

7

The Military, the Parties, and Globalization, 1980–2003

RESTRUCTURING THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Few people were aware of the intentions of the generals when they captured power; they claimed that they had intervened in order to save the state and its people from social division, economic breakdown, and the anarchy and violence for which the parties and politicians were responsible. They promised to restore the authority of the state in an impartial manner. To do that, the generals set up the National Security Council (NSC) headed by Kenan Evren, who was chief of staff, and composed of army, navy, air force, and gendarmerie commanders. The NSC was merely a front for other senior officers of the armed forces, who were divided as to the course of action they should take. As is often the case, there were moderates and hardliners, the latter in charge of martial law and restoration of law and order. General Necdet Uruğ, commander of the First Army and martial law, was a hardliner who was able to impose his will on his fiefdom. But these factional differences never emerged into the open because the generals abided by the well-established hierarchical principle: they all agreed to be committed to Kemalism which, since the death of Atatürk in 1938, still carried the symbolic significance of avowed loyalty to the original ideals of the republic. The hardliners won the internal debate and the NUC agreed to reconstruct the entire

political system on new foundations by composing a new constitution, disqualifying former politicians and introducing new ones, and even establishing the military's own political party to contest elections. Their main intention was to dismantle once and for all the liberal regime introduced by the 1961 Constitution.

The NSC began by suspending the constitution, dissolving parliament, closing down the parties and detaining their leaders. Professional associations, such as those of lawyers and doctors, were suspended, including the trade unions; strikes were declared illegal and striking workers were ordered back to work. Employers applauded these measures as a step towards restoring the economy. Military officers replaced provincial officials, mayors, and governors whose political affiliations were suspect.

On 16 September, head of state General Kenan Evren announced the junta's plan to de-politicize society, so as to render any future military intervention unnecessary. He promised radical changes in virtually all areas of Turkish life, but left foreign policy and the economy – then in the process of being restructured by the programme of 24 January 1980 – untouched. The new cabinet, led by retired Admiral Bülent Ulusu, was announced on 21 September: most of the ministers were bureaucrats, professors and retired officers, and Turgut Özal, who had been charged with economic restructuring by Demirel, was retained. Özal had worked in the World Bank and was known to financial circles in the West and within the business community in Turkey. He was trusted by the junta to run the economy. The regime also adopted a pro-Western foreign and military policy, which was judged crucial in Washington after the revolution in Iran and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. On US prompting, the Ulusu government lifted the Turkish veto against the return of Greece to NATO's military command without a *quid pro quo*; Greece had left the military command following Turkey's intervention in Cyprus in 1974.

The junta gave priority to restructuring political life. They began by crushing all aspects of 'the Left' – extremists, social democrats, unionists, and even members of the Peace Association who included the very elite of Turkish society. The extreme Right, aligned with NAP, was also crushed, though the junta embraced its ideology, designating it as the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis'. For the time being, 'combating terrorism' became the junta's principal

task. Arrests followed and thousands were taken into custody; torture became widespread and systematic, besmirching the reputation of the regime in the West. But the junta, relying on US support and its strategic importance, was undeterred and brutal repression continued.

Having established a semblance of law and order, the following year, in October 1981, the NSC appointed a consultative committee to write a new constitution. Meanwhile, a law was passed abolishing all political parties and confiscating their assets. In November, the 'Higher Education Law' placed education into the hands of so-called 'nationalist-conservatives' and liberal faculty members were dismissed from the universities. In January 1982, the calendar for restoring political life was unveiled after the NSC had made amendments to the draft constitution and presented it to the people in a referendum. If the people accepted the constitution, elections would be held in late 1983 under the new political parties and elections law.

A public debate followed Evren's declaration and the intelligentsia began to anticipate a return to normal political life. Alarmed by that trend, the generals issued a law on 12 February 1982, forbidding former politicians from engaging in public political debate. Arrests followed and Bülent Ecevit, the former prime minister, was put on trial and imprisoned. This was a clear warning that the country was still under martial law.

Presented to the public on 17 July, the draft constitution centralized power in the office of the president. He could dissolve parliament and call a general election if parliament was paralysed, rule by decree, and virtually appoint the constitutional court. A presidential council, the NSC in new guise, advised him. Other provisions would curb freedom of the press and the unions. This was to be a 'democracy without freedoms'! The political provisions of the draft constitution were tightened even further following public discussions. On 19 October, the junta strengthened presidential powers by allowing him to veto legislation and constitutional amendments, which would then be put to a referendum. The president was also to be given the power to select military judges and high-ranking officials, to appoint the chief of staff (in consultation with the prime minister he appointed), and to convene and preside over NSC meetings. If the new constitution was approved

by the people on 7 November, General Evren would automatically become president for the next seven years, and the other four generals of the NSC would be his advisers! Finally, the new constitution would rule out legal action against orders and decisions signed by the president. New laws would disqualify all members of the 1980 parliament from political activity for five years and all party leaders for ten, and new parties could not be formed if most of their members came from the old ones. The intention was to introduce new and 'clean' politicians into the system – but that proved impossible to accomplish.

When the draft constitution drew criticism, the junta banned all discussion of the document, although Evren was permitted to disseminate propaganda on its behalf. Voters understood that only by voting 'Yes' for a constitution they disliked, would civilian rule be restored. Therefore they voted overwhelmingly in favour of it – 91.37 per cent of the valid vote – though the generals interpreted the referendum as a vote of confidence in the regime! Thus Kenan Evren became Turkey's 7th president on 19 November 1982, convinced that the people loved him as another Atatürk – whom he tried hard to emulate.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW POLITICAL PARTIES

Having legitimized the constitution, the generals set about finding politicians who would be loyal to their philosophy. On 12 November, President Evren announced elections in October 1983, if all went well. They set about forming a 'state party' and the hardliners won this battle when retired general Turgut Sunalp was chosen to head this party instead of the moderate, Prime Minister Bülent Ulusu. The new parties law came into effect on 24 April 1983 and the NSC lifted the ban on politics the next day. New politicians could be vetoed by the NSC for any reason and the new parties were obliged to accept the legacy of what has come to be known as the '12 September regime'.

Of the new parties founded in the spring of 1983, only three proved to be politically viable. One was the social democratic party, or SODEP, founded by Professor Erdal İnönü, the son of İsmet İnönü. Its support came from former Republican voters and the Left. The second party was called the Great Turkey Party,

which was Süleyman Demirel's Justice Party under proxy leadership. The generals shut down the Great Turkey Party and vetoed SODEP's candidates to prevent the party from contesting the election. Had these two parties been allowed to survive, a stable two-party system might have been restored. But the generals wanted to establish new politics and politicians, and these parties represented the old. The third party was founded by Turgut Özal and was called the Motherland Party, or ANAP by its Turkish acronym. Özal claimed that his party was neither Left nor Right, but represented all the political tendencies in existence before the 1980 coup. General Sunalp headed the 'state party', the Nationalist Democracy Party (NDP), while Necdet Calp, İsmet İnönü's former private secretary, led the Populist Party, which was intended to fill the political vacuum left by the dissolved RPP. The generals calculated that Sunalp and Calp would become the new politicians committed to the 12 September philosophy and Özal would lead a party of no political consequence; after all, he was merely a failed politician who had stood as an Islamist candidate on the MSP ticket in 1977 and had not been elected. Had he been elected, he too would have been disqualified by the generals, but US support and intervention saved him from veto.

The election campaign opened on 16 October, and meetings held by both Sunalp's and Necdet Calp's parties failed to stir any public interest, for both men were uninspiring leaders. Voters simply did not trust a military man – or a former high bureaucrat such as Necdet Calp – to lead the country back to democracy. Sunalp had declared that his first commitment was to the state, then democracy, then to the party. In contrast, Özal was the only candidate who projected a liberal, anti-statist image and promised a swift return to democracy. Voters had forgotten Özal's role in the 'Bankers' scandal' of 1982 in which thousands had lost their savings, and which had resulted in his forced resignation. But the generals did not expect Özal to win and even wanted his party to merge with that of General Sunalp!

THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1983

Despite – or perhaps because of – the generals' open support, Sunalp lost and Özal won the election on 6 November. Özal's

Motherland Party (ANAP) won 45.15 per cent of the vote, while Calp's Populist Party won 30.46 per cent and Sunalp's National Democracy Party came third with only 23.27 per cent of the votes cast. Having imposed a monetary fine of about US\$25 for those not voting, there was a record turnout of almost 93 per cent. However, in spite of his victory Özal's position was barely legitimized, simply because the two genuine parties – SODEP and the Great Turkey Party – had not been allowed to contest the election. Consequently, the municipal elections the following year turned out to be the proving ground for ANAP. Özal took very seriously the challenge posed by SODEP and the newly-formed True Path Party which replaced the Great Turkey Party and exploited the advantages of patronage, in order to win. Patronage became the hallmark of his administration, especially the system of 'discretionary funds' established for the purpose of strengthening the executive against the legislature. These 'funds' became a valuable source of money outside the budget and beyond the control of the assembly or the finance ministry.

Özal won the municipal election but his vote declined from 45 to 41 per cent. Votes for the National Democrats and the Populists plummeted to below 10 per cent, marking their demise. The centre-left SODEP and the centre-right TPP became the opposition though they still lacked representation in the assembly, having to wait until 1987 before this was remedied. For the moment, Özal ruled without serious opposition in the assembly. He was a pragmatist who bragged that his government was essentially non-ideological: ANAP was not a continuation of the dissolved parties but contained their best elements and ideas. It was conservative like the JP, traditionalist like the Islamists, nationalist like the neo-fascists, and left-of-centre like the RPP because it believed in social justice. In reality, ANAP was conservative, undemocratic and wedded to the values of globalization and the free market. Liberals who questioned the party's leadership and its policies were forced to leave.

Turgut Özal concentrated on the economy and left the generals to maintain law and order. He had asked for five years of 'social peace' – that is to say, no strikes or protests – and the generals were providing that. The social democrats were divided between SODEP and the recently formed Democratic Left Party (DLP), and only the True Path Party provided any sort of challenge. ANAP

had become a family affair with Turgut's brothers, Korkut and Yusuf, and his wife Semra, playing active roles. They recruited young men with experience of the US 'Reagan revolution' which they wanted to emulate in Turkey.

Just as conservatives in the US said they spoke for 'the silent majority', so Özal claimed to speak for the 'central pillar' of Turkish society, the *ortadirek*. His promise of a bright prosperous future for Turkey and the removal of many restrictions on the economy and society caught the imagination of the people. Turkey, he promised, would 'skip an era' and become a major power because his would be the government that 'got things done'! By 1986, however, Özal was again challenged by former party leaders banned by the generals but who were now guiding the leading parties: the True Path Party fronted for Süleyman Demirel; the Democratic Left for Bülent Ecevit; the Welfare Party for Necmettin Erbakan; and the Nationalist Labour Party for Alparslan Türkeş. The Populist Party and SODEP had merged and become the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP), the principal party of the Left. The Right seemed more divided than ever with nine parties; for the moment, only the Motherland and the True Path Parties mattered.

FORMER POLITICAL LEADERS RE-EMERGE

One of the principal issues of Turkish politics in 1986 was the removal of the ban on former politicians. Demirel was gaining in popularity among the liberal Right and eroding ANAP's electoral support. The business community began to hedge its bets and financed the campaigns of both parties! Reacting to public pressure to restore the political rights of his rivals, Özal decided to put the question to a referendum and, although he campaigned vigorously for a 'No' vote, on 6 September 1987 the people voted to restore political rights. The banned political leaders were now back in business, finally reversing one of the most radical measures of the generals. To counter this, Özal decided to bring forward the general election before Demirel had time to get organized. When this was held on 29 November 1987, ANAP won 36.29 per cent of the vote which translated into 64.9 per cent or 292 seats in the assembly thanks to Özal's amended election law. In 1983, 45.1 per cent of the vote had given only 211 seats! Demirel described the

new Özal government as 'the election-law cabinet' and the ministry lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Özal had also lost much of his glitter and realized that it would be difficult to win any future election after seeing the results of the local elections in March 1988. In the four years since 1983, ANAP'S popularity had slipped from 45 to 22 per cent despite the patronage it had enjoyed. In August 1988, Özal tried to call another early general election for November but the measure was defeated in a referendum and Özal's prestige took another blow. He had done nothing to further the democratic process and all the laws passed by the junta – the trade unions law, the higher education law, the law on elections and political parties, the press law, the penal code law, and the law governing the running of Turkey's radio and television – remained on the books. Furthermore, corruption associated with the 'Özal dynasty' had damaged his reputation. Özal therefore decided to enter the running for president when President Kenan Evren's term expired in November 1989. His party had the votes in the assembly and that is what mattered. Özal was duly elected Turkey's eighth president by his party on 31 October – opposition deputies boycotting the session – and assumed office on 9 November, the second civilian president of the Republic. Within ANAP, the so-called 'Holy Alliance' of Islamists and Nationalists calculated that they would now be able to gain control of the party with Özal out of the way.

Özal's presidency (1989–93) was marked by political instability. Yıldırım Akbulut, the new prime minister, a puppet of the president, was not respected in the country. The opposition announced that they would remove Özal from the presidency as soon as they won the next general election. In light of the growing Kurdish insurgency in south-eastern Turkey, there was talk of another military intervention; the Islamists became more vocal, and there were political assassinations in the capital and Istanbul in early 1990. In March the business lobby called for an early poll under a new elections law in order to restore political stability; however, the arrival of ex-president Kenan Evren in Ankara to confer with the chief of staff, raised political tensions. On 9 April, the government responded to the situation by passing an 'anti-terrorism law', which gave the army and police extra-ordinary powers. Late in July, the National Security Council had these

emergency powers extended for a further four months in the eight provinces in the south-east.

Within weeks, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 transformed Turkey's situation dramatically and the political crisis was forgotten for the time being. Turkey was in the midst of an international crisis that redefined her place in the world, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall the previous year. Her strategic importance had faded with the end of the Soviet threat, but with the Gulf Crisis and the emergence of new Turkic states in Central Asia, Ankara gained a new significance. Özal bypassed the cabinet and supported President Bush's policy, gambling that Turkey would come out a winner, thereby garnering the goodwill of America and Europe. Ankara shut down the oil pipeline from Iraq to the Mediterranean on 7 August, and agreed to permit foreign troops to be based in Turkey. But chief of staff, General Torumtay, disagreeing with the way Özal was conducting policy without any consultation, resigned on 3 December. The soldier had advised a cautious policy that Özal had described as 'cowardly and timid'; nevertheless Torumtay's resignation reined in Özal and forced him to be more guarded and less adventurous. It seemed as though Özal was looking ahead to the partition of Iraq, and the formation of a Kurdish state that would join Turkey in a federation. He wanted to occupy Mosul and Kirkuk in Iraq and asked Torumtay how many troops would be lost in the invasion. Given a figure of thirty or forty thousand, he gave up the idea of invasion!

The Gulf Crisis exploded into war on 16 January 1991, ending with a cease-fire on 28 February. The influx of Iraqi-Kurdish refugees into Turkey aggravated the Kurdish insurgency and the economic situation. As a result, ANAP's standing in the country declined even further in favour of Demirel's True Path Party. ANAP hoped to strengthen its position by electing Mesut Yılmaz as its replacement leader for Özal, defeating the nationalist-religious faction. Yılmaz was 43 years old and a graduate of the Faculty of Political Science in Ankara. In contrast to Yıldırım Akbulut, he was modern, cosmopolitan, pragmatic and spoke a foreign language, German. He seemed to represent a leader who might revive the party's declining fortunes. Now Prime Minister Yılmaz decided that the party had better chance of success if elections were held before

the economy declined even further. The assembly therefore voted to hold elections on 20 October 1991.

But the elections did not turn out well for Yılmaz: Demirel's TPP won the majority with 178 seats, while ANAP won only 115, and Erdal İnönü's social democrats, 88 seats. Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party won 62 seats, but only because the Islamists had formed an electoral alliance with the neo-fascists, an alliance that proved to be ephemeral. ANAP, without Özal, had survived, and Demirel, the principal leader of the Right since the sixties, had assumed his rightful place. Although there were hardly any ideological differences between ANAP and TPP, the two centre-right parties, there was no question of a merger, which would have permitted a strong government. With too many vested interests at stake and too much to lose on ANAP's part to contemplate a merger, Yılmaz preferred to be in opposition. Therefore Demirel formed a coalition with the social democrats in November 1991, a coalition he had refused to form with Ecevit in the 1970s! The Demirel-İnönü cabinet was supported by 266 seats in the Assembly and 48% of the popular vote. In theory, the government was strong and capable of providing stability and solutions to Turkey's problems. The principal problem requiring attention was the economy.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS RETURN TO THE FORE

Turkey's economic development had gone through some radical phases since the fifties. After a decade of an unplanned economy during that decade, the country had quite successfully practised 'import substitution industrialization' in the sixties and seventies and had succeeded in creating an internal market for its goods, but these goods were never competitive and found no export market. In order to become competitive, the unions had to be disciplined and wages had to be cut. All this had proved impossible to accomplish under party politics and the coalition government of the 1970s. Consequently, one of the tasks for the military regimes of the eighties was to end party politics and establish a basis for economic development under the influence of 'global market forces' or globalization. Turkey had to become more productive and pay lower wages to its workers so as to be competitive.

The government was told to make a number of crucial changes in preparation to enter the global market. These included state withdrawal from production, in which it had played a vital role since the 1930s, in order to focus on building the country's infrastructure, its roads, communications systems and dams, to meet its energy needs. Other imperatives included the privatization of state economic enterprises, and the private sector and foreign capital were to be given the primary role in production. Also, the state had to abandon protectionism because protected industries, anti-statists argued, were weak and inefficient and provided consumers with expensive and inferior quality goods. Quality goods could be exported, thus attracting the much needed foreign exchange.

One of the results of these policies was that income distribution, always skewed, became much worse and undermined the middle and lower classes, while the rich prospered. According to the World Bank, Turkey was one among seven countries with the worst records for income disparity. According to Turkish economists, between 1980 and 1986, thirty trillion liras had been transferred from wages and salaries to the private sector. The SPO calculated that in ten years, the share of wages in Turkey's GNP declined from 36 per cent in 1977 to 18 per cent in 1987.

Despite the pain felt by the majority of the population (for there was no safety net), the economic policies of the 1980s produced remarkable results. Inflation fell and foreign exchange and imported consumer goods became available. The mood of the country was upbeat and optimistic after the depressing years of the late 1970s. The press spoke of an 'export miracle' because export earnings had increased from US \$2.3 billion in 1979 to US \$11.7 billion in 1988. This 'miracle' was aided by the Iran–Iraq war (1980–88) when Turkish goods were in great demand by both belligerents, and for a period, Turkish exports to the Middle East overtook those to Europe, Turkey's principal market. Corruption was endemic during these years, especially with regard to the so-called 'phantom exports' reported by companies so as to obtain export subsidies from the state.

Export subsidies benefited the large holding companies in western Turkey at the expense of smaller enterprise in Anatolia, although consolidation amongst these smaller enterprises became

a feature, marking the rise of conglomerates strong enough to compete with the capitalist ventures of Istanbul and the Marmara region. These companies were known as the 'Anatolian Tigers' and they became the supporters of Erbakan's Welfare Party, which acted in opposition to the companies united in TÜSİAD. The Anatolian Tigers formed their own association known as MÜSİAD, standing for the 'Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen', although it was no secret that the 'M' in the acronym was the code word for 'Muslim', 'Independent' being intended to deceive the secularists. Meanwhile, such well-established conglomerates as Koç and Sabancı had grown and achieved what was described as 'global reach', due to investment in the Balkans, Russia, and the Turkic republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union, even though Turkey itself needed capital investment. In the summer of 1992, President Özal held a conference to launch economic cooperation among states of the Black Sea region. The idea was a good one, although Turkey lacked the resources to play the kind of role that Özal aspired to. This was the age of 'economic Darwinism' – survival of the fittest while the small and the weak were eliminated or swallowed up in mergers. At home, the state encouraged this trend, but it was unable to act abroad because of its economic weakness.

Turkey had become a strategic asset in the 'second cold war' after the revolution in Iran (1978–9) and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1978). The victory of Andreas Papandreou's socialist party in Greece in 1981 – ending nearly 50 years of conservative hegemony – increased the value of Turkey to US policy makers. Özal declared that it was his policies that had enabled Turkey (in his words) to 'turn the corner' and 'skip an epoch', and that Turkey was on the way to becoming 'the Japan of West Asia'. But all this was an illusion, for investments in industry actually declined in relation to those in the service sector, making tourism – a fickle industry at best – a major source of foreign exchange. People who became wealthy were rentiers not entrepreneurs. The so-called export miracle had been financed through a massive foreign debt, whose service costs became a nightmare for the government. Turkey expected to be able to pay off her debts by 1995, but in the end could not do so; even by 2002, she had not paid them off, and the Ankara Chamber of Commerce calculated that over the past

two decades, the country had paid such vast sums in interest payments that its economic future was threatened.

TURKEY'S CHANGING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Nevertheless, Turkey's society and economy were transformed under Özal. Turkey had become a consumer society, serving about ten per cent of the urban population who were articulate enough to make demands on the state and have these demands satisfied. Everything was available to the new rich, even though advertising in the media – especially television – brought consumer goods into the homes of the less affluent as well! Cars, especially imported cars, became a status symbol, as did works of art, antiques and rare books. But the vast majority, living on wages and salaries, were barely able to survive, given the constantly rising cost of living. Employment patterns were also changing: university graduates no longer wanted to work for state concerns where salaries were low, but in the private sector, preferably for foreign companies, where salaries were high and the future promising. Universities were privatized to serve this new clientele and to produce the business managers which the private sector constantly needed. English was now the *lingua franca* of this class and positions were even advertised in the Turkish press in English, a language foreign to the majority.

Turgut Özal died on 17 April 1993, soon after his return from an exhausting tour of the Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union. He was succeeded as president by Süleyman Demirel, who was elected by parliament on 16 May. Demirel believed that he would retain control over the True Path Party if he handed it over to Mrs Tansu Çiller (1946–), whom he had promoted within the party. She was not the obvious choice, for she was a relatively young and inexperienced newcomer to the party and there were more seasoned men who had stronger claims to leadership. But Çiller had the advantage of being younger, female, attractive, and well educated in comparison with her rivals. Not only was she an economist, but she was also fluent in English and German, had a cosmopolitan outlook and was well acquainted with the West. Around the world, voters seemed to prefer young, dynamic leaders

and Turkey was no exception. A youthful Mesut Yılmaz had taken over ANAP from Özal, and İnönü's SHP went in the same direction when he retired and elected a younger leader in September 1993. It made good political sense to elect a woman as TPP's leader, thereby strengthening the party's position in the forthcoming election. She would counter the qualities of her rivals, especially among female voters, who made up over half the electorate. The open support that the business community gave Çiller could not be ignored either. Moreover her success was expected to enhance Turkey's image in the West as a forward-looking Muslim country from an Islamic world that seemed to be looking to the past for inspiration.

Çiller came to public notice in the late eighties as one of the critics of Turgut Özal's economic policies. The support she enjoyed in the business community enabled her to enter Süleyman Demirel's circle as a consultant on economic matters. She was elected from Istanbul and entered parliament in 1990. Demirel appointed her minister of state in charge of economic affairs. Before entering politics, she had taught economics at Bosphorus University in Istanbul, having earned degrees in America at the Universities of New Hampshire and Connecticut. Thus at the party's convention, she defeated her male rivals and became the party's leader and the first woman prime minister of Turkey.

Çiller's coalition with the social democrats won a vote of confidence on 25 June 1993, and she took charge of the country's destiny. Being the junior partners, the social democrats' political position in the country had begun to erode among voters as SHP supported the policies of a right-wing leader. The social democratic programme was too timid to attempt to challenge the system and yet too daring to be accepted by the conservatives in the business community. The programme, premised on a fast rate of growth, was incapable of dealing with the economic crisis of the nineties. There was therefore no obstacle to Çiller's programme. Her success depended on her ability to find answers to Turkey's many problems: the economy, entry into the European Union and a solution to end the Kurdish question. Turkey was being held to ransom since August 1984, when the PKK – the Workers' Party of Kurdistan – launched its insurrection. This war was estimated to cost US \$7 billion a year! If the conservatives failed to find a solution, the Islamists were standing in the wings to challenge them.

THE KURDISH QUESTION

The Kurdish question in its modern form had emerged in the 1960s, when the ‘peoples of the east’ demanded greater cultural freedom and questioned the state’s policy of assimilation. Their demands were related to the backwardness of the region, which had largely been ignored by Ankara, especially during the period of multi-party politics. The market economy favoured by the Democrats had benefited large landowners, tribal sheiks, and the rich peasants. Landlessness increased during these years as peasants could no longer afford to cultivate their plots and therefore sold them and became labourers. A survey conducted in 1984, the year the insurrection began, revealed that 45 per cent of peasant families in the province of Diyarbakır and 47 in Urfa had no land. The private sector concentrated industrial production in western Anatolia, close to the ports for shipment to world markets. As a result, there was high unemployment in the east and south-east and the people, Kurds and Turks, lived in conditions that were often described as feudal.

In the 1960s, the Kurdish intelligentsia hoped that it would be able to make gains by working through the Workers’ Party of Turkey and the left-of-centre RPP. But the political elite in Turkey, especially in the military, refused to promote a political solution, convinced that the armed forces could crush any challenge to the state, a challenge that was described as ‘separatism’ and fragmentation of the state. Ever since the aborted Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, Turks had lived under the ‘Sèvres complex’: they feared that the Western world had not forgotten its defeat at the hands of the Nationalists and that they were now trying to reimpose terms – in the form of a Kurdish state and Armenian irredentism – that it had failed to impose in 1920.

Initially, the elite saw the Kurdish insurrection as a minor internal matter that could be dealt with by military means. In the eighties, the generals took a harder line and in 1983 passed a law forbidding the use of any language other than Turkish. This law was applied only to the Kurds, who were not allowed to give ‘Kurdish’ names to their children, and the army often brutalized and humiliated them in the east. Özal had tried to deal with this problem politically but made no headway: he repealed the

language law and even went so far as to claim that he was half Kurdish, but to no avail. Ironically, there were many Kurdish members of parliament, especially from the social democratic party; the Kurdish party they had formed had not been allowed to contest the general election and so they had joined the social democrats in order to enter parliament.

The situation changed dramatically in 1991, after the Gulf War and the defeat of Saddam Hussein. Northern Iraq was liberated and Iraqi Kurds were given control of the region and protected by the Western powers. The PKK acquired modern weapons in northern Iraq, and began to act more like an army than guerrilla bands. Its fighters were able to retreat into territory under the control of Iraqi Kurds, forcing the Turkish army to make regular incursions into Iraqi territory in order to destroy PKK bases. They also had the unofficial support of such neighbouring countries as Iran, Syria and Greece, who made use of the Kurds to embarrass Ankara. In the 1980s, the PKK had claimed to be a Marxist organization, but after the fall of the Soviet Union, it began to adopt Islamic discourse. The conflict was also internationalized and foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to monitor the conflict, accusing Turkish armed forces of violating the human rights of the Kurdish population.

While politicians tried to soften the conflict, the army and the extreme Right escalated it. In 1992, Prime Minister Demirel went so far as to declare that they recognized the 'Kurdish reality', a fact that governments had tended to deny. In Washington, in December 1994, Turkey's ambassador, responding to an editorial in the *Washington Post*, noted that the Kurds were only one of 26 different ethnic groups living in Turkey. They were not a minority, but were co-owners of the country. 'Diversity in the Turkish population is similar to that found in the United States'. This statement suggested that sections of officialdom in Turkey were coming round to an inclusive definition of nationalism/patriotism, abandoning the exclusive nationalism of the extreme Right. Two weeks later, the press quoted Premier Tansu Çiller as proposing that Atatürk's famous aphorism, 'Happy is he who calls himself a Turk', be altered to 'Happy is he who calls himself a citizen of Turkey'.

But such ideas had no effect on the military campaign and the conflict in the east, which was a drain on the economy and cost

thousands of lives each year, and intensified in the years after 1992. It seems that money was being made out of the continuation of this conflict and the war profiteers did not want it to end. The army sent about one-quarter of a million troops and mobilized so-called village guards from amongst Kurdish tribes, who were paid to fight the PKK, thus providing them with money and 'employment'. Villages were evacuated and destroyed so that the PKK, not finding local support, would become 'a fish out of water'. An estimated two million refugees from such villages sought shelter in the cities throughout Anatolia. Those more fortunate fled to Western Europe, where they formed a vocal lobby for the PKK and agitated on its behalf, internationalizing the conflict.

The declaration of a unilateral cease-fire by Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK's leader, in March 1993, was seen as a sign of weakness by the generals, who thought they could now destroy the insurgency by stepping up their operations. They launched major incursions into northern Iraq in January 1994 and March 1995, but to no avail. The insurgency continued to cost thousands of lives each year, as well as isolating Turkey from the West. Nor were moderate Kurdish politicians allowed to become part of the political process by forming political parties, competing in elections, and putting forward their case in parliament. The People's Labour Party was banned by the constitutional court in August 1993, as were its successors, who were finally succeeded by HADEP (People's Democracy Party) in May 1994. Members of parliament belonging to these parties were imprisoned for 'separatist activities', closing the door to a political solution. Throughout the 1990s, European support for the Kurds continued to grow, with an estimated half a million displaced Kurds throughout Europe. In June 1998, a Kurdish rally in Dortmund was addressed by a former Danish prime minister, a former Greek minister, as well as the Green Party. So while the PKK had been weakened militarily, it had gained in diplomatic strength.

Ankara forced the Syrian government to expel Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK from Syria in October 1998 and finally captured him in Nairobi, Kenya in February 1999. He was tried and sentenced to death on 29 June 1999. The sentence was not carried out because Ankara awaited the outcome of a review of the sentence by the European Court of Justice. By now the Kurdish cause had

been taken up by the European Union, which insisted that Ankara abolish the death penalty and grant Kurds the right to have education and broadcasting in Kurdish before Turkey would be considered for accession talks for membership to the EU. In the year 2002, these two issues divided the coalition government and threatened its very survival.

The war against the PKK also exposed the unofficial alliance between elements of the state and the criminal element, or 'mafia', known in Turkey as the 'deep state'. This relationship, though an open secret often referred to in the press, came out into the open as a result of an automobile accident in November 1996, known as the Susurluk incident. In July, a journalist had said in an interview that he wished the state would give up being a gang of criminals and abide by the rule of law. He was vindicated when a Mercedes crashed into a tractor on the Balıkesir–Istanbul road, resulting in the deaths of three of the four passengers. Those killed included Abdullah Çatlı, a neo-fascist militant involved in the murder of leftists in the 1970s, and now a criminal working with the state, his girlfriend, and Hüseyin Kocadağ, deputy chief of police for Istanbul and involved in state security matters. The surviving man, though injured, was Sedat Bucak, a Kurdish tribal chief and a member of Tansu Çiller's TPP, involved in the village guard movement against the PKK. The collusion between state officials, criminals and neo-fascists had begun in the seventies, when the military entered into an alliance to crush the Left. Such an alliance became unnecessary after the 1980 coup, but was revived during the Özal administration when criminals infiltrated the state mechanism and bought officials with money generated by 'phantom exports' and smuggling. This alliance was later used against the PKK and other 'enemies of state', and that is why their crimes went unpunished.

The incident aroused great anger in the country and was seen as another turning-point in Turkey's politics. But there was no serious outcome because too many politicians and officers had been involved over the years. Nevertheless, the public were now aware of the complicity between the state and criminals, an activity that continued despite the revelations. Turkey seemed to have more urgent matters to attend to, perhaps the most urgent being relations with the EU.

TURKEY AND THE EEC

Turkey joined the Western world, led by Washington, after the Second World War. The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO cemented the relationship and secured Turkey's position within Western security arrangements. In the fifties, as the European Economic Community took shape, Ankara followed Greece and applied for association with the EEC, wanting to become part of the economic system. After the Johnson Letter of 1964, Turkey became lukewarm to the US connection and began to see itself more as a part of Europe; Europe had become a major market for Turkish products and the supplier of capital goods. The ties became stronger as Turkish workers migrated to Europe, comprising about three million people or about five per cent of Turkey's population. Ankara signed the Association Agreement with the EEC in 1963. But in July 1980, when Turkey was asked to apply for full membership at the same time as Greece, Premier Süleyman Demirel put off the application in order to appease anti-EEC Islamists and win their support for his weak minority government. Greece joined the EEC the following year, while Turkey missed the boat. Since then, Turkey's attempts to join the EEC – later the European Union (EU) – have ended in failure and disappointment. But the customs union agreement that came into effect on 1 January 1996 marked Turkey's entry into the world of globalization, with almost total dependence on so-called 'market forces'. With the customs union, Turkey had given up its best bargaining card; the EU was now able to demand conditions before Ankara was allowed to negotiate a timetable for full membership.

TURKEY'S POLITICAL MALAISE

The roots of Turkey's political malaise, and its failure to resolve many related problems, are to be found in the political regime created after the coup d'état of 12 September 1980. By disqualifying former politicians and creating new institutions, the generals succeeded in de-politicizing the entire system. By the time the political rights of former politicians – Demirel, Ecevit, Erbakan and Türkeş – were restored with the 1987 referendum, the entire

political architecture of the country had been altered. The centre-left and the centre-right had been fractured and non-systemic parties like the Islamists and the neo-fascists were able to play a critical role. During these years, Turkey had become part of the globalized world, accepted by both centre-left and centre-right, with the result that the social democratic parties were only that in name. There was no longer any significant difference between the parties save for the rhetoric; that was the end of ideology. And this is why social democrats under various leaders could co-habit with the True Path Party throughout the 1990s.

When Turgut Özal died in April 1993, Demirel's decision to become the next president proved disastrous for his party. Under Tansu Çiller's leadership, the party declined rapidly, leading to the Welfare Party winning the general election of 24 December 1995 with 21.38 per cent of the vote and 158 seats. Çiller is said to have even considered going to war with Iran to boost her vote! True Path's vote declined to 19.18 per cent and 135 seats, and ANAP's to 19.65 and 133. The centre-right parties had won almost 40 per cent of the vote and 268 seats, and could have formed a stable government had they united; but that was out of the question given the rivalry between the leaders. The social democrats also won over 25 per cent of the vote – the DLP won 14.64 and the RPP 10.71 – but they too could not unite because of rivalry between the leaders. The other parties failed to clear the 10 per cent hurdle required to enter parliament.

Again a coalition government proved difficult to form. The Islamists failed to do so; so did Çiller, though she tried to unite the centre-right under her leadership. In fact, TPP split as a result of her leadership and dissidents formed the Democrat Turkey party. While politicians were squabbling and bargaining, the press reported that people in the south-eastern province of Hakkari were struggling to feed themselves from rubbish heaps. Because of the war against the PKK, poverty had reached unbearable proportions.

NEW POLITICAL COALITIONS

Finally in March 1996, after much unsuccessful horse-trading, Mesut Yılmaz formed the 'Mother-Path' coalition between ANAP

and the TPP, supported by Ecevit's Democratic Left. The new coalition had a rotating premiership on the Israeli model, with Yılmaz as PM in 1996 and Çiller in 1997. Immediately, Erbakan began to harass Tansu Çiller with threats to investigate alleged corruption. Anticipating an early election and pandering to his electorate, Erbakan also made statements provocative to the secularists, praising Iran's Islamic revolution and promising to lead a revolution that he said would be painful but unavoidable. He called for an Islamic version of NATO, an Islamic common market and an Islamic equivalent of UNESCO, before establishing an Islamic Union.

The 'Mother-Path' coalition was too unstable to accomplish anything. When an IMF team arrived in Ankara in late May 1996, it warned the government of an impending financial crisis because of the huge budget deficit. Tensions within the cabinet forced Mesut Yılmaz to resign on 6 June. The government had lasted 90 days; it had taken 60 days before it was formed. Few people were surprised, and most agreed that Erbakan would have to be included in the next coalition or the country would have to go to an early general election. Business circles also accepted the fact of Islamist participation, but they hoped that the next coalition would lead Turkey to an election under a new electoral law. Political instability had led to economic instability and that had to end; otherwise observers once more predicted military intervention and an early conclusion to the experiment in democracy. The results of a survey conducted by Anadolu University suggested that people were losing confidence in politicians, the local administration, the private sector, the universities, the IMF and the media; only confidence in the military increased.

Three days after Yılmaz's resignation, the Welfare Party asked parliament to investigate how Tansu Çiller had accumulated so much wealth in so short a time. Çiller had campaigned on the platform that she was the salvation for a secular Turkey threatened by the rising tide of 'fundamentalism', and that she would never form an alliance with the Islamists. But she succumbed to Erbakan's blackmail and agreed to form a coalition, providing he froze the investigation against her. Erbakan, ever the opportunist, agreed and a 'Welfare-Path' coalition, with Erbakan as prime minister, was announced on 29 June 1995.

Erbakan's ministry came under pressure from secularist forces from the very beginning. Most of the press, monopolized by Turkey's media moguls, was hostile. Erbakan was criticized about his visit to Iran and other Muslim countries in August, even when he was following in the footsteps of other prime ministers who had visited these countries regularly to further economic relations. The monthly National Security Council meetings, dominated by the generals, were an embarrassment to Erbakan as he was forced to accept policies – the growing relations with Israel, for example – that were distasteful. The press excoriated him for the rebuff he had received when he visited Libya in October when Colonel Muammer Qadhafi had criticized Turkey's Kurdish policy. Feelings were running so high that the press spoke of the possibility of military intervention and even Mesut Yilmaz acknowledged rumours of a coup. Yet Libya was an important market for Turkey's contractors and their spokesman noted that members of his association wanted new projects in Libya despite the unpaid debt and the political wrangling following Erbakan's visit: 'We don't want to lose a market worth billions.'

CONTINUING POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE ECONOMY

The economy, already in poor shape, suffered as a result of the political instability. There was a flight of capital, and foreign capital in particular was not being invested in the country. Economists calculated that US \$70 billion of Turkish capital had left the country to be invested in the West; US \$45 billion was thought to be in Switzerland. Compared to September 1995, foreign investment had declined by 63 per cent, or US \$67 million, in the same period in 1996. The Central Bank predicted that the economy would face higher deficits in 1996 amid increased uncertainty about the government. The current account deficit was expected to rise to US \$6–7 billion in 1996 compared to US \$2.3 billion in 1995; the public sector borrowing was expected to reach 9–10 per cent of GNP as compared to 6.5 per cent in 1995. By the end of the year, the Turkish lira had depreciated 65 per cent against the US dollar compared to 35 per cent in 1995. The dollar declined to 107,500 liras compared to 59,500 in 1995, and the decline

continued throughout the next four years into the new millennium, when the lira sank to 1,700,000 liras.

Erbakan tried to improve relations with the generals at his party's congress, where he was greeted by military music. He denied that he was attempting to steer Muslim and secular Turkey away from the West and declared that Turkey was merely carrying out its own individual foreign policy. He even visited Anıtkabir, Atatürk's Mausoleum, something he had failed to do while in opposition, since Islamists had bitter disdain for the secular, anti-Islamic policies of the founder of the republic. The press noted that the government had increased the subsidy for the ballet and the opera by 129 per cent, cultural activities which Islamists had frowned upon as foreign and alien to Turkish culture. Visits made by Erbakan to various countries, especially the relationship with Iran, had annoyed Washington, and Erbakan wanted to appease the US. Consequently, in December 1996, he sent his minister of state to Washington 'in order to make ourselves better understood by our friend, America'. Fehim Adak was expected to discuss important issues, working to increase cooperation and to reassure the suspicions of US policy makers.

Erbakan's efforts to appease the secularists and the US were bound to fail, given the vast gap between the now moderate leadership of the Welfare Party and its militant rank and file, upon whom the party's success in elections depended. The leadership was becoming moderate and centrist because of the gains the Anatolian bourgeoisie – the 'Anatolian tigers' – had made since the 1980s; the 'tigers' wanted to share in the benefits of globalization, and these were forthcoming only if the party was in power. The rank and file, on the other hand, had only suffered economic loss during these years and remained radical in their demands. Erbakan continued to pay lip service to radicalism and was happy to talk of an Islamic common market and NATO, and a Muslim M-8 to counter the influence of the Western group of wealthy nations known as the G-7.

In February 1997, the Welfare Party mayor of Sincan, a village on the outskirts of Ankara, organized 'Jerusalem Day', to call for the liberation of the city from Israel. The Iranian ambassador was invited and, making anti-secular statements, he called for the establishment of Islamic law in Turkey, while the crowd demonstrated in

support of Hamas and Hizbullah, two Islamist groups waging armed struggle against Israel. Secularist forces in Turkey were infuriated and appalled by the rally so close to the capital, and the generals responded by sending tanks through Sincan as a warning. The mayor was arrested, the Iranian ambassador declared a *persona non grata*, and an investigation launched against the Welfare Party. The Welfare Party had provided the generals with a pretext to curb the Islamic movement and they did so, with what is described as a soft or 'post-modern coup'.

SECULARISTS AND ISLAMISTS

The National Security Council, presided over by Erbakan, met on 28 February 1997. Political Islam was declared to be more dangerous than Kurdish nationalism and Erbakan was humiliated into accepting a twenty-point programme. The programme was designed to undermine the influence of political Islam by purging its supporters from the state apparatus and curbing the schools for prayer leaders and preachers, schools whose expansion the generals had legislated for after September 1980 in order to counter the influence of 'leftist ideologies'. A law extending secular education from 5 to 8 years was passed in August, and its aim was to weaken the hold of political Islam on Turkey's lower and lower middle class youth. The measure sparked angry demonstrations throughout Turkey, because it was blocking employment opportunities for an entire deprived section of population.

Premier Erbakan's position had become untenable and he resigned on 18 June 1997, hoping that President Demirel would appoint Tansu Çiller as prime minister and that the Welfare-Path coalition would continue. But Demirel appointed Mesut Yılmaz instead and an investigation was opened against the Welfare Party. The Islamists realize that their party would be dissolved, so in December 1997, they formed a new party, the Virtue Party (VP – Fazilet Partisi) with Recai Kutan as its leader; in January, the Constitutional Court banned the Welfare Party, confiscated its property and banned Erbakan and the party's principal leaders from politics for five years. Each time the Islamist party was dissolved, its successor claimed to be more moderate and less Islamist. By May 1998, Kutan seemed to be abandoning the

hardline Islamism of Erbakan and no longer spoke of leaving NATO or of introducing Islamic banking. He also went to Anıtkabir to pay his respects to Atatürk, a demonstration that the Islamists were willing to join the mainstream of political life.

Nevertheless, the Virtue Party was dissolved by the constitutional court in June 2001. It was described as a hotbed of fundamentalism, especially for the role it had played in promoting the headscarf in its campaign against the secular state. In July, Erbakan's supporters formed Saadet, or the Felicity Party, while in August, the reformists in the Virtue Party formed the Justice and Development Party, or AK Parti, which they claimed was secular. But its leader was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (1949–), the former mayor of Istanbul who had been imprisoned for inciting religious hatred and violation of secularism. He soon became the most popular leader, and polls showed that his party would win the next election.

The Yılmaz-led coalition, with the Democratic Left and the Democrat Turkey Party, lasted until November 1998. Yılmaz resigned on a censure motion brought by the opposition that charged him with corruption as well as links with the 'mafia'. In July, the coalition had already agreed that the election should be held on 25 April 1999. But Ecevit, one of the few politicians not tarred with the brush of corruption, was able to form his coalition with independents on 11 January 1999, with the task of leading the country to elections. The capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK leader, in Kenya on 15 February, changed the mood of the country and improved the chances of nationalists in the coming election.

The nationalistic mood in Turkey explains why the Democratic Left and the Nationalist Action Party acquired the most votes in the general election in April 1999. The results were regarded as a political earthquake – the DLP and NAP emerging as winners while ANAP, TPP and CHP had collapsed. Turkey had moved to the extreme right. Though the Islamist vote had fallen from 19 per cent in 1995 to 15.94%, they had done very well in municipal elections, capturing the major cities of Turkey. The pro-Kurdish party, HADEP, had failed at the national level, but won control of the cities in south-eastern Turkey – Diyarbakır, Batman, Bingöl, Hakkari, Siirt, Şırnak – with large Kurdish populations. Results suggested that there would be a polarization of the conflict with NAP in government.

Ecevit had reinvented himself into an ardent nationalist and abandoned his leftism, while NAP had always flouted its extreme nationalism. His electoral success did not reflect the success of the Left, for Ecevit no longer spoke of changing the system as he had in the 1970s; nor did he associate himself with the leftward trend in Europe. The centre-right – ANAP and the True Path Parties – had collapsed, because voters were tired of the corruption and bickering between the parties and their leaders and preferred to vote Islamist, or in 1999, nationalist right. The voters' anger against Çiller and Yılmaz was responsible for NAP's success.

It was no surprise that when the next coalition was formed, it was composed of the DLP (supposedly centre-left), ANAP (centre-right) and NAP (extreme right). The principal concern of government was the economy and Ecevit noted on 30 May, that 'our economy is facing a serious problem. Political uncertainty, the world crisis, and foreign debt payments totalling US \$30 billion have caused the Turkish economy to enter a bottleneck. We must rapidly revive the economy.' The prognosis looked good, as the coalition promised stability and a willingness to work together. The business community supported the government, while the generals were left to build up the military. They had plans to invest in an arms industry (Israel was expected to supply the technology), investing US \$150 billion over the next ten years to make Turkey the most important regional military power. Turkey would have AWACS and 561 helicopters, giving it the strongest fleet in the region. When he was asked about his country's arms purchases, Baki İlkin, Turkey's ambassador to the US, replied: 'We are restructuring the army so that it has more mobility and rapid action units. We are surrounded by a lot of crises, in the Balkans, Kosovo, internal troubles in Georgia, The Caucasus, and we are following developments in Iraq.' Commenting on his country's political situation, Hüsamettin Cindoruk, a seasoned politician, noted that 'Turkey had failed to emerge from the status of a military republic'.

The devastating earthquakes of 17 August and 12 November 1999 put a damper on Turkey's economic plans. So dismal was the state's response to this tragedy that people believed the earthquakes were a turning-point in the country's political life. Civil society had responded energetically and had become self-reliant and assertive, while the state had weakened. But that proved not to

be the case and the state soon reasserted itself, although the government's performance in rectifying the damage done by the earthquakes remained poor. Perhaps the improved Turkish–Greek relationship that resulted from 'earthquake diplomacy' was a positive outcome, establishing a friendship between the two foreign ministers. But the real issues between the two governments – the Aegean dispute and Cyprus – remained unresolved.

The three-party coalition seemed to be working well, though they could not agree on amending the constitution in order to give Demirel a second term as president when his term ended on 5 May 2000. But the parties agreed to elect Ahmet Necdet Sezer, president of the Constitutional Court, as Turkey's 10th president. He was a liberal, who wanted to see the 1982 constitution amended so as to permit free speech on such issues as Kurdish rights and political Islam. He was independent-minded and often took positions that did not please the parties that had elected him. In February 2001, these qualities led to a spat with the prime minister, which triggered the most serious economic and political crisis in republican history.

THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF EU ENTRY

Entry into the European Union had become the mission of government. In October 1999, a Union commission had recommended that Turkey be considered as a candidate, providing it met the so-called Copenhagen criteria, which included economic reform, human rights and the protection of minorities, i.e. the Kurds. The coalition also accepted the IMF's bitter prescription that asked for a 25 per cent inflation rate and a reduction in military expenditure, in order to cut the budget deficit. The three partners had agreed to await the European Court's review of the Öcalan trial before proceeding on the death sentence. NAP's leader, Devlet Bahçeli, seemed to have come round to Ecevit's way of thinking, despite dissent in his party and the demand for Öcalan's execution. But the murder of Ahmet Taner Kışlalı, an academic-journalist, on 21 October, was interpreted as a blow against democratization and rapprochement with Europe. There had been similar murders and the killers were still at large.

Meeting the EU's conditions for accession divided the coalition, despite the compromises of the leaders. A strong government

would have carried out the reforms, not because the EU called for them, but because the reforms would make Turkey into a democratic society, bring it in line with the modern world and establish social peace. But Turkey lacked such a government. She had already made important economic concessions when she joined the customs union in 1996, without any of the substantial benefits that came with membership; that is why membership was so crucial. Polls suggested that around 60–70 per cent of the population favoured joining the EU, but felt pessimistic about the attitude of Europe towards Muslim Turkey. Would a ‘Christian club’ ever allow a Muslim country to become a member? The military’s response was mixed: a retired general declared that EU membership was against Turkey’s history and contradicted the Kemalist revolution, while Chief of Staff General Kivrikoğlu declared that ‘joining the EU was a geopolitical necessity’. The generals were opposed to the EU demand that the military be brought under civil control, as in Europe. PM Ecevit therefore rejected TÜSİAD’s proposal to abolish or diminish the role of the generals in the National Security Council. Big business was in favour of joining and TÜSİAD, its political lobby, insisted that Turkey needed companies that could compete in the global market, and proposed mergers between banks and companies.

The coalition had already lasted for 21 months, the longest and most stable government of the last five years, when a storm broke unexpectedly and created the worst economic crisis in the republic’s history. On Monday, 19 February 2001, PM Ecevit got into a row with President Sezer, when the latter rebuked him for turning a blind eye on corruption in the cabinet and for obstructing investigations. Corruption had been widespread in the coalition and Ecevit, himself incorruptible, had tolerated corrupt ministers. The prime minister stormed out of the meeting, declaring that ‘This is a serious crisis’. His words triggered a run on the financial markets and stocks plunged 7 per cent in a matter of minutes as investors feared that the coalition would fall. Interest rates rose as high as 3000 per cent and the Central Bank lost around US \$5 billion – one-fifth of its foreign reserves – as investors dumped liras for dollars and euros. This was the result of deregulations, which allowed investors to take out their investments and run for safer markets. Turkey’s financial situation had

been weak for some time, and Ecevit's words merely triggered a storm that was about to break.

The IMF again stepped in, having already provided Ankara with US \$11.4 billion in loans in November 2000, and Kemal Derviş, a vice-president at the World Bank, was sent to supervise economic and financial reforms as minister of the economy. The government agreed to privatize such state-owned assets as Turkish Airlines, the state petrol station chain, the oil-refining company, the electricity company, the national oil and gas pipeline company, Vakıfbank, the government-owned savings bank and the state spirits and tobacco monopoly. All this privatization was expected to raise about US \$10 billion, if buyers could be found.

The ongoing economic crisis, the stabilization programme launched in January 2000 and the IMF prescription had already had severe consequences for society at large. The general situation was aggravated now by this new crisis. People were dying for lack of medicines as pharmaceutical companies stopped exports to Turkey. There was massive unemployment as plants shut down, and small businesses were squeezed out as a result of the reforms, which were marked by tight credit, slow production to bring down inflation and higher taxes.

Some NAP ministers obstructed the implementation of economic reform and the World Bank had to apply pressure to get things moving. The National Security Council, alarmed by the situation, discussed the possibility of a social explosion if the economy continued to deteriorate. Already there were demonstrations against the extravagance of the rich, and chants of such slogans as 'the plunderers are here, where are the workers?' and 'the bosses are here, where are the workers?' There were rumours that the coalition would not survive the crisis and there would be an interim government to prepare for fresh elections. As a result, on 16 July, Ecevit warned that speculation about an interim government of technocrats was undermining confidence in democracy and shaking the markets' confidence in the coalition's ability to carry out the IMF reforms. Next day, Enis Öksüz, MHP's minister of transport and communications, who had opposed Kemal Derviş and IMF reforms, resigned.

There was no short-term cure for Turkey's economic ills and the people continued to protest and suffer. Markets had fallen to a new

low and the US dollar had risen to a new high of 1,500,000 liras. While the minimum wage was 100 million liras, unions calculated that the poverty line had risen to 797 million liras for a family of four, forcing workers to live in poverty. In November, workers from all over Turkey marched to Ankara to protest 'unemployment, poverty, corruption and war'. Outside the PM's residence, a mother of three set herself on fire, screaming 'I am starving to death'. In November, when the government issued a report on the state of the economy, 14,875 workplaces had closed down in the first eight months of the year, resulting in a million unemployed. Families were falling apart and crime had increased. The report also showed that the gap between rich and poor had increased and there was no safety net in place to protect the poor and the unemployed.

The attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon, on 11 September 2001, suddenly enhanced Turkey's role in President Bush's 'war against terrorism'. The Turkish government joined the war wholeheartedly, and was rewarded with more loans from Washington. Turkey was to receive an additional US \$13 billion urgently, to help its recovery programme. Ankara opened its airspace and bases to US transport, and Ecevit declared that 'the fact that the US found the evidence against Bin Laden persuasive, persuades us also'. The government agreed to send 90 members of its special forces to Afghanistan, Foreign Minister İsmail Cem declaring that: 'this is not only the US's war; it is Turkey's war as well ... This is not a war against Islam; terrorism has no religion ... or geography'. Ecevit asked that 'friendly and allied countries recognize Turkey's importance and take Turkey's needs into consideration' when the time came for loan requests.

Meanwhile the coalition was making an effort to carry out reforms in order to satisfy the EU. Parliament adopted a package of 34 constitutional amendments to liberalize society; but there was no agreement on such critical issues as abolishing the death penalty, giving the Kurdish people the right to broadcast and have education in Kurdish or to limit the generals' power in the political life of the country. While Mesut Yılmaz and the liberals in the coalition supported these issues, Devlet Bahçeli and the NAP (and many generals) were opposed. Liberals argued that Turkey had no alternative but the EU; Bahçeli and the extreme right opposed the

EU, arguing that demands for ‘the abolition of the death penalty, education and broadcasting in Kurdish were a plot against the unity of Turkey, sponsored by the ‘so-called pro-EU lobby in Turkey and EU officials’. Bahçeli was concerned about the votes of the lower middle classes in Anatolia, who were hurt by the process of globalization and who voted for such parties as the NAP and the Islamists. He wanted to guarantee their votes in the coming election.

The political and economic situation was adversely affected when the 77-year old Ecevit was suddenly taken ill and hospitalized on 4 May 2002. His illness created a crisis, brought on by speculation as to whether he would step down and who would succeed him; the stock market responded by a sharp decline. He was hospitalized again on 17 May, but refused to resign as he believed that his resignation would lead to the break-up of the coalition and early elections, and a political crisis at a time when the country was focused on the economy and accession to the EU. The coalition was paralysed. The three parties knew that an early election might mean that they would not clear the 10 per cent hurdle and would be left out of the next parliament. Polls showed that the new party, the Justice and Development Party, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the former Islamist mayor of Istanbul, was considered the favourite in an early election. The only bright spot came in June, when the Turkish [soccer] team reached the semi-final of the World Cup tournament before being defeated by the eventual winners, Brazil.

Devlet Bahçeli’s call, on 7 July, for an early election to be held on 3 November brought the political crisis to a head. The next day, Deputy PM Hüsamettin Özkan, and three others all belonging to the DLP, resigned. More resignations of ministers and legislators followed, until Ecevit announced that he would step down if the coalition no longer enjoyed a majority in parliament. When Foreign Minister İsmail Cem resigned from the cabinet and the party, there was talk of a new political party, led by İsmail Cem, Kemal Derviş and Hüsamettin Özkan, which would govern the country with the support of centre-right parties (ANAP and TPP). The new party would marginalize the extreme nationalists and carry out the reforms necessary to satisfy the EU before the Copenhagen summit on 12 December 2002. However, on 16 August, Ecevit, having

failed to resign, agreed to lead the country to an early election. The DLP dissidents had failed in their political manoeuvre to capture power and establish a totally pro-EU, IMF coalition. They had also burned their boats when they resigned and had no choice but to form a new party to contest the election.

The New Turkey Party was formed on 22 July, with former foreign minister İsmail Cem as its leader. Kemal Derviş, the most significant member of the troika failed to commit himself, leaving the new party weak and colourless. When he resigned in August, he joined the RPP after attempting to bring about a union of the centre-left, even including elements from the centre-right. He wanted to create a political movement – ‘Contemporary social democracy’ he called it – capable of coming to power on its own at the next election and forming a strong government that could carry out the reforms necessary to end the political and economic crises that had plagued Turkey throughout the 1990s. When he failed to form such a movement, Derviş realized that the NTP would fail, as all new parties in Turkey tend to. He therefore joined the only centre-left party, the RPP, which was likely to succeed. Surveys showed that the party under Deniz Baykal was receiving only about 6 per cent of the vote, while the AK party was in the 20 per cent range. Baykal had failed to enter parliament in 1999 and it was doubtful that he would do so in 2002. But once Derviş joined the RPP, the establishment’s media promoted Derviş and the RPP endlessly and the party’s ratings began to increase. By early September the polls showed that the RPP had moved up from 6.9 to 14.3 per cent, thanks to the ‘Kemal Derviş factor’. Meanwhile, the AK Party’s vote had risen to almost 25 per cent. Confronted with this reality, on 18 September, TÜSİAD’s chair Tuncay Özilhan, speaking for the business community, stated his preference for a CHP-AKP coalition, especially if Kemal Derviş was in charge of the economy. This was the hope of the bourgeoisie: that the election of 3 November would produce a two-party coalition so that the RPP would control any ‘extremist, Islamist’ tendencies of its AK Party partners.

The election results on 4 November therefore produced a surprise when the AK Party emerged as the winner with over 34 per cent of the votes and 363 seats, more than the number required to form the government. The RPP had won 19 per cent of the votes

and had 180 seats and became the only opposition. All the other parties had failed to clear the 10 per cent barrier and therefore had no representation in parliament. It seemed that the voters had humiliated and eliminated the former party leaders – Bülent Ecevit, Devlet Bahçeli, Necmettin Erbakan, Mesut Yılmaz, and Tansu Çiller. Even the newly-founded ‘Young Party’ of the business tycoon, Cem Uzan, won only 7.2 per cent of the vote. Professional advertisers had run his campaign and given the voters musical concerts and free food, as well as much publicity in the Uzan-owned media.

What accounted for the success of the AK Party and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan? If the polls were right, the voters wanted a new leader and not a new party and Erdoğan fitted the bill. He was a new kind of leader who did not come out of the system as did most of his rivals. He came out of the rough-and-tumble district of Istanbul called Kasımpaşa, from a humble background, lacked a modern education, and did not speak a foreign language. But he had proved himself as mayor of Istanbul and as a politician who could get things done – and is said to have become a US dollar millionaire in the process. He was the symbol of the party and not its sole leader, and he was being persecuted and prosecuted by the establishment.

Although the AK Party had its roots in political Islam, most of its leaders had moved to the centre and declared their party to be secular democratic and conservative Muslim democrats rather like the Christian democrats in Europe. Surveys showed that the party’s support was 51 per cent rural and 49 per cent urban, and largely male. Housewives (17 per cent) tended to vote AKP while urban working women tended not to. The AK Party was not a continuation of the former parties of political Islam, whereas the recently formed Felicity (Saadet) Party was. The voters marginalized the FP, giving it only 2.5 per cent of the vote even although Necmettin Erbakan, the foremost leader of Turkish political Islam, had campaigned vigorously for the FP and was himself defeated when he ran as an independent. The AKP had come to represent the counter-elite that had emerged in Anatolia; it had finally come to power. That is why the Istanbul daily, *Sabah*, described the election as ‘the Anatolian revolution’.

But the party still relied on Islamist support though only a minority (22 per cent) still called for the Sharia while 43 per cent

opposed it. Overall the fear of the Sharia had declined to just one per cent of the population. AKP took 27 per cent of its vote from the FP's base and 22 per cent from other parties. The party had a broad social base and it would be incorrect to call it the party of 'political Islam'; nor had it won a 'protest vote'. Voters, alarmed by the ongoing economic crisis, massive unemployment and rising prices, placed their hopes in a leader who had managed to govern Istanbul efficiently; they believed he could do the same throughout Turkey.

Since Recep Tayyip Erdoğan could not become a member of parliament or the prime minister because of his prison sentence, Abdullah Gül was appointed prime minister on 16 November. He was regarded as caretaker prime minister until the constitution is amended, allowing Erdoğan to take his place.

Abdullah Gül was born in Kayseri in 1950. He has a Ph.D. in economics from Istanbul University and has studied in England. He taught economics and worked for the Islamic Development Bank in Saudi Arabia before entering politics in the Welfare Party in 1991. In August 2001, he was one of the founder members of the AKP. He is a man of some experience, perhaps more so than the charismatic Erdoğan.

The Gül government faced a number of interconnected challenges: the new UN (Kofi Annan) plan for the reunification of Cyprus, which has added pressure to find a settlement for the island's problem; the question of EU accession, which will now be taken up in December 2004, after Ankara's human rights record has been reviewed, before a date is given for further talks; negotiations with the IMF and Turkey's huge debt; the problem of the economy at home and related unemployment and poverty; human rights and torture; the headscarf issue and the generals' warning; the possibility of a US war with Iraq in which Ankara, under great pressure from Washington, finally agreed to deploy US troops in order to open a northern front against Baghdad. These monumental challenges are waiting to be met. The government has begun cautiously. They know that while they control parliament and the cabinet, they do not control the state, that is to say the armed forces and the entire bureaucracy.

There is also the danger that this two-party formula might create a political situation which existed in the 1950s: 'a majoritarian

democracy' in which the Democrats claimed that they could do as they wished because they held such an overwhelming majority in parliament. This led to undemocratic behaviour on the part of the DP, with military intervention in May 1960. But the AKP seems to have learned from past experience and should therefore behave responsibly towards the opposition as well as the secular population, which is now in the majority. Moreover, 45 per cent of the electorate is not even represented because of the 10 per cent electoral barrage and that makes the government's position less legitimate.

Prime Minister Gül seemed to be aware of the situation. In his first statement to the press he declared: 'We have no secret agenda. I will take care to ensure transparency and accountability ... We are not going to spring any surprises ... We are not elitist. We are children of the people, people who come from the middle class and poor segments of society. Our priority is to give them some relief. We will work hard. First of all, we will deal with the State Security Courts and the detention period.'

But Abdullah Gül was regarded as the caretaker prime minister, waiting until the constitution had been amended in order to permit Erdoğan to be elected to parliament and become prime minister and party leader. The world was already treating Erdoğan as though he was at least the co-leader. He made statements and went on visits around the world where he was treated as the true leader. He visited Athens, Copenhagen, New York, Washington, Moscow, and Davos and he was given the red-carpet treatment in all these places. The constitutional amendment was passed in January 2003 and Erdoğan was elected to parliament on 9 March in the Sürt by-election. Abdullah Gül resigned on 11 March and President Sezer appointed Erdoğan as the new PM.

Meanwhile on 1 March, Turkey's establishment experienced a trauma resulting from parliament's defeat of the government's motion to permit the deployment in Anatolia of 62,000 US troops intended to open a northern front in the war against Iraq. Some one hundred MPs from the governing party voted against the motion in collaboration with the opposition. The vote was a major surprise because one month earlier, on 6 February, parliament had agreed to allow US forces to modernize their bases and transport heavy equipment to northern Iraq via Turkey. Virtually everyone

was convinced – the media, big business, the generals, the politicians – that Turkey would be an active member of the US led coalition. The ‘rewards’ were thought to be considerable: US financial aid and soft loans worth billions of dollars necessary to get a crisis-ridden economy on its feet and influence in post-war Iraq, as well as construction sub-contracts to rebuild a war-torn Iraq. The government’s defeat showed that the governing party was deeply divided. In electing the AKP, the voters had swept aside much of the old political establishment and opened the door to a new generation of leaders from the Anatolian heartland. Unlike earlier party governments, the AKP was not a tightly-controlled political party doing the bidding of its leader and manipulated by the elites. It was responsive to popular opinion and the anti-war demonstration had been significant in directing the negative vote. As some Turks noted, the concept of democracy had changed as a result.

The Erdoğan government now has much to get on with. The damaged relationship with Washington makes Erdoğan’s task much harder though both sides are already trying to repair the damage. The Cyprus question remains unresolved after the failure of the UN plan to reunite the island, and so do the relations with the EU. Washington’s post-war policies in the region will have a direct impact on Turkey’s future. How the AKP government deals with these problems will be a momentous challenge, especially for an inexperienced and divided party.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

- Metin Heper, Ayşe Öncü and Heinz Kramer (eds.), *Turkey and the West* (I.B. Taurus, London and New York, 1993).
- Tosun Arıcanlı and Dani Rodrik (eds.), *The Political Economy of Turkey: Debt, Adjustment and Sustainability* (MacMillan, London, 1990).
- Jenny White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2002).
- Ayata, Sencer and Ayşe Güneş-Ayata, ‘Religious communities, Secularism, and Security in Turkey’, in *New Frontiers in Middle East Security*, Lenore Martin (ed.) (Palgrave, New York, 2001), pp. 107–26.
- Ayata, Ayşe Güneş- and Sencer Ayata, ‘Ethnicity and Security Problems in Turkey’, in *New Frontiers in Middle East Security*, Lenore Martin (ed.) (Palgrave, New York, 2001), pp. 127–50.