

The Failure of the AKP's Total Transformation Project

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AKP (Turkish abbreviation for “Justice and Development Party”), established by the reformist wing of the pro-Islamic Virtue Party, defines itself as a “conservative democratic” movement. The party is socially and fiscally conservative, aiming to represent the devout Muslim trade’s people as well as the newly-emerging conservative bourgeoisie, lower and lower-middle class conservative Sunni Turks and Shafi’i Kurds living in the “periphery”. The predecessors of AK Party, the Welfare Party (“Refah Partisi” in Turkish) and the Virtue Party (“Fazilet Partisi” in Turkish) were against the European Union membership bid of Turkey, more critical of the market economy and defended a more statist approach (Insel, 2003: 3). However, AKP supported the European Union membership negotiation process of Turkey and introduced reform packages for adopting the EU acquis in its first years. (Kahraman, 2007: 139-143).

Since the beginning of its rule in 2002 AKP government has been playing two different and contrast roles. On the one hand, as a first role, it has been utilizing democratization, social justice and to be fair to the different social groups in its discourses. On the other hand, as a second role, it has been pursuing an aggressive economic and political attack against, who has the different political and world view, especially the working sections of the population. Additionally, especially after the 2007 General Election in which the AKP won a landslide victory and its attempts to tame the Turkish Armed Forces leadership in a protracted inter-oligarchic rivalry proved to be successful, AKP embraced even more aggressive policies against the larger sections of the society. Nonetheless, after 2007 AKP has been giving up the European Union process slowly as a first turning point. In this respect it has been beginning to lose distinction of discursive democracy. However that there were several logical arguments both from the world and the Turkey’s public opinions like AKP’s hard governance and policy methods (Parla, 2007: 117). After this period, mostly post-2007, AKP gradually began to harden and manage to monopolize the political power with all the relevant institutions, its attack started to be felt by the larger sections of the society. 2011 when another general election was a second turning point: In the same time with the Arab revolutions, the government’s policy of incremental change through economic cooperation took a heavy blow, while it created the basis for Erdogan’s recasting as model leader for the fledgling democracies of the Arab world. It was at this point, that the Prime Minister’s conservative rhetoric began to spiral out of control and increasingly resembled that of an autocrat, who was lecturing his domestic and international interlocutors about the straight path ahead, increasingly resorting to religious rhetoric and symbolism.

As the last turning point; Erdogan as clearly misread the nation’s fifty percent vote as a mandate for unfettered power at 2011 General Election. Not only is he now largely unrestricted by the judiciary, which has been manned with pro-government judges and prosecutors, or by the EU accession process, which has been all but derailed. He has also centralized all power in the party in his hands and he has used it to push liberals and center-right figures out of positions of power. In addition to these arguments AKP has a government that has only recently been re-elected with fifty percent of the popular vote. Moreover Erdogan, who was once the flag bearer of democratic reform and humane government, yet who has lost touch with developments on the grounds, and who is about to

suffocate in his own delusions of grandeur. He is talking disjointedly about women who should have at least three children, about abortion as murder, about people who drink beer as alcoholics, and about the protestors as an immoral bunch of looters. He disregards anyone, who disagrees with his views and tries to brand mark them as enemies of the state.

Not forgetting the aforementioned points, which are included to explain the essence of the protest in Turkey, AKP's main political, social and systematically transformation policies and their disturbances should be elaborate. In this respect, it is possible to see the background of the protest and main reasons why the society is reactive both AKP and the Prime Minister Erdoğan. At this point, it is possible to express that the 2013 Protests are the main outputs of these transformation process. To be much illustrative it is possible to categorize these transformation processes.

We can interpret the Gezi process as a final of AKP's failure of several transformation projects. For instance, first of all urban transformation and gentrification; huge construction projects are initiated by the AKP government, which helped the construction sector to grow rapidly. These government-backed construction projects involve the "remodelling" of rural and urban landscape. Secondly, unemployment, poverty, deunionization, dissemination of the subcontracting system; as it was mentioned before, one of the faces of AKP government is hidden into its economic policies. AKP government is a perfect member of world hegemonic economic system which is possible to call that free market based neoliberal capitalist economic model. This model, which has been significantly getting an effective role during the AKP period, causes unemployment, poverty and deunionization by the help of subcontracting system. Thirdly, social security system transformation; One of the main the reason behind the electoral victories of AKP is more complicated, the story of success of neo-liberalism is the same as the story of successful transformation of the social field in Turkey as in other Third World countries. In this sense, transformation of the social policies has played a key role. It is one of the most important aspects of reinventing the social so as to restructure society around neo-liberal ideals. In addition to the accelerating growth of informal sector and flexibilization of the labour market (which paves the ground for institutionalization of subcontracting, and part-time work and facilitates the ending of wage contracts), transformation of social policies in the Third World countries both eliminate the redistributive role of the state, and establish a new regime of prudentially and calculation in which every individual is deemed responsible for calculating his/her own future risk and taking necessary measures against it (Bora, 2011:126-127). Therefore, besides changing the relation between state-market and state-society, social policy reforms also attempt to establish a new form of subjectivity. Recent developments in the social security system in Turkey should also be seen as a part of this process. In here it has to be said that AKP's transformation of social security system seems greatly use full in the first sense. However that this new neo-liberal system create a great many aggrieved people who protested the AKP government in 2013 Protests. Fourthly, transformation in the media, oppressions against the journalists; the state of press freedom in Turkey has recently been in the spotlight, particularly after Reporters without Borders declared the country as "the world's biggest prison for journalists" last December. While concerns about press freedom in Turkey are not new, a series of recent reports reveal a rather disturbing declining trend in the country's press freedom.

In the last two years, a number of advocacy groups and international organizations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters without Borders (RWB), Council of Europe (CoE), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), have published reports highlighting the deteriorating press freedom in the country. Most recently, RWB's Press Freedom Index 2013, placed Turkey in the 154th place among the 179 countries included in the study, marking a new low for Turkey's democracy. Finally, ideological and political transformation; the polarized and demoralized opposition in Turkey is strident in its criticism, bereft of the political imagination required to put forward its own policies, and lacking in the sort of balance that is required if its criticisms are to be respected as constructive contributions to the

democratic process. It is especially suspect for the most secularized segments of Turkish society to complain about an authoritarian drift in AKP leadership when it was these very social forces that a few years earlier was virtually pleading with the army to step in, and hand power back to them in the most anti-democratic manner imaginable. Instead of taking justifiable pride in the great Turkish accomplishments of the last decade, the unrestrained hostility of anti-AKP political forces is generating a sterile debate that makes it almost impossible to solve the problems facing the country or to take full advantage of the opportunities that are available to such a vibrant country. It needs to be appreciated that Turkey viewed from outside by most informed observers, especially in the region, remains a shining success story, both economically and politically.

The trajectory of AKP's policies is undeniably one leading to a less democratic Turkey where more power is concentrated in fewer hands. Perhaps the best evidence for this is AKP's campaign to imprison, without public trials or evidence, military officers, journalists and writers who have expressed opposition to Erdoğan. All one needs to do in order to see AKP's agenda is to connect the dots along this trajectory.

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