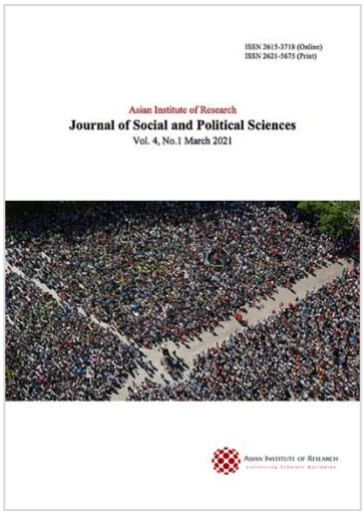

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The Republic of Turkey on the Verge of its Centennial: Continuity or Change?

Marcelo Macedo Rizo[1]

[1] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia. Email: jmmacedor@unal.edu.co

Abstract
The modern Republic of Turkey is close to its 100th anniversary but it has substantially changed in comparison to the secular and Western-oriented state of its initial days. After almost two decades of the AKP rule and the dazzling Erdoğan leading figure, several transformations have been experienced as in politics, because of the ascending and consolidation of an Islamist ruling party; in economy, since Turkey had an impressive performance during the first decade of the AKP in power; as well as in social sphere, due the emergence of identities that challenged the prevalent Kemalist narrative. All these changes involve complexities and provoke tense debates within Turkish society, some of which can start to be solved through next elections. Hence year 2023 becomes a watershed in Turkish History and certain questions regarding if the current trend will persist or if new transformations will take place become relevant. The discussion necessarily implies to envisage a hypothetical scenario without Erdoğan and the consequences of his absence on Turkey's near future.

Keywords: AKP Rule, Erdoğan, Post- Erdoğan Era, Turkey, 2023 Elections

Introduction

Claiming that Turkey is in crisis could be a commonplace. For a country that experienced four coups d'état during the 20th century, lived periods—under civilian rule—of restricted democracy and has gone through an allegedly increasing process of authoritarianism over the last ten years (including a new coup attempt), the right questions are whether it has had moments of normality or if being constantly on the edge is Turkey's "normal" condition. Even so, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) era has been different from former political experiences because it has contributed to the consolidation of political Islam in Turkey. Due to the secular character of the republic stamped by its founder Atatürk almost a hundred years ago, it had been nearly impossible for Islamist parties to come to power, with the notable exception of Necmettin Erbakan's failed rule in the mid-1990s which ended in the well-known "postmodern coup" (Zürcher, 2017: 325). The strengthening of the AKP, being itself the last stage in a continuum of Islamist parties conceived within the *Milli Görüş* (National Outlook) movement whose first one was the National Order Party in 1970, has vindicated a Muslim identity as an element in the definition of Turkishness. Such identity has disputed the hegemony that Kemalism carried out during the 20th century while it competes against other collective modes of self-representation. This clash is what Hintz denominates "identity contestation, defined as ongoing processes of debate and pushback among groups holding differing understandings

of what constitutes the appropriate national identity for their state" (2018: 18). Therefore, the debate on what being a Turk means goes beyond the recurrent dichotomy between Secularism and Islamism.

The figure of Erdoğan has been key in the success of the AKP process. As a sign of mutual dependence, the party's grassroots networks inherited from Islamist political parties in the 1980s and 1990s drove Erdoğan's ascent while his charismatic figure and cult of personality have channeled votes for the political organization. However, the growing personalistic rule in Turkey has not only created unbalances in the symbiotic relationship with his own party but also provoked concerns about the immediate future and the long-term situation of the country. It seems that Turkey will continue under Erdoğan's rule for a longer time than many predicted. In that sense, a discussion on coming events or the analysis of eventual scenarios—whether Erdoğan is in the picture or not—become relevant. This article, after briefly reviewing the rise of Erdoğan, will discuss future situations based on recent and current developments as well as scholars' considerations. It will assume 2023 as a watershed because it will be the centennial of the Republic and the date for the next general and presidential elections. Recognizing the importance that Erdoğan has for the representation of current Turkey, the document will also try to reflect on eventual scenarios once he leaves power.

Material studied and methods

The necessary bibliographic material was collected in order to offer a historical reconstruction of the AKP rule in Turkey which has been the dominant for most of the 21st century. Although the review was mainly done in terms of politics, economic and sociocultural elements were examined, too. It also resorted to a quantitative analysis of electoral results taking into consideration that the breaking point referred to within the article is the year of next elections in that country. Regarding to forecasts for Turkey's near future, the analysis is based on rigorous studies carried out by experts who have written on the different issues reviewed. After systematizing all the collected information and organize it on a historical and thematic linear basis, the results obtained are presented below.

1. The road to one-man rule

As mentioned, in 1996 Erbakan, as head of the Welfare Party (WP), became the first Islamist Prime Minister of Turkey. This was possible thanks to a coalition with other center-right parties despite having obtained only 21 percent of the votes in the 1995 elections. Since the beginning his Islamist origin as well as some defiant actions in the foreign policy arena (as a visit he paid to Gaddafi in Libya) raised suspicions within the military, which in February 1997 launched an ultimatum that eventually led to Erbakan's renunciation four months later. The "Postmodern (or Soft) coup" was followed by the ban of the WP by the Constitutional Court and Erbakan's permanent expulsion from political activity. In those days, the then incumbent Mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, took part in some demonstrations supporting the WP to which he also belonged. In one of those rallies he recited a poem that was considered an incitement of violence and as a consequence he was imprisoned for four months in 1999. After having been an active member of the Virtue Party (VP) that replaced the WP, Erdoğan led the reformist wing of the party which was also banned by the Court in 2001. This provoked a final split within political Islam in Turkey: on one hand, there was a traditional Islamist line, under Erbakan's guidance which became the Felicity Party; on the other hand, there was a conservative pro-reform and pro-market organization, the Justice and Development Party, whose leaders were Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül. The latter became Prime Minister after the November 2002 elections when the AKP obtained only 34 percent of the votes but, because of the electoral system, won an absolute majority in the National Assembly. With his partisans dominating the Parliament, in March 2003, the political ban for Erdoğan was lifted and he became Premier.

During its initial years, the AKP displayed an aggressive reformist agenda. Whereas it continued the Economic Stabilization Program initiated by the predecessor government as a reaction to the 2001 economic collapse -the final catastrophic event in what is known in Turkey as the "Lost Decade" in which the country "faced a worsened economic crisis and an intensified war in the south-east" (Delibas, 2015: 69)- the AKP also promoted reforms aiming at fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria, requirements to be considered for European Union membership. The then Minister of Economy, Ali Babacan, was in charge of process of economic recovery. In this realm, Turkey's

performance between 2003 and 2013 was impressive. Except for 2008 and 2009, the international financial crisis years, and 2012, when the percentage was oddly low, the GDP growth rate average was above 7 percent (World Bank, 2019). In terms of GDP per capita, the 2002 figures (USD 3 492) were tripled in 2008 (USD 10 444) although thereafter it has entered into a kind of "middle-income trap" and has been unable to surpass the USD 11 000 barrier (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016). Partially due to such positive results, the AKP was able to win the 2007 and 2011 general elections, maintaining its majority in the Parliament while Erdoğan consolidated his leadership and started to accumulate power. Indeed, after a golden age during his first period, in which the EU agreed that Turkey had fulfilled the referred criteria to be a candidate and opened negotiations in December 2005, Erdoğan focused on eroding the historical military tutelage on Turkish politics. In Republican Turkey, the army had always assumed the role as defender of secular principles of the nation, and of course Kemalism was dominant within it. However, first by altering the structure of the National Security Council during the reformist era, and later helped by judicial persecution, Erdoğan could weaken the military leadership to neutralize an eventual intervention. In fact, a deposition had been attempted by generals in 2007 through the same means used ten years earlier with Erbakan. In the most recent occasion, the "e-memorandum" posted by the military warning against the Islamist government, was responded to with a call for elections in which the AKP kept its absolute majority. As Waldman and Çalışkan note, "this episode proved that the days of military coups were over" (2017: 31) for now.

In 2008, at the same time that a lawsuit aimed at shutting down the AKP was rejected by the Constitutional Court, the Ergenekon and Balyoz (Sledghammer) trials were opened extinguishing the remaining political power of the military in the following years. They were driven by Gulenist elements within the judiciary in times when the movement- also known as *Hizmet* (service) -founded by Fetullah Gülen in the 1960s was a strong AKP partner and simultaneously was consolidating its infiltration process in several institutions of the Turkish state. Some years later, through the appeal processes, when Gulenism was already being persecuted, it was demonstrated that the evidence against the military in those trials had been fabricated. But the wounds were already incurable, and the generals would never recover their former influence. In the case of the Gulenists, "once their common enemy was destroyed, the AKP-Gülen alliance began to crack. The alliance came to a bitter end in 2013 when pro-Gülen judges revealed corruption charges against Erdoğan" (Taşpınar, 2016). The Prime Minister's reaction was a purge of *Hizmet* members in state institutions and the labelling of the Gulenist movement as a terrorist organization. In this sense, it was referred as FETÖ (*Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü*) even in official statements. Özeren, Çubukçu, and Baştuğ consider that "after winning its third consecutive general election in 2011, the AKP held more power in its hands than ever before (and) it also faced fewer institutional checks and balances, as the executive body's domination over the judicial and legislative branches had continued to expand" (2020). Nevertheless, it was in 2013 that Erdoğan's alleged turn to authoritarianism became irreversible.

In effect, that year marked a point of no return: there was an initiation of not only the persecution against Gulenists, but also the repression of the Gezi protests, which began with a small environmental demonstration against an urban infrastructure project but became the catalyst for nation-wide rallies. As McManus states, "Gezi was indeed a turning point - just in the wrong direction. Turkey was sliding from troubled democracy into an increasingly authoritarian state, centered on a single man" (2018: 287). The definitive steps toward a one-man rule can be illustrated in three different moments: First, in 2014 when Erdoğan became the first elected president in Turkey's history. Second, when a coup attempt was launched by some units of the army, allegedly led by Gulenist elements. Third, when Erdoğan won (though by a narrow margin) the April 2017 referendum which formally changed the system of governance from a parliamentary to a presidential one. While social changes were also being experienced with an Islam-oriented influence -sometimes driven by the government- in Turkish people's private lives as well as a reinforced role of Islam in society through public policies (for instance in education or family law), criticism against Erdoğan was officially persecuted. Insulting the President not only became an actively persecuted offense but also the press was the predilect target. Waldman and Çalışkan highlight that regarding the media, "the government has manipulated it, co-opted it or attacked it fervently" (2017: 31).

In its turn the failed coup provided extraordinary tools that Erdoğan used under the consequently declared state of exception that lasted two years. Such tools were useful to corner the Gülen movement, as its members were

involved in the putsch, and to put pressure on all the opposition voices within the mass media, academia, politics and the civil society. The measures also gave him legitimacy to confront the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK), with whom peace talks had come to an end in 2015. His confrontation with the PKK was followed by a worsening of armed operations: according to the International Crisis Group, there have been more than 5 000 people killed in clashes related to the PKK conflict since the talks broke down (ICG, 2020). Despite his appeals to Nationalism and the defense of democracy, Erdoğan witnessed the division of the country between his followers and his adversaries. Such juxtaposition has led him to accumulate an enormous social base of support that in many cases evolved into a cult of personality and even fanaticism. According to Çağaptay,

> "since the failed coup against Erdoğan, a new narrative has emerged amongst his supporters that I call Erdoganism. This 'Erdoganist' narrative holds that Erdoğan is a historic figure who will make Turks great and Muslims proud again (…) Here is Erdoganism par excellence: blending political Islam and Turkish nationalism under Erdoğan's persona, whose leitmotif is that he is protecting Turkey and the Muslim World against foreign attacks" (2017).

Under such a polarized environment, the referendum was voted for in 2017 and the political system was transformed: the President became head of state and government, the role of Prime Minister disappeared, and the Parliament turned into a strictly legislative branch. Moreover, during the transition period, Erdoğan re-structured the ministries and pursued reforms to extend his control over the military.

In 2018, pressed by the dramatic fall of Turkish currency after a diplomatic incident with the U.S. (the well-know "Brunson Crisis") (Çağaptay, 2020: 223), Erdoğan called for anticipated presidential and parliamentary elections in which he was re-elected as President. In the National Assembly, the AKP, despite not having obtained absolute majority, conformed a coalition with the ultranationalist National Movement Party (MHP) led by Devlet Bahçeli. He had supported Erdoğan since 2015 when the new Kurdish-oriented party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), gained seats in the parliament in detriment of the AKP, and new elections were held at the cost of PKK talks collapsing. In sum, for 2018, Erdoğan had become the most powerful person in Turkish history with extended control over other public power branches (including the central bank, the electoral board, and the high-profile judiciary) and keen pressure over his critics.

2. Road to 2023

The consolidation of a presidential system and the virtual elimination of checks and balances have led to an apparently steady autocratic rule. However, the deepened polarization in Turkey also means that Erdoğan's supporters and opponents can be homogeneously distributed and despite the majority in the quantity of votes and provinces the AKP holds over the country, there are also regions where elections are more disputable or even dominated by other political parties. That was demonstrated in the March 2019 local elections whose results are shown as follows:

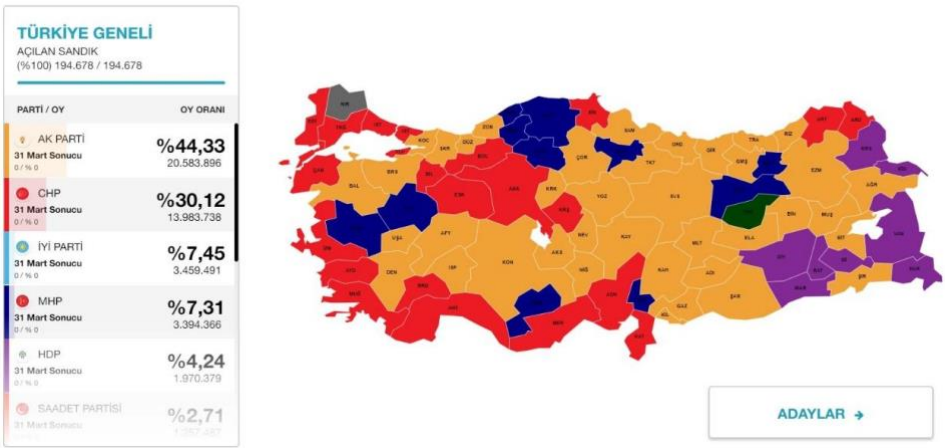

Figure 1: Turkey. March 2019 Local Elections Results

Source: www.hurriyet.com.tr/secim/31-mart-2019-yerel-secimleri/secim-sonuclari

The main opposition parties garnered 41% of the vote, figures lower than percentages obtained in the 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections (46% and 44% respectively) but more meaningful this time because the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) conquered the mayor's offices in most of the Turkey's biggest cities, including Ankara and Istanbul. In the latter case, the AKP alleged irregularities and asked for annulation and re-run. The Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey (YSK), which had validated suspicious votes in the 2017 referendum in favor of Erdoğan's interests (Cupolo, 2017), acceded to the AKP claims provoking even more concerns about its lack of independence. Subsequently, original results (which showed a difference of 24 000 votes between CHP candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, and AKP candidate, Binali Yıldırım, the last Prime Minister of Turkey) were annulled, new elections were called for June and a hard campaign was launched. As Grossman underlines, "Erdoğan himself had said many times, 'If we lose Istanbul, we lose Turkey' (…) and called the results of the first election, 'blemished'. In the rematch, the usually fractious opposition to the AKP unified behind İmamoğlu, mounting a serious challenge to the AKP's power in its largest base of support" (2019). Despite Erdoğan's expectations, the difference between the contenders increased to 800 000 votes confirming the CHP victory which was supported by the İYİ (Good) party (an anti-Erdoganist faction that broke off from the MHP) and the HDP. The Istanbul elections had three main effects in the chessboard of Turkish politics. First, it erected İmamoğlu as an attractive figure within not only the CHP but the whole opposition to run against Erdoğan in 2023 presidential elections. Second, it proved *in-situ* the possibility of a wider alliance among opposition parties, including the HDP. Finally, it puts Istanbul, the main and most populated city and economic center of Turkey under CHP management with a large quantity of resources at disposal and the opportunity of demonstrating a renewed way of governance.

Regarding the implications of such results for a political change in Turkey, positions are not univocal. Grossman claims that "Overall, the aura of Erdoğan's invincibility seems to be dissipating and Turkey appears to be nearing the day that the transfer of power is viewed as a normal and nonexceptional part of political life" (2019). The RAND Corporation shares this view when it states that "these results, the 2019 election of CHP candidates to be mayors in six of Turkey's ten largest cities—particularly the decisive victory of Ekrem İmamoğlu in İstanbul—illustrate that Erdoğan and the AKP are not invincible" (2020). Undoubtedly, the results in local elections (as well as in the 2018 presidential and parliamentary ones) showed that despite 17 years of an iron fist rule by Erdoğan and the AKP, there is a vigorous opposition in Turkey. Its participation in total votes records overall a percentage above 40 that could be better in case of a more extensive coalition. In this context, Turkish democracy still stands. However, as the Hudson Institute points out "the AKP (..) also faced fewer institutional checks and balances, as the executive body's domination over the judicial and legislative branches had continued to expand" (Özeren *et al.*, 2020). In a similar sense, Hintz expresses that she doesn't "see any political changes while Erdoğan is in power, other than increased efforts to remain in power that rely on intimidation, media stranglehold even on streaming platforms, jailing of political opponents and dissidents, etc" (2020). The optimism about a political change in Turkey could also have been dispersed very soon after the elections when Erdoğan removed three elected mayors, HDP members, in predominantly Kurdish cities in Eastern Turkey, just like did in 2016 when 24 mayors lost their positions after alleged links with the PKK. At the end of 2020, 47 mayors out of a total of 59 municipalities won by the HDP in 2019 elections had been ousted and 21 of them have been imprisoned. This took place in the midst of escalation of hostilities against Kurdish militias, particularly the PKK within Turkish borders, and the People's Protection Units (YPG) forces -a PKK wing- in Syria.

Under current circumstances, the big conundrum to be resolved is double-faced: Will the opposition in Turkey be able to defeat Erdoğan in 2023 presidential elections? Providing that they are able to, would Erdoğan accept the results and willingly leave power? An answer to the first predicament is directly linked to the possibility of a unified candidacy, if not by all, at least by the biggest opposition parties in Turkey as well as smaller but meaningful organizations. It is clear that a coalition between the CHP and the İYİ party, just like happened in parliamentary 2018 elections, is not enough. In fact, both parties, despite their "National Alliance" to the legislative body, ran with their own candidates for presidency: Muharrem İnce for the CHP who barely surpassed 30 percent of the votes, and Meral Akşener from the İYİ party, who obtained 7.29 percent. In the same competition, the HDP leader, Selahattin Demirtaş also took part, but his figures were only one percentage point above Akşener. Of course, not even combined could they have reached Erdoğan, who gained more than 52 percent of the votes. The remaining question is if a unique candidacy could have changed the results. In fact, some rapprochements were

held by party leaders, including the head of Felicity Party, Temel Karamollaoğlu. The original idea was to support ex-president and AKP co-founder Abdullah Gül as a multiparty candidate against Erdoğan. In the end, negotiations broke down, each party ran with its own candidate and the results were as seen. In any case, although it was considered to be part of an alliance, the HDP never had a real chance to join it. The reluctance to accept the Kurdish-oriented party in a wider coalition is precisely the kind of alignment which looks politically uncomfortable for nationalistic elements within the CHP and the İYİ party. However, if the HDP is not included, a victory will be very difficult in the next presidential elections. The possibilities of a really strong candidacy depend on the Demirtaş' party inclusion, which creates a dilemma on how to navigate the positions against. Maybe the achievements in the 2019 Istanbul elections could be a draft of how reach a such coalition.

But the HDP is only one of the parties that should be added to an anti-erdoganist alliance especially because there are new political actors that could increase their relevance in the following years. That is the case of the recently founded Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) whose leader, former Minister of Economy, Ali Babacan, left the AKP in the middle of critiques against Erdoğan and had the support of ex-president Gül (Gürsel, 2019). Although there is not enough clarity about the location of his party on the political spectrum, his background as the creator of Turkey's "economic miracle" in the first years of AKP rule, envisages a liberal and pro-European orientation. Also, in his early statements he has made it clear that a return to the parliamentary system is healthy for Turkish democracy. In his turn, Ahmet Davutoğlu, former Foreign and Prime Minister, and author of the *strategic depth* doctrine that led the "Neo-Ottomanist" (Çağaptay, 2020: 284) Turkish foreign policy under AKP governments, released his own new party, the Future Party, after having moved away from Erdoğan. In the case of these ex AKP members, rapprochements with the CHP or İYİ parties are more likely for Babacan. However, it will be almost impossible for him to become the strong unique candidate required by the opposition. In this realm, possibilities seem to rely on Meral Akşener, the head of İYİ party, or Ekrem İmamoğlu, the CHP incumbent mayor of Istanbul. For the latter, his performance on managing the biggest Turkish city will be key to consolidating his popularity. Moreover, he must deal successfully with investigations into his local fundraising that can be used by the AKP to legally kick him out of the running. Additionally, his party is experiencing recent withdrawals of relevant members, some of whom have expressed their intention to create new political organizations which could increase fragmentation within electorate.

Concerning the AKP, the divergence of former recognized members show that Erdoğan's intimate group is every day smaller and despite the electoral results of the party, his rule has turned excessively personalistic. In this sense, with regard to the upcoming 2023 elections, it is necessary to point out a difference between parliamentary and presidential contest which is applicable to the AKP-Erdoğan relationship. While it is clear that the incumbent president is able to win his re-election, the party's ability to hold the voting majority once obtained is less evident. As Grossman indicates, "in both presidential races, including his most recent in 2018, Erdoğan didn't exceed 52.5% of the vote. The AKP in the parallel parliamentary election happening at the same time in June 2018 fell short of Erdoğan's share. This suggests AKP is far less popular than he is" (2019). With a larger number of parties, some of them aiming at the same electoral base as the AKP, the allocation of seats in the Parliament will be more assorted. If the alliances to surpass altogether the threshold are allowed again, then smaller parties will also have representation, which will likely be detrimental to the AKP. Therefore, the mutual dependence between Erdoğan and his party has become unbalanced and it depends more on him than inversely.

Due to the increasingly personalistic direction of the government in virtue of which Erdoğan has become a genuine *Reis* (head, leader, boss), a new electoral success could be assured for him, even without the support of the grassroots networks in his party, though these are still important. Hence, the probabilities of an Erdoğan's loss could originate not for political but for other reasons. The economic crisis could be one of them. In particular, Turkey's economic trajectory has not been good in the last lustrum. As Jenkins underlines, "in recent years, as the pace of growth has slowed, the Turkish economy has become heavily dependent on domestic demand, which – given the country's low savings rate – has been largely financed by borrowing from abroad, particularly in US dollars" (2016). On account of the local currency experiencing a dramatic devaluation since 2017, the external debt has skyrocketed, threatening economic performance in the incoming years. These forecasts represent a risk for the current president because "if Turkey's economy continues to worsen, it will weaken the government ahead

of elections and further reduce Turkey's regional standing" (Abramovitz and Edelman, 2013). It is important to note that a large part of Erdoğan's renown is based on the economic success of Turkey during the first decade of the AKP rule and that his main justification to move to a presidential system was its necessity for a better control of economic and security issues. Resorting to the IMF for a bailout would be a setback for Erdoğan and in the case of economic downfall will appeal to a nationalist discourse (surely composed of military operations against Kurdish militias and more anti-Western rhetoric) to stand in power. In the end, the question remaining is if the economy will still be relevant for Erdoğan's political purposes or if Turkey's government will follow a path like, for instance, the Venezuela's where despite economic disaster President Maduro has been able to stay in power using increasingly authoritarian methods at the expense of democracy.

3. A post-Erdoğan Turkey?

Regarding the question asked above on the possibilities for Erdoğan to accept a defeat and his eventual "peaceful" withdrawal from the presidency, his autocratic character and the supposed support by huge social sectors as well as by leaders within the military -which Erdoğan has tried to shape with loyalists- could lead to a negative answer. The president of Turkey every new day looks more like a classical Latin American *caudillo* who believes that the fate of his country is inevitably linked to him and in his absence the country will fall.. Therefore, he will try to stay in charge whatever it takes. Hintz thinks that "his hold on power is an existential need: if Erdoğan leaves power, he will likely be subjected to prosecution unless whoever rules Turkey in his stead is a very strong ally of his. (…) His livelihood/life depends on him maintaining a hold on power" (2020). Although at least for now a defeat in the 2023 elections or Erdoğan's renunciation for any other reason looks unlikely, for strictly academic purposes, a dissertation on a future Turkey without him seems plausible.

The first question to address is about the person who would succeed him taking into consideration that, as mentioned, his intimate group is every day smaller. Jenkins accurately points out that "like many autocrats, Erdoğan has been reluctant to groom a successor for fear that s/he may launch an early bid for power" (Jenkins, 2016). And although he considers that if "his successor may come from within the Turkish Islamist movement, s/he is unlikely to be an Erdoğan loyalist or to be drawn from his inner circle" (Ibid.), it is probable that he finally opts for someone very close to him. In such a case, the candidates seem to be his son Bilal or the current Minister of Interior, Süleyman Soylu. Although was called to be Erdoğan's successor, his son-in-law Berat Albayrak, resigned as Minister of Finance and Treasury in November 2020, reducing even more the President's options and evincing cracks within the government and his own family. However, Erdoğan's image is immense and holding his legacy would be a very heavy burden that not anybody could bear. Moreover, the partisan support will surely not be the same for a different leader. In any case, as stated, the AKP's dependence on Erdoğan is vital and if results in the 2023 parliamentary elections are expected to be fewer, performance with Erdoğan out of the picture can be worse. According to Jenkins again, "This increases the likelihood of a purge of the Erdoğan nomenklatura from the state apparatus once Erdoğan himself is no longer in power" and "given that his successor is unlikely to be able to match Erdoğan's monopoly of political power, there would likely be at least a partial re-strengthening of Turkey's institutions" (2016).

In relation with the last subject, the second question to be addressed refers to the Turkish political system. It has been previously asserted that the AKP future largely depends on Erdogan's permanence. If absent, the political environment will be reorganized with non-absolute majority parties and the need to pursue coalitions. It will have a direct effect on the system of governance whose decision-making schemes have been deinstitutionalized in the last years. Because of this "strategic balance" the return to parliamentarism looks likely. Fuller considers that once the AKP reduces its power, the CHP will re-appear as the predominant party in Turkey but not that strong. In this sense, "while Atatürk's vital role in Turkish history as the heroic founder and modernizer of a new nation is secure, Kemalism -the ideology of his successors- is no longer regarded by the majority as a sacred national value" (2014: 346). The new configuration of political forces will also be reflected in the society, which has inevitably been transformed throughout the last decades. The emergence of collective identities that challenged the Kemalist as the privileged representation of Turkishness makes a reoccurrence of extreme secularism or Islamism impossible. For Jenkins, "in the foreseeable future, there appears little possibility of the return to the system of military

tutelage. (..) Nor does there appear any prospect of a re-imposition of the interpretation of Kemalism that prevailed before the AKP came to power" (Jenkins, 2016). However, the struggle for the definition of Turkish identity will continue and be the cause of social and political clashes. Without a divisive figure like Erdoğan on the horizon and the coexistence of several identities it is possible that the polarization within the country diminishes.

There are other relevant topics to discuss in a hypothetical end of Erdoğan's rule. One of them is the fate of Gulenism. Some reasons could be addressed for considering that the Gülen movement will not re-emerge in the incoming years: First, it is not a unified organization. As Aydıntaşbaş indicates, "Gülen's movement was known to have millions of followers and tens of thousands of members within the state bureaucracy. But no one was sure who they were" (2016: 1). Although there is no doubt about Gulenist involvement in the plot, it is also true that many members could have not been aware of it. Even, as this author states quoting an intelligence source, "a Gülenist within the military doesn't necessarily know who the other Gülenists are" (Aydıntaşbaş, 2016: 7). Second, the movement has been severely damaged by the Turkish government, at least in Turkey where it is considered a terrorist organization, since many of its members have been incarcerated or dismissed (from public positions) and most of its properties have been confiscated. Third, probably more than Erdoganism, the Hizmet is ultra-personalistic and deeply dependent on the Fetullah Gülen's guidelines. Gülen himself is a very old man and, in his case probably worse than in Erdoğan's, there are no heirs that can adequately fill his role. The excessive cult of personality implies that, without its natural leader, the organization will weaken even more. As Fuller highlights, "at this point there is no clear successor who commands charismatic support from the public. Some speculate that the movement could split along different lines and interests down the road" (2014: 352). Maybe the Nurcu religious order will continue underground but only for educational or spiritual purposes, not political or economic. Finally, Gulenism was labelled as the main culprit of the 2016 coup attempt and is repudiated by all other political actors in Turkey. The coup was interpreted as an attack against democracy, and a Gulenist rule would be more concerning in Turkey than a normal Islamist party, even within the AKP.

Another issue to be considered is the Kurdish Question, which unfortunately will also remain unanswered. The main reason is the reinforced Turkish nationalism that characterizes most political parties. Maybe the only exception is the HDP. It was noted that nationalistic bases and the fear to lose support deter more committed rapprochements by the CHP or İYİ party with the Demirtaş' one. Of course, the background is the fight against the PKK which, at least for some more years, will be a red line difficult to cross for the Turkish government whoever is in charge due to the political leverage provided by resorting to nationalism and the repulsion that the PKK itself (partially because of its portrayal in the media) generates in most of Turkish society. Even so, possibilities for further talks are not closed but it will be necessary the rise of moderate factions within the parties with the ability to understand the benefits that an agreement would bring for the future of Turkey. In that regard, Jenkins states that "the breaking of the taboo on 'negotiating with terrorists' and the dramatic decline in casualties during the PKK ceasefire in 2013-14 means that there is now a broad consensus in Turkey – including among many in the AKP – that the Kurdish issue can only be resolved through negotiations, not on the battlefield" (2016). The conundrum lies on when conditions will be favorable again for a reopening of rapprochements. As for the contents of eventual agreements, whereas most probably they will include cultural rights and certain degrees of autonomy as well as transitional justice, statehood is a non-negotiable subject for the Turkish government because of its nationalistic composition.

Finally, there is a sensitive question regarding Turkish foreign policy that under Erdoğan moved from a European approach to a Neo-Ottoman orientation in virtue of which Turkey attempted to exert influence in the Balkans, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and especially the Middle East. After almost 18 years of AKP rule, Turkey has definitely moved away from the West (Europe and the U.S.), held rapprochements with Russia and Iran and its policy in the Middle East region was not as successful as pretended, currently keeping good relations only with Qatar, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood at the same time that deploys troops in Syria and Libya for diverse interests (Çağaptay, 2020: 178). In the midst, there is a growing anti-Americanism in Turkish society based, again, on the nationalistic character of most of the political actors. Under such circumstances, the question about the future of foreign policy becomes relevant. Kirişçi suggests three scenarios with Erdoğan still in power. First, "Erdoğan walks back his party's domestic political agenda to the early days of his reign." In other words, he

readdresses the reformist path and sets his sights on Europe again. Second, "Erdoğan continues to mobilize his nationalist and Islamist supporters, only more aggressively." Third "and most likely scenario is a return to a situation reminiscent of the 1990s, with Erdoğan leading a Turkey that limps from one crisis to another and with a fragile economy deeply stuck in a middle-income trap" (2017: 190). In the last case, "structural factors (…) would break the temptation to leave NATO and completely rupture relations with the EU" (Kirişçi, 2017: 190). At this point, the possibilities of a change in a post-Erdoğan era look minimal. Even if a pragmatic view prevails over an ideological one in near future Turkish foreign policy, the Western approach seems irretrievable since other political forces share the anti-Western sentiment and, in the case of the CHP, have become critics of the EU accession process. It is not clear how the West could "recover" Turkey. In this sense, the development of current processes in the global arena produces for Turkey more doubts than certitudes on the performance of its incoming international relations.

Conclusion

Falling back onto a common place, Turkey is in crisis. Not only do domestic politics give rise to problems because of the predicaments on democracy that the AKP government and especially Erdoğan's leadership have caused in recent years, but also other aspects, such as the economy and foreign policy, provoke serious concerns. All of these elements are interrelated and although Erdoğan has the required skills to manage them in his favor, usually by resorting to a nationalist discourse or a hard attack against his opponents, a poor economic performance can bring with it real disadvantages for him. Perhaps the beginning of his end will be driven by negative outcomes in the economy, which have been noticeable since 2016 and may worsen in the upcoming years due to Turkey's high indebtedness, growth stagnation, fall into the middle-class trap, high unemployment rates (especially youth joblessness) and the slowdown of key economic sectors such as tourism. However, as noted, the economy may not be relevant in the end and Erdoğan can insist on staying in power despite the adverse figures, in which case an enlargement of authoritarianism would likely be inevitable. Many things can happen in the next two and a half years just before the turning point that has been laid out in this article. After two decades in power, the AKP's exhaustion becomes apparent, but Erdoğan's continuity, except if extraordinary conditions happen, does not seem to be in doubt. However, there have been surprising moments throughout Turkey's political history that have changed the course of trends. Hopefully the next shock, whatever it is, be beneficial for the country.

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