 Delicate power balance or the loss of reform momentum

The Justice and Development Party took power in 2002 after a long lasting and deep political and economic crisis in Turkey. The only way for the survival of democracy was to strengthen the economy, to upgrade the infrastructure, to support the growth of industrial production and this way to make a solid basis for the well being of the majority of the population who had lost their businesses and jobs in the 1990s and had suffered of the subsequent austerity measures in the early 2000s by Kemal Dervis, a famous neoliberal economist of Turkish origin who was hired by the pre-AKP governments. The Justice and Development Party, indeed, had spectacular economic successes in the period between 2002 and 2005 culminating in the release of the new Turkish currency, the new lira. This was the last step to end an abiding inflation and economic disaster. After strengthening the Turkish economy and winning a second general election, the AKP proceeded to transform the Turkish society according to their own principles. These early reforms can be seen as genuine efforts to attempt to further democratize the system, even though these efforts met serious criticism, especially from the side of those fearing that the pro-Muslim AKP would undermine the secular nature of the Turkish state. In 2008, the anti-clerical forces took the ruling party to the court in order to prohibit it as it was already done to several Right wing parties, basically the predecessors of the AKP, representing the more religious masses including the National Order Party (in 1971), National Salvation Party (in 1981), Welfare Party (in 1998) and Virtue Party (in 2001).

In reality, the ruling party was not a threat to secularism and the “punishment” was not severe against the AKP. They were cut off certain central funds but could survive and influence the social and political evolution of the country. It was rather Erdogan’s unprecedented personality that endangered the various political reforms initiated by himself such as the so-called Kurdish opening giving important civil rights to that ethnic minority including the limited right to use the Kurdish language in schools and the media. Basically these early reforms were aiming at two major goals: easing the life of the practicing Muslims, the core of the AKP electorate and to give popular support to the centralization efforts by Erdogan. “As the AKP under Erdoğan’s leadership has steadily moved from the periphery to the centre of the Turkish political system, it appears to have progressively monopolized power, leaving little opportunity for forces of opposition to contest its power and hegemony in a genuinely open political order.” (Onis, 2011:25).

The early reforms sacrificed in order to strengthen the position of Recep Tayyip Erdogan incited democratic deficit in Turkey. The first component of democratic deficit is the relapse in terms of freedom of expression. As it was already pointed out earlier in this chapter, intimidation of journalists, closing down media outlets, buying off newspapers critical of the government are a common practice in the 2010s and more specifically after the failed military coup of 2016. The second element of the democratic deficit is due to the excessive use of force, both by the police and by the military. The first examples of this bad practice have been observed in 2013 on the Taksim square against the demonstrators (who themselves were not always peaceful) and later on around the country provoking the death of at least five individuals and violent backlash by the extremists who joined the Left wing and liberal protestors. The military was also used excessively in certain cases. Probably the most known example is the bombing of Diyarbakir on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2016 when PKK terrorists occupied key locations in the historic center of the city rich in monuments including the longest city wall of the World and the Turkish defense forces destroyed a large amount of houses and businesses in order to purge the location. The third important feature of the democratic deficit is that the Turkish judiciary system is unable and in some cases unwilling to fight against corruption. Unfortunately, the AK Parti (abbreviation frequently used by AKP supporters) is not that “ak” anymore. (“Ak” in the Turkish language means “white” and symbolizes the political and economic cleanliness and tidiness of the party.) The growing corruption of the elite culminated in the 2013 corruption scandal when on the 17<sup>th</sup> December, no less than 52 persons close to the Erdogan cabinet were detained on corruption related

charges. Later on, it was also discovered that this defamation was an integral part of the conflict between Erdogan and Gulen (Onis, 2011:26).

This normal political disagreement was quickly perceived by the political actors as a cause for insecurity and the government instantly accused the opposition of preparing a military intervention against the legitimate leaders of the country. This way a political issue became within a few days a security issue and led the ruling Justice and Development Party to use force against those who accused them. Interestingly enough, this insecurity originated –according to the AKP officials- from within the state structure as they were evoking a deep state or parallel state masterminding a plot against not only the AKP government but also the whole republic. (Unver Noi, 2016:68).

The political and power-related rivalry between the two factions had a bitter economic impact. After the discovery of the first cases of corruption, the government tried to halt the detection of further cases and to hide that not very nice face of the system. The ambiguous investigation of corruption in Turkey forced the actors to feel insecure about the market, and foreign investors were less likely to consider spending more in Turkey (Simet et al., 2015:96).

#### 2.2.5 Post-Kemalist illiberal democracy

The founding father of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk died in 1938 but continues to impact and impress the social and political reality in Turkey. Though most Turks acknowledge Atatürk's military genius and deeds in World War I, an increasing number of mainly Muslim Turks refuse to live according to the ideals and principles proposed by him. The global political scene is evolving and founders of republics are mostly regarded as national heroes in most countries, the ideology of some of them might still influence the political choices of some electors and politicians. This is the case of Gaullism in France, and this the case with Kemalism in Turkey. Though Kemalism is no longer a state ideology imposed on everyone, it is a cord measure for one quarter of the Turkish population, namely those living a Europeanized lifestyle in big cities.

Though Kemalism is not dead, the era of the rule of the Justice and Development Party can be and must be called a Post-Kemalist period. Ziya Onis summarizes this time as follows: “formal institutions of democracy exist, but a civilian majority, with the religious conservatives as its dominant constituent element, increasingly monopolizing power and restricting the space for the rest of the society in an unequal political contest” (Onis, 2015:26). In other words, practicing

Muslims “invade” public and private spheres and inflict their way of life on the other side of the population. In fact, the more conservative religious Muslims are more numerous than the liberal and anti-clerical Muslims. So, this might be seen as a normal outcome of democracy where the majority rules.

Though Sunni Muslim majority rules, Post-Kemalism is a social and political reality of exclusion. The AKP governments before the court case in which Kemalists tried to prohibit the ruling party tended to be more inclusive both towards the religious and the ethnic minorities. In many cases prior to 2008, the politicians of the Justice and Development Party intended to picture themselves as guardians of the republic and democracy, and protectors of disadvantaged ethnic and religious identities (Acikgoz, 2014:23). The first phase of the AKP rule was aimed at giving a good image of Turkey and the Turks to the outside world in order to ease the integration of Turkey into the European Union and other forms of global cooperation. Kemalism was perceived in the West as a basically nationalist ideology that prevented all expressions from the side of the minorities. For many minority voters in Turkey, democracy is the tool to defend their rights and voice their concerns, and since the introduction of the multiparty democracy in 1946, the AKP seemed to be the only party led by non-Kurdish politicians who were interested in the issue. The logic behind is that if AKP defends the rights of the minorities, the World should accordingly and protect the rights of the Sunni Muslim majority. Many Muslim Turks were enthusiastic about joining the EU because they were thinking that Brussels would downturn the anti-clerical Kemalist tendencies. This means that many Turks misunderstood how the West works and got very quickly disappointed with the European Union. In the early 2000s, these were rather the AKP politicians and supporters who campaigned for the adhesion, whereas today the CHP voters have more pro-European tendencies.

Between 2008 and 2011, there was a transition period from an open willingness of democratic opening to a more targeted democratization and modernization. The 2010 referendum on the changes in the constitution was a good move and made the closure of political parties more difficult, but one can easily say that the real intention here was not promoting political pluralism but ensuring the future of the Justice and Development Party. After this brief transition period, in 2011 the AKP started to fully deconstruct the old Kemalist identity of the nation and construct a new Post-Kemalist identity for the Turks. Post-Kemalism sees itself as the only tool to establish

peace, stability and economic growth in Turkey, whereas all critique is regarded as undermining these goals and values (Acikgoz, 2014:24).

Post-Kemalism can be also observed in the promotion of the training of Sunni Muslim prayer leaders or *imams*. One can remember that one of the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was to centralize and nationalize the education of the Muslim clergy by prohibiting the Middle Eastern style medreses. The intention of the Erdogan cabinet in 2012 was not to better supervise the schools where these people are trained but to favor them over other, more secular forms of education by introducing the 4+4+4 years of education in public institutions (Acikgoz, 2014:25). It is to be noted that in the Kemalist pre-AKP period imam schools (known to Turks as Imam-Hatip) were suppressed and those who graduated from this type of secondary education could hardly proceed to other higher education than theology, whereas many pupils wanted to study wordly sciences next to their religious knowledge. In the second half of the 1990s, many former Imam-Hatip students continued their higher studies in Europe as they could not enter Turkish universities. What is the reparation of an old injustice for some people is an open threat to national unity and secularism for others.

#### 2.2.6 Institutionalizing strategic legalism

Post-Kemalism mainly after the attempted coup of 2016 is a regime that is more and more built on fear (Yilmaz, 2018:268). The Hizmet community that was accused by the Turkish government of being behind the armed intervention of the defense forces that killed almost 300 policemen, soldiers and civilians at different locations across the country could have, according to certain estimates, up to 4 million members. Some were more connected to the network, but most people were in touch with this religious movement loosely through its educational activities. The AKP government started a drive hunting against not only the top ranking officials and masterminds of the coup but also against all those who were considered as members. For being suspicious it was and it is enough to have a bank account at the Bank Asya, a commercial bank founded by members of the community or having downloaded a certain mobile phone application called ByLock that was supposedly used by the leading figures of Hizmet for coded secret communication. Individuals working at the schools and student hostels run by Hizmet were fired, the buildings nationalized, many of the employees were either fleeing or getting long prison terms. Those who were found directly guilty of the coup are now imprisoned for life.

Those who are and were not FETO members and therefore were not persecuted on terrorism charges can and could feel the enormous uncertainty that followed the attempted coup and that led to popular state of fear. It was common in 2016 and 2017 throughout the entire country that people looked at each other in a very suspicious way. Suddenly the famous Turkish hospitality ceased and, especially in the remote villages, strangers were quickly reported to the military police (jandarma in Turkish). This state of general fear of the other was institutionalized by the state of emergency that was prolonged seven times and finally lifted in 2018 (Yilmaz, 2018:268). Turks, chiefly those living in the southeastern counties heavily populated by the ethnic Kurdish minority are used to the state of emergency as it was in vigor there for decades due to the terrorist activity of the PKK, but the overall Turkish population including the inhabitants of the big cities in the West of the country perceived not very well these restrictions. Finally, the coup, the subsequent governmental repression and the popular fear lead to a state of alienation that was and still is new to Turkish society as Turks for centuries tended to keep short social distance between themselves. This is an important risk for the country as the society can fall apart due to the increased fear and suspicion.

This fear and repression is general but applies more to certain segments of Turkish society. For example, a growing pressure is put on civil society and the government intervenes in the reshaping of it by initiating and supporting the creation of new organizations that are not that independent from the state (Yilmaz, 2018:268). Though civil society already flourished in the Ottoman times, foundations were very important structures back in the Middle Ages as they ran mosques, schools and charity institutions everywhere in the empire, the real heyday of them is the period after the 1980 military coup and the restoration of civilian rule in 1982. Possibly the largest network of NGOs was that of Hizmet that monopolized certain areas. After the attempted coup of 2016, when the government closed down the schools, prep schools and other educational institutions, the AKP had to realize that in some areas the only service provider was FETO itself. For example, outside Turkey, most schools catering for the children of the Turkish guest workers and diaspora were in Gulen's hands. These were closed down in some countries having good ties with Turkey or massively left by the Turkish students, so, there was an evident need to create a new network of pseudo civil society organizations replacing the old, Hizmet-linked institutions. This new network is called Maarif (Maarif was not founded after the coup but it became really

active following the events in 2016), and it is ready to open a school in the 9<sup>th</sup> district of the Hungarian capital while Gulen's two schools continue to exist in Budapest (Horvath, 2019).

The above specific features of Turkish democracy cannot be dissociated from the past two decades. Notably, the power concentration and centralization efforts of the ruling Justice and Development Party and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's personal charisma and manoeuvres characterised these decades.

## **2. 3 Ideology, history and governmental performance of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)**

### **2.3.1 The impact of political Islamism in Turkey**

The Republic of Turkey has been secular since its founding in 1923, and in legal terms it remains so today. This not only means that political and religious leadership are strictly separated, but also that there is no real opportunity for religion-based politics. With the transition to the republic and the subsequent abolition of the caliphate, a kind of religious persecution took place in the first period of the republic. As a result, not only did the degree of religiosity among the population decrease, but the Muslim identity also faded somewhat, and a strong secular Turkish national identity also appeared, and these two ways of thinking began to compete from the 1950s. The Democratic Party tried to fulfill some of the demands of the religious people, so for example they re-authorized the call to prayer in Arabic, the conversion of which into Turkish was one of the biggest grievances of religious Muslims during the one-party period. At the same time, it must be emphasized that the DP did not want to build the country's governance on the principles of Islam, and did not want to introduce the Islamic legal system. The 1961 constitution, on the other hand, was much more liberal in terms of collective freedoms than its predecessor, thus giving way to the representation of various truly extreme political ideologies. In addition to the communist and nationalist parties, the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP) was thus able to appear, which still did not question the concept of the secular state, but the demand for Muslim advocacy and global Muslim unity already appears in its rhetoric. Necmettin Erbakan renewed this movement from an ideological point of view in the 1970s, when he started openly promoting Islamist ideas with the views of the National Vision (Milli gorus). The emergence and strengthening of Muslim political identity can also be linked to the spread of Milli gorus. The Milli



gorus movement essentially still exists today, this ideology is embodied by the Happiness Party (Saadet Partisi) on the opposition side of today's politics, and the Milli gorus still has considerable support in the circles of the Western diaspora. Recep Tayyip Erdogan is also a student of Erbakan and socialized in the political world of Milli gorus. Erdogan is special in that, when the AKP came to power in 2002, he was able to make people believe that his party and himself was significantly more moderate than Erbakan, and at first he handled the issue of religion very cautiously, instead he was striving to stabilize the economy. At the same time, parallel to the gradual cutting back of the army's political power, he made more and more gestures towards religious people. Under Erdogan, the state remained secular, while the meaning of the word became completely empty. The social demands of the Muslims have essentially come into effect, but the legal system is still secular, if not officially.

One of the immediate predecessors of the of the current Islamist party, the Justice and Development Party was the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), which was able to achieve serious success in the 1995 elections thanks to its highly critical rhetoric of NATO and the EU, and thanks to this it became a member of the governing coalition. Refah also used anti-Semitic slogans and politically attacked Israel. Instead of good relations with Israel and the West, they tried to build good relations with Iran, Syria, and Libya, i.e. the dictatorships of the Middle East, thus appealing mostly to the populist political segment existing among religious Muslims. After the leader of Refah, Necmettin Erbakan, became the prime minister and began his government based on his radical and populist views, the army intervened and the father of Milli Gorus was removed from his position in the postmodern coup of 1997, and the party was banned in 1998. Refah was followed by the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi), but it was also not long-lived, it was banned in 2001 and many of its politicians were imprisoned or banned from politics. (Aydin and Cakir, 2007:38).

After the banning of Fazilet, Necmettin Erbakan lost a lot of support within the movement. The Saadet party he created was a marginal radical party with openly Islamist views from the beginning. This party was so extreme that it had no chance of reaching the very high 10% parliamentary entry threshold on its own. The fact that Saadet still has representatives in the Turkish National Assembly today is only due to the fact that - despite their extreme right-wing views - they are nowadays part of the left-wing opposition together with the Kemalist CHP and the nationalist IYI. The majority of the Islamist movement, which was banned many times, understood that the radical path cannot be followed, because it will either lead to a ban or



marginalization. Those who preferred to define themselves as conservative democrats gathered around Recep Tayyip Erdogan. At many points, Erdogan broke with the ideology of Milli Gorus from the beginning, he emphasized the importance of democracy and human rights. In addition, he stood up for Turkey's Euro-Atlantic integration and advocated the start of EU accession negotiations as soon as possible (Aydin and Cakir, 2007:39). Erdogan's change of direction was not only aimed at making it easier for the international public, the army and the Turkish people to accept him, but the future president of the republic also realized that respecting human freedoms goes hand in hand with the expansion of freedom of conscience, i.e. making Muslim religious life more free. Erdogan viewed NATO and the EU as international forums that guarantee the pacification and democratization of the Turkish armed forces, thereby providing the legal framework for religious conservative politics.

Erdogan's change of direction also included the fact that the moderate Islamists gathered around him realized that Turkey could not become independent from global processes, especially in the field of economy. After the postmodern coup of 1997, the deepening domestic political crisis led to an astonishing economic decline, which was only exacerbated by the devastation of a gigantic earthquake in 1999. The Turkish economy collapsed despite the fact that the world economic processes could not have caused it at that time, and Turkey could only rely on international markets to put the economy in order. At the turn of the millennium, Turkey pursued a very strict, neoliberal, austerity-based economic policy under the leadership of Kemal Dervis. At the same time, Turkey turned to the International Monetary Fund for a loan and relied heavily on privatization revenues and the inflow of foreign investment (Aydin and Cakir, 2007:39). Erdogan also realized that only the revival of foreign economic relations and the enforcement of liberal economic principles can make conservative politics possible in Turkey. This is how the AKP became politically conservative, but economically liberal, in the initial period of its government, between 2002 and 2007. The other issue is that after the Turkish economy stabilized, the repayment of the IMF loan and market-based financing of the country became a priority for Erdogan as well.

During this first mandate of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) between 2002 and 2007, it was still a very complex political party, in which five factions of different origins and mentalities competed, which sometimes led to the fact that some groups still dared to openly take on the conflict with Erdogan. Such was the case during the Iraq war, when the prime minister proposed in the parliament that the American forces deploy soldiers in South-East Turkey, and 99

representatives of the AKP voted against the decision, i.e. although Erdogan himself pursued an emphatically pro-Western policy, not everyone within the party supported this. This also meant that between 2002 and 2007, not all AKP politicians shared Erdogan's views as a conservative democrat. Although most of the AKP's leadership came from the moderate branch of the Millî Görüş movement, there were some who came from other political directions. Some representatives moved from smaller, non-Islamist center-right parties, the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi) and the Right Way Party (Doğru Yol Partisi), while others did not deal with politics before, but they operated within a network of Muslim brotherhoods, religious organizations often based on the Sufi spiritual teachings of Islam. The attempt to ban the AKP and the E-Memorandum of 2007 brought the party together in such a way that, from the second AKP government onwards, these differences were blurred and the AKP began to engage in a more strongly Islamist type of politics (Aydin and Cakir, 2007:40).

Around 2010, the increasingly unifying AKP felt that it could openly politicize based on Islamist principles, i.e. by this time they had brought most of the state bodies under their close control and limited the political scope of the opposition in many respects. The referendum held in September 2010 can be considered the beginning of the Islamist transition, where the voters could express their opinion on 26 amendments to the 1982 constitution. The package of proposals itself was very diverse and showed that the AKP tried to position itself as a defender of human rights after 2002. Among these proposals was the expansion of women's rights or the introduction of the institution of the ombudsman. The Islamist agenda has already appeared behind the two most controversial changes. The AKP considered it important to change the composition of the Constitutional Court and the High Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors in order to put their Islamist allies, the FETO, in a position. Gulen's terrorist organization known as FETO was already trying to acquire all key positions within the state administration. This state-within-a-state type of organization served Erdogan's interests at that time, since the prime minister did not have as many well-trained cadres as the extremist Islamist preacher, but after a while, with Erdogan's strengthening, a conflict automatically arose between him and Gulen, who had gained too much power (Aydin-Duzgit, 2019:23).

### 2.3.2 Prelude to the foundation of the Justice and Development Party

The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP or AK Parti) unites in itself several ideologies and historical heritages, and this way can attract popular support from a very diverse electorate. This electorate is ready to identify with different figures of the Turkish past and the AKP is willingly using this specificity to enlarge its influence within Turkish society. Having said so, it is clear that the names that constitute the main reference of both the party and the electorate are Adnan Menderes who was the prime minister after the first free and fair elections in 1950 until the coup in 1960 after which he was executed by the putschist making him in the eyes of the more conservative voters a real national hero and a martyr, and Turgut Ozal who was elected for the position of the prime minister in 1983, and who is the first Turkish politician who equally served as head of government and a president of the republic later. The core voters of the Justice and Development Party often say that Menderes was put to death, Özal was prevented to act as he wished by internal and external forces, but Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the current leader is strong enough to realize what this political forces desires and no one can stop him of making Turkey great again.

If we do not take into account the subjective opinion of the partisans, one can easily find several similarities between these important historical and public figures in their intentions and political views. Both Menderes, Ozal and Erdogan believed at the beginning in the participation of the masses in the decision-making process. Their inclusive policies while starting their political career aimed at including the most destitute social strata in the political debate as they realized that they are the easiest targets in politics, and can be impressed and satisfied with certain types of political and economic investments. Their vision was a Turkish version of the welfare state where the poorest people can evolve and can live on higher standards than before. The key elements of this policy were housing, hospital and school building projects. These constructions were not the only important deeds of these heads of government, they were also actively promoting other infrastructural development projects including the building of roads, airports and investing in the equipment of the military. What is new in the politics of Erdogan compared to his great ancestors? “Erdogan’s discourse begins, therefore, by exploring feelings of exclusion of the fringes of society, consubstantiation in the presentation of measures that aim to respond to social concerns at the same time that they are inserted in the logic of more conservative, Islamic values” (Dos Santos Fernandes and Estrada Carvalhais, 2018:94). Erdogan’s relative success lies partially in his

personality as he is more sensitive than many other politicians. He is sensitive as far as the political topics and issues are concerned and easily recognizes what might and might not be interesting for others, and he feels better about the problems of those around or listening to him.

Erdogan's direct predecessor and master was Necmettin Erbakan who is credited with writing and implementing a special Turkish political ideology known as the “*Milli Gorus*” or National vision. The Milli Gorus ideology is basically a mixture of a moderate Islamic worldview and an inclusive political nationalism that sees Turkey as a key actor both in the Middle East and on the international scene having independent considerations in the global games. The Milli Gorus tried to reinvent Turkey that reconnects itself to its Ottoman past, but at the same time looks to the future while respecting the republican and secular nature of the state. This worldview, indeed, wants to “Islamize” Turkish society but not from above and not against the free will of its members. With the promotion of Islamic values and the support of the Islamic practices of the Muslim individuals, Erbakan thought that a natural need would arise from within the society for a national transformation resulting in the establishment of a political structure that bases itself on the values and practices of Islam. Erbakan was a radical politician who was often challenged by the then strong Kemalist establishment. The political parties led by him were several times prohibited, like the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) in 1997 and the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi) in 2001. The last political party called Party of Happiness (Saadet Partisi, SP) was created in 2001. This extreme right party by Western political standards, today, actively cooperates with the Left wing opposition of the AKP making it after the death of Necmettin Erbakan a small political movement losing its uniqueness and political identity. The Saadet nowadays is less radical and less Islamic than anytime in the past, pushing those closer to its original line to join the AKP.

### 2.3.3 Early years of the Justice and Development Party

After the prohibition of the Virtue Party, the Turkish Right wing gained an opportunity to fully reorganize itself in a new way. Many of their leaders including Recep Tayyip Erdogan were either imprisoned or legally restricted to participate in politics. The radical supporters –as it was underlined above- came together under the flag of the Party of Happiness, whereas the more moderate and conservative elements congregated in what later became the AKP. This division line was also described at that time as a fight between the Traditionalists (Gelenekciler in Turkish) and

the Reformists (Yenilikciler in Turkish) lead by Abdullah Gul future president of the republic and current critic of the AKP, as well as Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself.

The Justice and Development Party was officially founded on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2001. After the creation of the new political party, the Reformists or *Yenilikciler* gained momentum and quickly became popular among the voters who started to see them as saviors in a very harsh political and economic situation as in 2001, the Turkish citizens and enterprises were suffering from very extreme austerity measures. It is important to note that in 2001 and 2002 Recep Tayyip Erdogan was still under certain legal restrictions. Though we find his name among those who signed the founding documents of the party, the official leader of the new political force was Abdullah Gul who also led the 2002 electoral campaign and formed the first AKP government after it. Gul was respected within the party and by the general Turkish population, very much opposed by the old Kemalist elite, but after all, much less charismatic than Erdogan. He gave of himself an image of being the “grandfather of the nation” rather than a strong leader. As soon as it was legally feasible Erdogan took office as a prime minister in 2003. This was not an easy procedure. As Fadil Akgunduz, an AKP affiliated member of the Great Turkish National Assembly resigned and interim elections had to be organized in the southeastern city of Siirt, Recep Tayyip Erdogan could present himself as a candidate. After getting 85% of the vote of the mainly ethnic Kurdish local electorate, Erdogan became a member of the parliament. After this, Gul himself resigned and the president of the republic, the fierce Kemalist Ahmet Necdet Sezer was obliged to nominate Erdogan as the prime minister of the 59<sup>th</sup> government in the history of the Turkish Republic.

Under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan the Justice and Development Party gained more and more support, especially among the poorer segments of Turkish society. According to estimates, at the 2007 general elections 43,9% of the poverty-stricken and the needy voted for Erdogan and the AKP. The strengthening of the Turkish economy and the great infrastructural projects further enhanced the Justice and Development Party that was reflected by its very good local elections result in 2009. From among other achievements, the AKP gave the mayors of 10 out of 16 so called big cities (in Turkish administration *buyuksehir* or big city is a category that includes communities having multiple districts or divisions inside the locality having its own local governments and municipalities).

The growing popularity of the Justice and Development party did not stop the old Kemalist elite to attack it even outside the field of politics. Arguing that certain activities of the AKP

opposed the principle of secularism, the Attorney General Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya accused in 2008 the ruling party and initiated its prohibition as it was done to several predecessors of the AKP. Some accusations concerned important debates within Turkish society, some others were really marginal. Among the most serious controversies was that of the use of the Islamic headscarf in education. *Hijab* or headscarf is a religious obligation of the Muslim women according to the classical Sunni Muslim schools of thought but the more secular elements of Turkish society regard it as a symbol of Islam and religiousness, and therefore see it unacceptable in the public sphere. In the history of the republic, headscarf was sometimes permitted, sometimes prohibited in given public places. The Erdogan government allowed this time its use in the universities that angered the Kemalists. Next to universities, doctors having hijab started to appear at some private hospitals, too. Another major disagreement between more secular and more religious Muslims is the way they look at the consumption of alcohol. The local governments in certain cities and towns designed so-called “red zones” for establishments selling alcohol that was perceived as a form of discrimination by those who regularly drink it. Basically the Kemalists accused the AKP that it does not differ from its predecessors and wants to reintroduce the Sharia law as the basis of Turkish legislation, a form of rule that characterized the Ottomans. One of the arguments of the Attorney General was that Egemen Bagis, an influential MP from the Justice and Development Party had said that the headscarf should not only be allowed at schools and universities but also inside the building of the Great Turkish National Assembly. What might have shocked in the 2000s, is the reality today as women including MPs are free to wear or not wear headgear. Finally, six judges of the Supreme Court voted for the prohibition of the AKP against five others. This means that as the two third majority was not ensured, the Justice and Development Party was not dissolved. At the same time, the AKP was punished by being stripped of its central benefits and state subventions. The AKP remained in power but was considerably weakened from the financial point of view.

In the second half of the 2000s, the Justice and Development Party might have been weakened economically but was growing politically and became capable of both defending itself in the political arena and influencing the social, political and economic processes in the country. One of the key positions gained by the AKP was that of the president of the republic by Abdullah Gul. The president of the republic at that time was not the main policy and decision maker of Turkish politics, rather a guardian of the spirit of the republic and its secular nature. The old

Kemalist elite, of course, could not bear in mind the idea that a so-called Islamist would be elected after Sezer who never questioned the revolutionary principles of the early times of the republic. The president of the republic, in 2007, according to the 1982 constitution could be elected by the national assembly. Two third of the MPs had to present at all turns of the procedure. In the first two turns, the candidate was supposed to obtain a two third majority of all the members, in the third turn 50% plus one vote, but again, with the active participation of two third of the MPs. The two-thirds majority was 367 politicians whereas the AKP had 354 seats. On 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2007, the first vote was organized and Abdullah Gul obtained 357 votes that was not enough to take office as a president of the republic. The same day the main opposition force, the CHP, attacked the result at the court, and the military also intervened by posting online a document that is nowadays called the E-memorandum. This E-memorandum is a light and postmodern version of the military coup in which the national defense forces publish their wishes and try to push their agenda softly. Finally, the Constitutional Court cancelled the first election result and the military remained in the barracks.

It was clear that the national assembly cannot elect a new president unless a new election is organized and one of the political sides obtains a solid two third majority. In July 2007, new general elections were held and the Justice and Development Party came out of it as the winner. The new parliament proceeded a second time to the election and there were three candidates. Next to Abdullah Gul two smaller opposition parties also presented their favored politicians, namely the MHP was there with Sabahattin Cakmakoglu and the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Partisi or DSP) with Tayfun Icli. Gul was finally elected by 339 votes. It is interesting to note that the main force of the Left, the CHP refused to take part in the procedure. Nevertheless, Gul was elected and served as president of the republic between 2007 and 2014. Under his presidency, the AKP could considerably strengthen its position and start the centralization of power that Gul criticizes virulently since the 2016 attempted coup.

The political power gained from the election of Abdullah Gul and the winning of further general and local elections made the AKP a monolith which became less and less indulgent and tended more and more to centralize the political decision making process. This already considerably rigid structure was first challenged by the popular unrest of the Gezi park protests in 2013 to be presented under a later point of this present chapter.



### 2.3.5 Ideology and values of the Justice and Development Party

As it was said earlier in this chapter, the Justice and Development Party is based on a multitude of ideological fundamentals and historical heritage. This diversity was more visible during the early years of the party, and less evident after the centralization following the Erdogan-Gulen rivalry, the Gezi park protests and the 2016 attempted coup, meaning the political elimination of the inner opposition within the AKP.

So, at the beginning the Justice and Development Party could have been described as a Muslim democrat party resembling in a way the Christian democratic parties of the West. The AKP did not want to politicize the Islamic religion but rather build a complete political world view on the basis of the teachings and the values to be found in the holy scripture, the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad known as the *hadith*. Though it might seem that this Muslim democracy is copied on European and Christian models, in reality, it is a new and fresh ideology that even differs from what had been proposed by Necmettin Erbakan in his Milli Gorus theory (Kahraman and Yener, 2007:154).

Some experts argue that the Justice and Development Party is not based on a certain ideology but the AKP politicians rather are seeking political representation and identity for values derived from the Islamic religion, civilization and culture. This viewpoint underlines that the AKP is not trying to challenge the secular nature of the republic, rather they want to give to the Turkish Muslims a totally new identity that respects the frame of the secular republic. The result of these activities is that religion becomes a legitimate topic in political debates and the fact that certain electors are religious, others are secular start to influence political choices (Uysal, 2008:98).

This new type of identity of Turkish political Islam is sometimes termed as Post-Islamism as opposed to what Islamism in general is, and what in particular the Islamist past of the AKP and its predecessors was from 1950 to 2002. Post-Islamism is not a typical Turkish phenomenon though, it can be observed throughout the Islamic World as many traditional political forces representing religious Muslims in these countries failed at getting to power and successfully transformed the society while in power. Post-Islamists limit the role of religion in politics, concentrate on the main issues and topics Muslims frequently evoke and try not to overwhelm the society with their own principles. In the Turkish context, this means that the Justice and Development Party respects the rule of law and the secular nature of the republic. At the same time, the AKP has to accept modern realities, and has to realize that only a modernized acceptance



of the religion can be the target and age old realities –either from the time of the Prophet or that of the Ottomans- cannot be brought back without harming the secular social strata. In the field of politics, democratic pluralism is also to be respected by the Post-Islamists that includes the division of powers and the support for free and fair election in which the secular political parties can also obtain seats and mayoral positions (Yilmaz et al., 2017:51). “It is commonly assumed that free elections will inevitably bring Islamists to power in largely Muslim countries. This logic is employed to explain the AKP’s recent electoral successes as well. To assume that Muslims will vote with religious motivations, however, underestimates the plurality of views, debates, and issues that influence political behavior and the choices of Muslims in countries such as Turkey” (Dagi, 2008:30). This means that the Turkish society would reject the Justice and Development Party as soon as it disrespects the basic tenets of democracy, there is no need for such procedures as the court case of 2008 in which the old Kemalist elite tried to prohibit it.

Post-Islamism is also the realization of current political facts, the de jure and de facto constraints imposed by the Kemalists on everyone who is willing to rule Turkey as an old school Islamist. If it is so, those who want to rule in the name of the Muslims should also look at them as partners and seek the support of all their religious groups. The two most important sources of legitimacy for a Post-Islamist political party in Turkey are the religious communities (cemaat in Turkish) and mystic orders and brotherhoods of Sufis (tarikats in Turkish). The two main cemaats –the already mentioned Hizmet and the followers of Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan- were allied with the Justice and Development Party at the very beginning but got into conflict later on. The relationship between the AKP and tarikats was smoother and only the strangest ones came into open conflict with the ruling party. (Yilmaz et al., 2017:53) The story of the conflict between Gulen and Erdogan was and will be referred to several time throughout the thesis, therefor, here a few words should be said about the other community frequently called *Suleymancis* though this term might be also derogatory and members of the group do not use it to describe themselves. Mehmet Beyazit Denizolgun, one of the key figures of the community is to be found among the founding members of the Justice and Development Party. His brother Arif Ahmet Denizolgun, after the death of Kemal Kacar became the leader of the community in 2000. He died shortly after the attempted coup in 2016. His funeral was pictured in the Right wing Turkish media as an office of a mysterious and closed group that is also partially hostile to the government, a second threat after the revelation of the Hizmet. Indeed, as most religious communities in the republican era, the

Suleymancis are closed and reveal a part of their special teachings only to the members, but this is an ordinary religious group focusing on teaching the Quran. And what is not good for the AKP, Arif Ahmet Denizolgun did not support the AKP. He was a minister in Mesut Yilmaz's government between 1997 and 1999, and asked his followers to vote for a small party, the Democrats. Another small but influential community to be mentioned here is the Furkan Foundation headed by the controversial Alparslan Kuytul who is basically the only well known Islamic scholar to oppose Erdogan and his party from the very beginning. This vocal critique of the regime could work until the attempted coup but got repressed immediately as Kuytul did not condemn the coup and seemed to be happy with the event. Finally, this vakif was abolished and Kuytul is still in prison charged with organized crime.

Analyzing the conflicts around the Justice and Development Party it becomes evident that in many cases the personality of Recep Tayyip Erdogan is a key to understanding the issue. It is indisputable that the above stories can be depicted as an Erdogan-Gulen, an Erdogan-Denizolgun and an Erdogan-Kuytul conflict. If it is so, one might also say that the ideology of the AKP crystallized around the president of the republic, therefore, this special Turkish Post-Islamism can also be labeled Erdoganism. This new term, "Erdoganism, which defines the emerging Turkish regime that combines elements of electoral authoritarianism, neopatrimonialism, Islamism and populism" (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1813) can be a synonym of Turkish Post-Islamism. Erdoganism in this understanding is not only a personalized regime but also a party ideology reduced to a person. In fact, this argument says that the party does not have a leader, rather the leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has a party that keeps him in power as without a party it is hardly imaginable to govern a democratic country.

The Justice and Development Party in Turkey is a community with its values and preferences but it has also a leader with political goals. Post-Islamism is the ideology of the community and Erdoganism is that of the leader.

## **2.4 Ideological basis of the social and political change under the AKP rule**

The Turkish Justice and Development Party, after the stabilization of the Turkish economy in the early 2000s, wanted to promote a slow transformation of the political structure, and with these moves a change on the level of the values and behavior of the average Turkish citizen. As opposed to many Right-wing or Islamist parties of the Muslim world and the Middle East, the

AKP did not wish a direct and revolutionary metamorphosis, the Turkish ruling party was rather aimed at establishing a social and political environment that is suitable to have a pious lifestyle for the more religious masses that voted in mass for the party, and by realizing this project, this more Islamic social and political structure might be appealing for the more secular persons, too. In fact, this approach reflects the thinking that is inherent in the Islamic teachings that the religion should not be forced on the people, rather people should be called to respect and follow the religious rules. After bringing about such a social environment, the AKP became more and more radical in its approach, as well as its actual policies. The conversion of the republic from a parliamentary democracy to a more centralized presidential republic in the late 2010s is a perfect example for this shifting political methodology. A question arises though. Was this radical change the hidden and final goal of the AKP or was it the almost two decades spent in power that made the AKP desire more?

#### 2.4.1 The AKP as the antithesis of Kemalism

The ideology of the AKP tries to go against Kemalism in all aspects of life, politics and society. So, the actual policies, at least during the first term of the AKP rule, were not state-centered, elite-defined and illiberal. One can argue that the AKP is a pro-centralization political force in Turkey, and it is not possible to picture it as a non-state-centered party. In fact, the political strength and effectiveness of the AKP is unthinkable without the strong civil society sphere surrounding it. The political success of the Justice and Development Party is partially due to the revival of the pious foundations after the military coup in the 1980s. To understand this scene of Turkish society, one has to bear in mind that foundations are essential in the Muslim social construction since the Middle Ages, and in the Ottoman era, these organizations controlled the mosques, the libraries, the public baths, as well as all kinds of services designed to the poor and the needy. Atatürk, fearing their strong connection to religion and religious brotherhoods, dissolved these age-old NGOs, and they were only very slowly replaced by Western style civil society organizations launched on the model of Western and American organizations operating in interwar Turkey such as the Rockefeller Foundation and other charities. The political climate became favorable again for the foundations in the democratization processes that characterized the late 20th century. The proliferation of the Turkish civil society was a good basis for the evolution of several networks centered around Muslim scholars or secular circles, and some of them started to form the basis of the electorate of the AKP. Even today, it is not rare that these civil society

networks call upon their members to vote for a particular political party, most often the AKP. Fethullah Gulen's FETO terrorist organization, now one of the archenemies of the AKP was also originally one of these structures that grew too big and influential that fomented the escalation of a conflict between the AKP and its civil society hinterland.

The AKP openly defines itself as a party of the masses. The leaders of the party, including Erdogan himself, often like to play the role of a simple child of the people. The Turkish ruling party wants to guarantee the survival of traditional Anatolian values and social structure and often agitates against the urban elite. The AKP itself clearly confesses that they consider themselves to be the representatives of the so-called black Turks and opposes the so-called white Turks who are western and secular, and live mainly in the big cities in the western part of the country. The anti-elitism of Erdogan and the AKP is also evident in the way the Turkish ruling party behaves on the international political stage. Although originally a believer in European integration, in the 2010s he entered into more and more conflicts with the European Union and some of its member states, such as Germany and the Netherlands. While being anti-elitist, the AKP during the two decades of its rule built up its own elites that behaves perfectly the same way as the old elite of the Kemalists. So, a massive anti-elitism turned, in fact, into another form of elitism. A political force that stays so long in power, most possibly cannot avoid becoming elitist in the long run.

The opposition of Erdogan and the AKP to Ataturk's illiberalism during his twenty years in power developed as his relationship with the elites. In the early 2000s, it was clear that AKP governments were pursuing a policy that was conservative in terms of social values but liberal from an economic policy perspective. It is striking that during this period the AKP explicitly supported the inflow of foreign capital and even later stood on the ground of vigorous privatization. Due to changes in international power relations, and especially in the context of the Syrian civil war, Erdogan and the AKP have moved away from the liberal West and increasingly built partnerships with countries pursuing illiberal political practices. Of particular interest in this regard is the way in which Turkish-Russian relations developed over the twenty years and how Erdogan and Putin interacted.

The fact that ideology of the AKP is opposed to the basic tenets of Kemalism is not only a *l'art pour l'art* remonstrance but a political necessity in the contemporary political and social environment of international politics. In the 1920s and 1930s, the way Ataturk promoted his

reforms from the top of the ruling elite to the down, is no longer possible as in most countries societies are self generated. This political modernity that surpasses the old approaches of Kemalism forces both the states and the political parties to adapt themselves to a social reality in which the citizens are more active and accept less and less the orders given by the ruling elites (Cinar, 2006:471).

However, in the 1980s, after the military coup and the introduction of the new constitution, Turkish political life itself changed radically, making old-fashioned Kemalism obsolete. The content of the political right and left has been re-evaluated, the political middle has been given a new meaning. The political forces voicing criticism of the entire political elite also became sharper. In this public mood, it was no longer possible to present one or another political opinion as a "sacred truth." Many became political or anti-political. In this social and political environment, the AKP and its predecessors, by implication, sought to ride this public mood and forged political capital from the social movement of those who were dissatisfied with Kemalism (Cinar, 2006:472).

Kemalism –as a nation and state building project- was originally a hegemonic ideology that did not permit the existence of alternative ways. In the 1920s and 1930s, Kemalism was even more than a simple political ideology, it was also responsible for social construction and the realization of a superstructure that is the republic. Although there were attempts at creating several political parties at that given era, Kemalism was absolutely exclusive, and all attempts were aborted. During the lifetime of the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, his political force, the 1927 Congress of the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) defined this hegemonic ideology as republican, nationalist and populist (Ciftci, 2013:149). During the first three decades this hegemonic ideology could not be contested, the first alternative political party was founded in 1946, and the first democratic elections were held in 1950. All those ideologies, like the different forms of Islamism, Conservatism or Liberalism could arise only after these dates, and their evolution was also often interrupted by the subsequent military coups.

Republican, nationalist, and populist Kemalism views three political beliefs as its natural enemy and seeks to banish them from society as much as possible or to push them to political extremism. As long as Kemalism was truly hegemonic, Islamists, Kurdish separatists, and extremists branded aberrated by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk were made impossible. For a long time, the CHP did not establish political relations or alliances with these groups, but during the AKP

government, this trend was reversed, as the CHP was not only non-dominant, but its opposition positions also proved volatile. Thus, it may have happened that the CHP began cooperating in certain election situations with the HDP, which represents the interests of the Kurds and was often accused of separatism (Ciftci, 2013:151).

Kemalism is not fundamentally opposed to the Islamic religion, but on the one hand to the forces that conveyed Islam to the Turks and on the other hand to the specific manifestations that are the wheelbarrows of the development of the Turkish people. These are branded by Kemalists as reactive. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk realized that one of the foundations of the Islamic religion is a belief in the unity of human existence, which does not allow one to separate the state and the practice of faith within the system of religion. That is why the Turkish leadership decided in the 1920s to create an organization whose role would be to keep Muslims and Islamic faith in check. This is the Diyanet, or Governorate of Religious Affairs. Atatürk thought that since there is no church in Islam, the church cannot be separated from the state in the European sense, so there is a need for a church-like formation that exercises state control over the believing masses and acts as an authority, i.e. Muslims listen to it. From this point of view, the Islamist and reactionary is the one who opposes this organization, or wants to abolish it, so these Islamists want to return to the classical sharia law and political structure established under the Ottomans (Ciftci, 2013:152). The Turkish Justice and Development Party is not a reactionary political force in the sense that it does not oppose secularism in general, and does not want to close down the Diyanet in particular, instead of doing so, the AKP is trying to use the existing structures in order to push its political agenda and ease the Muslims in their practices. The Diyanet is a central and respected authority under the AKP governments, and is often used as a political tool, especially to convey the messages of the ruling elite to the masses, or to educate them in certain matters. The AKP realized that it was not possible to return to the sharia law or to Ottoman political structures, and the republican inventions, as well as the Kemalist ways of separating politics and religion can also serve the interests of the Muslim voters.

The Kemalists recognized that another means of controlling Islamists, in addition to establishing a central religious authority, was the nationalization of religious education. That is why traditional Muslim schools, the so-called madrasas, were banned. At the same time, they began educating young people in a Kemalist spirit, trying to pass on their modern and Western

values to them. However, they knew very well that most families were still operating on a religious moral basis and would oppose this modernization effort. The Kemalist response to this challenge was to try to exile religious values from society by all means, while at the same time yielding only partial successes in this field. Despite numerous restrictions and attempts at religious reform, many have preserved orthodox forms of religious practice at the family level and transmitted classical Islamic values. Since 2002, the AKP has built its political base primarily on these families (Ciftci, 2013:152). The AKP did not want to privatize or re-privatize religious education. As one of the main political support for the party comes from the Islamic brotherhoods, it is in the best interest of the Turkish ruling party to have them under control, and not let them educate the youth in their more sharia law-oriented spirit. To centralize religious education and to ease the Muslims at the same time, the AKP promotes religious education under state tutelage. The so-called *imam-hatip* schools training future religious prayer leaders and rhetors live their golden age, whereas institutions linked to the brotherhoods face occasional restrictions, or even are banned if they belong to movements that do not fully rally to the agenda of the AKP. This was one of the motives of the rivalry and conflict between Erdogan and FETO.

The issue of imam-hatip schools has also led to serious political and ideological upheavals in Turkey. The source of the conflict was that from these traditional imam high schools, students could essentially only get into the theological faculties of the universities, they could no longer choose a different career. Many young people were forced to leave Turkey and to go to Europe to pursue their higher education. The AKP tried to thematize the issue of higher education of students of the imam-hatip schools in such a way that its old system is discriminatory, graduates of imam-hatip grammar schools should not be forced to enter a religious career at all, they should be allowed to study further freely. At the same time, the Kemalists interpreted the situation as the AKP intervened directly in the secular education system, preferring students from religious classes (Rabasa and Larrabee, 2008:64). It is worth noting that many families and many teenagers have chosen this form of education not because they are religious or want to pursue a religious career, but because they provide a quality education alternative.

The early period of the republic was characterized by the spread of hegemony of Kemalism. From the 1950s onwards, a democratization began, as a result of which competing political parties and ideologies emerged on the stage of Turkish politics. With the AKP coming to power in 2002,



this political struggle did not end, but it became increasingly clear that the AKP and the Islamism it represented were striving for hegemony in the same way as Kemalism did in the past, and could do so because the Turkish society has traditionally conservative values, two-thirds of voters regularly vote for center-right parties. The AKP was able to build its own hegemony for the first time in the press, and from there it began to attack other actors in power to oust Kemalism as much as possible from Turkish society. The AKP has been targeting, among others, the Turkish army, a traditional external supporter of Kemalism. An organized press campaign was launched against the armed forces. The expiration, the accusations of secret conspiracies (Ergenekon, Balyoz), all served to alienate the army from society and thus weaken the political position of the Kemalist opposition. Chief of Staff Ilker Basbug also asked the media to stop psychological warfare against them (Ciftci, 2013:162). What is often referred to as the pacification or demilitarization of Turkish society was, in one sense, a political manoeuvre to ensure the positions of the AKP.

In addition to the army, the pro-government press also exposed the ruling presidential president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, to political attacks because of its Kemalist commitment, as he was a safeguard, working as brakes and counterweights that could hold back the AKP. It was quite clear that the AKP wanted to move Sezer out of his position, and they would not be satisfied with that, they would definitely put a man of their own, a reliable party cadre, in his place. Although it caused many conflicts and did not go like a hoop, the AKP finally managed to make Abdullah Gul, who was still loyal to Erdogan at the time, the President of the Republic. The point of this pull was that the AKP would eliminate one of the last bastions of Kemalist control and build its own hegemony even more (Ciftci, 2013:162).

The third remaining position of power for the Kemalist elite, along with the army and president, were opposition-oriented mayors and municipal councils. The AKP has also found a way to put pressure on these local politicians without having to win elections in those municipalities. The AKP government has launched a centrally managed audit process with the aim of uncovering possible irregularities in the functioning of municipalities (Ciftci, 2013:163). This practice led most in south-eastern Turkey to the removal of mayors from their seats by a prosecutorial decision and the temporary transfer of control of municipalities to the hands of government-loyal governors. In most cases, the leaders of these cities have been accused of



cooperating with Kurdish separatist forces, but the AKP has also been motivated to crack down on those who are either Kemalists or supporters of the PKK terrorist organization.

The AKP had to conduct two basic processes in order to finally break down the hegemony of the Kemalists and build its own. This required Recep Tayyip Erdogan's party to selectively reevaluate the past and build its own legend. Of course, that didn't mean they denied the past. On the contrary, the respect of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk persisted under the AKP's rule, no one denied his military genius and state organization, the AKP merely attempted to overshadow Ataturk's social transformation efforts that led to the restriction of Muslim existence. Although there were symbolic steps that showed that AKP politicians were ambivalent about the founder of the republic, outbursts against Ataturk, as happened in the 1950s, did not come from these moderate Islamists. "The dominant ideological scheme in Turkey (Kemalism) was contested by the AKP via its recycling of the past selectively and interpreting the present in terms of historical myths thus presenting a countermemory and a counter hegemonic discourse that would challenge the dominant rhetoric of Kemalism" (Christofis, 2018:13).

Forgetting certain elements of the past and building a new political mythology began with the introduction of a new political concept, or rather a new political communication product. This was the concept of "Yeni Turkiye" (New Turkey). The essence of Yeni Turkiye was that the AKP governments intended to carry out slow social reforms while at the same time making people increasingly forget what the reforms of Kemalism and Ataturk meant in the country's past. No one tried to deny that Kemalism was an integral part of a glorious past, but they sought to squander that nearly a century after the formation of the republic, the nation needed new ideals. In addition to the new ideals, of course, they also sought to build a new layer of social leadership. And to accept this, a new social myth against Kemalism was needed. Essentially, it was the concept of Yeni Turkiye (Christofis, 2018:14).

In the formulation of the AKP, this new ideological foundation never appears as an open and radical opposition to Kemalism, but rather paints the situation as a kind of bourgeois revolution in which a new bourgeois leadership layer is born, the ideals of which both draw on from the past and bring a new one. The new Turkish leading elite, then, essentially emphasizes its novelty and does not characterize itself as a denial of something. While the demolition of old hegemonic structures is clearly underway, the AKP does not define itself as an anti-Kemalist movement, but

wants the public to see them as modern and Western. They act just like the Kemalists themselves seventy to eighty years before. The fact that the politicians of the AKP did not apostrophose themselves as an antithesis of something is due to the fact that they have as a political goal normalization and not a democratic struggle. They want to take on conflicts in the field of the economy rather than in the matter of identity politics (Christofis, 2018:14).

Although it did not directly confront the ideology of Kemalism, the AKP successfully compromised the past. It is true that the political and economic crisis of the second half of the 1990s left many frustrated with Kemalism and the left, the result of the AKP being that an increasing proportion of Turkish voters began to see the early period of the republic as an anti-democratic and authoritarian system. Contrary to the perceived anti-democracy and authoritarianism of the past, the AKP could present itself as a new political movement starting with a clean slate. This is also indicated by the name of the party itself. The AKP is regularly referred to by party supporters as the AK Party, in which the word "ak" is both an abbreviation and means white. And white is a symbol of purity, suggesting that everyone else is corrupt, only the AKP is an untouched and fresh force. Ultimately, the emerging hegemonic ideology of the AKP is not declared anti-Kemalist, but seeks to transcend the sinful past, corruption, and crisis (Christofis, 2018:15).

As time passed and the construction of a centralized presidential republic was under way, and Turkey tried to become an influential regional power through the adventure in the Syrian civil war, the ideology of the AKP started to become openly anti-Kemalist and pro-Ottoman. In one of his speeches, Recep Tayyip Erdogan described his home country as a nation rising from its ashes. "As a discursive repertoire, presenting an image of Turkey rising from the ashes encourages the people to think of the current Turkish government as a total break with the Kemalist past and a resurrection of a glorious Ottoman history" (Christofis, 2018:18). It is true that for many Turks, the Ottoman Empire represents the glorious past, the time when they could fully live according to the Islamic values and Turkish culture. This nostalgia, in the 2000s, for a certain segment of the AKP electorate and some of the politicians, such as Ahmet Davutoglu was a good basis to promote a new ideological variety, Neo-Ottomanism. Although Neo-Ottomanism mostly influenced Turkish foreign affairs, it had also impacted the overall Turkish society. There was a false

impression among many that Turkey is once again a world power factor, so its leadership should proceed to major transformations at home, too.

Already in the first half of 2010, Erdogan's rhetoric contains more and more religious elements. Although this cannot be considered open anti-Kemalism, it is clear that secular references are being replaced by expressions of Islamic origin. It is good to know that when Atatürk used concepts known from Islamic terminology, he was just trying to articulate a critique of the Islamic world, or he wanted to give a secular meaning, that is, he wanted to reinterpret the concepts. However, when Erdogan plays on the religious register, he wants to send a message to the religious masses. Such was the case when he described reforms and the transition to a presidential system with the word "fatiha." "Fatiha" is the first chapter of the Holy Qur'an, recited by all believing Muslims a total of 17 times a day during the five prayers. With this, Erdogan wanted to say in 2014 that the new system, if not otherwise, will be Islamic in spirit. (Christoforis, 2018:18).

From the second half of the 2010s onwards, AKP ideologues ventured not only to reinterpret the Turkish past, but to begin to picture their own coming to power as a sharp caesura. According to this approach, the republican era can be divided into two parts: the age of Kemalism, which lasts until 2002, and the age of the AKP. This is interesting because we traditionally divide Turkish democracy into two stages: the one-party system lasts until 1950, and then comes the multi-party development divided by coups. The same ideologues also assume two types of people. In „ancient times“, "Homo Kemalicus" was typical. Homo Kemalicus denotes a Turkish Muslim who feels comfortable in a secular arrangement run by the state. The Yeni Türkiye program can also be interpreted as the antithesis of Homo Kemalicus and gives birth to a new type of human, which may even be called "Homo Erdoganicus" (Christoforis, 2018:19).

Since neither the AKP nor Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself want to openly oppose the person of Atatürk, nor do they want to take on the conflicts that such a decision could entail, they seek to reinterpret the person and role of Kemalism and Atatürk. Since the mid-2010s, Erdogan and the AKP have been making increasing attempts to Islamize the secular image of Atatürk. In this interpretive framework, the founder of the state does not appear as a secular politician, but as a "gazi", that is, a warrior who, in the interests of the Turkish nation and the Islamic world, successfully confronted the Western occupying forces during a sacred war. With his leadership,

the Turks actually defended the entire Muslim world community, the "umma". Not only is his „cult” therefore not questioned, but on the contrary, a new cult is being built around the person of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in which the "Gazi" is transformed into a Turkish Islamic hero. Erdogan also continually praises Atatürk in his speeches, causing no small astonishment to traditional Islamists, in whose eyes Atatürk is a red cloth, a destroyer of a state based on religious law (Christoforis, 2018:25).

While in politics the AKP and Erdogan prefer to reinterpret the Kemalist narrative, they are implementing reforms on a number of practical issues that are in stark contrast to the Kemalist worldview. This is also very visible in the field of education. Even in the early days of AKP governments, it was clear that the transmission of religious values and imam training were central elements of AKP education policy. However, after the coup attempt in 2016, the Turkish school system was placed in a new interpretive framework, which also aims at structural renewal. The failed military intervention in Turkish domestic politics gave the Turkish ruling party a chance to simultaneously end the alternative school network built through decades of hard work by Fethullah Gülen and his Hizmet movements and eliminate the Kemalist influence in public education. Some religious subjects, such as the biography of the Prophet Muhammad or the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, were introduced into high schools as optional subjects as early as 2014, only after 2016, the idea arose that so-called presidential schools to start at home and a new Turkish foundation school network to be set up abroad. The clear aim of these new institutions is to promote the AKP's hegemonic narrative (Christoforis, 2018:29).

While it is clear that the political ideology and political performance of the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan run counter to Kemalism in many respects, the above paragraphs also show that they do not always engage in open conflicts and go beyond Atatürk reforms, nor the whole system of institutions built by the founder of the state. In many cases, only the past and the institutional system are reinterpreted. It is striking, for example, that they leave Diyanet, the central religious authority, undisturbed. Although Atatürk created Diyanet precisely to exercise strong political control over the believing masses, the Erdogans have no problem with this, apparently. In fact, both Erdogan and the AKP want to exercise control over the electorate by presenting religious legal opinions to religious people as interpreted as authority. The system preserves the Kemalist structure not out of cowardice, but out of practical reasons and political calculation. This, in turn,

allows for the approach that the politics of the AKP, as the antithesis of Kemalism, is actually seen as a kind of post-Kemalism. This post-Kemalism, if its aims are to preserve certain elements of the Atatürk regime, puts them in a new, Islamic perspective. In other cases, however, radical reforms are carried out if the decision-makers of the AKP are not afraid of encountering social resistance (Tombus and Aygenc, 2017:78).

In this post-Kemalist political system, therefore, Diyanet was not abolished, but explicitly strengthened. According to 2015 data, this ministerial style central office is the eighth largest beneficiary of the Turkish budget, with more than 5.7 billion Turkish lira at its disposal. The number of Diyanet employees has also doubled under AKP governance. Their number increased from 74.000 to 141.000. (Tombus and Aygenc, 2017:79) A huge, well-paid and bureaucratic power structure has developed from the Kemalist Diyanet, which controls the country's religious life well, uniting and at the same time restraining Muslim fraternal communities. Moreover, it is exerting increasing influence abroad through Diyanet's Western European branch foundations. Conflicts have arisen in many EU Member States, with several countries either seeking to ban foreign funding for mosques (e.g. from Turkey) or seeing locally trained imams instead of prayer leaders unable to speak Western languages and representing the political interests of the Turkish state.

There are, in fact, sharper criticisms of Diyanet from two groups, and they often say that it should be eliminated. Such are the old-fashioned Islamists who think Diyanet is a barrier to the Islamization of Turkish society. Likewise, this circle also includes certain religious minorities, especially the Alevis, who have always regarded Diyanet employees as limiting their religious affiliation. When in 2015, on behalf of the Alevis, the opposition, namely the HDP, proposed to liquidate Diyanet, it was not the Kemalists who stood up most fiercely in defense of the organization, but Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself. The reason for this was that Diyanet, in its current form, serves the political interests of the AKP very well. In other words, even then, Erdogan did not view this authority as a remnant of a "sinful past" but as an integral part of modern public administration. Because of his support for Diyanet, it can also be said that when Erdogan and the AKP criticize the CHP, reform the secular state, it wants to be its antithesis, it preserves a lot of it, so it can also be called a post-Kemalist political movement (Tombus and Aygenc, 2017:79).

So far in this chapter, it has been said about Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP that they were building a new hegemonic system based on a specific and novel narrative. So far, I have referred to this ideological framework as the hegemonic ideology of the AKP, the antithesis of Kemalism, or post-Kemalism. The question rightly arises as to whether Erdogan's role is central to this ideology or not, as it is more or less at odds with the past hallmarked by Ataturk. The main argument to prove that the term Erdoganism can be correct and accurate is that it is a structure built around a person, like systems established around the Sultan or Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Erdoganism in this sense is not a personal cult, or a person's private system, but an ideological and practical framework that would be unthinkable without Erdogan. (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1813). The characteristics of Erdoganism as a political ideology will be discussed under the third point of this chapter.

#### 2.4.2 The AKP as the anti-thesis of Traditional Islamism

By traditional islamism, I understand the old approach of the Muslim policy-makers, in the political parties preceding AKP or in other countries of the Muslim World, that seek a social change by implementing radical alterations in society and politics. Opposed to this concept, the contemporary or more enlightened islamism as promoted by the Justice and Development Party tries to upgrade the individual, and based on the desire of these more pious persons, transforms the society.

Within the global Islamist movement, many local and regional variants can be encountered. Although they are similar in some respects, there may even be a name match, as in the case of the Turkish and Moroccan Justice and Development Parties, but there are a number of differences between them. All this is true even if some Islamist forces, especially those belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood community, form a loose international network. For a long time, a part of the Islamic world was characterized by a kind of state Islamism. In some Arab countries, the state helped certain Islamist movements in exchange for their political support. In doing so, the respective governments also achieved that the religious masses became divided, making it easier for them to exercise state control over them. It has been characteristic of some states in the Middle East since the 1970s that political leadership has circumvented Salafi-inspired hardline Islamists against Sufi-affiliated more moderate groups (Cavdar, 2006:486). In Turkey, this process was not observable, as the state was still organized according to Kemalist principles at that time, and

Salafism had minimal social support. Sufi brotherhoods were much more significant and have remained to this day, the influence of "tarika" movements impact Turkish politics to a very large extent. In the 1980s, in the spirit of the new constitution, religiously affiliated foundations known from Ottoman times were reorganized; they were often backed by Sufi masters. These Sufi circles are perhaps the strongest and most easily mobilized electoral base for moderate Islamists.

Although this chapter will basically discuss the moderate and reformist Islamism of the AKP and Erdogan as opposed to classical Islamism, shortly after the 2001 split within the Islamist party family, the divide between AKP and some Muslim movements loosely attached to Sufism began also in the 2000s, or there was even an entire community that did not stand behind the AKP at all. In the early days of the government, military intervention in northern Iraq, an attack on Kurdish terrorists in that region, caused one of the important conflicts within Islamists. Sahin Alpay, a publicist for the Zaman daily associated with FETO, for example, puts it as the "beginning of the end," and it is clear from his lines that some FETO activists were already disappointed in the AKP by this time (Cavdar, 2006:494). The subsequent rift between Hizmet and AKP can thus be traced back to a long historical past, however, this division was not visible to the general public for some time. For the final break-up of Hizmet and AKP will have to wait until 2010. Followers of another influential Muslim fraternal community, the students of Suleyman Hilmi Tunahan, were perhaps the second largest such formation after the Hizmet in the 2000s. Although the former leaders of the movement, the Denizolgun brothers, were originally Islamists, one of the brothers even got a ministerial wallet in one of the previous governments, no longer played a role in the AKP's coming to power, they were supporting a smaller secular party, the Democrats.

Since even in Islamism, the so-called "couleur locale" can be observed, there are well-perceived national peculiarities, it is no wonder that we can speak of a separate Turkish Islamist tradition. This tradition has in the past been represented in Turkey by parties such as Refah and Fazilet, which were characterized by strong Muslim identities, they also engaged in sharp conflicts on behalf of Islam, and it is largely due to this behavior that they were banned after a relatively short period of operation. The AKP clearly wanted to break with this past because its politicians recognized that from a realist political point of view, it was not pragmatic to fight these conflicts for the sake of rhetorical achievements alone. Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his party decided not to



make open references to the Islamic religion to give as few attack surfaces as possible to the Kemalists (Cavdar, 2006:479).

In the Turkish Islamist movement, the final rift between old-fashioned Islamists and modern-minded Muslim Democrats took place in 2001. Those who clung to Necmettin Erbakan and the principles he represented, the Milli Görüş, formed the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, SP), which has come a long way in the last 20 years but has always opposed the political direction of Erdogan and the AKP. The AKP understood that with this outdated approach, one could not become a mass party and would be unable to address the masses of ordinary people in Anatolia. It was for this reason and consciously that they led the process of popular partisanship, at the end of which today's ruling party was able to prove itself to be moderate, and united many large and heterogeneous social groups (Cinar, 2006:474).

The fact that the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan broke up with hardliners of the Felicity party, including his own master, Necmettin Erbakan, and that the party's tone was moderate and avoided open Islamist references, political science began to say that the Turkish ruling party became characterized by a kind of "new thinking". The AKP's way of thinking began to be called "revolutionary" because it was clearly driven by political opportunism and not by vague social engineering ideas. Erdogan's moderate Islamism focused on making the political agenda feasible, not on what ideal society the party's intellectual leadership dreamed of. This moderate Islamism is not just for domestic use. One of Erdogan's fundamental aims at the time was to accept with the countries of the European Union that a Muslim-majority people could exist within a democratic framework, and that Turkey's European integration was not hampered by the fact that the country was ruled by a conservative political force (Cavdar, 2006:480).

The ideological development of the AKP, its initial moderate Islamism, was seriously influenced not only by European integration, but also by the United States. Erdogan and the other leaders of the AKP were equally impacted by the Europeans and the Americans. Americanization has a long tradition in Turkey anyway, so it is not surprising that even the conservative right is able to come under the cultural and political influence of its overseas allies. The formation of the AKP was also followed with interest from America, and many Americans probably agreed with the summary that the Turkish daily *Hurriyet* conveyed to them that a more moderate tone of the emerging AKP was the best antidote to the rise of more radical Islamists (Tugal, 2007:19).



In the first half of the 2000s, the fact that the party politicized in an acceptable way on the international stage played a major role in the overseas acceptance of the AKP. According to U.S. governments, the radical demands of Islamists have been dissolved in the party's all-encompassing moderate character. The U.S. administration also appreciated Turkey's commitment to excellent cooperation with the Pentagon under AKP governance. Regardless of the political direction, Turkey's North Atlantic commitment was still clear at the time. The role of the Turkish army did not change in the early 2000s, either in managing international conflicts or in controlling domestic political life. The demilitarization of Turkish society took place only in the second half of the 2010s, and most of all after the 2016 coup attempt. The Americans also liked that the Turkish government is business-minded and supports foreign capital investment in the country, including helping Western capitalists in privatization. Probably not only the Americans got to know and acknowledge the efforts of the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, but the AKP also responded well to some Western and global trends. Among other things, they realized that the general religious revival in the West after the fall of the Berlin Wall favored moderate Islamist politicization (Tugal, 2007:34).

The rift between the two Islamist trends has revived the reformist intelligentsia behind the AKP. Ali Bulac and his circle set out to organize the party's intellectual hinterland. They published new magazines and newspapers to ensure that the AKP had a forum for internal discussions and that they could reach a wider audience. As early as 2002, it was observed that the sharpest controversy developed around the concept of "new Islamism." Incidentally, this skeptical circle was opposed to the direction of the party leadership in several cases. Some writings also made sharp criticisms of liberal democracy and the market economy, while the official position of the AKP was precisely that they were conservative reformers who respected liberal democracy and professed explicitly liberal economic policy principles (Cavdar, 2006:482). In retrospect, however, the intelligentsia preceded its age and outlined a political philosophy that, while not influencing the AKP in the early 2000s, defined political public thinking a decade later.

In addition to building its own hinterland in terms of the intelligentsia and the press, the AKP has done its utmost to gain the support of economic actors. The main supporter of the moderate Islamist occupation of the economy was MUSAID, an organization of independent businessmen that offered an alternative to the other long-standing grouping, TUSIAD. The

membership of the two organizations was clearly separated along political and ideological lines. TUSIAD was and still belongs to secular and Kemalist investors tied to the old elite. In contrast, MUSIAD members are more conservative and religious, although they also supported the liberal economic policies of AKP governments in the 2000s. MUSIAD also has serious propaganda potential. To this day, it is typical of its ability to mobilize a large number of business actors to support the ruling party. This association has sometimes come under crossfire from political attacks because it has advocated Islamic-rooted trade patterns and forms of funding. The head of the National Security Service, for example, once accused the president of MUSIAD of inciting hatred among the people by adhering to religious-based economic policy principles (Cavdar, 2006:484).

MUSIAD embodied Islamist principles much more clearly as early as the 2000s than the AKP. This situation can also be interpreted as that this association of businessmen has said a lot of things that politicians could not have said out of their mouths at that time. Perhaps it can also be said that the AKP made MUSIAD state what did not fit into the party's profile at the time. MUSIAD's famous 2006 call no longer only contains clear religious references, but also lists some of the practical demands of believing Muslims. The two most controversial statements in this writing were that MUSIAD advocated the Islamic principle that interest is a sin and is forbidden, and called on the government to oblige mall operators to set up prayer rooms in their facilities if they are larger than 3,000 square meters. In addition, MUSIAD also draws attention to the fact that the consumer society typical of the West is dangerous for millions living along traditional Muslim values (Rabasa and Larrabee, 2008:53).

According to Erdogan and the AKP's political philosophy, social reforms are needed and can only be implemented if they have the necessary social support, that is, society is prepared for them. In the debates around the Islamic headscarf, he articulated this position markedly when he stressed the importance of the principle of gradation in Islamic theology. He did not say that the use of headscarves should be allowed immediately, but that easing the Muslim women should be introduced step by step. He argued that the Holy Qur'an itself, the holy book of Muslims, was revealed not all at once but in 23 years. He added that the ban on alcohol has also gradually become a cornerstone of Islamic religious law. Erdogan made it clear that the modern Islamism he represents does not want to change people's lives by transforming society, as the political forces

affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood believe in the Arab countries, but to reform man first and only later society itself (Ciftci, 2013:165).

Of course, the principle of gradation has not been implemented in all cases. One of the most glaring examples of this political contradiction is the failed attempt by Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2004 to criminalize adultery. Paradoxically, the criminalization of infidelity would have taken place in the context of a legal reform, one of the aims of which would have been to prepare for European integration. One of the preconditions for negotiations with the European Union was for Turkey to amend its outdated Penal Code. The AKP majority smuggled the impugned passage into this package of laws, which immediately provoked the anger of the Kemalists and filled with suspicion those who had previously considered the Justice and Development Party to be moderate. Eventually, Erdogan accepted that this law would not be voted on by the legislature until agreed by the Kemalist opposition. According to contemporary news commentators, the reality behind the original idea was that the more conservative wing of the party put pressure on the prime minister to pursue a more radical Islamist policy (Rabasa and Larrabee, 2008:55). This case also contributed to the fact that in the 2007 elections, the AKP no longer launched its more radical politicians as candidates.

Contrary to old forms of Islamist conception, in the 2000s the AKP sought to formulate a Turkish Islamic synthesis. This synthesis simultaneously draws on the ethnic and cultural heritage of Turkey, the interaction of Turkey with other Muslim peoples, the great past performance of Turkish Muslims, as well as the basic teachings of the Islamic religion. In this approach, the Islamic religion and Turkish culture are considered equal treasures. At the level of rhetoric, this approach is in many cases inclusive, makes gestures towards ethnic and religious minorities, but at the same time is in practice quite exclusive and builds on the narratives of the Turkish ethnic and Sunni religious majority (Christoforis, 2018:14). Although AKP governments grant limited freedoms to the Kurds (see policy of Kurdish opening) and allow the Alevis to self-organize more than the pre-emptive leadership, including the Kemalists, major national projects are carried out according to the tastes of the Sunni Turkish majority. Those who are not in the focus of this new kind of Islamism can often feel excluded from the entire Turkish nation.

AKP by its self-definition was originally not Islamist. During the initial period of government, i.e. between 2002 and 2008, no references that would have linked the party to Muslim

identity were made. At that time, AKP supporters saw themselves as reformers or conservatives, and this self-determination was largely accepted by both the public and the literature. Of course, even then, there were voices warning that the Turkish ruling party could be radicalized and move in a more pronounced Islamist direction. The initial goal of the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan was to put in place a civilian and military elite capable of working effectively with the United States and the European Union by pushing Kemalism into the background. This means that they did not want to appear to be a moderate Islamist, they did not emphasize that they broke with the Erbakan hardliners, but they proved to be practical and opportunistic, for whom political action was more important than ideological foundations (Mufti, 2014:34).

At the same time, it is also clear that, in addition to practical politicization, ideological foundations have been continuously strengthened. The AKP's intellectual workshops sought to answer the question of how to reconcile politicization with Islam and democracy. This thinking became central to the fact that the leaders of the AKP had ambitious plans and thought that this particularly Turkish form of Islamic democracy could be developed into a model. In doing so, they wanted to get the political leaders of the Middle East and the Turkish Republic to see fantasy in this project and to try to implement it in their own country. They looked at this approach as a real political product, which they thought could also pave the way for a political transition in the Arab world (Mufti, 2014:34).

Recep Tayyip Erdogan originally enthusiastically received the news of the Arab Spring and welcomed the awakening freedom movements in the Islamic world. In the early days of the Arab Spring, Erdogan advocated democratization in the Middle East, demanding more freedoms and respect for human rights from the leaders of the new political regimes emerging in place of failed systems. At a conference in 2011, in Cairo, in the Egyptian capital, Erdogan spoke of the glorious past of the Islamic world, but its present is all the more frustrating, even though there is serious potential in the Islamic and Arab worlds (Mufti, 2014:37). The sequence of events in the Arab Spring has, of course, roughly refuted this vain dream.

By the early 2010s, AKP leaders had already taken on their Muslim identity much more openly. This was driven not only by the euphoria from the Arab Spring, but also by the growing sense that Muslim masses and Islamic core values were being threatened by the way the West intervened in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. In the 2010s, Western media and public discourse

were also increasingly dominated by the misconceptions that Islam is inherently violent and Muslims are all terrorists. They wanted to counterbalance this false image by pointing out that true Islam is peaceful and tolerant. Both the Muslim identity and classical Islamism have been brought closer to the direction of the AKP for this practical reason. An important difference remained, however, and at that time the AKP still turned out to be a moderate Islamist political movement. And this was because classical Islamists represented the radical social-transforming aspect of religion, while the AKP worked precisely to establish a “human-faced” Islamism (Mufti, 2014:34).

The moderate Islamism of the AKP has also undergone a major change due to the character development of its political actors. In many cases, party leaders were religious intellectuals who chased ideals and lacked the skills to plan strategy and think in a realistic way politically. As they spent more and more time in power, they had to realize that their moderate Islamist ideals could not be realized in many cases due to social and political constraints. Pragmatism, therefore, began to influence Islamist discourse and practice. To this kind of ideological trap situation, it can be said that a particular bureaucratic Islamism began to become a feature of the Turkish ruling party and within the government (Mufti, 2014:34). Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s personality is interesting in this regard because it combines ideological grounding and strategic thinking. Other leaders, such as Abdullah Gul, are less practical and consequently ousted from the top political leadership.

Within the framework of the Party of Justice and Development, a completely different kind of political learning process can be observed, too, and its history can be traced back to the political crisis of the 1990s. It is about the fact that Turkish Islamist politicians understood much more about their own failures than about their own successes. The main common experience of failure of politicians belonging to the Turkish Islamist party family was when the Fazilet party, led by Recai Kutan, suffered a severe defeat in the elections in April 1999, shrinking to become the third largest political party on the Turkish political palette. This has been experienced by party leaders in such a way that the movement is incapable of renewal, will not be able to lead the country out of the deep political-economic crisis, so it can easily become insignificant. The response to this shock was that a fundamentally different and more moderate party was formed in 2001, the AKP. Even after joining the government in 2002, failure motivated the AKP to fight further than successes. This was roughly the case until the events in Gezi Park, which marked the first open

conflict between increasingly less moderate Islamists and dissatisfied sections of society (Cavdar, 2006:481).

In 2007, the AKP also had to deal with the last counterattack of Kemalism, as the old elite attempted to try to ban the Justice and Development Party. At the same time, the description of the Islamist threat by the "ancien régime" also shows well that a distinction can be made between classical and radical Islamism and the AKP's direction at the time. While Chief of Staff Yasar Buyukanit has portrayed AKP governance as the greatest possible threat to the secular state since the republic was formed in 1923, President Ahmet Necdet Sezer has only warned that the AKP is trying to turn the secular republic into a moderate Islamist republic. This also shows that even some of the Kemalists have recognized that there is a fundamental difference between the worldviews of Erbakan and Erdogan (Mufti, 2014:35).

The year 2007 is also key because not only did the last Kemalist attacks on the party take place at that time, but also with the AKP sent a message with its election candidates to those who were uncertain about whether the AKP represents more moderate or extremist Islamism. What happened was that the AKP recalled 200 candidates who were considered too conservative or radical Islamist by the Turkish public. They were replaced by Liberal, Western-minded individuals and members belonging to the left-wing of the party. Thus, in the post-2007 parliamentary term, a rather liberal faction of the AKP was formed in the TBMM, and this also had a serious impact on the legislative work (Rabasa and Larrabee, 2008:54). The radicalization of the 2010s can therefore also be interpreted as a response to this smaller liberal turn.

The rift within the Turkish Islamist party family in 2001 and the overwhelming victory of the AKP in 2002 can also be summed up as the rebellion of the pragmatists. Two key figures, two later presidents, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gul, also concluded that Erbakan's hard-line policy will only lead to further failures and that the Turkish Islamist party family needs reform. In essence, it was Abdullah Gul who first articulated that, within the framework of liberal democracy, only a right-wing party that sees Helmut Kohl's German Christian Democrats as an example to follow could be successful. This concept was essentially about implementing a Muslim Democratic movement that would embark on a bumpy road of forming a popular party. The moderate transition eventually became so marked that even the word Muslim fell short of the self-definition, the AKP began to see itself as a movement of conservative reformers. And these

conservative reformers counterpointed in all respects and eventually defeated the radicals grouped around Necmettin Erbakan under the name of Felicity Party (Bubalo et al., 2008:87).

#### 2.4.3 AKP Rule as Erdoganism

Recep Tayyip Erdogan's specific political thinking may have become a marked and well-defined political ideology as of today, but in the early 1990s, he was professing that no way of thinking could become monopolistic in Turkey. Opposing Kemalism, Erdogan said in a 1993 speech that „there is no place for Kemalism or any other official ideology in Turkey”. From the rejection of Kemalism as a state ideology, the later Prime Minister and President of the Republic have come a long way in building his own system of ideas that excludes other ideologies (Castaldo, 2018:475).

Erdoganism as an independent political ideology owes its existence to the fact that Recep Tayyip Erdogan recognized at the turn of the millennium that the "Milli Gorus" view system inherited from the 1970s is not necessarily compatible with modern liberal democracy and respect for human rights. For Erdogan, liberal democracy and respect for human rights were not fundamentally ideological but practical considerations, as the aim was for Turkey to join the European Union, for which the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria was essential. Joining the Union is itself a practical goal, as European integration would be able to guarantee the human rights of Muslims in Turkey in all circumstances. Even if the Kemalists return after a change of government. It can also be said that human rights include the rights of Muslims, so it is in the interest of Muslims to respect them (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1816). At the same time, human rights are a much broader concept, and in the course of Erdogan's exercise of power, Erdogan is in many cases in conflict with them when it comes to the rights of another group, not Muslims.

Erdoganism is a political ideology that does not place ideology at the center of political thinking. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the formation of the AKP was led by the revolt of political pragmatists. This is why Erdoganism emerged as a mixture of pragmatic change and moderate tone in the early 2000s. Pragmatism also includes the ability of Recep Tayyip Erdogan to redefine himself in a way that suits the situation, to accept himself with the masses of voters at home and with partners abroad. In the early 2000s, he managed to convince people that he had changed, and became a true and faithful Democrat who became a Democrat for democracy itself. Erdogan's ever-changing self-esteem paves the way for the emergence of a pragmatic ideology on



the one hand, and on the other, support from members of groups (Kurds, right-wing liberals, and members of the Hizmet movement) who have traditionally voted for non-Islamist forces. This politicization also allowed Erdogan to accept himself as an equal partner with the European Union (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1816).

Erdoganism not only changes itself depending on the situation, but also forces actors in its political environment to change. An integral part of Erdoganism is that Recep Tayyip Erdogan is constantly putting pressure on one segment or another of society. Roughly since 2007, it can be said that it finds different targets and tries to transform them gradually. An example of this is the case of the 2010 referendum, which focused on a number of significant constitutional changes. Erdogan then considered the judiciary to be the main obstacle to build his full power, so he asked for voter confirmation that the organization of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court be redefined so as not to hinder the centralization efforts of the executive. In this series of steps, of course, pragmatic thinking, which is the basis of Erdoganism, can be seen in action (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1816).

In 2011, the AKP could win the third national elections in a row, and their government was even more autonomous than the previous ones, the old Kemalist elite or the military could not prevent their political actions. This election secured their position and led Erdoganism to develop into a more centralized regime that can be termed as electoral authoritarianism. “An important feature of Erdoganism is ‘electoral authoritarianism’. Electoral authoritarian regimes have three common characteristics: an uneven playing field for the opposition, elections that are neither fair nor free, and a widespread crackdown on fundamental freedoms” (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1816).

The Turkish electoral system was designed to provide a more stable government with a strong mandate. This goal is best guaranteed by the extremely high entry threshold of 10%. This rigorous electoral system was needed in Turkey because during the 1990s, the country experienced a protracted political crisis resulting from the fragmentation of parliament and the ever-changing composition of coalition governments. In addition, the continuing inability to govern was leading to a deepening economic crisis. Many analysts also pointed out in the past that this system, which was introduced before the AKP's first success, may have been motivated by the wish of stripping the Kurdish minority of parliamentary representation. Eventually, the 2010 elections refuted this



thesis, and the Kurdish-friendly HDP crossed the entry threshold several times. It is certain that, in this system, the winner carries everything, as strong winner compensation is needed for the stability of the government. This system, of course, means that parties with a stable social base are difficult to “blow out” from power. Now this method favors the AKP, but in a given case it would also concretize the left-wing People’s Party into power, and this is really uneven for the opposition (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1817).

In the era of Erdoganism, this Turkish electoral system cannot be said to be completely free and fair. The main reason behind this fact is not winning compensation itself, but the predominance of the governing party in many areas of life. Winning compensation is not an AKP invention, the party can only live with and abuse this tool extremely skillfully. The main problem is that the AKP's hegemonic system has placed the party's cadres in a number of key positions and the AKP's advantage can also be clearly seen in the subsystems serving the political system. It can be said that most critical media outlets and critical voices today have been silenced by pro-government civil servants. Of course, there are still high-volume newspapers that can be called independent and objective, there are also opposition news portals that generate high reach, but much of the news market is dominated by the AKP, and the public discourse is thematized by the AKP. This one-sidedness will not make the electoral system fair (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1817).

Strong action against fundamental human rights was not at all typical in the first decade of AKP governance. Governments led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan first lost their patience during the Gezi Park protests. The government responded to the protests organized by environmentalists, activists opposing city planning and opposition activists with unprecedented force, which, of course, also provoked violence on the opposite side. During the protests in the Gezi Park, the AKP government eventually took practical steps and took control of the situation, so the restriction of liberties was only sporadic. The 2016 coup attempt, as the riot itself was extremely violent, resulted in a much tougher response. And since then, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has not been shy either, in many cases exercising the powers conferred on him during the state of emergency imposed after the aborted military intervention. Today, Erdoganism, albeit not explicitly, accepts that in exceptional cases some civil rights can be restricted (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1818).

The economic philosophy of Erdoganism is essentially based on the fact that there is no sharp separation between public and private property in Turkey. This means that the public sector, the decision-makers, significantly determines who can get property that generates significant revenue in the private sector. The privatization process is top-down, with the transfer of state property to private hands (for example in coal mining or sugar production) serving to build both a new national bourgeoisie and a clientele loyal to the AKP. The Turkish market economy is characterized not only by the fact that the wealth of some traditional circles of investors is passed down from generation to generation, but also by the fact that a new capitalist with good relations with power can easily become rich, thus becoming a rival to the old economic elite. This ultimately means that in Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey an entrepreneur can gain significant wealth in two ways: through inheritance within the family and through benefit from power. This system is often labeled as Neopatrimonialism. „Neopatrimonialism has been an integral feature of the Erdoganist regime in Turkey. A ‘neopatrimonial system’ can be defined as ‘a mixture of two co-existing, partly interwoven, types of domination: namely patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination’ (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1819).

Erdoganist Neopatrimonialism is an economic structure that is archaic in some ways but contains many modern elements in other ways. One of these novel social phenomena is that all this has led to the networking of actors in the Turkish economy. Entrepreneurs who are controlled from above, but who cooperate and compete with each other in various ways, try to make as much profit as possible, but at the same time they do not forget that they have a responsibility to the society and to the power elite that brings them wealth. These entrepreneurs usually also appear among the sponsors of civil society and provide financial support to those in need, and the ones who are the losers of economic change. The government itself builds on these social processes, using the new entrepreneurial and civic strata to conduct charitable actions. This ultimately leads to the fact that the welfare system itself mainly serves client building. In return for subsidies, these layers vote significantly for the AKP (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1819). The fact that the AKP was able to increase its electoral base from election to election in the first decade of its government can be explained precisely by the fact that with these benefits, Islamists have essentially conquered an important segment of society. Of course, this also required the previous governments to neglect the social sphere and infrastructure development.

The privatization of Turkish charity is in many cases carried out with the help of so-called GONGO organizations. GONGO stands for Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization and refers to foundations and associations that political leaders create to achieve their own political, economic, and social goals. Formally, these organizations are indeed civilians, but their entire operation is aimed at supporting government work, complementing it. GONGOs, such as TURGEV, do not contribute to the democratization of Turkey, on the contrary, they disguise centralization by promoting organizations that act as government agencies though they pose as civilians (Diner, 2018:103).

Some of the civil society and charitable activities were "privatized" by Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself. Back in 1996, before the AKP was formed, he established a non-governmental organization called TURGEV, the Turkish Youth and Education Service Foundation. To this day, the leaders of TURGEV come from within the inner circle of the Erdogan family, and the President of the Republic still exercises close supervision over it. Following the success of the AKP at the 2002 election, TURGEV also took an active role in privatizing the Turkish welfare system and building AKP clientele. TURGEV raises huge amounts of donations from entrepreneurs who have been provided by AKP governments with significant wealth and business opportunities. This form of operation essentially means that the government gives and takes, but not for itself, but for the lagging strata of society (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1820).

TURGEV serves not only to reorganize Turkish civil society and Turkish welfare services in an Erdoganist way, but also to spread Erdoganism abroad, to gain AKP overseas influence. The best example of this is that in 2017, TURGEV established a Turkish private university in Lanham, Maryland, USA, named Ibn Haldun. Ibn Haldun University is located in the center of Diyanet, the American foundation of the Turkish religious authority, in the immediate vicinity of the largest Turkish mosque in the United States (Yayla, 2019:92). The founding of the university is a good indication of the intertwining of Erdogan's private foundation, TURGEV, and a foreign subsidiary of a Turkish public body. One can observe the feature of Neopatrimonialism that the Turkish public and private sectors are not sharply separated. In addition, Ibn Haldun University is an advocate of the ideology of Erdoganism in a foreign country, contributes to the ideological training of American Turkish youth, and seeks to influence American public opinion as well.

TURGEV and similar pro-government NGOs not only serve practical purposes, but also exemplify serious ideological aspirations. TURGEV is not only working on charitable and educational projects, but also on a kind of restoration of the “glorious” Ottoman past. As it is known, in the Ottoman era, and so in general, in medieval Islamic systems, a significant role was attributed to the foundations of believing communities. Indeed, they organized charitable activities next to their faith-related deeds, and they also operated public baths, libraries and similar community institutions. When the form of foundation became popular again in Turkey from the 1980s onwards, many old foundations were re-established and several Muslim Sufi spiritual masters formed new organizations following Ottoman examples. Supporting foundations by the AKP governments like TURGEV strengthens Ottoman nostalgia as well as Turkish Sunni Muslim identity. The ruling party seeks to instill in them a sense that they are the heirs of a great empire and are able to revive the progressive traditions of the past in the present. According to the Erdoganist narrative, with the state support of these foundations, it is possible for the country to regain its former glory (Yilmaz, 2021:15).

Erdoganism is clearly populist in terms of the relationship between the masses of voters and the political elite. Although Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself has been a member of the Turkish political elite for decades, he successfully makes the people believe that he embodies the rebellion against the elite, he is the child of the people and the voice of the people (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1820). Erdogan is able to play on the emotions of this kind of people because Turkish society is extremely divided, as if there were two peoples: a Kemalist and an Erdoganist. Of course, only those close to him are affected by Erdogan's populism. Those being close to Erdogan do not mind the decline of the “ancien régime”, the old Kemalist elite, the world of white Turks.

Turkish society has traditionally been divided, and Erdoganism only reinforces this situation and deepens more and more gaps between different social groups. The primary method for this is pointing fingers at an enemy. In Erdogan's rhetoric, the opposite pair of “we” and “them” appears very often. While “we” are always the right people, the honest ones, and serving the interests of the community, “they” are the bad and immoral people, the erring and the traitors. Erdogan in many cases uses strong and derogatory adjectives to name those he opposes. When choosing these terms, he also takes care to indicate that he is at the head of the majority, the opposite side, he says, is just a small minority (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1820). Perhaps the best

example of this is one of his speeches during the Gezi Park protests, in which he called opponents of real estate development at Taksim Square "three or five bandits" (uc-bes capulcu in Turkish). This insulting and de-honestating phrase immediately set fire to the opposition, with many left-wing and environmentalist users adding the word "capulcu" to their names on social media.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his political communication showed populist elements even before the formation of the AKP, he often referred to the people with preference in the 1990s. The memory of this age-old populism is reflected by later moments, too. In 2007, commemorating the 1997 postmodern military coup, Erdogan in a speech put it that the republic could be defended not by the institutions but only by the "people". Under institutions, he made a reference to the military officers defending Kemalism. Erdogan tried to sharpen the opposition between the people and the military by saying the „people” he meant his own followers, while the Turkish armed forces were still considered by everyone to be the main defenders of Ataturk’s principles (Cay, 2019:93).

Recep Tayyip Erdogan proved in 2016 that he is not only populist and charismatic, but he can really make an impact on the people (Cay, 2019: 94). During the turbulent hours of the coup attempt, he signed up from a smartphone on the newscast of a loyal TV station. In a short and impromptu speech, he asked his followers to go down to the streets and squares and defend Turkish democracy. Some today interpret this as Erdogan endangering his own people, more than 200 of whom were killed by the rioters. At the same time, it is also clear that huge crowds, according to some estimates, of up to millions of people across the country have responded to the call. The success of the crowd, Erdogan’s populism, may have surprised the coupists and may have helped defeat the coup attempt. The Erdoganist masses mobilized by Erdogan’s populism remained on the streets for days, guarding strategically important points, and apostrophizing themselves as defenders of democracy. Erdogan had a greater mobilizing power than the grouping that rose up against him, so his populism helped Erdogan to survive (politically).

Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s populism was also very noticeable in the run-up to the 2007 failed presidential election. After the ruling party in the Grand Turkish National Assembly was unable to guarantee a majority alongside its own candidate, Abdullah Gul, and the whole procedure led to a serious political crisis that only an early election could solve, Erdogan lost his patience and angrily referred to the people when a compromise became impossible with the opposition. Erdogan refused to compromise and argued throughout the crisis that it was not the political elite but the

people who should elect the president of the republic. When the then leader of the opposition, Deniz Baykal, also mentioned that Erdogan was unwilling to compromise and thus the national assembly was unable to elect a candidate who held the trust of both the government and the opposition, Erdogan asked back. He said that in Turkish history there was only one such consensual leader, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. He also added that there has never been a need for compromise in the presidential election since Ataturk passed away. He called this whole process the opposite of democracy and tried to convince the electorate that the Kemalist elite would do everything in their power to make Abdullah Gul, the popular and jovial politician, the first dignity in the republic (Dincsaahin, 2012:634).

With regard to Erdoganism, it has once been said that, from an economic point of view, one of its characteristic features is top-down privatization, in which a businessman loyal to the party and willing to donate acquires a stake in a once state-owned company. It was also mentioned that one of the typical sectors was coal mining, in which this process took place. The privatization of coal mining in this form, and the complete neglect of the mines, led to perhaps the most serious tragedy of the era of AKP governments, the 2014 Soma mining disaster. The accident, which claimed the lives of 301 miners, could not be separated from politics, the Erdogan government had to take political responsibility for the incident. Recep Tayyip Erdogan could only survive this challenge in a political sense by reaching out again to the tool of populism. Interestingly, while Erdogan's populist explanation was widely accepted in the country, and the disaster had no effect on the AKP's national election results in July 2015, in Soma, the AKP had to face a significant decline, a loss of about 10%. However, this loss of popularity was only short-lived. In a repeat vote in November 2015, the AKP regained its lost supporters, and in the 2017 referendum, more people supported Erdogan's constitutional amendment proposals than the national average, although in 2014, the day after the tragedy, almost all residents of Soma blamed him for the high number of casualties (Adaman et al., 2019: 526).

Incidentally, the entire Turkish population is sensitive to populist ideology, and especially populist rhetoric. Populist phrases are frequent not only in the speeches of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, but also in the oral interventions of opposition leaders, and it depends on political challenges how often they use this manipulative tool. A quantitative analysis of nearly 600 speeches by Turkish public figures showed that, overall, Erdogan makes the most use of this tool, but in his case, too,

how much he wants to influence people's emotions and instincts will change over time. According to this study, it can be concluded that Erdogan was above average populist between 2014 and 2017, which may have contributed to the development of the coup situation and its subsequent management. By 2017, Erdogan had stabilized his situation, so he needed less to be populist. In parallel, populist statements have become increasingly common in the speeches of opposition CHP and HDP politicians (Elci, 2019:388).

In the last two decades, there have been two cataclysmic events in Turkish history that have had a strong impact on the speeches and actions of political leaders, governing parties and opposition alike. These are, of course, the Gezi Park events and the coup attempt. While in the case of Erdogan both crisis situations provoked the strengthening of populist rhetoric, in the case of opposition politicians the same can be observed only after the second event. It is clear that the Turkish political elite perceived and assessed the two challenges differently. While the Gezi Park demonstrations were approached by everyone from the perspective of a classic government-opposition dichotomy, in 2016 the entire political elite shared the narrative that the rebels were trying to undermine Turkish democracy. Because the coupists were seen as enemies and traitors by all traditional political figures, against them and in order to restore order, they all essentially used populist rhetoric (Elci, 2019:398).

If the AKP's ideology is the antithesis of Kemalism, then Recep Tayyip Erdogan will increasingly appear in the 2010s as a challenger to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkish history. Among his followers, Erdogan is like a father figure, the second father of the nation after Atatürk, the charismatic leader who is able to unite the glory of the past and the hope of the future. Probably there would be no problem with such an image of the leader living among the AKP voters, all the more so as the state-controlled media is trying to spread this image to the entire population. Opposition voters are particularly irritated by the Erdoganist press trying to paint Erdogan as the savior of the nation (Yilmaz and Bashirov, 2018:1821). In Erdogan's speeches, it is not only striking that he sometimes portrays himself as the savior of the nation, but that he uses very strong images that show military and war inspiration. He refers to himself as if he were a successful warlord, constantly fighting all sorts of supposed or real opponents. As a leader, Erdogan calls himself a representative of the silent majority, who, for example, fights vigorously against the guardianship of Kemalists and old-type staff officers in defense of the people. Of course, here the



people only include the religious masses, the secular strata can stand –according to Erdogan– somewhere on the side of the enemy (Elci, 2019:391).

Recep Tayyip Erdogan is still revered by his followers as a father figure, but some once enthusiastic supporters have made sharp criticisms around the end of the first decade of governance. One of the very first of these critics was Ahmet Altan, a columnist for the newspaper *Taraf*, who in a rather sharp outburst in 2011 accused Erdogan of having no taste or not being as brave and innovative as he had been in the past. Although Altan admired and admired the economic development the country produced in the 2000s, he was outraged by the way Erdogan concretized his own and his party's power. According to the first internal critics of the father figure, the way in which economic and infrastructural development was used by Erdogan and the AKP to create a hegemonic structure is unforgivable. Political supremacy led to the fact that it was a section of the intelligentsia who turned away from Erdogan, though they had admired his economic performance in the past (Beaumont, 2011).

For the outside observer, today's Turkey is an authoritarian and centralized democracy where every thread seems to come together in the hands of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The question arises as to what actually motivates millions of Turks to support Erdogan and his party, and hundreds of thousands to be members or leaders of the AKP at some level. The question can also be asked whether the people are in favor of Erdogan's cause, or whether they have become an uncritical fan of Erdogan as a result of the politician's personal charm. Erdogan's case is nothing more than conservative reforms and the liberal transformation of the economy so that it also serves the interests of believing Muslims in the secular republic, and Erdoganism is a simple personal cult. These are difficult questions for many AKP fanatics who want to be bigger Erdoganists than Erdogan amid the constant changes of direction done by the president of the republic (Sebnem Oruc, 2017).

### **3. Political crises**

During the rule of the AKP government and the presidency of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the governing Justice and Development Party and the government itself had to find the right response to several critical crises. Constant crisis situations and conflicts have made the party and its politicians resistant, but at the same time they have become increasingly rigid, moving away from the masses, including their own constituents. This means that while they have so far successfully



stabilized their power in all such situations, they have increasingly needed political force and have been less and less willing to be helped by social groups that support the AKP. A centralized political force has been created that has made the situation of the AKP "comfortable" for at least two decades, but this situation has also alienated it from the people.

The first major crisis that the Justice and Development Party, which came to power in 2002, had to deal with was the deep social divisions caused by the 1990s, and especially the Ecevit era, and the near-bankruptcy of the Turkish economy. Without wishing to be exhaustive, it is worth highlighting some of the factors and events from this period in order to make visible how complex the crisis was that the AKP had to deal with while stabilizing Turkey after their first election victory.

One of the reasons for the constant crisis of the 1990s was that the political scene was extremely polarized, many parties with relatively little influence were present in the National Assembly, and they were unable to secure a stable government majority. As a result, coalition governments were formed in which parties with very different ideologies participated. The constant political battles, the ideologized struggles, were an obstacle to solving the growing number of economic problems.

After a while, the army also intervened in the ongoing battles of the parties. In 1997, during the so-called postmodern coup, the Turkish armed forces published an e-memorandum on the Internet. With this document, the government of the radical right-wing Necmettin Erbakan was finally overthrown. Between 1997 and 2002, there was a deeper political crisis compared to the previous years, it marked the repulsion of Turkish political life.

The political crisis was further exacerbated by one of the greatest natural disasters of the republic's era, the 1999 earthquake, which claimed tens of thousands of lives in the eastern basin of the Marmara Sea. The disaster, which had just ruined the developing hinterland of the country's industry, slowed the businesses and the recovery exceeded the capabilities of the Turkish economy. After 1999, nearly one million small and medium-sized businesses went bankrupt. Not only companies, but also families were in an extremely difficult position with unemployment in the skies and inflation galloping. In this economic crisis, the pre-AKP Turkish governments resorted to the instrument of neoliberal economic policy. Kemal Dervis, an internationally known and recognized economist, was asked to create the economic recovery program. However, the extreme

austerity measures provoked even more serious social tensions, which brought the long 1990s to the point where the last coalition government also failed.

Meanwhile, moderate Islamists and conservatives have reorganized their party structures. Those who were not barred from practicing in public affairs after the 1997 postmodern coup formed the Justice and Development Party, which integrated much of the right and made the voters believe that they would find a way out of this deep crisis. This hope is the explanation for the overwhelming triumph of the AKP in the 2002 parliamentary elections.

#### **4.Stabilization of the Turkish economy in the early 2000s and the Urgent Action Plan**

The post-2002 economic recovery and crisis management efforts of the AKP cannot be completely separated from the last similar program of the previous period, the Strong Economy Transition Program (GEGP). Among other things, it was the economic program that radically transformed the Turkish banking sector and whose impact on finances and the fight against inflation was still felt in 2006. The GEGP provided, for example, that Turkish banks could decide for themselves on the exchange rates they used, and the central control that regulated interbank transactions was abolished. These reforms laid the foundations for a disciplined fiscal policy, which proved to be a very good basis for the AKP in power. This explains why, after 2002, the Turkish government did not intervene radically in the operation of the banks, liberalized and depoliticized the roles of the central bank, and struggled with inflation with all its might (Inan, 2006:23).

Also with the achievements of the Strong Economy Transition Program, it can be explained that after 2002, the Turkish public finance deficit has been declining steadily. The AKP did not bring anything new in this area either, but only adhered to the neoliberal economic trajectory defined by Kemal Dervis and his team in 2001. While the budget deficit was 15.3% in 2001, AKP governments reduced it to 2.5% by 2005 by continuing the line started by their predecessors (Inan, 2006:24).

However, Kemal Dervis's Strong Economy Transition Program was far from being able to provide an answer to all the problems of the Turkish economy. The year 2001 was catastrophic in all respects, with macroeconomic indicators showing a huge decline. Overall, the downturn in the Turkish economy reached 5.7%. In 2002, the opposite trend was observed and the Turkish

economy started to grow again, with Turkey closing the year with an impressive development of 6.2%. Obviously, this included some of the GEGP's measures, but also the new economic policy of the newly emerging AKP. Of course, it is also true that the real economic turn of the Conservatives will take place in 2003, as only then will the government's economic stimulus package, called the Urgent Action Plan (AEP), be announced (Karagol, 2013:26).

Dealing with the economic crisis has posed a difficult ideological challenge to the Justice and Development Party. Since the 1950s, conservative and moderate Islamist political parties have traditionally professed liberal economic philosophical principles in Turkey, and the AKP has insisted on this in economic matters. They advocated privatization, private initiatives and the involvement of foreign working capital in the recovery of the Turkish economy. At the same time, they could not forget that the economic crisis was accompanied by a social crisis, the lives of citizens were becoming increasingly difficult, so austerity was sought to be avoided where possible. They have had to face the fact that, since the late 1980s, Turkey has become increasingly exposed to the world market, and since 1989, the Turkish economy has been essentially kept alive by loans from the IMF and the World Bank. That is why the AKP has voted in favor of a liberal economic policy that breaks with the international financial institutions and their commands, and can only imagine the development of the economy from foreign sources (Akcaý, 2018:3).

The Turkish government decided in 2002 to do everything in its power to repay its loans to the IMF, and then not to take on more debt from the international organization, but to finance its debt from the market, and from the proceeds of economic growth. In practice, this meant that the \$ 23.5 billion debt outstanding in 2002 was planned to be paid back by the Turkish government over 11 years. This plan was finally realized by 2013, as imagined. In addition, Turkey did not take out a stand-by loan from the IMF after the AKP came to power. The 19th Turkish-IMF stand-by arrangement expired in 2008 and Turkey has fulfilled its obligations under it, despite the outbreak of the global economic crisis that year. Repaying IMF loans proved to be a good decision, as the repayment largely fell between 2002 and 2007, when international markets were plentiful of money, and so Turkey was not forced to make such loans after 2008, when they became more expensive after the crisis (Karagol, 2013:67).

The AKP's new kind of liberal economic policy has not only been foreign losers like the IMF and the World Bank, but has also weakened the position of many domestic players. From the

1920s onwards, a civic and entrepreneurial layer loyal to Ataturk was formed and strengthened, ensuring the survival of Kemalist principles in the field of economy and the financial background of the political Left, especially the Republican People's Party (CHP). The AKP wanted to involve new entrepreneurs in revitalizing the economy. Since the mid-1980s, the right-wing, conservative and religious bourgeoisie, which has been growing stronger since Turgut Ozal but has been deprived of state orders so far, has sought to put the old economic elite in the background. A good example of this is the support for the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MUSIAD), which was already discussed in the previous chapter. In essence, a new national bourgeoisie has been built, which since the early 2000s can build on achievements in market conditions, but also enjoy state subsidies and business in return for supporting the state's charitable efforts in the context of a deep economic and social crisis. In other words, in a kind of symbiosis, the conservative business circle represented by MUSIAD and the AKP government mutually reinforce each other (Akçay, 2018:5).

The AKP in the early 2000s tried to form a new generation of the so-called Anatolian bourgeoisie by putting a significant amount of capital into the hands of believing Muslim businessmen. This is well illustrated through the example of TOKI projects. TOKI is a housing development program of the Turkish state, in the framework of which cheap-rent apartments are built in the outskirts of large and medium-sized cities within a short period of time. The construction of blocks, which in many cases do not really fit into the environment and are tasteless, is dominated by construction companies in the hands of this new Muslim Anatolian bourgeoisie. The TOKI program therefore has a dual purpose. On the one hand, the AKP thus capitalized its economic clientele, and on the other hand, through a social rental housing project, it sought to help the lower middle class masses left homeless due to the social crisis, and thereby sought to improve the country's infrastructure. Even during their political campaigns, the AKP's main argument in favor of them was how much was built in the country in such a short time. At the same time, a serious danger was coded into this economic policy. By allocating resources from the central budget to infrastructure development, the AKP did not get enough capital with the productive sectors, which did not develop as a result, leaving Turkish imports behind and forcing Turkey to import (Bakan and Cimen, 2018:53).

Infrastructure development efforts are not only reflected in the mass construction of low-cost housing, but can also be seen in other segments of the economy. Transport infrastructure was also lagging far behind the European or world average. This was especially true for fixed-track traffic. In the early 2000s, there were hardly any railway lines in Turkey, and in the big cities there were one or two metro lines, but they were not organized into a system either. A milestone in this situation was the start of the construction of the Marmaray railway tunnel connecting Europe to Asia under the Bosphorus, which was later followed by the development of a number of metro lines, high-speed railways and airports. Significant progress was also made between 2002 and 2007 in the field of telecommunications. The success here was due to the cooperation of the Turkish state-owned Türk Telekom and Vodafone, the involvement of foreign working capital (Turan, 2015:228).

In terms of business, the AKP sought to maintain the system that had characterized the Turkish economy in the decades before it came to power, i.e., that the political elite intertwined with entrepreneurs, with politics intervening in business affairs. At the same time, AKP governments have advocated the opposite in other segments of the economy. With regard to the national bank, for example, the AKP had a particularly liberal attitude in the initial period, with the aim of making the central bank as independent as possible from the government and the financial institution pursuing an independent fiscal policy, just as the European Union and international financial circles wanted, and which is one of the preconditions for European integration (Akçay, 2018:6).

The main goal of liberal fiscal policy was to curb extremely high inflation. After the AKP came to power, it intended to achieve this through a labor reform. Between 2002 and 2005, AKP governments felt that one of the main reasons for the deterioration of the Turkish currency was that workers were earning too well compared to the way the Turkish economy was performing and that too many Turkish people were working full-time, further increasing economic burdens and reducing the incentive for businesses to invest. The New Labor Act No. 4857, passed in 2003, sought to change this situation by favoring employers over employees, which further heightened social tensions. This new legislation has made it possible for people to be employed part-time. At the same time, this law also adversely affected the trade union activity in the workplace, so they could not take effective action against further redundancies and new employment contracts. As a

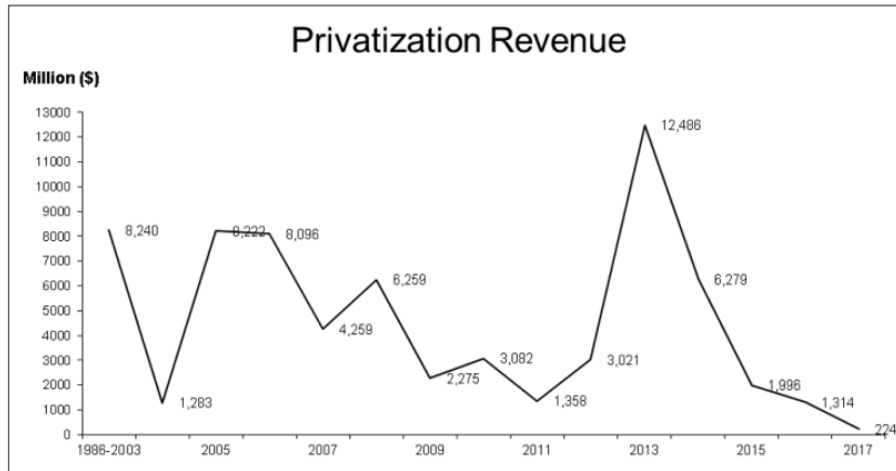
result, unemployment has risen, employment has fallen, and some of those who have kept their jobs have taken home less than before. In addition, the law reduced the burden on employers, increased their willingness to invest, increased productivity and slowly began to reduce inflation. This policy soon won the favor of Western financiers and investors disappointed by the AKP's credit policy. Although workers were dissatisfied, Turkey has become an attractive investment destination (Akçay, 2018:8).

Macroeconomic data from 2004 to 2007 show that productivity growth in Turkey is spectacular and inseparable from the above mentioned labor reform, but there were still many gaps in this area despite the reform in the second half of the 2000s. Foreign observers noted that the further development of the Turkish economy could be hampered by the fact that workers' income tax rates and many other contributions also hit workers hard. However, they also point out that high minimum wages can be repulsive for some foreign investors. The Turkish vocational training system was also not perfect and the modern training of industrial workers was not completely solved (Macovei, 2009:14).

The AKP has indeed been successful in tackling the extremely high inflation rate. While in 2001, the year of the Strong Economy Transition Program, consumer prices were still increasing by a rocketing 54.4%, three years later, in 2004, for the first time in 34 years, the annual money deterioration reached a single digit, with inflation rising to a moderate 9.4%. The extent to which this was a steady decline and due to the good functioning of Turkish financial markets is no better indication that inflation continued to moderate until the 2008 global economic crisis, and this also allowed the introduction of the new Turkish lira in 2005 (Karagöl, 2013:36).

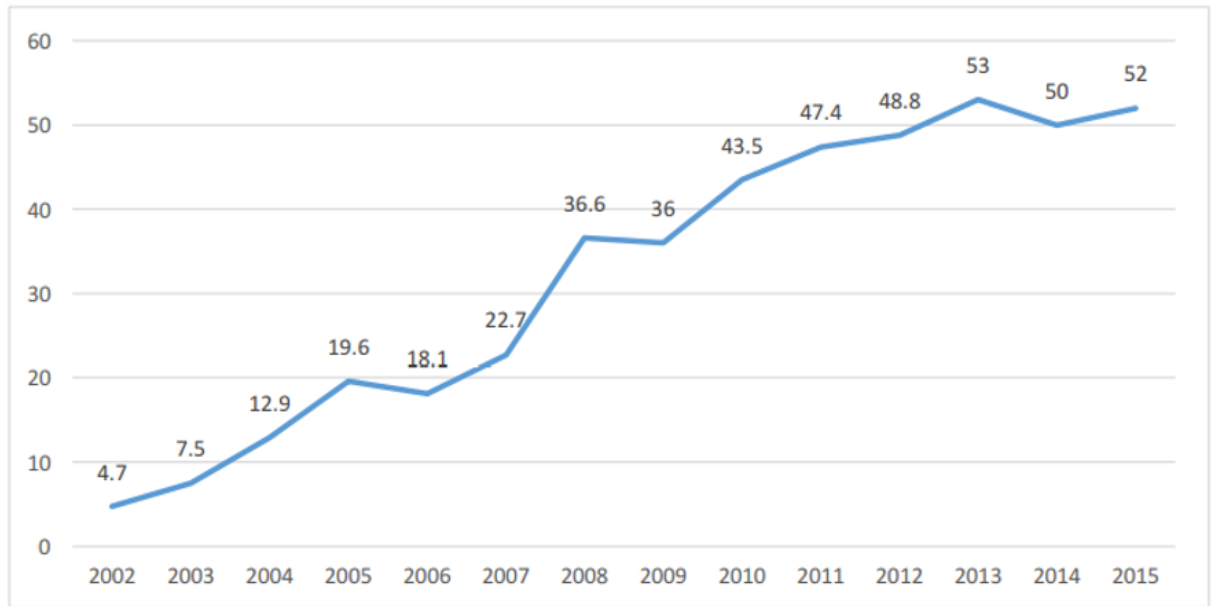
Until the 1980s, the Turkish economy's financial needs were largely met by cash. Due to very high inflation, millions of numbers appeared on the banknotes, which in many cases, both at home and abroad, led people to make fun of the Turkish currency. Even in the coalition negotiations of the 1990s, it was repeatedly suggested that 6 zeros should be cut off from Turkish money, but this theoretically set goal had not yet been achieved by Turkish governments at the time. The AKP government, already led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, finally took this radical step in 2005. The fact that the AKP's disciplined fiscal policy essentially regulated inflation by 2004 paved the way for this important decision. In addition to curbing inflation, the ever-increasing gold and foreign exchange reserves of the Turkish Central Bank (TMB), which was pursuing an

increasingly independent fiscal policy, have also contributed to the success of monetary reform. While TMB's reserves were only \$ 28.2 billion in 2002, by 2005 it had almost doubled to \$ 50.2 billion (Karagol, 2013:38).



**Figure 1.**Privatization revenues in Turkey between 1986 and 2017 (source: Akcay, 2018:9)

One of the most significant pillars of the AKP's liberal economic policy was privatization, which provided Turkish and foreign investors with state assets. The volume of privatization in the early 2000s coincided with the privatization process under Turgut Ozal in the mid-1980s, and was the second largest step in the AKP's history in which Turkish state property was taken into private hands. In 2005, at the culmination of the first AKP privatization, \$ 8,222 million in value went to private investors (see table above). Trade unions weakened by labor law were unable to take action against the process, and frustrated organized workers left the unions en masse. While in 2001, the year before the AKP came to power, 29.1% of Turkish workers belonged to one of these organizations, by 2015 their number had fallen to 6.3%. Interestingly, privatization has led AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan to settle accounts with one of the potential domestic critics, organized workers (Akcay, 2018:8).



**Figure 2.** Household debt to disposable income in Turkey between 2002 and 2015 (source: Akcay, 2018:14)

Measures to reduce inflation and increase the balance of public finances have further aggravated the living conditions of families. In this situation, the AKP government has sought to improve the life condition of the Turkish families with innovative social policies, facilitating access to benefits and subsidies and reducing territorial disparities within the country. Families themselves, on the other hand, often found no other way out than to get into debt. Simultaneously with the decline in inflation and the gradual stabilization of the Turkish currency, domestic credit markets opened up to citizens. The marginal willingness of the Turkish population to borrow money has been steadily increasing since 2002. At first, personal loans were taken out for the purchase of the necessities of life and subsistence, and then, in an increasingly growing welfare situation after 2005, the purchase of less essential consumer goods was also financed from credit. While in 2002 Turkish families were indebted to only 4.7% of their income, by 2005, with the introduction of the new Turkish lira, that figure had quadrupled to 19.6%. Falling inflation, the stabilization of the national currency, despite the still high unemployment rate, filled people with optimism and they were not afraid to partly finance their own well-being with credit. This mixed economic development eventually led to the AKP performing much better in the 2007 parliamentary elections than 5 years earlier (Akcay, 2018:14). Despite the continued indebtedness of families, it cannot be said that increasing money supply has had a positive effect on



consumption. Household spendings did not increase in 2002 and 2005, on the contrary, there was a noticeable decline. While Turkish families spent 68.2% of their income in 2002, in 2005 it spent only 67.8%. This 0.4% decline resulted in a severe downturn in the market, with traders and manufacturers of consumer goods facing a noticeable loss (Inan, 2006:27).

Of course, the relative development of the Turkish economy cannot be decoupled from world economic processes. The AKP certainly benefited from the fact that its first term of government, between 2002 and 2007, was in a phase of rapid expansion of the world economy, which was hampered by the 2008 global economic crisis, from which Turkey was able to recover relatively quickly with relatively small losses. Although the Turkish economy survived the 2008 crisis relatively well, after 2009 the recession will be felt in the Turkish foreign economy as well, and from then on it will become increasingly difficult to finance Turkish public and private debt from money coming from abroad. The importance of financing private debt is easy to understand if one considers the above detailed trends of the households. Similarly, the share of working capital from abroad was declining after 2009 (Benlialper et al., 2015:4).

The European Union is also emerging in the international context of the transformation of the Turkish economy. In 2002, one of the priorities of the AKP in power was European integration, for which they were ready to comply with all the requests coming from Brussels. One of the most fundamental expectations of the European Union vis-à-vis Turkey was to significantly liberalize its markets and strengthen the financial sector, as the pre-AKP government had already attempted with a project called the Strong Economy Transition Program, whose banking policy was also carried on by the new political elite. The EU has also required Turkey to create an investor-friendly environment and to transfer a significant part of its state assets to private owners. This means that privatization was not only aimed at creating a new Anatolian bourgeoisie, but was also an essential corollary of joining the EU. The Brussels bureaucracy also had a say in Turkish interest rate policy. They wanted Ankara to cut interbank rates. AKP governments also appreciated this request, as it also coincided with Muslim traditions that prohibit interest-taking (Karagol, 2013:26).

The economic policy changes presented so far culminated in the Urgent Action Plan (AEP) stimulus package announced by the AKP in 2002 and introduced since 2003. The Urgent Action Plan was drawn up by the 58th Government of the Republic of Turkey in the last days of 2002 in the economic situation outlined above. The development plan was presented to the Turkish public

on 3 January 2003 by Prime Minister Abdullah Gul. According to the Prime Minister's approach, the Turkish economy can develop freely if its bureaucratic burden is reduced. According to Gul, there are constant struggles in Turkey between the two opposing parties, economic actors and the administration. However, in the wake of the 2001 crisis, policy-makers can do nothing but favor and cut red tape for businesses. This political philosophy shows that the AKP's development plan sought not only to remedy economic problems, but could also be seen as a political turnaround (Yilmaz and Guler, 2016:301).

The essence of the AEP was to bring about real structural changes in Turkish economic governance, to accelerate privatization, to provide capital to certain productive sectors, and to increase financial discipline, resulting in the radical decline of the public debt that fell under the Maastricht criteria, bringing Turkey's accession to the EU in theoretical proximity (Karagol, 2013:14).

The Urgent Action Plan is essentially a national independence program, as the creators of the AEP had the goal to pursue economic policies separate from those of the major international financial power centers. Experts speculate that if the AKP had not come to power, but, say, a center-left political formation, it would have also formulated its economic plans against the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These institutions put such strong pressure on Turkish governments in the 1990s that there was an almost complete political consensus surrounding the need for Turkey to regain its economic sovereignty and decide on its own finances. Of course, there are degrees of independence from the IMF. It is conceivable that a left-wing government would not have repaid all the loans so quickly or entered into new stand-by arrangements, i.e. a flexible policy of secession instead of the AKP's gradual but radical withdrawal policy (Konukman, 2003:18).

The AKP also differed from other contemporary parties in that they saw not only indebtedness as a negative in IMF loans, but also failed to identify with the economic policy direction expected by the IMF. There were basically three topics on which there was a serious disagreement between the liberal approach of the AKP and international neoliberal experts. On the one hand, the AKP wanted to spend the public resources obtained from the loan mainly on the development of the productive sectors. On the other hand, it would have paid special attention to social spending. It was believed that it was only with the help of the lagging lower middle class

that Turkish society could recover. Thirdly, the system of additional payments to agriculture would have been maintained. In the early 2000s, Turkey was still an industrial-agrarian country, with agriculture accounting for close to 20% of production, exports and employment. At that time, Turkey was not yet ready for a post-industrial turnaround (Konukman, 2003:18).

According to the AEP, the Turkish manufacturing sector will be able to pull the country out of the deep economic crisis if small and medium-sized enterprises strengthen. The recapitalization of these companies with the help of the AEP has become an overriding goal of the independent Turkish economic policies. To this end, AKP governments have encouraged the SME sector to build links with similar foreign companies as much as possible and to involve their funds in the Turkish economy. In addition, the government has earmarked funds to help Turkish small businesses benefit from the challenges of globalization, improve their digital equipment and access state-of-the-art technology (Konukman, 2003:18).

According to AEP policy, the most urgent social reform was to be led by the AKP government in the health sector. The system of GP care has been modernized. Hospitals were merged and these modernized conglomerates were given relative independence. Social security was made available to all, but at the same time a significant amount of private capital was attracted to health care, which led to a noticeable improvement in a short time. This part of the program was a success that was most noticed by the less favored sections of the population, increasing the popularity of the ruling party was partly due to these measures (Konukman, 2003:18).

The AEP has also introduced significant reforms in the area of agricultural financing. A new insurance scheme has been set up for farmers, guaranteeing that producers have their money even if a natural disaster destroys their crops. It is an extremely big challenge for farmers to produce in 9 months of the year but have no income, and in the remaining 3 months there is no field work, but then its financial fruits are ripe. This new insurance system provides a satisfactory answer to this duality and guarantees the financial stability of those living from agriculture. The new law establishes advocacy organizations to protect producers and simplifies their accounting, which will make it easier for villagers living in an increasingly difficult situation and increase the population retention capacity of rural areas, as the Turkish village is being depopulated due to the ongoing rural exodus (Konukman, 2003:19).

The Urgent Action Plan set basically economic goals, but it also wanted to have an impact on politics. In addition to its classic economic policy goals, it has also announced a program of stronger action against corruption. To this end, a coordinating body has been set up around the person of the prime minister to investigate and discuss allegations of corruption in politics. It has been decided that the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and the Civil Law Convention on Corruption would also be ratified. According to these bills, the penalty for corruption had to be raised and citizens had to be given the right to be properly informed about corruption cases. In other words, the Turkish government advocated transparency. (Bigpara, 2002) This is very interesting in light of the fact that in many cases in 2010, the AKP's leading politicians were linked to significant corruption charges that did not spare Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself or his family.

In 2003, the reform of AEP's economic policy was not considered definitive. Contemporaries were convinced that the AKP was planning further steps, but only wanted to introduce them gradually. For example, they were confident that the Conservatives would significantly reshape the Turkish tax policy. Despite the fact that the AKP is a right-wing party, it was predicted that they would want to guarantee the stability of public finances and pay growing social and health spending by increasing certain taxes. Among other things, there has been speculation that they will increase the value added tax, which will be used for debt service and to reduce its interest burden in addition to the above objectives (Konukman, 2003:19).

Thanks to the Urgent Action Plan, Turkey's financial awareness was also improving. AEP has created a sound fiscal environment, which has made Turkey attractive to foreign investors. The AKP governments have achieved this goal not only by reducing the country's indebtedness by repaying an important part of the IMF debt, but have also done their utmost to keep the operating costs of the Turkish state and the Turkish public sector as low as possible and to reduce the need for expenditure is financed by foreign loans. The fact that the Turkish government reduced to 3% the government deficits by 2007 impressed the experts and the policy-makers, they also expressed their contentment seeing that the Turkish government did not want to increase the deficit with non-essential foreign loans (Macovei, 2003:11).

The success of the Urgent Action Plan has also been recognized by the international financial community. According to the OECD, Turkey had the most important growth rate in the first half of the 2000s from among its member states. The OECD highlighted most that the AEP

in Turkey had led to a comprehensive economic policy turnaround that had a beneficial effect on the economy as a whole. „The main economic reforms took place in several key areas, such as fiscal and monetary policy, tax policy, financial sector prudential regulations, product market regulations, labor market regulations, capital markets, foreign direct investment, privatization of state-owned enterprises, infrastructure and agriculture.” (Macovei, 2009:18) Part of the international recognition is that between 2002 and 2007, Turkey's foreign trade activity also showed a significant increase. Two and a half times the increase can be detected during the 5 years examined. Exports rose from \$ 36 billion to \$ 107 billion, while imports rose from \$ 50 billion to \$ 170 billion (Sakarya, 2014:247).

Thanks to the strict neoliberal economic policies before the Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002 and the AKP's Urgent Action Plan, the Turkish economy has been on a spectacular growth path since 2003. Between 2002 and 2007, Turkey's GDP grew by an average of 6.8% per year. And if one looks at the per capita value and compares it with the growth rate of the EU member states, one can see that the development of the Turkish economy was 10% ahead of the EU average, i.e. the growth was more spectacular compared to Europe. Incidentally, this outstanding performance has also made a good impression on Brussels, and Turkey has begun to be truly seen as a potential candidate that will be able to meet the EU's economic criteria in the long term. By the end of the first cycle of the AKP, the soaring economy of the Turkish economy had already begun to be felt by the average citizen, as GDP per capita had almost tripled in five years. While in 2001, the last year of the crisis, it was only \$ 3,250, by 2007 that number had risen to 9,000 (Macovei, 2009:10).

It is also clear from the above that, despite some anomalies, the Turkish crisis management of the early 2000s was a success, and this success has been recognized by international markets and organizations. From a political point of view, it is very important to emphasize that the economic reforms of the AKP government are not hampered by the opposition, the old Kemalist elite or the army, which was still an important domestic political factor at the time. And all this is true despite the fact that AKP has built and supported its own clientele on several occasions. This peaceful economic crisis management may be explained by the fact that the actions of the AKP did not harm the economic interests of the old elite and the army. The opposition did not criticize the government's measures more seriously, because the left itself would have changed Turkish

economic policy, sought to loosen its relationship with the IMF, and changed many rules in the social sphere (Onaran and Oyvat, 2015:7).

In addition to real, tangible successes, political communication also played an important role in the acceptance of the AEP. AKP politicians have recognized that the great macroeconomic indicators can be used to persuade voters even in a global comparison. In all of their speeches, they emphasized the numerical evidence of growth, but underlined much less that this development could only be sustained for some time, and that Turkey was nevertheless exposed to changes in the world economy. Thus, the pro-government part of Turkish public opinion was hit quite unprepared by the 2008 global economic crisis. This is true even if this crisis has hampered the Turkish economy in its rapid expansion phase, than any other emerging market, including the former socialist countries (Onaran and Oyvat, 2015:7).

#### **4.1 Crisis of the 367**

The so-called Decision of the 367, or Crisis of the 367, is a protracted and multi-level crisis in the history of Turkish democracy and the AKP that happened in 2007. By the mid-2000s, the AKP had successfully managed the economic crisis that culminated in 2001, and at the same time built its own economic hinterland, thereby increasingly stabilizing itself on the political stage. By the beginning of 2007, the Turkish ruling party felt that the time had come to gradually settle accounts with its political opponents, more precisely with the branches of power and bodies that were still in the hands of the old Kemalist elite at the time. During the crisis of 367, it was precisely these forces, the President of the Republic, the Constitutional Court, and the army, who opposed the AKP, which sought to expand its power more and more.

The Justice and Development Party and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan believed that the weakest link in the chain was the institution of the President of the Republic. Their aim was to appoint a loyal party man to the post of head of state, who has exercised the most ceremonial powers so far, so that he can fight militantly for the moderate Islamists in domestic political battles and will be less vigilant over Ataturk's old principles and the secular state. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the last president of the Kemalists, was exactly the type against whom the AKP politicized with the strongest force. The mandate of Sezer, this modest but restrained politician satisfying all the needs of the Kemalists, expired in 2007 and was replaced by Abdullah Gul, a policy-maker from one of the AKP's innermost circles. The election of the presidential candidate in the Turkish

parliament soon failed, which activated all the opponents of the AKP and they tried to give a rather virulent response to the ruling party seeking concentration of power. The crisis called 367, in Turkish political history marks the combined reaction of the parliamentary opposition, the Constitutional Court and the military, the way out of which was the holding of early elections in 2007. The newly formed National Assembly, to which the AKP had sent more members than before, eventually elected Gul President of the Republic. Abdullah Gul, and he remained in office until 2014. Although the Turkish opposition has raised many objections to former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, it is important to note that Gul was very popular in the West and several European forums welcomed his election. Gul has maintained particularly good relations with European Union leaders since accession negotiations accelerated in 2005 (Migdalovitz, 2007).

To understand the so-called crisis of 367, it is necessary to detail the characteristics of the Turkish political system in 2007 that was based on the 1982 constitution. Turkey was a parliamentary democracy at the time, but in many ways its operation differed from that of similar regimes in the West. On the one hand, the Turkish army was still strongly influential, and this also meant that the armed forces wanted to make their voices heard about the presidential election and the operation of the president. Although the army accepted that the head of state was a civilian, they did everything they could to get their own man to sit in the post and be able to be controlled. Although the presidency was still symbolic at the time, it was typically not filled by symbolic leaders but by real and influential political characters. Although the head of state was elected by parliament, it is understandable for these reasons that fierce political battles preceded all presidential elections. And in 2007, there was more uncertainty and power struggles than in previous cases (Acar and Celebi, 2012:6).

Intellectual supporters of the opposition began to draw attention to the impending political and legal crisis long before the outbreak of scandals, in April 2007. Sabih Kanadoglu, who was close to the CHP and was appointed Turkey's Attorney General in 2001 by outgoing President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, and who was forced to resign in 2003 due to his age, wrote a lengthy article in the opposition Cumhuriyet (Republic) newspaper on 21 December 2006. The article entitled „Are you aware of the danger?“ sought to alarm the opposition public about the presidential election, and at the same time provoked serious polemics on the side of the opposition to the AKP



and former Prime Minister Abdullah Gul. Kanadoglu argues in his publication that if 367 deputies do not run in the first round of the presidential election, it will be invalid and, using Articles 96 and 102 of the constitution together, the AKP will be able to have its own head of state (Erogul, 2007:170).

The opposition was also well aware that the election of an Islamist politician as president, with improving economic indicators, would put the AKP in power in the long run. The economic situation seemed to stabilize. Although there was turbulence in the Turkish financial markets in the last quarter of 2006, the Central Bank began to cut interest rates, which reduced inflation and further strengthened the lira, the Turkish currency. In this economic environment, in the hands of the CHP and other opposition forces — apart from deploying an army loyal to Kemalist groups — there were no other means that could have created a chance to overthrow the AKP, than a lasting political chaos. This would also have served the opposition's sake because AKP governments had sold a number of public assets to foreign investors and were negotiating more and more Turkey's joining the European Union. The CHP, then hitting an increasingly nationalistic tone, demanded national control over the nation's wealth and was very critical of the EU. It was therefore thought that the election of an Islamist politician as president should also be prevented in order to curb these irreversible processes (Landesmann and Worz, 2007:1).

The political crisis in Turkey in 2007 was called decision or crisis of the 367 in political history because, according to Article 102 of the 1982 Constitution, two-thirds of the members of the National Assembly should vote in the first or second round for one of the candidates, ie 367 MPs are needed for a politician to be elected as the president of the republic. Under the same legislation, a simple majority of 276 votes would have been sufficient in the third round. Kemalist Ahmet Necdet Sezer was also elected to the third round by the Turkish parliament with 330 votes (Acar and Celebi, 2012:16).

Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP organized nationwide rallies in an attempt to prepare the Turkish public for the party's group to nominate one of their own members for the presidency of the republic. Finally, on 24 April 2007, Erdogan officially announced in front of the AKP parliamentary group that the popular and jovial former prime minister, Abdullah Gul, had been nominated for election (Acar and Celebi, 2012:17).



Leftists and members of the secular strata were deeply outraged and frightened by the news that the AKP had nominated Abdullah Gul as President of the Republic. Gul could not be accepted by them for several reasons. On the one hand, Gul was seen as Erdogan's extended right hand who does nothing but "obey his master's orders." Looking back from today, this argument may seem very strange, as the two politicians have been arguing and politicizing in separate parties for years. On the other hand, secular-minded Turkish citizens thought that Gul was too committed to one political side and would be unable to symbolize the unity of the nation. And thirdly, they were convinced that Gul was at least as extreme as Erdogan, and that he, too, would only work to introduce Islamic legislation, sharia, in Turkey. Because of these fears, both the left and the secular masses began to move, and in April 2007 mass demonstrations in several large cities in Turkey, the so-called republican meetings were organized. Although tens of thousands attended these events, they did not have much of an impact on the election of the president of the republic (Duran, 2010:16).

The series of demonstrations, which began in Ankara on 14 April 2007 and ended on 13 May 2007, was not officially organized by opposition parties, but by NGOs close to them. The demonstrations, in addition to trying to draw attention to the excesses of the AKP and the dangers of Islamism, also sent a massive message to opposition parties. Left-wing civilians wanted opposition parties to run united in the election and balance their strength with the ruling party (Tuncer, 2007:137). The opposition did not come together in 2007, but has since shown a dynamically changing federal system, with some political forces, especially the nationalists, fluctuating between the two poles.

One of the most militant NGOs from among the organizers of the above republican meetings was the Ataturkcu Dusunce Dernegi (Association of the Ataturkist Thinking). Their activists were present in very large numbers at the rallies held in late April and early May. Many had signs in their hands labeled "ordu goreve," which called on the army to do its job, that is, to overthrow a government they did not like. The heightened activity of the Kemalist civil society is also the reason for the issuance of the e-memorandum by the army chief of staff on the night of April 27, 2007. It is also worth noting that not only does the army try to intervene in the events of Turkish society and politics, but sometimes the other way around. Some Turkish political and civilian actors are trying to instruct the military (Celik, 2020).

Finally, the Turkish parliament tried to decide on the election of former Prime Minister Abdullah Gul under the presidency of Bulent Arinc of the AKP. Arinc told those present that the vote would be held in accordance with Article 96 of the Constitution. The opposition CHP called the procedure unconstitutional, citing Article 121 of the Inner regulation of the Parliament, because, in their view, Articles 96 and 102 of the Constitution should have been taken into account. This led the Kemalist politicians to take the matter to the Constitutional Court, thus continuing the crisis and deepening the legal aspect of it (Acar and Celebi, 2012:22). According to the first paragraph of Article 148 of the Turkish Constitution, any parliamentary decision that is contrary to the Constitution and the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly falls within the competence of the Constitutional Court. Parliament may not take a decision on the validity of a sitting which is contrary to the Constitution and, within that, Rule 85, which governs the right to vote. That is why, in the event of political battles between the government and the opposition, the responsibility for legal oversight and the correction of erroneous decisions lies with the Constitutional Court (Ulusahin, 2007:19).

On 1 May 2007, the Court issued its decisions E.2007/45 and K.2007/54, which made it clear that the election of the President of the Republic required the unanimous vote of two thirds of the deputies. It became clear that the judiciary was also in open conflict with the ruling party, as the court ruled that Arinc and AKP politicians had violated the constitution during the 27 April session. In the absence of a compromise solution to the legal and political crisis, the Turkish National Assembly was dissolved and early elections were called (Acar and Celebi, 2012:22).

The dissolution of the parliament was, by the way, a very risky and dubious move on the part of the AKP, as it could have jeopardized the country's governance. According to the laws in force at that time, the National Assembly, which was set up after July 22, was obliged to elect a president within 30 days. If they had not been able to do so, the only solution would have been to dissolve the parliament again and call early elections. Furthermore, there was also a scenario where Turkish citizens were called to the polls four times in a row in a calendar year. Some speculated that after the July 22 elections, there would be a referendum on constitutional amendments, then the people would elect the president of the republic, and then a second parliamentary election might have been necessary if the body elected in July had no decision (Cagaptay and Unver,

2007:1). This long and cumbersome democratic process could have alienated many from politics. It is fortunate for Turkish domestic politics that this has not been the case.

Events have accelerated and a situation of urgency has arisen with regard to the timing of the early elections. When choosing the final date, decision-makers had to take into account the fact that elections are rarely held in Turkey in the summer, either in the spring or in the fall. Many feared low attendance. These fears ultimately proved meaningless because voters wanted a solution to the political crisis and went to the polls in record numbers (Tuncer, 2007:135).

The military became aware of the political opposition, and three days later, on the night of April 27, 2007, at 11:20 p.m., one of the strangest documents in Turkish political history, the so-called e-memorandum was published explaining that they want to see a real secular political leader at the head of the country, not a nominal one, and that they will do everything in their power to ensure that Gul does not become head of state (Acar and Celebi, 2012:17).

Given the inability of the Turkish National Assembly to elect a President of the Republic at the end of April, followed by the Constitutional Court's ruling that the process was unconstitutional, and the army's criticism of the Turkish political elite in an e-memorandum, there was no other solution to the crisis but to call new parliamentary elections slightly earlier than originally planned. In practice, this meant that the parliament was theoretically dissolved on 3 May 2007 and new elections were held on 22 July. However, the AKP majority in parliament took a very surprising and not necessarily fair and democratic step after the decision to hold early elections had been taken. On 31 May 2007, the AKP parliamentary group tabled the bill, No 5678, which sought to amend the constitution in several ways. One of them stipulated that the presence of one third of the deputies was sufficient for the parliament to have a quorum. Another proposed that the President of the Republic should no longer be elected by the National Assembly but by the people. The CHP was then unwilling and unable to oppose the ruling party, as the main opposition party was preparing with all its might for the crucial election, which it ultimately failed (Acar and Celebi, 2012:23).

After the e-memorandum, of course, the Turkish government did not remain idle either. The Council of Ministers was convened on 28 April 2007, where the panel condemned in a harsh response the Turkish army's interference in politics. The statement, noted by government spokesperson Cemil Cicek, condemns the way the army published the e-memorandum and points

out that its date is in the interests of both the opposition press and the opposition political side, and an open attack against the process of electing the President of the Republic. The spokesperson of the government assured voters that the government remained committed to secular principles and the rule of law. The declaration branded "unhealthy" how the army chief commented on the relationship between the military and the government. This could even be interpreted as a threat, showing that the government, for the first time in the history of the Turkish republic, is ready to clash with the leaders of the army Kemalist on a political level, which could lead to a loss of influence of the Turkish military in the long run (Ural, 2012: 731).

The leader of the opposition, Deniz Baykal, who was then chairman of the CHP, was, of course, opposed to the government. In April 2007, he repeatedly stated that he expected the army to intervene directly. Baykal was thinking that Erdogan himself tries to become the president of the republic and was quoted as saying: „Erdogan should not be president. I think the Armed Forces will not be indifferent to this.” On another occasion Baykal expressed his views the following way: „The Prime Minister cannot be the Commander-in-Chief. A person who is incompatible with the Turkish Armed Forces should be prevented from sitting in the presidency, who also assumes the authority of the commander-in-chief.” (Celik, 2020).

Although the Turkish army's e-memorandum is only one element of the crisis, it has had a great impact on the society and the press. Turkish citizens were most frightened that the situation could escalate, that the armed forces could also take to the streets with tanks and did not want to return to the barracks soon, that is, a coup-like situation would emerge. More realistic thinkers were not afraid of this, but many have argued that the e-memorandum will lead to a political stalemate and economic crisis like the one that followed the 1997 postmodern coup. This possibility was also frightening because the economy was just beginning to recover or develop. The Turkish press saw the e-memorandum as an important source of news, and the Turkish military's website increasingly began to resemble a well-functioning news portal. A total of 303 news and opinion articles were published in the national press. This is a much higher number than for other actors or events in the crisis of the 367 (Efilti Atay, 2019:13).

The e-memorandum and an additional 99 announcements issued by the army before Gul's election show that the Turkish armed forces have recognized the increasing concentration of social and political power in the hands of the press. For this reason, Kemalist officers leading the army

realized that if they wanted to influence the work of the government, they had to influence a section of the Turkish press. From the press reactions after the e-memorandum was issued, it is clear that this "operation" was partly successful, with Turkish national dailies and their online versions taking over the narrative of the military. There were 3 exceptions. On the one hand there was *Yeni Safak*, a newspaper that is close to the government, and *Zaman*, that was linked to Fetullah Gulen and forbade after the 2016 coup attempt, but also had an Islamist line, and on the other, the more opposition-minded *Milliyet*, that behaved rather restrainedly in late April and early May 2007 (Efilti Atay, 2019:22). The behavior of the press was also indicative of the AKP because it was understood with the party that it was in great need of a press empire loyal to them. After 2007, Erdogan set about building an Islamist Turkish press network and gradually silencing the opposition media.

The early elections of 22 July 2007 ended in a spectacular victory for the AKP. Both in terms of vote share and percentages, the moderate Islamists were able to increase their influence. In addition, two other parties managed to cross the extremely high threshold of entry: the Kemalist CHP and the nationalist MHP. The 2007 early parliamentary elections in Turkey were met with great interest. The result was one of the highest voter turnouts in the history of Turkish democracy, with 84.25% of Turkish citizens registered to vote. With 46.58% of the vote, the AKP won 341 seats, guaranteeing the stability of the government and enabling them to help their candidate win the third round of the presidential election. And by expanding its voter base by some five million in absolute terms, the AKP cemented itself in power. This new political situation has made it clear that a stable one-party government can be formed and that even with unity of the opposition it is unlikely that they would be able to stop Erdogan (Bahar, 2007:69).

Experts say that the AKP's electoral success was not a result of the masses supporting the ruling party in the debate of the 367 or a way to end months of controversy, but rather a reward for the AKP's efforts to stimulate the economy. Impressive macro-economic indicators and infrastructure improvements not only appealed to traditional centre-right voters, but also won over the majority of swing voters. The spectacular economic improvement, the 25% drop in inflation or even the tripling of exports were arguments in the AKP's political communication that also had an impact on some moderate left and centrist groups (Bahar, 2007:70).

The AKP also benefited from the political competition in the run-up to the election as the press did not talk about the programs, but only about the results of the polls. There was no real political struggle in the Turkish media, just a constant evaluation of the chances. Thus, the AKP was also able to argue mostly about the results it had achieved so far and listened deeply about what they wanted to do after the election. Uncertainty was also heightened by the fact that the newspapers were underlining that only three parties could enter the new National Assembly, but the moderate right-wing Democratic Party was also sometimes referred to as having the opportunity to form a faction in Ankara after 2007 (Balkir et al., 2008:202).

There are also some regional trends behind the success of the AKP at the 2007 elections. On the one hand, the right-wing party has successfully addressed the inhabitants of Central Anatolia, which has traditionally been the backbone of conservative and Islamist parties, as seen in the analysis of the electoral background of the Welfare Party in the 1995 parliamentary elections. The AKP, on the other hand, has performed better in this area than its predecessors, because it is not only focused on rural areas, but also on several cities with a population of half or one million, such as Konya and Kayseri. This means that the message of the AKP has reached the workers living in the outer quarters of traditional industrial cities as well as a part of the bourgeoisie. Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his team have been able to make vote for those who have either not voted so far or, if so, for left-wing parties. Experts say this was possible not only because the AKP broke with the rhetoric of the past, but also because it had nominated new cadres as candidates in Central Anatolia whose style was closer to the people who lived there (Cagaptay and Unver, 2007:2).

Behind the advance of the AKP, not only in Central Anatolia but also in other regions of the country, there is the phenomenon that traditionally left-wing residential areas and social strata have tipped over. This is best seen in the lower-middle-class slum-dwelling parts of Turkey's most developed northern and western metropolitan areas, which are home mainly to modern industrial activities and the service sector. The Turkish word „varos” of Hungarian origin refers to these housing estates of low-wage residents, some of which were built after 2002 (Cagaptay and Unver, 2007:4).

The success of the AKP parliamentary elections also paved the way for constitutional amendment. On 21 October 2007, with a very high turnout the changes were passed, with 68.95% saying „yes” from among those who voted. The success of the referendum further strengthened

the positions of the AKP. (Ural, 2012:734) It is worth noting that the outcome of the 2007 referendum was also influenced by a number of smaller parties by encouraging their constituents to vote in favor. Surprisingly, these included both left- and right-wing political formations. Among the leftists, the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi), which defended at the time the interests of the Kurdish minority, noted that they were not in favor of the AKP but of democratization. The Social Democratic People's Party (Sosyaldemokrat Halkci Parti) decided to support the amendment of the constitution because they considered the idea that the president of the republic could be elected directly by the people to be good. Smaller, radical right-wing parties like the Felicity Party and the Great Unity Party, as well as the moderate Democrats, were hoping for a right-wing turn from the decision (Tamer, 2017).

The left-wing Republican People's Party was also able to increase its vote slightly, with 1.5% more voters than in 2002. However, this is far from indicating that the Kemalists were able to mobilise new voters, as the relative success was due to the fact that supporters of two smaller socialist-social democratic parties also rallied behind the CHP. The New Turkey Party collectively joined the CHP, while the Democratic Left (DSP) decided not to contest the 2007 elections. In other words, the CHP's support was essentially stagnant, and they failed to make a major breakthrough (Bahar, 2007:70).

Many were surprised that the theoretically left-wing CHP was unable to articulate a credible critique of the AKP's radical and anti-secularist views and actions. There are far more secularists in Turkish society than there were people who voted for the Kemalists. In fact, even the number of those who are critical of the AKP's brand of Islamism exceeds the CHP's results. Analysts say this could be because the CHP has been unable to use strong left-wing rhetoric to push back against the AKP's moves that run counter to the old principles proposed by Ataturk in the 1920s and 1930s. Rather than confronting the government with a socialist argument, they often proved more nationalist than the National Action Party (Bahar, 2007:72).

The unfortunate nationalist tone of the CHP can also be seen when looking at the party's results from a regional perspective. Its radical stance has led to a large number of secular Turkish citizens of Kurdish nationality defecting from the CHP. They either did not vote, or put their trust in smaller parties. The CHP has suffered a spectacular decline in the southeastern Turkish provinces, which are partially populated by ethnic Kurds (Bahar, 2007:72).



The relative failure of the CHP can also be explained by the fact that the opposition has not adapted well enough to the challenges of the modern world. By the beginning of the 21st century, the Turkish media market had, among other things, undergone significant changes and campaign strategies became different from those of the good old times. The AKP and the nationalist MHP have made fairly good use of modern tools, while the CHP has lagged behind in many respects. For a very long time, Kemalist politicians were used to their own press following the party's line without criticism and mostly acting as a mouthpiece for CHP propaganda. In contrast, the Turkish media of the early 21st century is much less partisan than it was before. CHP politicians have found it very difficult to come to terms with the fact that the press is critical of them and is no longer a pawn in their politics (Balkir et al, 2008:200).

Not only was the CHP unaware of the modern world of media and political campaigns, but it also considered old ideas about the secular state itself to be correct. While the CHP in the early 2000s saw the separation of state and religion as Atatürk a hundred years before, a new kind of secular thinking emerged in Europe and the West, characterized by a high degree of compromise. The AKP's large-scale victory and Gül's election created a chance for the CHP to embrace these modern secular views and reach an agreement with the ruling party on some issues. The fact that the CHP was still unable to break through in most elections can be partly explained by this inability to change (Duran, 2010:17).

The nationalists were the balance in the new National Assembly. Although they were also part of the opposition, they did not stop the plan of the AKP in the presidential elections and finally the AKP MPs elected the AKP candidate as president of the Republic on 28 August 2007 by 339 votes, a simple majority in the third round of the election. Abdullah Gül thus became the last Turkish President of the Republic to be elected by Parliament and not by the people. (Acar and Celebi, 2012:23). This decision also marked the end of a political and legal crisis that had been dragging on for months, and the beginning of the MHP's search for a political path. In the years that followed, the nationalists pursued an opportunistic policy, allying themselves alternatively with the left and the right, but in the end they have chosen Erdoğan and the moderate Islamists.

Moreover, the election of Gül as President did not in any way result in a completely clean situation in legal terms. According to the legislation in force in 2007, it was not clear how long his term of office, which began on 28 August 2007, would last, whether he was elected by the National



Assembly for five or seven years. In January 2012, the Turkish Grand National Assembly finally passed Law No. 6271, which regulated the manner in which the President of the Republic should be elected. According to one of its provisions, Gul's term lasted until 2014, after which the people could elect a new president (Gozler, 2012:1).

From the point of view of the legal assessment of Crisis of the 367, the experts point out that one of the biggest problems is that in this, Turkish constitutional law has become a toy for politics, i.e. Turkish law has been politicized. In 2007, many Turkish lawyers began to seriously fear for the rule of law and how it is interpreted by the AKP, which was increasingly trying to centralize Turkish politics. It was believed that the ruling party would “twist” the law as long as it did not serve its political interests, rather than adhering to standard rule of law expectations. (Ulusahin, 2007:28).

#### **4.2 The Fragility of Turkish Political Structures – The AKP Closure Case**

For the Justice and Development Party (AKP), one of the most serious challenges in its history was the dissolution lawsuit against the party in 2008. This was not because there would have been no precedent in Turkey for banning the various political parties, but because by then one could speak of a government party with serious social support that had already won two parliamentary elections. Since the founding of the Republic of Turkey, it has not been uncommon for one or another political formation to be banned, but at times they have reactivated themselves under a different name. In fact, the initial, one-party era of the republic was also created by the situation provoked by the founder of the state, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who banned rival, opposition parties that threatened his position. Even since the introduction of the multi-party system in 1946 and the first multi-party election in 1950, nearly three dozen parties have been doomed. These included Kurdish separatist groups, parties with communist ideologies, but also the AKP's moderate Islamist predecessors. It has also happened that the leaders of a military coup have decided to ban some parties, but it has also been the case that in a peaceful and democratic period the prosecution has initiated the same in the Constitutional Court claiming that one party or another is opposed to the most basic republican principles.

Yet the case of the AKP was special because, in the case of a party that had been ruling alone for six years, it was still surprising that it was not its political opponent trying to overthrow its power, but the legal nomenclature attached to the old elite. In the second half of the 2000s, the

AKP was still taking reluctant steps towards democratic opening, and it was far from the authoritarian style and centralization efforts that characterize it today, yet it can be said that they had fairly stable political positions. Of course, it is no coincidence that several things have weakened the situation of the AKP, and the party leaders could not have felt that they were surviving this crisis in a political sense. There was a chance that the organization would actually cease to function and the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic would be banned from practicing public affairs for up to 5 years.

The legal process aimed at banning the party has resonated heavily in Turkey, but has come as a real surprise only to the Western public opinion. The purpose of this article is to look at why the Turks were so laconic about the situation and why it has caused so much uproar in Europe and America. At the same time, it will be possible to see the main differences between Western and Turkish democratic traditions.

The first legal authorization of political parties on Turkish soil took place in 1909. In the time of the Ottoman Empire, the political parties thus had only a particular significance, they could not have much say in the real political processes and decisions, because power was still concentrated in the hands of the sultan at that time. The predecessor of today's Turkish party law was the 1961 constitution. The military junta that perpetrated the 1960 coup wanted to put the Turkish party structure on a new footing, so it repealed the party law in force until then and set the legal framework in a higher-ranking law. Following a subsequent coup, the 1982 constitution was born, paragraphs 68 and 69 of which still govern the formation, operation, and dissolution of parties. Until 1995, this basic law allowed the Constitutional Court to dissolve a political party without any evidentiary procedure if it deemed its activities dangerous. An amendment in 1995 already provides for a formal court hearing and makes the banning of parties subject to the consent of two-thirds of judges. At the same time, the Grand Turkish National Assembly enacted a party law that is already very similar in principle and detail to the law customary in Western liberal democracies (Albayrak Coskun, 2008:145).

If an analyst examines the history of banning Turkish political parties, they can see that the first modern case took place in 1960, when the perpetrators of the coup disbanded the Democratic Party (DP), which ruled for 10 years, and executed its leader, Adnan Menderes who served as prime minister between 1950 and 1960. On the grounds of the 1961 constitution introduced by the

coupists and the 1982 constitution created by later military junta, the Constitutional Court abolished a further 24 political parties. These can be divided into three different groups: there were Kurdish separatist, a communist, and moderate Islamist formations related to the AKP among them. Incidentally, the ban on political parties did not end with the AKP coming to power in 2002. The Democratic People's Party (DEHAP), founded in 1997 and considered by Western media as Kurdish-friendly, was banned in 2005, while two years later, in 2007, another organization with a similar profile, the Democratic Society Party (DTP), suffered a similar fate (Albayrak Coskun, 2008:146). In the case of DEHAP, the prosecutor's office did not complain that the party was defending the interests of the Kurdish ethnic minority or pursuing a nationalist or separatist policy. The main accusation against the DEHAP leadership was that false papers were used to found the party and run in the elections, thus committing the crime of falsifying public documents. The party was disbanded despite failing to enter the National Assembly under the new suffrage law introduced for the 2002 elections, as it did not reach the 10% threshold when it reached 6.23% of the vote (Bozarslan, 2021).

In order to better understand the situation of the AKP, the most important case of party banning is that of the Welfare Party's (Refah Partisi - RP) dissolution in 1997, and the banning of the Virtues Party (Fazilet Partisi – FP) in 2001. The Refah Party was formed on the ruins of previously banned organizations by political followers of the moderate Islamist traditions in 1995, just as the constitution was amended and a new party law was used to bring the Turkish party system into line with Western norms. Refah took advantage of and abused the opportunity thus created, as they very soon became very radical in their discourse and politicization. Despite the fact that they won the most votes in the 1995 elections and became the most important member of the governing coalitions, in 1997 during the so-called postmodern coup, they could not avoid the ban after the military e-memorandum. The strength of the secular and Kemalist elite at the time of the ban on Refah is also well illustrated by the fact that only two of the then constitutional judges voted against the ban. (Golcu, 2013:119).

The ban of the above-mentioned Islamist parties had some positive effects on their movement. On the one hand, Turkish Islamists learned from the relative failure of the short-lived RP and FP, and on the other hand, this experience led to a rift within the movement.. Necmettin Erbakan, peacefully overthrown by the military, has set up a new formation by the name of

Happiness Party (Saadet Partisi – SP) that still holds radical views and a small electoral base, but is now cooperating with the opposition of the AKP. Whereas Erbakan’s best-known student, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his circle founded the AKP a little later, in 2001, which was much more moderate at first than the conservative parties of previous decades and took great care for a long time not to be accused of unconstitutionality (Aydindag and Isiksal, 2021:502).

Between 2002 and 2004, the newly acceded AKP did its utmost to work according to the expectations of the European Union and to meet the Copenhagen criteria for candidate status. During these two years, no less than eight packages of amendments to the laws concerning democratic institutions were submitted to the National Assembly. This process has been seen by the West, and within it by the European Union, as a democratic opening. Among other things, these amendments to the law made it legally more difficult to ban parties. (Aydindag and Isiksal, 2021:507). In this initial era of governance, the AKP was still really serious about democratization. On the one hand, it wanted to comply with certain Western institutions, such as the European Union or the Venice Commission, and on the other hand, it wanted to win the confidence of democratically committed, centrist or undecided voters. The party's goal after the 2007 parliamentary election victory was to give the people a completely new, civilian constitution, as it became increasingly uncomfortable that the Turkish constitution, which is still in force today, was drafted by those soldiers in 1982 who overthrew the civilian government in 1980. The AKP commissioned one of Turkey’s best-known social scientists, Ergun Ozbudun, and four other constitutional lawyers to produce a constitutional reform. The AKP at the time was still thinking of a constitution that would extend individual freedoms, protect the rights of ethnic and national minorities, and liberalize regulation around parties, making it more difficult to ban them. Due to the internal political conflicts following the 2007 elections and the lawsuit against the AKP, the idea of a new constitution was eventually rejected by the government led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan and replaced by the amendment of the old constitution and the enshrinement of democratic freedoms in other laws. (Bali, 2015:291) Prior to the democratization packages of the AKP, both Turkish and Western public opinion saw the Turkish Constitutional Court’s party-banning practice as a process that served a less legitimate, much more political purpose. If the old Kemalist elite was unable to defeat a rival by political means, it took out the ban, arguing that this was necessary in the fight against radical Islamism or Kurdish nationalism. (Bali, 2013:668).

On March 14, 2008, the chief prosecutor of the Court of Appeals addressed a lawsuit to the Constitutional Court to ban the Party of Justice and Development and to forbid its 71 leading politicians from practicing public affairs for 5 years. Among those to be banned were the newly elected President of the Republic, Abdullah Gul, and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The most interesting in the lawsuit was that the main argument that was used against the AKP was a constitutional amendment regarding the use of headscarves at the universities, which was also voted by the Nationalist National Action Party (MHP), but the prosecutor's office did not demand the abolition of the radical right-wing party. (Dagi, 2008:2) Otherwise, the prosecution has quite extensive powers to oversee the functioning of the parties, so if the arguments against the AKP were considered valid, they could have taken action against the MHP, too. The prosecutor's office keeps a file on all Turkish political parties and, if necessary, may hold extraordinary consultations with their leaders. This was not the case for the MHP (Rumpf and Akarturk, 2008:7).

After the indictment was filed, as early as March 2008, a multi-level, heated debate erupted in Turkish public opinion. One dilemma was of a legal nature, and lawyers speculated which passage of the Penal Code the judges would apply, and based on it what punishment was expected, whether a ban on the AKP was indeed conceivable. The second clash touched on political issues and the parties meditated on what the role of the President of the Republic was in Turkish democracy. Several constitutional amendments signed by Abdullah Gul, who had only come to power with great difficulty through an early election, were the subject of the lawsuit. It was only then that the Turkish people realized that the President of the Republic was the head of state and had the right to sign a constitutional amendment proposal, and that the Turkish constitution was not set in stone, it was not a political scandal to change it. Until 2007-2008, the President of the Republic of Turkey exercised essentially only ceremonial powers and defended Atatürk's political superstructure, but was not an active participant in political games. It can also be said that the Turkish political system began to move from the parliamentary regime to the presidential system known today around this moment in time (Sevinc, 2008:258).

Members of the old Kemalist elite hostile to the AKP have made the legal process an instrument of their political activism and have thrown themselves into the work with great impetus. Because all high bureaucrats, high judges, members of the constitutional court, senior officers, generals and so on sit there. There was serious activity at that time. Despite great effort, the action

against the ruling party was unsuccessful (Ilter, 2012). “On July 30, six judges on the Constitutional Court voted to ban the party, one short of the required super-majority, providing the AKP with a narrow escape.” (Migdalovitz, 2008:4).

In the Turkish public opinion, the 2008 lawsuit against the Justice and Development Party is mostly seen as a struggle of rival identities. It is true that arguments in many cases were based on practical examples, but it was clear to all Turks that two conservative approaches clashed here and now. On one side are the defenders of Atatürk’s secular traditions, on the other are the followers of Islamic religious customs. Proponents of the ban have often raised cases, such as allowing the use of headscarves in hospitals and public education, to suggest that the AKP is putting pressure on Turkish women. In reality, however, two worldviews were at odds. The old side, which interprets the headscarf as a political stance and the neo-conservatives who treat the headscarf as a private matter but want to allow it. The ideological battle was about whether Atatürk’s secular principles would prevail in public spaces or whether democratic ideas favorable to Islamists would be taken into account. The Kemalist elite, of course, considered the situation to be that the AKP was only seemingly democratic, and if it maximized its power, it would immediately introduce sharia and make the use of shawls mandatory (Aydindag and Isiksal, 2021:510). Kemalist women also feared that their progressive feminism would give birth to a right-wing rival, an authoritarian feminism, that would strengthen AKP Islamism. For this reason, those close to the female section of the CHP and other left-wing feminists also hoped for success in the lawsuit (Chislett, 2008:4). Thus, in addition to the secular-religious dichotomy, a feminist rivalry also lurked in the background. The struggle for identities also extended to female self-awareness.

The prosecution’s own argument also shows that in the 2008 trial the headscarf was just an excuse to use against the ruling party, this case was much more about principles and identity than about what women wear. The main argument put forward by the prosecutor's office against the AKP was that all those who questioned Turkey's secular system and anti-secular political activism, which was also the focus of the ruling party according to the old Kemalist elite, were grouped around the party. The accusations also only referred to cases where women were wearing headscarves, but mostly objected to the direction of politicization of the AKP and certain statements made by some AKP politicians (Bali, 2013:689).

It can be explained from the above that the specific political steps were less emphasized in the indictment, it may seem more like a socio-philosophical discussion paper to the Western reader than an actual accusation. The prosecution mostly revolves around the definition of a secular state and seeks to prove that the AKP is politicizing the opposite on several points. In this political and legal framework, essentially all religious developments could be brought against the AKP and its leaders. A system of principles that is theoretically idealized and less legally defined can be violated in a number of ways. The AKP felt in vain that its political steps were in line with the secular state. The problem was that they based their assessment of their own image of the secular state, and not on what the Kemalists thought of the same thing. The AKP may have felt too soon that they were surely dominating the political arena and could interpret certain terms contrary to the old consensus. „The use of religious expressions in public speeches, reference to the interests of religiously observant women, and arguments in favor of greater freedom from state regulation for religious institutions were all cited as evidence of anti-secular activities” (Bali, 2013:689).

The political behavior of the AKP did not differ much from the mindset of the prosecution and the political left. As much as those who aimed to ban the AKP took a philosophical approach, the ruling party argued in the same abstract way. In essence, they wanted to point out that they have a right to a new interpretation of old concepts and thus will not be enemies of republican principles, they will only place them in a modern interpretive framework. The ambiguous decision of the Constitutional Court just shows that this philosophical debate took place in a transitional period when the followers of the restrictive narrative still had some political power but no longer had the ability to fully dominate the political field and public discourse. The relative success of the ruling party at the end can be explained by the fact that „the AKP argued that a commitment to the constitutional principle of secularism need not take the form of a substantive commitment to a particular metaphysical conception of secularity.” (Bali, 2013:689).

The decisions of the Turkish Constitutional Court in 2007 and 2008 show that the above-mentioned war of identities did not leave the Turkish constitutional system itself untouched, which led to the reform of the 1982 constitution and the 2010 referendum on it. The "loss" of the Turkish Constitutional Court was caused precisely by its involvement in a serious self-contradiction, as there were also sharp differences between its own conservative and progressive members. After the Constitutional Court overturned AKP-backed legislation that allowed the use of shawls in



universities but did not ban the AKP, the board lost a great deal of its credibility. The Constitutional Court itself was unable to get out of this crisis of confidence, giving Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan the means to reshape the legal framework governing the court itself. Moreover, he even gained serious social support by ratifying the decision in a referendum (Bali, 2015:250).

The decision of the Constitutional Court, in particular that it eventually withdrew state support for the party, was interpreted as a misrepresentation, a search for a path or a political position by the court. According to some analysts, the Constitutional Court has ruled that it is not the AKP as a party that is at stake, but its identity and political orientation. They gave an interpretation of the events that the AKP could still “change,” and it would be up to the AKP to reinforce its conservative line and separate its identity well from traditional and radical Islamism (Gumuscu and Sert, 2009:954).

The constitutional crisis soon became a political crisis, which was also perceived by those who originally campaigned for a ban on the AKP. It has become clear that both AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan can only emerge victorious from the proceedings. Either an ambiguous verdict is made, as finally pronounced, or the party is banned, making it easier for Erdogan to show himself as a victim immediately. In the latter case, the AKP would have ceased to exist only temporarily, because it would have relaunched under the leadership of other people, and Erdogan, having finished his ban, would have been able to return triumphantly to Turkish domestic politics. The political and legal opponents of the AKP had to understand that they had been trapped by themselves (Dagi, 2008:5).

Although Western countries can be said to have liberal principles regarding the functioning of parties, and it is quite rare that they ban political groups, they still use this tool at times. It is quite rare to ban political sheds, they still use this tool at times. The Germans, who are quite liberal since World War II, have been so strict in the 1950s that the German Imperial Socialist Party (Sozialistische Reichspartei Deutschlands - SPR) closed to the Nazi ideology, and the German Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands-KP) were banned. A closer example in time can be found in Spain, where a political formation that allegedly cooperated with the Basque separatist terrorist organization, the ETA, was banned from operating in the early 2000s. (Albayrak Coskun, 2008:142) The case of the Batasuna party in the Spanish Basque Country can be linked to Turkey to the extent that the case has been brought before the European Court of Human Rights



(ECtHR), as have several pro-Kurdish groups in Turkey, such as the HEP or the DEP. (Rumpf and Akarturk, 2008:18) The same European judiciary also issued an opinion on the case of the predecessor party of the AKP, Refah. They then declared the decision of the Turkish Constitutional Court lawful by four votes to three (Rumpf and Akarturk, 2008:20).

An attempt to ban the AKP has provoked extremely violent reactions in the West, especially in Europe. The European Union has strongly condemned the legal process, with Portuguese President José Manuel Barroso, for example, explaining that a ban on the AKP could hinder or even halt Turkey's European integration. Swedish Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn added that „in a normal European democracy, political issues are debated in parliament and decided in the ballot box, not in the courtroom” (Dagi, 2008:2). In addition to the fundamentally liberal approach of European politicians, the fact that the EU saw the AKP as its partner in Turkey in the second half of the 2000s also played a role in advocating for the AKP. The AKP was still consistently pro-European at the time, even if it made some criticism of Brussels from time to time. The Turkish opposition, and in particular the Kemalist Republican People's Party, was strongly Eurosceptic. By now, the positions of both Turkish political sides have been reversed. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that the moderate Islamists of the AKP at the time still believed that the political representation of the religious masses could not be successful in Turkey based on Atatürk principles, and that the EU would extend Western freedoms to this social stratum. As the AKP strengthened and was able to dominate the Turkish political landscape, it no longer needed the EU and moved away from it.

Another well-known Western organization that issued an opinion on banning the AKP was the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe has taken the classic liberal Western position that all political ideologies in Europe, including Turkey, should be allowed to operate freely. However, it is worth noting that this opinion is quite surprising to a Turkish citizen. The Turks see that this excessive liberalism led to the fall of Europe and provoked the break out of World War II. The various fascist, Nazi or even communist parties operated in Europe without any restrictions, leading to the establishment of dictatorships and a subsequent disaster. The average Turkish person is more willing to ban parties that pose a threat to the nation and the state than to really face an unavoidable situation (Albayrak Coskun, 2008:141).

The Venice Commission linked to the Council of Europe had a report in 1999 outlining to the Council of Europe member states what principles they should apply in party laws and how they should regulate the banning of parties. According to this document, the democratic party systems that have developed in Europe today are an integral part of our common cultural heritage, and the free functioning of parties can only guarantee the survival of this political tradition. This position of the Venice Commission reflects the Western idea that freedom of expression and assembly belongs to political parties and that it is in the common interest of all European democracies to guarantee it. In only one case does the Commission see an exception if the rule of law is respected. In a situation where a country is operating democratically and an extremist party is abusing the opportunities offered by democracy, and poses a threat to democracy itself, it can be banned. However, the AKP in 2007-2008 was still difficult to call extreme. Rather, it could only pose a threat to the secular system of the state, and Erdogan and his mates themselves did not question democracy as a system (Sevinc, 2008:260).

The American politicians have been much more cautious than their European counterparts. They sought to strike a balance and emphasized the importance of both democratic freedoms and the respect for the secular state. In other words, the United States did not try to interfere in Turkish internal affairs, but gave its views to the understanding of both parties. The Turkish Constitutional Court had to learn from this that the US would not be happy with the ban of the AKP, but also called on the AKP to respect the ideals of a secular state (Dagi, 2008:3).

The initiators of the lawsuit against the AKP did not reckon with one thing, and this explains why the party survived this political and legal attack on it. The Kemalists assumed that much of Turkish society thought like them and that believers practicing their religion were a minority. However, they did not think that this minority is large enough and that its influence is growing, almost half of Turkish society, even if they do not live a faithful life, agrees with some views of the AKP, supports some of its steps, and there are those who are still in solidarity with the party even if they are not voted for them. This carelessness, as it was related to the religious-secular opposition, led to an even greater division of the Turkish people (Jenkins, 2008:2).

The legal process to ban the AKP also created a regional political divide in Turkey, too. The prestige of the Constitutional Court has increased in the eyes of the urban and secular middle-class population of the large cities in the western part of the country. They increasingly saw the

organization as a tool that swayed over their secular conception of the state alongside a portion of the military and state bureaucracy. In contrast, the more rural population in central and eastern Turkey began to cultivate increasingly hostile sentiment towards the constitutional court, which also shook confidence in the entire judicial system. These domestic political divisions persisted until the 2010 constitutional amendment, when the Constitutional Court ceased to play the role of checks and balances and increasingly took action to defend Erdogan's policies (Bali, 2015:306).

The lawsuit to ban the AKP has ended with the clear success of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Although some members of the Constitutional Court voted to ban the party, they eventually escaped with only a minor sentence. Behind the party, a fairly serious group of financial backers had already emerged, so the fact that the AKP had been deprived of a year of state support could not make the party impossible to operate. However, the court decision infuriated Erdogan, who, on the one hand, swore vengeance and, on the other, tried his best to strengthen his own political positions. Erdogan also made sure that he was not the only one to decide to reorganize the Constitutional Court and oust the old lawyers associated with the Kemalist elite, but to arrange for an amendment to the constitution to decide on the changes. This amendment was eventually put to a referendum, in which a fairly high proportion, 58% of the voters, decided to transform the supreme Turkish judicial forum. The new constitutional court, which was eventually voted by the people, was filled by Erdogan with his own people (Akçay, 2018:18).

The final decision of the Constitutional Court, i.e. not to abolish the AKP, put the Turkish opposition, especially the Republican People's Party, in a very difficult position, as they had to realize that their resources against the government were becoming increasingly scarce. The 2007 military memorandum and the 2008 court ruling proved that the social positions of the Kemalists had been extremely weakened. They had no choice but to defeat the AKP and Erdogan on the political stage (Dagi, 2008:9). The nearly one decade and a half since then proves that the Turkish opposition has only partially grown up for this task.

As his opponents' playing field narrowed, the AKP's political position strengthened spectacularly after the lawsuit. The conservative circle of entrepreneurs, the business association close to the AKP, MUSIAD, has provided more financial support to the AKP than before, and is still an important financial support for Erdogan. Also due to the lawsuit, conservative Anatolian citizens who were morally and financially ready to support the AKP became stronger and more

self-conscious (Gumuscu and Sert, 2009:966). At the same time, a structural political transformation has taken place in Turkey, as a result of which the AKP has built a stable electoral base around itself, which was only partially eroded even by the early 2020s.

For certain observers, it was not clear that the AKP was relatively strengthened by surviving the lawsuit to ban it. Moreover, in 2009 there was even a rumor that another court case was being prepared against the Turkish ruling party (Castaldo, 2018:12). After successfully defending itself, the AKP commenced a spectacular counterattack. After the ruling party's politicians learned that the party could continue to operate, they themselves filed lawsuits against secular personalities, including military officers, who had previously sought to defeat the AKP themselves. In the social debates of these lawsuits, the opposition proved to be quite weak, the Republican People's Party was unable to defend its own people. This has further increased the AKP's room for maneuver, both legally and politically, and has increasingly pushed the CHP into the background. The AKP besides strengthening its own position, was also undermining the opportunities of its opponents „by increasingly framing the necessity of judicial reform as a struggle against oligarchic rule”, the party implemented policies that incrementally weakened judicial independence and undermined horizontal accountability.” (Somer, 2019:51).

#### **4.3 The Ergenekon Conspiracy and the Rise of Xenophobic Nationalism in Turkey**

The Ergenekon lawsuits, which ran from 2008 to 2016, are a good example of the proliferation of suspicion and fear in Turkish political life. Even in the course of the legal proceedings, it was difficult to distinguish what was well-founded from this, who might actually have been the conspirators against the Turkish state, and what was more of a conspiracy theory. As time goes on, and as the narrative of the various political sides, but most of all the Justice and Development Party, changes, this whole story becomes more and more confusing and the threat less and less real. The world behind the Ergenekon lawsuits is at least as fabulous as the original legend of Ergenekon itself, one of the basic terms of Turkish national mythology.

The term Ergenekon first appears in the 14th-century in the writings of Rashiduddin Hamedani, namely in the book entitled *Jami at-Tevarih*. Here Ergenekon refers to the myth of origin of the Mongol people related to the Turks. From the 17th century onwards, in literary and prehistoric books, the word Ergenekon refers to the origin of the Gokturk people, the ancestors of the Turks, or the mythical homeland of the Turkish people. Historians believe that the location of

Ergenekon could not be established with certainty from the existing descriptions, but it is located somewhere in Central Asia, in the Altay and Belukha mountains. Modern history also places the homeland of the Turkish peoples roughly in the same area. Due to its mythical significance, the term Ergenekon is of particular importance to the Turkish people, one of the most important references for nationalist-minded Turks. The use of the word Ergenekon by potential conspirators or even those who conspire with the conspiracy is intended to influence the national emotions of the average Turkish person.

The Ergenekon lawsuits - whatever their real background is - created a very comfortable situation for the AKP. Legal proceedings have allowed the ruling party to gradually settle accounts with some of its internal and external rivals. The cases, as a number of senior military officers were also involved, provided a good opportunity for the AKP to attack the Kemalist military leadership. Among the victims of the AKP's advance was part of FETO, and the Erdogan-Gulen duel began somewhere around the Ergenekon trials. However, the Ergenekon case, due to its vague and non-transparent nature, made it possible for the AKP to accuse the conspirators for everything from terrorism to political killings. It was around this time that the Turkish citizens began to dread some vague grouping, some deep or parallel state trying to overthrow the Republic of Turkey. The average Turkish person, held in fear and dread, is easily restrained and gladly votes on who he sees as his savior.

In the early 2000s, a new trend in Turkish nationalism emerged that simultaneously affected the right-wing national-minded intelligentsia and the critical, secular, yet highly nationalist people of the left. This xenophobic way of thinking was given the name *Ulusalçilik*, and this social-philosophical attitude was witnessed by many people who were later accused in the context of the Ergenekon trials. The essence of *Ulusalçilik* is that it sought to reconcile traditional national thought with anti-Westernism and a commitment to Atatürk's reforms. This approach resonated on both the right and left edges of the political arena. One of the main enemies of *Ulusalci* thinking is the European Union, which favors Greek Cypriots in the disputes over the island and demands special rights for minorities in Turkey, such as the Kurdish ethnic community and Alevi religious groups. From this perspective, the AKP is also an enemy of *Ulusalçilik*, as the Turkish ruling party still had very good relations with Brussels in the mid-2000s (Grigoriadis and Ozer, 2010:109).

Ulusalçılık is not only a political ideology, but also a method of power engineering. At least according to the interpretations of those who oppose these Turkish nationalists. Certain accusations against Ergenekon and the followers of the Ulusalci way of thinking say that they were not satisfied with the creation of associations with national feelings (there really was a non-governmental organization called Ergenekon), but they sought to create a so-called deep state (*derin devlet* in Turkish) with the aim of gradually influencing the functioning of the Turkish state or even overthrowing the current government (Grigoriadis and Ozer, 2010:113). Although the term deep state first appeared in the context of Turkey and Ergenekon, it later became popular in the Western social science literature, so work has been done in recent years on the nature of the British or American deep state (Tas, 2014:164).

According to some assumptions, an organization among military officers began as early as the 1990s with the aim of ousting Islamist parties from Turkish public life, or at least provoking a secular turn in these political formations. This theory states that Cevik Bir, who stood behind the 1997 postmodern coup, not only sought to put the Welfare Party at a political disadvantage, but also wanted to bring together like-minded journalists, economic actors and civil activists. This means that Bir's goal was not only to overthrow the Erbakan government, oust Necmettin Erbakan and defeat the Islamist parties, but to establish an ideologically based circle that would hamper anti-secular efforts in Turkey in the long run (Aydinli, 2011:228).

Bir's grouping within the army was somewhat overshadowed by the AKP coming to power and forming a government alone. In 2003, Chief of Staff Hilmi Ozkok had already declared that their relationship with the ruling party was harmonious. However, he also did not forget to state that the military is constantly monitoring the work of the government and is ready to intervene whenever they feel that the AKP has crossed a border that it should not have. Ozkok's declarations showed that the political behavior of the armed forces was changing in the first half of the 2000s. They sought cooperation more than before and wanted to apply the principle of gradation in politics, that is, they did not want to jump in the case of the slightest „violation.” (Aydinli, 2011:228).

Nonetheless, in some cases, the Turkish army's statements gave the impression that it did want to intervene directly in politics and the work of the judiciary. The best example of this is what happened on November 9, 2005, when two nationalist military officers bombed a bookstore in the

town of Semdinli, in eastern Turkey. The target of the attack was a bookstore that authorities said was linked to the Kurdish separatist terrorist organization, the PKK. One of the perpetrators was according to Yasar Buyukanit, one of the leaders of the Turkish staff, the later chief of staff, „a good boy”. With this ill-considered statement, Buyukanit seriously influenced the course of the investigation and prosecution, and at the same time proved that the army had not yet given up on being a factor in Turkish public life. Some Turkish citizens have interpreted the case as if the Turkish army was apologizing to those who committed a bombing, meaning the top military leadership could collude with extremist nationalists (Aydinli, 2011:229).

The speculation that a conspiracy group may exist within the Turkish army became even stronger when the newspaper called *Nokta* (Point) published the diary of Navy Commander Admiral Ozden Ornek in 2007, in which this senior military officer mentions that Kemalist military officers had plotted a coup in 2004. According to this text, the leader of the rebels was Sener Eruygur, the commander-in-chief of the gendarmerie, who was later also accused of participating in the Ergenekon organization itself. An investigation in 2008 proved that someone had stolen Ornek's diary from his own computer, and in 2009 this corpus became one of the main pieces of evidence against the defendants in the Ergenekon trial (Aydinli, 2011:231). The Ergenekon trial also revealed that the group was also planning a second coup in 2009 with the aim of making it impossible for Turkey to join the European Union once and for all. Within the framework of this military coup, they wanted to assassinate several famous Turkish intellectuals, such as Nobel Prize-winning writer Orhan Pamuk and many well-known leaders of the Kurdish ethnic minority (Grigoriadis and Ozer, 2010:114). The investigation also revealed a CD featuring a secret military operation, *Cage* (*Kafes* in Turkish). This describes in as much detail as possible how the xenophobic naval officers would kill the leaders of the Greek and Armenian communities in Turkey (Rodrik, 2014:7).

The official proceedings in the Ergenekon case followed a similar choreography in almost all cases. Anonymous reporters provided very detailed information to the police. Each such announcement clarified where the guns were hidden, who the conspirators were, and what they did or planned to do. Police then conducted spectacular house searches, after which they leaked some of the evidence to press products close to the AKP. Eventually, pro-government media



launched a politically charged expiration campaign against oppositionists, most notably nationalists from the Ulusalci way of thoughts, who had just been targeted (Rodrik, 2011:107).

The Ergenekon case itself "exploded" into the public consciousness when, in the summer of 2007, Istanbul police raided an apartment on the Asian side of the city in the Umraniye district, which is mostly inhabited by religious Muslims, following an anonymous announcement. 27 grenades, mostly made in Turkey, were found in the property. The suspicion of the authorities was aroused by the use of similar explosives by the perpetrators who had attacked the editorial office of the secular and pro-Republican newspaper Cumhuriyet (Republic) a few weeks earlier. The suspects in the case soon turned to some retired military officers, including Muzaffer Tekin. Not long after, similar hand grenades were found in the apartment of Fikret Emek, a retired military officer, and some firearms were also discovered there. In the police after the Kemalist suspects were produced, it emerged that the attack on Cumhuriyet was a false flag operation, and yet the perpetrators were not extreme Islamists as they had hitherto suspected (Aydinli, 2011:232).

Following the raids in the summer of 2007, on January 21, 2008, many more suspects were detained during an even more extensive series of house searches. It was striking that during this police proceeding, not only did the handcuffs clatter in the hands of opposition-affiliated active military officers, but leading journalists, well-known mafia chiefs, and a spokesman for the Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate also entered the guardroom. They were followed by other well-known left-wing intellectuals. Among them was Kemal Alemdaroglu, a former rector of Istanbul University. The political motivation of the case is also demonstrated by the fact that in February 2008 Dogu Perincek, the chairman of the Labor Party, one of the small but influential far-left political groups, was also among those arrested (Aydinli, 2011:233).

During the Ergenekon process, the AKP-led state apparatus and the secret services used state-of-the-art equipment, and apparently the targets were also those who used modern infocommunication tools frequently and skillfully. The whole police investigation has shown well that the AKP was most afraid of the secular and Western-minded intellectuals who argue against them, and of those like the Dogu Perincek who are raising their voices against all forms of social injustice. Much of the evidence was also Internet correspondence and publication, which the AKP has so far not used to discredit its opponents (Ertur, 2011:38).



In July 2008, the arrests linked to the alleged Ergenekon conspiracy already included the highest-ranking officers in the army. It was then that the gendarmerie chief, Sener Eruygur, who had planned a coup d'état in 2004 according to Ozden Ornek's diary, was taken into police custody. Hursit Tolon, commander of the first army, was also able to enjoy the "hospitality" of the police. After both Eruygur and Tolon were detained, the Istanbul Prosecutor's Office filed a 2,455-page indictment on July 14, 2008, accusing a total of 86 soldiers and civilians, secular nationalists, of participating in the Ergenekon conspiracy. (Aydinli, 2011:233) Eruygur was also the president of a radical Kemalist NGO called Ataturkist Dusunce Dernegi, which had been discussed in the previous chapter over protests against the AKP and Abdullah Gul's election as president in the spring of 2007 (Grigoriadis and Ozer, 2010:116).

Even at this starting point in the Ergenekon series of proceedings, it was already clear that the behavior of the Turkish army was changing and that the general staff was strongly divided. This was also evident in the case where, according to some documents released in 2009, secular and nationalist military officers planned to assassinate Bulent Arinc. With Arinc, who was the Speaker of Parliament before 2007 and then Deputy Prime Minister as an AKP politician, the perpetrators were scheduled to end up in his own homes in Ankara. During the investigation, it was revealed that in the secret archives of the special forces of the army, the so-called Cosmic room, there are some crucial documents. The military leadership eventually agreed to allow a civilian judge to enter the facility and take notes there. That would have been unthinkable before (Aydinli, 2011:234). Later, in 2015, the investigating authority terminated the proceedings in the attempt to assassinate Arinc because it was not found to be proven. At the end of 2010s, the entire military court system was abolished, and the jurisdiction of civilian courts was extended to the military.

As the Ergenekon case began to dominate public discourse in Turkey, the authorities sought to portray many of the crimes originally handled independently of Ergenekon as if they had also been committed by secular nationalist military officers. Thus, the January 2007 assassination of Hrant Dink, an ethnic Armenian journalist of Turkey, became part of the Ergenekon conspiracy. Dink was born in 1954 in the eastern Turkish city of Malatya and became known for his strong Armenian nationalist stance. He considered the events of 1915 a genocide and strongly insisted on his Armenian identity. He also received a prison sentence on one occasion for saying that he was

not Turkish but an ethnic Armenian from Turkey. According to the court ruling, this counts as contempt for the Turkish nation, which is punishable in Turkey.

The perpetrators of the January 2007 murder of Hrant Dink after turning to the European Court of Human Rights over their lawsuits in Turkey. At the same time, this international body also acknowledged in its 2010 ruling that there was a secular nationalist circle behind the crime, whose members aimed to protect Turkey's secular character. It is worth noting that the European Court of Human Rights itself refers to this circle as Ergenekon, which means that some Western observers have accepted the official Turkish position that Ergenekon is a real conspiracy and, as an extensive network, struck down in Turkey in several ways (Esayan, 2013:36).

During the Ergenekon lawsuits, several individuals were placed on the dock who made harsh statements about Hrant Dink in the first half of the 2000s. On February 6, 2004, Dink published an article in the weekly *Agos*, the largest media outlet of the Armenian community in Turkey, with which he aroused the anger of Turkish nationalist circles. Dink wrote that Sabiha Gokcen, who was the foster daughter of state founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and who gave her name to one of Istanbul's airports, was in fact of Armenian ethnic origin, and Ataturk took her from an Armenian orphanage and raised a pilot, more specifically Gokcen was the first Turkish female pilot in the history of aviation. Dink's writing was reviewed by one of the most important Turkish dailies, *Hurriyet* (Freedom), after which Dink was Threatened by several people. In connection with the incident, Dink was called to the Istanbul Minority Office of the Istanbul Governorate, where intelligence officers sought to put pressure on him. Among them was a certain O.Y., who later became one of the defendants in the Ergenekon trials. Levent Temiz, a well-known activist in the Muslim nationalist group *Ulku Ocaklari* and the MHP, also appears as a defendant in the Ergenekon case. Temiz stated, "From now on Hrank Dink will be the object of our rage and hatred, he is our target." (Cetin and Tuna, 2010:2).

Beyond the wrath of the nationalists, Hrant Dink had to face several lawsuits. Not only did he have to reckon with being prosecuted for the Gokcen article, but he was also sued by an association of secular and nationalist lawyers, the Great Union of Lawyers, saying Dink was trying to influence the legal proceedings against him. The NGO also organized a protest against Dink, which was attended by Oktay Yildirim, Veli Kucuk, Sevgi Erenerol and Kemal Kerincsiz, who later also found themselves among the defendants in the Ergenekon trial. The above-mentioned

lawyers raised the following hateful banner high at this event: “Hrant, the son of a missionary, do not disturb the peace of Turkish Armenians, Hrant do not betray the bread you ate” (Cetin and Tuna, 2010:4).

Sevgi Enerol's name was also mentioned in connection with other anti-minority cases, and these were also brought against him during the Ergenekon trial. According to the indictment, Enerol held a training course organized by the General Staff and Air Force Command in October and November 2006, where he discussed the so-called threat posed by ethnic minorities to Turkey and gave a lengthy analysis of the missionary activities of Christian groups on Turkish soil. (Cetin and Tuna, 2010:6) The name of Kerincsiz was not unknown to Turkish public either, as he sued not only Hrant Dink, but also the only Turkish Nobel Prize-winning writer, Orhan Pamuk. In both cases, he brought up against intellectuals that their writings had offended the Turkish people. (Jenkins, 2009:41).

At the initiative of a group of Turkish intellectuals, more precisely the "Art for Peace" organization, the street where the Armenian newspaper, the Agos editorial office is located and the assassination took place, was named after Hrant Dink. The piquancy of the thing is that until then the road in question was called Ergenekon Street. Incidentally, the name change was not supported by the AKP and was authorized by Mustafa Sarigul, the left-wing mayor of the district concerned, Sisli. (Armenian Weekly, 2010) By the way, Sarigul has since left Kemalist CHP and founded his own party called Movement for Change in Turkey (Turkiye Degisim Hareketi).

Turkish public opinion linked the Ergenekon conspiracy, similar to the Hrant Dink assassination, to the attack on the Christian publishing house Zirve in Hrant Dink's hometown of Malatya. The triple murder in April 2007 was suspected by a gang of five people who broke into a Bible and Bible commentary printing plant. The attack claimed three lives. Among the victims are two Turkish citizens, Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel, who were born Muslims but converted to the Christian faith, and a German missionary, 45-year-old Tilmann Geske. The first reactions of the Turkish media were that the perpetrators may have been Muslim extremists who might have thought that leaving Islam was a major sin. However, as the Ergenekon affair began to dominate Turkish public opinion, more and more people linked this case to secular military circles and referred to the killings as a false flag operation. (Esayan, 2013:38) After several attacks on Christians had been linked to Ergenekon, they were also blamed for the murder of Father Andrea

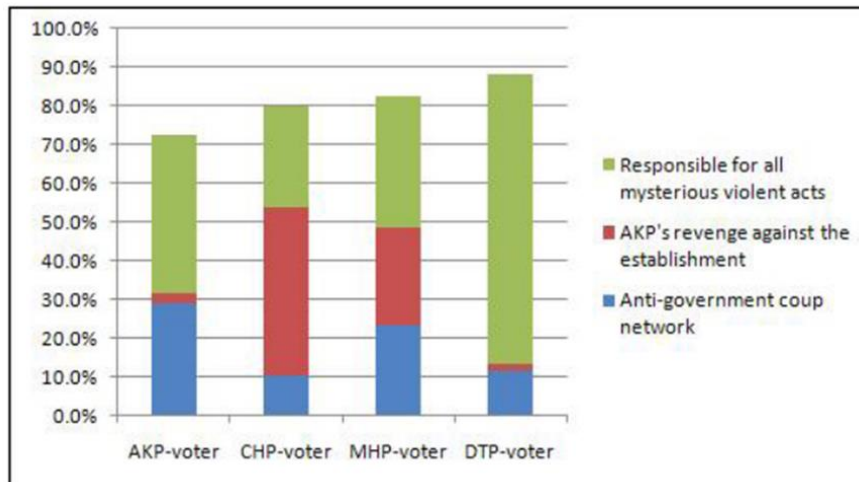
Santoro. The Catholic priest of Italian descent was killed in February 2006 by a young man who had fallen into the priest's trust, pretending to be a Christian but was guided by bad intentions. (Jenkins, 2009:59).

Some scholars have also come up with the idea that attacks on Christians may not only target Christians but also the FETO terrorist organization. Gulen was still well-groomed in the second half of the 2000s with prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP, and was known to be an avid supporter of interfaith dialogue. If hatred against Christians flares up in Turkey and can be caught up with radical Islamists, it could put the religious leader who emigrated to America and his people in Turkey in a very awkward position. However, it is also true that although the relationship between Ergenekon and Gulen has occasionally arisen, the case has not yet worsened the assessment of the „hojja.” (Avsar et al, 2013:9) Fetullah Gulen and his terrorist organization are emerging elsewhere during the Ergenekon trial. The sources agree that a significant proportion of the lawyers in the Ergenekon case are followers of and either under pressure or on behalf of a religious leader in America. Ultimately, it is also possible to read the Ergenekon lawsuits as a duel between the two rival secret societies, the secular nationalist Ergenekon and the Islamist terrorists of the FETO network (Taspinar, 2014:1).

By the late 2000s, fears of the Ergenekon conspiracy began to show paranoid symptoms, too, and AKP leadership began to see Ergenekon behind every anti-government movement. At a 2010 demonstration, for example, some college students tossed eggs at an AKP member of the Turkish National Assembly. A spokesperson for the ruling party then told the Turkish public that the perpetrators were most likely linked to Ergenekon. However, the students said in response that they were supported in the egg-launching not by Ergenekon but by chickens. (Ertur, 2011:34).

It can be seen from the above that Ergenekon is a very complex phenomenon and allows for radically different interpretations. Some see it as a very serious conspiracy, while others consider it being just a crazy paranoia. As the narratives are varied, voters in different parties assessed the Ergenekon case in slightly different ways in the late 2000s, as can be seen from the table below. DTP voters representing the rights of the Kurdish minority, which has since been disbanded, said Ergenekon was responsible for all political crimes in Turkey; it was an all-encompassing terrorist network. Half of Kemalist CHP voters, a third of nationalist MHP supporters, by contrast, thought the government was behind the Ergenekon and they were aimed

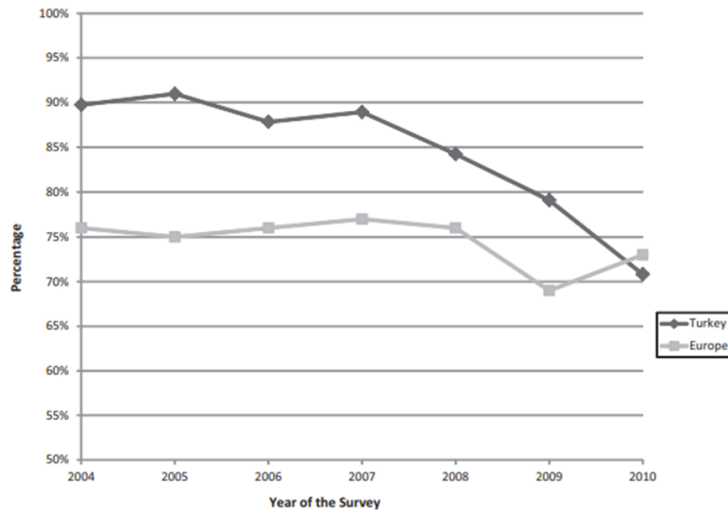
at defeating the opposition and the old elite. Nearly half of pro-government citizens, on the other hand, perceived the Ergenekon as an anti-government terrorist network. So each political side felt most about itself as a target and a victim.



**Figure 3.** Opinion poll on the nature of the Ergenekon-conspiracy according to the voters of the various Turkish political parties (source: Unver, 2009:25)

After the first proceedings, the number of suspects and indictments has steadily increased. The Istanbul High Criminal Court finally handed down its judgment on 5 August 2013 after more than 600 court hearings. The sentence, based on a total of 22 indictments, was 503 pages long. The court convicted 193 defendants for collaborating with a terrorist organization, 32 people were brought to try to overthrow the democratically elected government, and 21 people were acquitted of the charges against them. Among those convicted was former Chief of Staff Ilker Basbug, who was also accused of wanting to overthrow the AKP government. (Esayan, 2013:29) Basbug was finally released in March 2014 and completely rehabilitated in May 2016. Since then, Ilker Basbug has retired and is raising his voice as a critic of the government if military officers are arrested on political grounds.

As can be seen from the table below, the image of the Turkish army changed in a very negative direction in the second half of the 2000s in Turkey. The drastic loss of confidence in the Turkish armed forces was influenced by a number of factors, but there was no doubt that more and more people began to fear the soldiers. More and more people saw the armed forces as a potential source of danger and not as defenders of the nation and the homeland.



**Figure 4.** Trust in the military in Turkey and the European Union (source: Gursoy, 2015:19)

If one views the Ergenekon conspiracy and subsequent lawsuits from a political and military perspective, it can be said that they have had a dual impact on Turkish society. On the one hand, it had a clearly positive return, as a process of cleansing within the Turkish armed forces began, which then led to military reform following the failed coup in 2016. On the other hand, it is quite clear that the whole story had a very negative impact on Turkish democracy itself. A survey conducted in October 2011 with the help of interviews with 2,775 people, the Survey on the Armed Forces and Society in Turkey (SAFST), shows that Turkish political life has become extremely divided and there is less and less chance of reconciliation between political sides. So Turks managed to reconcile the army a little and infuriate the civilians. (Gursoy, 2015:104).

The Ergenekon affair and all its consequences led to the upset of the balance of power that had existed until then. Until 2007, parties and governments had essentially no say in the affairs of the army, but the military could intervene in politics if they did not like something. Following the Ergenekon case, civilian control over the army began. Indeed, there is a widespread view in Turkey that it is incompatible with democracy to have bodies over which the state and civil courts have no control. The demilitarization of Turkish society began with the relative failure of the memorandum discussed in the previous chapter and the Ergenekon affair. (Gursoy, 2015:107) Frustration and revenge on the part of some pro-government politicians have also emerged as causes. One of the AKP's leading politicians, for example, once said, "For years, they blacklisted us. Now, it is our turn." (Rodrik, 2011:108).

The Ergenekon case has brought about serious changes in the system of relations between the military and civilians and in Turkish political life, but has left Turkish universities and researchers almost untouched. It is striking that the sources for the present dissertation were practically in English, as if Turkish scientific life had not been affected. The most likely reason behind the silence of Turkish social scientists is that although the Ergenekon trials have launched a slow process of purification, the „scribes” are still afraid. They are afraid of those exercising political power, but they are also afraid of reactionary elements that may still exist within the military. The principle that Turkish scholars should follow the state and the official ideology of the state in everything remained unspoken. In the case of Ergenekon, this resulted in self-censorship in the Turkish scholarly community. (Tas, 2014:167).

#### **4.4 Prosecution of Turkish civil society under the AKP**

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) does not only have problems with the military and the judiciary while building a totalitarian system, but also with the traditionally strong Turkish civil society. In Turkey and before that in the Ottoman Empire, civil society has always been of great importance, especially foundations having centuries-long history. The proclamation of the republic in 1923 is also a serious rupture in this regard, as the founder of the state, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, pushed traditional civil society into the background and abolished the structures that had behind them fraternal communities associated with the Islamic religion. In the initial, one-party period of the republic, therefore, the non-governmental sphere slowly and hardly regenerated. In many cases, Western, European, or even American examples were used as the basis for the new organizations. Ideologically, too, liberal models and mindsets had a significant influence on reorganizing Turkish citizenship. Successive military coups have also failed to strengthen Turkish civil society during the multi-party era of the republic. The very well-known organizations, foundations and associations were mostly established or strengthened in the 1980s, a period that can be called the heroic age of Turkish civil courage. Following the 1980 military coup, a new constitution was adopted in Turkey. In addition to his liberal economic policy, Turgut Özal, who came to power in the 1983 elections, became known for his conservative social policy. In this right-wing political mood, the new democratic system, which was gaining momentum, was able to provide a good environment for the rapid development of Turkish NGOs. One of the marked elements of the liberal economic policy was the privatization and the support of private enterprises,



this line also prevailed in the field of media, and a number of private TV and radio stations were established. The resulting pluralistic media market has had a beneficial effect on private initiatives and the civil sphere (Burak, 2021:64).

By the early 1990s, a thriving civil society could be found in Turkey. The fact that Turkey's foreign policy has also become more and more active has been a great boost for the organizations that focus mostly on charitable activities. Turkish aid organizations first showed their strength in the Balkan war and then became characteristic participants in charitable work in conflict zones around the world. In addition to foreign charitable activities, two domestic events also made a positive contribution to the development of Turkish NGOs in the 1990s. In 1996, an international meeting called the Global Habitat Conference was held in Istanbul, where Turkish civil activists were able to show their power to the world for the first time. And during the horrific 1999 earthquake in the eastern basin of the Marmara Sea, Turkish charities worked in a great way with non-governmental groups from abroad. These two events have put Turkish civil society on the world map. (Burak, 2021:65) The Turkish civil society has also benefited from the country's Euro-Atlantic integration. The 1999 Helsinki Summit and the so-called Copenhagen criteria to join the European Union point to the democratization and Europeanisation of Turkey. In the spirit of this democratization, the legal framework for civil organizations was also facilitated by Turkish legislation at the turn of the millennium. (Diez et al, 2005:7).

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which came to power in 2002, took over at a time when politics could already build well on a stable civil society. These conservative, moderate Islamist civil society organizations have already played a role in the success of large-scale victories of moderate Islamists of the AKP. During the nearly two decades of governance of the AKP, a politically based divide has been consolidated in Turkish society, of which the civil sphere is no exception. AKP governments are counting on their loyal civilian partners not only to mobilize the electorate, but also to address serious social challenges such as the care for and integration of Syrian refugees, or the media coverage of the coronavirus, vaccination campaigns or the care for quarantined people. The AKP has significantly reshaped Turkish civil society. They declared some of the once loyal organizations enemies because they saw in them the perpetrators of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. And at the ideological and political level, rival groups are increasingly opposed by the administration of Recep Tayyip Erdogan.



During the rule of the AKP, self-government was also characterized by a relative democratic deficit. Local charities were pushed into the power vacuum that sometimes appeared at the local level as early as the 2000s, and a lot of work was taken over from municipalities and village notary offices by the NGOs. At the same time, the AKP was able to successfully reframe the interpretation of this situation to the small town and village population by telling that all these services are done by the government, the government provided the opportunity for associations and foundations. As so many people in the countryside accepted this element of government communication, civil activism was able to increase the popularity of the ruling party even if it was precisely the political inertia that caused the situation that private individuals had to activate themselves (Metin, 2011:195).

The best example of such a division and rearrangement of civil society is how fiercely Erdogan and the AKP government have been acting against civil society actors they do not like since 2016.

### **5.1 Growing conflicts between the Turkish government and civil society**

AKP governments and Recep Tayyip Erdogan have repeatedly testified that they will use all their political clout to make certain NGOs and activists impossible. One of the most striking such cases occurred in 2017, when the Turkish delegation left one of the meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) because a representative of the Journalists and Writers Foundation had the floor. According to the Turkish government, this organization is clearly linked to the religious leader Fetullah Gulen, whom the AKP cabinet associates with the 2016 coup attempt and whose community has been declared a terrorist organization by the name of FETO. The President of the Republic of Turkey sought to veto the participation of civil society activists close to Gulen at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in September 2018. (Tamklin, 2018).

Contrary to the fierce action of the AKP and Erdogan, Western and primarily American policymakers have already raised their voices in January 2018. U.S. Sens. Roger Wicker and Ben Cardin wrote to Assistant Secretary of State Wess Mitchell, asking the U.S. government to call on Erdogan to exercise restraint and do everything possible to get all NGOs that need it involved in

the work of the OSCE. At the same time, Turkey has also found some allies that shared Ankara's position. Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan stood by the Turks not only for kinship and common strategic, geopolitical goals, but because FETO also gained serious influence in their countries and became dangerous for the government. In this political context, Western actors feared Erdogan and did not necessarily dare to openly conflict with him because they feared that following a diplomatic blow, the Turkish government would impose severe restrictions on NGOs in Turkey. (Tamklin, 2018).

“Earlier studies note that the strong state has always been suspicious, if not hostile, towards civil society because it allowed the masses from the periphery to voice discontent and mobilize against the state authority.” (Yabanci, 2019:289). The NGOs attacked by the Turkish government and Erdogan, whatever their peripheral situation in Turkish society, have a perceptible mobilization force due to their international background, so they can somewhat counterbalance the rigor of the political system and leadership.

At the end of 2020, Erdogan and the AKP saw the heightened threat of terrorism as a good excuse to further tighten regulations restricting the lives of NGOs. On December 27, 2020, the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed a law called Preventing Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which provides extraordinary additional rights to the Minister of the Interior, who oversees foundations and associations. One paragraph, for example, states that if a foundation becomes involved in a suspicion of terrorist support, the interior minister can replace its leadership by government people who can act as quasi-trustees and have substantially free control over the organization's assets. (Unker, 2020).

Opposition parties and prominent NGOs such as the Human Rights Association, Amnesty International Turkey and the Federation of Women Associations of Turkey have drawn attention after the vote on the above law to the fact that since terrorist support is a very broad concept in Turkish law, very many organizations may disappear, their assets may be wasted. For example, Ozturk Turkdogan from the Human Rights Association explained that about 300,000 Turkish citizens are prosecuted under the Turkish Penal Code every year on charges of supporting terrorism, so it is very easy to get any Turkish NGO to be accused of cooperating with a terrorist organization. This is all the more true as Turkey has indeed been fighting an ideologically very colorful enemy for decades, with a number of active terrorist groups operating in Turkey, ranging

from extremist Islamists (ISIS) to Kurdish separatists (PKK) to far-left militants (DHKP-C), and they also have some social base, too. At the same time, it is clear that this legislation was created only to make the government-critical civil sphere even more impossible and to transfer its assets to pro-government organizations. (Unker, 2020).

According to the opposition and government-critical civic groups, the law targets a well-defined group of civic organizations and activists. Women's rights activist Canan Gullu, for example, believes those most at risk are those who operate in Turkey as part of some liberal-oriented international networks. According to Gullu, groups fighting for refugee rights or supporting the LGBTQ community may even be stigmatized and discribed as traitors. Organizations working on gender equality are also plagued by Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, which in any case makes certain social groups more vulnerable. (Unker, 2020).

The new regulation also raises the risk of an increase in atrocities, arrests and imprisonment against prominent civilian leaders. This was already the situation in the pre-2020 period, for example in the case of Taner Kilic and Osman Kavala.

## **5.2 Prosecution of the Turkish branch of Amnesty International**

Since 2016 two of the political and legal attacks on Turkish civil society have reached the stimulus threshold of the international community. In the so-called Buyukada lawsuit, the Turkish section of Amnesty International (AI) is being acted upon by the Turkish authorities. Buyukada, or “Big Island,” is one of Istanbul’s elegant neighborhoods, located in the Sea of Marmara, and is a part of the Princess Islands, which can be reached in about an hour’s boat ride from the city’s Asian center. The gathering, which took place in one of the hotels on the island, was carried out in 2017 by the Turkish branch of the international NGO, but the meeting was knocked down by special police units following an anonymous report. Eleven activists, including foreign nationals, were detained during the raid. Among those arrested were Taner Kilic, honorary president of the AI organization in Turkey, and almost the entire leadership of the group. Kilic and his associates were accused of collaborating with FETO, who planned the coup attempt according to the government, but at the same time, the accusations were already quite weak. Turkish and international publics were really shocked by the news that Kilic had been sentenced by the court

to 6 years and 3 months in prison in July 2020, but the organization's actual leaders, including President Idil Eser, had also been sentenced to two years in the first instance (Simsek, 2020).

Andrew Gardner, an international expert at Amnesty International, wrote on Twitter against the charges and the court verdict that he cannot accept them. Gardner called the Turkish authorities' procedure outrageous and absurd. He expressed his view that repression was continuing in Turkey, but also added that AI would not stop fighting for human rights and would do everything in its power to secure the release of their Turkish staff (Simsek, 2020). Gardner's statement was also reinforced by the fact that Amnesty International had been campaigning in the Buyukada case for three years at the time. An international signature-gathering action was conducted and an English-language document was prepared in which the allegations against Taner Kilic and AI were itemized.

Nothing proves better that politically motivated, created accusations were made against the defendants in the Buyukada lawsuit than the fact that in June 2021, a decision of the Turkish Constitutional Court invalidated the charges fabricated by the prosecution against AI's Turkish director, Idil Eser. This Supreme Judicial Forum has also ruled that Eser and one of his direct colleagues, Ozlem Dalkiran, are each required to pay 40,000 Turkish lira damages by the Turkish state. In essence, it turned out that everything that was brought against the Turkish Amnesty should be perfectly legal in a democratic system. The meeting itself took place in a hotel that is open to the public, meaning that the meeting can in no way be called a secret meeting. It is also absurd that AI leaders were set up as foreign spies by the Turkish political elite, the media and the prosecution, because although they could have done so, they did not consult in secret and there was nothing that was contrary to Turkish law (Tahincioglu, 2021).

The decision of the Constitutional Court also ruled that AI leaders did not commit any crime by maintaining contact with Taner Kilic. In fact, Kilic downloaded an app on his cell phone called ByLock in 2014 that enabled him to send encrypted messages, which was really popular among FETO members. The prosecution could not prove against Kilic himself that he had used this app in connection with the coup attempt, and the court ruled that it was not a sin in itself to meet someone with ByLock on their device (Tahincioglu, 2021).

If one looks for the political reasons behind the harassment of Amnesty International in Turkey, it can clearly be seen that the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan were probably infuriated

by the AI campaign in which they sought to take action against the use of tear gas. During the suppression of the 2016 coup attempt and the ensuing state of emergency, Turkish law enforcement agencies deployed very large amounts of tear gas against oppositionists and government critics. Seeing this, Amnesty International was embarking on international sensitization and has even tried to put pressure on the South Korean government not to sell tear gas to the Turks. The Turkish government may have thought that with the international network behind it, AI was trying to obstruct the work of Turkish internal affairs agencies and colluding with FETO (Tahincioglu, 2021).

Another campaign by Amnesty International that has received an interesting political response, was linked to the 2013 events in Gezi Park. In that year, local patriots, environmentalists and oppositionists were protesting in defense of a popular promenade in the European part of Istanbul, they were the ones who were first hit by serious physical violence on the streets since the AKP came to power in 2002. The first crisis during Erdogan's leadership was this protracted series of protests, during which a certain H. Y. fell victim to police brutality. AI, along with two Turkish human rights NGOs, launched a campaign to explore the H. Y. case. By implication, the AKP and Erdogan may have been disturbed that civil activists were upset by such an old case, believed to be closed, that could put another focus on the AKP's first inconveniences. Officially, the court here did not complain that Amnesty was dealing with the H. Y. case, but that, based on an email, it was suspected that members of the organization were hiding important information from the authorities. They also wanted to weigh in on the fact that AI has an underground activity, were foreign agents and maybe even co-operating with FETO (Tahincioglu, 2021). The events in the Gezi Park are a splash in the eyes of Erdogan and the AKP because it was the point in recent Turkish history that opposition-affiliated organizations sought a path towards each other and built a rudimentary network of action. After June 2013, political resistance subsided, but forms of cooperation emerged between left-wing and liberal NGOs, and that seriously disturbed the Islamists of the AKP (Yalcin, 2015:90).

### **5.3 Changes in the landscape of Turkish civil society organizations**

The membership of Turkish NGOs is low. It is common for the Turkish people to be reluctant to take part in such initiatives even today. Among other things, because they are afraid of retaliation such as that has befallen on the leaders of Amnesty International and the Open

Society Foundation in Turkey. According to an international survey conducted between 2010 and 2014, Turks are among the most socially inactive peoples. 12% of the population is a member of an association or cooperates with foundations. Of the 65 countries studied, Turkey ranks 55th (Sahin and Akboga, 2019:415).

Compared to the size of the country, civil society has still not reached its ideal size, but it can be said that its role in Turkish society is becoming increasingly important. According to a summary compiled by the Turkish Foundation for Life (Yasama Dair Vakfi) back in 2015, there were a total of 126,730 NGOs in Turkey that has more than 80 million inhabitants. Out of these organizations 108,712 were associations and 4,968 opted for the more traditional form of foundation (Cicek, 2017:23). Following the 2016 coup attempt, their number declined, as many organizations were banned during the state of emergency, but new ones have since been created, often at the initiative of the government to replace the disbanded organizations. Five years after the Foundation for Life's investigation, in 2020, the Turkish Interior Ministry reported that there were 120,668 NGOs in the country, of which 5,774 were foundations. (Dogan and Genc, 2020: 129) This means that in five years there has been a slight decrease in the total number of organizations, but there is a significant increase in the number of foundations. In this, too, Islamic traditionalism is actually at work, as Islamic civilization has a millennial tradition of foundations. In the Middle Ages, both mosque and Quran schools functioned as a *vakif*, i.e. as a foundation.

The above detailed prosecution of civil activists and organizations, and other recent events and phenomena tend enormously to modify the situation of these 120.000 Turkish NGOs. A conservative-liberal or a religious-secular confrontation has been well perceived in Turkish society for decades. For some time now, this has been reflected in the system of non-governmental organizations. At the same time, this division has only been strengthened and will be strengthened by the ruling Justice and Development Party, which is doing its utmost to rearrange the terrain and favor civic initiatives close to the government.

It can be observed that Turkish NGOs today are organized along four characteristic strategic principles, and the Turkish state seeks to exploit them for its own purposes in each case. There are organizations that provide primarily charitable services that the state is unable or unwilling to give. For other groups, it is true that they want to introduce innovations into society. The third category includes those for whom the preservation and transmission of values and

traditions is of paramount importance. While the fourth, in the present situation, perhaps the most important, their operating principle is legal protection (Akinci, 2020:1843-1814).

In the case of the latter group, the ongoing coronavirus epidemic has shown that the Turkish government not only wants to build on their activities, but also exploits them in its own way. From the advocacy organizations, the political elite has made communication channels that do not represent the interests of different social groups, but mediate and explain government policies and actions to these groups. From a policy perspective, the advantage of advocacy organizations is that they mostly deal with well-defined social groups, including minorities, and disadvantaged people. The AKP government did not seek out these associations and foundations during the epidemic, for example, to assess the needs of immigrant communities composed of millions of individuals in Turkey, but used advocates as a one-way channel to migrants of Syrian and other origins. As a result, 20% of Turkish refugee NGOs were already blowing a retreat during the first wave of the pandemic, and as they did not want to become a government tool, they withdrew completely from the scene of the fight against COVID-19 in Turkey (Akinci, 2020:1843-1814).

Turkish NGOs that have ultimately decided to take on the challenges of epidemic management are also reporting extreme pressure. Non-governmental groups received many expectations from two directions at once: society hoped they would operate as skillfully as possible, and the government viewed them as executors of state procedures. In addition to the double pressure, Turkish NGOs, especially associations and foundations working in the charitable sector and human rights defenders, have dwindled their financial resources, a situation exacerbated by the weakening of the Turkish and global economies. Due to financial reasons, about one third of the non-governmental organizations working in pandemic management were forced to liquidate or suspend their operations. This means that in the absence of government or foreign financial support, the Turkish civil sphere finds itself in increasingly difficult conditions. In these circumstances, it is also becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the pluralism and democracy of civil society (Akinci, 2020:1845). During the COVID-19 pandemic, one Turkish civil umbrella organization, the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV), also conducted a survey of how civil society responded to the challenges posed by the epidemic. Based on the responses to their questionnaires, the situation could have been even more severe in 2020 than



mentioned above. 43% of respondents stated that they had to cancel events, trainings and conferences already organized due to their additional costs. At the same time, 83% indicated that they had met with increased demands from the Turkish people, with so many more wanting to use their services (Dogan and Genc, 2020:136).

The relative weakening of the Turkish humanitarian civil sector is a serious loss for Turkish society as a whole and is also having a negative impact on the AKP government itself. As already mentioned, the rise of the Turkish civil sphere has been seriously helped by the emergence of Turkish charitable foundations in various conflict zones around the world since the first half of the 1990s. At first they were very active in the Balkan war, later in the Middle East, Africa and other parts of the world. Seeing these successes, the Turkish political leadership has also placed a number of international projects in the government structure within a government development agency, the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA). Charitable and other assistance has become an important export and has contributed to the rapid improvement of Turkey's international image. AKP governments, with TIKA coordinating civic initiatives, had even more significant goals. In 2017, for example, the head of the organization, Serdar Cam, said that TIKA is also good at decentralizing an overly Western-centered global world (Altunisik, 2019:2).

Building on the activism of charitable NGOs and the professionalism of TIKA, AKP governments are working to build a specific Turkish model in the field of humanitarian diplomacy. The AKP's policy in this regard is entirely in line with the party's ideology. It was already clear that even before the events in Gezi Park, it supported two groups in this regard: religious foundations and small and medium-sized businesses run by well-known Muslims. Abroad, with the help of these actors, they are not looking for government partners, but for local leaders and civic actors. As Turkish NGOs seem to be cooperating in this system with their foreign partners, they can portray these actions in a way that they have no political overtones and do not serve the Turkish government's foreign policy goals (Altunisik, 2019:3).

If one looks at the workings of TIKA and its affiliated NGOs, which are loyal to the Turkish government and mostly tied to Islamic culture, one can clearly see that this Turkish model is, indeed, an ideological one. TIKA's annual report for 2017 also states that the main motive for the organization's actions abroad is to promote the Ottoman and Islamic compassion approach.



The otherwise secular Republic of Turkey carries out religious propaganda and activities aimed at converting non-Muslims in a perceptible way abroad. TIKA and the Turkish Islamic NGOs are involved in identity building on two levels. On the one hand, they seek to strengthen the world's Muslim population in their faith and to promote Islam among non-Muslims through charitable actions. On the other hand, they also cover Turkey as they are consolidating the self-consciousness of the Turks as a Muslim nation (Altunisik, 2019:4).

#### **5.4 Polarization of the Turkish civil society under the AKP**

The division of Turkish society is also noticeable in civil society, for the reasons described above. In the literature this schism is found among the secular vs. found among the Turks. It is most often described as a conflict between Islamist positions, but a completely different approach emerges. According to this, Turkish NGOs can also be divided into two groups by differentiating between those who focus on their responsibilities and those who demand complete freedom from the government. In other words, the Turkish civil sphere has a loyal segment that respects the state in all circumstances, passes laws and strives to meet the expectations of the Justice and Development Party. The other group belongs to organizations that are more critical of the state, laws, and government, and want to conform to those they represent or serve (Keyman et. al, 2017:22).

This division, which manifests itself among non-governmental organizations dependent on the state and fighting with the state, leads to a significant division within civil society and sometimes induces serious struggles. All major forms of conflict in Turkish society are manifested. Among other things, one can get a good idea of the ethnic conflict within the country. The largest minority, the Kurds, is a source of conflict as organizations fighting for the enforcement of their rights, or even against Kurdish separatism, divide the Turkish civil sphere at least as much as it is customary in politics (Keyman et. al, 2017:22).

The fragmentation and politicization of Turkish civil society is also characterized by the ease or difficulty with which an organization can obtain tax benefits provided by the state and the likelihood of it benefiting from state subsidies. Before the AKP came to power in 2002, the Human Rights and Freedoms Foundation (IHH), which has a committed Sunni Muslim identity, had never received any state support, nor did it receive the principle of the greatest concession. At the same time, today IHH is one of the government's favorite NGOs, taking advantage of the opportunities

to operate a serious infrastructure. Obviously, it must also be acknowledged that they nevertheless do a very valuable charitable work in almost all of the countries of the World (Keyman, et al., 2017:23).

A survey of NGOs working with women also showed why civil society activists believe Turkish President AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdogan have set up a system of inequality in Turkish civil society. The most frequently voiced reason among opinion leaders is that the Turkish political leadership wants to shape public opinion with the help of NGOs. The second most popular response was that they desire to drown out opposition voices or validate their interests in the eyes of the EU (Doyle, 2018:462).

To sum up what has been described so far, the AKP governments have basically divided the Turkish civil sphere at the level of opportunities. Preserving the secular nature of the republic on paper, the system of financial and other subsidies was reorganized so that it would benefit the organizations that share the ideology of the ruling party. In contrast, all Western-minded liberal organizations that are in sharp contrast to Erdogan's views are severely persecuted. This inequality seems in many cases to be such that an Islamist vs. secular dichotomy dominates Turkish civil society.

## **6. The E-Devlet**

### **6.1 A suspicious attempt at centralization in the service of the AKP government and the citizens: the E-Devlet**

From a political point of view, the basis for the development of e-governance was created by the neo-liberal turn observed at the global level in the 1980s. While in the 1970s the governments of the world were forced to deal with the economic crisis caused by the rise in oil prices, the period before the fall of the Berlin Wall, especially in the West, favored the development of the social market economy. Within this framework, the leaders of the developed countries tried to bring state services as close as possible to the population. The same period, i.e. the 1980s, also brought rapid changes in the IT world. The rudimentary personal computers appeared and became widespread, the first networks were built, and the world wide web, which was still limited at the time, was launched in the United States (Akcagunduz, 2013:129).

By the beginning of the 1990s, the bipolar world order had ended. Due to the lack of political, economic and military rivals, the developed western countries found themselves in a favorable situation, which made it possible to put the info-communication tools, which were becoming more and more available to the general public at the time, at the service of the state and the citizens alike. For several political and economic reasons, Turkey has left behind Western countries in the democratization of governance. This cannot be explained simply by the fact that, both economically and technologically, it has accumulated a significant lag compared to the West. Serious systemic problems were also observed in the country throughout the 1990s. One of these problems was the complete lack of political stability which is very well illustrated by the fact that the multi-party coalition governments were only able to lead Turkey for a very short time. The political crisis was further deepened by the fact that extremist parties were able to gain power and tried to achieve political goals contrary to the ideal of a secular republic. Staging a so-called postmodern coup in 1997, the army also intervened in politics and forced Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to resign. The political uncertainty was further deepened by the corruption that permeated the entire Turkish state, thus corruption became a systemic source of economic problems. Since Turkey wanted to be a member of the European Union, the Brussels reports on the country found these points to be the most serious challenges (Akcagunduz, 2013:131).

Indeed, there was a well visible gap between the level of development of the EU member states and Turkey as far as the development of the IT sector was concerned. This difference was, in fact, due to a lower GDP-level, the underdevelopment of the indigenous electronics sector, the lack of support from politicians and lack of consciousness among the general public, and more specifically the public administrators (Kutlu & Sevinc, 2010:2).

The European Union not only forced the Turkish government to act politically, but also set a good example for the leaders in Ankara. At this time, EU member states not only used e-governance tools separately, but also started to connect their systems. We can call this development E-Europe. E-Europe is “qualified as a network governance in accordance with its own administrative mechanisms” (Aktel et al., 2017:773).

Turkey was also in great need of European good practices because the Turkish public administration system itself lagged behind global trends due to the turbulent domestic political period of the 1990s. At the turn of the millennium, the majority of the buildings of Turkish central

bodies were not yet connected to the Internet, and they did not have their own websites. Before the AKP came to power, roughly at the end of 2000, the turning point occurred and the digital supply of the Turkish public administration began to grow rapidly. At that moment 599 central level government organizations were connected to the web; this figure increased to 830 in November 2001, 858 in December 2001 and to 990 in April 2002 (Bensghir & Yildiz, 2001-2002:43). The complete technological development of the e-government system also required significant development in the communication methods. Instead of cables, which were considered increasingly obsolete by the 2000s, the Turkish government platforms used and continue to use the TURKSAT Turkish satellite (Yeloglu & Sagsan, 2009:22).

After solving the problem of equipping the central state administrative bodies with the Internet and homepages of these institutions were born, the left-wing government led by Bulent Ecevit took the first steps towards e-governance. The Turkish Informatics Council was convened on May 10, 2002, and it was decided to launch several major projects that laid the foundation for the later "e-devlet kapisi" system. Developments started by the left, such as the E-Europe+ initiative, the National Individual Information System, the Tax Collection Agencies Automation System and the Turkish National Information Infrastructure Main Plan put Euro-Atlantic integration in the focus of political thinking regarding e-governance. The Justice and Development Party, which came to power in November 2002, and its first leader, Abdullah Gul, could already rely on the basic concept that had been developed by the Ecevit cabinet (Bensghir & Yildiz, 2001-2002:44).

Not only Ecevit, but also other left-wing politicians of the turn of the millennium were enthusiastic about info-communication tools and advocated their use when interacting with citizens. For example, the head of state, Necdet Sezer, known for his secular and Kemalist views, explained that he finds it very entertaining to be able to communicate with voters by email. Mesut Yilmaz, who served as prime minister twice in the 1990s, even called on IT professionals to lobby for the new government to introduce e-governance as soon as possible. (Bensghir & Yildiz, 2001-2002:45).

Over time, in addition to government services, similar initiatives of local governments also appeared on the Internet and on mobile devices. One of the very first mayoral offices to take steps in this regard was the traditionally left-wing and Kemalist Izmir. In the third largest city of Turkey,

three developments were started already at the end of the 2000s. Through one, the residents of the settlement had access to local government services in the virtual space, on the other platform they could get to know the announcements of the local authorities, and on the third they could make payments in a completely secure form (Uste & Guzel, 2012:54).

Shortly after the AKP came to power, in 2004, Law No. 4982 was introduced, which regulates the government's data management system. This legislation created the legal foundations of e-governance, and referring to this normative text, the supply of state bodies with computers and Internet access was accelerated, and from then on, every state and local government organization had its own website (Carikci & Yavuz, 2010:103).

Essentially, the criticism coming from the EU and the leftist opposition led to a situation, starting in 2005, in which Turkish ministries and state bodies began preparing for the transition to e-governance. In other words, the development of the E-Government Gateway system, called "e-devlet kapisi" in Turkish, can be explained not only by technical progress, but also as a reform of a poorly functioning state organization hit by corruption and political division. A total of 35 different government agencies started to promote not less than 334 various services in the mid-2000s (Akcagunduz, 2013:131).

The relative backwardness of Turkey at the end of the mandate of the first AKP government, i.e. in 2007, was clearly demonstrated by the e-readiness study organized with the participation of 69 countries, according to which Turkey was ranked 42nd, well behind the majority of developed countries (Cayhan, 2008:4). Between 2005 and 2008, one can only talk about sporadic development, the Turkish state's digitization experiments finally came together in 2008 into a coherent system, known to the Turkish public as "e-devlet kapisi", i.e. E-Government Gateway (Bozaslan, 2019:3278).

## **6.2 E-devlet as a means of frugal governance**

The introduction of e-governance in its initial phase brought many advantages for both the government and the population, so at that time, i.e. in the late 2000s and early 2010s, few people dealt with the possible dark sides of the system. As long as the AKP governments were able to govern without major social tensions, the voters accepted the change more easily. Just as the popularity of the AKP began to decline with the large-scale protest actions in 2013 related to an

urban planning project in the famous Gezi Park of Istanbul, a part of society also became increasingly critical of e-government.

Nevertheless, until 2013, it can be said that several positive features of the "e-government" dominated the public discourse about it. The Turkish population was more optimistic, the political elite also believed that this tool would make the Turkish state more democratic, inclusive and cheaper.

In the second half of the 2000s, the Turkish state apparatus accumulated a lot of useful experience in the field of e-governance in a very short time. Thanks to the above-mentioned 334 digital services, the state saved significant amounts of money, which the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government typically spent on infrastructure development. The latter significantly contributed to the fact that, after 2002, the Islamist political formation overwhelmingly won the parliamentary elections in 2007 as well. Economic governance was therefore of interest to the AKP government at this initial stage of their rule because they tried to use the state budget in a manner as to stabilize the economy and raise the standard of living of ordinary citizens in such a way that they would want to vote for the AKP again and again. By 2011, the "e-devlet" system had reached the level where the Data Collection Directorate (Bilgi Toplu Dairesi) belonging to the Ministry of Development was able to carry out a comprehensive cost-saving study and draw up a cost-saving report. This 2011 report showed that since the introduction of the "e-devlet", the state has made demonstrable savings on the operation of the social welfare and the police, and the introduction of electronic invoicing systems has also resulted in significant revenues (Akcagunduz, 2013:131).

Savings can be demonstrated not only in terms of material gain, but also in terms of environmental protection. According to the 2011 report of the Ministry of Development, only the SOYBIS e-governance subsystem, which serves state bodies dealing with social support, saved funds in the amount of 205,583,491 Turkish liras. By the way, by not printing the necessary documents out, the lives of 42,053 trees were also spared (Akcagunduz, 2013:132).

A very good example of cost-effective operation is the National Judicial Network Project (UYAP), within the framework of which 23 different databases were connected between 2008 and 2011 and then integrated with the digitized population registration systems. Thanks to this, a state survey conducted in April 2011 showed that 1.6 billion Turkish Liras were saved in this sector

alone. This amount is 16.6% of the IT development budget of Turkey between 2002 and 2011 (Erdem, 2014:740). In addition to the above examples, it is also clear that the Turkish government prioritized the economic operation of the system. In the initial stages of e-government, it is evident that the most basic consideration was not the interest of the citizens, but rather that the state administration processes that generate the most revenues could operate as cost-effectively as possible (Ogurlu, 2014:24).

The positive effect of the e-governance system on the Turkish economy and budget does not stop at the fact that less has to be spent on running the state administration, but it also helps the country's development in other ways. According to some estimates, the operation of e-government contributes to the growth of GDP in the long term. The use of e-devlet systems over several decades can increase productivity by 1.4% and employment by 0.6%, creating quality jobs. With this, the cheaper and digitized public administration can increase the Turkish domestic product by 2% (Gokmen & Hamsioglu, 2010:259).

Since the founding of the republic in 1923, Turkey has been rocked by a number of serious corruption scandals. It should be remembered that between December 17 and 25, 2013, the prosecutor's office initiated joint proceedings against a number of leading Turkish politicians, their relatives and their business partners. Since e-governance is more transparent due to its method of operation, it would be expected that the introduction of e-devlet would effectively counter this problem and make the operation of the Turkish state cheaper. In this regard, it is difficult to judge how well this theoretical proposition is realized in practice (Zangana et al., 2020:1164).

At one point, however, e-governance definitely increases the costs of the Turkish state, and this point is the issue of cyber security. Protecting sensitive and confidential data stored on digital surfaces is more complicated and expensive than protecting paper-based databases. During the construction of the system, it was necessary to spend money preventing the creation of fake user accounts and all similar fraud. The system had to be secured so that foreign spies could not access it. A special mechanism was also developed to ensure that no one can obtain citizens' data for commercial use, and the integration of banks and citizens' bank accounts required special precautions (Efendioglu, 2007:229).



### **6.3 E-devlet as a means of social integration and advancement**

It can be said that at the time of the introduction of the "e-devlet", the system was not discriminatory and aimed at society as a whole. At that time, society as a whole still included the bottom decile, the most underprivileged people. This is well exemplified by the fact that the acquisition of the family allowance and the achievement of entitlement were also carried out through e-government tools. In Turkey, the poorest 6% of the population can get extra cash support if they take care of their children's regular health check-ups and send them to school. After 2005, pediatrician visits and school attendance were also registered on the "e-devlet" interface. With this, the AKP, which was still emerging at the time as a ruling party, simultaneously achieved that even the poorest joined the technological leap that was taking place at the time, and that the operation of the social care system placed less and less burden on the central budget. According to the survey, 11,773,127.40 Turkish liras were saved with this step alone (Akcagunduz, 2013:132).

The extension of "e-devlet" services to the lower classes of society really points in the direction of cohesion, but it should not be forgotten that as of 2019, nearly two million illiterate people still live in Turkey. Unfortunately, they are largely excluded from the system, since the spread of "e-government" is not accompanied by an educational program for the illiterate and digital immigrants (Bozaslan, 2019:3279).

During the general spread of e-government services, the Turkish government tried to open up to a wider audience. They soon realized that different communities of people with disabilities have special needs and expectations from the system. In order to meet these needs, the AKP governments created the policy called "No Barriers to the e-government Project". Within the framework of this, more than three million hearing impaired people had access to state services. This also means that the sign language version of the e-devlet has also been completed, and a special frequent questions and answers page has been created for deaf people (Kilic et al., 2019:160).

In 2012, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) conducted another major public opinion poll, with which it wanted to test how the spread of "e-government" systems affected the digital culture of the Turkish population. This Household Information Technologies Usage Survey (Hane Halkı Bilişim Teknolojileri Kullanım Araştırması) proved that the opening of e-governance interfaces was also a significant step from the point of view of social integration. In 2012, a little



less than half of Turkish households had Internet access, to be exact 47.2%. At that time, 48.7% of the adult population regularly used a computer, and the vast majority of them, 97.3% of computer users accessed the World Wide Web. The survey found a clear correlation between the spread of Internet government services and the use of the Internet by the Turkish population (Akcagunduz, 2013:138). This means that during the long decade between 2001 and 2012, the number of Turkish Internet users increased tenfold in absolute terms, and eightfold in percentage terms. Turkey joined the World Wide Web in 1993, but even in 2001 there were barely four million users nationwide (this was 6% of the population at the time). Based on TUIK's 2012 survey, it can be stated that this figure was around 40-42 million people in 2012 (Bensghir & Yildiz, 2001-2002:43).

#### **6.4 E-devlet as a means of simplifying government administration**

The technical development experienced since the introduction of the e-devlet kapisi in 2008 has not only made administration simpler and faster, but the procedure itself has also become more logical. In Turkey, the clearest example of this is the spread of the so-called MERNIS system. Before the MERNIS plan, every Turkish citizen had some different registration numbers. The Ministry of Justice, the police, the Social Security, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Defense, as well as many other sub-systems of the government, registered the Turks under a separate number. Within the framework of the MERNIS project, the General Directorate of Population and Citizenship Affairs (Nüfus ve Vatandaşlık İşleri Genel Müdürlüğü) used the personal number (kimlik numarası) as a basis from 2017, and built a new and partly decentralized registration system using it. As part of this, the data of Turkish citizens is collected at the district level. In order for this to function without problems, the district population registers were modernized and their databases digitized. Data management and data storage related to individuals have been standardized in these district centers. If necessary, this is the level that provides data about the person concerned to other government bodies (Bozkurt, 2017:94).

The unification of population register data is logical and practical in many cases, but it can sometimes be alarming for the average citizen. These district data providers not only know whether the citizen has already completed his military service or whether he pays for his health insurance, but they can also have information about the person's major purchases, statistical analyzes can be

carried out without the person's knowledge, and they can offer targeted government services to the person's attention. According to the narrative of the government, this is of course not about stronger control, but simply about bringing the government and the citizen closer to each other (Bozkurt, 2017:94).

If we take stock of who benefits from the MERNIS system introduced by the AKP government in 2017, it is clear that the government is the one that gets the most. Thanks to MERNIS, it has become easier to collect taxes and contributions, control tax evaders, and expose fraudsters abusing land registry and bank documents. Based on the MERNIS databases, the government can plan investments and infrastructure developments financed by the central budget in an easier and more targeted way. The public administration is aware of where citizens are and who are crossing the national border. The army organizes the conscriptions with the help of MERNIS, and the Ministry of Education checks here whether the compulsory students attend school. In contrast, the citizens does not get much. Maybe it's just that now they don't fill out your ID card by hand, so they can't write your name wrong (Bozkurt, 2017:96).

### **6.5 E-devlet from the users' side**

It is clear that the political leadership of the country operating the e-government system can and wants to achieve many social, political and economic goals with the digital transition. It is also evident that the system is much more important to the political elite than to the average citizen, but it cannot be denied that the latter are also making more and more use of the convenience provided by the system. A questionnaire survey in 2010 tried to map who and how this opportunity was used during the year or two after the development of the e-government gateway. At this initial stage of the project, the most popular service was the request for information about personal identification numbers. 57.2% of the surveyed users utilized the digital government platform for this purpose. It is not surprising that the young people were the ones who understood the importance of the system the earliest, as the second most common digital interaction with 42.2% can be found in connection with university entrance exams and the results of semester exams. In addition, quite a few people used state databases to access phone numbers, health insurance or tax information (Carikci & Yavuz, 2010:113).

The users of the initial era made it clear in 2010 that the Turkish state was not sufficiently prepared for the digital transition either at the national or local level. According to the above-

mentioned questionnaire survey, neither the expertise nor the infrastructural capabilities of the state bodies were at the level that citizens expected, and they complained that the government agencies and their employees did not help them with the electronic processes. Internet users believe that the Turkish state does not have enough trained and experienced IT staff, and that they do not want to support citizens who are less experienced in informatics. The situation can also be described as the fact that at the beginning of the 2010s, the infrastructure for IT developments was not yet in place. At the same time, the majority was still optimistic and believed that the AKP would be able to cure the childhood diseases of the e-devlet kapisi (Carikci & Yavuz, 2010:115).

Carikci and Yavuz's 2010 survey also looked for the answer to how the typical profile of users could be drawn. They found that the most active citizens are from the age group of university students to the age of 50, with the demand for digital services falling drastically after the age of 51. By definition, most of the people involved were still among those with a higher education. They were very happy with the possibilities and highlighted the fact that the state administration uses less paper and protects the environment (Carikci & Yavuz, 2010:116).

In 2015, Celik and Kabakus examined, within the framework of a quantitative analysis, how Turkish users of e-governance relate to the system itself. They were mostly interested in whether the respondents thought the e-devlet would make their lives easier. The result shows that the majority of Turkish users believe that official administration is easier with this new method, but only 15.59% said that they strongly believe that we are facing a positive change. The most skeptical about e-devlet are urban residents, people with primary school education and people working in the public sector. It is shocking that about 48.2% of public employees believe that digital government services do not make our lives better (Celik & Kabakus, 2015:189). A survey conducted in a rural hospital in 2013 shows better results within the health care professional layer. Within this educated and partly intellectual stratum, the e-government is better known and popular. 58.5% of the respondents were happy that such services exist and that some of them are also available on mobile devices. 88.2% of the people involved also highlighted that the system provides them with useful feedback information and enables them to communicate with their colleagues and patients on different platforms (Naralan et al., 2013:50).

From the users' point of view, it is a very important consideration that their sensitive and personal data stored in the system is safe. During the construction of the e-devvlet system, there

were several cases that upset public opinion for a reason. Such was the case in the middle of the 2000s, when the computer of the head of the local government was stolen in the Batikent district of the Turkish capital, Ankara, along with the data of about 45,000 citizens. The case, which also came to light in the mid-2000s, and according to which some municipal and government computers were connected to foreign Internet providers, not Turkish, for economic reasons, also caused a great uproar. In this case, there was a risk that the sensitive and secret data of Turkish citizens could have been leaked out of the country, and some people could even have misused it (Efendioglu, 2007:227).

In some e-government applications, as a result of an inquiry process, many personal and corporate information unintentionally emerge and this situation poses a significant danger in terms of information security (Seferoglu et al., 2011:298). This is why some Turkish citizens have approached digital government services with suspicion since the early 2010s, saying that they do not feel the security of their data is guaranteed, and they have complained that the sanctity of their privacy is or may be violated. Many people were reluctant to conduct financial transactions on these platforms (Kervenaol & Kocoglu, 2012:359). Although Turkish citizens are remarkably suspicious of those who govern them, in fact the legal environment is given as the 2010 constitutional amendment states that every Turkish citizen is the owner of his own data and that only they can decide on its usability. However, beautiful theory does not always match the practice (Mamur Isikci, 2017:1903).

Every two years, the European Union examined the development of e-governance in the member states of the community and in the candidate countries. Both the 2013, 2015 and 2017 reports state that the Turkish e-government gateway is user-friendly and provides a good service to the citizens, but in almost all cases the Turkish digital government is criticized from the point of view that communication between the Turkish system and European countries is not well resolved, which would be one of the basic conditions for European integration (Ekinci, 2018:343).

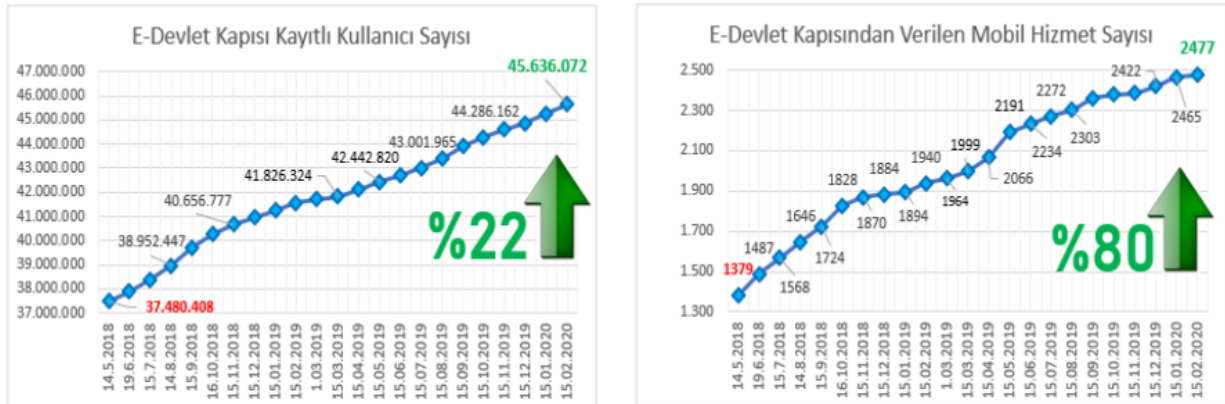
## **6.6 E-devlet in the era of mass consumption**

Although Internet use spread worldwide in the 2010s and the web became accessible to most citizens in almost every situation and moment of life in most countries, Turkey still lags behind developed nations. Based on the E-Government Index introduced by the United Nations, Turkey belongs to the middle range of member states. The first such survey was conducted by the

UN in 2008. At that time, out of the 192 countries examined, Turkey was in 76th place with a development index of 0.4834. After eight years, in 2016, the international organization showed a higher value, but an index of 0.59 was only enough to take 68th place (Ekinici, 2018:339).

The fact that Turkey does not occupy a prominent place in the ranking of countries in the world does not prevent the dynamic development of the system, and even in recent years experts have noticed that the number of users is constantly growing, and that access is increasingly transferred to mobile devices. Between May 2018 and February 2020, for example, the number of registered users increased by 22%, which exceeded 45 and a half million people at the beginning of 2020. In the same period, the number of mobile applications connected to the e-devlet Kapisi system increased by 80% (Karasoy & Babaoglu, 2020:125). The reason for the late spread of applications for mobile phones is that the Turkish government could not start early dealing with the integration of different IT systems, which is a prerequisite for websites running on computers to be stably available on mobile devices as well. One such challenge that Turkish professionals had to solve during the 2010s was that there are dozens of mobile data providers operating in the country, and thanks to them, more than 60 mobile Internet browsers are available to Turkish users (Kervenaol & Kocoglu, 2012:357). One of the barriers to interoperability is that Turkish state bodies and the average Turkish citizen often do not use the same file formats due to the fact that the government operates large, comprehensive networks, in which the rapid flow of data is difficult to solve using the extensions that ordinary mortals use. It is in the interest of the Turkish state that in order to protect sensitive data from an economic and IT perspective, the country's system can be independent from worldwide structures. On the other hand, most people prefer the most globally widespread IT tools. This means that there is a clear difference of interest between the government and the citizens (Medeni et al., 2009:3).

The transition to the presidential system significantly influenced the legal background and operation of e-devlet gateway. As in other areas of the Turkish state administration, a strong centralization can be observed in the case of digital services since the 2018 constitutional amendments. A Digital Transition Office was established within the presidential office of the republic, which receives instructions directly from the head of state, i.e. Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself took charge of this key area. (Duman & Aktel, 2021:636)



**Figure 5.** The number of users of "e-devlet kapisi" and the quantitative change of mobile applications connected to the system in Turkey between 2018 and 2020. (Source: Karasoy and Babaoglu, 2020:125)

By the 2020s, e-governance services have become completely natural for Turkish society as a whole. The usefulness and functional errors of the system were mostly demonstrated by the closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the overloading of the healthcare system and the virtualization of some healthcare services in 2020, at the peak of the disease. According to the Turkish government portal's own data, out of the estimated 84,740,000 Turkish citizens in 2021, 57,276,122 users have registered for 6,161 different electronic services or use the 3,300 available mobile applications. Although the Turkish "e-devlet" system today offers a wide variety of e-services for doctors, institutions and patients, statistics show that users use only a fraction of them. It is a given that Turks can receive digital prescriptions, but they could also handle matters related to obstetrics, sports medicine or even disability-related procedures on the Internet, prior to the epidemic they were mostly only interested in their general health information, and would like to know what data the system stores about them (Bostanci et al., 2022:273).

The closures due to COVID-19 changed people's lives to a great extent and forced those who were averse to them until the outbreak of the epidemic to use Internet solutions. Not only did the demand for "e-devlet" services increase, but more and more people ordered food, made purchases and communicated with their loved ones on the Internet. COVID-19 not only separated people from each other, but also created a serious health risk, especially for the elderly, who until then had less use of the opportunities provided by "e-devlet" services. In 2020, in the changed circumstances, it might be slightly exaggerating, but it is safe to say that these systems were the

key to survival. The specialists saw that the Turkish citizens massively generated for themselves the so-called HES code to access digital government information for their own security (Bostanci et al., 2022:275).

The panic surrounding the pandemic greatly contributed to the fact that the AKP government was able to increase its control over its own citizens from 2020. In this given year, a total of 66,254,113 HES codes were generated on government websites and mobile applications. With their help, users were not only able to filter out risk factors, but also provided sensitive data about themselves to the government, the healthcare professionals and other citizens. The situation became even more acute with the upsurge of vaccination campaigns. The Turkish social security was also able to use the fear and tension in people due to the disease to find a solution to the problem of those who were not paying. 243,258 Turkish citizens who generated codes on the internet and in mobile applications were able to settle their debt to the government on the digital interface. Even more successful was the campaign in which the Turkish social security tried to collect charitable donations from residents in the framework of a central action, the Social Protection Shield. A total of 2,056,442 individual donations were received, which is an outstanding number even in the already generous Turkish society (Bostanci et al., 2022:276).

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the next challenge that was faced by the Turkish government and the e-government was the gigantic and devastating earthquake that occurred on February 6, 2023 in the Pazarcik and Elbistan districts of Kahramanmaraş County. The government received a lot of criticism for not reacting quickly enough and for the slow progress of the rescue work. At the same time, the e-devlet system tried to introduce certain services as soon as possible. On the fourth day after the earthquake, an application was already available, in which Turkish citizens could search for the technical and static condition of their residential properties with the help of address and personal ID number. In addition, the government has created an internet interface at [hasartespit.csb.gov.tr](https://hasartespit.csb.gov.tr) where the official damage assessment takes place (Hurriyet, 2023).

Since the introduction of the presidential system, a dual process can be observed in Turkey. On the one hand, due to globalization and the general development of technology, more and more Turkish citizens have access to electronic and mobile devices, more and more people are also registering for the e-devlet system, so thanks to digitalization, everyday reality and access to



information seem to be more and more free and democratic. At the same time, caused by the powerful centralization efforts of politics, not only the citizen learns more and more about the state, but also the state about the citizen. And the experts expect that the government's digital control will only increase in the coming years.

For the Turkish political leadership, the e-devlet system is not only about controlling the citizens, but also about being able to operate the state administration system as cost-effectively as possible. It is expected that this will also be one of the main motivations in the future. The only question is whether the money saved by the citizens will return to the citizens' pockets or whether it will increase corruption and prestige investments.

The e-government systems in Turkey can be said to be quite developed at the national level, but with the exception of a few wealthier metropolitan municipalities, this is not yet the case everywhere at the local level. It is expected that in the coming years the situation will improve in this area as well and "smart cities" can be built.

The 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquake also proved that Turkey cannot avoid building disaster prevention digital systems that respond to natural catastrophes at record speed. The systems of the government agencies working in the area have not yet been unified, so the system cannot provide an adequate response even in the event of a significant flood or wind disaster, much less during devastating earthquakes.

Above all, the Turkish government must increase the reliability and transparency of the system. Turkish people are inherently critical, so it is not surprising that they have doubts about the functioning of the e-government. The political future of the current AKP government and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also depends on whether it can prove that in the greatest emergencies, the Turkish government stands with the people and not behind them.

## **7. The refugee crisis**

### **7.1 Growing mistrust in Turkey: the policing of the refugee issue**

The AKP has been trying to centralize the Turkish state and maintain its own power since the second half of the 2000s. Despite the strong structures that are being developed more and more, the Turkish political leadership is being increasingly criticized, and with it, a growing number

political trump cards are falling into the hands of the opposition. One of the topics with which Erdogan's opponents successfully thematize public life is the issue of Syrian refugees. The key to the integration of Syrian asylum seekers is whether they can be integrated into the Turkish economy and labor market with success or not.

Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, the perception of Syrian refugees in Turkey has changed significantly. Already in the first year of the civil war that broke out in 2011, tens of thousands of Syrians crossed the border between the two countries, but at that time, for several reasons, the Turkish public had a positive attitude towards the settlement of the problem. In addition to the partially shared religious and cultural background and geographical proximity, the fact that many of them were Turkmen, who are essentially part of the Turkish nation, and many wealthy traders of Arab nationality from the Aleppo region also contributed to the acceptance of Syrians in the first years as these rich business people created quite a few companies in the big border cities from Adana to Sanliurfa, which provided many poorer Syrian immigrants with a livelihood. However, this initial welcoming attitude has completely changed by the early 2020s. According to a survey conducted in 2022, 82% of Turks believe that Syrian refugees should be moved home, since there is essentially peace in Syria. And 71% of those surveyed said that the Syrians pose a security risk to Turkey, which can be evidenced by the fact that there have been several terrorist attacks recently - for example on the fancy shopping area of the Istiklal Street in Istanbul - which the Turkish authorities accuse Syrians of committing. Overall, it can be said that about two-thirds of Turkish citizens harbor hostile feelings towards Syrians (Adar & Puttmann, 2022).

After the failed coup in 2016, uncertainty and suspicion grew in Turkish society. This general bad mood also affected the perception of Syrians in Turkey in a negative direction. According to another survey, 70% of Turks believe that Syrian Arab refugees pose a long-term cultural challenge to the Turkish nation and threaten the survival of Turkish identity. From 2017, the cooperation between the Syrians in Turkey and the Turkish majority society decreased more and more, they started less and less joint enterprises, and this hindered the economic integration of the Syrians, reduced their employment, which led to increasing unemployment among them (Adar & Puttmann, 2022). A small part of the Syrians left without work moved back to their native country, but the majority remained on Turkish soil and only a very few left for Europe.

The negative processes and changes occurring in Turkish society did not leave the political arena untouched. The NGO called Angry Young Turks (Ofkeli Genc Turkler) became popular among right-wing university youth, which named Syrian immigrants as the cause of Turkey's political and economic problems. The organization, reminiscent of the name of the former movement of state founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (Young Turks), initially caused limited reactions, but as the problem grew, the existence and role of Syrians in the Turkish economy and society became an important topic of political debate. This is also shown by the fact that Umit Ozdag, a well-known Turkish political scientist, even founded a new political party with the stated goal of campaigning for the repatriation of Syrians. However, the Victory Party (Zafer Partisi), which is generally labeled as far-right, cannot yet have significant masses behind it (Adar and Puttmann, 2022:2). At the time of writing, Turkey is preparing for general and presidential elections in May 2023. According to opinion polls conducted in December 2022, the Victory Party can count on 4% of the vote. This is not a small amount for a new formation, but in the Turkish political system it is not possible to achieve a breakthrough, since the entrance threshold is very high, 10%, which means that Ozdag's party does not have much of a chance of gaining seats in the Turkish National Assembly.

In recent years, the attitude of the mainstream political parties seems to be changing with regard to the Syrian issue. The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has been in power since 2002, at first gradually and then more and more strongly sought to Islamize Turkish society, and the large number of Syrian refugees came to their aid. At the same time, the AKP was not most interested in the employment of Syrians, but in having as many of them as possible become Turkish citizens as soon as possible and vote for Recep Tayyip Erdogan's party in the elections. The leading opposition parties, such as the Republican People's Party (CHP), which follows a social-democratic line and keeps Ataturk's secular traditions alive, saw the increasingly negative social perception of Syrians, and began to formulate political messages critical of immigration and increasingly distanced themselves from the economic integration of Syrians. The growing anti-foreigner sentiments forced the government to take action, in recent years Erdogan has not called any more asylum seekers guests and there are more and more raids against foreigners staying in Turkey illegally. (Adar & Puttmann, 2022).

## **7.2 The demographic composition of the Syrian refugee workforce**

The demographic composition of Syrian refugees differs significantly from Syrian or Turkish demographic trends. This can be seen in terms of the refugees' ethnic, religious and socio-cultural background, but also in the proportion of people born in different Syrian regions, as northern Syrians are overrepresented, southerners are underrepresented as the latter fled mainly to Lebanon and Jordan. An interesting and important fact from the point of view of employment is that the gender composition of the refugee population is unbalanced, a strong male surplus can be shown, since while only 46.9% of the refugees are women, the majority of them, 53.1%, are men. This means that a higher proportion of Syrian refugees may be potential workers than the average Syrian or Turkish population (Cakilci, 2017).

The demographic composition of Syrian women under international protection in Turkey –who compose the minority of the refugee population- is special and probably significantly different from the Syrian average. The questionnaire survey of the research group led by Ozturk proved that many of the Syrian refugee women are young, 51.5% of them are under the age of 29, and a striking number of them are not yet married (47.4%), which may be due to the confusion of the civil war and the fact that they had to flee Syria. The proportion of illiterate people is extremely high (19%), and 18% of the respondents stated that they had never attended school (Ozturk, Vildan Selin & Altinoz, 2019).

The Syrian refugee workforce, characterized by a significant male majority, also affected Turkish women's chances of getting a job. Many Syrian refugees have found work in the gray economy. In many cases, Syrian men displaced Turkish women from informal jobs. While employment among the Turkish population as a whole fell by 2.2% due to Syrian immigration, the same figure among Turkish women is 2.6%. This means that the main losers of the appearance of cheap and unskilled Syrian labor were disadvantaged and uneducated Turkish women, and all of this mostly affected the already more backward region of southeastern Turkey. (Ceritoglu et al., 2015) „Furthermore, socio-cultural barriers in the Turkish society seem to have prompted females to withdraw from the labor market after the Syrian refugee shock. Women’s weak attachment to the labor market is one of the major characteristics of the labor market in Turkey” (Suzuki et al., 2019:22).

A 2018 survey also showed a significant difference in the employment of Syrian refugee men and women, as well as in terms of how it compares to the employment of native Turks. The research found that in the case of men, the difference between the employment of the two groups, i.e. Turks and Syrians, in paid work, are relatively small. In 2018, 68.9% of Turks of active age were working, while the same could be said for 61.8% of Syrian refugee men. In the case of women, 22.2% of Turks had a job, against 6% of Syrians. So, in the case of men, the difference remained below 20%, but in the case of women, only a quarter of Syrian women could work compared to Turkish women. If we look at the difference within the Syrian refugee population, a man was ten times more likely to be employed than a woman. (Demirci & Kirdar, 2021) In addition to the number of employed people, there is also a difference in the type of work refugees find and in which economic sector they are employed. Surveys show that while Syrian men are employed in large numbers in the manufacturing industry, women typically thrive in agriculture and few work in services. All this is strange because the industry in Syria is underdeveloped and few people work in it, and 67% of the population lives on services. (Demirci & Kirdar, 2021) According to the ILO's 2020 survey, there is also a difference in salaries between women and men. While a Syrian refugee woman took home 1,083 lira a month, a man was paid 1,337 lira (Erdogan, Kirisci & Uyasal, 2021).

In addition to the difference between the genders, Ceritoglu's control group research published in 2015 showed a significant difference in distinct age groups as well. In general, it was established that the Turkish population's chances of getting a job decreased significantly in all age segments with the mass appearance of Syrians, and this was most marked among the under-35 age group. Unemployment among young people has increased at a higher rate than that of the over-55 age group, and among young people, women are considered bigger losers than men (Ceritoglu et al., 2015).

The prevalence of gray and black employment also led to the development of a serious problem, namely the illegal employment of children. Although this phenomenon exists in Turkey regardless of the Syrian refugees, and the AKP governments have not tried to eradicate it, the exploitation of young people among Syrians has reached an astonishing level. According to a survey conducted in 2021, 18.8% of Syrian refugee boys between the ages of 12 and 14 work somewhere. If we compare this with a 2009 statistic that was prepared before the civil war in Syria,

we find that this problem has more than doubled, since in the 2000s in the Arab country, 7.6% of boys in this age category worked (Demirci & Kirdar, 2021).

### **7.3 Turkish government efforts at integrating the Syrian refugees**

Turkey signed the international refugee agreement known as the Geneva Convention in 1961, but this does not mean that the necessary legal changes were made after that, since very few refugees arrived in the country for decades. (Unluturk Ulutas, 2016)

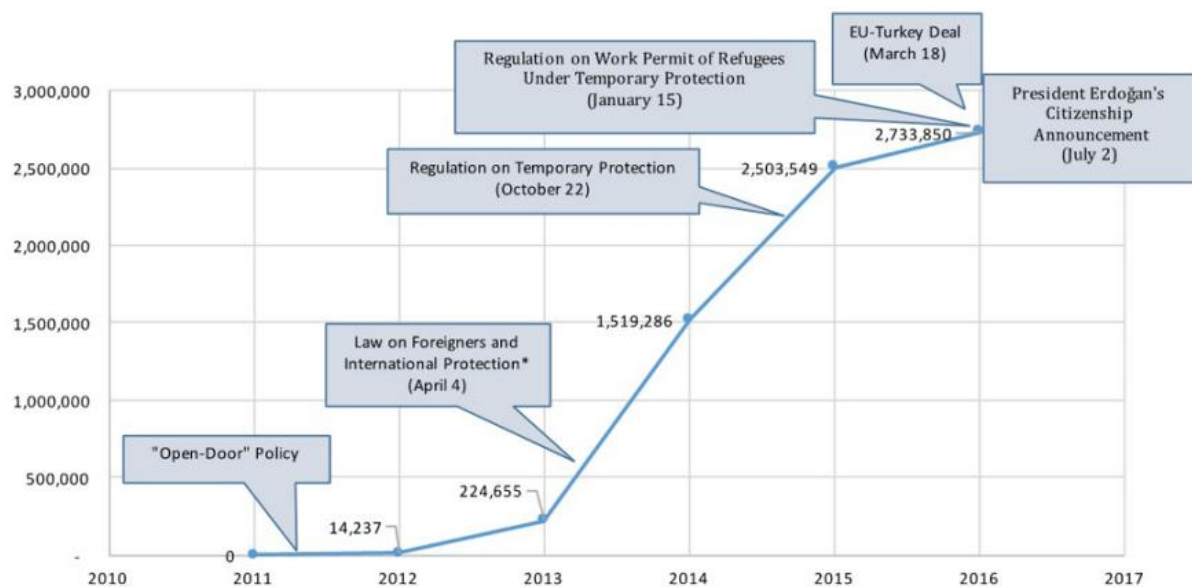
In the days before the Syrian civil war, Turkey was not prepared for the massive presence of foreign workers in the country's labor market. The Justice and Development Party, which came to power in 2002, perceived the ex-lex situation and took the first steps towards market opening and liberalization. In 2003, the first Turkish law was passed that provided for work permits for foreigners. This legislation was already created in connection with European integration, and regulated the legal situation and opportunities of asylum seekers, legal and illegal immigrants in accordance with international standards. The law reflected the global social reality of the 2000s and did not anticipate waves of refugees in the millions (Icduygu & Millet, 2016).

Following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the AKP governments essentially opened the border and contributed to the massive influx of Syrians. At that time, the ruling party saw the solution to the problem by building more than two dozen temporary refugee camps in the border region. By the way, stereotypes appeared very quickly in the border regions, according to which the maintenance of these refugee camps is very expensive, and that the government spends too much on the workers there (Suryantama, 2021).

The legal environment of the asylum case showed no change. By 2014, the Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan was forced to realize that a solid solution was needed, since the war would drag on and the refugees would stay. In October 2014, the AKP majority in the Turkish National Assembly passed legislation that would allow Syrian refugees to receive temporary international

protection and access to social security and some other government services, but even this law did not introduce the possibility of employment (Erdogan, Kirisci & Uysal, 2021).

Before the asylum reform of January 2016, it was very difficult for Syrian refugees to obtain a legal work permit. By the end of 2015, the Turkish authorities had issued such certificates to a total of 7,692 Syrian refugees. The introduction of Turkish Law No. 8375 made it possible for refugees and asylum seekers under temporary international protection to take up work. The law imposes several conditions, so the AKP government tried to limit the employment of Syrian



**Figure 6.** Timeline of refugee-related Turkish legislation and number of asylum seekers Source: Icdygu & Millet (2016)

workers on the one hand, and on the other hand to guarantee that only those who have been staying on Turkish soil for a long time can get a work permit. The legislation required Syrian refugees to register with Turkish labor and asylum authorities and hold a Turkish identity card for at least six months. In addition, the work permit also contains a geographical restriction, according to which the refugee can only work in the county in which his official address is located. They also defined the maximum number of refugee workers an employer can hire (Demirci & Kirdar, 2021).

Obtaining work permits for refugees was difficult and the introduction of new regulations in 2016 did not lead to a dramatic increase in their number. Since they had to be renewed every



year, those who had been working legally for a long time had to go through the procedure again and again. By 2018, the number of permits had risen to 34,573, although even this is extremely short of the real number of Syrian refugees, so it can be concluded that many people continue to find work in the gray and black economy, trying to employ themselves and their peers in smaller businesses, or to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Turkish social care system (Demirci & Kirdar, 2021).

Due to the increasingly hostile Turkish public mood towards Syrian refugees, the integration of asylum seekers and the promotion of the participation of Syrians in the labor market are increasingly challenging for the AKP governments. One of the main reasons for the difficulties is that a significant number of Syrian immigrants have a lower level of education than the Turkish average, and the value and appreciation of diplomas and certificates obtained in Syria is very low among Turkish employers. The only way to improve the situation is if as many Syrians as possible receive formal education in Turkey, and as many as possible obtain university degrees. The number of Syrians pursuing university studies in Turkey increased from 445 in 2011 to approximately 15,000 in six years, i.e. more than thirty times as many Syrians attended Turkish higher education institutions than before the civil war. This is a significant development, but the number is dwarfed by the total Syrian refugee population. One thing is certain, the education of Syrians in Turkey and in the Turkish language is key to their success in the labor market (Bariscil, 2017).

#### **7.4 The 2016 EU-Turkey statement on migration**

Turkey has been conducting accession negotiations with the European Union since 1999. This means that regarding the legal status and rights of refugees, and especially the issue of women, Turkey should have found an answer long before the Syrian refugee crisis (Toksoz, 2020). Nevertheless, the European Union has recognized that some Mediterranean countries –including Turkey- are not only victims of the wave of refugees, they do not only accept immigrants and support them with the financial aid of the West, but are active participants in the management of the refugee crisis, thus contributing to the fact that the problem can be partially resolved outside of Europe (Sahin Mencutek & Nashwan, 2021).

Although it was subject to many criticisms, the agreement signed on March 18, 2016 between the European Union and Turkey was extremely important from the point of view of global

refugee management and the employment of refugees. Around 3.7 million asylum seekers lived in the Asian country at the time, most of whom came from Syria, but there were also a significant number who were born in Afghanistan. The purpose of the agreement was for European countries to free themselves as best as possible from the harmful effects of migration after the 2015 refugee crisis, and to keep out of Europe as far as possible those who they thought would not be able to find their place on the European labor market and would not contribute to the continuous growth of the European economy. The purpose of concluding the EU-Turkey Deal was to manage the migration of Syrian refugees wishing to live in Europe under orderly conditions. The results of public opinion polls conducted in Turkey after the entry into force of the agreement showed that the majority of Syrians who have been living there for years no longer want to migrate to Europe, only 4% of them planned to go to the West legally or illegally in 2021. Half of the refugees who indicated their intention to move on said that they think so because they have no means of living in Turkey. From this, it can be concluded that about half of the Syrians who fled to the West via Turkey were able to work in Turkey for a while (Elmacioglu, 2021).

Europe did not want to push the problem away from itself, but tried to find a solution that would efficiently organize the lives of these people, partly from European sources, but in a completely different economic environment. FRIT, the EU's refugee support program in Turkey, aimed for the integration of Syrian asylum seekers was initiated in order to promote this policy. Of course, the leaders in Brussels thought that the highly qualified and well-integrated workforce could migrate even further over time, which would also benefit the old continent (Adar & Puttmann, 2022). In 2018, Turkey and the European Union developed a so-called exit strategy ("Exit Strategy From The ESSN Program") with the aim that within the framework of FRIT, as many Syrian refugees as possible can get a legal job, the establishment of which is also supported by Brussels, and that as few as possible depend on the Turkish social welfare system. (Erdogan, Kirisci & Uysal, 2021) The Turkish state apparatus tried to realize the goals of FRIT in the best possible way. An independent FRIT directorate was established in the office of the President of the Republic of Turkey, and the state labor organization ISKUR hired 1,000 new employees, mostly language and vocational teachers, to support the Turkish language training and competence development of Syrian refugees (Kirisci, 2020).

The agreement between the EU and Turkey in the second half of the 2010s created a situation in which Turkey's European partners were able to support the livelihood of Syrian refugees in the country in several ways and at several levels. Turkish and international governmental and non-governmental organizations received EU support, which helped Syrians learn the language and receive vocational training, but there was also a program aimed at providing tax or social security benefits to businesses that employ refugees. The latter had its limits, since the legislation adopted by the AKP in 2016 maximized the number of foreigners employed in one workplace at 10% (Kale, 2022).

At the same time, the projects supported by the EU achieved only indirect results and could only reach a small part of the Syrian refugee community. Relatively few people were able to participate in EU-financed language and professional training, and they actually had little impact on employment opportunities and did not influence the essential processes experienced on the labor market. The fact that Syrian refugees could only participate in these EU programs for a specific period of time, there was no follow-up, and it was not possible to achieve a long-term effect was also a problem. In many cases, the refugees did not receive training from European sources, but simply cash, which did not solve their long-term integration. All of this is well proven by the fact that many of the Syrians receiving training in EU programs became unemployed due to closures and quarantine measures during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Kale, 2022).

In the nine years between 2011 and 2020, the Turkish government spent about 40 billion dollars on the care of Syrian refugees, the majority of which was generated from domestic sources. This huge amount alone would not be enough, without the selfless help of Turkish civil society, perhaps even the Turkish refugee care system would have collapsed without the generosity of the Turkish people. Compared to this, the approximately 6 billion dollars granted to Ankara by the EU-Turkey Deal dwarfs it, it is only one eighth of Turkish government spending. EU resources were therefore only able to contribute to the labor market integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey to a small extent (Erdogan, 2020).

## **7.5 EU-Turkey municipal cooperation on refugees**

Turkish municipalities play an active role in the integration of Syrian refugees as the following quote from the Seyhan District Municipality located near the border area: „ome call them as ‘asylum-seeker’, some ‘refugee’, or some say ‘guest’. As a municipality, we regard and approach to Syrians as our townsmen. For us, they are our townsmen. We acknowledge that 85 per cent of those people (Syrians) will be permanent here... There is not a separate migration unit (at the municipality) because we don’t discriminate Syrians from Turkish citizens. We are trying to do our best to treat Syrians equally as we treat Turkish citizens. Also, our municipality does not favour just social assistance to Syrians; we really care about social inclusion”. (Sivis, 2020).

The employment of Syrian refugees in Turkey is not only supported by the government-level mechanisms of 2016, but other levels of subsidiarity are also involved. Many settlements in Western Europe have been struggling with successive waves of immigrants for decades, so they have accumulated a significant amount of experience in the matter. They are happy to share these good practices with their Turkish partners. In addition, both the European Union and some European cities believe that part of the subsidies should not be paid to the governments of the candidate countries, but directly to the local communities. more and more people in Europe think that the euros intended for job creation should be paid directly to the Turkish municipalities, since they, knowing the local conditions better, could spend this money more efficiently than the AKP cabinet in Ankara, which is often accused of corruption. Cooperation at the municipal level would have, and already has, several social benefits. The joint work of several German and Turkish municipalities proves that not only direct project financing works better this way, but also that citizens and their civil organizations find each other more easily (Adar & Puttmann, 2022).

## **7.6 Impact of migration on Turkish unemployment**

For a long time, Turkey accepted relatively few refugees, and was not considered a destination country for immigration at all, so the foreigners settling mostly temporarily in its territory did not really influence labor trends or increase unemployment statistics. In the 70 years following the declaration of the republic in 1923, a total of about 1.7 million refugees arrived in Turkey. Among them were Europeans chased by Nazism, as well as persons of Turkish or Turkic origin who fled from Bulgaria, Iraq or the former Soviet Union. A significant part of these refugees returned home when the conflicts and persecution in their homeland ended, only a small proportion

of them, especially those with higher education and university degrees, remained in Turkey. Among them, it is worth mentioning the Jewish professors from Germany, who in the 1930s significantly contributed to the leap-like improvement in the quality of Turkish universities and research institutes (Cakilci, 2017).

From a demographic and economic point of view, the wave of refugees started by the Syrian civil war was radically different from the challenges posed by the settlers of the 20th century. Not only did three times as many people come from the Arab country in a few years as in 70 years in total, but most of them who came did not speak the Turkish language, had a low level of education, or represented the illiterate population of rural areas. Questionnaire surveys prove that the majority of Syrian refugees have not mastered the Turkish language even after nearly a decade has passed, and this is one of the most important obstacles to their employment. According to one such research, only 13% of Syrians said that their knowledge of Turkish was better than average. All this is true despite the fact that the Syrians themselves say that if they don't know Turkish well, they either won't get a job, or they only have a chance for a much lower salary (Kirisci, 2020).

From a social and economic point of view, Syria is a significantly less developed country than Turkey. In the years before the conflict, Syria was an agro-industrial society, where 16% of the employed still made a living from agriculture. Syrian industry did not represent a greater weight in the country's economy than the primary sector, since only 17% of the country's population worked in this sector. At the same time, services underwent a relative development at the turn of the millennium, with 67% of the active-age population working in this field. The lower level of education, the lack of developed sectors, and that of experience in advanced industrial and service jobs further aggravated the integration of Syrian refugees into the Turkish labor market (Cakilci, 2017).

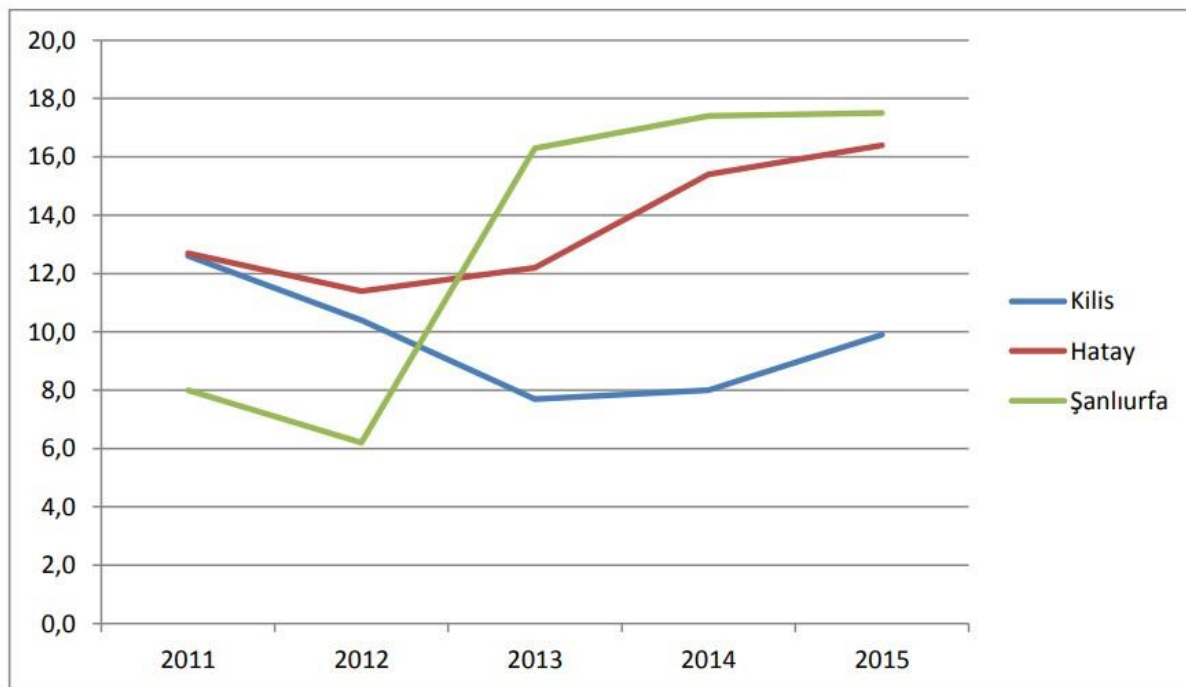
In the initial stages of the wave of Syrian refugees, the Turkish authorities did not allow those who arrived to settle in the interior of the country or in the large cities of western Turkey, so the majority of asylum seekers lived and still live in the medium-sized settlements near the Syrian-Turkish border. This was helped by the fact that the Syrians themselves initially hoped that they would be able to return home soon, but one of the decisive factors was also the fact that a significant Arabic-speaking minority lived in the cities of Kilis, Hatay and Sanliurfa, and that many

Syrian Arabs and Turkmens had relatives there. The largest concentration of Syrian refugees was observed in Kilis, where the number of Syrian far exceeded that of natives, 93% in 2016 and their proportion was higher, but even in larger cities such as Kahramanmaras, Mersin or Adana it reached 7%. Since few Syrian refugees were still able to move to the more developed regions of Turkey in the mid-2010s, it is relevant to examine how unemployment developed in the border region, because it clearly shows how the first wave of mass immigration affected unemployment in Turkey. (Cakilci, 2017) The drastic increase in unemployment surprised the Turkish experts, since Kilis and the nearby Gaziantep began to develop rapidly at the end of the 2000s and, compared to its relative backwardness, employment developed well. According to the Turkish Statistical Office in 2013, the unemployment rate was one of the lowest in the region, the rapid increase of which can only be explained by the massive influx of refugees (Erdogan, 2014).

After the deep political and economic crisis of the 1990s, the Turkish economy began to stabilize around 2005, and then it would start to develop. This is also proven by the fact that the currency introduced in 2005, the new Turkish lira, has hardly been inflated, the country's modern infrastructure has been built rapidly, and the unemployment rate has also decreased. Even the global economic crisis of 2008 could not stop this development for a long time. The internal, structural difficulties of the Turkish economy and the internal and economic policy errors and mistakes of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) began to be seen in the statistics from 2012. The country's domestic political crisis was first demonstrated by the 2013 Gezi Park protests. Unemployment reached its most favorable value in 2012, hovering around 8.5%. After that, it began to grow rapidly, in 2015 it already exceeded 10%. Empirical research by Serttas and Uluoz showed that there is a direct and drastic correlation between the large number of Syrian workers and Turkish unemployment indicators. Serttas and Uluoz found „that the arrival of every 10 Syrians drops the number of unemployed persons in Turkey approximately by 3” (Serttas & Uluoz, 2021:26).

The unemployment statistics of Turkish cities characterized by a significant Syrian refugee population also show similar trends. In the already mentioned Kilis, between 2012 and 2015, unemployment increased from 11.5% to 16.5%, i.e. the number of unemployed people rose above the national average. The most drastic negative change was produced by Sanliurfa, where the

proportion of jobseekers almost tripled in one year, while in 2012 only 6% of the residents were in this situation, in 2013 it was already 16% (Cakilci, 2017).



**Figure 7.** Unemployment in selected cities which hosted the highest proportions of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Source: Cakilci (2017)

The appearance of Syrian refugees on the Turkish labor market did not only worsen the official statistics, but also made it difficult for ordinary Turkish people to find work. Many Syrian immigrants obtained informal work in the gray economy, in many cases displacing disadvantaged and unskilled Turkish workers from casual jobs. A survey showed that the wave of Syrian refugees reduced employment in Turkey by 2.2% relative to the population as a whole. Among the members of the Turkish-born population, those who lost their unofficial jobs due to the influx of Syrians were forced to redesign their employment strategies. As a result, half of the affected people dropped out of the labor market completely, 32% became unemployed and received some kind of pension after losing their job, while only in 18% of the cases they found legal work (Ceritoglu et al., 2015).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that in 2017, 813,000 Syrian refugees worked in informal jobs across Turkey. This represented 90% of all employed Syrians in the country (Erdogan, Kirisci & Uysal, 2021). Ozturk's 2019 survey indicates a smaller proportion



of illegal employment. 54% of the participants stated that they work in a non-legally registered workplace, while this figure was 74% among the female respondents (Ozturk, Vildan Selin & Altinoz, 2019).

When evaluating the spread of informal employment, two very important factors must be kept in mind. On the one hand, it is important to note that the AKP governments were unable to eradicate the black and gray economy, black and gray employment is still very widespread and accepted in Turkey and is a completely acceptable alternative for many untrained and uneducated Turks. On the other hand, for a long time, the government of Turkey prevented Syrians from getting legal work, because it wanted them to stay in the refugee camps or go home after the conflict ended. Unfortunately, many Turkish citizens also believe that an informal job is better than a registered job in many cases. Due to this peculiarity of the labor market and the dismissive behavior of the Turkish political elite, the Syrian refugees coming from a similar socio-cultural environment considered it completely natural to find work illegally, and did not mind that this would reduce the livelihood chances of the locals (Ceritoglu et al., 2015).

Giovanis and Ozdamar's (2021) comparative survey, which was conducted simultaneously in Jordan and Turkey, showed that Syrian asylum seekers only briefly displace the local workforce from low-paid, informal jobs, as soon as they learn the Turkish language and obtain a work permit, the trends show that they are trying to make use of the competences they acquired in Syria (Giovanis & Ozdamar, 2021).

Del Caprio and Wagner's survey conducted in 2015 also revealed a surprising reaction among Turks who were pushed out of the labor market by the Syrian refugees in the border region. Since it has already been said that young people, specifically those under 35, were more affected than older people in this process, the researchers found that many young Turkish people decided to go to school instead of misusing the social welfare system or opting for the world of legal work. According to Ceritoglu's team's investigation, half of those affected have left the labor market, but Del Caprio and Wagner prove that some of these people entered vocational training and another group chose higher education. All of this means that immigration and the refugee crisis of 2015 forced the native youth to study and obtain a new and better education, which will give them more chances to get a job and the less qualified Syrian refugees will not be their competitors (Del Caprio & Wagner, 2015).

After the initial difficulties, the employment of Syrian refugees was drastically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of Syrians employed in informal jobs lost their place in March 2020 and in the following months. According to a two-time survey by the NGO called Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers, more than three quarters of people in the black and gray economy became unemployed. In March 2020, 89% of those surveyed had this type of work, but in the second half of 2020, only 18% could say the same about themselves (Erdogan, Kirisci & Uysal, 2021).

It is important to note that the professional handling of the refugee crisis also created jobs for some members of Turkish society, which led to an increase in employment in certain sectors. According to estimates, about 1.2-1.5% of the Turkish population of the border region found work in the refugee camps and in governmental and non-governmental organizations dealing with refugees. It can be observed that these were mostly more educated young people with degrees in the social sphere. There are also data to the effect that, while the less educated Turkish youth were really pushed out of the world of work en masse, employment among those with a university degree increased by 0.9%, especially in jobs related to refugees (Del Caprio & Wagner, 2015).

### **7.7 The impact of refugee employment on wages**

The wave of Syrian refugees and the initially illegal and later legal employment of Syrians not only affected employment, but also significantly modified the trends observed in the field of salaries. The Turkish government was prepared for the fact that the mass and legal employment of Syrians could lead to wage tensions. It is therefore no coincidence that the January 2016 decision to liberalize work permits coincided with a 30% increase in the minimum wage, which curbed conflicts within society but put employers in a difficult position (Unluturk Ulutas, 2016).

Since the employment of native Turks was restructured, employment shifted towards more qualified people with university degrees. It can be seen that employment among the uneducated dropped drastically, and many of them decided to retrain or continue their education. In addition, university graduates had a better chance of getting a job, as the number of people with jobs increased by 0.9%. At the beginning of the 2010s, the monthly salary of the relevant graduates increased by 55-107 Turkish lira, and this represents a net improvement of 7%. In the case of women, the increase in salaries is slightly below the average, but among them it is extremely true

that those who worked in fields related to the refugee issue could count on a spectacular salary increase of up to 180 lira per month (Del Caprio & Wagner, 2015).

While Turkish graduates, especially those who work in refugee affairs, can count on a significant salary increase, Syrian refugees typically receive much less than their Turkish counterparts. A survey conducted in 2016 in the K sget industrial park in the city of Gaziantep showed that the salaries of Syrian refugees are definitely lower than those of Turks. The Turkish language literature also states that this is not the first time in Turkish history, since the ethnic Turks fleeing Bulgaria at the end of the 1980s were able to take home less than the local Turks in the city of Bursa, where they were temporarily resettled at the time, and where the Turkish Refugee Museum is located today. (Caglar Deniz, Ekin ci & Banu H l r, 2016) The ILO estimates that Syrian refugee workers earn 7% less than the official Turkish minimum wage. In 2020, this meant an average salary of 1,302 Turkish lira among Syrian refugees, which - due to the galloping inflation caused by the policy mistakes of the AKP governments - is barely enough to live on (Erdogan, Kirisci & Uysal, 2021).

Kayaoglu's 2020 attitude research, which she conducted in developed textile factories in Istanbul, showed that the employment of Syrian refugees also affected the attitudes of the refugees' Turkish colleagues. In several cases, employers in the textile industry stated that the Turkish workers demanded a salary increase when they found out that their Syrian colleagues were essentially receiving the same salary as them. The Turkish workers therefore expected to be more advantageously differentiated according to their origin and citizenship. Among the arguments of the Turkish workers, the xenophobic stereotypes of the end of the 2010s also appeared. Several people told their bosses that Syrians were lazy, while Turks were more productive, so they contributed more to the company's success (Kayaoglu, 2020).

Over time, the bargaining positions of the Syrian refugee workers also began to improve. Because many of them stayed in the same industrial plants for a longer period of time, many of them acquired the competencies necessary for factory work and also learned the Turkish language. In the case of the Syrians who can be said to be more and more educated, the professional knowledge was combined with the culture brought from Syria, which is why the Syrians were able to negotiate more and more skillfully with the employers and win higher and higher salaries for themselves. Of course, this also affected the attitude of the Turkish workers, since while they felt

sorry for them in the initial phase of the wave of refugees, now they are more and more envious (Kayaoglu, 2020).

The wave of refugees in Turkey following the Syrian civil war that broke out in 2011 showed the weaknesses and downsides of the Turkish labor market and pointed out that the host nation's economy has undergone a two-faced development in the last two decades and is significantly vulnerable to external influences such as a large number of potential workers that do not speak the language of the country.

In Turkey, unemployment is high and wages are low, and some Syrians living there are not guaranteed access to basic needs. Although the global trends show that refugees are forced to work in worse conditions, in many ways the situation of Turkish workers is not much better than that of those fleeing the war in Syria.

The fact that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP governments were only partially able to integrate refugees in the last decade, and that the resentment towards them reached such a level that it made migration one of the main issues of this year's Turkish election campaign can also be explained by the fact that few Syrians find legal work, while many Syrians and Turks are forced into the black economy. The prevalence of informal jobs has brought Turkish society to the point where, due to the galloping inflation, not only the refugees, but also almost half of the native Turks struggle with livelihood problems. It is quite possible that the winner in the May voting will be the one who can assure the Turkish society that they will find a permanent solution for the employment of Syrians, which will not negatively affect the standard of living of the Turkish majority.

## **8. Pacification and democratization of the army**

### **8.1 The role of the military in Turkish history**

The Turkish people have been apostrophized many times throughout its history as a military nation, since it built many large-scale empires thanks to its well-armed and skillfully maneuvering army. When they were forced to defend themselves, such as during the war of national defense after the First World War, the Turks showed great courage and thanks to their discipline, they were able to keep most of the territories inhabited by ethnic Turks. The founders of the Republic of Turkey, including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself, were high-ranking military

leaders, so it is no wonder that this discipline and military mindset essentially leave its mark on the functioning of Turkish society to this day. From the 1920s, the military not only guaranteed the internal and external security of Turkey, following the famous saying of the founder of the state: "peace at home, peace in the world", but also acted as a guardian of the spirit of the early republic from time to time.

The Turkish army was therefore not only a professional defense organization during the first century of the republic, but an important social force, one of whose functions was to ensure that Ataturk's revolutionary principles governed Turkish society and that the political system remained as secular as possible and conform to what the founder of the state imagined. At the same time, it was a challenge from the point of view of political pluralism that in a multi-party democracy this essentially manifested itself as a stand for one political side and continuous control of the other side. The army left very little room for maneuver for the political leadership, in essence, the commanders of the army often felt that they were above the cabinet elected by the people. The aim of the army was not to enforce the democratic will of the people, but to ensure that the functioning of the state did not deviate from Ataturk's principles. It follows that in many cases the army intervened in politics in the form of open military coups or threatening memoranda.

The nature of the coups mentioned above varied. While the coup d'état of 1960 was clearly directed against the government led by the Democratic Party and the Prime Minister, Adnan Menderes, and did not consider the Turkish people themselves as targets, the 2016 coup attempt, although it tried to hunt down the leaders of the state and officers loyal to the government, essentially it was directed against the Turkish people, which is also proven by the fact that only then in the history of Turkish coups did the rebels shoot at civilians in the open street. Although the coups differed in their goals, ideological foundations and methods, they all pointed to several problems that posed a great challenge to the democratically elected governments, since the political dominance of the army had to be reduced in such a way that the army could intervene in the processes at any time with weapons. Civilian governments had to take several dangerous political steps for this very reason. On the one hand, it was necessary to pacify Turkish society, where the role of the army does not extend beyond the framework that can be seen in Western democracies. On the other hand, the internal operation and financing of the army had to be made transparent, i.e. a kind of civilian control over the army had to be built up. And thirdly, it had to

be guaranteed that future officers would be loyal to the government and not to a political trend, secret society, religious sect or Kemalism itself, which is only one of the possible ideologies in the modern multi-party framework.

In order to understand the socio-political role of the Turkish army, it is very important to emphasize that from the 6th century to the end of the 19th century, the armed forces formed the backbone of Turkish communities, nomadic societies and empires, which during this period of about 1300 years developed only thanks to internal dynamics and operated according to a specific Turkish logic. At the same time, the Turkish army at the time was under the direct control of the ruler, the Ottoman sultans themselves regularly joined the campaigns, supervised the operation of the army, rewarded those who achieved success and punished those who suffered a humiliating defeat or betrayed the interests of the empire. The 19th century was considered a turning point because the Ottoman rulers tried to modernize many segments of society with careful steps. The army could not be left out of this enlightened absolutism either. Many Turkish officers were sent to study at European military academies and many Western European generals joined the Ottoman army, as did Hungarians after the fall of the 1848-49 revolution and war of independence. At the same time, it is important to underline the fact that, despite the serious Western influence, a radical change did not start at this time, the true modernization and reorganization of the military in a Western spirit only took place after the proclamation of the republic (Aknur, 2013:32).

## **8.2 The role of the military in politics in the early republican era**

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Turkish army underwent a radical modernization and western-style reorganization, which included the acceptance by all actors of the political scene and the people that the army was more than a guarantor of the country's security. The repertoire of the military was enriched with at least two new functions: they became the defenders of the young republic and the main armed supporters of Atatürk's principles. The public opinion of the time typically supported this change, because the politicians of the early republican era were often seen as petty and needlessly quarrelsome characters, and the army was thought by the people to be able to keep order among the bickering politicians. So people didn't mind when they saw that the army was playing politics and the army also thought that it should always speak out if the political debate required it (Aknur, 2013:33).

A double phenomenon can be observed in this early period of the republic. On the one hand, high-ranking military officers who fought throughout the First World War and the Patriotic War were leaving the army en masse to enter the political field. The two very first presidents of the republic, Ataturk and Inonu, did the same, but it can also be said that a fifth of the representatives of the very first National Assembly, while a quarter of the ministers of the first governments consisted of former military officers. On the other hand, those military officers who remained in the military branch were openly expressing their political views. They were free to do so, since their political opinion essentially coincided with the position of the state's leaders (Aknur, 2013:34).

### **8.3 Alternance of civilian governance and military coups**

Many former military officers could also be found among the cadres of the Republican People's Party (CHP), founded by Ataturk. After the introduction of multi-party democracy after 1945, these politicians remained within the CHP, no former military officers joined the Democratic Party. The intricate political challenges and disruptions stemming from a shift towards less state-centric and more liberal political and economic development during the multiparty era since 1946 underscored a distinct politicization of the military (Sakallioglu, 1997:156). Former soldiers within the CHP viewed many of the DP's moves with great suspicion. Although they were officially concerned about the secular system of the state when the Menderes government expanded the education of religious studies, increased the budget of the state religious affairs office, the Diyanet, and re-authorized the call to prayer in Arabic from the minarets, in fact they were disturbed by the fact that they were politically marginalized and deprived from their material and organizational resources. The DP-led government was not only considered dangerous for the secular state, but they believed that they were going to limit the army, its ideological base. (Aknur, 2013:35) In most cases, the reason behind the coup of 1960 is that the military was dissatisfied with the political direction of the Menderes and the marginalization of the CHP, but there was another important factor, namely that Turkey joined NATO. The traditionally America-skeptic Kemalists did not take kindly to the fact that after 1952 the country experienced a political and military change of direction due to pressure from the Western allies (Burak, 2011:149).

After the first military coup in 1960, the 1961 constitution adopted by the National Security Council (Milli Guvenlik Konseyi), i.e. the coup junta, significantly increased the military's



political influence. The commander-in-chief of the army, for example, had more political power than the minister of national defense, since he did not report to the minister, but directly to the prime minister. In addition, the army was also given access to the information of the civilian secret services, so they could also obtain precise information about Turkish domestic politics. They were able to do this though the military had its own secret service, which did not share its own knowledge with the government (Aknur, 2013:35).

The 1961 constitution not only further strengthened the role of the army in Turkish political life, but also created a relatively free and liberal political framework for the competition of the parties, in which the army did not really intervene for a decade. This was the period in the history of Turkish democracy that led to the strengthening of the far-left (pro-Soviet and pro-communist) and far-right (nationalist and moderate Islamist) parties, while the government was led by the Justice Party (Adalet Partisi, AP), which in its ideology and political style resembled the Democratic Party. The leaders of the army were disturbed by the popularity of Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel and the AP, but since they were barely beyond a coup, they did not want to interfere directly in politics. Finally, on March 12, 1971, a memorandum was issued, which was basically against the promotion of extreme political ideas, especially communism, after which the Workers' Party of Turkey (Turkiye Isci Partisi, TIP) and its branches were also banned, but it created an opportunity for the army also from the point of view of putting Demirel in the background for a while and introducing military control until 1973. The spread of extremist ideas was embedded in the constitution drafted by the military junta, and yet this was the pretext for overthrowing the democratically elected and moderate government (Aknur, 2013:35). The advance of the extreme left was made possible by the 1961 constitution, but it worried the army already in the first half of the 1960s. After the strong influence of the military was still felt until 1965 and it tried to oust the TIP from the political arena, the armed forces appeared in the role of defenders of capitalism in addition to republican principles (Burak, 2011:150).

After the military returned control of Turkey to civilian politicians in 1973, the country descended into political division, terrorism and chaos. Although the 1971 memorandum was about the rise of extreme political forces, political radicals continued to gain popularity in the 1970s. This process resulted in far-right parties being part of several short-lived government coalitions. Simultaneously with the strengthening of the nationalists, several terrorist organizations became

more and more active. The activities of the far-left and separatist Kurdish Workers' Party, the PKK, which started in the early 1970s, continue to this day, but the series of attacks by the far-right nationalist "grey wolves" can also be attributed to this period. If the rising terrorism wasn't enough, the number of militant organizations and the political murders associated with them also increased (Aknur, 2013:36). The army prepared for the coup itself for about a year. As early as September 1979, General Kenan Evren commissioned his colleague Haydar Saltik to prepare plans to overthrow the civilian government. Evren would have expected the presidents of the two leading parties, MSP and CHP, Demirel and Ecevit, to solve social problems and be able to elect the president of the republic in the parliament, which did not happen even after 115 attempts. After Demirel and Ecevit refused to allow a vote of confidence to decide the fate of the government, Evren decided to intervene and overthrow the government and repeal the 1961 constitution. This also means that the coup was not officially carried out to protect the republic and Ataturk's principles, but to achieve the army's own political goals, even at the cost of the temporary liquidation of the CHP, which carries the legacy of Ataturk.

After the 1980 coup, in 1982 the military junta led by Kenan Evren gave the Turkish people a new constitution, which is still in force with significant amendments. It is therefore important to emphasize that the legal framework of today's Turkish political system is defined by a document that has been in force for more than 40 years and that was formulated by the army in such a way that although it broadened individual and collective political and human rights, it tried to limit the positions of the government and favor that of the army as well. After 1982, a new and dynamic party system emerged in Turkey, which was increasingly supported by a tangled network of civil organizations, associations and foundations. While the CHP was re-legalized and the MHP continued its political activity, more serious changes took place in the religious far-right. Necmettin Erbakan's ideology, the rather radical National Vision (Milli gorus) formulated in the 1970s, gained more and more popularity. The Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) performed very well in the 1995 elections with this radical program and became one of the key players in the government. The rise of the government's political power is shown by the fact that the army, although unsympathetic to the rise of Refah, did not intend to take overt action until Erbakan became prime minister in 1997. It also shows the loss of space of the military, that in the second half of the 1990s they no longer dared and were able to think about an armed uprising, so instead they carried out a so-called postmodern coup, i.e. they published an e-memorandum on the

Internet, forcing the resignation of Erbakan and the banning of Refah in 1998. (Aknur, 2013:37) Behind Refah's electoral success, somewhat independent of the radical party, was a series of social changes that disturbed the army's leadership. Ozal's right-wing policies after the 1980 coup led to the strengthening of many identities by the 1990s. Religious groups defined themselves more and more as Muslims, while among ethnic minorities, including the Kurds, the insistence on origin and the need to use the mother tongue became stronger. At the same time, a Muslim business class was formed, which was still weaker than the Kemalist economic elite, but it already pricked their eyes, and behind the precise accusations of Islamization, opposition to these social processes also motivated the military leadership (Burak, 2011:152).

The e-memorandum of 1997 not only forced political changes, but also brought to the surface social forces that had not accompanied the history of Turkish military coups until then. Civil organizations in solidarity with the military began to carry out activities. The Kemalist element was still strongly present in higher education and the feminist movement, but in 1997 these groups spectacularly stood up for the spirit of the e-memorandum. Kemalist professors began demonstrating at Istanbul University, while left-wing women's movements organized a spectacular demonstration at Ataturk's mausoleum in Ankara, known as the Anitkabir (Burak, 2011:153).

#### **8.4 The AKP's approach to the armed forces**

The 1997 intervention into Turkish domestic politics shows the army's loss of political reality that this move further radicalized Erbakan and his close circle, while allowing the pragmatist Islamists to quickly reorganize while the country was hit by a huge earthquake and a deep economic crisis. Five years after the postmodern coup, Turkish domestic politics came to the point where the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP), which was still called moderate Islamist, came to power in 2002, essentially "disarming" the army in a political sense in several steps. Perhaps, if the army had not been so afraid of stealthy Islamization, it would not have favored its adherents.

The pragmatism of the AKP and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is also shown by the fact that in the first five years of his administration, he tried to avoid an open conflict with the army, so that at first they did not really try any reform measures that would have affected religious rights. After the AKP cabinet inherited a serious economic situation, which even the neoliberal shock therapy could not fully help, the government mostly concentrated on stabilizing the

economy, introducing the new lira and developing the infrastructure. The hidden Islamism of the AKP began to become more and more evident around 2007. They wanted to introduce changes that were previously demanded by other religious right-wing parties, such as the expansion of the system of imam hatip schools that train religious leaders, the authorization of headscarves at schools and public institutions, and they tried to support the European Islamist school network of the later close enemy, Fetullah Gulen. These in themselves were considered taboo for the members of the old Kemalist elite who had lost power, and they understood that the secular state was under threat from them, but there was an even more serious problem. The AKP decided to install its own party cadre, Abdullah Gul, as the president of the republic. Since the president of the republic was the ultimate guardian of Ataturk's principles alongside the army, everyone knew that if the AKP could accomplish this, the political status quo would be overturned and the army would permanently lose its political and social positions. The entire state apparatus moved against the AKP, but in the end they proved to be few. They could not prevent the fulfillment of the demands of the religious masses, the election of Gul, or even they could not ban the AKP. The Kemalist wing within the army had to see that they had no chance of an armed coup (Aknur, 2013:38).

On April 27, 2007, the army issued a strongly worded e-memorandum, but it was in many ways a parody of previous similar documents. The ideological basis of political intervention was still the defense of the secular state, but only a few people took this concern seriously. The argument that Abdullah Gul, an AKP politician, cannot become the president of the republic because his wife wears a headscarf, made many people smile and the government itself was not scared like Erbakan's cabinet was ten years earlier. The government not only remained in place, but it can also be said that they did not respond to the e-memorandum at the highest level either. It was not Prime Minister Erdogan, but government spokesman Cemil Cicek, who appeared before the public and only replied that the AKP government continues to stand for the secular state order, and there is no cause for concern (Burak, 2011:164).

The 2007 memorandum known as E-muhtira in Turkish political history shows that the military interventions in Turkish politics are far from being the solution to political turmoil. Unlike the commonly suggested interpretation, military coups were not mere reactions to political crises. Instead, the military emerges as an institution actively involved in instigating crises, manipulating them to enhance its autonomy, legitimize its actions, and broaden its social influence. In the context

of Turkey, the military strategically generated and capitalized on crises through three primary intervention methods: forming social coalitions, shaping the discourse on security, and effectively asserting control over non-military institutions. (Dorronsoro and Gourisse, 2015:69) One can argue that „the Turkish military returned to its barracks after the coups not out of respect for democracy but according to a strategy based on “ruling but not governing,” i.e., controlling politics without taking political responsibility” (Kuru, 2012:47).

The events of 2007 led to early elections, which the AKP won by a large margin. With this political victory, the Islamist party, which increased its social support, further marginalized the army and the Kemalist stratum within it (Dorronsoro and Gourisse, 2015:83). Under Erdogan's leadership, the Justice and Development Party was actively working to sideline the military from power, collaborating closely with the Turkish private sector to achieve this goal. After winning the 2007 elections, Muslim investors further helped Erdogan in his struggle against the military (Rafiyi Dovlatabadi and Pazookian, 2014:152).

The normalization of the relationship between the Turkish political elite and the army in the 2000s was helped by the start of the country's European integration process. The accession procedure is determined by the Copenhagen Criteria, which in its approach prescribes a liberal government-army relationship system. In the case of Turkey, this set of conditions includes two important elements. On the one hand, it was stipulated that the National Security Council, run by the army, cannot have more political powers than the government, and cannot control the political leadership. In addition, Brussels proposed that the army should be accountable to the Turkish National Assembly. This means that not only was the government's will clear with regard to the democratization and pacification of the Turkish army, but there was also an external force exerting pressure. It is also important to understand this from the point of view of why Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP government were so enthusiastic when accession negotiations between Turkey and the European Union began in the mid-2000s. (Burak, 2011:161) Concerning the matter of EU accession, the Turkish Armed Forces exhibited a clear internal divide. While they expressed support for the economic advantages associated with membership, they remained steadfast in their refusal to make concessions on sensitive issues like the Kurds, Cyprus, Armenia, or the Aegean Sea. Additionally, the military contended that certain requests from the EU were posing a threat to the principles of secular democracy (Pereira Matos, 2013:25).

In addition to negotiations with the EU, Turkey's strategic position in NATO was also an important influencing factor. After NATO began a dynamic expansion in the East-Central European region from the end of the 1990s, the priority of the military alliance became the guarantee of the stability of the post-communist countries and the pacification of Europe after the war in Yugoslavia. In this context, Turkey's position has improved, since until now it was relatively far from NATO's core territory, but now the North Atlantic Alliance has "moved" to the country's vicinity. This forced Turkey to pursue an increasingly pro-active foreign and military policy. In addition to the EU, the Kemalist elite, which is somewhat skeptical of NATO, also had to reckon with the rise of civil politics here, which gave way to new dissatisfaction among some officers (Kutay, 2016:14).

The reform of the National Security Council began even before the EU negotiations and the AKP coming to power by increasing the number of civilian members of the body. Before 2001, the government's dependence on the military council was also greater in that it had to consult the army on each and every decision it made. After the first reforms, all that remained of this was that the government was obliged to send a notification to the National Security Council about the content of its decisions. After the AKP came to power, in 2003, another reform step took place, namely the abolition of the rule that only a military officer could lead the council, so theoretically even a civilian politician could become its head. This can already be evaluated as the first step towards civilian control of the army (Burak, 2011:161).

After the E-memorandum of 2007, it seemed that the government won the battle, but the failed coup in 2016 proved that a group was able to infiltrate the deep structures of the military, and even then tried to overthrow the government elected by the people. The fact that there was no armed uprising by the army between the AKP's rise to power in 2002 and the failed coup by the followers of FETO, i.e. Fetullah Gulen, is not only due to the fact that the AKP strove for balanced relations, did not impose identity politics important to Muslims, was cautious when they tried to push back the army a little with reform measures and used the issue of joining the EU to make the army more transparent, but also to show that the disaffected layer within the army was too weak and incompetent to launch a coup. In 2004, the records of Ozden Ornek, a retired navy commander, came to light, according to which two coups were planned in the first two years of the AKP governments, in which the officers tried to involve the Kemalist media and leftist civil

organizations. This means that a postmodern civil-military organizational network, a secret organization, was born, the purpose of which was to overthrow the democratically elected government. Although the logic of this broad cooperation initiated from above differed from FETO's later methods, they followed the same state-within-the-state logic that also motivated the planners of the 2016 action (Dorronsoro and Gourisse, 2015:82).

### **8.5 The 2016 failed military coup and the subsequent revenge and reform**

The retreat of the army from the political stage can be explained by the personality of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in addition to the above-mentioned foreign and domestic political reasons. Erdogan is often described as an autocratic leader, but one cannot ignore the fact that his personal charisma has a great influence on the conservative and religious sections of the Turkish people. Erdogan alone became such an authority in Turkish politics that he was able to rival the influence of the military and others. This was shown, among other things, by some elements of the 2016 coup attempt. Although military units loyal to FETO tried to dispose of him, Erdogan could not be killed or completely cut off from the public eye. The putschists did not think in a sufficiently modern way because they only made sure to dominate the state public media, TRT and the army's official website. In practice, they thought like Talat Aydemir in the 1960s, who thought it was enough to occupy the Ankara building of the state radio. During the turbulent hours of the coup, Erdogan was able to give an interview to a private channel, CNN Turk. Addressing the people, the broken president asked his voters to take to the streets and defend Turkish democracy. This was a decisive turning point in the outcome of the coup attempt. On the one hand, he showed his own strength, and on the other hand, he forced the FETO militants to shoot civilians for the first time in the history of Turkish coups. Erdogan and his AKP sympathizers finally prevented the "Peace at Home Council" created by FETO and the putschists from taking over Turkey (Kaya, 2019:54).

The 2016 coup attempt gave Erdogan the chance to once and for all deal with Kemalist, Gulenist and nationalist sympathizers within the army, and to reorganize the military according to completely new principles. Already in the days following the failed coup, while mass arrests and the nationalization of FETO-related infrastructure were taking place, military political reform began. In July 2016, the composition of the Supreme Military Council underwent its initial modification, tilting the balance in favor of civilians. As a result, the Chief of the General Staff became the sole military representative within the Council. The legal changes began with the



complete transformation of the military education system in the summer of 2016. The AKP government found that the forces behind the coup attempt were able to gain ground within the army because they dominated the military academies and high schools and through their secret system they guaranteed that a significant part of the officer corps came from FETO members. With a single stroke of the pen, all such schools were liquidated and military training was transferred to the responsibility of the Minister of National Defense, who established new schools and developed a new basic military curriculum (Kaynar, 2022:6).

After the total reorganization of military education, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his government moved towards civilian control of the army with several other steps. Until the 2016 coup attempt, the army's general staff decided on the advancement of military officers. From now on, in addition to seeking the opinion of the Chief of the General Staff, the Minister of National Defense decides on the appointment of officers. In January 2017, the legal special status of the national defense was terminated, the legal autonomy of the armed forces ended, with the Military Court of Appeals, Military High Administrative Court, and military courts being closed, which were created after the 1960 coup. On July 15, 2018, i.e. the second anniversary of the failed coup, the process culminated in the fact that, in a legal sense, the President of the Republic and the Chief of the General Staff changed places in the political hierarchy, given that now the Commander-in-Chief of the Army is obliged to report to the president and not the other way around (Kaynar, 2022:7).

The abolition of the military court system points to another segment of the civil-military relationship. There was not only political, power and personal rivalry between the two spheres during the multi-party period of the republic, but there was also a legal battle, which took place partly in these military courts and partly in civil forums. It was already mentioned that in 2004, the press aired the diary of retired naval commander Ozden Ornek, in which there was talk of two coup plans devised by Kemalist officers between 2002 and 2004. Then it was just a kind of press sensation, it had no legal consequences. At the same time, since 2007, the civil courts, increasingly under the influence of the AKP, have already regularly ruled in connection with conspiracies behind which the government suspected Kemalist and nationalist officers and ideologically close media personalities and artists. Ilker Basbug, who was the Chief of the General Staff at the time, fell into the first price dura of this kind, the Ergenekon conspiracy. Basbug was also imprisoned,

from which he was soon released and chose cooperation with the AKP instead of further confrontation. Between 2007 and 2009, the Turkish public became aware of four additional coup attempts. These were Ayıışıđı, Sarıkız, Yakamoz and Eldiven. After another attempt called Kafes Eylem Planı in 2009, the bomb exploded in 2010, i.e. one of the best-known groups, Sledgehammer, went to court and became famous on the international level. In 2012, 300 members of the Sledgehammer conspiracy were sentenced to prison, but in 2014 they were acquitted, saying that the digital data submitted as evidence turned out to be false. This was the time when the conflict between Erdogan and Gulen intensified. Erdogan accused the courts that the FETO sympathizers working there acquitted the FETO conspirators serving in the military (Kaynar, 2022:8).

After the unsuccessful coup in 2016, the general staff officers of the Turkish army, purged of FETO militants, tried to do everything to win the favor of the President of the Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and formulated their personal and military goals according to the needs of the autocratic political leadership. After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the Turkish military leadership was reluctant to deploy the Mehmetciks, i.e. the Turkish common soldiers, in the territory of the neighboring Arab country, despite the fact that the political will was clearly there. Since 2016, members of the new military leadership has been racing to carry out as many military actions as possible in both Syria and Iraq. (Santana, 2022:5) This trend can also be observed at the end of 2023, since even in December of that year there was a serious raid on PKK positions in Iraq.

## **9. Cooperation and clashes between AKP and FETO**

### **9.1 Fetullah Gulen and the origin of his movement**

Fetullah Gulen was born in 1941 in Erzurum, Eastern Turkey, and during the AKP's rule, he turned from one of the most respected religious leaders into a close enemy and terrorist leader. Turkish and international public opinion recognized Gulen as the leader of a socio-religious cult putting an emphasis on interreligious dialogue. Until the conflict with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Gulen was mainly criticized because of the heresy in his views regarding the validity of other religions. By abusing Turkish Sufi traditions, Gulen created an obscure sect that did not serve the religious masses, but built a network using only their money. The largest crowds were attracted by Gulen's preparatory schools, which not only gave young people a good chance to enter elite

universities, but also laundered the movement's income, because FETO was mostly a business and political enterprise. The extremely hierarchically organized community may have had several million members - the exact number cannot be known in the absence of a membership register - many of whom were members of the public administration, the judiciary and prosecutors, the army, the police, etc. and held key positions in its ranks. Although Gulen began his secret expansion in the early 1980s and left for the United States after the postmodern coup of 1997, the AKP's rise to power in 2002 marked the rapid development of his community. The Justice and Development Party operated in symbiosis, and partially still operates today, with the Islamic communities. These brotherhoods deliver up to ten million votes to the ruling party, as the members follow the leaders of the movements, so-called perfect masters or Sufi sages, in an extremely disciplined manner. Members of these communities, regardless of their own political opinion, vote for the party that the community leader suggests. Most of these communities are apolitical in the sense that they do not seek power, but they consider it important to influence the government in matters of religion and to obtain positions in the Diyanet, the government's office of religious affairs. Since none of the AKP-supporting brotherhoods, apart from Hizmet, has gained political power, the ruling party has had a balanced relationship with them to date. However, the relationship between Erdogan and Gulen deteriorated very quickly from December 2013, Gulen first became a close enemy, and then, after the failed coup in 2016, became a terrorist leader.

Fetullah Gulen began working as an imam in Edirne, near the Bulgarian border, in 1959, and then had to enlist in the military, where he continued his religious activities, which had to be suspended after the 1960 coup due to a speech he gave. From 1964, he worked again as a prayer leader in Edirne, where his speeches were listened to by an ever-increasing crowd, so the state religious authority transferred him to Izmir, on the Aegean coast, which was famous for the fact that the people living there are much less religious than the average Turk. Blessed with good oratorical skills, Gulen also gathered a significant audience in Izmir, and he also created his first small communities while traveling in the region. After the military memorandum of 1971, Gulen was also arrested, but he was released very soon, because at that time the putschists did not really act against the Muslims, but against the communists, the sympathizers of the Turkish Workers' Party. After Gulen was released in February 1972, he began intensive organizing. As a result, he created his first foundation, the Ak Yazili Foundation, in 1978, which remained active until the 2016 coup attempt. Gulen's move is also remarkable because the multitude of religious foundations

appeared only after the introduction of the 1982 constitution, which means that Gulen was a little ahead of his time (Seufert, 2014:7).

In the 1970s, the Muslim brotherhoods were able to operate more and more freely. It was then that the community of the late Kurdish preacher Said Nursi, the Nurcu movement, really spread in Turkey. Although the members of the Nurcu movement and the nationalist morality (*milliyetçi mukadessatçılık*) they represented were an important inspiration for Gulen, the Nurcu have always distanced themselves from Gulen, who often refers to Nursi. Even after the coup attempt in 2016, the Nurcu movement defined itself with the state and against FETO (Tas, 2022:388).

After the 1980 military coup, Gulen began to express himself more and more in social and political issues. At that time, Gulen also published a magazine called *Sizinti*. In an article that appeared in one of the 1980 issues of *Sizinti*, he expressed his very radical views, saying that only the traditional Anatolian mentality could prevent the attacks of "Crusaders" and "Jesuits", alcohol consumption and other sinful activities, as well as harmful foreign philosophies and spiritual influence. It is worth noting that this position is the radical opposite of the system of views that Gulen later professed and for which he became internationally known. These ideas are not really compatible with the spirit of interreligious dialogue. Gulen's extremist views did not trouble the secular governments of the 1980s and 1990s. Not only was he able to operate and expand undisturbed, but it also received substantial government subsidies until the postmodern coup of 1997. This money made it possible for Gulen to establish his network of preparatory schools in Turkey in the second half of the 1980s (Seufert, 2014:7). Gulen established his first boarding school well before the 1980s, in 1972 in Bozyaka, which is part of Izmir, and in 1974, the first university preparatory course in Manisa (Tas, 2022:389). These establishments provided elitist and strict instruction, in which co-education was usually prohibited (Yegavian, 2014).

After the fall of the Berlin wall and the regime changes in Eastern Europe, Gulen realized that he could expand his network to the Muslim-majority regions of the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. This expansion was also supported by the Islamist political elite in the 1990s. As prime minister, Turgut Ozal stood by Gulen, seeing his international development plans, because they saw them as a good tool for Turkish soft power diplomacy (Seufert, 2014:10).

Gulen, who was increasingly becoming a political actor, tried to have a good relationship not only with the radicals, but also with the moderate right-wing parties like Motherland and True Path, and their leaders, Ozal and Tansu Ciller, who was the first and so far the only female prime minister in Turkey's history. Moreover, his relationship with the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Partisi, DSP), one of the leading forces of the left, and its president, Bulent Ecevit, was also fruitful. All this shows that Gulen became more and more opportunistic and wanted to become part of the political elite (Seufert, 2014:10).

Gulen's opportunism also involved a change in style and teaching. In the mid-1990s, Gulen no longer voiced radical, anti-Christian and anti-Western views, but rather moved in the direction of interreligious dialogue and sought opportunities for cooperation with Christian denominations and the Vatican. The relationship was spectacularly good between Pope John Paul II and Gulen. In February 1998, the Holy Pope of Polish origin received Gulen in an audience. To support the new views and the new profile, a new foundation was established in 1994, the Journalists and Writers Foundation (Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi, GYF), which quickly became a leading player in Turkish civil society and a supporter of interreligious dialogue (Seufert, 2014:10).

In the mid-1990s, there was clearly a rift between the "cultural Islam" characterized by Gulen's name and the "political Islam" propagated by Necmettin Erbakan. Gulen's views spoke of a system built from the bottom up, into which Muslim behaviors gradually spread, while Erbakan wanted to Islamize Turkish society from the top down and with rapid steps. An important difference between Gulen and Erbakan was that while Erbakan thought at the level of the ummah, i.e. the global Muslim community, Gulen was closer to Turkish nationalists and did not want Muslims to dominate global politics (Tas, 2017:2). Although Gulen did not really support Necmettin Erbakan and the Welfare Party that came to power in 1995, because Gulen and Erbakan disagreed on many religious issues such as the wearing of the female headscarf, after the 1997 postmodern coup, Gulen's room for maneuver was narrowed. When the military issued its famous memorandum on February 28, 1997, then removed Erbakan from the prime minister's seat, and finally banned the Welfare Party, Gulen was always on the side of the military's demands. This may seem a bit schizophrenic, as the army's demands included limiting the training of imams and removing from public life those who also perform religious services, but Gulen's opportunism encouraged the religious leader to cooperate with the armed forces to protect his school network.

Although Gulen swore an oath of allegiance and offered his schools to the Ministry of Education, he himself became a target of public sentiment amid the political turmoil. On March 31, 1999, Gulen left for medical treatment in the United States of America, and it was there that the news reached him that in June 1999, a coordinated media campaign had been launched against him in Turkey. Gulen never returned to Turkey after that, but by now his movement had become so widespread that he was able to control its expansion from afar (Seufert, 2014:10).

After Gulen's departure in 1999, the Journalists and Writers Foundation was the FETO-linked organization that tried to spread Gulen's political views in Turkey. GYF organized many conferences and symposiums on the topic, but overall Gulen kept a low profile in Turkish domestic politics. This was also true for the period leading up to the formation of the Justice and Development Party and the AKP's rise to government in 2002. At that time, FETO had not yet openly campaigned for the AKP, and it was not known how the followers of the preacher who had fled to America voted in the elections. However, in 2003 and 2004, the media and internet sites associated with Gulen became increasingly pro-government. What happened was that Gulen realized that some of his goals, such as the democratization of the army and the suppression of the Kemalist elite, coincided with the government's policy. The numerous coup plans against the government, the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer conspiracies, were mostly covered by the Gulen media at that time. This is how the opportunistic "marriage" of Gulen and Erdogan was born (Seufert, 2014:17).

## **9.2 Cooperation between Gulen and Erdogan**

It can be said that both Erdogan and Gulen approached their relationship pragmatically and opportunistically in the decade after the AKP came to power. Erdogan knew that the members of the FETO also wanted to deal with the Kemalist elite in the public administration. Erdogan therefore wanted to use Gulen to oust the Kemalist bureaucrats from the leadership of the state, while Gulen wanted to get his own people into the vacant positions. Between 2008 and 2011, the AKP and the FETO, who were already playing important roles in the judiciary and the police, conducted numerous raids and trials, as a result of which the old Kemalist elite was permanently weakened. The opposition Republican People's Party began to worry about the rise of Gulen in the Turkish public sector after the AKP came to power. In 2005 and 2007, parliamentary investigations were initiated in order to reveal how FETO activists are trying to invade the Turkish

administration. In both cases, the CHP's initiative was unsuccessful, but the cases at least showed that the left-wing opposition was already quite critical of Gulen, while the AKP was still protecting its strategic partner (Tas, 2017:3). From 2008 to 2012, the FETO followers within the police and judicial system orchestrated notable trials against not only military officers but also journalists and opposition members, utilizing fabricated evidence. This resulted in the suspension and arrest of military officers, subsequently replaced by individuals loyal to the movement and supporters of the AKP (Tungul, 2018:149).

Gulen expected that in any case his people would get ahead in the ranks of the establishment. The peak of the political relationship between Gulen and Erdogan was Gulen's speech on August 1, 2010. At that time, Turkey was preparing for a referendum on the amendment of the constitution. Gulen assured the government and the changes of his maximum support. He said that even the dead would have to rise from the grave to vote yes (Seufert, 2014:18).

### **9.3 Hidden conflict between Gulen and Erdogan**

However, before the famous Gulen speech, there was an incident that the political leadership of the AKP and Gulen evaluated in radically different ways. In June 2010, the Turkish aid organization IHH, which is very close to the AKP, launched a shipment of several ships towards the blockaded Gaza Strip. Although those on the Mavi Marmara boat were civilian and peaceful, the ships were attacked by the Israeli Navy while still in international waters. As a result of the brutal attacks, nine Turkish citizens lost their lives. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu referred to the men as martyrs, while Gulen condemned the entire aid action in an article published in the American Wall Street Journal (Seufert, 2014:19).

In June 2011, Recep Tayyip Erdogan was forced to make a serious political balancing act when he selected his party's candidates for the National Assembly. Since the AKP was a conglomerate of several predecessor parties and several supporting Islamic brotherhoods at that time, Erdogan was forced to give some space to all groups and factions and at the same time limit them. During this maneuver, up to 100 FETO-linked politicians did not become candidates for parliament, which the FETO members did not like (Tas, 2017:4).

In February 2012, Gulen had to be further seriously disappointed in Erdogan, as the prime minister appointed one of his own staunchest allies, Hakan Fidan, to head the National Information



Office (Milli Istihbarat Teskilatti, MIT). Fidan, who today holds the post of foreign minister, is still Erdogan's most important confidant and a known opponent of Gulen and his FETO terror group. This may have been the first break between Erdogan and Gulen, but at that time there was no spectacular conflict, no open debate in front of the public (Balci, 2015:13).

Although there was no open conflict between Gulen and Erdogan at that time, a group of prosecutors loyal to Gulen made an attempt to remove Fidan on the grounds that Fidan and some of his colleagues, on behalf of the Turkish intelligence service, held secret negotiations in the Norwegian capital with the leaders of the separatist Kurdish terrorist organization, the PKK. Fidan categorically denied the accusation and, as the head of MIT, refused to testify at the prosecutor's office, meaning Gulen's attempt was unsuccessful, Erdogan's confidant was able to maintain his influence. The unsuccessful attack on Fidan, on the other hand, resulted in the FETO-linked prosecutors starting to investigate other prominent people in Erdogan's circle. Lawyers linked to Hizmet wanted to prove that the AKP government was corrupt and that Erdogan himself and his family were involved in financial abuses (Balci, 2015:13).

During the period of the hidden conflict, the two sides made gestures towards each other. It was commonly uttered in AKP circles that Fetullah Gulen is good, but his environment has deteriorated, which is why Gulen is not objectively informed about the events taking place in Turkey. In the spirit of this reconciliation attempt, in June 2012, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited one of the most significant mass events of the FETO, the Turkish Language Olympics (Turkce olimpiyatlari). Erdogan also spoke at the program and explained in his speech that he was waiting for the preacher living in America to come home (Tas, 2017:5).

The Turkish public did not yet feel anything about the power struggles taking place in the background, but the international press linked to Gulen was already sounding increasingly critical. FETO also included an extensive media empire. The best-known print daily newspaper and news portal was Zaman (Time). While the Turkish-language edition of Zaman did not talk about Gulen's opinion on Erdogan and about the MIT case, the English-language Today's Zaman has already started labeling Erdogan as an autocratic leader and reported that the government is preparing to come to an agreement with the PKK terrorist organization. Also, many articles were published about the fact that after the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war, the AKP government would also like to intervene with its armed forces in Syria and Iraq (Balci, 2015:14).

The Turkish-language daily Zaman only followed the tone of its English-language sister paper in November 2013, when the AKP government decided to attack the FETO's central cadre training institution and source of funds, the preparatory schools. In the early 2010s, this system of educational institutions supporting the university admission process was very extensive in Turkey. Not only FETO operated such schools, but also many other Muslim brotherhoods and secular foundations. The government's move was explained by the fact that these schools reproduce the elite and create a barrier for poor young people who want to go to university, whose families cannot afford to go to such a place in addition to the public school. FETO confidants and the press launched a counterattack regarding the blow to the movement's financial base. After that, not only the Turkish-language Zaman started publishing articles critical of the government, but one of the movement's best-known faces, the famous former national football player and member of the parliament, Hakan Sukur, left the AKP. Sukur's exit shocked public opinion, but the shock was even greater when in December 2013, Zaman wrote about an anti-corruption raid on Erdogan's circles. Behind the raid was another well-known FETO militant, Zakariya Oz, who had also investigated the Ergenekon case. (Balci, 2015:14) Following the December 17, 2013 anti-corruption raid, the partnership between Gulen and Erdogan not only collapsed but also initiated a worldwide settling of scores, impacting Gulen's domestic and foreign assets (Balci, 2014:4).

#### **9.4 Open clashes and revenge**

In the aftermath of the departure of four ministers implicated in Zakarya Oz's corruption charges, Erdogan restructured half of his cabinet. Beyond the replacement of a total of 96 prosecutors and judges, the government opted to enact stringent new laws, granting increased authority over the judiciary and intensifying surveillance on telecommunications and the Internet. The fresh legislation also bolstered government influence over the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors, responsible for judicial functions and judge appointments, thereby significantly eroding the separation between the executive and judicial branches (Taspinar, 2014:3).

After December 2013, the FETO-linked press tried to express very strong criticism of Erdogan and the AKP in every imaginable way and matter. Discussing Erdogan's visit to Tehran in 2014 and the purchase of Iranian natural gas, Zaman already reported that Erdogan's goal was to support the regional rise of Iran and the Iranian Shiite clergy. With this, they wanted to suggest

to Erdogan's supporters that the prime minister is a hypocrite, since he acts as a representative of Sunni Muslims domestically, but is a friend of Iran on the international stage (Balci, 2015:16).

After the anti-corruption raid of December 2013, Erdogan openly cracked down on FETO. In a speech, he also stated that even if foreign public opinion considers this a witch hunt, he will cleanse Turkish public life and the media of Gulen's harmful influence and blind serving of foreign interests. As part of this showdown, the two largest FETO-oriented media groups, Samanyolu and Zaman, were banned in December 2014, and in 2015, the properties of the third media outlet, Koza Ipek, were also foreclosed (Tas, 2017:6).

Not only the communication of FETO changed during the AKP governments, but also the rhetoric of the government and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Although Gulen still gave his full political support to Erdogan's constitutional amendment plans on August 1, 2010, Erdogan and his entourage began to refer to Gulen as the man from Pennsylvania, the state in which he actually lives in the United States of America. This wording showed the understanding audience that there could be a conflict in the background. The open conflict began at the end of 2013, when the government decided to ban preparatory schools, and in response, Hakan Sukur left the AKP, and Zakariya Oz launched an anti-corruption raid against Erdogan's inner circles. From then on, the AKP referred to Gulen's movement as a parallel state, and the term Cemaat or Hizmet completely disappeared from public discourse. However, since the failed coup in 2016, it has been accepted by all political actors that Gulen was behind the coup, that Gulen is an enemy of the Turkish state, therefore a terrorist, and from then on, all Turks refer to his organization as FETO, i.e. the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (Tas, 2017:2).

The moment of revenge came after the failed coup. On July 20, 2016, five days after the military intervention, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan ordered a state of emergency, during which the arrest of those involved in the coup and all kinds of other opposition parties began. A total of 110,000 people were prosecuted, almost half of whom received prison sentences to be served. Although the vast majority of those arrested were indeed FETO followers, many of them only worked at one of the network's institutions, but did not play an active role in the coup attempt itself. In a speech, Erdogan stated that the coup attempt was a "gift" from God, as it allowed him to completely cleanse Turkish public life of the FETO members (Tas, 2017:8).

After the coup attempt, the smallest sign connected to Gulen was suspicious. Thus, it was enough to be arrested if a Gulen book was found in someone's apartment or if someone had a current account at Bank Asya, which is connected to the movement. According to 2021 statistics, in the five years following the events of 2016, 320,000 FETO terrorists were arrested, of whom 99,962 received prison sentences to be served (Tas, 2022:394).

The showdown against the movement, which at that time was already called the FETO terrorist organization, led to a mass flight among FETO activists, which was greatly helped by the huge network of institutions built up abroad. In Hungary, among others, two schools, colleges and many associations belonged to the community. The Turkish government has pressured many countries to close these institutions. The Hungarian government also received such a request, but the FETO-linked schools are still operating. However, other states, such as Pakistan or Venezuela, responded positively to the AKP's request (Tas, 2022:394).

## **10. Failed military coup of 2016 and its immediate aftermath**

### **10. 1 The course of the failed coup**

The official Turkish government narrative and the Turkish opposition both hold FETO, i.e. the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization, responsible for the failed military coup in 2016. Between 2002 and 2010, Gulen and FETO actively supported the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and then there were non-public conflicts between the two parties in some minor cases. In 2013, when Erdogan banned Gulen's university preparatory schools, and in response, FETO militants began a prosecutorial investigation into corruption scandals in Erdogan's inner circles, the fight became clear and open. According to the official Turkish position, this rivalry culminated in the tragic events of July 15, 2016.

On July 15, 2016, about a quarter of an hour before 10 p.m., the FETO-affiliated Haberdar news portal announced that a successful coup had taken place within the army and that tanks loyal to the putschists had begun occupying key points in Istanbul. The armored fighting vehicles were first seen on the Asian side of the city at the foot of the bridge, now called the 15th of July Martyrs, at the Beylerbeyi Palace, which is very close to the building of Turkey's perhaps best-known military academy, the Kuleli Lisesi or Towered Highschool. The century-old educational institution was also under the influence of FETO at that time. After the failed coup, it was

liquidated as an officer training organization and a museum dedicated to Turkish military higher education was opened in it. After that, the tanks drove up to the two busiest bridges spanning the Bosphorus, and then appeared on the European side of the city at the port of Besiktas and the governor's palace in Eminonu. A few minutes later, other tanks blockaded the buildings of Ataturk Airport, Istanbul's central airport at the time, which has since been closed. At the same time, a firefight already took place in Ankara, when the armed units of FETO besieged the headquarters of the army and the secret service, MIT. (Altun, 2016:13) Fighter jets loyal to FETO took off from the Akinci air base, and in the meantime, FETO terrorists kidnapped Chief of Staff Hulusi Akar, who was later released, and after the failure of the coup, he also received the Ministry of National Defense in the AKP government (Tas, 2018:4).

As long as they did not encounter any serious resistance, the putschist combat vehicles moved dynamically towards their targets. In some cases, however, they encountered soldiers and policemen opposed to the coup. One of the two best-known cases is that of Omer Halisdemir, who killed with his service weapon the coup brigadier general Semih Terzi, who was appointed by the junta to take over the command of the special military forces. Halisdemir's self-sacrifice and martyrdom became one of the inspirations for his resistance to the putschists. The other case was when the coup plotters attacked the police special forces training base in Golbasi, south of Ankara. Here, more than fifty defending policemen fell victim to FETO killings. Later, after millions of civilians appeared on the streets at Erdogan's call, the commanders of the FETO units were faced with a dilemma. In the history of Turkish coups, soldiers have never shot at civilians. There were also officers who refused the order to fire, but some of them started shooting on the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul (today the bridge is called 15th of July Martyrs bridge) or at the presidential palace in Ankara. Putschists even bombed the latter location, even though it was known that the president was not in the capital (Gumuscu and Esen, 2017:62).

## **10.2 The role of the media in the coup attempt**

After that, FETO units occupied the Ankara buildings of the state news agency TRT and forced the journalists working there to read the demands of the coup junta. FETO may have thought that it was sufficient to control the public media during an armed uprising, but in the digital age this is no longer necessarily the case, as social media sites were being filled with images uploaded by ordinary users of the two big cities, Istanbul and Ankara, of overpowering tanks and sporadic

battles. In addition, the independent and close-to-government commercial media also tried to report on the events objectively. At 11:05 p.m., the A Haber TV channel linked to conservative circles broadcasted Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, who admitted in an interview that a coup attempt was taking place in the country and he was the first to name that FETO could be behind the uprising. Until then, many Turks believed that the shadows of the past had returned and that it was another Kemalist rebellion (Altun, 2016:14). By the way, the putschists themselves deliberately played on Kemalist traditions and vocabulary in order to bring the Kemalist popular strata to their side. It is clear that the name "Peace at Home Council" was given to the junta precisely because "Peace at Home, Peace in the World" was one of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's most famous slogans. The TV statement read by the putschists was also full of key phrases that may be familiar to the Turkish people from Atatürk's speech to the youth. The ancient negligence (*gaflet*), perversion (*dalalet*), and treason (*hiyanet*) terms are of Arabic origin and are rarely used by the average native Turkish speaker in the 21st century. With this selection of words, the putschists - unsuccessfully- wanted to arouse sympathy in the secular strata and divert suspicion from FETO (Icener, 2016:111).

FETO timed the coup by putting the plan into action when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was on vacation at a beach resort. The coup plotters tried to capture or kill the president, but they were unsuccessful. At 3:20 a.m. on July 16, FETO militants also stormed the luxury hotel in Marmaris where the President of the Republic was staying, but they were not lucky, because Erdoğan left the building for the Dalaman airport about two and a half hours after the start of the coup. From there a military plane took him to Istanbul. The famous interview he gave to CNN Türk may have taken place in Dalaman minutes before takeoff (Tas, 2018:5). The President of the Republic was reached by the Turkish-language news channel of the global news provider CNN through a video phone connection. In the footage, Erdoğan looked extremely tired and worn, but in comparison to the situation, he was quite charismatic. The president called on his supporters to go out into the streets and squares and defend Turkish democracy. The president's appeal was so successful that millions of Turkish citizens showed up in public squares and strategically important points of all cities, and in many places they even met FETO tanks. The so-called "Democracy Watch" (*Demokrasi nobeti*) demonstrations created in defense of the system remained on the streets for days, sometimes even weeks, as many, especially AKP voters, feared that the coup attempt was not over yet (Altun, 2016:14). When evaluating the events, it is important to know that Turkish

society is extremely politicized, with many of the citizens being active members of a political party. According to the organization's records, the AKP has around 10 million paying members, while 1.6 million members also hold some position within the party. This huge number is roughly the half of the party's voter base. With such a membership and activist class, it is not surprising that Erdogan was able to mobilize millions during a simple interview in such an emergency (Gumuscu and Esen, 2017:63). As per a survey carried out in Istanbul on July 26, of those who participated in the street demonstrations because of Erdogan's appeal, 57 percent identified as party members, and 83 percent had cast their votes for the AKP in the November 2015 elections (Gumuscu and Esen, 2017:64). This means that Erdogan's call could mobilize some segments of the society even beyond the electoral base of his party as the FETO organization was considered a threat by many Turkish citizens.

The political leadership loyal to Erdogan not only motivated the civilian population to act actively against the putschists, but also mobilized the state religious authority, the Diyanet. Until 2016, the authority established in the early republican era largely stayed out of the fighting and stayed away from direct party politics. On the night of July 15, 2016, the Diyanet asked the imams serving in the country's 86,000 mosques to use the minaret speakers to say prayers with loud chants, which on the one hand signaled to the population that there was an emergency, but on the other hand clearly supported the government and the ruling party against the putschists. This move by the Diyanet and the imams was later condemned by many oppositionists who were otherwise wholeheartedly against the coup (Gumuscu and Eser, 2017:65).

There may be many factors behind the failure of the coup, but one of them is definitely that the coup plotters underestimated Erdogan's political power and charisma. Since the Gezi Park events in 2013, many crisis phenomena have appeared around Erdogan and the AKP. Erdogan has been increasingly criticized both domestically and within his party. Many leading politicians in Erdogan's immediate environment also distanced themselves from the president. Former presidents and prime ministers such as Abdullah Gul or Ahmet Davutoglu should be considered here. For the coup planners, this gave the false impression that support around Erdogan had evaporated, that the president was weakened and would be unable to guarantee his political survival. On the other hand, the events of July 15 showed precisely that a significant segment of the population was willing to protect the democratically elected leaders at the cost of their lives



and physical integrity, and the majority of the armed forces remained loyal to the elected government and did not transfer to the side of the FETO (Duran, 2016:24).

In addition to the president and the prime minister, the commercial TV channels also reached the members of the national assembly of all the parliamentary parties, while the politicians barricaded themselves in the building of the legislature in Ankara. The Great Turkish National Assembly was also surrounded by FETO-affiliated tanks, but the representatives sitting there were not willing to leave the scene even when armed men linked to FETO started shooting at the building. Through an Internet connection, not only the politicians of the government party, but also MPs of the Kemalist CHP, the nationalist MHP and the pro-Kurdish HDP condemned in a sharp voice what the armed rebels were doing (Ataman and Shkurti, 2016:35).

### **10.3 International reactions to the attempted coup**

During the hours of the coup attempt, Devlet Bahçeli, the then-opposition MHP president, spoke in the commercial media, calling on everyone to preserve national unity. Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who led the Kemalist CHP until 2023, also spoke a little later. Kilicdaroglu explained that his party definitely stands up for Turkish democracy and condemns military intervention under all circumstances. Even the presidency of the pro-Kurdish HDP, which was quite marginalized in Turkish politics at the time but had a serious electoral base, sharply distanced itself from the putschists in a tweet. While the Turkish political elite unanimously condemned the coup attempt that killed 240 armed personnels and Turkish civilians and injured thousands of people, foreign politicians and the media expressed much more caution, which had a serious negative impact in Turkey. The leadership of the United States of America, which has been sheltering FETO leader Fetullah Gulen ever since, was reluctant to call the events a coup attempt. The word uprising was used instead in their official communications. Following the position of the USA, the major Western governments also only talked about an armed uprising and did not really mention who was behind it (Ataman and Shkurti, 2016:40).

The international media showed serious interest in the events from the initial moments of the coup attempt, although they did not always report in accordance with the facts. Several Western news outlets already reported in the first hours that the Turkish government had failed and that the "Peace at Home Council" set up by the army had taken over the country, while the putschists actually read such a statement on TRT, but the Prime Minister, the president of the republic and

party leaders remained in their place and condemned the coup plotters. While Recep Tayyip Erdogan flew to Istanbul, taking on the dangers, whose plane could have been attacked by fighter jets loyal to FETO, and who just spoke to CNN Turk, the headlines in the international media were about the theory that the President of the Republic of Turkey sought asylum in Germany. Later on, when the events calmed down and it became clear that at the cost of serious blood sacrifices, but the government and the system remained in place, the narrative came to the fore that it was not Gulen, who was also swindled by Western governments, who was behind the incident, but that it was organized by Erdogan against himself. This explanation is still widespread in the West, but almost everyone in Turkey rejects this suggestion (Ataman and Shkurti, 2016:40).

Although the Western political elite and the media often apostrophized the events of July 15, 2016 as a self-coup despite the fact that 240 Turkish civilians, police and soldiers lost their lives, and did everything to refute the official Turkish narrative that Gulen and FETO followers were behind the military intervention, the fact that Fetullah Gulen himself never condemned the incident is telling. It is also worth noting how Gulen behaved during previous coups. During the very first Turkish coup, in 1960, he was temporarily suspended from his position as imam because of a religious sermon, but since he was still very young at the time, no serious retorts were made. At the time of the 1971 memorandum, he was imprisoned for a short time, but he was released in February 1972, since the putschists at that time wanted to deal with the extreme leftists and some Muslim speakers were detained only in order to act unitedly against all political rivals. At the time of the 1980 coup, Gulen already had an extensive network of civil society organizations, as well as numerous student hostels and preparatory schools, and had already achieved a serious audience through his religious magazine *Sizinti*, in which he published articles with a radical anti-Western and anti-Christian tone. After the coup, he supported the military. He called the coup a resurrection and the last outpost of the nation's expectations and saluted the army with high praises. Even after the postmodern coup of 1997, Gulen swore an oath of loyalty to the army and offered his schools to the Minister of Public Education. Moreover, according to a letter made public, Gulen specifically praised Cevik Bir, the author of the military memorandum published on the Internet, which was also motivated by the fact that Gulen was an old rival of the prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, who was removed by the soldiers at the time. (Ulutas, 2016:45) All this shows that the earlier military coups had a much less negative effect on Gulen than many other Muslim preachers and religious leaders, and he often stood up for the soldiers who intervened in democratic

processes. It is no exaggeration to say that Gulen preferred a military-style establishment over civilian and democratic governments. Of course, this is not direct evidence against Gulen, but it clearly shows that he is not a peaceful Muslim sage.

Shortly after the failed coup, widespread arrests ensued as a revenge by Erdogan. Out of a total of 358 generals and admirals across the armed forces, 151 faced arrest. Additionally, 1,656 colonels, primarily from the Air Force and Gendarmerie, along with approximately 3,500 junior officers, were also taken into custody (Gumuscu and Esen, 2017:62).

#### **10.4 The Yenikapi spirit**

The putschists not only failed to take power, but for a time they also created a very strong national unity in Turkey, which greatly contributed to the political survival of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the transition to a presidential system. The political leaders of the nation, waking up from the shock of the coup attempt, invited the commemorators and the demonstrators to Yenikapi, the huge harbor on the European side of Istanbul, on August 7, 2016. The demonstration was the largest mass event in Turkey's history, attended by around 5 million people according to government estimates. The Turkish political elite began to talk about the "Yenikapi spirit", as the leaders of all the opposition parties in the parliament appeared in addition to Erdogan and gave inspiring speeches. It seemed to observers that the coup plotters really brought together those who suffered the blow. This happened despite the fact that the leader of the main opposition force, the CHP, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, initially refused the invitation, saying that his appearance at such an event would only strengthen Erdogan's legitimacy. In the end, Kilicdaroglu changed his original position because, knowing the reaction of Western politicians and media, he realized that the demonstration and implementation of national unity and the common condemnation of FETO were more important than his personal political ambition (Duran, 2016:149). By the way, this step also strengthened his own political position, as he was able to remain at the head of his party for another 7 years and squeeze Erdogan in the last presidential election. His absence could have resulted in his own political downfall, not that of his main rival, Erdogan.

#### **2. Conclusion**

This chapter has traced the political evolution of the Turkish Republic from its Kemalist foundations through cycles of military intervention, the rise of political Islam, and the Justice and

Development Party's (AKP) transformation from a reformist political force into a dominant, competitive authoritarian regime. Organised chronologically from 2.2 to 2.7, and supported by a comparative table summarising shifts in governance from 1923 to 2019, the literature reveals several enduring structural and sociopolitical dynamics that frame the AKP's trajectory.

The early Republican period (1923–1950) established a centralised, secular, and authoritarian state that excluded large segments of the conservative and religious population. The mid-century transition to multiparty democracy (1960–1997) brought political pluralism but was frequently interrupted by military coups, leading to institutional instability and the entrenchment of tutelary structures. The emergence of political Islam in the 1980s and the eventual formation of the AKP in 2001 introduced a new political actor that promised to reconcile conservative identity with democratic governance and economic modernisation.

Between 2002 and 2008, the AKP utilised the European Union accession framework to advance institutional reforms, restore macroeconomic stability, and consolidate civilian supremacy. However, these reforms, while initially liberalising, also facilitated the dismantling of institutional checks once EU leverage declined and electoral dominance was achieved. As the analysis of the 2008–2013 period shows, the AKP's shift toward centralisation and its monopolisation of media and judiciary power marked a pivotal transformation in the governance model. The culmination of these changes occurred between 2013 and 2019, when a series of national crises—including the 2016 coup attempt—enabled the party to fully institutionalise a presidential regime and redefine democracy in majoritarian and personalised terms.

The accompanying summary table of Turkey's political landscape from 1923 to 2019 helps systematise this transformation. It shows how each phase in Turkey's political development—despite being framed in the language of stability and democratic renewal—contained institutional weaknesses and unresolved societal tensions that could later be instrumentalised by dominant actors. From the Kemalist project's suppression of pluralism to the military's periodic interventions and the AKP's strategic deployment of democratic norms, each regime phase was shaped by a duality: the pursuit of legitimacy on one hand, and the circumscription of opposition on the other.

In this context, the critical analysis of Turkey’s shift from “EU-driven democratisation” to competitive authoritarianism is particularly instructive. Recent scholarship (Esen & Gumuscu, 2020; Çetin & Altay, 2021) demonstrates that the very institutions designed to liberalise Turkey—such as judicial reform, media diversification, and civil-military restructuring—were later repurposed to entrench AKP dominance. Democratic backsliding in Turkey, therefore, did not occur in defiance of democratic procedures but through their co-optation. The AKP leveraged its electoral legitimacy, economic performance, and populist appeals to national identity to justify increasing authoritarianism, effectively reconstituting the Turkish state in its image.

Ultimately, this chapter underscores the need to approach Turkey’s political transformation not as a sudden democratic collapse, but as a path-dependent process grounded in historical legacies, institutional fragilities, and shifting balances of power. These findings offer a critical foundation for the dissertation’s central inquiry into the structural and sociopolitical conditions that enabled the Turkish electorate to increasingly prioritise political stability and economic development—even at the expense of democratic pluralism.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter lays out the theoretical framework that informs the analysis of the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) rise and sustained rule in Turkey from 2002 to 2019. It aims to position the AKP within key scholarly debates on authoritarianism, democratic erosion, institutional centralization, and hegemonic rule. In doing so, it directly addresses the dissertation's core research questions:

- How does the rise of the AKP explain how to remain in power under democratic circumstances?
- To what extent are centralization and hegemonic rule interrelated?
- How did the AKP impact Turkish democracy?

The chapter proceeds by reviewing major theoretical concepts relevant to the Turkish case, drawing from comparative politics, political theory, and democratic studies. It then contextualizes the AKP's trajectory through these lenses and concludes by mapping the connections between theoretical insights and empirical developments.

#### **3.2 Authoritarianism in Democratic Contexts**

The notion that democratic regimes can accommodate authoritarian practices is central to understanding contemporary Turkey. This apparent contradiction—where governments gain power through elections but erode democratic norms once in office—has been examined in a growing body of literature on democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016; Waldner & Lust, 2018).

Unlike classical authoritarianism, where pluralism is overtly suppressed, modern authoritarianism often emerges within formal democratic frameworks. Levitsky and Way (2010) term this competitive authoritarianism, a regime type in which democratic institutions exist in form but are systematically abused by incumbents to retain power. This theory provides a foundational

lens for interpreting the AKP's governance, particularly as the party leveraged elections, legal reforms, and populist rhetoric to consolidate its rule while marginalizing opposition.

The Turkish case is especially relevant in this context because of its hybrid institutional architecture, oscillating between periods of military tutelage and civilian-led electoral governance. The AKP inherited a weakly institutionalized democracy that lacked robust checks and balances, which became fertile ground for autocratization under the cover of majoritarian legitimacy (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016).

### **3.3 Competitive Authoritarianism and Electoral Hegemony**

A critical concept for this study is electoral hegemony, which refers to a situation where a dominant party systematically wins elections not purely through coercion or fraud but through the uneven playing field it constructs over time. As Schedler (2006) explains, electoral authoritarian regimes manipulate the media, control public resources, and co-opt or repress opposition while maintaining a veneer of democratic legitimacy.

The AKP's electoral performance—from its 2002 landslide victory to its continued dominance through the 2010s—can be seen as an archetype of electoral hegemony. While elections in Turkey were mostly free in procedural terms, the AKP increasingly ensured they were not fair. Media capture, judicial reforms, and changes to electoral laws enabled the party to control the political narrative and obstruct challengers (Yesil, 2016; Esen & Gumuscu, 2020).

Moreover, the AKP's ability to mobilize religious-conservative identities while portraying secular opposition as elitist or unpatriotic helped construct a discursive environment in which dissent was not merely opposed but delegitimized. This “hegemonic electoralism” (Baykan, 2021) reframed power consolidation as democratic will, a critical mechanism in the party's endurance.

### **3.4 Centralization of Power and Institutional Transformation**

Central to the AKP's ability to retain power was the centralization of political authority. The transformation from a parliamentary to a presidential system under Erdoğan in 2017 formalized a longer trend of executive consolidation. Theoretical approaches to centralization



emphasize how institutions—originally designed to disperse power—are repurposed to concentrate it in the hands of a single actor or ruling party (Helmke & Levitsky, 2006).

In Turkey, this process involved three key elements:

1. Legal engineering: Amendments to judicial appointments, regulatory bodies, and civil service laws allowed the AKP to neutralize institutional resistance while preserving formal legality.
2. Personalization of leadership: Erdoğan's growing dominance converted the AKP into a party centered on a single leader, undermining intra-party democracy and institutional pluralism (Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018).
3. Emergency powers: Especially after the 2016 coup attempt, the use of decree laws and emergency rule solidified executive supremacy, often at the expense of constitutional norms.

These mechanisms transformed Turkey's political system into what scholars describe as a hyper-presidential regime, wherein traditional democratic institutions are hollowed out while central authority is cloaked in constitutional legitimacy (Özbudun, 2015).

### **3.5 Hegemony, Populism, and Political Culture**

The AKP's consolidation of power cannot be fully explained by institutions alone. Ideological hegemony—what Gramsci (1971) calls the dominance of one worldview over others—plays a crucial role. Under Erdoğan, the AKP promoted a hegemonic narrative that fused nationalism, Islam, and conservative values, portraying the party as the authentic voice of the “real people” against corrupt elites and foreign enemies (Bashirov & Yilmaz, 2020).

This narrative was sustained through populist communication strategies, the instrumentalization of religion, and selective historical revisionism. Populism, in this sense, served both as a mobilizing ideology and a governance tool. As Laclau (2005) argues, populism constructs

“the people” as a unified subject in opposition to “the other.” The AKP effectively used this logic to delegitimize opposition parties, journalists, academics, and even former allies.

Importantly, cultural resonance with a large segment of the Turkish population—especially the pious and conservative Anatolian middle classes—allowed the party to frame its dominance as both natural and necessary. This cultural legitimation explains why authoritarian practices did not provoke widespread resistance among AKP voters.

### **3.6 The AKP Through the Lens of Theoretical Frameworks**

Synthesizing the theoretical approaches discussed above, the AKP’s trajectory can be understood as a case of democratic decay through legalistic authoritarianism, executive centralization, and discursive hegemony. Each of these dimensions helps explain how the party remained in power despite the erosion of democratic quality.

- From democracy to dominance: The AKP used democratic entry points—free elections, popular support, reformist rhetoric—to initially legitimize its rule.
- From pluralism to centralization: Over time, the party reshaped Turkey’s institutions to consolidate executive power, limit accountability, and weaken opposition.
- From competition to hegemonic closure: The discursive framing of AKP rule as morally and culturally superior excluded alternative voices and fostered a majoritarian understanding of democracy.

This transformation aligns with theoretical models that emphasize path-dependent authoritarianism, where early reform trajectories paradoxically enable future illiberal practices (Way, 2015).

### **3.7 Synthesizing Theory with Research Questions**

Each research question posed in this study is now examined in light of the theoretical literature:

Q1: How does the rise of AKP explain how to remain in power under democratic circumstances?

Theories of competitive authoritarianism and electoral hegemony explain how the AKP used elections as instruments of legitimation, while altering institutional rules and narrative frameworks to entrench its dominance.

Q2: To what extent are centralization and hegemonic rule interrelated?

Centralization is both a precondition and outcome of hegemonic rule. As institutional power was concentrated in the presidency, discursive power was used to justify and normalize it. The fusion of legal, administrative, and symbolic control exemplifies this interdependence.

Q3: How did the AKP impact Turkish democracy?

The AKP's impact lies in transforming Turkey from an imperfect but pluralist democracy into a competitive authoritarian regime. This was achieved not through rupture, but through a gradual redefinition of democratic norms via institutional and cultural mechanisms.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the key theoretical tools employed to analyze the AKP's rise and governance from 2002 to 2019. Drawing on concepts from comparative authoritarianism, institutional theory, and political sociology, it has provided a framework for interpreting the Turkish case as one of democratic erosion through electoral means. The next chapter applies these frameworks empirically to analyze how the AKP operationalized power across successive electoral cycles and institutional transformations.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the analysis of the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) rule in Turkey between 2002 and 2019. As a response to the research questions posed in this dissertation, the methodology has been selected to best explore the conditions under which the AKP rose to and sustained power under democratic circumstances, the mechanisms through which centralization and hegemonic rule became interrelated, and the broader implications of these dynamics for Turkish democracy.

Given the political nature of the inquiry, this study adopts a qualitative, interpretive case study design rooted in process-tracing and thematic analysis of secondary sources. The research draws exclusively on publicly available academic and institutional materials, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and policy reports from reputable think tanks such as Freedom House, the International Crisis Group, and TEPAV. This chapter proceeds by describing the chosen methodology, the rationale for its selection, the specific methods of analysis, ethical considerations, and the strengths and limitations of the overall research design.

#### **4.2 Methodological Orientation: Qualitative and Interpretivist**

The dissertation is positioned within a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist approaches assume that political realities are socially constructed and shaped by meanings, values, and historical contingencies (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). This is particularly pertinent when studying the rise and endurance of dominant parties in democratic systems, where legal institutions, ideological discourses, and voter perceptions interact in complex and often non-linear ways.

Turkey's political evolution under the AKP is best examined not through variable-based causal inference, but through historically grounded narrative explanation, focusing on how institutional changes and ideational discourses legitimated increasingly illiberal governance.

### 4.3 Research Design: Single Case Study

This study adopts a single-case study methodology, as articulated by George and Bennett (2005) and Yin (2018). Turkey under the AKP is an especially appropriate case due to its transformation from an EU-aligned reformist democracy into a centralized, competitive authoritarian regime.

The case study allows for a longitudinal, process-sensitive, and theoretically informed analysis of how democratic institutions were gradually repurposed to entrench one-party dominance. This design supports both theory testing—of concepts such as competitive authoritarianism—and theory building, particularly in understanding the interrelationship between centralization, identity politics, and legitimation strategies in hybrid regimes.

### 4.4 Methods of Data Analysis

To address the dissertation’s central questions—how the AKP rose to power under democratic conditions, how it centralized authority and built hegemonic control, and how its governance impacted the quality of Turkish democracy—this study relies on two complementary qualitative methods: thematic analysis and process-tracing. These methods enable the analysis of extensive secondary data with both breadth (thematic scope) and depth (causal mechanism exploration). Their combined use ensures a nuanced and theory-informed interpretation of political developments over time.

#### 4.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, based on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model, is employed to identify and interpret recurrent patterns in the academic and policy literature. Thematic analysis is not bound by a single theoretical orientation, which makes it particularly suitable for interdisciplinary work in political science. In this study, it enables the identification of cross-cutting themes across peer-reviewed academic articles, think tank reports, and election monitoring data.

Application in this Study  
Themes such as “executive centralization,” “judicial restructuring,” “identity-based legitimation,” “discursive populism,” and “erosion of institutional autonomy” are traced across texts to uncover

how scholars have understood the AKP's strategies and how these patterns align with the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 3.

Strengths:

- Flexibility: Can be used across diverse texts and analytical frameworks.
- Pattern recognition: Efficient in capturing the repetition and evolution of political strategies over time.
- Accessibility: Well-suited to synthesizing large volumes of secondary material without access to field data.

Limitations:

- Potential subjectivity: The researcher's own theoretical orientation may influence how themes are identified or interpreted.
- Lack of causal depth: Thematic analysis is excellent for pattern recognition but limited in explaining how one event leads to another in a causal sequence.
- Risk of decontextualization: Without sufficient contextualization, patterns may be falsely assumed to be generalizable or causally linked.

For these reasons, thematic analysis in this study is embedded within a broader methodological framework that also includes process-tracing, which offers greater causal depth.

#### 4.4.2 Process-Tracing

Process-tracing is the core analytic method for exploring causal mechanisms behind the AKP's consolidation of power. Originating in historical institutionalism and comparative politics (George & Bennett, 2005; Beach & Pedersen, 2013), process-tracing involves identifying sequences of events and reconstructing the pathways through which outcomes—such as regime transformation—occur.

In this dissertation, process-tracing is used to investigate the temporal evolution of the AKP's political strategy from its reformist phase (2002–2007) through its period of centralization and populist consolidation (2008–2013), and into the phase of full regime transformation (2013–

2019). The method facilitates a historical reconstruction of how the party’s initial use of democratic institutions laid the groundwork for their later manipulation or co-optation.

Process-tracing is particularly well-suited to the research questions:

- Q1: How does the rise of the AKP explain how to remain in power under democratic circumstances?

Process-tracing reveals how legal reforms, electoral success, and institutional restructuring created a stable environment for long-term incumbency while maintaining formal democratic legitimacy.

- Q2: To what extent are centralization and hegemonic rule interrelated?

The method uncovers causal links between centralizing legal reforms (e.g. the 2010 judiciary changes) and the consolidation of ideological hegemony through discursive control and media regulation.

- Q3: How did the AKP impact Turkish democracy?

Process-tracing allows the researcher to assess how each institutional change cumulatively hollowed out democratic norms, transforming Turkey into a competitive authoritarian regime.

#### Phases and Events Traced in this Study:

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Phase	Key Events / Processes
Reformist Legitimacy (2002–2007)	EU-oriented legal reforms, military marginalization, economic liberalization
Strategic Consolidation (2008–2013)	Constitutional referendum, judicial overhaul, media capture, Gezi Park protests

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Authoritarian (2013–2019)	Entrenchment	2016 coup attempt, emergency rule, 2017 constitutional changes
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Each phase is analyzed not merely as a chronological development but as a linked sequence of strategic actions, in which earlier reforms (often liberal) enabled later authoritarian consolidation.

Process-Tracing presents both strengths and limitations to this research. The strengths include:

1. Causal insight:

Process-tracing is uniquely powerful in uncovering *how* and *why* specific outcomes occurred, which aligns directly with the study's aim to go beyond surface-level descriptions and into the mechanisms of political transformation.

2. Temporal depth:

It allows the researcher to segment analysis into historical phases while maintaining a continuous causal narrative, which is essential for analyzing long-term regime evolution such as that observed in Turkey.

3. Theory-building potential:

By identifying recurring mechanisms across different time periods, the method contributes to broader theoretical debates on competitive authoritarianism, populist consolidation, and legalistic autocracy.

4. Fit with secondary data:

Unlike interview-dependent methods, process-tracing works well with existing secondary literature, provided that events, reforms, and discourses are well-documented—which is the case with AKP governance.

The limitations of Process-Tracing include:

1. Non-generalisability:

Process-tracing is deeply contextual and cannot produce findings that are generalizable across cases. Its value lies in depth, not breadth.

2. Source dependency:

The quality of causal inference is highly dependent on the availability and reliability of historical sources. In highly polarized or censored environments (such as Turkey post-2013), the risk of biased narratives increases.

3. Researcher Interpretation

Although rigorous, process-tracing relies heavily on the researcher's interpretive judgment to construct causal chains, making transparency and triangulation of sources critical.

4. Difficulty in isolating variables:

Political outcomes often emerge from complex, overlapping causes. Process-tracing does not lend itself to identifying discrete variables with measurable effects, which may be seen as a limitation in positivist traditions.

#### **4.5 Sources of Data**

All data for this research is derived from secondary sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed academic literature (e.g., *Third World Quarterly*, *South European Society and Politics*, *Turkish Studies*, *Middle East Critique*).
- Policy reports (e.g., Freedom House country reports, International Crisis Group assessments, TEPAV white papers).
- Books and editorial commentaries by regional and comparative politics scholars.
- Election monitoring reports (e.g., OSCE/ODIHR)

The use of secondary data allows for a broad-ranging and theoretically informed analysis, free from the logistical and ethical challenges posed by fieldwork in an authoritarian context.

#### **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Although this research does not involve direct human participants, it adheres to a rigorous ethical framework in line with institutional academic standards.

#### 4.6.1 Representational Ethics

One of the foremost ethical responsibilities in political analysis is the accurate and balanced representation of political actors and processes. Given the polarized nature of Turkish politics, this study makes a conscious effort to:

- Avoid normative bias: It does not condemn or celebrate the AKP's governance but critically assesses its trajectory within established theoretical frameworks.
- Balance sources: While relying on international reports (e.g., Freedom House, ICG), it also considers Turkish academic perspectives and government-authored white papers when available.
- Contextualize discourse: Narratives such as “national will” or “foreign plots” are analyzed not as factual statements but as discursive strategies with political functions.

This approach reduces the risk of mischaracterizing actors and ensures that the analysis remains fair and empirically grounded.

#### 4.6.2 Use of Publicly Available Information

All data sources used in the dissertation are open-access or published in the public domain. This avoids the need for data anonymization, participant consent, or sensitive disclosures. Nevertheless, academic integrity requires:

- Proper citation of all sources, including grey literature and policy documents.
- Critical assessment of potential bias in think tank reports, particularly those with known affiliations.

Disclosure of limitations, such as the exclusion of internal party documents or confidential communications that are unavailable to researchers.

#### 4.6.3 Political Sensitivity and Research Integrity

Studying contemporary authoritarian regimes poses challenges related to security, censorship, and scholarly independence. While this research does not involve fieldwork, it navigates political sensitivities by:

- Framing analysis through theoretical concepts rather than partisan language.
- Avoiding identification of individuals in legal or political conflicts.
- Acknowledging the dynamic and evolving nature of regime classification.

Moreover, in line with ethical review expectations, the dissertation does not claim privileged access or unverified insights. It instead contributes to the scholarly understanding of Turkey through robust, traceable, and theoretically informed engagement with existing knowledge.

#### 4.7 Contribution to Scholarship

This methodological approach strengthens the scholarly literature in several key areas:

1. Theory application: It tests and refines models of competitive authoritarianism and democratic erosion in a significant regional case.
2. Temporal sensitivity: It traces gradual regime transformation over nearly two decades, contributing to debates on democratic durability and backsliding.
3. Discourse-institution nexus: It highlights how narrative and institutional changes interact—a relatively under-explored area in Turkish politics.

Through this design, the dissertation bridges the gap between high-level theoretical frameworks and grounded empirical narratives, offering a methodologically rigorous and politically relevant account of how power is retained under democratic forms.

#### 4.8 Limitations of the Study

The following limitations are acknowledged:

- No primary data: Exclusion of interviews and elite testimonies limits interpretive depth regarding party strategy and internal decision-making.
- Potential bias in secondary sources: While peer-reviewed, some materials may reflect ideological positions or political agendas.
- Case specificity: The Turkish case is context-specific and findings may not be easily generalizable to other hybrid regimes.

Despite these limitations, the methodology remains appropriate and robust for the research questions at hand.

## **Conclusion**

By combining thematic analysis and process-tracing, this study balances pattern identification with causal depth. Thematic analysis organizes the discourse around recurrent political strategies, while process-tracing reconstructs the historical logic through which democratic procedures became mechanisms for authoritarian rule. Together, these methods allow the dissertation to answer its central research questions with both analytical clarity and empirical richness, grounded in a theoretically coherent and ethically responsible research design.

## Chapter 5

### Findings

This section presents a thematically organized interpretation of how the Justice and Development Party (AKP) established and maintained hegemonic rule between 2002 and 2019. Themes were developed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) model and triangulated across peer-reviewed literature, AKP official documents, and institutional reports (e.g., OSCE, Freedom House). Sub-themes reflect variation across time periods and actor constellations, and each is explicitly linked to causal mechanisms identified through process-tracing.

#### 1. Thematic Analysis: Core Strategies of AKP's Hegemonic Rule

##### 1.1 Reflexive Note on Coding and Interpretation

The interpretive orientation of this thematic analysis was shaped by two goals: first, to represent AKP strategies as dynamic rather than monolithic; and second, to account for resistance and counter-narratives from opposition actors, NGOs, and civil society. While ideological orientation and regime loyalty vary across sources, codes were selected based on recurrence, causal salience, and intertextual resonance. Efforts were made to balance empirical accuracy with theoretical abstraction.

##### 1. Electoral Legitimacy as a Vehicle for Structural Transformation

Core theme: Elections were used not only to govern, but to authorize structural shifts, marginalize institutions, and redefine democracy in majoritarian terms.

##### Sub-theme 1.1: Performance-Driven Consent (2002–2007)

In the early period, AKP campaigns focused on economic recovery, EU accession, and rule-of-law reform. The 2002 manifesto declared:

*"Our movement rests on the principle of justice and service. Democracy will flourish where the state serves, not suppresses."* (AKP Manifesto, 2002)

Electoral legitimacy was built on delivery: inflation dropped from 45% to 8% by 2004, while GDP per capita doubled by 2008. These achievements created performance legitimacy,

allowing AKP to reconfigure civil–military relations and judicial appointments with limited opposition.

#### Sub-theme 1.2: Electoral Majoritarianism (2011–2019)

After consolidating support, the AKP reframed electoral success as a blanket mandate to reshape the system. Erdoğan declared during the 2015 campaign:

*“Those who do not respect the ballot box do not respect the people.”*

This rhetoric treated dissent—not as part of democratic plurality—but as treasonous opposition to national will, aligning with Mudde’s (2004) conception of populism as a moralized form of majority rule. Judicial independence was portrayed as a threat to democracy, justifying constitutional reforms that ultimately placed key appointments under presidential control. The 2010 constitutional referendum—legitimized through electoral popularity—eroded the judiciary’s autonomy while affirming the illusion of popular consent.

## **2. Populist Discourse and Discursive Hegemony**

Core theme: The AKP constructed a symbolic universe in which the party, the state, and the national identity were increasingly indistinguishable.

Drawing on Gramsci (1971), we understand hegemony not merely as domination but as the naturalization of a worldview. The AKP cultivated consent by narrating itself as the authentic voice of the people, while framing elites, secularists, and external critics as existential threats.

#### Sub-theme 2.1: People vs. Elites and 'Guardians'

The 2007 presidential crisis marked a turning point. AKP framed the judiciary’s challenge to Abdullah Gül’s candidacy as a coup attempt by the “old guardians.” The 2007 party advertisement read:

*“Let the people choose the president. Not the bureaucrats, not the elites.”*

This dichotomy—“national will” vs. “bureaucratic tutelage”—was weaponized to silence secular opposition, marginalize the CHP, and redefine dissent as obstruction.

## Sub-theme 2.2: Erdoganism and Moral Authoritarianism

Laclau's (2005) theory of populism explains how Erdoğan positioned himself as both the embodiment of the people and the savior of national unity. In post-2016 discourse, he claimed:

*"I am not a leader made by the media. I am made by the people, and I fight for them."*

The failed coup attempt was narrated as a "second war of independence," blurring the lines between regime loyalty and patriotism. The presidency became the symbolic core of the nation, effectively eliminating the conceptual space for opposition. After 2016, this discursive fusion enabled the shift to a hyper-presidential system via referendum without triggering mass resistance.

## 3. Civil Society Transformation and the Weaponization of Media

Core theme: The AKP simultaneously suppressed autonomous institutions and built parallel organizations that mirrored civil society and media structures.

### Sub-theme 3.1: Patronage-Based NGO Ecosystem

Initially aligned with religious civil society, the AKP later replaced critical or autonomous NGOs with loyalist ones. Following the 2016 coup, over 1,500 associations were shut down. The government created the Maarif Foundation to take over Gülen-linked education institutions globally.

As Baser and Ozturk (2017) note, this shift represents a hybrid model: coercion mixed with soft hegemony through state-aligned civil society.

Opposition civil society groups (e.g., TİHV, TTB) were not only defunded but criminalized—with leaders imprisoned or accused of terrorism.

### Sub-theme 3.2: Media Capture and Narrative Discipline

Freedom House (2019) classified Turkey as "not free," citing media capture and digital censorship. Over 90% of media is now owned by pro-government conglomerates such as the Demirören Group.



Headlines such as “*Our Nation Taught a Lesson to Terror Supporters*” (Sabah, 2017) framed CHP and HDP voters as collaborators with enemies. Journalists like Can Dündar were prosecuted for “revealing state secrets,” reinforcing what Esen and Gumuscu (2020) call narrative closure—where alternative realities are erased from public discourse. This monopolization of narrative space ensured that opposition to the 2017 constitutional referendum appeared treasonous, not political.

#### 4. Resistance and the Strategic Marginalization of Opposition

To avoid AKP-centrism, it is critical to examine how opposition actors were engaged, co-opted, or repressed.

- The CHP tried legal institutionalism, appealing to the Constitutional Court, but post-2010 judicial reforms neutralized this pathway.
- The HDP, representing Kurds and leftists, faced massive repression, especially after 2015. Over 80 mayors were removed and replaced by state trustees (kayyım).
- The Gezi Park protests (2013) briefly united a cross-ideological coalition, but were framed by the government as a Western-backed conspiracy. Erdoğan declared: *“There’s an interest-rate lobby and international media trying to overthrow our economy and stability.”*

This framing enabled preemptive repression, painting protests not as civic unrest but as foreign sabotage.

#### Integrated Thematic Summary

Theme	Sub-Themes	Illustrative Quote	Linked Event
Electoral Strategy	Performance legitimacy → Majoritarian mandate	“Ballot box is sacred” – Erdoğan, 2014	2010 referendum

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Discursive Hegemony	People vs. elites → Moral leader	“Let the people choose the president” – AKP ad, 2007	2007 crisis
Civil Society Control	NGO substitution → Media capture	“Our nation taught a lesson...” – Sabah, 2017	2016–2017 purge
Opposition Suppression	Legal appeals blocked → Protest criminalized	“Second war of independence” – Erdoğan, 2016	Post-coup state of emergency

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## 5. Conclusion

This revised thematic analysis presents a complex, evolving picture of AKP rule as a hegemonic project that gradually eliminated rival sources of legitimacy while retaining electoral forms. Rather than relying solely on coercion, the AKP developed multi-layered strategies—discursive, institutional, and cultural—to dominate Turkey’s democratic landscape. Each thematic pattern sets the stage for the causal sequences explored through process-tracing in the next section.

## **Conclusion**

This concluding chapter revisits the main arguments and findings of the study in relation to the central research questions:

1. How does the rise of the AKP explain how to remain in power under democratic circumstances?
2. To what extent are centralization and hegemonic rule interrelated?
3. How did the AKP impact Turkish democracy?

These questions were explored through a qualitative, theory-driven case study using process-tracing and thematic analysis of peer-reviewed literature and institutional reports. By engaging political theory and empirical data, this dissertation has traced how the AKP not only emerged as a dominant electoral force but also transformed Turkey's institutional and ideological framework under the formal banner of democracy. This final chapter consolidates the study's contributions, identifies its limitations, reflects on the research process, and outlines future research trajectories.

### **6.1 Summary of Key Findings**

#### **6.1.1 Ruling Through Democratic Institutions**

The first and most central finding of the study is that the AKP effectively used democratic legitimacy as a resource for regime transformation. Drawing on competitive authoritarianism theory, the research traced how the AKP leveraged its electoral dominance to reengineer state institutions—especially the judiciary, media, and civil society—thereby weakening checks and balances while retaining procedural democratic legitimacy.

Electoral victories, particularly those between 2002 and 2011, served as discursive cover and institutional leverage. The party's consistent framing of itself as the authentic representative of the "national will" allowed it to delegitimize opponents and reframe dissent as disloyalty or subversion. These strategies were not unique to Turkey but reflect global trends in hybrid regimes where incumbents use law, elections, and identity politics to dominate the political field without formally abandoning democratic institutions.

### 6.1.2 Centralization and Hegemony: Mutually Reinforcing

The second major finding is that centralization and hegemonic rule were deeply interrelated and mutually reinforcing in the AKP's political strategy. Centralization of executive power—particularly through legal reforms (e.g., 2010 constitutional amendments) and systemic changes (e.g., the 2017 presidential transition)—provided the structural foundation for long-term hegemony.

Simultaneously, the AKP's discursive hegemony, rooted in populism, nationalism, and religious symbolism, created cultural consent among its core electorate, thus justifying the institutional centralization. The analysis revealed that Erdoğan's leadership style, increasingly personalized and moralized, blurred the line between party, state, and national identity. This ideological hegemony ensured that centralization was not only tolerated by the public but actively endorsed by large voter segments.

### 6.1.3 Impact on Turkish Democracy

The study finds that the AKP's impact on Turkish democracy was both transformational and regressive. Between 2002 and 2007, reforms aligned with EU accession criteria supported liberalization. However, starting in 2008, those same reforms were repurposed to entrench executive control. By the post-2016 era, Turkey had undergone a full transition to a competitive authoritarian regime—formally democratic but substantively illiberal.

Institutions once envisioned as protectors of pluralism (judiciary, media, NGOs) became tools of control. Moreover, Turkey's democracy now operates within a majoritarian logic in which electoral victory overrides all other forms of accountability. Opposition parties face legal harassment, media blackout, and structural disadvantages, while civil liberties—especially freedom of expression and assembly—have deteriorated significantly.

## 6.2 Extent to Which the Research Questions Were Answered

Research Question 1: How does the rise of the AKP explain how to remain in power under democratic circumstances?

This question was comprehensively addressed through the analysis of electoral strategy, legal engineering, and discursive framing. The study demonstrated that the AKP's long-term rule was not despite democracy but through its adaptation. It employed both liberal democratic mechanisms (elections, legal reforms) and populist narratives to disarm institutional checks and preempt opposition.

Research Question 2: To what extent are centralization and hegemonic rule interrelated?

The study showed that the two are not only interrelated but co-constitutive. Centralization created the legal and institutional conditions for hegemonic control, while hegemony (discursive, cultural) helped legitimize centralization. This finding strengthens theoretical models that connect personalization of power with state restructuring in hybrid regimes.

Research Question 3: How did the AKP impact Turkish democracy?

The research clearly demonstrated that the AKP's governance represents a transition from pluralist procedural democracy to a hegemonic electoral regime, undermining liberal norms without abandoning formal elections. This shift has fundamentally reshaped Turkey's political landscape, limiting democratic resilience and reducing institutional independence.

### **6.3 Unexpected Findings and Reflections**

One of the more unexpected findings of this research was the extent of public consent and civic alignment with the AKP's project. While existing literature focuses heavily on elite capture and institutional manipulation, this study found that discursive strategies—particularly appeals to national identity, Islamic values, and historical grievance—were highly effective in creating cultural hegemony.

Moreover, the research revealed that civil society transformation was not merely about repression but about structural replacement. The creation of parallel organizations (e.g., pro-government NGOs, media groups, and educational institutions) ensured long-term ideological reproduction, even in the absence of coercion.

Another surprising element was the adaptive capacity of the AKP. Even in the face of major legitimacy crises (e.g., the 2013 Gezi protests, the 2016 coup attempt), the party managed to reframe threats as opportunities to further consolidate control. This ability to turn crisis into opportunity was a recurring mechanism across all phases of governance.

#### **6.4 Limitations of the Research**

Despite its strengths, the research carries certain limitations:

- No primary data collection: The study is based solely on secondary sources. While these were carefully curated and critically assessed, the absence of interviews or archival fieldwork may limit interpretive nuance—particularly regarding internal party dynamics or decision-making processes.
- Single-case focus: The analysis is limited to the Turkish case. While Turkey is paradigmatic in many respects, broader comparative insights would require cross-case analysis with other hybrid regimes (e.g., Hungary, Russia, India).
- Scope of actor perspectives: While efforts were made to include opposition, civil society, and media voices, the focus remained on the AKP and state institutions. Further research could explore bottom-up dynamics such as protest movements, grassroots resistance, or shifts in voter attitudes over time.

#### **6.5 Avenues for Future Research**

This study opens several paths for further research:

- Comparative authoritarianism: Future work could compare Turkey's trajectory with similar cases in the Global South and Eastern Europe to test whether the causal mechanisms identified here—legal engineering, discursive nationalism, crisis exploitation—hold in other contexts.
- Post-2019 developments: Given the growing challenges facing the AKP (e.g., economic decline, opposition coalitions, urban electoral losses), future studies should examine whether the party's hegemonic model remains sustainable or if it is entering a phase of decline.

- Digital authoritarianism and AI: A new and under-researched area is the role of digital technologies in sustaining regime dominance. In Turkey, online surveillance, algorithmic censorship, and social media manipulation increasingly shape the political field.
- Voter psychology and identity: Further research could engage with the micro-foundations of hegemony—how voters internalize, resist, or reinterpret authoritarian populism in everyday life.

This dissertation has shown that democracy's erosion does not always occur through coups or revolutions. In the case of Turkey, the AKP's rise and rule illustrate how hegemonic governance can be built incrementally through elections, laws, and narratives—all under the veneer of democratic form. The Turkish case compels us to reconsider what democracy means when it becomes hollowed out from within.

Understanding this transformation requires going beyond binary categories like democratic vs. authoritarian. It demands a nuanced, theory-informed analysis of how political actors instrumentalize democracy to limit democracy, and how institutions once designed to constrain power can be redeployed to entrench it.

In documenting and analyzing this process, the dissertation makes a timely and critical contribution to debates on democratic resilience, regime hybridity, and political hegemony in the 21st century.

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