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Whose Democratization? Periods of Transition and Voices from Below in Turkey Kıvanç Atak

COSMOS WP 2012/8

COSMOS-Centre on social movement studies
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This paper has been sponsored by the ERC Advanced Grant for the project Mobilizing for democracy.

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
COSMOS CENTRE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT STUDIES
“MOBILIZING FOR DEMOCRACY:
DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESSES AND THE MOBILIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY” PROJECT
EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL (ERC) GRANT



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Mobilizing for Democracy: Democratization Processes and the Mobilization of Civil Society

The project addresses the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in democratization processes, bridging social science approaches to social movements and democracy. The project starts by revisiting the “transitology” approach to democratization and the political process approach to social movements, before moving towards more innovative approaches in both areas. From the theoretical point of view, a main innovation will be in addressing both structural preconditions as well as actors’ strategies, looking at the intersection of structure and agency. In an historical and comparative perspective, I aim to develop a description and an understanding of the conditions and effects of the participation of civil society organizations in the various stages of democratization processes. Different parts of the research will address different sub-questions linked to the broad question of CSOs’ participation in democratization processes: a) under which (external and internal) conditions and through which mechanisms do CSOs support democratization processes? b) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms do they play an important role in democratization processes? c) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms are they successful in triggering democratization processes? d) And, finally, what is the legacy of the participation of civil society during transitions to democracy on the quality of democracy during consolidation? The main empirical focus will be on recent democratization processes in EU member and associated states. The comparative research design will, however, also include selected comparisons with oppositional social movements in authoritarian regimes as well as democratization processes in other historical times and geopolitical regions. From an empirical point of view, a main innovation will lie in the development of mixed method strategies, combining large N and small N analyses, and qualitative comparative analysis with in-depth, structured narratives.

Whose Democratization? Periods of Transition and Voices from Below in Turkey

Kıvanç Atak

Cosmos Working Paper 2012/8

Abstract: Turkey’s experience with democracy, at least in its procedural terms, is one which has been discontinuous thanks to repeated military interruptions to civilian rule. Since 1946, Turkey has experienced coups on an almost periodic basis, in the name of protecting the Kemalist foundations of the regime from counter-hegemonic currents however defined. These recurrent takeovers by the armed forces created a vicious circle for the survival of democracy in the country. In the meantime, various contentious players became considerably influential at different points, despite pervasive repression. By contrast, the specific junctures of transition to and resumption(s) of democracy were largely monopolized by military-bureaucratic elites leaving little room for grassroots participation. Still, public demonstrations for democratization were not totally absent, and at times articulated by various civil society and social movement actors. In the last decade, the military’s political tutelage seems to have weakened, yet this did not suffice to save Turkey from being a democracy ‘in danger’, as the authoritarian face of the state took a new form under subsequent AKP governments. Today, the continuous battle of re-democratization and de-democratization is perpetuated in Turkey’s contemporary politics and society, perhaps most notably in the realm of the Kurdish question, while democratic contributors ‘from below’ are trying to increase their salience in a patronizing state.

Keywords: Turkey, elites, military, protest, democratization, civil society

Introduction

This report focuses on the periods of transition to and the resumption of democracy in Turkey with a specific eye on the roles of civil society and social movements. Throughout the paper, I share the observation that democratic transitions in Turkey have followed “a strong centralist state and an elite tradition”, which is “dominated heavily by a bureaucratic structure and culture” (Sunar and Sayarı 1986, 166). In that sense, the driving force to re-democratize usually came ‘from within’ the authoritarian establishment, to recall Alfred Stepan’s (1986) conceptualization. Coupled with the structural conditions, this has not left much room for grassroots participation or contentious mobilization during specific periods of transition. It by no means suggests that public

resentment to authoritarian rule was absent; instead, this report singles out various albeit rare articulations of dissent during different moments of democratization.

The transition to electoral democracy has largely been carried out by military-bureaucratic elites in Turkey. Their decision to democratize was driven either by political calculations and bargaining amongst themselves, or influenced by the motivations and pressures of their western international allies. The limited nature of civil society contributions to these processes sprang from similar reasons, but were mainly due to the political contingencies of the day. During the transition to a multiparty regime and subsequently electoral democracy, associational forms of civil society were broadly premature and monitored by the state, and independent political initiatives had hardly any chance to survive. Resumptions of democracy after military takeovers, on the other hand, were preceded by sweeping political repression under the martial law of the junta regime. Still, some articulations of social dissent or mobilization did exist, if not always undertaken by democratically-oriented actors.

In fact, social movements and protest gained tremendous weight at certain times in the Republic's history. Yet it would be ontologically problematic to consider them within the frame of transition. In general, I concur with the view that the history of democracy in Turkey, and arguably elsewhere, is a continuous battle between re-democratization and de-democratization. Conceptualizing transition so as to cover the country's entire democratic history in this perspective would not only be a shocking example of concept-stretching, it would also unnecessarily compel the scholar to write a cursory and superficial narrative, since more than that would be unmanageable within such a framework.

Periodization of democratic transition

Turkey's multiparty regime has existed for more than half a century. Yet her experience with democracy is one that has been discontinuous given the cyclical military interruptions of civilian politics. The interesting story behind this, as Salvador Giner has observed, is that the coup d'états "have not been directed against democracy itself [...], but rather the resumption of democratic politics is nearly always explicitly contemplated by the military and, what is more, does eventually take place" (Giner 1986, 38). This statement may sound somewhat naïve, yet a cursory glance at the coups affirms that the military were more concerned with eliminating regime 'threats' from the political sphere than with permanently blocking democratic practice. For them, in other words, democracy was acceptable to the extent that the Kemalist currents of the regime (unitary state, hardcore secularism, market economy etc.) were not purged by power struggles between different groups. Indeed, the first breakdown of the

multiparty regime on May 27 1960 was shortly followed by a new constitutional draft which then paved the way to the re-installment of electoral democracy in October 1961. Ten years later, the military's involvement took place in the form of a memorandum on March 12 1971, but this time the parliamentary system and the political parties retained their functions. The coup of 12 September 1980 was by far the most repressive and brutal in terms of its short-term as well as long-term consequences. Yet, it did not generate a consolidated military dictatorship; instead the transition to procedural democracy came three years later.

In Turkey, the first signs of democratic transition came around the mid 1940s when the top cadres of the regime were motivated by domestic and international factors in favor of a multiparty system. The establishment of a main opposition party in 1946 and the first general, albeit not free and fair, elections a few months later marked the first concrete kickoff, so to speak, for the transition. The period until 1950 can be characterized as an era of partial liberalization. Indeed, the 23-year old ruling party retained its position in office and thus did not slew its authoritarian skin altogether, all the while sending the message that they themselves were not strictly abiding by their own previous policies of the single-party setting¹. In May 1950 the first free and fair elections took place and resulted in the first transfer of power in government. The transition was complete.

From then on, the functioning of Turkish democracy has been interrupted almost once per decade. Twice, in 1960 and 1980, the parliamentary regime was repealed. In the other two cases, in 1971 and 1997, military involvement undermined democracy's survival without dissolving its main representative institutions. What can be said about the periods following the re-installments of democracy after military interventions? Leaving conceptual debates aside, Turkey has never appeared amongst the 'consolidated' types of democracy. The transition to, and the reinstatement of democracy more than once were generally followed by prolonged terms of (re-) democratization and de-democratization, never incontestably ending in consolidation.

Arguably, this represents a challenge for my effort to classify the periods of a fragile yet persistent democracy with respect to the post-transition context. For one thing, inquiring into the entire historical span of nearly seventy years would miss the transition frame as the main focus of this report. Needless to say, it would also generate factual problems. Yet totally disregarding returns to democracy after military interregnums would oversimplify the fluctuating trajectory of democracy in Turkey. To balance these two points, I will concentrate mainly on the 1946-1950 period, but will also briefly mention re-democratization after the 1960 and 1980 coups, together with the role of social

¹For example, they started relaxing their strongly statist mentality concerning the economy, and espoused a more flexible perspective on religious education.

movements in calling for democratic deepening since the 1980s.

Establishment of the multi-party regime 1946-1950

Social and political background

With the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 single party rule with a westernist nation-building agenda was set up. For this purpose, the governing elites led by Atatürk and organized under the Republican People's Party (hereafter RPP) launched a top-down modernist project to transform society entirely. Public reactions against the project were not absent, especially when it came to issues such as Turkification policies or the de-Islamicization of everyday life in the name of *laïcité*. However, there was no tolerance for any kind of opposition, and contentious attempts were repressed severely². From the 1930s onwards, in particular, the autocratic character of the regime sharpened, paving the way to an extensive process of societal engineering.

Nevertheless, a combination of domestic and international factors began to challenge authoritarian stability towards the end of the 1930s. Turkey had managed to stay out of World War II, but could not escape its devastating effects. The economy receded to the extent that the population was suffering from food and other basic material shortages³. Prices rose sharply, and limits were placed on the consumption of certain basic goods. By the same token, half of the state budget was allotted to military expenditure to face to the potential threats of the war. Pauperization spread, while a small group of wartime profiteers emerged as a result of the shrinking supplies in the markets (VanderLippe 2005). Moreover, the government undertook extraordinary measures such as the National Defense Law (*Milli Korunma Kanunu*) and Wealth Tax (*Varlık Vergisi*). The former bestowed the state with utmost authority over economic affairs, including the decision for compulsory work for peasants around mining areas like Zonguldak. The latter imposed ultra-heavy taxes on affluent classes' incomes collected specifically from non-Muslim minorities, e.g. Greeks, Armenians, and Jews (Akar 2009; Okutan 2009). Besides, several provinces including Istanbul were placed under martial law (*Örfi İdare Kanunu*, 1940) which remained in force for seven years until 1947. Coupled with the relative unpopularity of Kemalist reforms, the deterioration of living standards fed the feelings of resentment to the political administration.

²Intolerance to social opposition was exemplified by measures such as the Law on the Maintenance of Order, or by military operations against Kurdish rebellions.

³Once Germany cut off exports to Turkey, imports and exports fell sharply. "Before cutting off trade, Germany supplied 51 percent of Turkey's imports and took 37 percent of its exports, but in 1940 and 1941, these figures dropped to 12 percent and 9 percent respectively. As trade with Germany fell, trade with Britain and the United States made up only part of the shortfalls in the early years of the war" (VanderLippe 2005, 66).

However, tough state repression hampered the flourishing of any organized opposition, and public protest was confined to minor activities such as “to burn the ears off of İnönü’s portrait on Turkish money, to send the message that he was not listening to the cries of the people” (Keyder 1987, quoted in VanderLippe 2005, 73).

Political elites: the beginning, development, and completion of transition

Political elites in Turkey with uncontested access to power originally had a military-bureaucratic identity. Most “consisted of ‘civilianized’ military men, intellectuals, and professionals closely associated with the government” (Karpat 1964, 51). The ensuing composition of the elites also reflected a peculiar occupational pattern in the parliament.

Prior to 1950, the largest single occupational group in the Parliament consisted of civilian government officials, who accounted for 20-25 percent of the membership. Military officials were the second largest group with 15-20 percent of the members, followed in turn by law (10-15 percent), commerce, trade, and banking (10-15 percent), and education (5-10 percent) (Tachau and Good 1973, 554).

As mentioned, popular discontent with the worsening of social and economic conditions could not easily be articulated through established or grassroots channels due to strict regime controls. Yet around the mid-1940s the political elites themselves became aware of a need for change within the regime. This recognition was motivated by both international and domestic concerns. At the international level, the post-World War II adjustment of Turkey’s foreign relations created an impetus for loosening the premises of the single-party rule. For instance, the country’s participation in the San Francisco Conference and the foundation of the UN in 1945, and increasing American and British influence over its internal affairs encouraged Turkey to join the democratic alliance of the West. Indeed, the Turkish delegate in San Francisco publicly announced that Turkey was “‘determinedly progressing on the way to modern democracy’” (Karpat 1959, 141). The president and the ‘permanent’ head of the RPP, the so-called National Chief İsmet İnönü, also came to be a spokesman for a prospective democratic transition by openly advocating the idea that democracy was a requirement for development into an advanced nation (Koraltürk 2007, 79).

By the same token, an emerging group in the elite of the RPP was uncomfortable with the tight measures of the two-decade old one-party government. In June 1945, four of them, Adnan Menderes, Fuat Köprülü, Celal Bayar, and Refik Koraltan signed a statement entitled the Proposal of the Four (*Dörtlü Takrir*). The statement underlined the importance of respect for human

rights and liberties, and recalled the liberal spirit of the 1924 Constitution jettisoned by prolonged restrictions on the polity. The proposal was rejected for debate in the Assembly, three of the signatories were expelled from the party and one resigned (Koraltürk 2007). Later, the four agreed on the formation of a new party (January 1946) which they named the Democratic Party (hereafter DP), inspired by the U.S model. Ideologically, the DP did not differ considerably from the RPP, except for its critique of etatism and heavy-handed state policies. The government ostensibly welcomed the DP's establishment. In addition, the RPP held a convention in May 1946 which ended with some promises for reforms within the party and liberalization within the regime. These included initial amendments to the Press Law, the Association Law, and the University Law. Yet, during the convention, İnönü also announced the rescheduling of the general elections in July 1946, earlier than the initial date (1947), leaving the opposition without sufficient time to organize and address the electorate. Thanks to the majoritarian system and electoral fraud (linked to open ballots and secret counts), the RPP did not thus lose to the DP in the summer of 1946, and the latter gained only a minor number of seats in the parliament.

Until the next elections in 1950, the democratic transition remained in an intermediary phase. The Democrats were not satisfied with the liberalizing reforms of the Republicans, as they criticized, for example, continued martial law in several of the country's provinces. Along these lines, the DP drafted what they called the Freedom Charter (*Hürriyet Misakı*) at their first party convention in January 1947. The Charter embraced a list of conditions for the survival of democracy, such as changes to the electoral law and the elimination of anti-constitutional laws. The Republicans, on the other side, split between hardliners versus moderates. The latter proved dominant in the party, as became evident with İnönü's July 12 Declaration (1947). The Declaration assured the equal treatment of government and opposition parties, furthering support for the multiparty system. This compromising attitude was consolidated at the 7th Convention of the RPP a few months later, when the Republican's conception of etatism was relaxed; issues such as teaching religion in schools were debated, and reforms in the party organization adopted. The abolition of martial law in Istanbul and her adjacent provinces after seven years was the next step in this relatively liberal turn (Karpas 1959).

Although the liberal moves of the Republicans generally loosened tensions with the Democrats, a group within the DP felt particularly annoyed by these measures. In their opinion, the Republicans were simply trying to absorb opposition demands and subdue them according to İnönü's wishes rather than follow genuinely liberal goals. The dissidents led by Fevzi Çakmak, Kenan Öner, and Hikmet Bayur split from the Democrats as a consequence and formed the Nation Party in July 1948 with the claim of "genuine opposition to the rule of RPP, fair and free elections, better relations with Muslim countries, and the

end of government interference in religious affairs” (VanderLippe 2005, 175). In the meantime, the Republican cabinet presided by Hasan Saka was unsuccessful in its attempts to tackle the chronic problems of the economy manifest in rising unemployment and prices. He was replaced by the premier Günaltay, a liberal figure who “believed in free discussion, free press, and a safe, impartial election system” and “promised to take all measures necessary for a free election in 1950” (Karpat 1959, 229).

Indeed, the elections in May 1950 took place freely and fairly. The Democrats won a sweeping victory against the Republicans. They were further rewarded by majoritarian rules granting them around 400 seats in the Parliament. The first transfer of power in Turkey’s history thus occurred. The transition, therefore, was complete.

Civil society

This section is about the essential features of civil society in Turkey during democratic transition. Let me reemphasize that the contribution of civil society to the introduction of democracy in Turkish political life was minimal. This was so because, as already indicated in the previous section, the transition process was largely driven by political elites who did not rely on societal input ‘from below’.

Prior to the democratic transition, political opportunities were not the most favorable for a vibrant civil society to develop. Law no. 3512 of 1938 (*Cemiyetler Kanunu*) regulated associational life in the country in a very strict manner. For instance, the formation of organizations based on locality, family, religion, and class was prohibited (*Turkish Official Gazette* 3959, 1938). Previously, some of these forms of association were present, such as the Turkish Workers Union (*Türkiye Amele Birliği*) and its successor the Workers Development Society (*Amele Teali Cemiyeti*) (Güngör 1996, 40; Anon. 1996a, 69–71). Nevertheless, such experiments were outlawed or repressed under the Law on the Maintenance of Order (*Takrir-i Sükun*) in 1925, enacted as a response to the persistent Islamist and Kurdish rebellions in the country. Hence, civil society activities, let alone political engagement, were extensively limited and strongly monitored by the state.

Before 1946, one of the few and most notable platforms where oppositional views could be voiced was newspapers. One of these, *Vatan* (Homeland), had been run by Ahmet Emin Yalman since 1940 (again after a first experience in the 1920s) and published articles praising the virtues of democracy. Another, *Tan* (Dawn), run by Zekeriya Sertel and Sabiha Sertel concentrated on economic problems with socialist tendencies (Gürkan 1998). However, it was not an easy task to espouse an oppositional stance against the government, the costs of which eventually proved highly detrimental. In

December 1945, a sizeable mob mostly composed of university students looted *Tan*'s central office along with those of some other leftist journals in Istanbul. Soon after, the newspaper terminated publication activities (Kabacalı 2007, 94–99).

With the beginning of the transition there was a slightly positive change in opportunities for non-state actors. Arguably, this was most remarkably echoed in the growing number of political parties - the Democratic Party was not the first opposition party to be founded in the period. Before it, the National Resurgence Party created by Nuri Demirağ, a prominent businessman, was established with a liberal stance in September 1945. Yet the party did not attract mass support and remained marginal in the subsequent elections. Besides these two parties, Cemil Koçak (2012) notes that more than twenty parties were established between 1945 and 1950. Those ranged from the Turkish Socialist Workers Party to the Islamic Protection Party, with various political agendas. Nonetheless, “the institutional commitment of these opposition parties was to never become government and to never intend to do so!” (Koçak 2012, 195). Although many accentuated issues such as the separation of powers, impartiality of elections, or constitutionality, they refrained from directly challenging the authority of Republican rule. As a consequence, their effect on governmental decisions proved very weak. Eventually, most of these parties survived for only a few years or less, and some were subsequently banned from political activity.

The liberalization within the regime also had an effect on associational life. As mentioned in the previous section, a number of legal changes including the Association Law allowed organizations based on class interests to be formed. Plenty of labor unions emerged following this legal opening. Some had affiliations with the leftist parties, whereas many others were controlled by the RPP. Yet unions were deprived of the official right to strike. Plus, the common allergy against Soviet ideology and the general antipathy towards the left at the elite level placed formidable constraints on union activity (see next section).

All in all, the process of democratic transition helped organized civil society blossom only to a certain extent. However, this awakening was small in scale, largely due to the limited nature of the liberalization brought about by the transition.

The labor movement

Under single-party rule, the labor movement lacked the legal channels and resources to develop. Thus, the potential contribution of labor to the democratic transition was minimal, if not nonexistent. In reality, the early years of the Republic recorded only a few organized labor demonstrations and strikes (Keskinoglu 1996, 493). Yet from the late 1920s onwards the state both

deepened its authoritarian character and controlled the entire economic field under etatism. This culminated in the relative prosperity of the working class, mostly employed in the public sector on the one hand; and on the other legally ruled out class-based organized activity.

At the end of the 1930s not only did material conditions deteriorate but the economic share of private enterprises also began to grow due in particular to war-profiteering. The aforementioned National Defense Law (1940), for instance, increased working days to eleven hours, enforced obligatory work, and introduced a ban on leaving the workplace (Güzel 1993, 166–173). Employees in private ventures suffered more on the grounds of the unrestricted application of working regulations. Under such circumstances, labor dissent was obviously mounting yet workers could not engage in any kind of mobilized struggle largely because of the absence of any organizational infrastructure. The regime did not even tolerate weeklies such as *Sendika* (Syndicate), an issue-based newspaper expressing labor problems and demands. The newspaper managed just sixteen editions until its closure in December 1946 (Ibid. 294).

In May 1946, the government officially recognized the right to form class-based organizations, and in February of the next year a law on labor unions was passed (Güzel 2007, 111–112). Yet this only brought partial liberalization for labor. Indeed, shortly after the government's recognition of class-based organizations, two socialist parties, the Turkish Socialist Workers and Peasants Party (TSEKP) and the Turkish Socialist Party (TSP) were formed. These parties pioneered the establishment of leftist labor unions independent of the regime's political center. The birth of what is called the "Syndicalism of 1946" (Öztürk 1996; Toprak 1996; Çelik 2010) was initially ignored by the RPP rulers. However, the burgeoning trade union activism soon alarmed the politicians in Ankara who were suspicious about the spread of communist ideology through these labor unions. As a result, the Martial Law Department in Istanbul banned both the two socialist parties and the affiliated unions in December 1946, just six months after their establishment (Çelik 2010, 107).

Eventually, the Republicans themselves participated in the formation of unions, mostly by converting previous workers' associations into state-sponsored unions. For this purpose, the Istanbul branch of the RPP set up what they called the Worker's Bureau (*İşçi Bürosu*) and which also covered other regions. They instated a regional federation of labor unions in Istanbul (İİSB) and published a newspaper called *Hürbilet* (Free Brist) to indoctrinate the Republican perspective within trade unionism (Doğan 2003). The right to strike was not granted, and even some of the state-sponsored unions claimed that striking was a harmful practice and not beneficial for the workers (Koç 2010). Examples of wildcat strikes were also very rare. Interestingly enough, the Democrats advocating the lawful exercise of strikes in opposition did not legalize this once in power in 1950, nor throughout their entire decade in office.

In this climate, the labor movement entered a phase of ‘tutelage syndicalism’ as Çelik (2010) phrases it, which lasted roughly until the late 1960s when the political left gained some momentum in Turkey.

Student mobilization

No sustained student movement was present throughout 1940s and until the end of the democratic transition. Yet the period did witness the emergence of a number of student organizations, most of which were enabled by the 1938 law on associations. Until then, the most notable student organization was the Turkish National Student Union (hereafter MTTB) which had been active since 1916. It was an admirer and a protagonist of Turkification and nation-building policies, at times mobilizing small rallies on the streets. Several years after its closure, the Union was reactivated in 1946 along with newly emerging student associations (Okutan 2004).

This period was marked by ultra-nationalist and pan-Turkist influences on student mobilization. Most probably inspired by the fascist ideologies of the era, these students adhered to expansionist interpretations of nationalism. Among others, the Turkish Culture House (*Türk Kültür Ocağı*), Turkish Association of Culture Studies (*Türk Kültür Çalışmaları Derneği*), and Turkish Youth Organization (*Türk Gençlik Teşkilatı*) were at the forefront of such initiatives. The Turkish National Student Federation (TMTF) followed a similar line, yet it was less concerned with direct political involvement than with the problems of students and universities (Szyliowicz 1970, 156). Some of these organizations acknowledged their “ideational struggle against attacks on the Turkish culture and ideas incompatible with nationalism”, while others espoused a more militant path (Kabacalı 2007, 101). In general, they had adverse relations with leftist ideas and ideologies, displayed through offensive behavior on several occasions. The aforementioned looting of the *Tan* newspaper and other left-wing journals was but one example of such behavior. In another case, a group of students from the same circles blocked a conference speech by a professor known as a leftist at the Ankara University campus in March 1947. The next day, a greater number of students marched to the Ulus square in the urban center, burning oppositional newspapers and journals on the street. Similarly in December 1947, a large student protest denouncing communism was organized. In the course of the event, the protest turned against the rector of Ankara University, blamed for protecting leftist academics, and demanded his resignation. The rector was only able to leave the campus in the company of military officers (Ibid., 105).

Besides these groups, there were also some organizations sympathetic towards leftist ideologies. Yet the prevalent political climate was extremely unfavorable for their survival. In addition to the popularity of the ultra-

nationalist mindset, the anti-leftist consensus within the political mainstream undermined the mobilization of the leftist youth. A few examples of such organizations were the Youth Association of Turkey (*Türkiye Gençlik Derneği*) and the High Educational Youth Association of Istanbul (*İstanbul Yüksek Tahsil Gençlik Derneği*). Some of their members were affiliated with the underground Turkish Communist Party (TKP). Attempts at collective action were confined to instances such as petitioning for the amnesty of Nazım Hikmet, or leaflets against university fees.

Religious mobilization

As mentioned, the de-Islamization of public life in the name of a secular state was not wholeheartedly embraced by the public, instead triggering some popular reaction. In the early years of the republican reforms, these reactions were embodied in the form of rebellions, if not sustained movements. The well-known Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925 deserves separate attention since it merged Islamic and Kurdish resentment to challenge the Republican authority. Yet religiously motivated upheavals were definitely not confined to this event. For instance, a *Nakshibendi* order in a northern province, Rize, “attempted an armed rebellion” the same year “in protest against the wearing of hats and the alleged decision of the government to outlaw the veil” (B. Toprak 1981, 69). On some notorious occasions rebels went so far as to behead military officers, as happened for example in one small Aegean town near Izmir in 1930 (Ahmad 1988, 754–755). Outbursts of Islamic insurgency continued in Bursa (1933) against the practice of calling for prayer in Turkish; in Erzurum (1935) where a sheikh, after claiming himself Mahdi, staged an armed struggle; and in Çorum the following year (Özek 1982). Alarmed by such threats to secularist reforms, the Turkish state did not refrain from taking repressive measures. Still, it was impossible to extinguish Islamic communities or brotherhoods (*tarikats*) altogether, only to push them further underground.

Although the transition to the multiparty regime engendered relative tolerance in terms of religious affairs (Lewis 1952), Islamic opposition was still limited. This was mostly because of “the criminal charges and heavy sanctions against actions aiming at the restructuring of the state according to the Islamic principles” (Duman 1999, 33). Together with this, certain Islamic groups did not hesitate to show themselves in the public sphere with offensive behavior against the regime’s symbols. For instance the *Tijanis*, stemming from Morocco and who conveyed their doctrine to Turkey in the early 1930s, began destroying statues of Atatürk for the first time in 1949 (Özek 1982, 552). In fact, it was largely due to their persistent attacks that the first DP government felt obliged to pass a law banning public insults against Atatürk and his memory in 1951.

Under these circumstances, Islamic opposition was mainly channeled

through printed media. Two examples are worth mentioning. One of them, *Sebilürreşad*⁴, was a journal which has been banned before the multiparty era, but was started up again in the transition period in 1948. The authors were critical of both the Republicans and the Democrats since they did not much differ in their political attitudes towards religion. They were in addition disappointed with the latter as they did not fully meet the pious expectations of the Muslims. Addressing the DP deputy Celal Bayar, the publication stated that once:

[...] The people embraced the Democratic Party expecting that the party would allow the development of religious freedom as the other liberties; would not show hatred but respect towards Shari'a. However, today we regret to see that their leader attempted to defy the Shari'a even before seizing power [...] (Eşref Edip, quoted in Duman 1999, 36).

The other example worthy of mention is *Büyük Doğu* (Great Orient), another journal first published in 1943. The journal's opposition also revolved around Islamic decay under the RPP's secularism. After the Democrats' victory in 1950, both journals leaned towards the DP as the 'lesser of two evils'. For them, the return of the RPP to power "would be a disaster, the Muslims would be slaughtered again" (quoted in Duman 1999, 50).

In a nutshell, Islamic opposition both under single party rule and during transition was limited and did not directly challenge the idea of autocratic rule but rather its secular agenda. Their relationship with democracy took the form of positioning themselves vis-à-vis competing political actors once the multiparty game was introduced. Yet at times this positioning entailed nothing but an outcry for Shari'a rather than a deliberate request for democracy. Thus, it is hard to acquiesce to a significant contribution from the Islamic opposition to democratic transition in this period.

Protest events

During and around the transition period big protest events were not a very frequent phenomenon in Turkey, but there were some notable exceptions to document. One was the large gatherings to celebrate the Democratic Party's entrance into politics as an alternative to single-party rule. The contentious character of such meetings derived from popular resentment of the RPP. At times, these gatherings took the form of a public rally to welcome a DP leader to a town; at others DP cadres themselves organized demonstrations to protest against the RPP's political domination.

Soon after the general elections in July 1946, the Democrats were

⁴The name is composed of two separate words: *Sebil* means public fountain built to distribute drinkable water for piety, whereas *Reşad* means being or walking on the just path.

convinced that the Republicans had manipulated the elections, particularly in the DP's strongholds. To protest the alleged electoral fraud the party organized a series of mass meetings in several towns. On 25 July 1946, thirty-thousand people thus assembled on the Cumhuriyet Square in Izmir following a call from the DP administration. Several speakers from the local branch addressed the crowd, and harshly criticized government pressure seeking to curb the opposition's political struggle (*Cumhuriyet* 26.07.1946). A similar event followed two days later in Bursa, where the number of participants was a reported twenty thousand (*Cumhuriyet* 28.07.1946). The crowd was fifteen thousand strong in Balıkesir (July 29th); while in Konya (July 31st) the majority of the attendees were artisans and shopkeepers, and the meeting dispersed without public order incidents after speeches by local party elites (*Cumhuriyet* 02.08.1946). The next day, the Democrats held another protest meeting in Ankara with the participation of forty thousand people. Despite it being the hottest day of the season, the newspaper noted, popular interest in the meeting was considerably high (*Cumhuriyet* 04.08.1946). Actually, this level of public enthusiasm was heralded by the arrival of Marshall Fevzi Çakmak a few days before the visit of the party leaders in the capital. He was one of the leading figures of the Independence War and a committed conservative who also ran as a candidate for the DP. A crowd of thousands gathered in front of the central station. *Cumhuriyet* also reported that two buses of policemen were brought in advance, but were unable to calm the excitement of the crowd.

For a couple of days, people went to the station with the expectation that the Marshall would arrive. Once the news of his arrival that day had circulated in the whole city, the station was filled with a huge crowd. Ten to fifteen thousand people gathered in the station. The crowd outside the station reached to the gate of the Grand National Assembly (*Cumhuriyet* 30.07.1946).

A similar story recurred on 1 April 1947, when Celâl Bayar, one of the founding members of the DP, visited Izmir. During that visit there was a public debate on the scheduled by-elections in Istanbul, and whether the Democrats would boycott or participate. Whereas the government was blaming the Democrats – leaning towards boycott – for torpedoing democracy, the latter were playing the impartiality card against the Republicans. In this atmosphere, and one day after the prime minister's public speech in Izmir, Bayar arrived in the town surrounded by around twenty thousand cheerful inhabitants. He needed police assistance to walk through the streets of the Basmane neighborhood while he was greeted the crowd. It took several hours for the gathering to disperse (*Cumhuriyet* 02.04.1947). Such rallies may not appear the best examples of protest; but they represented burgeoning dissent towards the RPP which encouraged public masses to ardently embrace the DP's elites through such celebrations.

However, it should be noted that the DP's mobilization of the masses did

not only pertain to electoral issues. In this respect, a different but certainly relevant event took place on 8 May 1949 in Istanbul. This time the Democrats called for a public demonstration against the increasing costs of living. The central Taksim Square was occupied by more than ten thousand people carrying hundreds of banners, DP flags, and caricatures. Several figures from the party's senior cadres spoke against the RPP's economic performance which they associated with the alienation of the will of the people (*Cumhuriyet* 09.05.1949). In other words, the democratic rhetoric of the DP was somewhat packaged in a critique of the economy. The meeting lasted about five hours, and again no incidents of public disorder or police intervention were recorded.

A second example of mass protest behavior in the same period was the meetings to denounce communism (*komünizmi telin*). These initially began in the late 1940s with the instigation of certain nationalist youth circles such as the MTTB, and state-sponsored labor unions (Anon. 1996b, 275–276). Mobilizations against communism, as one may expect, did not target any state or government institution, and often involved ruling and opposition parties' collaboration. Yet the provocation of communist 'suspects' was common. Examples included meetings held in various provinces such as Adana (1 January 1948), Malatya (10 April 1949), Eskişehir, Ankara, and Istanbul (26 August 1950) and Bursa (17 September 1950) to name just a few (see respective editions of *Cumhuriyet*). Some attracted thousands of participants. These meetings continued throughout following decades, as in the case of the December 22 1962 meeting organized by the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (TÜRK-İŞ). Anti-communist mobilization speaks about the roots of the prevalent anti-leftist rhetoric in the Turkish public discourse. Yet aside from being a protest phenomenon, it is not plausible to consider these meeting within the frame of civil society engagement in democratic transition.

The first interruption and re-installment of democracy: 1960-1961

Social and political background

In their first term in government, the Democrats enjoyed tremendous public support not only because they had dislodged the Republicans from office, but also because of the booming economy. Their dedication to liberal market principles paid off well, especially in the agricultural sector. The country's infrastructure improved thanks to the mechanization of agriculture, and the amount of cultivated land increased. Moreover, domestic social mobility began to accelerate due to the expanding network of land roads. This resulted in a growing supply of labor in the newly emerging industrial areas surrounding the urban centers in the west (Kalaycıoğlu 1998, 40). Together with agricultural development this was reflected in an average ten percent annual growth in the

economy. Yet the Democrats concentrated too much on short-term gains. Zürcher (2004) points out that the DP government behaved shortsightedly when it came to public investments and the distribution of cheap credits, mostly anticipating immediate growth. They lacked long-term plans as they were allergic to the very idea of planning, and furthermore investments were widely sacrificed for political calculations (Zürcher 2004).

The optimism that characterized the Democrats' first term thus began to erode from 1954 onwards. The DP was reelected in May 1954, but this time they faced serious problems. The economy was giving bad signals on several grounds. Why was this so?

The insufficiency of foreign exchange to meet increasing imports reached a peak. The decrease in agricultural crops because of the drought, the low international demand for agricultural products, the hardening difficulty of getting loans and credits are the primary reasons (Demirel 2011, 251)

As a consequence, the government ended with inflationist policies which undermined the real income of the masses day by day. Perhaps the severest measure was the devaluation of the currency by 330 percent in 1957, the effect of which was particularly detrimental for fixed salary earners.

Although the Democrats survived early elections in the same year, their public support was no longer as secure as it had been at the beginning of the decade. This insecurity was filtered through a series of authoritarian measures indicating that the government wanted to control popular resentment. One was increased fines prescribed in the press law; another was the amendment of the public demonstrations law (1956) which ruled out all political party meetings except for electoral propaganda, submitted protest gatherings to governors' permission, and gave the police the right to fire shots indiscriminately should demonstrators fail to disperse upon warning (Demirel 2011, 251). Meanwhile, the Republicans had been attacked by violent mobs on several occasions, and on one occasion the party leader, İnönü, was not permitted to enter the city center in Kayseri where he was to attend a party congress by the city governor's order (Eroğul 2003, 238). The relations between the DP and RPP were thus further strained. But certainly the most annoying of the government's maneuvers came in April 1960, when it decided to establish an investigatory committee (*tahkikat komisyonu*) in the parliament to survey the media and all oppositional activities. The committee had extraordinary competences that ranged from banning publications to imposing sanctions for political demonstrations. Criminal charges were foreseen for those who challenged the measures of the committee. (*Turkish Official Gazette* 10491, 28.04.1960). The Democrats had begun to act like the Republicans under single party rule, unable to stand for any opposition in society.

Student protests of April 28-29, 1960

The repercussions of the Investigatory Committee were strong among young university students. Following the violent repression of a medical students' congress in Istanbul by police (*Milliyet* 28.04.1960), students of Istanbul University decided to protest against the Committee which they claimed was unconstitutional. Several students from different faculties walked to dozens of dormitories in the town to circulate the news about the protest throughout the night. The next day, a law student announced the demonstration in a lecture hall, and thousands of students gathered in the campus garden (Kabacalı 2007, 123).

Soon after the students began protesting, police squads arrived to disperse the gathering. Faced by the students' resistance, the police used gas bombs and firearms against them. The protest spread outside the campus and continued on Beyazıt Square, and students then marched to the governor's building in the Eminönü district. In the meantime, violent clashes with the police continued for hours, and military forces were called in. Two students, Turan Emeksiz and Nedim Özpolat, died: Turan was shot by police firing on the protesters, and Nedim was crushed between the pallets of a military tank. Dozens of others were injured, including several policemen. Martial law was declared in both Istanbul and Ankara; all public meetings and assemblies were outlawed, and it was also prohibited to publish news about the events of April 28. In addition, all universities in Istanbul were closed for one month (Feyizoğlu 1993, 21–22).

The following day, hundreds of students at the political science and law faculties at Ankara University assembled on campus to protest against the violent repression of the demonstrations in Istanbul. They were prevented in their attempt to leave the university building by the martial law authorities; police and military forces arrived rapidly, and suppressed the students with firearms. The Ministry of the Interior declared that 11 students had been wounded, and 58 arrested. Again, all reports about the Ankara events were banned (Feyizoğlu 1993, 26). The same day, university students in Izmir organized three separate 'quiet' marches. In this case, the police did not take the hardline approach but 'kindly' asked protestors to disperse at the end of the marches. As a result no incidents were reported (*Milliyet* 30.04.1960).

The Coup

The role of the military in Turkish history has been the subject of a long debate stretching back before the Republic to the Ottoman era. Suffice it to say here that the tradition of a politically involved Turkish military was broadly perpetuated in the last century. Specifically, prior to the coup in May 1960, discontent with the Democrats within the armed forces was particularly widespread among young officers. Amongst several other reasons, the fact that

the social status of these officers had deteriorated due to the absolute decrease in their real incomes, and their pessimism regarding their professional futures, were influential. Karpat's (1970) anecdote aptly captures the story I am trying to elucidate here:

Many of the officers I interviewed after the Revolution [he refers to the coup] complained that in the 1950's some landlords would not even bother to show them houses for rent, for "they could not afford it"; some store owners looked annoyed at the prospect of showing expensive items to this impoverished group; waiters with an eye on tips preferred to serve richer customers; and even mothers, who had once been highly honored to have officers as sons-in-law, often advised their daughters not to marry men with "shiny uniforms but empty pockets." (Karpat 1970, 1663)

They were also annoyed that some of the top ranking generals maintained good terms with the Democrats in order to secure their position. For them, this further degraded their 'honorable' identity, as they generally looked down on politicians upon whom they did not want to rely to rise in their careers. Coupled with their self-ascribed historical role as not only guardians but also proprietors of the regime, young officers' resentment flared up. The "incident of the 9 officers" (*9 subay olayı*) in December 1957 revealed that some small factions were already planning to stage a coup (Demirel 2011, 289). That attempt was unsuccessful, but three years later the situation was different. On May 21 1960, a sizeable crowd of military school students marched on Kızılay Square in Ankara as if carrying the message of the intervention that would occur within the week. Indeed, on May 27, Colonel Alparslan Türkeş initiated the takeover with, he claimed, the ultimate aim to "extricate the parties from the irreconcilable situation into which they had fallen" (Zürcher 2004, 241). Thereby, young officers succeeded in overthrowing the government without reference to the chain of command within the army.

Drafting a new constitution and bringing democracy back in: a civil society contribution?

After the coup, the incumbent officers formed the Committee of National Union (hereafter CNU) headed by General Cemal Gürsel. Composed of 38 officers, the CNU replaced the civilian government, but how long they would remain in power was not clear at first. This was particularly because the CNU members lacked consensus. Some were in favor of large scale political reforms and remaining in power for a prolonged period, others planned to devolve authority to a civilian government after a few months; still others had no clear plan in mind. Hence, these different factions skirmished over the roadmap, and tried to eliminate each other from the power struggle. Eventually, the moderates who favored a quick transition to civilian rule took the upper hand by overcoming

their opponents.

In August 1960 the activities of the Democratic Party were suspended. The party elites were tried by a supreme court appointed by the CNU⁵. In effect, the military junta wanted to install a political regime that would not allow any government to become 'too powerful'. This was to be achieved through institutional guarantees such as a constitutional court and other autonomous mechanisms. Whether the military was truly concerned with checks and balances to make Turkish democracy durable is however an open question. Above all, they were championing a system that would safeguard the military's privileged position and ability to take over civilian politics⁶. For that purpose, the CNU facilitated the formation of a constituent assembly in December 1960. The assembly was given the task of drafting a new constitution. The new governmental system was to be bicameral in structure. The first chamber was to host the members of the CNU itself; while the second chamber, named the House of the Representatives (*Temsilciler Meclisi*), was to be composed of the representatives of political parties and various organizations. The latter included "bars, media, unions of veterans, artisan bodies, youth, labor unions, chambers, teachers organizations, agricultural institutions, universities and judiciary bodies" (Gençkaya 1998, 23).

Thus on paper various civil society groups could contribute to the drafting of a new constitution. Indirectly, they were to become the engineers of the democratic order fabricated by the constitution. Nevertheless, this 'civil society' had an overly enlightened character, with the intelligentsia over-represented and grassroots links generally missing.

Only a few members of labor unions were present in the assembly, while landless and impoverished peasants did not have any representative. Therefore, the real debate during the negotiations took place between reformist intelligentsia, politicians, and representatives of the agricultural sector. Class-based representation was absent. Liberal and reformist attempts were rather supported by enlightened groups such as civil servants, writers, and teachers (Gençkaya 1998, 24).

Two factors show that this was genuinely the case. The results of the constitutional referendum in the summer of 1961 revealed that almost 40 percent of the populace rejected the new constitution, despite strong manipulation from above. But probably the bigger surprise came in October of

⁵Thirty-one were given life sentences, another fifteen received capital punishment. Only three were finally executed, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, and Finance Minister Refik Koraltan.

⁶This was to be done by instituting a National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*). Headed by the President, and composed of top army generals and members of the government the Council was to discuss daily political issues.

the same year when the general elections took place. The newly formed Justice Party, which more or less succeeded the Democrats in terms of their political posture, received 35 percent of the votes compared to 36 percent for the Republicans. In a way, the bulk of the population thus sent the message that they were not happy with the military takeover, the extinction of the DP, and the installment of a new political order. By contrast, many actors within ‘civil society’ such as the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Koç 2010, 173) celebrated the military takeover almost unconditionally. This confirms Kayalı’s (2009) analysis that the coup and the politics it manufactured overwhelmingly relied on a social compromise between the military and an elitist intelligentsia which assumed a superior position over the rest of society.

Protest

Between the breakdown of parliamentary democracy and its reinstatement in late 1961, protest was a highly costly option. Still, contentious action was not entirely absent, even if not a routine practice, and this despite closed opportunities for mobilization. Here, I will mention three cases.

One was a symbolic yet truly effective protest action by a number of university rectors. After the military takeover, the junta decided to expel 147 professors from their universities for political reasons. Aggrieved by this decision, the rectors of Istanbul University (Sıddık Sami Onar), Istanbul Technical University (Fikret Narter), Ankara University (Suat Kemal Yetkin), Middle East Technical University (Turhan Feyzioğlu), and Ege University (Mustafa Uluöz) resigned, together with several faculty members. It was an unexpected move since these figures were not real opponents of the coup as such. Eventually, their collective resignation paved the way for the reappointment of the expelled professors, albeit as late as March 1962 (Zürcher 2004, 354; *Milliyet* 29.10.1960).

A second example was workers’ protests, which mounted towards the end of 1961. The initial central objective of these protests was to demand a law granting the right to strike and collective agreements. In fact, the new constitution recognized these rights, but legislation for their implementation was missing. On 25 November 1961 a few thousand workers – many of them barefoot – rallied in Konak Square in Izmir under the banner of the local federation of labor unions. They also raised complaints about low salaries, for which they blamed the Arbitration Committee charged with resolving labor conflicts. (*Milliyet* 26.11.1961). One month later, workers organized the biggest labor protest in the republic’s so far. The Istanbul Federation of Labor Unions (the local branch of TÜRK-İŞ) called for a mass meeting to voice the same demands as those seen in Izmir. 100.000 workers from various towns arrived in Istanbul, and assembled on Saraçhane Square. 3000 policemen were scrambled

to secure public order which was not disrupted during the event. The workers carried banners with slogans such as “Unions without strikes are like soldiers without arms!”, “He who considers striking a crime is criminal himself!”, “Misery destroys the morality of society!” and so forth (Anon. 1996c, 566–568). Yet, they had to wait two more years until legislation was passed by the parliament. It should also be noted that anti-communist rhetoric was still prevalent among the participants.

A third example regards the protests of students unable to enroll at university. These high school graduates criticized the low quotas allotted for new students at the universities. They organized events for several weeks from late October 1961 onwards, mostly in Ankara and Istanbul. Although participation was not massive, the form of their collective action varied from demonstrations in front of the universities and governorships to hunger strikes and occupations of central squares. On November 25 1961 a group of one hundred students went as far as to enter the Ministry of Education building, chanting slogans such as “Either science/education or death!” (*Milliyet* 26.11.1961). The outcome of these protests was not totally inconsequential, even if it did not fully meet the students’ demands. The universities in Istanbul and Ankara announced increases in their quotas to a certain extent.

The coup d’etat of September 12 1980 and the re-resumption of democracy in 1983: civil society destroyed

Turkish parliamentary democracy was repealed once again on 12 September 1980. This was in actual fact the military’s third irruption into politics (after March 12 1971). The parliament was dissolved for a second time. This time, the return to democratic practices took longer than it had after the first takeover in 1960. The consequences of the coup were also much more brutal, and civil society was nearly eradicated. In other words, civil society was left with no possible channel to partake in the transition to democracy. Hence, there is little to say here about civil society’s contribution to the transition. A few words concerning the junta and the scheduled re-installment of democracy will serve to lay bare the notorious story.

Politics and society towards the coup

The constitutional regime of 1961 brought some advantages for associational life in Turkey. The relatively liberal interpretation of organizational rights cemented a fairly vibrant civil society sector. This vibrancy was followed by intensified politicization towards the end of the decade, which was also influenced by the international context, such as the 1968 protests, anti-Vietnam mobilizations and so on. Confrontations with government authorities became frequent, especially in the case of student mobilizations. Consequently, the

military memorandum of 1971 was a law-and-order response to the escalating “anarchy, fratricidal fight, social and economic unrest” (*Milliyet* 13.03.1971). It held the government and the parliament responsible for this, and reminded the civil authorities of a likely takeover unless the politicians righted the allegedly chaotic conditions. Violent events such as the ‘Bloody Sunday’ of February 1969⁷ and the 15-16 June 1971 labor protests⁸ were emblematic of the turbulent climate on the grounds of which the memorandum was justified. A plethora of constitutional amendments followed, but the parliament and political parties endured.

However, politics and society after 1971 did not prove any more tame. After a short term under a technocratic government, political polarization “came to characterize not only the parties, but was insinuated into other important social sectors as well, including organized labor, the teaching profession, the civil bureaucracy, and even the police” (Tachau and Heper 1983, 24). At the level of political elites, governments throughout the 1970s were highly volatile as they were replaced nine times with different cabinet makeups. The main axis of power was divided between two main competitors, the RPP, which espoused a social-democratic ideology under the leadership of Ecevit, and the center-right Justice Party led by Demirel. They were followed by two other candidates for unstable coalitions: “(1) Necmettin Erbakan’s National Salvation Party (NSP), which emphasized Islamic, fundamentalist principles; and (2) Alparslan Türkeş’s Nationalist Action Party (NAP), which supported a protofascist program of domestic corporatism, pan-Turkic irredentism, and a uniformed youth organization known as the ‘Grey Wolves’” (Gunter 1989, 64). Since none of these parties could secure a parliamentary majority⁹ coalitions were inevitable; but the lack of compromise on almost all issues stalemated governments in political deadlocks and impasses. Respective governments were also challenged by external influences such as the 1973 Oil Crisis, which exacerbated the problems in the domestic economy, already destabilized by the failures of ISI policies.

At the societal level, polarization was accompanied by widespread

⁷On February 16 1969 a large group of students and youth organizations sought to protest against the arrival of the 6th Fleet of the U.S. Armed Forces in Istanbul. The protest was interrupted by anti-communist counter-demonstrators. As a result of the clashes between the two groups, 2 people died, and another 114 were injured.

⁸On June 15-16 1970 a huge mass of workers, mostly organized by the Revolutionary Workers Unions Federation (DISK), protested against amendments to the laws on unions, strikes and lockouts in Istanbul. The first day, 70.000 workers in different parts of the city marched without many clashes with the security forces. The second day, protests continued with the participation of 100.000, but this time clashes with the police resulted in 4 casualties and around 200 injuries. Martial law was declared for 60 days. For Cemil Koçak’s narrative, see <http://www.stargazete.com/guncel/yazar/cemil-kocak/donum-noktasi-olamayan-eylem-15-16-haziran-isci-direnisi-haber-443591.htm>

⁹The robust PR system introduced after 1960 made it especially difficult for any party to keep a majority in the parliament.

militancy and radicalization. The military memorandum represented a short break in insurgent activities through the mass incarceration and killing of political opponents. For instance, revolutionary groups such as the Turkish People's Liberation Army (TPLA) and the Turkish People's Liberation Front (TPLF) became targets of "a major anti-terrorist campaign" whereby "the security forces managed to either kill or capture almost the whole leadership cadres of both" (Sayarı 1987, 25). The second half of the decade, however, witnessed an upsurge in political violence from both leftwing and rightwing extremists. On the left of the spectrum were organizations such as DEV-SOL and DEV-YOL, established by people in secondary positions in the organizations mentioned previously. Rightwing radicalism, on the other hand, "had usually started out in the paramilitary groups organized by the extreme right-wing National Action Party (NAP)" (Sayarı 1987, 26). There were interrelated factions such as the Idealist Clubs Association (*Ülkü Ocakları Derneği*), Idealist Path Association (*Ülkü Yolu Derneği*) and Idealist Youth Association (*Idealist Youth Association*).

Comparing Turkey's experience with political violence with those of other countries such as Italy and West Germany during the late 1970s, Sayarı notes that it "caused more fatalities in one week during the early months of 1980 in Turkey than it did in Italy in an entire year or in West Germany in the entire decade" (Sayarı 2010, 198). Indeed, Gunter documents "a total of 9795 incidents of clashes and armed attacks during the overall period", of which 6732 were "incidents of arson and throwing of explosives" (Gunter 1989, 69). Among these, political assassinations had a particularly destabilizing effect.

Political assassinations came to include members of the parliament, an ex-prime minister, prominent journalists, and university professors. Some of the victims were extremists of left or right but others (particularly among journalists and professors) were moderates. The latter type of assassination was clearly designed to undermine the political center and accelerate the process of polarization (Tachau and Heper 1983, 24-25).

Outbursts of ethnic or sectarian conflict exacerbated the situation¹⁰. Under these circumstances, Turkish generals already critical of political leaders did not have a hard time justifying their takeover in September 1980, the third military coup in the Republic's history.

The Coup and transition: a familiar story

Differently to 1960, the coup in 1980 was instigated by the military leadership, and the junta regime was institutionalized with the National Security Council (NSC) presided by Kenan Evren. Leaders of political parties were kept in

¹⁰For a historical narrative of the events in Malatya, Çorum, and Kahramanmaraş, see Şahhüseyinoğlu (2005).

custody, all political activities were suspended, martial law prevailed, and tens of thousands of unionists, students and activists were arrested as political suspects. As in 1960, a schedule for a new constitution and transition to electoral democracy was prepared. This would once again be the task of a constituent assembly (June 1981); the NSC as the first chamber, and an advisory council as a second (*Danışma Meclisi*), one third of which was to be selected by the NSC itself (Tanör 2008, 137–138).

The drafting of the 1961 Constitution allowed the participation of some civil society representatives, at least on paper and despite an elitist agenda. The process for drafting the new constitution twenty years later was definitely a step backwards in this respect. Not only was the civilian contribution overly limited, any negative propaganda and criticism of the draft was prohibited. Indeed, an NSC decision (*Turkish Official Gazette* 17845, 21.10.1982) proclaimed that “it is not allowed to criticize the advocatory speeches of the head of the state concerning the new constitution on radio-television and during his travels in the country; and to make any written or oral declaration against them”.

For non-state actors, thus, there was no other option but quiescence or praise of the military, illiberal constitutional draft that followed. To give an example from organized labor, Koç (2010) recalls the welcoming message from the TÜRK-İŞ confederation delivered to the head of the NSC, Kenan Evren, soon after the coup. By the same token, quiescence was not an inexorably safe option, as illustrated by the case of the Revolutionary Workers Unions Federation (DİSK, established in 1967). Their members thought that by remaining silent (not challenging the coup) they could avoid military repression. “Yet those who were expecting release shortly after being arrested and without mistreatment, were tortured and imprisoned for years” (Koç 2010, 280).

Consequently, it was not surprising to most that more than ninety percent of the electorate endorsed the constitution in the referendum held in November 1982. According to one interpretation, this was not only due to the imposed lack of counter-propaganda, but also because many people preferred a flawed yet immediate democratic transition to an extended junta regime (Tanör 2008). After the referendum, a new law on political parties was passed, and new parties were formed. These were the center-right Motherland Party of Turgut Özal, the social democratic Populist Party that to some extent substituted the RPP, and the Nationalist Democracy Party supported by the junta. In November 1983, the Turkish electorate disappointed the junta by casting 45 percent of its votes for the Motherland Party.

In a nutshell, the transition to democracy after 1980-1983 appears a one-player game, but it would be misleading to imagine the military as the single actor in this process. Ihsan Dagi (1996) points to the role of external actors such as the then European Community and the United States in pressuring the junta to haste in the resumption of democracy. In that sense, West Germany and

France initially took up the issues of political refugees and the trials of unionists through diplomatic channels, expressing their concerns about human rights under military rule. Yet this pressure did not yield any convincing response from the junta in terms of desisting from political repression. Thus, the European Community went further, changing the strategy. One idea which became popular among European socialists was that the EC should “suspend Turkey’s association agreement with the Community, as had happened in the case of Greece in 1967 following the colonels’ coup” (Dagi 1996, 129). The other strategy regarded the increased economic aid of 600 million ECU that had been planned for Turkey following the signature of a fourth financial protocol . The EC, “by threatening not to release the aid, used it to pressure Turkey over a rapid return to democracy and respect for human rights” (Ibid, 130). The USA, on the other hand, used softer language in lobbying for democracy, without criticizing the military’s being in power to any great extent¹¹. These were two big challenges for the junta, since non-compliance with the West would not only be self-contradictory for a western-oriented army, but also mean the loss of material gains. It is, therefore, plausible to claim that the generals’ decision to begin the democratic transition was influenced by these external pressures and their wish to avoid Turkey’s isolation in the international arena.

Protest

Newspaper reports on the protest events that took place in this period are almost exclusively about demonstrations in foreign countries. The self-censorship that the media widely resorted to may have played a part in the non-coverage of domestic events. Yet this hardly changes the fact that protest became a rare phenomenon under the conditions described above. There is, however, one case which deserves particular attention here.

A few months after the general elections in 1983, on 15 May 1984, a petition was sent to the office of the Presidency and to the chief office of the Grand National Assembly. The title of the petition was “Observations and Demands Concerning the Democratic Order in Turkey”. It was written by a group of intellectuals during a series of private meetings, and subsequently signed by around 1400 people. Publicly known as the Petition of the Intellectuals, the document addressed political repression and human rights issues related to the junta regime. The petition started with the statement that the petitioners had chosen this way of raising their dissent because of legal constraints they did not agree with. Then, it juxtaposed several criticisms of the restrictions on political and organizational rights and liberties, criminal charges against civil society actors and political activists; and the mistreatment of

¹¹At any rate, the U.S. administration was most likely less alarmed by a compliant military junta than an Islamic revolution as seen in Iran at around the same time, or indeed by a Turkey under socialist influence.

arrestees and prisoners.

In light of these considerations, we are aware of our responsibilities to our society, and sincerely believe; that modern democracy has a stable essence despite changes in practices in different countries and their specific conditions; that the institutions and principles as the makeup of this essence are already acknowledged by our nation; that legal regulations and practices in breach of these principles should be lifted through democratic methods; that we can thus overcome the depression in a healthy and secure way¹².

The day that the petition was posted, the martial law authorities in Ankara banned the public release of the document. A few days later, the military prosecutors launched an investigation into the document, and on June 20 the martial law court in Ankara opened a trial, initially against 46 people (which then became 59) for unlawfully circulating a petition. The trial lasted two years and all the suspects were acquitted in February 1986 (*Aydınlar Dilekçesi Davası* 1986). By virtue of the fact that the Petition of the Intellectuals was perhaps the first collective and organized initiative against the measures of the military regime and the illiberal democracy that it constituted, the document has particular relevance within the frames of this report.

The recent trajectory of democracy and civil society

The Turkish story does not end in 1983 however. In the last thirty years, the regime has experienced various constellations of democratic enhancement and erosion. For instance, the ways in which the Kurdish insurgency has been dealt with, as Larry Diamond (1999) reminds us, has undermined the advancement of liberal understandings of democratic principles in the country. The ‘management of social conflict’ in this particular case definitely did not ‘facilitate’ consolidation (Valenzuela 1990), indeed it obstructed its progression. Furthermore, the transition in 1983 did not truly safeguard civilian politics from military influence. Most notoriously, the National Security Council¹³ decisions of February 28 1997 signified a soft coup targeting the Islamist ‘threat’ posed by the Welfare Party’s presence in the governing coalition. The government was practically forced to resign while additional measures, such as closing down a number of preachers’ schools, were taken to pacify Islamist currents in society. Apparently, it was the institutional guarantees bestowed by what Casper and Taylor (1996) call the “compromise path to democratic installation” that assigned this high level of discretion to manipulate politics to the Turkish Armed Forces.

¹²For the whole text of the “Petition of the Intellectuals”, see: <http://bianet.org/biamag/bianet/19444-aydinlar-dilekcesi-tam-metni>

¹³Not to be confused with the NSC of the junta regime.

The anchor of prospective EU membership, on the other hand, represents an external stimulus for overcoming the authoritarian legacy through political reforms. As of 1999, Turkey became an official candidate state, and the period between 2002 and 2005 witnessed a series of reform (e.g. harmonization) packages that furthered the cause of freedom and democracy to a certain extent. Many observers believed that Turkey was “in the midst of going from a hybrid regime that blended elements of democracy, autocracy, and pluralism to one that is more liberal *and* democratic” (Diamond et al. 2003, xviii). However, as the euphoria of rapprochement with the EU faded away for various reasons, and as the AKP secured a growing power base through subsequent elections, the liberal and democratic opening proved ephemeral. Students, journalists and Kurdish politicians have been imprisoned; the rule of law has been thwarted by courts with extraordinary competences; the opposition media has been pacified, and so forth. All this signals an authoritarian backlash that is becoming increasingly clear.

A limited frame for civil society

Since 1983, Turkey has experienced a certain degree of institutionalization in the realm of social movements and civil society. Indeed, associational life began to reemerge, at least in quantitative terms, while various forms of new social movements burgeoned in organizational diversity. This was largely due to piecemeal liberalization within the regime which gradually lifted restrictions on political activity. However, the mandate of the 1982 Constitution, despite subsequent amendments, by no means allowed a high degree of political freedom. In other words, political activity was condoned as long as it remained within the margins of the mainstream. Organizing within civil society was also promoted over *apolitical* ventures (see page 32). By the same token, state repression, primarily of leftist and Kurdish activists, continued at various levels through clandestine (e.g. murders), judicial (e.g. State Security Courts, and after 2002, courts with extraordinary competences) and street (e.g. protest policing) forms.

The labor movement

Between the end of the 1980s and the late 1990s, Turkish labor became a salient actor in democratic politics. To date, labor unions have mobilized on the street more than any other organizations. Nevertheless, political opportunities for labor to influence governmental processes – even to the extent of provoking resignations – were more favorable in the previous decade than in the 2000s. Indeed, the division in the political elite that led to the instability of coalitions characterized almost the entire decade of the 1990s. Coupled with a fluctuating economy that saw crises as in 1994 and high inflation and corruption scandals,

labor unions emerged as powerful actors with the ability to bargain effectively with employers and to mobilize large sections of the population. In the succeeding decade, unions also had strong reasons to mobilize due to continued neoliberal policies such as massive privatization. Yet the ruling elites were no longer divided but united under the expanding conservative equilibrium of the AKP government. Moreover, economic stability reigned and was marketed well, and government-friendly unions largely broadened their shop-floor bases.

After the junta regime, the rightwing ANAP government under the leadership of Özal committed to the profound liberalization of the economy. Their first term from 1983 to 1987 was also marked by strong anti-union policies. Not surprisingly, the consequences for workers in public and private enterprises were detrimental. Real wages dropped by 7 and 12 per cent respectively on the basis of wholesale and consumer prices (Boratav 2008, 192). By 1988, for public workers the figures amounted to a decline of almost 50 per cent since 1983, whereas the decrease for civil servants was around 20 per cent (Koç 2010, 335). Under these circumstances, the deadlock in collective bargaining talks between TÜRK-İŞ and employer associations in 1989 fanned the well-known Spring Actions (*Bahar Eylemleri*) that lasted from March until May of the same year. 600.000 workers participated in a wide variety of events that included but were not limited to “slowing down and late-starting work, collective medical visits, food and bus service boycott, beard boycott¹⁴, quiet marches, stoppage, sit-in, obstruction of traffic, collective petitioning for divorce” (Çelik 1996, 103). These actions were not only economically but also politically motivated, and relied on notable media and public support. Indeed, mass sympathy for the Spring Actions was reinforced “by the reaction against the residues of the September 12 (junta) regime and the Özal government, as well as by widespread demands for democratization” (Çelik 1996, 104). The outcomes proved highly positive for the workers as the government granted large salary increases.

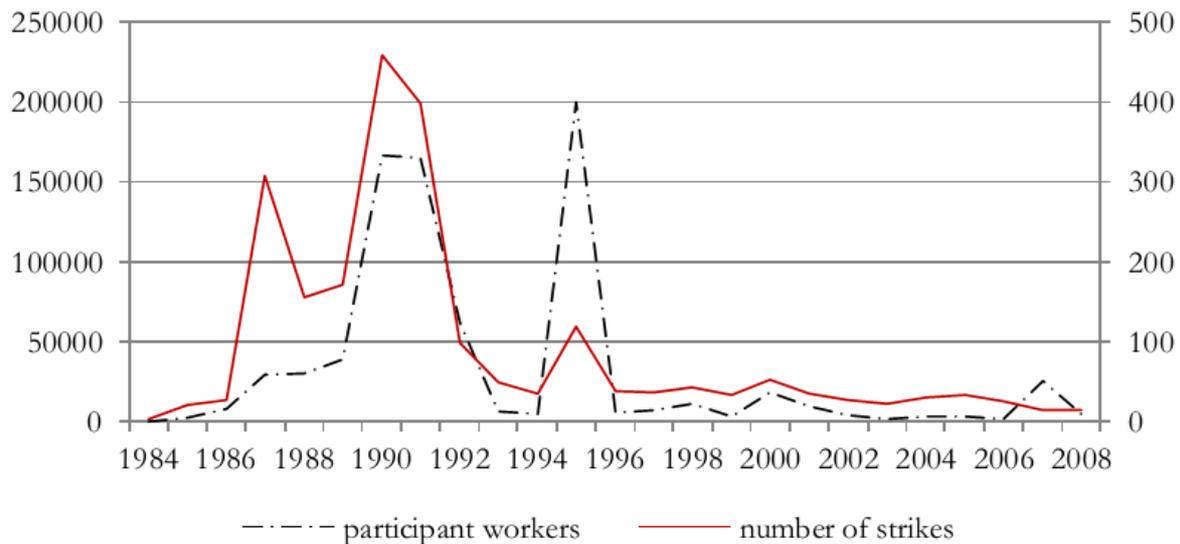
In the following years, Turkish labor persisted in eventful mobilization. The temporal distribution of strike activity in the country (Figure 1) is presumably a blueprint for the intensification of contention seen in the 1990s. Mass meetings and rallies were quite common, and the level of participation in a series of demonstrations in 1994 and 1995 in particular was reportedly very high, even at those of an illegal nature (e.g. 100.000 in Ankara on November 26 1994; 300.000 in Ankara on August 5 1995; 100.000 in Ankara on October 15 1995). At times these demonstrations also played a remarkable role in pushing cabinets out of office.

TÜRK-İŞ became influential three times in governmental change. By means of pressuring the RPP, TÜRK-İŞ played a decisive role in the RPP’s withdrawal

¹⁴Growing beards to boycott the dress code of the workplace.

from the coalition government on September 20, 1995, when big strikes were commenced within the public sector. The demonstration and the stance on the Kızılay Square on October 15, 1995, hindered the positive vote of confidence for the Tansu Çiller (center-right True Path Party) government. In 1997, the impact of the Initiative of the Fives¹⁵ (*Beşli Girişim*), of which TÜRK-İŞ was a party, on the resignation of the REFAHYOL government (Islamist Welfare Party and True Path Party) was significant (Koç 2010, 415).

Figure 1 – Official strike statistics in Turkey (1984-2008)



Source: ILO

Yet the link between this high level of mobilization and the democratic orientations of the labor is not beyond dispute. In 1987, for instance, during a referendum concerning the abolition of political bans on ex-politicians from the pre-junta period, TÜRK-İŞ campaigned for these to be lifted. Ten years later, by contrast, when the military, alarmed by the Islamic currents of the Welfare Party in the governing coalition, ‘softly’ intervened in politics at the National Security Council meeting of February 28 1997, TÜRK-İŞ took a joint pro-military posture in the group of the aforementioned Initiative of the Fives (Koç 2010). By the same token, the recently formed KESK (Confederation of Public Employees’ Unions), together with a number of vocational associations,¹⁶ were critical of the undemocratic pressures on the government provoked by the

¹⁵Besides TÜRK-İŞ, the Initiative was composed of the Revolutionary Workers Unions Confederation (DİSK), the Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen (TESK), the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), and the Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (TİSK).

¹⁶Turkish Dental Association, Turkish Pharmacist Association, Turkish Chambers Union of Architects and Engineers, and Turkish Medical Association.

imminent ‘Islamist threat’ (Çelik 2012). This indicates two things. First, Turkish labor’s relationship with democracy not only reflected the ideologically fragmented nature of the unions, but also the slippery ground on which at least some of them positioned themselves with regard to democratization and de-democratization. Second, an inherently pro-democratic spirit did not uniformly underpin the contentious politics the unions pursued.

The ambivalent character of the labor movement’s relation with democracy also prevailed in the 2000s. In this respect, the golden age of Turkey’s alignment with the EU in the first half of that decade was perhaps the least contested field across different segments of the labor movement. In general, labor representatives did not categorically oppose EU membership as such, nor the political reforms implemented under the auspices of harmonization. Criticisms either revolved around specific political dilemmas such as the Cyprus problem, voiced especially by nationalist confederations like KAMUSEN, or centered upon the rejection of an ‘imposed’ path of Europeanization that would allegedly thwart national independence or undermine the principles of social democracy (Bal 2007). Otherwise, many unions invested in transnational networks with their counterparts at the EU level, at times receiving resources from them (Öngün 2011), and elsewhere built up solidarity for striking workers (Fougner and Kurtoğlu 2011) or occasionally partook in “joint projects, seminars, workshops and other activities, which are often organized either by the EU institutions or by trade unions and confederations in Europe” (Agartan 2010). Yet when it came to certain cleavage structures in society, e.g. on the Kurdish issue, the status of Muslim and non-Muslim minorities, civilian-military relations and so on, the divided nature of labor translated into a lack of shared understanding over further democratization. Still, unions such as KESK and its affiliated unions, more active in terms of contentious politics and relatively independent from the political mainstream, mobilize frequently for the drafting of a pluralist constitution, education in mother tongues (for Kurds in particular) and against the state’s repression of unionists and tough police strategies on the street.

(Pro-) Kurdish activists

The Kurdish question in Turkey maintains a paradoxical relation with democracy. Whatever the actors involved, the politicization of the Kurdish identity definitely unveils the blatant fact that the advancement of Turkish democracy is dependent on the resolution of that conflict. Yet at the same time this historically rooted question has turned into the battlefield of the severest repressive strategies of authoritarian statecraft in the face of an ongoing armed insurgency.

The centrality of the PKK in the Kurdish conflict is hard to deny, yet it is

equally true that “(L)ittle serious attention has been given to the efficacy of non-violent domestic struggles to reform Turkish state policies towards Kurds or to pro-Kurdish use of electoral politics to promote the movement’s goals” (Watts 2006, 125). In that sense, the representation of the Kurdish movement in parliament played a pivotal role both for the recognition of the Kurdish identity and for the chance for the pluralist practice of democracy. Before establishing their own party(ies), Kurdish politicians allied themselves with the (now defunct) Social Democratic People’s Party (SHP), founded in 1986. Nevertheless, some SHP members were uncomfortable with the public pronouncements of Kurdish ethno-politics under the SHP banner, which eventually led to the expulsion of (pro-)Kurdish politicians from the party (Robins 1993, 666; Kirişci and Winrow 1997, 136–137). Soon after, in June 1990, the first of the successor Kurdish political parties, the People’s Labor Party (HEP), was founded.

Besides objectives related to cultural and linguistic rights, the political agenda articulated at the party level resonated with the ideas of pluralism, self-government and critiques of the (over-)centralized nature of state administration. However, the enunciation of such a political discourse at all, let alone through parliamentary channels, was highly controversial in the domestic situation of the 1990s. Indeed, Turkish state bureaucracy and political authorities spread strong apathy towards the Kurdish question from every possible platform.

The HEP’s often-volatile public meetings and outspoken promotion of Kurdish political and cultural rights created concern among many bureaucratic and elected officials that the group was a mouthpiece for the PKK, and the party faced constant pressure from police, public prosecutors, and many members of the Parliament (Watts 1999, 631)

In the meantime, mass protests that notably erupted in the southeast laid bare the grassroots basis of the Kurdish movement, and began to challenge state authority from below. New Year celebrations, *Newroz*, turned into a political outcry for the Kurdish identity. The events of March 1990, 1991 and 1992 particularly culminated in severe clashes with the security forces. Paul White (2000) even draws an analogy with the Palestinian *intifada* to describe the social atmosphere.

To make the symbolism quite apparent, youth began wrapping headscarves over their faces after the style of the Palestinian rebel youth. As the temperature of the movement rose higher, other features of the Palestinian phenomenon began appearing as well, as shops, offices and even some schools were shut down by locals in protest at the authorities’ allegedly heavy-handed tactics (White 2000, 164).

This Kurdish *intifada* is phrased as *serhildan* or uprising in the native language.

The number of civilians involved in these events was sometimes in the several thousands, while the scale of violence came close to warfare. For instance, the daily *Milliyet* headline ran “Riot situation in Nusaybin. 5000 people clashed with soldiers, 1 dead, 6 wounded, 300 detained” (*Milliyet* 16.03.1990). The violence ramped up in Cizre a few days later, where four people died and some public offices were set alight (*Milliyet* 21.03.1990). In the following years, PKK attacks peaked – towards the mid-1990s – while state-sponsored violence made use of every possible method to suppress Kurdish insurgency. This included counter-guerilla tactics, mystery killings, torture, kidnapping activists, imprisoning politicians, setting villages on fire, banning Kurdish publications and so forth. Still, (pro-)Kurdish political parties managed to survive under changing names, i.e. the Democracy Party (DEP 1993-1994), the People’s Democracy Party (HADEP 1994-2003) which gave way to the Democratic People’s Party (DEHAP 1997-2005) and then transformed into the Democratic Society Party (DTP 2005-2009), and most recently the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) of today¹⁷. As Watts rightly observes, the persistent albeit recurrently interrupted political office of these parties “suggested that a Kurdish political ‘house’ had been built in the Turkish political system, and that even if its inhabitants were arrested, new ones would move in” (Watts 1999, 632). In one sense, she argued, this ostensibly conventional form of politics-making became barely distinguishable from some sort of social movement activity. It is “because the relationship between the state and officeholders continues to be a publicly adversarial one characterized by threats against the status or even person of the officeholder, who continues publicly to challenge the basic ‘rules of the game’” (Watts 2006, 126). The simple fact that as recently as November 1998 the number of party members arrested exceeded 3000 is perhaps the most vivid reminder of this ‘sustained’ conflict with the state (White 2000, 170).

The Kurdish movement’s relationship with the Turkish political regime entered a new phase between 1999 and 2005. Two main reasons account for this. First, the capture of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 culminated in a relative truce in armed insurgency. Second, the heyday of the EU-Turkey rapprochement in the first half of the new decade gave birth to a series of political reforms that relaxed restrictions on the Kurdish identity to some extent. Actually, the indirect effect of Europeanization on Kurds was welcomed but found insufficient by the (pro-) Kurdish camp. At any rate, the Kurdish question had already become transnational through diaspora relations and the official mechanisms of the EU.

Kurdish activists consider the Turkey-EU accession negotiation period as one during which the brokers of Kurdish organizations and parties have the best bargaining position to realize change at home.

¹⁷For a journalistic narrative of the successive (pro-)Kurdish parties, see “HEP, DEP ve HADEP de kapatılmıştı” at <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25029246/>, accessed on 16.08.2012.

Thus, for instance;

[...] Lobby activities are being directed towards members of the EP, members of the CE, and to a lesser extent, towards members of the European Commission. Additionally, the legislative and judiciary bodies in Turkey are indirectly influenced by Turkey's many convictions on charges of human rights violations by the European Court of Human Rights (Casier 2010, 9–10)

From 2006 onwards, however, the situation took a turn for the worse as negotiations stopped progressing and EU membership proved an open-ended question. The exogenous political opportunity rooted in accession talks, in other words, lost momentum for the Kurdish activists. The domestic opportunities were not any more favorable. In terms of the armed conflict, the PKK resumed its attacks; at the societal level, chauvinistic nationalism spread; and within political society the AKP consolidated its power, becoming increasingly authoritarian. In the meantime, the Democratic Society Party (DTP) was banned by the Constitutional Court in December 2009¹⁸, and quickly replaced by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).

Under these circumstances, (pro-)Kurdish politicians and activists felt the need to develop new strategies to sustain the movement. At the intellectual level, the idea of 'democratic autonomy' was put forward by the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), an umbrella platform hosting current and ex-politicians and intellectuals in support of the Kurdish cause. This concept relies on the local re-interpretations of self-government, autonomy, and to some extent federalism which "requires joint elaboration with the establishment of civilian, self-organizations of society, is essentially the systematized model of the perceptions of 'less state', 'more society', 'less restrictions', 'more freedom'"(Peace and Democracy Party 2011).

At the level of protest mobilization, the BDP, like any social movement organization (SMO), has sought to expand its collective action repertoire. Two methods are worth mentioning here. The first was the decision to boycott the constitutional referendum of September 12 2010. For this purpose, the party organized mass meetings in several provinces including Istanbul (on the Manisa and Şanlıurfa meetings see *Radikal* 05.08.2010). The other, and most recent, are the multiple forms of civil disobedience with an ultimate call for "education in the mother tongue', amnesty for political prisoners', suspension of military and political operations', and 'the lifting of the ten percent electoral threshold'" (*Milliyet* 24.03.2011). Mass sit-in were frequently resorted to. One innovation was the gathering of people for the Friday prayer outside the mosques. In doing this, they rejected the official call for prayer in state-registered mosques, and followed imams instructing the *namaz* on the street instead.

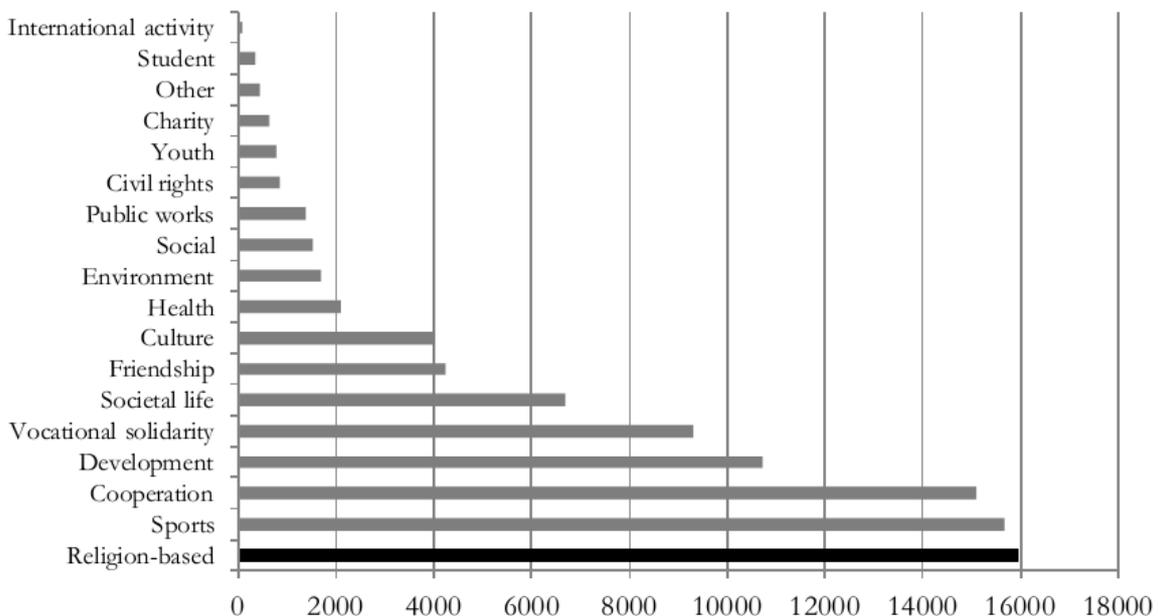
¹⁸See "DTP kapatıldı [DTP is banned]" at <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25030653/>, accessed on 16.08.2012.

The Islamic sphere and civil society: two cases

Islamist groups benefited greatly from the guided growth of associational life throughout the 1990s. In fact, it was the junta regime’s idea to promote religion as a catalyst for the de-politicization of society. Islamic actors thus enjoyed a great deal of leverage in organizing within civil society in comparison to other actors such as labor, the left, students, or Kurds. The rise of the Islamist Welfare Party in the 1994 local elections in particular also signaled an equivalent pattern in political society. Yet as the Islamization of both civil and political society became more and more apparent, the military-bureaucratic establishment felt threatened to the extent that the coalition between the Welfare Party and the True Path Party was forced to resign shortly after the February 28 1997 National Security Council meeting, publicly known as the soft or postmodern coup.

However, the AKP’s march to power in 2002 elicited more favorable conditions for Islamists to become more vocal in civil society. The fact that religious associations rank first in terms of quantity is arguably emblematic of the situation (Figure 2). However, one needs to be more specific alongside this in order to shed light on Islamic perspectives on democratization and human rights. Here, I prefer to talk about two associations in the foreground of the scene which also mobilize occasionally on the streets.

Figure 2 – Distribution of associations according to their occupation (2012)



Source: Presidency of the Department of Associations, Ministry of Interior

MAZLUM-DER (Association for Human Rights and Solidarity with the Oppressed People) was established in 1991. Originally a human rights organization, MAZLUM-DER’s sensitivity to the issue of women’s headscarves

plus the predominantly ‘Muslim’ profile of its members created a public image as an Islamic NGO. The infamous February 28 1997 decisions addressing the Islamic ‘threat’ Kadıoğlu (2005) to quote its president, led to “a series of stringent measures preventing public visibility of Islamic identities in Turkey”. The exclusion of students wearing the headscarf from universities thus became part of mundane politics. “MAZLUM-DER stood by these students on the basis of human rights violations. This has contributed to its increasing reputation as an Islamic organization” (Kadıoğlu 2005, 35). Despite its Islamic image, however, MAZLUM-DER has also been active on several other issues as varied as ethnic discrimination, the rights of the non-Muslim minorities, the Kurdish issue, state-sponsored violence, and so on. The majority of its activities consist in organizing seminars, conferences, publishing human rights reports and carrying out public opinion surveys; protest is less common but does take place. The protest event data collected by the author show that the headscarf issue, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the US involvement in the Middle East were the most frequently raised topics during street actions organized by MAZLUM-DER throughout the 2000s.

The other organization I want to mention briefly is ÖZGÜR-DER (Association for the Freedom of Thought and Educational Rights), which was founded in 1999. The political agenda of ÖZGÜR-DER is evidently narrower than MAZLUM-DER. Indeed, its president “stated in the text that signaled the foundation of the association that, in response to the extraordinary circumstances that paved the way to the curtailment of the educational rights of the students who had chosen to wear the headscarf, ÖZGÜR-DER’s primary focus would be the headscarf issue” (Kadıoğlu 2005, 32). According to the association’s own statement, furthermore, human rights advocacy separate from the Islamic identity is mistaken¹⁹. Thus, compared to MAZLUM-DER, the organization is less sympathetic towards civil society groups and social movements campaigning against state repression that are not driven by Islamic motivations. The militarist-secular tutelage of Turkish politics and its symbols in education (ban on the headscarf, monotype religious classes, restrictions on the use of Kurdish in compulsory education) constitute the main axis of ÖZGÜR-DER’s oppositional stance. In terms of activity, ÖZGÜR-DER refuses to be dominated by routinized professional work such as regular press declarations and reports. It remains to be assessed whether the groups has convincingly diversified its action repertoire in line with this claim. Occasional appearances at protests against the ban on the headscarf being worn in public places, and against Israeli and US policies in the Middle East, are reminiscent of MAZLUM-DER’s street actions.

¹⁹See “Özgür-Der Nedir? [What is Özgür-Der?]” at: http://www.ozgurder.org/v2/news_detail.php?id=542, accessed on 14.08.2012.

The Global Justice Movement

The evolution of the Global Justice Movement (GJM) in Turkey was patterned by the emergence of this particular form of contention towards the late 1990s in the West. The participation of a handful of leftist activists and unionists in the Seattle events of 1999, and later in Genoa, and subsequently the newly emerging social forums contributed to a process of social learning and diffusion of movement experiences and repertoires of action (Baykan and Lelandais 2004; Gümrükçü 2010). This growing knowledge and collaboration among local and transnational activists accumulated in what may be called the native manifestations of the GJM in Turkey, e.g. the formation of provincial social forums, the Social Forum of Turkey (2005), and a forerunner organization named Coalition for Peace and Global Justice (*Küresel Barış ve Adalet Koalisyonu*) (2003) inspired by Tariq Ali's famous petition.

In Turkey, the rise of the GJM largely overlapped with the anti-war mobilization against the U.S. occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. The protest cycle that took place roughly between 2002 and 2005 was no doubt the GJM's most remarkable contribution to the enrichment of democratic practices in Turkey. In early 2003, the AKP government drafted a resolution (known as *1 Mart tezkeresi*) licensing the Turkish army to take part in the occupation of Iraq, and additionally allow the deployment of U.S. troops within Turkish borders for a period of six months. The ongoing protest cycle peaked on March 1 2003 in Ankara when the resolution was being voted in the parliament. Tens of thousands came together on one of the central squares, Sıhhiye, in Ankara in a grand anti-war coalition composed of numerous civil society organizations (reportedly more than 100) (*Milliyet* 02.03.2003). 5000 policemen were deployed, but no clashes occurred. The resolution was rejected²⁰. Whatever the motivations of the MPs, the protest cycle definitely contributed to the outcome of the parliamentary vote. After 2005, however, the GJM lost momentum with the de-mobilization of anti-war protests.

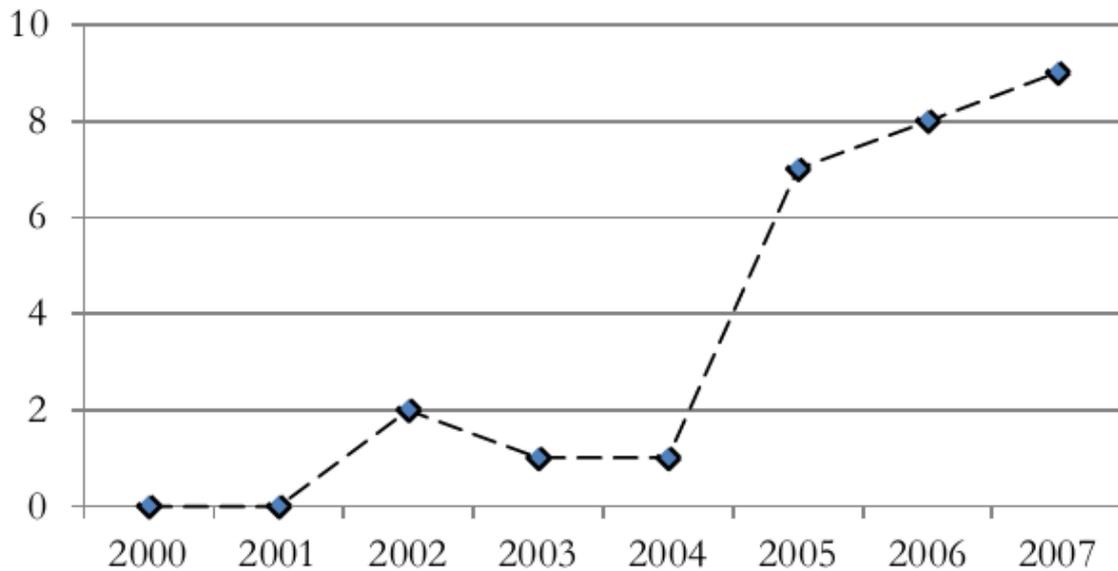
Democracy and anti-coup platforms

A peculiar case that has lain at the crossroads of contentious politics and democracy since the late 1980s merits some attention here. This is the ad hoc platforms that bring together many civil society organizations such as labor unions, vocational associations, human rights groups and other types of NGOs with a shared agenda of democratization and/or a common stance against military interventions. Examples of such platforms existed in the 1990s; the so-called Labor and Democracy Platform was probably the most vocal case (Koç 2010). In the last ten years, local and provincial variations of these multi-player

²⁰See "Turkey rejects U.S. troops proposal" at http://articles.cnn.com/2003-03-01/world/sprj.irq.main_1_al-samoud-demetrius-perricos-prime-minister-abdullah-gul?_s=PM:WORLD, accessed on 14.08.2012.

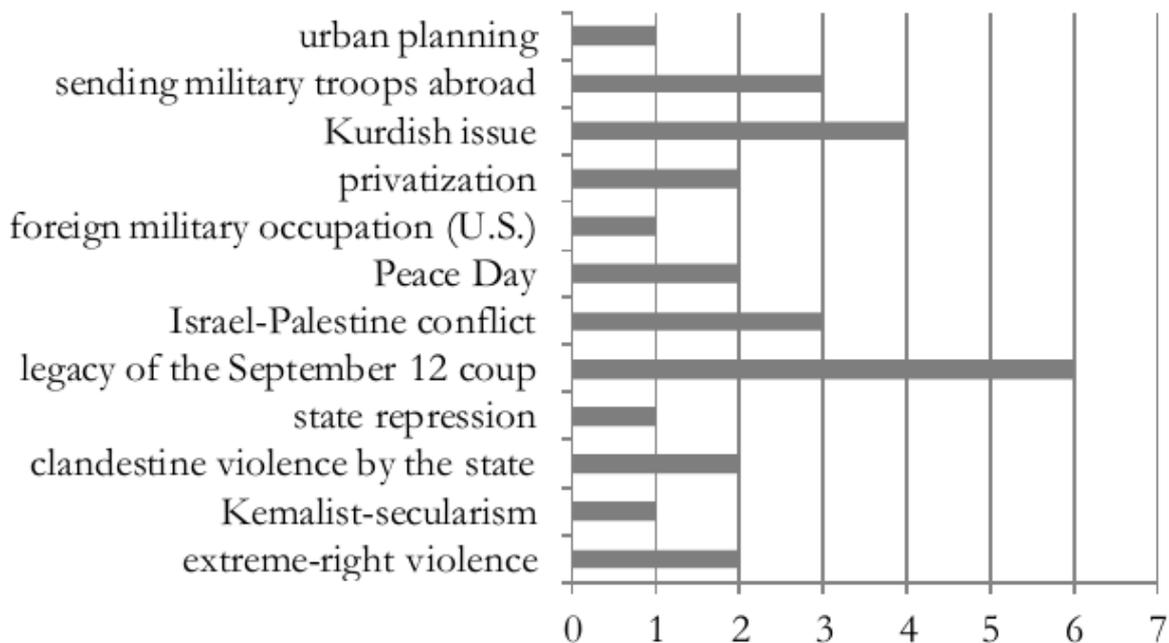
yet interim coalitions arose alongside the nationwide platforms. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate their street mobilizations and specific issues raised as covered by the news media.

Figure 3 – Protest events organized by democracy and anti-coup platforms



Source: protest event data (AA)

Figure 4 – Issues of protest events by democracy and anti-coup platforms



Source: protest event data (AA)

It seems that protest became a more and more common strategy for these democracy and anti-coup platforms, as indicated by the upward trend. The range of topics addressed during their events is also considerable. However, the fact

that these platforms use the label of democracy does not automatically make them champions of democracy. A deeper investigation of the groups involved in particular platforms would probably uncover that – as in the case of Kemalist-secularism – some favor the political status quo rather than democratic progression. Thus, one needs to be rather cautious regarding the implicitly undemocratic motivations of pro-democracy mobilizations, and to distinguish the different actors.

A further case: the ARI Movement

This is a pro-democracy initiative that dates back to 1994. A small group of well-educated, young Istanbulites started lobbying the existing political parties to discuss the ‘need for change’ in the country. At first they developed close ties with the center-right ANAP, yet later on in 1998 the group decided to move on independently, i.e. without links to any political party, and adhered to a movement form. Notwithstanding the label of ‘movement’ in its name, the ARI operates more like a think-tank that produces projects, publishes reports, and conducts public opinion research²¹. In other words, the political objectives of the ARI Movement do not derive from a contentious agenda, nor do they resort to protest mobilization strategies. Especially concerned with the encouragement of youth to take part in what they describe as “volunteerism”, the promotion of “civil society’s role in the creation and dissemination of information”, and “structural and intellectual changes in the social and political arenas”, the ARI juxtaposes the rule of law, transparency, ethical values, accountability, and participatory democracy as main principles to advocate²². It collaborates with likeminded organizations such as the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TÜSEV) and the Social Democracy Foundation (SODEV), which are just two examples of civil society associations that burgeoned after the early 1990s.

Concluding remarks

This report has shed light on the transition(s) to democracy in Turkey and the involvement of civil society and contentious actors in the main episodes of democratization processes. It appears that periods of transition in Turkey were overtly elite-driven, leaving little space for contributions from below. Specific political contingencies and structural conditions did not favor the latter’s active engagement in the transitions. Of course, these situations differed according to the contextual characteristics of the day, and this is why particular periods have

²¹The institutionalization of the ARI was completed through the establishment of the ARI Social Participation and Development Association in 2003 with headquarters in Istanbul, and of the ARI Foundation in 2010 in Washington, D.C.

²²See http://www.ari.org.tr/english/index.php?page=mission_vision_and_principles, accessed on 13.08.2012.

been covered separately, if not independently. However, despite unfavorable political opportunities and high costs stemming from the threat of repression, some forms of mobilization, protest, and reaction did exist, at times carried out by actors who were not necessarily democratically oriented. The important thing is to document such experiments as notable and valuable experiences for subsequent generations of contentious politics.

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