

THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION in TURKEY

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In recent years, there has emerged an upsurge of interest in, and a global attraction to, Turkey and its modern history -a history that has demonstrated that a secular, democratic, constitutional democracy is possible in a social setting where the population is dominantly Muslim. As our globalizing world has been framed increasingly by the discourse of “the clash of civilizations”, in which not only is Islam codified as a “general Other” that negates secular modernity and liberal democracy, but also, in an orientalist and Eurocentric fashion, it has been linked with terrorism and radical fundamentalism, Turkey and its historical experience of coexisting Islam and modernity has constituted a significant case to be studied and discussed. As a social formation with a large Muslim population, Turkey has succeeded in establishing itself as a modern nation with a strong secular state structure, transforming its political system into a multi-party parliamentary democracy and creating a free-market economy. Moreover, as a social formation located at the intersection of the East and the West, Turkey's identity has always been marked by its will to "reach the contemporary level of civilization," understood as Westernization and Europeanization. In other words, even though Islam has remained a significant symbolic reference in the formation of cultural identity in Turkey, its modern history has been characterized by Westernization as a site of secular modernity, economic progress, and democracy. Moreover, despite the existence of a number of regime breakdowns and democratic-deficit problems in its multi-party system, Turkey has nevertheless persisted in its commitment to parliamentary democracy and its norms. Similarly, Turkey's navigation in Westernization and Europeanization has recently taken the form of “the full accession negotiations with the European Union”. Even if there is still a significant degree of ambiguity in terms of the possible outcome of the accession negotiations, Turkish modernity and democracy has become strongly anchored to the European integration process. It is within this historical context that Islam and its political actors has been able to find for themselves a place in the multi-party parliamentary democracy in

such a strong way as to become the majority government of a strongly secular constitutional regime, as in the case of the Justice and Development Party, hereafter, the AK Party.

Of course, the Turkish experience of modernity and democracy has not been without serious problems and recursive political, economic, and cultural crises. In fact, the history of modern Turkey can be described as one of "success and failure" -- successful in establishing the necessary institutional structures of modernity, such as a nation-state, modern positive law, parliamentary democracy, a market economy, and citizenship, but at the same time a failure in making modernity multicultural, consolidating democracy, creating a stable and sustainable economy, and enshrining rights and freedoms in the exercise of citizenship. As will be elaborated in this paper, it is the simultaneous existence of success and failure that explains the emergence of the paradox that Turkey has been confronted in recent years, that is, while becoming a site of global attraction and interest due mainly to its proactive and constructive foreign policy, Turkey has also faced a serious problems of political and social polarization, and the institutional clash between state elite (mainly military and judiciary) and government. The problem is that the more the global attraction to Turkey places a special emphasis on the role of the AK Party government in Turkey's achievement of the coexistence of Islam with modernity and democracy, the more existing secular middle classes and secular state elite would feel that Turkey's secular modernity is increasing under, and the power of Islamic conservatism is widening and deepening throughout society. In other words, global attraction outside leads to political and social polarization inside.

In this paper, I will provide an account of this paradox, and suggest that the bifurcated nature of Turkish modernity is the key to understanding the paradox that turkey faces today, and that it is only through democratic consolidation that this paradox can be overcome. In substantiating this suggestion, first I will analyze briefly what the recent global attraction to Turkey entails, and focus on the problem of, the need for, democratic consolidation to link domestic governance with proactive foreign policy. Secondly, I will analyze the bifurcated nature of Turkish modernity as the main source of the paradox confronting Turkey today, and locate the recent AK Party experience in it. In conclusion, I will go back to the need to consolidate democracy in Turkey.

Global Attraction: Identity-based perceptions of Turkey

The reason for the recent global attraction to Turkey has to do with the increasing presence and role of Turkey in the following areas:

- The Occupation of Iraq and the Kurdish Question in relation to Northern Iraq
- The Iran Problem and the Future of the Middle East region
- The Russia Question and the Future of Eurasia
- The Crisis of Multiculturalism and the Question of Islam in Europe
- The Clash of Civilizations in Global Politics
- The Global Democratic Governance and the Question of Europe as a Global Actor
- Mediterranean Politics and Identity
- Global Political Economy
- Global Energy Politics
- The Membership of the Security Council of the United Nations

Moreover, a quick glance at the global academic and public debate on Turkey and its proactive foreign policy reveals the fact that there have emerged a number of identity-based perceptions that have been attributed to the role of Turkey in our globalizing world, that is:

- (a) As a modern nation-state formation with democratic governance and a secular constitutional structure, Turkey is a "**model country**" for the possibility of stability and peace in Iraq in particular, and in the Middle East and Islamic world in general. In fact, with its more than a century long modernizing reform and constitutional democracy experience, Turkey is the most successful example in the world today of a secular democracy within a Muslim society;
- (b) Turkey's modern history constitutes both an "**alternative to the clash of civilizations thesis**" (as in the case of the Inter-Civilization Dialogue Project, led by the United Nations, Spain, and Turkey) and a "**significant historical experience**" from which the

Islamic world, and in particular countries such as Malaysia, Morocco, Indonesia, can learn in their attempts to democratize itself. Particularly instructive may be the AKP and its ability to establish an electoral victory through its claim to be a "conservative-democratic center right party”;

- (c) With its ability to sustain, and even deepen, its secular democracy in a peaceful manner, along with its "dual identity as both a Middle Eastern and European country," Turkey's recent governance by the AKP has made Turkey a "**pivotal state/regional power**" in the process of fighting against global terrorism without making Islam the focal point of opposition;
- (d) In the deepening of Turkey-EU relations and the beginning of full accession negotiations, there is an increasing perception, especially among economic and foreign policy actors, that Turkey is a "**unique case in the process of European integration**" with the ability to help Europe to become a multicultural and cosmopolitan model for a deep regional integration, a space for the creation of a post-territorial community on the basis of post-national and democratic citizenship, and also a global actor with a capacity to contribute to the emergence of democratic global governance. The possibility of Europe to gain these qualities depends to some extent on its decision about the accession of Turkey in the European Union as a full member; and
- (e) With its dynamic economy, recursive growth rates, and young population, Turkey has become one of the important, but not pivotal (such as India, Brazil), "**emerging market economies** of today's economic globalization. Moreover, although Turkey does not produce oil or natural gas, it has recently begun to act as an "**energy hub**" for the transmission of natural gas between the Middle East, the Post-Soviet Republics and Europe.

Alternative Modernity and Constitutional Democracy

All these perceptions of Turkey and its proactive foreign policy have to do with the concept of soft power, which is the fact that Turkey is the most successful example in the world today of a

secular democracy within a Muslim society. In fact, it is through its commitment to secularism and democracy, as well as on the basis of its success in economic dynamism, that Turkey has presented a significant historical experience of the coexistence of Islam, democracy and liberal market values in a time when the modern world has been experiencing a growing suspicion toward multiculturalism in general, and toward Islam in particular, as in the case of Europe and America. Turkey in its recent experience has proved that coexistence rather than clash is possible, and it is through coexistence that not only can a secular constitutional and democratic system be possible in a national formation with a large Muslim population, but that the national formation can also play a proactive and constructive role in the creation of peace and stability in global politics. To appreciate, as well as learn from, this experience, it is useful to attempt to analyze Turkish foreign policy from the perspective of “modernity” and “democracy.” The global perception of Turkey as an important soft power and pivotal state derives from the suggestion that Turkey’s alternative route to secular modernity and democracy makes the Turkish experience interesting and important, especially in the recent restructuring of world affairs, in which the question of how to face Islam has been brought to the fore. Turkey’s experience of alternative modernity and democracy constitutes one, but an effective answer to this question. This answer also involves an important clue by which to explain why the recent global attraction to Turkey has been perceived negatively in Turkey.

The perspective of modernity, in this sense, provides a useful analytical device to demonstrate in a sociological and historical way not only the peculiar nature of Turkish modernity, giving rise to the simultaneous existence of global attraction outside and social polarization inside. Here, it is useful to focus briefly on the concept of modernity, and in doing so, learn from three important theoretical accounts, all of which contribute to advancing our understanding of Turkish modernity. First, by relying on Charles Taylor’s “Two Theories of Modernity,” in which he differentiates what he calls “cultural” and “acultural” theories of modernity, one could employ “a cultural theory of modernity.”¹ Whereas cultural theory recognizes cultural differences and the peculiar nature of each culture, and therefore maintains that the association of modernity with the West does not result in the idea that the other cultures can modernize by following and imitating

¹ C. Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity”, in D.P. Gaonkar (ed) *Alternative Modernities*, Duke University Press, London, 2001, pp.172-197.

Western modernity, acultural theory, on the other hand, sees modernity as the “development and growth” of Western reason, secularism, and instrumental rationality. By employing a cultural theory of modernity, one sees that since its inception Turkish modernity was mainly a project of political modernity aiming to establish a modern nation-state, a modern national economy, and modern national law, but lacking a social ethos in terms of creating a secular/individual-based national identity.² Thus, Turkish modernity has achieved the establishment of political modernity, but this did not mean the demise of the role of Islam in everyday life as a main symbolic reference for identity-formation. Secondly, by relying on Gerard Delanty’s analysis of modernity, we could suggest that alternative modernity emerges from within the conflictual nature of modernity, involving a tension between political modernization (state and economy) and cultural modernization (identity), or between autonomy and fragmentation.³ Following Delanty, alternative modernities can be approached as historically and discursively constructed societal claims, embedded in cultural modernization and its recent fragmentation and aiming at altering the state-centric and secular model of Turkish modernity. Thirdly, by relying on the theory of alternative, multiple or global modernities, one could make a suggestion which has two dimensions: the first is the recognition of the fact that modernity is not one but many, meaning that there are different and varying articulations of economy and culture in different national sites; and secondly that in our globalizing world, as well as in the post-September/11 world, modernity is becoming distinct from Westernization, meaning that a disjuncture between modernity and Westernization has been emerging and increasingly deepening in recent years. In fact, in our globalizing world, we have been observing that there have emerged more and more cases where the claim to political and economic modernity (the nation state and market capitalism) is not involving the acceptance of the Western secular and individual-based reason.⁴ Modernity cannot be associated or identified with Westernization. The acceptance of modernity does not necessarily and automatically lead to a secular-individualistic culture and self. From Japan to China, from Iran to Malaysia, from Islamic fundamentalism to Occidentalism, in a wide spectrum, the increasing disjuncture between modernity and Westernization, and the concomitant emergence of the idea of alternative, multiple and global modernities, together are shaping global politics in recent years. As a matter of fact, it is the recent experience of Turkey in coexisting

² See S. Mardin, *Din ve İdeoloji* (Religion and Ideology), İletişim, İstanbul, 1999.

³ G. Delanty, *Social Theory in a Changing World*, Polity, Cambridge, 1999.

⁴ S.N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities”, *Daedalus*, vol.129, no.1, pp.1-31.

Islam, democracy and free market values by maintaining its secular constitutional structure that has demonstrated to the world that a social formation with a large Muslim population can fulfill the disjuncture between modernity and Westernization without necessarily accepting the clash of civilization thesis.

However, coexistence rather than clash also needs democracy, in fact, a “consolidated version of democracy which makes the articulation of modernity and democracy possible”.⁵ For this reason, the perspective of modernity has to be completed with a critical analysis of the history of contemporary Turkey from the perspective of democracy and its consolidation. As has been suggested by many, although Turkey’s travel in modernity has always involved a reference to democracy, this history has revealed a paradox: a “success” in the transition to democracy, but a “failure” in making it consolidated.⁶ It was in fact the case that Turkey until very recently had displayed a “paradoxical development” in terms of the simultaneous presence of its “success” in modernization and democratization and its “failure” both to make its modernity more liberal, plural, and multicultural, and to consolidate and deepen its democracy by making it more participatory, stable and strong. In other words, even though Turkey had been successful in creating a modern political and institutional structure necessary for *political modernity* (that is, the emergence of the nation-state, modern state bureaucracy, secularism and citizenship), as well as in the process of *the transition to democracy* (that is, the transforming its single-party political system into a multi-party parliamentary democracy), it had failed to consolidate and deepen its modernity and democracy. This paradox had manifested itself (a) in the problem of regime breakdowns (1960, 1971, 1980) in the multi-party parliamentary system, (b) in the emergence of identity-based conflicts since the 1980s (the question of Islamic resurgence, the Kurdish question, the problem of civil society), and (c) in the problem of strong-state and its clientalistic, corruption-based and populist mode of governing. All these problems have been the main obstacles to the consolidation of democracy in Turkey.

⁵ See, E.F. Keyman and Z. Öniş, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World*, Bilgi University Publications, İstanbul, 2007.

⁶ See I. Sunar, *State, Society and Democracy*, Bahcesehir University Publications, İstanbul, 2004, E. Özbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2000, F. Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity*, One World, Oxford, 2003, and E.F. Keyman and Z. Öniş, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World* .

A consolidated democracy includes both a formal understanding of democracy as a political regime with institutional norms and procedures, and, more importantly, a substantial understanding of democracy as a specific type of society in which the language of “right, freedoms, and responsibilities” constitutes a dominant normative and legal norm concerning not only the question of “the regulation (or the governance) of societal affairs” but also the question of “the creation of unity in a diverse and multicultural social setting” in a given society.⁷ By democratic consolidation, it is usually meant the deepening of democracy in state—society/individual relations, and one can define the deepening process in behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional terms:

“Behaviorally, a democratic regime in a territory is consolidated when no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a non-democratic regime or turning to violence or foreign intervention to secede from the state.

Attitudinally, a democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life in a society such as theirs and when the support for anti-system alternatives is quite small or more or less isolated from the pro-democratic forces.

Constitutionally, a democratic regime is consolidated when governmental and non governmental forces alike, throughout the territory of the state, become subjected to, and habituated to, the resolution of conflict within the specific laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process”.⁸

Of course, these dimensions imply that in order for democracy to be consolidated, in addition to a well-functioning state:

“Five other interconnected and mutually reinforcing conditions must also exist or be crafted for a democracy to be consolidated. First, the conditions must exist for the development of a free and lively civil society. Second, there must be a relatively autonomous and valued political society. Third, there must be a rule of law to ensure legal guarantees for citizens’ freedoms and independent associational life. Fourth, there must be a state bureaucracy that is usable by the new democratic government. Fifth, there must be an institutionalized economic society”.⁹

⁷ E.F. Keyman and Z. Öniş, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World*, chp.1.

⁸ E. Özbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, p.14.

⁹ E. Özbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics*, p.15.

All these behavioral patterns and reinforcing conditions indicate that democratic consolidation involves both a formal/procedural understanding of democracy and a substantial/societal understanding of democracy, and more importantly a simultaneous existence and operation of both. Within the context of Turkey, the history of democracy demonstrates a success in terms of transition but a failure with respect to consolidation. In this sense, the problem in Turkey has less to do with democratic transition, that is, the formal/operation of democracy, but more to do with its deepening in societal affairs.

On the basis of these methodological openings, developed on the basis of the concepts of alternative modernity and democratic consolidation, it can be suggested that Turkey with its ability to achieve the coexistence of Islam, secular modernity and democracy constitutes an alternative modernity facing the problem of democratic consolidation. Moreover, it is democratic consolidation that strengthens the recent perception in global academic and public discourse of Turkey as an important actor and pivotal state whose experience of modernity and democracy should be taken seriously by any attempt aiming at going beyond the clash of civilizations, beyond the orientalist divide between the West and the East, and more importantly beyond the culturally essentialist and fundamentalist desires to codify difference as the dangerous Other. Yet a viable Turkish foreign policy with strong soft power capabilities and capacities requires a consolidated democracy. If so, the question to be answered is, why Turkey has not consolidated its democracy? Why is it that proactive foreign policy has not gone hand in hand enhancing the quality of Turkish democracy. One possible answer lies in the bifurcated nature of Turkish modernity, which, I suggest, despite its system-transforming capacity, has nevertheless been one of the basic obstacles to democratic consolidation. In what follows, I will provide, first, an account of the bifurcated nature of Turkish modernity, which will also enable me to analyze critically the ability of the AK Party to have significant electoral achievements leading to its enduring political power as a strong majority government. This analysis will reveal that unless democracy is consolidated in Turkey, Turkey's alternative modernity, carried out by the AK Party successfully and proactively in global context, will remain vulnerable to political and social instabilities inside.

Turkey's Bifurcated Modernity and Conservative Democracy

In his introduction to the fourth volume of *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, Reşat Kasaba suggests that the history of modern Turkey involves repeatedly occurring “swings between” the possibility of democratization and “retreat to political closure.”¹⁰ Indeed, from its inception in 1923 as an independent and modern nation state until today, it is these wild swings, which have created constant pull backs from “points of no returns”, or from “thresholds of new eras”, that provide an adequate picture of modern Turkey. For Kasaba, the major reason for the occurrence and endurance of the wild swings is that

“Turkey has been pursuing a bifurcated programme of modernisation consisting of an institutional and a popular component which, far from being in agreement, have been conflicting and undermining each other. The bureaucratic and military elite that has controlled Turkey’s institutional modernisation for much of this history insists that Turkey cannot be modern unless Turks uniformly subscribe a same set of rigidly defined ideals that are derived from European history, and they have done their best to create new institutions and fit the people of Turkey into their model of nationhood. In the mean time, Turkey has been subject to world-historical processes of modernisation, characterized by the expansion of capitalist relations, industrialisation, urbanisation and individuation as well as the formation of nation-states and the notions of civil, human and economic rights. These have altered people’s lives and created new and diverse groups and ways of living that are vastly different from the blueprint of modernity that had been held up by the elite. Hence, Turkey’s modernisation in the past century has created a disjuncture where state power and social forces have been pushed apart, and the civilian and military elite that controlled the state has insisted on having the upper hand in shaping the direction and pace of Turkey’s modernisation”.¹¹

No period in the history of modern Turkey has demonstrated the significant and system-transforming ramifications of the “bifurcated programme of modernisation,” and the “disjuncture between state power and social forces” that it has brought about, better than the AK Party experience. Achieving consecutive electoral victories as a political party *vis-a-vis* its opponents in 2002, 2004, 2007 and 2009, playing a crucial role in the transformation of Turkey into one of the key and pivotal actors in world politics and global political economy, but at the same time, creating strong scepticism and fear among the secular elites and secular middle classes for the

¹⁰ R. Kasaba, “Introduction”, in R. Kasaba (ed) *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume (4)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 2008, p.1.

¹¹ R. Kasaba, “Introduction”, p.2.

future of the secular constitutional regime, the AK Party experience since 2002 has constituted the most significant era in Turkish politics, democracy and modernity.¹² It is in this era that Turkey has undergone significant changes and transformations, lived and felt in each and every sphere of life, ranging from proactive foreign policy to dynamic economy, from the beginning of the full accession negotiations with EU to being one of the architects of the inter-civilizational dialogue initiative. The country at the same time faced serious problems from terror, violence and societal polarization to the assassinations, murders, human right violations, and from creating a strong majority government capable of bringing about stability and good governance to the emergence of the risk of “political impasse” as a result of the party closure cases, postmodern military quo attempts and increasingly conflictual patterned interactions between the state elite and government. While the adjective “new” has been used frequently to delineate the power of these significant processes of transformation, such as “the new Turkish Republic”, “the new middle class”, “the new era in Turkey”, and “the new Turkey”, the AK Party experience has also involved significant non-democratic attempts, ranging from party-closure cases to military ultimatoms, aimed at interfering parliamentary politics in the name of saving the existing secular regime. In this sense, the AK Party experience has been an illustrative and telling case of a major swing between transformation and retreat, between change and status quo, and between proactivism and scepticism.

The consecutive electoral successes of AK Party since 2002 have generated a political earthquake-like impacts on Turkish politics and modernity. In the November 3, 2002 national election, the three governing parties that had formed the coalition government after the 1999 national election, as well as the two opposition parties, failed to pass the 10 % national threshold; thrown outside the parliament, they all found themselves as the complete losers of the election. The sole winner of the election was the AK Party. By receiving 34.2 % of the popular votes and with the aid of the undemocratic 10% national threshold, the party gained 66 % of the

¹² In all these general (2002 and 2007) and municipality (2004 and 2009) elections, AKP has gained electoral success enough to form a strong majority government or to win most of provincial or greater city mayorships, and general council elections. AKP's electoral support was 34,3% in November 2002, 46,6% in July 2007, 41,7% in March 2004, and 38,8% in March 2009 elections. These results doubled the electoral support of the opposition parties, and constituted what can be called an electoral hegemony of AKP in Turkish politics. For a detailed and comprehensive account of these elections see A. Çarkoğlu, “Turkey's Local Elections of 2009”, *Insight Turkey*, 2009; and “New Electoral Victory for the ‘Pro-Islamists’ or the ‘New-Centre Right’?”, *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 12:4, 2007, pp.501-519.

parliamentary seats (that is, 363 of 550 seats) and constituted a strong majority government. Although the AK Party had come into existence as one of the two parties that emerged from within the constitutionally-banned *Virtue Party* whose Islamic identity and discourse has been seen by the Supreme Court as a threat to the secular foundation of the Turkish Republic, the AK Party's electoral success, leading to its majority government, was welcomed by a large part of Turkish society longing for political stability and effective governing. On the evening of July 22, 2007, the election results created another political earthquake. This time, the ruling AK Party won "a landslide victory, receiving 47% of the vote, the largest share for a single party since the elections of 1957, and it was only the second occasion since 1954, in which the incumbent party significantly increased its vote share in a subsequent election."¹³ Despite a number of serious attempts undertaken by the military, judiciary, opposition parties, media, and civil society organizations to confront the AK Party's mode of governance on the basis of the party's alleged intentions to make Turkey a moderately Islamic society by dismantling the secular foundations of the political regime --the attempts whose concrete manifestations were observed in the widespread resentment in secular segments of society to the announcement of Abdullah Gül as the AKP's candidate for the new president of Turkey-- the July 22, 2007 election resulted not only with the fortification of the power of the AK Party government, but also in the elimination of all the attempts aiming at refraining Abdullah Gül from presidency. The AKP won against the actors and discourses defining themselves as the "defenders of secularism," reinforced its majority government and societal support; soon after the election, Abdullah Gül became the new president of Turkey.

Similar developments have occurred in March 2004 and March 2009 municipal elections. In both elections, despite the decline of its votes to 38,8% in March 2009, not only has AKP won most of the provincial or greater city mayorships, "the opposition gained little and divided across many modest to smaller size parties, and "no single opposition party...gathered the electoral momentum" with which to present itself a strong candidate to end the AK Party majority government in the coming 2011 general elections.¹⁴ After March 2009 municipality elections, the AK Party seems to have returned back to its reform-based politics with which it had gained a

¹³ R. Karakaya Polat, "The 2007 Parliamentary Elections in Turkey", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vo.62, no.1, p.130..

¹⁴ A. Çarkoğlu, "Turkey's Local Elections of 2009", p.

significant degree of domestic and international support and legitimacy in the 2002-2006 period.¹⁵ Such recent attempts of the AKP in the areas of democracy, foreign policy and economy, as “democratic opening” to cope effectively the Kurdish question, “the good-neighbourhood policy-based” attempts to enhance peace and dialogue in Turkey-Armenia relations, the abolishment of visa requirements to deepen Turkey-Syria relations, and initiating an economic reform package to revitalize Turkish economy, all indicate that the party is preparing itself for the 2011 national election in a way to maintain its popular support and to continue to govern Turkey as a strong majority government.

Moreover, the AK Party seemed to know that the more reformist in its domestic politics and the more proactive in its foreign policy the party is, the more legitimacy and support it has both inside and outside, and the stronger it becomes vis-a-vis challenges stemming from secular state elites, mainly from military and judiciary. The fact that since 2002, Turkey has been governed by the strong majority AK Party government did not mean that the party has been without confrontation and challenge. In fact, the party been confronted by both military and judiciary in the form of strong criticisms and ultimatums about the alleged anti-secular discourse and activities of the party. In fact, just after its electoral victory in the 2007 national elections, in the beginning of 2008, the AK Party faced a very serious risk of being closed by the Constitutional Court. In 2008, a closure case was brought against the AK Party by the Prosecutor General with the claim that the party became the centre of anti-secular activities. The intense discussions about the closure case dominated politics, and the case became the exclusive focus of Turkish politics. On 30 July 2008, the Constitutional Court announced its verdict, which was “not to close the AK Party”. Even though there emerged a variety of interpretations of what the verdict involved and implied in terms of the alleged anti-secularisms of the discourse and activities of the party, the verdict meant politically the continuation of the enduring power of the AKP as a strong majority government of Turkey.

The AK Party has achieved its enduring power through a successful electoral strategy. This strategy has four dimensions:

¹⁵ For an analysis of the reform-based politics of the AKP in the period between 2002-2006, and its move away from reform since 2007, see E.F. Keyman and Z. Oniř, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World*, Bilgi University Publications, İstanbul, 2007, chp.3 and 4.

- (i) **Conservative democracy** which is proactive, market-oriented and reform-based in its interaction to society, but at the same time “caring” and assuming a supervisor role in its relation to economy. In this context, the AK Party claims that in its governing, it will change the existing state structure which is detached from society and blind to its needs and demands, and which therefore functions as a closed, ineffective and undemocratic system of rule, and instead create an effective and post-developmental state;
- (ii) **Philanthropic and regulated neoliberalism** which is growth oriented and enriching. The AKP argues that it promotes a free-market economy and sees it as the basis for growth, to the extent that it contributes to further industrialization of the Turkish economy and its consolidation on the basis of financial stability and a strong economy;
- (iii) **Service-based politics** which is to be established both in terms of the distribution of wealth and welfare services, and with respect to the domain of recognition in which social segments will not be discriminated in terms of their different cultural beliefs. At this level, focusing on poverty, the AK Party’s economic program differentiated itself from the other parties, and linked itself with different segments of society in need of help and caring; and
- (iv) **Proactive foreign policy** which indicated a major shift in Turkey’s foreign policy behaviour, and aims at giving it a proactive, multi-dimensional, constructive quality. Proactive foreign policy, as will be analyzed in detail later, means the increasing “soft power” role of Turkey in world politics and international relations. The AK Party saw economy, security and identity as relational, and considered them as intertwined sources of Turkey’s economic modernization process and proactive role.

Working on the basis of these principles, the AK Party has claimed that it could govern the recent transformation process of Turkey better than others, and make Turkey strong actor in the globalizing world. In what follows, I will offer an historical-institutionalist and political-economic analysis of the AK Party governance by taking into account the question of transformation. This analysis, I believe, also allows us both to approach the AK Party without ideological prejudices and to see the possibility of the emergence of certain contradictions, limitations and democratic deficits in the course of its governing Turkey.

Transformation and Turkey as a “complex society”

At this point, it is useful to pause our discussion of the AK Party experience, and turn our attention to the history of modern Turkey from the perspective of the question of transformation, for it is through an analysis of the on-going and complex process of transformation that we can understand how the AK Party has achieved electoral victory by putting into practice its conservative-liberal synthesis.

The history of modern Turkey has usually been analyzed either with reference to the concept of “rupture”, which indicated that the declaration of Turkey as a new, independent and modern nation-state in 1923 constitutes a “rupture” in history, or by placing a strong emphasis on the continuities between the new regime and the Ottoman Empire. The studies in which rupture is emphasized view the history of modern Turkey as a process of nation-state based modernization since 1923. On the contrary, in the studies where continuity is emphasized this history is seen as a process of top-down, state-centric and authoritarian modernization, whose sources and origins can be traced in the late-Ottoman Empire.¹⁶ All of these studies provide valuable, but nevertheless partial accounts of modern Turkey. Here I suggest that there is another way to study modern Turkey. Insofar as the history of modern Turkey is a history of “modern nation-building” and “nation-state building” defined along “a will to reach the contemporary level of civilization”, it is also “a process of transformation”; transformation of a traditional society into a modern society, which was to be achieved by the state through a project of modernity, premised on the equation of modernity with progress, that is, on the making of a modern nation through the introduction and the dissemination of Western reason and rationality into what was regarded a traditional and backward social formation. According to Şerif Mardin, the process of transformation in the making of modern Turkey involved: (i) the transition in the political system of authority from personal rule to impersonal rules and regulations; (ii) the shift in understanding the order of the universe from divine law to positivist and rational thinking; (iii) the shift from a community founded upon the "elite-people cleave" to a "populist-based" community; and (iv) the

¹⁶ For detail, see R. Kasaba (ed), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*.

transition from a religious-community to a nation-state.¹⁷ These transitions were necessary and realized as the pre-condition for Turkey to live as an advanced and civilized nation in the midst of contemporary civilization.

I have explored elsewhere the ramifications and manifestations of the process of transformation of Turkey into a modern society through the realization of a nation-state, capitalist economy, national identity, and industrialization, and suggested that modernization as a process of transformation, even though it has involved significant ruptures in history, still continues.¹⁸ The first rupture was the transition to parliamentary democracy in 1945-1950, and since then Turkey's modernization entailed a significant reference to the question of democratization. Despite frequent regime breakdowns and significant democracy deficits, the history of modern Turkey has been, and today remains as, a process of modernization with democratization since 1950. Turkey's exposure to globalization occurred in the 1980s primarily but not only in the area of economy, also in culture and politics. Since then, globalization has constituted the world-historical context of the transformation process of Turkey, as it has brought into existence the squeeze of "the national", i.e. the nation-state, national economy, national identity, between the global forces and local dynamics. The discourses of minimal/effective state, free market rationality, and identity/difference have gained power and popularity, and increasingly become the focus of politics. Globalization has generated significant and system-transforming impacts on politics, economy and identity in Turkey, and it has become impossible to understand and govern the country without reference to globalization. Thus, since the 1980s, and especially since the 1990s, the process of modernization involved globalization, and acted as modernization with democratization and globalization. In the year 2000, Turkey has faced a new rupture as the country has been granted candidate status for the full membership of the EU by the European Council in the Helsinki Summit of December, 1999. This decision has also led to the deepening of Turkey's European transformation, as it demanded that Turkey should initiate a democratic and constitutional reform process to further and upgrade its democracy. Since 2000, Turkey has been undergoing a process of European transformation, covering almost all the areas of the governing structure and the state-society/individual interactions. Since October 3, 2005, Turkey-

¹⁷ S. Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 2006, p.19.

¹⁸ See E.F. Keyman, *The Good Governance of Turkey*, Bilgi University Publications, İstanbul, 2008.

EU relations have been taking place in the form of “full accession negotiations”, and, despite the existing problems of uncertainty and lack of trust, the process of transformation of Turkey has had a strong and effective “EU-anchor”.

Two points can be extrapolated from this brief account of the history of modern Turkey. The first is that the process of transformation is an ongoing, multi-dimensional, multiplex and complex one, insofar as it involves;

- (i) 1923-the present: the process of modernization,
- (ii) 1950-the present: the process of democratization,
- (iii) 1980-the present: the process of globalization,
- (iv) 2000-the present: the process of Europeanization.

It can be suggested, in this sense, that the present nature of Turkey is characterized by the simultaneous and intertwined existence of all four these processes --modernization, democratization, globalization, and Europeanization-- as well as their impacts on the economy, politics, and identity. These processes and their impacts, which together constitute Turkey’s transformation into a much more “complex society”, require an attempt to go beyond the bifurcated programme of modernization, an attempt to fill the disjuncture between state power and social forces, and a call for flexible, pragmatic and reform-oriented governance. In other words, the present nature of Turkey, in Ulrich Beck’s terminology, cannot be reduced to a social formation of “simple modernity”; instead, we can talk about a “reflexive modernity” whose context is no longer national, but also global and regional, and in which social transformation has multi-dimensional sources and multiplex structure, as well as multi-causal and simultaneously existing relations.¹⁹

Moreover, this complex sociology of Turkey has been complicated further by the multiplication of political cleavages as a result of the multi-dimensional process of transformation. Since 1923, throughout the process of transformation of Turkey, a number of political cleavages, each corresponding to the different dimensions of modernization, have occurred. These political cleavages can be listed and categorized in the following way:

¹⁹ See U. Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics*, Polity, London, 2000, and also U. Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, Polity, London, 2006.

- (i) 1923-the present: the centre-periphery cleavage
- (ii) 1950-the present: the left-right cleavage
- (iii) 1980-the present: the global-national cleavage
- (iv) 2000-the present: the identity-citizenship cleavage

The present nature of Turkish politics contains in itself all these cleavages, simultaneously and in an intertwined fashion. They together require an understanding of Turkey as a complex society whose good and just governance entails an attempt to cope with all of these cleavages at the same time. This means that today the question of governing Turkey should be posed, more precisely, as that of “governing a complex” society, going through the processes of modernization, democratization, globalization and Europeanization, bringing about complex challenges, risks, but also potentials, emerging from within the centre-periphery, left-right, global-national and identity-citizenship cleavages.

In fact, in addition to its main functions of defining the AK Party and differentiating it from other parties, the conservative-liberal synthesis has also been a response to the question of “governing Turkey as a complex society.” The AK Party has developed and implemented its response by positioning itself in politics and in front of the electorate as a globalist and pro-EU “centre-right party” with a conservative-democrat political identity, and attempted cope with these cleavages by locating itself both in the centre and in the right-axis of politics, allying with globalization and Europeanization. In doing so, it has also claimed to be the main actor and carrier of the process of transformation of Turkey. The AK Party has made use of transformation, such that it was not regarded as a challenge but instead a positive vehicle by which to increase its electoral support, its political power and its societal (both domestic and global) legitimacy and acceptance. It is in here that the success of the AK Party lies and becomes subject to strong confrontations by the reactionary nationalisms and politics of the opposition parties. As the AK Party has become more powerful, and its societal acceptance as the main and only actor in responding to the governance of Turkey as a complex society has expanded, the opposition parties have increasingly reacted by taking a highly sceptic position on globalization and Europeanization; they placed a strong emphasis on the risks that the process of transformation poses to Turkey, and developed reactionary and security-oriented reactions to both the recent global attractions to Turkey and the AK Party. However, as the results of the 2002 and 2007 general elections, and

2004 and 2009 municipal elections have demonstrated, the reactionary and sceptical politics of the opposition parties has not brought any success to the opposition parties. Instead, the AKP has remained in power as a strong majority government, and it is likely that it will continue as such after the 2011 general elections. However, what has also remained is the bifurcated nature of Turkish modernity in which the problem of political and social polarization is embedded.

In Conclusion: the AK Party experience and democratic consolidation

It should be pointed out in this sense the enduring dominance of the AK Party experience in Turkey has not been without problems, confrontations, tensions, and even calls for non-political and undemocratic interventions into politics. In fact, the more the AK Party become the dominant actor of Turkey's recent transformation, the more it has been subject to criticism, scepticism and reaction, especially with respect to its conservative-liberal synthesis, its instrumentalization of democracy, and its political and normative position toward secularism. In the face of such reactions and criticisms, the AK Party experience, rather than solving the problem of the bifurcated nature of Turkish modernity, as well as the disjuncture between state power and social forces, has recently tended to reinforce this problem, and led Turkey to pull back from the democratic and economic reform process, retreating to the state-centric politics. The recent turn in the AKP's mode of governance toward (i) a strong security-oriented political discourse from an economic growth and good governance-based political discourse, (ii) a group interest and "us versus them"-based politics from a service and reform-oriented mode of governance, and (iii) a reactionary nationalist and communitarian language of polarization from a more accommodating and encompassing language of living together has indicated that the conservative-liberal synthesis on which the party acts and operates lacks a strong commitment to democracy and its consolidation. In other words, the power of the AKP, stemming from its transformative role in Turkey's modernization and foreign policy, has not paved the way to the consolidation of democracy. On the contrary, as the AK Party has become powerful, its relation to democracy has become more and more instrumental, demonstrating its lack of normative commitment to democracy and its consolidation. The AK Party has not furthered and upgraded Turkish democracy, and instead, its governance has involved what can be called the "instrumentalization of democracy"; first, by reducing democracy to parliamentary majoritarianism, second, by

privileging a specific and religious right-claims and freedoms over the others, even to the degree of discrimination.²⁰

The democratic deficit of the AK Party means that there is no guarantee that the conservative-liberal synthesis, operating with a claim to the coexistence of Islam, modernity and liberal market norms on the one hand, and a proactive foreign policy behaviour in the post-September/11 world on the other, would bring about electoral victory with which to form a strong majority government. Yet there is no guarantee that the conservative-liberal synthesis would lead to democratic consolidation, sustainable economic development and societal coexistence in Turkey. In this sense, there is no guarantee that, despite its enduring electoral success and political power, the conservative-liberal synthesis would lead to a democratic, just, stable and good governance;

- (i) which will establish a reciprocal and democratic relationship between the state and society, so that the disjuncture between strong but ineffective state power and changing society/social forces can be solved, and that Turkey can put into practice a democratic modernization programme rather than the existing bifurcated one;
- (ii) which will cope effectively with the increasing political and social polarization that has been generating severe negative obstacles to the possibility of living together in a plural and multi-cultural society;
- (iii) which will fight against the problems of poverty, inequality, exclusion, othering, gender inequality, and uneven regional development, in a way to make Turkey a socially just society successful not only in the area of economic growth, but also, and more importantly, in the area of human development; and
- (iv) which will prepare Turkey as a democratic and stable country, strong in the full accession negotiations with the EU, and as a full member, capable of making important contributions to Europe in the areas of economy, security and social cohesion.

Whether or not the AK Party and its conservative-democracy can create a democratic, just, stable and good governance of Turkey still remains to be answered. We know from the AK Party

²⁰ We have seen this tendency of the AKP in “the head scarf affair, as well as in its approach to the demands of Alevis and non-Muslim religious minorities for their religious rights and freedoms, and to the social security and organization rights of the workers.

experience that electoral victory and parliamentary majority in and by themselves do not constitute sufficient conditions for making this desirable vision of Turkey possible. After the 2009 municipal elections, in which the AK Party was unable first time to increase its electoral support, even though it remained its winning party position, there have emerged significant signs indicating that the party is going back to its reformist politics with an emphasis on the importance of democratic consensus and deliberation in the process of coping with fundamental problems confronting Turkish modernity and democracy, such as the Kurdish question, the demands of non-Muslim minorities and Alevites for the protection of their religious freedoms, the women question, the serious problem of poverty and unemployment, to name a few. Recent political initiatives, namely those of “the Kurdish opening”, the “Alevite opening”, revitalizing the accession negotiations with the EU, and “the Judicial Reform”; all indicate that the AK Party has chosen what can be called “the democratic reform initiative” as its main strategy for the coming general elections. That, we know. What we do not know yet is whether or not the AK Party’s reformist politics has political will or normative commitment strong enough to consolidate Turkish democracy institutionally, constitutionally, behaviorally and attitudinally.