

ADALET VE KALKINMA (AKP): NEW MODEL OF GOVERNANCE

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Introduction

In November 2002 and July 2007 the Turkish electorate voted for the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AK Parti) demonstrating a great risk for broad political change. There was some doubt whether a modern democratic party with deep roots in political Islam was in the position to expand liberties and preserve the democratic system. The AKP had been described as an “Islamist or Islamic party”, “fundamentalist party”, “party with Islamic roots” or, as the economist called it “Mildly Islamist”. Nowadays, several authors use the phrase “democratura”¹ in order to explain the new model of the Justice and Development Party and its political choices and tactics.

Islamic Party or Not?

It's of a great importance to differentiate religious Islamic parties from religious Islamic politics. An Islamic party is a religious party with an ideology which derives from religious ideas². Religious parties desire to resolve their ethics divisions on the base of a shared religious affiliations and they incorporate religious and secular issues as well. A party might not be Islamic, but could pursue “Islamic Politics”³. We can say that the AKP cannot be considered as a religious party because it does not seek the political transformation of state and society. However, the AKP is involved in

¹ (Neologism) (Policy) dictatorship camouflaged under the guise of democracy. <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2015/03/07/democratura62.html> .

² Religious parties seek regime change by implementing their religious worldview, in the case of the Muslim world, the Islamization of the state and society is their main goal. Nancy L. Rosenblum., *Religious Parties, Religious Political Identity, and the Cold Shoulder of Liberal Democratic Thought*, Kluwer Academic Publishers ,Netherlands, 2003, p53.

³ The competition to define the meaning of life, identity via Islamic values. Hakan Yavuz, M., *Secularism and Muslim Democracyin Turkey*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2009, p85.

Islamic social ethics and cultural norms.

The AKP avoids pursuing a policy of Islamic identity politics. There is a connection between politics and Islamic life-style. For example, the party leadership participates in religious activities by its headscarf-covers wives or by the fact that they dispute gender equality as ‘against nature’. There is a conflict between Islamism and the “conservative democracy”⁴. The AKP is a party formed by what it wants to forget and of course what it wants to become publicly in the future. The European Union membership project played a significant role in transforming the identity of the party, but now, being a member of the European Union is not a priority for Turkey.

We notice that the three-fold pillar⁵ which shapes the “conservative democracy” is surrounded by a number of internal contradictions. During the party leadership over the years, we notice that the AKP desires to reform the political system but at the same time it does to give internal space to the democracy. It seems like wishing pluralism but they declare its identity as “conservative democracy”. Also it came under discussion the fact that decentralization could be the solution for Turkey’s bureaucracy, but the leadership continued to centralize its structure.

New modern model of dictatorship?

Lately, when authors talk about the model of “democratura” they tend to compare Russia and Turkey. Turkey tried to enter to the European Union, but then they refused for economic and political differences between states. Erdoğan used the disappointment of the Turks to get away from the West and he came closer to Moscow. Russian and Turkey have many features in common and they have always valued their unique Eurasian identities but they also know that without Europe their modernization project will be a failure.

⁴ The concept of Conservative Democracy cannot be comprehended without understanding the concept of *hizmet*, “rendering social services” in the name of Islam. The dominant version of Conservative Democracy for the AKP is fideistic conservatism, which stresses the role of religion in defining the good life. Speech of Erdoğan, 2002, www.akparti.org.tr.

⁵ Family, Ottomanism and piety. . Hakan Yavuz, M., *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2009, p78.

Nowadays, Turkey is represented by a mixture of democratic and dictator features. There is a common political attitude in its foreign and domestic policy. It seems difficult for Turkey, because of its rich history, culture and geopolitical ambition, to be nothing more but part of the “European Project”. It seems also difficult for Turkey to come close to the “2023 vision”⁶ of the government. The fact that Erdoğan was named once by the European Voice, “The European of the year 2004” seems like an illusion after the brutal police tactics during the Gezi Park Protests on 28 May 2013. The Freedom of expression, Freedom of thought and religion, justice, children’s right, gender equality, minority problems etc, are still the main obstacles for the success of his vision.

Erdoğan cannot navigate parallel paths and he should realize some say that despite the government crackdown the protests marked an awakening of political consciousness. This intersection between different nations and cultures in the world seems that doesn’t bring any kind of democracy but only contrasts and conflicts. It’s difficult to re-evaluate the role of the democratic state and the dark side of the economic system which governs every state.

Conclusion

The truth is that Turkey is governed by one of the most charismatic and stronger leader in the world, who tries to be at the same time in two parts. When he realized that this tactic did not bring good results, he started to behave like a person who wants to be a dictator. “Democratura”, maybe is the modern usage of the term dictatorship, but for what we are sure of is that if Turkey desires to become part of the group of the democratic states, needs to change definitely its current policy. Erdoğan’s international image has crashed irreparably with his irrational response to the Gezi protests. Today, the perception of Erdogan as a backward, Islamist autocrat hostile to the West and capitalism continues to spread but his structure and his party remain strong.

⁶ The 2023 vision is a goal list of the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan administration to achieve by the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. The list focuses on Economy, Energy ,Foreign policy, Health care, Transport Tourism. Hürriyet Daily News. January 17, 2011. Retrieved 2011-01-28. .

