



STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

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The Making of the New Turkey: The Rule of Law is a 'Sine Qua Non'!

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Introduction



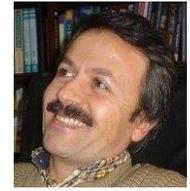
AK Party has managed to recollect the votes it lost in June 7, 2015 elections and emerged as a sole winner of the ballot box in November 1 elections with a landslide victory of 49.5% of the votes. After a five-month-long concussion, therefore, we may rejoice of re-obtaining stability: may it be auspicious to all of us! It is time now for “restoration,” as Prime Minister of Turkey states, or in other words, time to “Make the New Turkey”. This article evaluates the success story Turkey achieved during earlier periods of AK Party’s rule, possible reasons for the recent stagnation, and puts forward suggestions on what to do to make the future brighter.

Background

Turkey's Success Story in 2000s

During 2002-2009 period Turkey had written a dazzling success story. It had not only implemented a series of reforms in the political and economic grounds, but also managed to maintain stability, gave a confidence to internal

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and external markets, and improved the existing standards in many ways in terms of democratization and civilian governance. Macro-economic indicators were rejuvenated with skyrocketing growth rate, GDP per capita, exports and foreign exchange reserves combined with falling inflation and interest rates, as well as declining internal and external debt burden. Revolutionary reforms in the public health sector were accomplished and a great leap forward in the transportation sector was achieved.

To put it directly in plain words, the third term of the government, “the proficiency era” as Recep Tayyip Erdogan called it earlier, has been a period of disappointment in many ways. Macro-indicators were reversed, ceased to improve, in some cases even declined, and annual average growth rate nearly receded by a third. We began to display a country that is at odds with itself as well as abroad. Gezi Park incidents, “Parallel Structure” conflicts, re-emergence of terrorism, increased risk of instability, the frightened foreign capital, stagnating economy, and non-progressive

politics. In other words, an unpleasant outlook, far from the bright one observed in the previous decade became a dominant in the recent years.

Analysis

Conspiracy Theories Do Not Heal Wounds

Once you listen to certain high-level advisors to the State, the culprit is evident: “foreign enemies who devote their full energy to strangle us over the last three hundred years, the colonialist West, and its compradors within country”. Our ancestors had stated that “Do not believe in fortune telling, but do not fully abandon it as well!” If to paraphrase this statement with regard to conspiracy, then we would have: “Do not believe in conspiracy, but also do not abandon it fully.” The political, economic and social disasters that Turkey has experienced over long decades perhaps partially originated from the external enemies, who wants to weaken the country. They might be the ones, who had turned the Gezi Events into some sort of “uprisings,” or supported terror. However, directly linking every single disappointing event to external factors and imposing the whole responsibility over external sources is unconvincing; it is taking the easy way out, and dodging responsibility, self-satisfaction with no solution.

Our ancestors had said “before pricking the packing needle to someone else, smoothly stick the small one to yourself.” That means, in our context, “Before criticizing someone harshly, criticize yourself first.” Before completely pushing the responsibility of every single displeasing events, we must first criticize ourselves, go through the self-criticism, ask the question “where have I done wrong?”

When we ask how did we come from the skyrocketed 2002-2009 Turkey to these days, where did we make mistake and what went

wrong, I can think of some reasons originating from ourselves as well. First of all, we should not forget that when Turkish economy was growing at nearly 7%, and when all the macroeconomic indicators were rapidly improved, the outside world was still the same, the “external enemies” were still there. It was the same EU, which had strongly supported Turkish government while it was struggling against the *military guardianship regime*. Some of our today’s newfound “external enemies” were the same countries, which were among those 151 states, who supported Turkey’s temporary membership to the United Nations Security Council just a few years ago. In this regard “there is nothing new on the Western Front” as they say it. Then it must be us, who have changed, who have entered a new course, and who changed the discourse. In this respect, we have to criticize our stance. If we do not figure out our mistakes, we cannot fix them.

What Went Wrong?

Even though it is considerably difficult to enlist all the problems that have originated from us, nevertheless we can pinpoint some of them as followings: the long-promised new constitution fallen into abeyance, the slackening of EU reforms, the discourse aiming at taming the citizens with government, a political discourse that constantly strains the political atmosphere, the usage of a threatening-bossy tongue towards the big players of the world, the negligence of fighting against corruption charges, the overdoing in combating against the “parallel state structure,” and the dereliction in sustaining the rule of law.

There are “difficulties, the resisting front, traitorous networks, and external enemies.” These all exist. However, the “success” is something that you accomplish despite all difficulties and complications. While you were

struggling against militarism, striving with the party-closure case by the Constitutional Court, standing up against the 27 April, 2007 military memorandum, removing many of the old prohibitions and taboos, and while initiating the Solution Process, the same complications and the same resistance front was still there. Therefore, we should give up producing excuses; we must diagnose the problem and solve it.

First of all, the constitution issue had been left in abeyance. Even though in every elections, lots of promises have been made to make a new constitution, and the first three months of the post-elections provided the perfect political atmosphere for it, necessary actions were not undertaken, leaving the constitution issue unresolved. There are at least four such opportunities: 1) the 22 July 2007 election victory that came right after April 27 e-memorandum by the military, 2) the referendum that enabled the election of the president via popular vote, 3) the 12 September 2010 referendum to amend 30 articles of the constitution, and lastly, 4) the 6 June 2011 elections which AK Party won by %50. If the political will were there, these were the perfect opportunities to pass a brand new constitution. If these opportunities had been utilized and a democratic, civilian, pluralistic, libertarian, market-oriented constitution based on the supremacy of law had been passed, later crises including the Gezi Park uprisings and reemergence of terrorism would have never occurred.

The Taming of the Citizens with State's Iron Feast is Wrong!

Even if not fully implemented, discourses that imply intervening into private life, such as the prohibition of abortion, the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, the control of student

dorms, are wrong. They frighten the public and trigger negative responses. In principle, "the taming of the citizens by the state" is wrong. Dictating a life-style or certain religious-cultural preferences should not be among duties of the government. Let the civil society, NGOs, associations and foundations -not the government- deal with the taming of the people. . Don't forget how we were terribly annoyed by the Kemalists' indoctrination of our children with their ideologies at schools in the past. Now, our indoctrination of the children of those who are not as of us, is equally wrong. We don't need "green Kemalism," or religious-colored state-centered ideology and indoctrination. In this respect, despite numerous demands of the Alawites, the fact that compulsory religious courses were not abolished is a mistake. State attempts to define whether Alawism is a religion, a sect, or a culture is wrong. The fact that the "Alawite Initiative" by the government has been interrupted in the middle of the way is saddening. Recently, the observations and rumors concerning the criteria used for high-level bureaucratic appointments, - rather than eligibility and merit - as discriminatory, tribalistic and nepotistic, favoring the individuals from Black Sea region, Imam-Hatip or Divinity graduates, followers of the National View (Milli Görüş) or certain Sufi sects, are worrying. This implies that the vision presented here is not, unfortunately, very different from the discrimination implemented by the Kemalists or the militarists in the past.

Justice and the Rule of Law is a Must

The overdoing in the recent contention towards the "Parallel State Structure," that hurts consciousness and damages the feeling of justice is seriously worrying. The handcuffing of a number of the veiled women a few weeks ago has created an upheaval in the public

opinion. One can observe that the oversensitivity of the top government officials created by the 17-25 December, 2013 shock produced a golden opportunity for the *incapable greedies* ("kifayetsiz muhterisler") dying for a post in the state bureaucracy. Recently it has been quite common among these poor guys - who know that they cannot defeat their rivals in a fair competition, and that they themselves are less-skilled than their competitors - to betray even their best friends by accusing them of being linked to 'parallelists,' i.e. the Gulen community. If they see that this accusation does not work, then they try such accusations of "fraternizing with the parallelists," or "protecting the parallelists", or at least "not confronting them enough." The worrying part is that these baseless accusations are given an ear, taken seriously and acted accordingly by the state officials, hence treating the accused with *extrajudicial punishment*.

If contemplate thoroughly, "two wrongs do not make one right" as they say. The coup attempts by the so-called "Parallel State Establishment" at 17-25 December 2013, which is, in essence, an endeavor to "capture the state" and rule the country via the security and judiciary bureaucracy is strictly unacceptable. All the blackmailings, illegal phone auditing, releasing the minutes of the secret meetings, are all intolerable, unacceptable, wrong actions. However, it is equally unacceptable to turn the "struggle with the parallel" into a witch-hunt, the harassment of innocent people, and extrajudicial punishment of people who are not involved in any of those illegal actions. Justice is a divine ordain, and is at everyone's necessity. We all need the rule law; now, immediately, with no delay. This is the only way to guarantee to be treated fairly, when we need it someday. The warning of the Holy Creator is clear: "You who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and let not the enmity and

hatred of a people drive you to avoid justice" (see: Qur'an, Ma'idah/8)

Finally, we should underline the challenges of the foreign policy. In essence, the "zero problem with neighbors" policy designed by Mr. Ahmet Davutoglu was exhilarating and peaceful. A policy revolutionized the suspicion-and-security-based traditional 'Kemalist' foreign policy. In virtue of this new foreign policy based on peace and negotiation, Turkey, at a certain period, managed to reconcile in many respects with its neighbors, increasing contacts, travels and commerce, even removal of border-barriers and set up joint meetings with the council of ministers of some neighboring countries. We were progressing in the direction of overcoming the century-old political issues with Armenia, Greece, and our southern neighbors. However, when we started to move by ourselves, as if there were no great powers or other actors, who have an interest in the region, and when we ignored the influential states, things started to change significantly in a negative direction.

The "one minute" crisis and the Mavi Marmara occasion were already major incidents that created tensions between Turkey and Israel and its blind supporters in the West. Additionally, it was inevitable to bear the costs of declaring "we will govern the change in the Middle East," and "Assad has a period of two months left." It was equally wrong, rather than embracing the leftist-rightist, secular-religious all the opposition in Syria and Egypt, to support only the Muslim Brotherhood, thinking that it would open all the doors. One would argue that, given the distrust by the West to the Islamist movements in the region, Turkey's unilateral, ambitious, indigested moves is the primary reason to be isolated and left alone in Syria and Iraq by the West. Similarly, the open or implicit support of the West towards Egyptian military

coup by General Sisi, not sharing the costs of the refugee crisis and putting it onto Turkey's shoulders, the re-emergence of the terror by the Kurdish militants right after the June 7 elections are, either directly or indirectly, related to Turkey's changing discourses and actions in foreign policy. It is quite easy to blame the West, external enemies and imperialism of course, as resorted quite often. However, we should not forget that, when we were in a cooperation with the West and other global-regional players, they were quite sympathetic towards Turkey, taking it as a living example where Islam and democracy was compatible, as an "exemplary model" to the Muslim world. However, right after realizing that Turkey had started to behave independently with a threatening manner, the West radically changed its attitude. They isolated Turkey, participated in the demonization of Erdogan as a "dictator," and, in a sense, attempted to subdue Turkey.

This doesn't imply that - "Turkey is not right in principal." Turkey may be righteous at 100% in its stance regarding the ongoing regional crisis: it may be on the side of the innocents, wishing the collapse of dictatorial regimes, desiring democratization, or support the Arab nations' pursuit of honor and freedom. This is completely right, nothing wrong with it. However, if you are a country residing in the Middle East, if you have the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, if the region has rich oil and gas reserves, you have to ponder three times before you talk; you have to accurately calculate the balance of powers, and use discourses only you can actually support politically, economically, and militarily. Otherwise, you

will have to pay a high bill, which is the case today. The burden Turkey had to assume and cost it has been paying for the last three-four years is essentially the price of acting with rash, impatient, short-tempered manner. Maybe 20 years from now, when Turkey becomes a truly independent big player with its giant stable economy and technological-military strength, independent defense industry with nuclear capacity, aircraft carriers, cruise missiles, software and hardware infrastructure, then Turkey can act independently.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we need to think about these issues as a whole again along these lines. Once again, just like in its first term, we need a reformist AK Party government, which is democratic, pluralist, libertarian, reformist, market oriented, internally embracing and externally cooperative, a confident builder for the people and investors. We cannot underestimate the importance of the Rule of Law and justice. The making of the New Turkey requires adopting universal-international values and principles, guaranteeing the basic human rights and freedoms. We are obliged to implement reforms in economy, politics and law; we should take the EU tasks seriously. Regarding the regional and global matters, we need to cooperate with the powers that are in line with our interests.

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