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**Europeanization and Its Discontents:  
Turkey, 1959-2007**

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**1. Introduction**

In the last couple of years we have witnessed in Turkey an intense questioning of the country's relations with the EU, blaming the EU for a lack of understanding and respect in its relations with Turkey. According to the Euroskeptic narrative, the moment Turkey lost its strategic value for Europe in the aftermath of the Cold War, the latter began to revive its historical claims from Turkey, which had been most clearly manifested in the articles of the 1920 Treaty of Sevres. Hence, the narrative has it, pressures have been put on Turkey to accept the Armenian genocide; to yield to the Kurdish demands for autonomy and independence; to recognize Greek authority over Cyprus; and to make all the reforms demanded by the EU, without being offered any timetable for membership.

The extent to which the elite-level Euroskeptic discourse has been internalized by the general public can be observed in the findings of a nation-wide opinion survey, which was conducted in October and November 2003 as part of a research project led by the author himself (Yilmaz 2004 and 2005b)<sup>1</sup>. We have found out that the feelings of being excluded by the EU were predominant among the people. Hence, 60% of our respondents agreed with the view that the EU treated Turkey with double standards, that it imposed on Turkey conditions that it had not demanded from the other candidate states, and that it did not view Turkey as a European state. On the question of whether the EU demands in the area of human rights and minority rights were similar to the terms of the Sevres Treaty, the respondents were roughly divided into three equal chunks: approximately one third said that they shared this view; the second third said that they disagreed with it; and the remaining one third said that they did not know about those historical events to come to a judgment. Yet a third element of the elite-level Euroskeptic discourse was that Turkey's EU membership would result in the rise of ethnic separatism

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<sup>1</sup> The sample was a nationally distributed, multi-layered, random sample of 2123 people, aged 18 and above. The respondents were selected from 17 provinces and the 3 big metropolitan areas (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir). 68 percent of the interviews were conducted in the urban areas and 32 percent in the rural areas, reflecting the rural-urban division of the Turkish population. This research project, and the related opinion poll, were the first attempts to obtain an empirical measure of the degree of the responses to Euroskeptic themes and issues by the general public.

and the eventual loss of its national unity and territorial integrity. Our survey revealed that 45% of the general public agreed (as opposed to 20% who disagreed) that ethnic separatist movements would definitely increase if Turkey joined the EU. However, 50% of the respondents disagreed (as opposed to 35% who agreed) that EU membership would result in a disintegration of Turkey along ethnic lines.

In this paper we are going to examine the evolution of the major Euroskeptical themes and movements in Turkey, from the early years of the EEC-Turkey relations in the late 1950s until the Turkish general elections in 2007. The first three sections of the paper will offer a historical review of EU-Turkey relations. Thus, in the first three sections we will examine the early years of EU-Turkey relations, from the association agreement of 1963 to the military intervention of 1980; EU-Turkey relations from the military intervention of 1980 to the membership application of 1987; and the rise of Euroskepticism in Turkey in the radicalized and polarized political atmosphere of the 1990s. The following two sections will be devoted to an assessment of the outcomes of the elections of November 2002 and July 2007, which have brought ex-Islamists and new “Conservative Democrats” to power, the turn of Islamic conservatism towards Europe, and Europeanization and democratization under a “Conservative-Democratic” leadership.

## **2. The Early Years of Turkey-EU Relations: From the Association Agreement of 1963 to the Military Intervention of 1980**

The contractual relations between Turkey and the European Union (EU) started close to half-a-century ago, in 1959, when, on July 31 of that year, the Turkish government of the centre-right Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti, DP) applied to the European Economic Community (EEC) for membership. This application reflected, on the one hand, the overall Western and European orientation of Turkish foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, Turkey had already been a member of such critical Western and European organizations as the Council of Europe, OECD and NATO, and seeking membership in yet another newly founded European organization, the EEC, was nothing but the normal thing to do. Yet a second, and equally powerful, motive behind the Turkish application for membership in the EEC on 31 July 1959 was no doubt the fact that Greece, Turkey’s regional rival, had already made a similar application just two weeks ago. The EEC’s answer to both Greece and Turkey was to offer a form of relationship that fell short of full membership, in view of the less developed economies of the two countries. This relationship was termed as “association” and it was formulated in the Association Agreements that were signed first with Greece in November 1962 (the Athens Agreement), and then with Turkey in September 1963 (the Ankara Agreement). The Turkish agreement envisaged a three-stage transition (a preparatory stage, a transitional stage, and a final stage) first to a customs union and then to full accession to the EEC. Indeed, it is stated in Article 28 of the Ankara Agreement that “as soon as the operation of this Agreement has advanced far enough to justify envisaging full acceptance by Turkey of the obligations arising out of the Treaty establishing the Community, the Contracting Parties shall examine the possibility of the accession of Turkey to the Community.”

The 1960s and the 1970s were years of ideological radicalization and political polarization in Turkey. The radical right was represented in the political arena by two political parties: the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) embodying Turkish ethnonationalism and the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP) representing Islamicism. Both the radical left and the radical right were vehemently opposed to Turkey's entry to the EEC. In the parlance of the radical left, the EEC was an appendage of American imperialism, from which they were trying to save Turkey. In the eyes of the Islamicists linked with the MSP, the EEC was nothing but a "Christian Club", sponsored and maintained by the Vatican, in which a Muslim Turkey would have absolutely no place. Turkish ethnonationalists of the MHP, on the other hand, while adopting both the "anti-imperialism" of the radical left as well as the "anti-Christian Club" discourse of the Islamicists, put the emphasis on the claim that joining the European community would have given the European states a historic opportunity to meddle in Turkey's internal affairs with the purpose of weakening the state structures, provoking the minorities and "over-Westernized Turks" to rebel against the Turkish state, and finally divide the country and take its various parts under their rules. In the 1970s, taken hostage by the radical parties, groups and ideas, none of the major centrist parties in government could make a meaningful move towards the EEC, at a faithful time when three other southern European countries, Greece, Portugal and Spain, which had just come out of US-supported dictatorships, were determinedly progressing towards democratic Europe. This early period of Turkey-EEC relations came to an abrupt end with the military takeover in Turkey in September 1980.

### **3. Turkey-EU Relations from the Military Intervention of 1980 to the Membership Application of 1987<sup>2</sup>**

The military regime in Turkey lasted for two years, at which time the political system, from top to bottom, was speedily and nearly completely redesigned. The driving idea behind this system redesign was depoliticization, which would be achieved by dramatically curbing freedom of speech and political participation. Following these sweeping political changes, the military regime formally ended when new elections took a place in November 1983 and a new elected civilian government, that of the Motherland Party under Turgut Özal, took office in December of that year. It took more than a year for the EEC to suspend its relations with Turkey, in protest of the military intervention of 12 September 1980. The suspension, which came into force in January 1982, was lifted in September 1986, when the EEC-Turkey Association Council met for the first time after a long break. The decision of the EEC to normalize its relations with Turkey was no doubt motivated by Turkey's return to civilian rule, and the pace of liberalization, particularly in the economic arena. The Özal government had already set its mind for making Turkey a member of the EEC. On 17 April 1987, the Özal government handed in Turkey's formal application for membership in the EEC. It took nearly two years for the European Commission to draft its "Opinion" on the Turkish application, which was published on 18 December 1989. In its Opinion, the Commission reiterated Turkey's eligibility for membership in principle but claimed that neither Turkey nor the EC were ready to start membership talks. Turkey, according to the Commission, Turkey was not

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<sup>2</sup> For excellent reviews of the early years of EU-Turkey relations see the contributions in Evin and Denton (1990).

ready to take on the obligations for membership, given its existing level of economic and political underdevelopment. The EC, on the other hand, had to put its house in order first and complete the Single Market before contemplating any further enlargement. The Commission then went on to underpin the need for a comprehensive cooperation program aiming at facilitating the integration of the Turkey and the EC and added that the Customs Union should be completed in 1995 as envisaged.

Although the membership application in 1987 did not bring any tangible results, it put Turkey back on the agenda of the EEC and, much more importantly, it brought Europe back into the agenda of political decision-making and public debate in Turkey. Indeed, the EC-Turkey relations, particularly in the commercial and economic arena, continued to proliferate in the years that followed the membership application. As Turkey was undergoing the Özalist reforms of economic and to a lesser extent political liberalization in the 1980s, by the early 1990s the country had come to the point of undertaking the obligations of a customs union with the EC. In the eyes of the Turkish government of the day, under Turkey's first woman prime minister, Tansu Çiller, the customs union would be the first step taken towards full membership. For many European leaders, however, Turkey had to be firmly linked to the EC but she had to be left beyond the borders of the Community. Hence, in their eyes, the customs union with Turkey represented the end-point of the Turkish-EC relations.

#### **4. The 1990s in Turkey: Political Radicalisation, Ideological Polarization, and the Rise of Euroskepticism<sup>3</sup>**

On 6 March 1995, while Turkey was governed by the “grand coalition” of Tansu Çiller's centre-right True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP) and Deniz Baykal's centre-left Republican People's Party (CHP), the EU-Turkey Association Council took a decision regarding the inauguration of a customs union between the EU and Turkey, following the pattern set out in the Ankara Agreement of 1963 and the Additional Protocol of 1970<sup>4</sup>. The Council's decision received the European Parliament's assent on 13 December 1995, enabling it to enter into force on 1 January 1996. Following the Association Council's customs union decision, in July 1995, the Turkish government has launched a series of democratizing and liberalizing reforms, which were the first ever package of amendments to the 1980 military-era Constitution. It is apparent that the tactical goal of the Turkish government for initiating the reforms has been to persuade the European Parliament to give its consent to the Association Council's customs union decision. The government's strategic goal, on the other hand, has been to fulfil the necessary political conditions, such as those formulated in the June 1993 Copenhagen meeting of the European Council, of Turkey's qualification for full membership in the EU.

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<sup>3</sup> For first-rate examinations of the rise of identity movements in the 1990s see Göle (1997) for the Islamic movements; Mutlu (1996) for Kurdish movements; Vorhoff (1998) for the mobilization of the Alevi identity; and Bora (2003) for the transformations of Turkish ethnonationalism.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Official web site of the EU at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg1a/turkey/overview.htm>.

The 1990s were a time of crisis, economic, political, as well as cultural. Perhaps the most important facet of politics in the 1990s was the politicization of identities. Beginning first with the coming to the public scene of political movements organized around Kurdish, Sunni Muslim and Alevi identities, this was quickly followed by political and civic movements attempting to mobilize their followers by an appeal to gender, region, life-style, sexual choices, age and other subjective and mostly symbolic issues, feelings and attachments.

The armed Kurdish secessionist movement led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (known by its Kurdish acronym, PKK), which reached its peak by the second half of the 1990s, constituted no doubt the most important source of the political crisis of the 1990s. Apart from its costs in terms of lost human lives, perhaps the most detrimental consequence of the PKK terrorism was the creation, within the state apparatus and the security forces, various para-legal or utterly illegal organizations, referred to as the "gangs" in the Turkish popular parlance, which brought together state officials and mafia members, who operated largely outside of the control of the democratic authorities and followed the agendas they set for themselves. These self-appointed protectors of the state largely ruined the credibility of the state in the eyes of the large masses and hit a severe blow to the efforts to build a state based on the rule of law in Turkey. A second and equally destructive impact of the PKK terrorism was that it gave rise, among the Turkish masses, to nationalist extremism of unprecedented proportions. This nationalist extremism was at the same time fuelling anti-Western and anti-European sentiments among the Turkish people, because people generally believe that the PKK has been tacitly or openly supported by the Western governments.

A second source of the crisis of the 1990s was the rise of political Islam, represented in the political arena by the parties of the National Outlook (Milli Görüş) movement (Welfare Party [Refah Partisi], Virtue Party [Fazilet Partisi], Felicity Party [Saadet Partisi]), all founded and led by Necmettin Erbakan. The continual strengthening of political Islam was partly due to the increasing inability of the secular parties of the left and the right to deal with the pressing problems of the country. A second reason commonly put forward to explain the rise of political Islam by the late 1980s is the intense Islamicization of the Turkish educational and intellectual life following the military coup of 1980, as an immunization to the power and threat of the communist ideology. Yet a third factor that is referred to for making sense of the rising power of Islamic politics is the massive rural-urban migration of the 1980s. This migration, it has been claimed, resulted in the formation of poor urban peripheries that are inhabited by people of rural origin who were very receptive to religious indoctrination and mobilization.

Yet a third source of the political crisis of the 1990s was something quite unexpected, external and non-political: it was the Marmara earthquake of August 1999. The utter inability, incapability and lack of capacity of the government and more generally of state institutions to deal with the problems created by the earthquake discredited not only the political parties that were then in power, but the political establishment in general. This

protest mood was no doubt an important factor in the almost total electoral annihilation of all the parties of the 1990s in the general elections of November 2002.

The 1990s were also a decade of the decline of pro-systemic and centrist parties and the rise of anti-systemic and radical politics. As it usually happens in moments of crisis, radical solutions began to be articulated and applied to radical problems. Hence, the 1990s witnessed severe and sometimes violent radicalization and polarization of political choices, cultural identities, and even economic policies. While the combined electoral power of the centrist parties of the left and the right fell from 83% to 57% from 1991 to 1999, that of the radical parties, largely of the right, rose from 17% to 42% during the same period. Perhaps a more dramatic expression of the rise of radical politics can be seen if we contrast the electoral performance of the centre-right parties with that of the radical right parties. Hence, the total vote of the centre-right parties, which had been 51% in 1991, steeply fell to 26% in 1999. At the same time, radical right parties of nationalist and Islamicist varieties, doubled their combined electoral support from 17% to 34%. Although there was no marked increase in the support of the radical left parties (their total vote increased from 0,2% 1995 to 1,3% in 1999), the electoral base of the Kurdish nationalist parties continually widened, from 4,2% in 1995 to 5,6% in 1999.

### **5. The Elections of November 2002 and July 2007 and the Turn of Islamic Conservatism towards Europe<sup>5</sup>**

The outcomes of the 3 November 2002 general elections in Turkey was an “expected surprise” for the observers of Turkish Politics. It was “expected,” because the general ranking of the parties in relation to one another had been estimated by many people. It was, on the other hand, a surprise, because no one could predict with any precision the high performance of AKP and the near annihilation of the parties of the former prime minister Bülent Ecevit (the Democratic Left Party [Demokratik Sol Parti, DSP]), and of the former foreign minister İsmail Cem (the New Turkey Party [Yeni Türkiye Partisi, YTP]). Similarly, contrary to the estimations by many analysts, the secularist-social democratic Republican People’s Party (CHP) could not manage to make a big showing, despite its last-minute recruitment of Kemal Derviş, the much-acclaimed former economy minister, into its ranks.

AKP turned out to be the undisputable victor of the elections, with 34% of the votes and 66% (363 out of 550) of the parliamentary seats. It was followed, by a large margin, by CHP, which won 20% of the votes and 34% of the seats (178 out of 550). No other party managed to top the national threshold of 10%. As a result, slightly more than 45% of the voters, nearly half of the electorate, remained unrepresented in the new parliament. 70% of the voters voted for the right-wing parties and 30% for the left-wing parties. The 70% right wing votes was divided between the “conservative-democratic” right of AKP (34%), the radical (Turkish ethnonationalist or Islamist) right of the Nationalist Action Party and the

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<sup>5</sup> For thorough analyses of the causes and consequences of the November 2002 elections see Çarkoğlu (2002) and Öniş and Keyman (2003). For AKP’s role in the consolidation of Turkish democracy see İnel (2003). Çarkoğlu (2008) offers an expert look at the determinants of party support in the July 2007 elections.

Felicity Party and others (22%), and the center-right of the True Path Party and the Motherland Party and others (15%). The 30% left-wing votes, on the other hand, was divided between the center-left of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Democratic Left Party (DSP) and others (22%) and the radical left of the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) and others (7%). Finally, 77% of the electorate chose parties which had declared themselves as "Eurosupporters", whereas 23% of the electorate have preferred the "Euroskeptic" parties of the left and the right.

The first remark to be made regarding the profile of the AKP supporters is that 60% of them thought that their primary identity was "Muslim", while the national average was only 35%<sup>6</sup>. In a similar vein, 40% of the AKP supporters identified themselves primarily in national terms (as "Turks" or "citizens of the Republic of Turkey"), while the national average was 60%. It is therefore clear that the AKP supporters perceived themselves as being "more Muslim" and "less Turkish" than the average Turkish citizen. Secondly, the AKP supporters turned out to be less educated than the average respondent, and much less educated than the CHP supporters. 54% of the AKP voters received only 5 years of elementary school education, while the national average was 42%. 33% of the AKP supporters went to middle or high school, while the national average is 40%. Finally only about 8% of AKP supporters were university graduates whereas the national average was 12%. All in all, AKP has a constituency of which 60% identified themselves as being primarily Muslim and which was less educated than the average citizen.

A brief look at the AKP voters' attitudes towards Europe and Turkey's membership in the EU reveals that they could not be labeled as Eurorejectionists but they manifested significantly more Euroskeptic tendencies when compared with the national average and with the voters of the opposition party, CHP. Hence, in a hypothetical referendum on Turkey's membership in the EU, the AKP supporters would vote YES by a ratio of 56%. This was significantly below the national average of 64% and far below the CHP figure of 82%. Similarly, when asked whether their lives would change for the better in case of EU membership, the YES rate among the AKP supporters, 34%, though it was slightly above their NO rate of 30%, still fell far below the national average of 42% and the CHP average of 53%. When it comes to the expected harms from the EU membership, 78% of the AKP supporters said that the most important disadvantage of EU membership for Turkey would be a corruption of national and religious values. This emphatic sensitivity of the AKP supporters on the issue of the would-be negative impact of Europeanization on Turkish national and religious values, reaching a total of 78%, far exceeded the national average of 64% and the CHP average of only 46%.

A clear majority of the general respondents turned out not to believe in the sincerity of the EU in admitting Turkey as a full member. This overall Euroskeptic tendency became

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<sup>6</sup> See Yılmaz (2005a). The data regarding the profile of the AKP electorate circa 2002 are drawn from "Turkish Public Opinion Regarding the European Union", a research project supported by a joint grant of TESEV (The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) and Bogazici University Research Fund. Date of Completion: December 2002. Project directors: Ali Carkoğlu, Refik Erzan, Kemal Kirişçi, Hakan Yılmaz. The opinion survey was conducted in May 2002, over a nation-wide random sample of 3060 people.

much more emphatic among the supporters of AKP. Thus, around 60% of the respondents said that the Europeans did not understand Turkey and the Turks, that the EU was not sincere in accepting Turkey as a full member, and that the Union imposed on Turkey conditions that it did not impose on the other candidate states. Among the AKP supporters, the ratio of those who shared a similar skepticism towards Europe and the EU rose to about 70%. In a similar vein, close to 50% of the average respondents believed that the EU would not accept Turkey as a full member, even if Turkey fulfilled all the pre-conditions required for membership. This ratio too was found to be around 60% among the potential voters of AKP. Finally, when asked the ultimate question, i.e. whether they perceived the EU as a “Christian Club” or not, the overwhelming majority of the AKP supporters, close to 75%, said YES. This was significantly higher than the average of 54% and much higher than the CHP average of 46%. It seems that, as they primarily identify themselves as “Muslim”, using a religious category, they perceive Europe also in religious terms and define it as being Christian before everything else.

In a striking opposition to its constituency’s Euroskeptic attitudes, the leadership of AKP, right from the day they won the elections, committed themselves to the cause of bringing Turkey into the EU. Hence, AKP turned out to be a party with the most Euroskeptic and isolationist constituency and the most Eurosupportive and integrationist leadership. Given this dramatic discrepancy between the tendencies of the party’s base and leadership, it would not be a big surprise if clashes and tensions occur between this generally conservative, inward looking and isolationist constituency and a self declaredly liberal, outward-looking, integrationist leadership of AKP. In the two years since they had come to power, the AKP leadership, to its credit, was admittedly more inclined to bring its own constituency forward into the sphere of European values rather than yielding to an easier and populist method of playing on the nationalist and Islamic sentiments of its supporters for covering up mistakes and mismanagements.

Nearly five years after it came to power in November 2002, in the July 2007 general elections AKP increased its share of the votes by 13 points over the previous elections, from 34% to 47%. This was the second time in Turkish democratic history, when a party increased its percentage of the votes from one election to the other while in government (The first such party was the center-right Democratic Party of the 1950s). Moreover, this was the largest share of votes that a party could get in a general election since the electoral victory of the center-right Justice Party (AP) in 1969. All in all, AKP won a historic victory in July 2007. Almost all the other larger parties (the Turkish nationalist MHP, the Kemalist CHP, and the Kurdish nationalist DTP) got most of their votes from certain regions of the country: CHP from the coastal zones of the Marmara and the Aegean regions; MHP from the inner Anatolian regions; and DTP from the Kurdish-populated southeast Anatolian regions. Only AKP received votes from every corner of the country, including people of Kurdish origin.

The high percentage of the votes and the more or less even distribution of its electoral support across the country can be taken as the indicators that AKP made a drastic move to occupy the center-right mainstream of the Turkish party system. However, this statement has to be qualified. AKP did not simply occupy an empty center-right seat; it also set out to

re-define the center-right mainstream of Turkish politics along three new dimensions: Islamic conservatism in politics, neo-liberalism in economics, and pro-EU orientation in foreign relations. What we are observing can be interpreted as the birth pangs of a “Muslim Democracy” in Turkey, which are not very different from the problems encountered during the formative years of Christian Democrat parties and ideologies in countries like Italy and Germany in the 1950s and 1960s, and later on in Spain (Popular Party) and Greece (New Democracy Party) in the 1970s and 1980s. AKP deserves the credit of time, and a lot of European help, so that it can successfully complete its historic leap from an anti-Western Islamicism to a pro-Western Muslim Democracy.

Why did so many people go and vote for AKP, despite the allegations, voiced by no less than the chief of the general staff, that the party might endanger the secular character of the Turkish regime? The oft-cited reasons for that success are usually revolving around the general macroeconomic improvement during the AKP government, which reflected itself, for the common people, as a drastic fall in the inflation and unemployment rates, and a slight improvement in income distribution. On the more political side of the picture, one can pinpoint three other reasons that might help us understand how AKP could gain the favor of so many voters. One reason could be that AKP was the only party that based its electoral campaign on a list of “do’s”, positive promises, and a general air of optimism, as opposed to the other parties that stressed their “don’t’s”, gave negative promises and talked pessimistically. The electorate never had a chance to learn what the opposition parties were planning to do if they made it up to the seat of government. All they heard was what the other parties would not do or would not let other people do. A second probable reason behind the choice of AKP could be that AKP appeared to be the only party that talked over multiple issues, while each of the other parties stressed a single issue only: secularism by CHP, Turkish nationalism by MHP, Kurdish nationalism by DTP. Still a third probable reason behind the electorate’s choice of AKP was AKP’s generally flexible and pragmatic stance as opposed to the other parties’ ideological, inflexible, and extremist discourses. In the eyes of the average voter, the hard-liner discourses of the opposition parties might have rung the alarm bells that had they come to power they might have drifted the country towards some sort of crisis.

## **6. Europeanization and Democratization under an Islamic Conservative Leadership: Future Prospects**

What can be said about the ex-Islamists’ strategic choice for the EU and how different is it from the earlier tactical rapprochement towards the EU? Admittedly, the pro-EU attitudes of the AKP elites had started as a tactical choice, as a matter of finding European protection against the suppressive policies of the Turkish secularist establishment. However, this tactical choice seems to have been evolving into a strategic one. This strategic choice also has to do with the defeat of Turkish political Islam, which has been traditionally represented in the political arena by Necmettin Erbakan and by the so-called “National Doctrine” parties he led, through the shock waves of the “post-modern” military intervention of 28 February 1997. Hence, anti-Kemalist revanchism, top-down transformation of the society along Islamic lines, using democracy as no more than an instrument to be able to come to power, this quintessentially political project, has proved to be futile. Erdoğan, who was a radical Islamist in the pre-28 February period,

once said that democracy was but a train and that one should get down from the train at the right station. Once his party took power, the same Erdoğan started to say that he and his party rejected any project of “social engineering”, that is to say using political power to change the society according to the precepts of a certain ideology, including the Islamist one. He also, started to vehemently deny that his party was Islamist or even that it was a religiously-based party. In quest for a more appropriate appellation that would better reflect the party’s new orientation away from political Islam and towards the center, the party ideologists came up with the term “conservative democrat”.

The strategic choice seems to involve the following dimensions. The first dimension has to do with delinking from political Islam, ideologically as well as institutionally, while the second one aims at Europeanizing the Turkish public sphere for it to accommodate the performances of Islamic identity, particularly by passing legislation that would allow Muslim women wearing a headscarf to have a legitimate presence in the universities and government institutions. Here the issue is the compatibility of Muslim identity and European modernity. In this respect, Kemalist-nationalist understanding of modernity is too restrictive, too exclusive for the desired integration of Islamic identity and modernity. Hence, a new, more liberal, more inclusionary version of modernity, one could say a more “post-modern” definition of modernity, such as the one that is upheld by the European Union, would offer a much better ground for that integration to take place. The Kemalist understanding of modernity is, paradoxically, too modernist, too much attached to an earlier, French revolutionary, 19<sup>th</sup> century definition of modernity as to allow the manifestations and performances of Islamic identity in the public sphere. On the other hand, the current European understanding of modernity is, again paradoxically, much less “modernist” than Turkey’s. Therefore, a Europeanized public sphere in Turkey would more easily tolerate the free display of Muslim identity. Two forces will resist this project, however. The first of these is Euroskepticism and nationalist isolationism in Turkey: Nationalist isolationists will not leave the battleground without, at least, a fierce last battle. Nationalists will particularly be willing to mobilize the public opinion against the government, whenever the latter attempts to touch upon such nationally sensitive issues as the Kurdish and Cyprus questions. The second force is likely to be Turcoskepticism and rejectionism of Turkey in Europe. Hence, European rejectionists of Turkey, such as the newly elected French President Nicolas Sarkozy, sticking to theses of cultural and civilizational incompatibility between Turkey and Europe, will make it harder for Turkey to get integrated into European Union, alienating many Muslim supporters of AKP, while at the same time playing into the hands of Turkish nationalist isolationists.

The success of the conservative democratic project for Europeanizing Turkey depends essentially on an external and uncontrollable factor, namely, the EU policy towards Turkey. Squeezed between Turkish Euroskepticism and European Turcoskepticism, the AKP project may very well fail. If it fails, then, Islamism, as a political ideology, will surely come back. Kurdish secessionism would most probably follow suit, as Kurds would lose their hopes of expanding their community rights in a democratic Turkey. As a result, Turkish politics would again revert to the battlefield, much the same as in the 1990s, of Islamism, Kurdish nationalism and Turkish isolationism. If Turkey’s

integration with the EU makes a leap forward with the smooth progression of the accession negotiations that were opened in the fall of 2005, then the expected short-term consequence of this would be felt, at the political front, in the form of the consolidation of a more democratic and liberal atmosphere. In such an atmosphere, it would be easier for AKP to build a wide-ranging consensus for the purpose of integrating Muslim identity into the liberalized Turkish public sphere. That would satisfy the party's more religious constituency and provide the party leadership with enough ideological ammunition to fight against, and detach themselves from, their Islamist critics. In this manner, AKP could pass a critical threshold in its journey towards the secular center of Turkish politics, and this would surely make a significant contribution to the stabilization and consolidation of the democratic regime in Turkey.

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