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Conservative Democracy and the Future of Turkish Secularism

Emad Y. Kaddorah | May 2015

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, a socio-political current concerned with the preservation of traditional values and shared Turkish heritage has evolved in Turkey, in tandem with the pursuit of development and modernization of state and society. Known as the “conservative” trend, it developed to overcome the dichotomy of secularism versus Islam, which frequently meant that the presence of one implied the exclusion of the other, particularly in the public sphere. This trend has evolved on the back of various experiences, until it moved from the margins of political life to its center. A loose alignment that spoke for general traditional forces, embodied by many social and political personalities such as Said Nursi, Adnan Menderes, Turgut Ozal, and Fethullah Gulen, it grew until it became the most prominent and widest movement in Turkey on both the official and popular levels, enshrining itself once the “Conservative Democratic” Justice and Development Party (AKP) took on a political identity.

By means of identity and a new political vision, the AKP concentrated on fostering the traditional values shared by Turks, sidelined the role of religion in political life, adhered to secularism as the identity of the state, and aimed to expand freedoms and make political and economic reforms. This enabled it to be open to other trends in society, thus benefiting from their abilities and experiences, and form a broad coalition which included conservative, Islamist, and liberal figures and forces with economic and social weight.

Its success in mobilizing the conservative forces and placing them at the center of power, in addition to its magnifying political, economic, and media influence, led to increasing debate over the status of Turkish secularism and the future of the secular system in view of the dominance of a party with Islamic roots, especially as it considers the establishment of a “new republic” as a priority for coming years. In this context, the most important question, perhaps, concerns the nature of the secularism that conforms to the vision of the AKP and the conservative democratic identity, and not the future “existence” of secularism in Turkey or otherwise.

This paper will discuss the concept of conservatism in Turkey, the evolution of the conservative trend, and the factors influencing its ascent. It examines the concept of Conservative Democracy and how by using it the AKP restructured a system of relations and brought together a broad coalition on the basis of shared Turkish values. It also asks what role religion plays for a party with Islamic roots, and to what extent liberals

are in accord with conservatives, despite their differences. Finally, the paper deals with the effect of the growing influence of the AKP and the conservative trend on the future and nature of Turkish secularism.

The Conservative Trend and its Evolution in Turkey

The word conservatism suggests a tendency to conserve traditions and the status quo and resistance to change. However, in the modern political context, it means something else: in many countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan, the conservative trend tries to develop and build the state, encourage private ownership and the free market, and be open to the outside world. This it does in parallel with conserving the traditional values and heritage that characterize local society.

For Turkey, the concept of conservatism no longer means a political movement associated with returning and clinging to the past as much as it means modernization and progress while conserving traditional values and the historical and institutional legacy.² Hence, the AKP defines conservatism as change, but this change should be achieved by protecting core values and the gains of traditional structures.³ Yalcin Akdogan—advisor to the former AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan and one of the theorists of conservative democracy—views the family as the most important institution in society because it passes on traditions and social values. At the same time, as traditions are thought necessary to build the state and maintain social peace in a pluralist political environment, the modern conservative doctrine is seen as part of liberalism in terms of its opposition to socialism and its defense of free market economics⁴ as well as their having common interests in Turkey in terms of fostering reforms, expanding freedoms, and shrinking the Kemalist military inheritance. There might be many definitions and interpretations of conservatism and the conservative trend, but former Turkish president Abdullah Gul sees the Turkish conservative current,

² Taha Akyol, interviewed by Selma Tatli, "AKP is secularizing religious people," *Today's Zaman*, June 9, 2014, <http://goo.gl/h1adsS>.

³ "Political Vision of AK Parti for 2023," September 30, 2012, p. 6, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/akparti2023siyasivizyonuungilizce.pdf>.

⁴ Mehmet Sinan Birdal, "Queering Conservative Democracy," *Turkish Policy*, Volume 11 Number 4 (Winter 2013), p. 120, cited in Yalçın Akdoğan, *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi* (Istanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2004), 38-58.

and its components, as an intellectual “legacy” rather than a theory.⁵ Therefore, conservatism is founded on elements derived from shared Turkish culture and values like religion, national identity, traditions, customs, the Ottoman heritage, as well as the heritage and identity of the republic.

Turkey’s conservative trend began as a direct response to the challenge posed by the declaration of a new philosophy for the state with the founding of the republic: secularism founded on westernization, the restriction of the religious authorities, and a break with what was termed “backward traditions.” This challenge was confronted by the opposition of traditional forces in Turkish society. At the time however, these forces had little presence in politics, economics, and government administration. Their voice in society and beliefs were ignored by the dominant new discourse. For this reason, Serif Mardin has described these traditional forces as peripheral. The members of the periphery generally had a rural background and an under-average education. Their lifestyle was largely determined by religious and traditional values.⁶ With regards to the elite, the first figure to confront these severe changes imposed on state and society was Said Nursi who was interested in Quranic exegesis and in demonstrating that the truths of faith conformed to the nature of the universe and modern scientific developments, and that there was no contradiction between them and in countering the accusation that Islam was the reason for Turkish underdevelopment. He laid out these ideas in his writings known as *Risale-i Nur* whose 6,000 pages were written intermittently from 1923 to 1946.

The traditional, or peripheral, forces began to get involved with political life after the country entered the period of party pluralism at the end of the 1940s. The two most successful parties in that regard were the Democrat Party in the 1950s, under the leadership of Adnan Menderes, and the Motherland Party in the 1980s under Turgut Ozal. The Democrat Party was able to incorporate large parts of the people in the political system and was the first to consider the needs of the periphery. The Motherland Party, which was founded in 1983, had a major influence on conservative politics in Turkey under the influence of Ozal who combined a traditional conservative

⁵ <http://www.middle-east-online.com/?id=172962>.

⁶ Charlotte Joppien, “A Reinterpretation of Tradition? The Turkish AKP and its Local Politics,” May 2011, p. 5, <http://goo.gl/j7YY0D>; see also Şerif Mardin, “Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?” *Daedalus*, vol. 102, no. 1 (Winter 1973), pp. 169-190.

Sufi upbringing with an advanced Western education. Their experience and influence brought the culture of the periphery into the center of society and led to it being consolidated as a possible alternative to the dominance of secularism and Kemalist culture.⁷

It is thought that official recognition of the conservative current began after the military coup in the 1980s when the conflict between right and left had exhausted the country. In order to prevent society from fracturing as a result of this conflict, the military establishment launched an initiative it described as “a new philosophy for the state,” which was based on “a mixture of Turkish nationalism and Islam (*Türk İslam Sentezi*)” and aimed to create a homogeneous and stable society by using religion, traditions, and conservative values. The family became the most important institution to ensure the stability of society. The coup also led to the collapse of the socialist solidarity networks in the cities, leaving a vacuum that was rapidly filled by the Sufi orders and religious associations, who met the needs of poor urban workers, further leading to the strengthening of the conservative consciousness. There is also a profound socio-economic factor behind the rise of conservatism in the form of the large-scale internal migration underway since the 1960s. People moved from eastern and central Anatolia to the western coast and from towns and villages to big cities. Many of these immigrants did not adapt to urban life and stuck to their traditions and village values. They used traditional networks (the family and religious associations), which mostly formed their economic resource and social support.⁸ Over time, their numbers grew as did their influence: in 1990, only half the population lived in urban areas, whereas today that proportion has climbed to 75 percent.⁹

Under these changing circumstances, a new social group, “the Anatolian bourgeoisie” emerged. The members of this class was originally on the margins of society. Their fathers had been farmers, small artisans, or shop owners. They benefited from three things: the education campaign undertaken by the state starting in the 1930s with the

⁷ Charlotte Joppien, op. cit., p. 5.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 6-10.

⁹ Steven A. Cook, “Recent History: The Rise of the Justice and Development Party,” in Madeleine K. Albright, Stephen J. Hadley and Steven A. Cook, *US-Turkey Relations: A New Partnership*, Independent Task Force Report, no. 69 (Washington: Council on Foreign Relations, May 2012), p. 53, <http://www.cfr.org/turkey/usturkey-relations/p28139>.

aim of building a “western, civilized society, which enabled them to acquire important skills; secondly, “cultural capital” acquired from their belonging to the Sufi orders and the religious networks and the solidarity between them; and third, a large part of the capital they put to work in their initial investments deriving from the savings of Turkish migrant workers in Europe or investment from other Islamic states. These businessmen represent the Islamic modernity that revived new elites and a strong civil society. They became an important social force and the “financial backbone” of the AKP.¹⁰

The demographic transformation to Turkey’s cities and Turkish economic growth led to a shrinking in the economic gap between the population. For the first time, the country had become one where the middle class were in the majority, thereby increasing opportunities from political development. These evolutions show that the “modernization theory”—the idea that economic development leads to more democracy—is being validated in Turkey. Indeed, as countries foster a greater middle class, they tend to become irrevocably diverse, developing the bedrock for democratic governance, including consensual politics and respect for individual and minority rights.”¹¹

On their own, however, these deep social and economic changes in Turkish society were not sufficient to strengthen the conservative trend or cause the political transformations that Turkey is currently witnessing. The factors underlying social transformation are varied and diverse. An effective organizing force with clear goals is needed to turn latent changes into an impact on state and society. As stated above, Turgut Ozal gave the impetus to this trend decades before, but the more effective and more widespread push came with the AKP’s declaration that it would adopt “Conservative Democracy” as its official political identity. At the same time, the party could not have given this impetus nor win successive elections and form successive governments, had it not benefited from the previous experiences of the Turkish Islamic movement, absorbing most of its figureheads and members and forming a broad coalition with the array of forces making up the conservative trend.

¹⁰ Charlotte Joppien, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

¹¹ Soner Cagaptay and James F. Jeffrey, “Turkey’s 2014 Political Transition from Erdogan to Erdogan? The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Notes*, no. 17 (January 2014), p. 8, <http://goo.gl/4XVa6A>.

Conservative Democracy: A Political Identity and a Broad Social Coalition

What the AKP succeeded in developing is a new political identity, which it used to recast the system of social, political, and economic relations in Turkey. It did this by adopting a program that brought the components of society into contact with the existing political spectrum, placing itself at the center on the basis of the shared Turkish values that united these components. In order to do this, it adopted a loose ideology which it termed Conservative Democracy, so creating a concept that formed common ground for party members, supporters with Islamic orientations, the conservative trend, nationalists, liberals, and even some of the traditional secular elite. Perhaps the repeated banning of the political parties founded by Necmettin Erbakan, made some of their leaders, such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Gul, and Bulent Arinc seek a solution to this seemingly intractable dilemma and found a party with a new vision.

The "Political Vision of AK Parti" states that the party with its new identity has come to be at the "center" of political action and not at the periphery, and that it transformed the possibilities of the conservative trend into an "institution". For Conservative Democracy, it states, "the articulation of societal differences in the realm of politics can only become possible if politics are founded on a basis of compromise." The party "situates itself as a meeting point of individuals who come from different political traditions on the basis of established values and principles." At the same time as putting itself forward as the preserver of national traditions and religious values, the party views itself as a dynamic party based upon local Turkish socio-cultural specifics and is working for change and development according to global specifics and practices.¹² Erdogan clarifies the path of the party in different terms: "A significant part of Turkish society desires to adopt a concept of modernity that does not reject tradition, a belief of universalism that accepts localism, an understanding of rationalism that does not disregard the spiritual meaning of life, and a choice for change that is not fundamentalist."¹³

¹² "Political Vision of AK Parti for 2023," op. cit., pp. 4-5 and 7.

¹³ Charlotte Joppien, op. cit., p. 8.

Therefore, the founders of the party chose a new way that allowed them to adopt ideas more open to all the trends present in Turkish society, a discourse different to that of their previous experiences, taking advantage at the same time of that accumulated experience. In order to overcome premature ideological classification, and the potential dissolution of the new party, the founders tried to reassure other trends, including the Kemalist secularists and the military establishment. They stressed that religion had no role in political life, repeatedly stated their commitment to secularism as the identity of the state, strengthened links with the West, and made Turkey's membership of the EU a priority in its party platforms and for its governments. At the same time, in order to maintain the party's electoral base and core support, and expand its constituency into a broad spectrum of conservative and Islamic personalities and political and social actors, the party still stressed its conservative identity which meant adhering to and fostering the values and traditions shared by the Turkish people, Islam among them, but also stressed economic liberalization, political reforms, and the expansion of freedoms. In this way, the AKP fashioned a political discourse and an identity that combined conservatism, democracy, and liberalism, and tried to form a broad coalition on that basis.

To understand this political discourse and new identity that was able to create consensus over principles and interests with various sectors of society, this paper will examine questions raised around the role of religion for a party whose roots go back to the Turkish Islamic movement. It will consider the essence of the broad conservative coalition that has become the central force in Turkey today, and on what basis liberals are in conformity with conservatives despite the fundamental differences between them and the course of this conformity.

1. The Role of Religion

The AKP rests on a new approach that sidelines the role of religion in politics. In this regard, it has made every effort to maintain its commitment to keep Islamic symbols outside Turkish politics. Abdullah Gul, former Turkish president, expressed this notion by saying, "The religious party is damaging to religion itself." The party program also stresses this vision when it states that "it is not acceptable to use religion for political, economic, or other ends." This is not to say the party has completely ignored Islam. It considers it a genuine element representing the traditional values of the majority of the Turkish people. In this way, the AKP does not need to repeat Islamic slogans or programs, but endeavors to expand the sphere of religious, political, and cultural

freedoms for everyone in the country,¹⁴ which enables the components of Turkish society to freely practice what they believe in.

2. The Conservative Democracy Alliance

The AKP brought together a broad coalition of parties with grievances and bad impressions of the economic and political situation at the beginning of the century, ones that were not content with the situation. This unprecedented coalition combined Islamic reformists, bankers, financial experts, and small and medium-sized business owners. It defied traditional party loyalties and obtained the support of all the secular and Islamic business associations. Many argued that the AKP came to power by combining the power of democracy with the support of the rising Anatolian bourgeoisie reliant on media capital and a discourse of national reform. This led to the emergence of a new socio-cultural group with economic influence to once again reflect traditional, conservative, and religious values.¹⁵ Ziya Onis emphasizes that the businesses and associations of these people, such as the MUSIAD Association, had an influence in moderating their political positions. They represent the “friendly face of capitalism” enriched with values like solidarity, justice, piety, moderation, and generosity, which they affiliate with the true character of Islam. They declare, that there is no conflict between capitalism and Islam.”¹⁶

The AKP’s discourse and modus operandi is close to the Turkish social movement, the Hizmet group, led by Fethullah Gulen, which is the traditional Islamic rival to the political movement of Necmettin Erbakan, in that the AKP and the Gulen movement are compatible with secularism. Gulen accepts the secular system in Turkey, and does not favor the application of Islamic law, rather he affirms that the vast majority of the provisions of Sharia relate to people’s private lives, while there are a small number of laws related to the administration of affairs of state.¹⁷ Despite there being an alliance between them for more than a decade, a serious disagreement recently emerged between them that led to mutual recriminations ever since mid-December 2013.

¹⁴ Emad Y. Kaddorah, “The Turkish Model: Acceptability and Apprehension,” *Insight Turkey*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2010), pp. 116-117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.

¹⁶ Charlotte Joppien, pp. 7-8.

¹⁷ Emad Y. Kaddorah, *op. cit.*, 118.

Combatting the “parallel state” (the penetration of the Hizmet movement into state institutions) became a priority for the government of Ahmet Davutoglu. In spite of this dispute, it is difficult to speak of a breakup of the conservative coalition. The 2014 local and presidential elections proved the popular and electoral weakness of Gulen’s movement in comparison with the ascendancy of the AKP, and demonstrated the size of the coalition and its rootedness in society and state when a powerful movement like the Hizmet should pull out without damaging it.

3. Conservative Democracy and Liberal Democracy

In the first few years after the founding of the AKP, avenues for cooperation between social liberals and conservatives opened up, particularly with regard to the struggle to dismantle the system of Kemalist guardianship guided by the military. Liberal intellectuals also supported what are called the Kurdish, Armenian, and Alawite initiatives launched by the AKP government in 2009 as part of what was subsequently labeled achieving equal citizenship. They also supported domestic political and economic reforms and encouraged the procedures for Turkish membership in the EU. Nevertheless, the conservative-liberal coalition carefully steered by the AKP during its first years in power gradually began to split apart. This was anticipated by liberals, given that the AKP did not represent the interests of their intellectuals in the first place, and because they saw that its axis and electoral base lay in conservative circles concentrated in central Anatolia with a strong desire for economic growth and free trade.¹⁸

Hence, agreement on the basis of interest or for a specific political phase does not mean the disappearance of fundamental differences between Conservative Democracy based on values and local identities espoused by the AKP and its thinkers, and Liberal Democracy calling for full freedoms in Turkey according to the global model of absolute emancipation without restrictions in accord with Turkish local traditions. As power consolidated in the hands of the conservative democrats, visible today in Erdogan’s becoming president, and with the gradual waning of the importance of the shared goal to dismantle the secularist-military old guard, the chances of conservatives and liberals

¹⁸ Karabekir Akkoyunlu, Kalypso Nicolaidis and Kerem Öktem, *The Western Condition: Turkey, the US and the EU in the New Middle East* (Oxford, UK: South East European Studies at Oxford, University of Oxford, 2013), pp. 28-30.

returning to square one in terms of their fundamental difference regarding the social sphere increased.

Liberalism endorses individualism and is liberated from the legacy and traditions of the past, while conservatism defends the restoration of authority in the social sphere and makes the public interest conditional for all of society and is linked with the past (values and traditions). Liberalism calls for the separation of civil society and the state, while Akdogan, the theoretician of Conservative Democracy, sees the merger of state and nation: "The reunification of the democratic system is a basic precondition for peaceful co-existence between the divisions in society in order to create a synthesis of state and nation to restore the eroded system."¹⁹ In order to maintain social peace, Akdogan states that Conservative Democracy needs to create a pluralist political environment that respects different identity-based groups and to do this relies on the "shared values" that are the essence of Conservative Democracy. This reliance on a set of particular values contradicts with absolute liberal democracy.²⁰

These differences come to the surface from time to time and are given expression by liberals through criticism in the media, academic studies, or even by support for groups with environmental or political demands or demanding additional freedoms, like the protests around Gezi Park in Istanbul in summer 2013. Despite the probability that the confluence of interests between conservatives and liberals will sooner or later come to an end, the results of the 2014 local and presidential elections demonstrated the weak effect of liberal criticism and the protests and events on the strength of the AKP and its conservative alliance until now.

The Future of Secularism in View of the Growth of Conservative Democracy

With the success of the AKP in turning the conservative forces of the periphery into an effective institutionalized system and in placing it at the heart of power, that is in the presidency, government, and parliament, and with the increase in its economic and media clout, debate has grown over the status of secularism and the future of the

¹⁹ Mehmet Sinan Birdal, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

secular system when the state is controlled by a party with Islamic roots and the traditional conservative forces allied with them, particularly with the AKP's avowed intent to found a "new republic". Is there a threat to strict Kemalist secularism? And will a new regime be established on its ruins, or will the AKP aim to reformulate Turkish secularism in line with shared traditional values?

According to the political vision of the AKP, the party believes in politics that "normalizes the regime" when it states, "For decades, Turkish politics has been under the shadow of tensions arising from the relationships between religion-politics, tradition-modernity, religion-state and state-society-individual. [...] AK Party has attempted to reconstruct these relationships and free them of being problem areas."²¹ Hence, by normalizing politics, or the regime, it means reconstructing these relationships by returning to the "natural", authentic components in Turkish society and its shared values, without imposing an extremist philosophy of the state that would exclude traditions on the pretext of modernization and exclude religion on the pretext of Westernization and exclude other ethnic and cultural identities.

Despite the clear targeting of the secularism instituted by Kemal Ataturk, the repeated affirmation of AKP and its leadership that secularism remains the identity of the state and their intention to reconstruct this identity so that it does not clash with Turkish values indicate that they are planning a secular system of a different kind. In this respect, researchers adopt various terms for the form of secularism that fits with the AKP. Some term it "passive secularism,"²² as an expression of the wish that the secular system allow the free practice of religious rites without interfering in the way citizens lead their lives. Others adopt the term "soft secularism"²³ as an expression of tolerance for greater religious expression in government bodies and in politics and education to take the place of the "hard, exclusionary" secularism of Ataturk. Yet others consider

²¹ "Political Vision of AK Parti for 2023," op. cit., p. 6.

²² Ahmet T. Kuru, "Muslim Politics without an 'Islamic State,'" *Policy Briefing*, Brookings Doha Center, February 2013, p. 5, at: <http://goo.gl/qfVNI7>.

²³ Soner Çağaptay, "The Empires Strike Back," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2012.

that the AKP prefers a “moderate version”²⁴ of Kemalist secularism, or that the aim of the party is to develop a “truly secular” society.²⁵

In reality, the terminology and interpretations of secularism that the AKP is seeking to reconstruct and adopt in Turkey and even promote abroad may vary. Recep Tayyip Erdogan gave considerable importance to interpreting and defining what he wants from secularism. He stated that “there are many interpretations of secularism,” and that his party considers that the secular state is “neutral towards all religions groups” and that “the secular state is not against religion, but guarantees religious freedom, and has even to respect and defend atheists.” He also states that “the Turkish constitution defines secularism as dealing with the members of all religions equally, and that the secular state does not propagate non-religion.” In reference to himself he said, “Recep Tayyip Erdogan is not secular, he is a Muslim, but he is the prime minister of a secular state and acts how this state directs him.” Moreover, he offers some advice to the Egyptian people to accept his secular system, “I tell the Egyptian people not to be anxious about secularism [...] Modern secularism does not stand in opposition to religion but must co-exist with it.”²⁶

From this it would appear that the aim of the AKP is to develop a “truly secular society,” meaning that the party aspires to a form of secularism close to the Swiss or American models, which provide citizens with the freedom to embrace religious beliefs and practices and express them freely and without fear or oppression, as an alternative to the extreme “*laïcisme*” form of Turkish secularism which was inspired by France, and where the state controls religion to prevent it entering the public sphere.²⁷

On this understanding, there is a question over the extent to which the AKP really accepts secularism, even in its attenuated form which rests on two main pillars: the demand that no religious institution supersede the state’s executive, legislative, and

²⁴ Omer Taspınar, “Turkey’s Strategic Vision and Syria,” *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 2012), p. 128.

²⁵ Steven A. Cook, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁶ “Erdogan: I am not secular, I am Muslim. Secularism guarantees people religion,” Al Arabiya Net, September 14, 2011, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/09/14/166779.html>.

²⁷ Steven A. Cook, op. cit., p. 54.

judicial bodies, and that the state has no official religion.²⁸ This means not relying on the principles and rulings of Islamic law in legislation, the legal system, and affairs of state, in a country overwhelmingly Muslim, and with the agreement of a party with Islamic roots that considers Islam as one of the common Turkish values.

Some see that the shift undergone by Turkish Islamists as pragmatic and not necessarily ideological,²⁹ and the AKP's pragmatic understanding of politics retains its Islamic frame of reference, which allows the party to operate between secularism and Islam, since the democratic system enables groups and individuals to express and promote their opinions by means of participation in political or legal institutions or via civil society and the media. "They can reflect Islamic ethics by, for instance, fighting corruption and nepotism, or promoting justice. Islamic parties can also promote their diverse understandings of sharia through free and democratic processes. In this way, there is no need to formally name the state 'Islamic' in order to promote Islamic principles in politics."³⁰

Moreover, the best way to guarantee freedoms in Turkey, including freedom of religion, for AKP thinkers, is not to turn away from the West but to integrate with it. Hence, the AKP can make use even of the ultimate goal of the founder of modern Turkey Mustapha Kemal Ataturk to raise Turkey to the level of "civilization," that is Western civilization,³¹ and say that it is acting in accord with the goal of Ataturk himself. Over its years in power, the AKP has implemented more reforms that conform to Western standards and membership of the EU than all the previous secular parties in Turkey's history. It has also strengthened Turkey's links with Western political, security, and military alliances and not given them up. In this context, Erdogan affirms that his party "would not retreat from the path of modernity promoted by Ataturk."³² Pragmatism is clearly apparent here in his affirmation of moving forward in his project for change by means

²⁸ Ahmet T. Kuru, op. cit., p. 3.

²⁹ Lucie Drechselova, "The AKP in Turkey: Islamic or Conservative?" *Nouvelle Europe*, March 31, 2011, at: <http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/node/1088>.

³⁰ Ahmet T. Kuru, op. cit., p. 4.

³¹ Steven A. Cook, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

³² Fulya Ozerkan, "Erdogan seeking place in history alongside Ataturk," *AFP*, August 3, 2014, <http://news.yahoo.com/erdogan-seeking-place-history-alongside-ataturk-033255751.html>.

of founding a new regime or “second republic” which may be devoid of the strictures of the “Westernizing” Kemalist secularism that was imposed in a transitional and exceptional historical context on the ruins of the caliphate and Islamic identity. At the same time he affirms that this change will not necessarily do away with the modernity of Ataturk or the official secular identity of the state because those shared values and traditions have become entrenched in the current period and there is no conflict or contradiction between them.

Thus, it should be noted that the AKP wants by means of a reconstruction of the concept of Turkish secularism to deal with the requirements of secularism in general that put the state at an equal distance from all parties, beliefs, and religious and cultural identities. It wants particularly to divest Turkish secularism of the political and ideological meaning that is believed to have led to the imposition of specific models for state and society.

Conclusion

In modern Turkey, the collective memory of Kemalist secularists is connected to the assumption that things will revert to their “true order” sooner or later. For conservatives, Islamists, and liberals, especially within the present AKP, this memory is linked to the fear of the possibility that things return to square one. For both sides, this assumption rests upon a formulation in the preamble to the Turkish constitution: “With these ideas, beliefs, and resolutions to be interpreted and implemented accordingly, thus commanding respect for, and absolute loyalty to, its letter and spirit.”³³ Both sides are aware the provisions in the constitution stipulate explicitly for adherence to the secular legacy of Ataturk.

Accordingly, the military establishment has seen itself as a guarantor of this central precept and has long used it to intervene in political life when it senses an imminent threat to the state’s values of Kemalist secularism. The judiciary have also relied on this very text to ban parties and movements that threaten these ideas. The Kemalist secular parties will also fight to keep this same phrase in the context of any future change or amendment to the constitution. In contrast, the political trends and parties challenging the restrictions imposed by this and other dicta remain apprehensive about military or

³³ *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*, “Preamble,” p. 2.

judicial intervention given the many such experiences over the history of the republic beginning with the coup 1960 which ended the rule of the Democrat Party despite its achievements and popularity and ending with the attempt to judicially ban the AKP in 2007, which threatened to take things back to square one.

On this basis, it seems that political rivalry or conflict, which is given an ideological covering, will shift over the coming years into the constitutional realm itself. The AKP sees the necessity of depriving the military and judicial establishments and the secular parties, ones that have acted as guardians of the Kemalist secular legacy, of the ability to use some constitutional provisions to get rid of their opponents. The AKP sees that "Although the 1982 Constitution was amended 17 times and half of its content has been changed [...] amendments have been subjected to ideological interpretations and thus have been rendered meaningless [as a result of this phrase]. [...] The concept of 'the essence and soul of the Constitution,' which began with the 27 May 1960 military coup, has served as a shield of tutelage and protection against true democracy."³⁴ In order to declare a new constitution free of such restrictions, it will have to obtain a two-thirds majority in the next parliamentary elections in summer 2015. Even if it fails to do so at the time, its efforts will continue, because it sees the step of changing the constitution as central to the laying down of rules for political action removed from the obsession with the clash between Islam and secularism.

Still, in the midst of this rivalry, the picture is not completely clear at the current time. Each side has drawn closer to the other, even if only by one step, apparent or real. As noted above, the AKP has evolved a political identity that sidelines the role of religion in political life, rests on the experiences of the conservative trend, and takes advantage of its broad forces in society based on shared Turkish values and traditions, including respect for Islam as the religion of the majority of the people and its own identity, and the adoption of secularism as the identity of the state as the shared heritage of the republic. On the opposing side, the resort of Kemalist secular and nationalist parties to conservative and "moderate Islamist" figures such as Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu as a candidate in the presidential elections in August 2014 is seen as the first step and an implicit sign of the chances of the acceptance of another candidate coming from an Islamic or conservative background, despite that choice having had negative

³⁴ "Political Vision of AK Parti for 2023," op. cit., p. 18.

repercussions for traditional secular voters who felt that their parties were trying to placate voters with Islamist or conservative leanings and obtain their votes.

Finally, there are no doubts over the continuation of secularism in Turkey, because the majority of social forces and parties do not see it as a threat, but accept it as the official identity of the state. As for current disagreements, perhaps the coming conflict will be over the nature of this secularism, between those who defend its continuation in the strict Kemalist form which proscribes everything that threatens its characteristics and its soul and essence and those who wish to redefine it to become a moderate secularism like that found in most Western states. Whether this revised model for Turkish secularism is termed "moderate", "soft", or "passive", the AKP and its Conservative Democracy alliance is not striving to do away with the secular system, but rather to consolidate it and redefine it on a new basis that relies on all the shared Turkish values and traditions.

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