Turkey at the Polls

AFTER THE TSUNAMI

Soli Özel

Soli Özel *teaches in the Department of International Relations at Bilgi University in Istanbul. He is the editor of the Turkish edition of* Foreign Policy *and a columnist for the daily newspaper* Sabah. *His "Eye on Turkey" commentaries for the U.S. affiliate of the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TÜSIAD) can be accessed at* www.tusiad.us.

The elections of 3 November 2002 were more widely discussed, more intensely scrutinized, and of more interest to foreign publics than any in the 80-year history of the Turkish Republic. Why did Turkey come under the glare of this spotlight? Because the frontrunner in all the polls and the eventual winner of just over a third of the vote and just under two-thirds of the seats in the 550-member Grand National Assembly, Turkey's unicameral parliament, was the Islamic-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP), a successor to two previously banned Islamist parties that now rejects the Islamist label. In a fit of rage, it seemed, Turkish voters had swept aside a whole cohort of established but corruption-tainted parties, possibly in defiance of the country's politically powerful military, and opted instead for a group of self-avowed "Muslim Democrats" led by the charismatic former mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. (See the Table on p. 98.)

Ordinarily, these events would have been of interest mainly to specialists, and then mostly because of the huge disproportion between votes received and seats gained: Thanks to the 10 percent national threshold that the outgoing military regime wrote into the constitution back in 1982, both the AKP and the only other group to win a place in parliament, the Republican People's Party (CHP), reaped enormous "seat bonuses." But the ascent to power of a party rooted in Turkey's Islamist movement drew wide international attention and prompted some of the usual (and sometimes poorly informed) questions about Islam and democracy that have become so pressing since 9/11: Could Turkey, this most militantly

secular, predominantly Muslim country, turn fundamentalist? Was this going to be an example of "one man, one vote, one time" even though Turkey had a long history of pluralism and vigorously competitive electoral politics? Was a clash with the secular establishment (including perhaps the military) inevitable even though the AKP refused the "Islamist" label and ran on a platform calling for Turkey's full membership in the European Union (EU)? So the image that these elections evoked was Iran for some and Algeria for others, although Turkey is neither.

The parliament that the elections have brought into being has just two parties: the AKP with 363 seats and the CHP with 178 (there are 9 independent deputies). Several things leap out from the election results: First, voters were merciless in punishing nearly all the traditionally established parties, whether or not they were part of the government. The three parties that formed the incumbent governing coalition—the leftist-cum-nationalist Democratic Left Party (DSP) of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, the center-right Motherland Party (ANAP), and the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP)—saw their combined vote share fall from 53.4 percent in 1999 to a humiliating 14.6 percent in 2002. Likewise, one of the major traditional formations then in opposition ranks, the True Path Party (DYP) of former prime minister Tansu Çiller, also lost vote share, going from 12 percent in 1999 to a seatless 9.6 percent total in 2002. The traditional Islamists fared poorly as well. Their vehicle, the Felicity Party, won a mere 2.5 percent.

A second aspect of the 2002 balloting was the electorate's anxious search for new options. According to a survey taken by pollster Tarhan Erdem, nearly a third of the voters said that they had been intent on "trying out a new party."[1] Erdem suggested that 38 percent of AKP voters were from this group. This volatility is probably a symptom of the eroding support bases of the DYP and ANAP plus the two other traditional centrist parties: The four saw their combined vote share drop from almost 83 percent in 1991 to just over 36 percent in 2002.

The dark horse of the elections and a probable beneficiary of the voters' restless mood was the Youth Party (GP), a brand-new grouping that serves as the political vehicle of 37-year-old media tycoon Cem Uzan. Relying on concerts and shows, bereft of organization, and touting a message of unabashed, even fascistic nationalism and xenophobic populism, the GP pulled a surprising and perhaps ominous 7.2 percent of the vote. A typical Uzan stump speech—I took the following from the 30 October 2002 edition of *Star,* his Istanbul-based newspaper—would avow that: "Turkey has all the wealth it needs to become a world power. This is what scares the foreigners . . . the strengthening of Turkey will be a propaganda boost for Turkishness and Islam. . . . This is exactly what they don't want. . . . Either the IMF or Turkey!" Given Uzan's age, wealth, and skill at exploiting modern mass communications, his GP could become a force to be reckoned with.

A third notable characteristic of the 2002 races was the comparatively low turnout. With nearly a quarter of the electorate (up from about 18 percent in 1999) either not voting or casting spoiled ballots, voter participation was at its lowest in 30 years, though in absolute terms it still included more than 30 million people, or slightly less than half of Turkey's total population. Voting is nearly the only institutionalized act of political participation that most Turks perform, so the drop may bespeak rising alienation from the political system, or at least the established parties.

Finally, the high threshold ensured that nearly one out of every two votes cast (46 percent) was wasted. The legitimacy questions that this raises could constitute a rallying point for extraparliamentary opposition to the AKP government. The Kurdish-nationalist formation that appeared on the ballot under the hastily devised acronym DEHAP after courts had threatened to outlaw its mother-party fell short of the threshold with 6.2 percent of the total nationwide vote, and yet took 45 percent or more of the vote in five of Turkey's 82 provinces, and in fact topped 10 percent in nine more, all of which were clustered in the southeast, where Kurds predominate. And yet none of this was enough to send a single DEHAP candidate to Ankara.

After the elections, party leaders Tansu Çiller of DYP and Mesut Yılmaz of ANAP resigned their posts. Devlet Bahçeli of the MHP was the first to declare an intention to resign but as of this writing in early March 2003 still has not done so. The new head of the DYP is a former minister of both the Interior and Justice departments, Mehmet Ağar. His background, record, and involvement in a grave scandal of the late 1990s may signal a significant shift in the DYP's identity. ANAP elected to its chair a former cabinet minister named Ali Talip Özdemir; he has impressed few among the public with either his personality or his vision.

Surprising Election, Not-So-Surprising Result

Like Santiago Nasar in Gabriel García Márquez's novella *Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* the three parties in the coalition that had held power since May 1999 moved toward their own obliteration. By calling elections for the fall of 2002, 18 months ahead of schedule, the DSP, MHP, and ANAP were putting their tenure on the line before voters could feel any payoff from the painful but necessary economic-stabilization measures that these parties had adopted in order to solve the worst economic and financial crisis in modern Turkish history. Had the bickering coalition partners been able to contain for just a few more months their disagreements over such matters as the internal political and legal reforms demanded by the EU-accession process, they might well have caught the voters in a much better mood. Whatever the coalition partners' reasons for not wishing to wait, one thing is clear: Their decision

to call the country to the polls flung wide the door to power for the AKP, which stepped smartly through it.

Exit polls overseen by Yılmaz Esmer show that the AKP got almost equal numbers of votes from men and women and was highly favored by 18-to-25-year-olds, many of them first-time voters. The AKP also drew heavily on support from the less-educated and less well-off while polling about equally strongly in big cities, medium-sized towns, and rural areas. Esmer found that most AKP voters favored EU accession even if they doubted that the EU was sincere about the process. Fully half of AKP voters wished to end relations with the International Monetary Fund, whose loan conditionalities had spurred the coalition government to enact its unpopular austerity measures. Finally and most significantly, the AKP attracted voters who had previously supported other parties across the political spectrum. Only a quarter of all AKP voters were people who had voted for the Virtue Party (FP), the AKP's Islamist predecessor, in 1999.[2]

There is little doubt that Erdoğan was a strong campaign asset for the AKP. Still a popular figure in Istanbul, he had since 1998 been barred from holding office because a court found him guilty of inciting hatred after he publicly recited a poem by the nationalist writer Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924) that referred to minarets as "our spears" and mosques as "our barracks." The determination of the secular-statist establishment to keep Erdoğan out of politics probably only enhanced his mystique and his party's appeal.

While the 2002 balloting was in the most immediate sense a cry of anger by voters infuriated at the sorry state of Turkey's economy, deeper analysis suggests that broader and longer-lasting forces are at work. In the future, we may look back at 2002 as the first in a series of realigning votes that decisively reshaped Turkish parties, elections, and political life in general. The AKP certainly shows signs of being a classic realigning party. It appears to have swayed and motivated both new and existing voters, and represents a winning coalition that is diverse but held together by a common cultural discourse that resonates with all. The party's leaders appear to sense this, too, which may explain their emphasis upon a synthesis of communitarianism and market-based liberalism as well as the remarkable absence of almost any Islamist references in their major campaign speeches.

If a watershed has been reached, the roots of the shift may be traceable to the 1980s. Under the more liberal economic policies strongly advocated by Prime Minister (later President) Turgut Özal (1983–91) of ANAP, including freer capital flows, privatization, and integration into the EU customs union, there prospered a new provincial business class that was not dependent on state protectionism but was simultaneously in touch with world markets, culturally conservative, and religiously observant. For a time, the forces of economic liberalization

were held back by an older rent-seeking and rent-granting coalition of small and large business owners, public and unionized employees, wealthier peasants from the Anatolian heartland, and bureaucrats. As beneficiaries of a fading era of high tariffs and other state-led development policies, the members of this coalition feared globalization and free markets.

But theirs was a rear-guard action. The new middle classes began to come into their own in the 1990s, drawing to their ranks traditional provincial shopkeepers and merchants who had learned to adapt to markets and developing a shared sense of "independence from the hegemony of the ruling Republican elites."[3] More free from state patronage networks and the cultural influence of Republican secularism, they are the engine of AKP's expansion, which has gained such momentum that even farmers, small businesspeople, and less-skilled workers who once supported antiglobalization Islamist or nationalist parties now vote for the avowedly pro-market and pro-EU AKP.

The AKP has thus come, through a number of remarkable twists and trends, to represent both many net winners and many net losers from Turkey's integration into the global economy. Can the party reconcile their divergent interests while at the same time carrying on the arduous work of political liberalization and democratization? This, more than any other, is the master question of Turkish politics at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

The Long Wave

For the Turkish economy, the 1990s were "years that the locust hath eaten." Rampant populism in economic policy fueled wild boom-and-bust cycles that bottomed out in the deep recessions of 1994 and 1999, during each of which the economy shrank by more than 6 percent. Public finances deteriorated and real interest rates shot up (the average inflation rate across the decade topped 80 percent, up from 48.5 percent in the 1980s), while a poorly regulated banking system, uncompetitive state-run utilities, and the exceedingly slow pace of privatization held down growth. Poverty and inequality grew worse.[4]

Instead of summoning the more than 60 million people of Turkey to rise to the new challenges of the post–Cold War world and the global economy, the center-left and center-right parties that dominated the politics of the decade tried to preserve the old spoils system. The bitter harvest of the establishment's inability or unwillingness to let go of its accustomed clientelism and populism was the disastrous 2001 bankrupting of Turkey's public finances and the resulting depression, which saw negative growth rates top 9 percent, unemployment rates hover around 15 percent, and close to a fifth of the population slip below the official poverty line. The establishment's refusal to seek ways to accommodate

the aspirations of Turkey's large Kurdish population or of observant and politically active Muslims led on the one hand to increasing restiveness among these groups (indeed, in the Kurdish case an internal war ravaged many corners of the mountainous southeast and probably cost about 30,000 lives between 1984 and 1999), and on the other to a consequent intensification of the worried military's willingness to make its weight felt in political affairs.

The Kurdish insurgency, combined with testy EU dealings, particularly after the Union chose to pass over Turkey's candidacy for full membership in December 1997, spurred the rise of xenophobia and exaggerated nationalism. The military gradually redefined domestic problems as national-security threats, with the influence of the armed forces visibly increasing throughout political life. And yet throughout this very decade pressures for further democratization continued to well up from within Turkish society. The EU helped by asking Turkey to live up to its commitment to democratic reform as a *sine qua non* of the membership process.

While democratic advocacy had long been the province of a small slice of the intelligentsia plus a cluster of NGOs, the 1980s and early 1990s saw some Islamist intellectuals making constructive contributions as well. While human rights and democratic liberties never became a top priority for most ordinary Turks, there were signs of a strong, if latent, desire to civilianize and liberalize the polity. Among these were the popularity of the expansive Turgut Özal, and the burst of enthusiasm that greeted the short-lived New Democracy Movement's efforts (1993–95) to promote a more liberal approach to politics and to gain a wider public hearing for Kurdish and Islamist activists. In the 1990s, the prominent industrialists' and business owners' association known as TÜSIAD, which had supported the 1980 military coup, added its voice to the democracy chorus, noting that Turkey's future prosperity hinged on EU accession and thus on further democratization.

The armed forces and other foes of liberalization often rebuffed these and similar appeals, pointing to the threats of surging Islamism and violent Kurdish separatism (and taking little care to distinguish peaceful Kurdish activism from the armed insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers' Party [PKK]). With the 1999 capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the winding-down of the internal war, Islamism came to replace Kurdish nationalism as the primary security threat in military eyes.

Paradoxically, then, the 1990s were both good years and bad years for democratization, with Turkey's still-fragile civil society groups, and not its professional political class, doing the lion's share to sustain the case for greater liberty and participation. Looking at this uneven report card, one is reminded of Guillermo O'Donnell's observation that new polyarchies "actually have two extremely important institutions. One is highly formalized but intermittent: elections. The other is informal, per-

manent, and pervasive: particularism (or clientelism broadly defined)."[5] Even as rampant cronyism feeds a cynical public mood and hampers democratic consolidation, he goes on to note, the democratic ideals that are supposed to underlie the practice of elections are not unimportant. For even the paying of mere lip service to the formal rules of open and accountable government encourages and legitimizes demands that these rules be followed.[6] The effect, loosely speaking, is to create a seesaw battle between a cynically apathetic acknowledgment that clientelism rules and a righteous anger that democracy and transparency do not.

Turkey in the 1990s provided a good illustration of what O'Donnell meant. Throughout the decade, a closed and protected system was kept on artificial life support. Blatant populism and patronage drove corruption to new levels. In case after case, expediency and habits of mutual protection among even rival politicians stymied legal enforcement as the public looked on in disgust. As market-based reforms, global competition, and economic troubles narrowed the opportunities for spoils, the centrist parties developed sharper elbows in their fight for a place at the trough. Cronyism became rampant just as the parties faced the erosion of their electoral base. The center-right parties turned into self-perpetuating, nepotistic, corruption machines that were increasingly alienated from their constituencies. The main center-left Social Democratic People's Party (or SHP, which was absorbed by the CHP in 1995), became a victim of its own incompetence in municipal administration between 1989 and 1994, and began to lose ground to the nationalistic left-wing populism of Bülent Ecevit's DSP.

Under these circumstances the Islamist-based Welfare Party (RP) began its rise. It was the only party that took grassroots organization seriously, put forward ideas, and talked often and openly about justice. After winning the mayors' races in Istanbul and Ankara, the RP became the biggest single vote-getter in the 1995 parliamentary elections with 21.4 percent. In July 1996, Welfare formed a coalition government with the DYP (even though Tansu Çiller had campaigned on an anti-RP platform) and took Turkey down the path toward the "postmodern coup" of early 1997.

Susurluk and the Postmodern Coup

The AKP's success has proximate as well as structural causes. The former grew out of four events that have shocked the Turkish people over the past six years. The first was the startling set of revelations that came to light after a fatal car crash near the small western town of Susurluk on 3 November 1996. The second was the postmodern coup, which was originally set in train by the military on 28 February 1997. The third was the devastating Izmit earthquake of 17 August 1999. The fourth was the economic meltdown of February 2001. Not only did these

developments take place amid larger currents of dramatic economic, social, and political change that eddied about Turkey in the wake of the Cold War, but each hit with the force of a blow heavy enough to change the course of Turkish politics.

In the ill-fated Mercedes sedan that ran into a truck outside Susurluk were a senior police official, an ultra-rightist assassin and drug dealer wanted by (among others) Interpol, his ex–beauty queen girlfriend, and a Kurdish tribal leader–cum–DYP deputy (the wreck's sole survivor) who headed an anti-PKK militia. The car's trunk held an array of pistols and silencers, plus official documents establishing several false identities for Abdullah Çatlı, the fugitive criminal. Like a stone heaved into a cesspool, the Susurluk incident sent out widening riplets of scandal as reporters traced links between these characters and other politicians (including the DYP's Mehmet Ağar, who was forced to resign as justice minister), organized-crime figures, state-security agencies, and unsolved killings from the mid-1990s.

At the scandal's heart was the lawless "dirty war" that Turkey's shadowy "deep state" had been waging in the southeast. Çatlı was a notorious gangster long suspected of involvement in various crimes including the 1978 murders of seven left-wing students in Ankara, the 1979 killing of a prominent journalist, and Mehmet Ali Ağca's 1981 attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II. Dogged reporting by Turkish journalists showed that Çatlı had in all likelihood been acting as a hitman for elements within the security services, which in return had been shielding him and his other illicit activities from the law. Citizens' anger was intense and widespread. The quest for a clean society, a transparent state, and accountable politicians gained strong momentum. Tansu Çiller owned up to her government's actions, insisting that they had all been taken to protect the nation's unity, while RP head Necmettin Erbakan—the chief of the only party with no connection to these events—deliberately did nothing to capitalize on the eruption of public fury.

For Prime Minister Erbakan, however, another sort of reckoning was waiting. On the last day of February 1997, the regular monthly meeting of the military-dominated National Security Council, a constitutional body that comprises top elected officials and the senior armed-service chiefs, gave the Welfare–True Path coalition government a list of 18 measures to be implemented without delay, including a clampdown on "reactionary Islam." With the threat of an actual coup hanging in the air, the military spent the next months waging a relentless public-relations campaign that turned society against the government and eventually forced the resignation on June 18 of Erbakan and his cabinet.[7] The noose on civilian politics remained tight after that. Press freedom was severely curtailed, with many journalists and other public figures targeted by military-orchestrated smear campaigns.

Despite the obvious damage that these machinations did to democ-

racy, a significant segment of the public supported them, most likely for two reasons. The first was the immoderation that the RP's leaders showed in their rhetoric regarding foreign policy and the sacrosanct principle of secularism (both "red zones" for the generals).

The second reason grew out of the failure of Turkey's civilian politicians, particularly those in the center-right parties, to take the initiative in defining the boundaries of legitimate political speech and action, especially as these touched on secularism. The RP's bolder—indeed at times bigoted—claims about the role of religion in politics flanked these parties to the right, exposing their ambivalence on the secularism question and carving away much of their traditional Muslim support base. The military, alarmed by the lack of a robust civilian response to the Islamists' use of religious symbols and values for political purposes, saw itself as stepping in to fill the gap and defend the threatened foundations of the order created by Kemal Atatürk, the founder of both the secular Turkish Republic and its army. And yet: The political system probably would have dealt with the RP eventually and the postmodern military intervention—like the not-so-postmodern coups of 1960, 1971, and 1980—set back not merely one admittedly problematic faction but the whole cause of civil and democratic political order.

The Motherland Party under Mesut Yılmaz opportunistically acquiesced in the intervention and took the ousted RP's place along with Ecevit's DSP and defectors from DYP who just formed a new party. It is a testimony to the complexity of the relations between the military and the parties that Erbakan specifically called on his followers not to riot or even protest when the Constitutional Court later banned Welfare as a threat to the foundations of the Republic. This behavior is in line with the studied ambivalence toward the politically assertive military that Turkish parties have generally shown. Pondering the reasons for this, Ümit Cizre argues:

> A political class threatened by the formal and informal role of the military as the ultimate guardian of the regime has critical problems in relinquishing patronage resources. In that guardianship model, the political class constantly weighs the political pay-off derived from a reform in the system—to put an end to powerlessness, incapacity, corruption and stasis—against the costs of giving up power based on patronage. It is more than likely that the civilian political class will not choose to terminate rent-seeking networks by reforms that would reduce the prominence of the military in politics. Its foremost concern will be a short rather than a long-term one.[8]

What is called within Turkey "the February 28 process" was not limited to the political wing of the Islamist movement. Islamic networks, sects, associations, and individuals were targeted for excoriation and sometimes prosecution or court-ordered bans on their activities. Accus-

tomed to gentle official treatment, the larger community of Islamists was traumatized and left with deep new doubts about the benign character of state authority.

Knocked cold by a mailed fist swathed in the bureaucratic equivalent of a velvet glove, some Islamists awoke from the experience with a newfound appreciation of democratic principles and a systematic resolve—the first ever in their movement's history—to embark on a principled quest to defend not merely their own liberties, but democratic liberties as such. The much-maligned EU and its norms became a key source of support for the persecuted Islamist parties. In an ironic way that no one fully intended, the postmodern coup paved the way for the generational and ideological cleavage and reorganization within the Islamist movement that gave birth to the AKP.

Goodbye to Big Daddy: The Quake of '99

Amid the fear and anger created by the 28 February process and the breakdown of EU-Ankara relations after the snub at Luxembourg in December 1997, Turkish society turned increasingly inward and even, in some quarters, xenophobic. Under threat of war, Syria at last ended the 20-year stay within its own or Lebanon's borders of Turkey's public enemy number one, PKK chieftain Abdullah Öcalan. After a fugitive interval, he wound up in the Greek embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, where he was caught by U.S. agents in February 1999 and turned over to Turkish authorities.[9] Thereupon nationalist feelings boiled over, and upon such sentiments rode to power the DSP and the MHP—the nationalist parties to the left of center and on the extreme right, respectively.

This heavy nationalism and the reified idea of an omnicompetent, paternalistic *devlet baba* (daddy state) were shattered in the early-morning hours of 17 August 1999, when a powerful earthquake devastated several urban areas in western Turkey. Centered near the city of Izmit at the easternmost tip of the Sea of Marmara, less than 60 miles from Istanbul, and measuring 7.4 on the Richter Scale, the quake's 45-second-long main shock was enough to cause massive loss of life and expose "fissures in the edifice of the Turkish State."[10]

The state apparatus, including the military, utterly failed to come to the rescue of the victims for almost three days. As round-the-clock television coverage broadcast the disaster's aftermath to a horrified nation, it became painfully obvious that the damage had been made much worse by the illegally shoddy construction of so many buildings in the densely populated quake zone. Bribes or patronage deals had caused building codes to be ignored. There were reports of multistory apartment blocks that had lethally collapsed on their sleeping denizens because the buildings' foundations had been made from unstable (but free) beach sand while inspectors looked the other way.

Other countries immediately sent rescue teams, which on several occasions were refused entry into Turkey or otherwise impeded. The Turkish state's disaster-relief agencies were revealed to be dry-rotted with ineptitude and corruption. While authorities sat back in disarray, "thousands of ordinary citizens and NGOs searched for victims in the rubble and provided such goods as medicine, food, legal advice, and educational services to victims."[11] Foreign organizations and governments (including that of Greece, in a gesture which undid much of the damage done by Greek involvement in sheltering Öcalan) rushed help into the disaster zone and impressed Turks with their efficiency, sympathy, and warmth. The earthquake and what it brought to light broke the national mood of sullen isolation and destroyed the old *modus vivendi* between Turkish society and a state that would rather hold tight to its own prerogatives than take help from civic organizations struggling to bring relief to thousands of suffering people.

Because of the neighborhoods it struck, the earthquake heavily affected Turkey's articulate, *status quo*–oriented middle classes. Their sense of having been betrayed by the state that they had once venerated ran deep indeed. The social contract between the state and this important segment of society was broken. Thenceforth the drive toward an accountable, transparent, and efficient government ruled by law would go forward on a stronger social basis than ever before. EU membership became all the more prized as an aid to this cause; some even saw it as a panacea. The outpouring of help and support from abroad also showed Turks that the world was not their enemy. The spell of xenophobia and exaggerated appeals to national security was fast being broken.

As the 1990s waned, there were ample signs that stopgap measures needed to give way to serious efforts at effecting a basic overhaul of Turkey's key political and economic institutions. Yet fierce resistance slowed reform, at least until the twin economic catastrophes of November 2000 and February 2001 showed all but the most incorrigibly obtuse that to try and carry on with "business as usual" would be tantamount to embracing national self-destruction.

With an economy shrinking by more than 9 percent a year, a radical cure was the only way out, and the pain would be widespread. As Ilter Turan argues,

> Economic reforms, taken together, call for nothing less than the total abandonment of the patronage system that has characterized Turkish politics during the last several decades. Each measure inflicts some deprivation on some constituency that rebels against the unfortunate fate that is being imposed on it.[12]

With the twin crises "the existing mode of capital accumulation . . . where gains are private but 'all risks' are socialized has irrevocably ended."[13] The state and the private sector alike have had to bite the bul-

let and streamline themselves. But as former treasury secretary Mahfi Eğilmez repeatedly stresses, smooth progress toward full EU membership is the hook upon which hang so many hopes for solvency and sustained growth. From the foreign direct investment that Turkey needs to meet the IMF's stringent demands to prospects for better governance, governmental efficiency, a deeper rule of law, and genuine modernization—much hinges on the EU accession process.

The net results of Susurluk, the coup, the quake, and the economic downturn have been surging pro-EU sentiment, a broad-based demand for further democratic reform, and fury directed at any and all institutions—no matter how previously sacrosanct—deemed responsible for the calamities of recent years. The popular support for EU membership is new, and suggests that this great goal of Republican Turkey is no longer the special preserve of elites. Ultimately, the push for change, the claims of a rising counterelite to a place in the power structure, and the popularity of EU membership all point to a fundamental fact: Having undergone a rather unsettling two decades, Turkey is now ready to shake off the shackles of the 1982 military-drafted constitution as well as the mentality that framed it.

It was the tide of these aspirations and this disenchantment with the established order of things that brought the AKP to power as the only untested major party in the running on 3 November 2002. A sign of how well the AKP understood this mood was Erdoğan's decision to visit every EU capital before the Copenhagen Summit on enlargement met in December 2003.

The Republic's Great Test

The AKP's rise may have been too rapid for its own good. It did not have enough time to consolidate its organization or formulate a detailed program. To this day, the AKP remains a coalition of forces rather than a coherent political apparatus. Its first few months in power also revealed its deficits of expertise and experience. The best chance to shape economic policy came and went unexploited. The cabinet could easily mishandle the cross-pressures that will come from the IMF's demand for austerity and party loyalists' demands for largesse, patronage jobs, and the like.

For all its early stumbles, the AKP government has also proven itself to be a quick study, pragmatic, and decisive when it comes to foreign policy and most domestic political matters. From the start, Erdoğan boldly departed from the official line on the now-almost-30-years-old Cyprus issue by calling for it to be resolved, and soon. He has stuck with that position so far, despite bitter criticism from some quarters, probably because he realizes that the Cyprus issue is a litmus test for the AKP. If it cannot recast policy in this area but instead finds itself

forced to mouth the words of the old script, the party will reign but not rule.

The difficult issues surrounding Turkey's possible involvement in a military coalition against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq have also generated a severe crisis for the AKP. Prime Minister Abdullah Gül's sagacious if half-hearted handling of the matter and the hard negotiations conducted by the United States and Turkey over military, political, and economic issues appeared to end in futility when on 1 March 2003 the Grand National Assembly refused the government's request for permission to invite U.S. ground troops to base themselves in Turkey, and also refused to allow Turkish troops to cross into northern Iraq. Nearly a hundred AKP deputies either defected or abstained—a sign of intraparty power struggles as well as the AKP's responsiveness to public opinion, which was overwhelmingly against a war considered unjust in Turkey. How the mismanagement of this vote—by the AKP government, by Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer, and by the United States—will affect the AKP's future and staying power remains to be seen. Whatever the repercussions, Erdoğan will be the one primarily responsible for dealing with them, since he won a by-election to parliament on March 9 and was expected to take over quickly as prime minister.

During his few months in office, Abdullah Gül's transparent conduct earned the country's respect. The holder of a doctorate in economics and a one-time deputy premier under the government that was ousted by the 1997 coup, he is arguably one of the most levelheaded members of the Islamist establishment. Certainly he kept remarkably cool in the face of scathing verbal sallies against his government by senior military officers and their allies, including judges, who have been warning the public against the Islamist peril, albeit to reactions of ridicule and ire more than concern and support.

The military issued its warning via the chief of the General Staff at the beginning of January. In a speech citing the usual concerns about "national security," he attacked the government's Cyprus and EU policies and above all condemned the possibility of Islamic rule. While established opinion makers voiced little backing for the general's minatory message, the possibility of confrontations with the military will in all probability linger, and this may not be a bad thing. Contrary to what many believe, at some stages of democratization open confrontation may be healthier than a paper-thin, basically phony consensus. An opportunity for the kind of salutary face-off I am talking about could come when the AKP government finally decides to tackle the hot issue of headscarf-wearing by women in universities and the public domain. There has already been one uproar, which arose when the speaker of parliament took his headscarfed wife along to see the president off on a trip.

The AKP faces a formidable challenge, and it is itself a formidable challenge for the established order of the Turkish Republic. Partly this

is a result of a conflation of socioeconomic and cultural cleavages that causes symbols such as the headscarf to take on extraordinary political significance. Many doubt the sincerity of the AKP's recent democratic conversion, citing the party's Islamist lineage and the religiously conservative character of its leadership. But this is the wrong line of argument. As Dankwart A. Rustow reminds us in the ur-text of democratization studies, "we should allow for the possibility that circumstances may force, trick, lure or cajole nondemocrats into democratic behavior and that their beliefs may adjust in due course by some process of rationalization or adaptation."[14]

In truth, the AKP, if it continues to hold together, has a historic task and opportunity to be the agent of Turkey's transformation from a spotty and in too many ways illiberal democracy into a fully fledged specimen of the liberal democratic breed. It is worth noting that Turkey's political tradition mostly precludes political liberalism. The Islamist movement is no exception. However, the only way for this party to survive in power and endure is through a liberal transformation of the Turkish polity and its civilianization. This explains why the AKP's drive for EU accession is genuine: It is a matter of enlightened self-interest, and the party clearly knows it. As the events of early 2003 regarding Iraq made clear, the EU is in a state of internal disarray that could render Turkey's goal of full membership very elusive. Moreover, the Iraq war, even as it rehabilitates Turkey's prime strategic value, could harm the cause of democratization. The record shows that when Turkey collects high strategic rents, its democracy is liable to suffer.

The AKP's success or failure at the mission described above will have ramifications far beyond the consolidation of liberal democracy in Turkey. If the communitarian-liberal synthesis works and Turkey's decent secular principles can be rescued from their essentially extrinsic yet historically stubborn entanglement with authoritarianism, if Turkey's Islamic movement reconciles itself to a secularism grounded not only in worry about the dangers of politicized religion but also in an honest desire to protect religion's own integrity and dignity, if the military can at last be brought to see that it is time to let its inordinate political involvements "go gentle into that good night," then the Turkish political system will have managed to remodel itself along democratic lines. Finally, the success of AKP will also and at last make of Turkey what the country had always sought to be: a modern, democratic, secular model for the rest of the Muslim world.

The ingredients are there for the experiment to succeed. As Erik-Jan Zürcher has noted, "Perhaps the greatest success of Turkey's modernizing elite is the very fact that it has lost its monopoly of the political and cultural debate. Through the spread of higher education and wealth there has come into being a large and vocal middle class, important parts of which no longer regard a strong religious identity and a modern way of life as

incompatible."[15] To take the measure of what could happen if the AKP fails to become the agent of such a transformation, or if the established elite finds a way to spoil it, one need only look at the nihilistic populism of Cem Uzan and his GP and wonder what might be waiting in the wings.

The challenge and the choice, as always, are Turkey's own.

NOTES

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2. Yılmaz Esmer, "Postelection Analysis," [in Turkish], *Milliyet* (Istanbul), 15–19 November 2002.

3. Ahmet Önsel, "Normalizing Democracy and Modern Traditionalism," [in Turkish], *Birikim,* November–December 2002, 22.

4. Serhan Çevik, "Rock the Vote, *Morgan Stanley Sovereign Research, Europe* (London), 31 October 2002, 2.

5. Guillermo O'Donnell, "Illusions About Consolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 7 (April 1996): 35.

6. Guillermo O'Donnell, "Illusions About Consolidation," 41.

7. On the coup itself and the larger issues of "military politics," see Gareth Jenkins, "Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics," *Adelphi Paper* 337, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 2001; Cengiz Çandar, "Redefining Turkey's Political Center," *Journal of Democracy* 10 (October 1999): 129–41; and Ümit Cizre, "Demythologizing the National Security Syndrome: The Case of Turkey," *Middle East Journal* 57 (Spring 2003, forthcoming).

8. Ümit Cizre, "From Ruler to Pariah: The Life and Times of TPP [True Path Party]," *Turkish Studies* 3 (Spring 2002): 93.

9. Tuncay Özkan, *Operasyon* (Istanbul: Doğan Yayıncılık, 2000).

10. Paul Kubicek, "The Earthquake, Civil Society, and Political Change in Turkey: Assessment and Comparison with Eastern Europe," *Political Studies* 50 (September 2002): 762.

11. Paul Kubicek, "The Earthquake, Civil Society, and Political Change," 766.

12. Ilter Turan, "Short-Term Pains for Long-Term Pleasures," *Private View* 11 (Spring 2002): 16.

13. Güven Sak, "Recent Gains and the Challenges Ahead," *Private View* 11 (Spring 2002): 24.

14. Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," in Lisa Anderson, ed., *Transitions to Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 20.

15. Erik-Jan Zürcher, "The Rise and Fall of 'Modern' Turkey," (review of Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*), *Turkology Update,* Leiden Project Working Papers Archive, Department of Turkish Studies, Leiden University, The Netherlands (available online at *www.let.leidenuniv.nl/tcimo/tulp/Research/Lewis.htm*).