

CHAPTER III

DEBUNKING THE END OF DEMOCRACY DISCOURSES: THE CASE OF TURKISH DEMOCRACY

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1. Introduction

As a form of government democracy has taken various forms and has gone through many phases. Today, it is widely considered to be the best and perhaps the only viable form of government. For some researchers, the Western roots of democracy make it difficult for this form of government to establish itself in other cultures.

Also the Turkish democracy has been tested with many internal challenges and faces many obstacles in the way of becoming a “mature democracy”. The wave of democracy that was initiated with the dissolution of the Soviet Union has been going through an autocratic trend. Whether this global democratic recession or backsliding is gradual or alarming is debatable. However, there is a rising perception that democratic institutions are in retreat. The countries that have become skeptical to democracy or experiencing democratic recession hit the headlines but those that have still strong democratic institutions remain in the background and although European democracies receive blows a radical erosion of norms has not been observed yet.

The democratic recession is a global phenomenon, profound political changes like we are experiencing this day have been seen before. However, unstable political changes, intolerance and skepticism toward foreigners surely foreshadow crises but they do not mean end of democracy. Therefore, the return of authoritarian great powers coupled with democratic rollbacks does not necessarily lead the change of a predominantly democratic system but it may lead a gradual erosion of democratic institutions within the system.

We rather tend to believe a temporary stagnation in democracy characterized by a short term crisis. Hence, in this paper the global

recession in democracy within the context of Turkish democracy was examined.

The tutelary mechanisms designed by the statist elites who wanted to protect top-down revolutions is a problem that prevents Turkish democracy being consolidated. The military and bureaucratic elites that founded the republic dominated the army and the judiciary, and these elites had long believed that elected governments could be hostile to revolutions. As a result of this, the military bureaucratic elite who wanted to protect the revolutions staged coups. These coups and memorandums seemed to be peculiar to Latin American and Turkish democracies. However today democratic backsliding seems to be all pervasive and it is fair to locate the current crisis Turkish democracy is experiencing within a global context. The paper also tackles the domestic structuring of foreign policies and debates concerning the quality of democracy.

2.Global Democratic Recession

We are living in an era when people live with the far right, the far left and different kinds of extremists all shouting at the same time. Many declare that all politicians are crook or all journalists lie. In postwar Italy this form of skepticism and anti-politics was called *qualunquismo* (Applebaum, 2020, 142). The Western liberal democracies are marked with some tolerance for disorder and criticism. The failure of democracies has always been possible and political legitimacy based on a social contract has been shattered.

The liberal democratic state attempts to control every aspect of life more extensively because it makes people believe that democratic state is under asymmetric threats. The liberal ideology is not apparent like its communist or fascist counterparts. Liberalism's historical rise and global attraction are hardly accidental; it has been supported by people living under tyranny, inequality and severe poverty. The other political philosophies have failed to promote that it could provide political stability, liberties and economic development with regularity and predictability. This is why Francis Fukuyama could declare that the other ideal regimes have died and that liberalism was the end of history (Deneen, 2018, 21).

Today the fascisms of the 1920s and 1930s have been reawakened. The fascism of those times was celebrating the violence over law; it proposed a leader with mystical powers and was claiming that globalization and global financial network were part of a global conspiracy (Snyder, 2018, 20). To them democracy was creating an illusion of equality for the sake of a group of elites.

After the fascist and communist experiences it was thought that the American democracy was exceptional. However, only after 1965 the United States became fully democratic (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, 167). Like Alberto Fujimori, Hugo Chavez and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Donald Trump began his tenure by launching attacks on his opponents and criticizing media (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, 144). All roads lead to global conspiracies and populist anger.

“Erdoğan’s default explanation for political opposition to his rule is that his enemies are conspiring against the Turkish people” and the conspirators include also Western powers, global financial network called interest rate lobby. In Poland the Law and Justice Party (PiS) blames the global system for all kinds of problems. Agents of foreign regimes are to be blamed for internal problems (Runciman, 2019, 65). In both cases democracy is used to oppose against the non-native elements that threaten the national interests of the mentioned countries.

Democracy is tired and a replaceable system which has encountered many challenges. Even the threat of populism that democracy faces is not totally new. But currently it is experiencing a type of authoritarian threat that is more pragmatic. Toxic rhetoric against oppositions and a kind of undemocratic liberalism undermines its foundations.

Actually, liberal democracy is a promise to the masses, a promise to minorities to protect their rights from an oppressive majority and a promise to economic elites to guarantee their property. Its flexible nature has helped to make liberal democracy uniquely stable (Mounk, 2018, 54). But a uniquely stable liberal democracy experiences a decline in the quality of democracy and this backsliding is not peculiar to just Turkey and the reason for this is that the liberal order did not bring benefit to everyone. In all cases, many people believe that their identities are not being given adequate recognition either by the outside world or by other members of the same society. Those identities vary and they are all manifestations of identity politics (Fukuyama, 2018, 9).

3. The Turkish Ordeal by Democracy and Domestic Restructuring of Foreign Policy

Successful democracies require finely tuned balance; a balance and a contract between state and individual. In countries like Turkey where a paternalistic approach is predominant in state-individual relations, Western democracy is at times associated with Western hegemony. To develop a new moral and political identity civilizational policies are introduced and domesticization of foreign policy is favored.

Like anywhere in the world, the decline in democratic institution has become a hot debate in Turkey. Some would associate this democratic backsliding with authoritarianism, but indeed they are two different political strategies. In a typical democracy, people are governed with what they deserve. But, with industrial capitalism local hierarchies disappeared and a more direct relationship was established between an individual and state. Likewise, the relationship between individual and nation intensified, which probably created more shared democratic sentiments. Therefore, Democracy is linked with social psychology and nationalist sentiments are essential parts of a democracy.

In particular, the Turkish democracy has been reshaped by external pressures and its foreign policy is subject to a kind of domestic restructuring. As in the case of Eurasianists, Turkish democratic policies were also structured based on a civilizational agenda. To this approach, it is appropriate to locate Turkey as a unique culture and civilization.

Actually, these civilizational claims have been voiced more loudly after Özal and his liberal conservative approach came to power. An attempt to enable society's true colors to emerge from its Kemalist veneer (Jenkins, 2008, 149) was made. From its foundation the AKP, which regarded itself once as the continuation of Özalist tradition, sought to express itself as a liberal, conservative democratic party.

Nevertheless, public sentiment calls for alternative roles for Turkey, which impacts the quality of Turkish democracy because the majority sometimes demands anti-democratic and illiberal moves and the ruling party is "attuned to public sentiment" (Karagiannis, 2020, 2). Furthermore, upon the introduction of presidential government system comes to mean a regime shift and this shift is not an isolated incident. Many other countries are also labelled as moderate autocracies.

Likewise, the issue that the problems of Turkish democracy being used as an instrument in European and American politics led to a growing concern among Turkish political elite that Turkey is under the threat of foreign and domestic elements. This shift in Turkey's politics has also been reflected in the relations between Turkey and the EU and the Turkish side blamed the EU as anti-democratic, anti-foreigner, anti-immigration and anti-Islam (İnat, 2017, 51-52).

In a perspective regarding the respect to democratic values and sovereignty European powers should either decide that they do not want Turkey as an EU member, and will avoid policies that would mean interfering in the internal affairs of Turkey and develop a relationship based on mutual respect for sovereignty with Ankara. Or, they need to develop a frank policy about Turkey's EU membership just like the policy that prevailed in 2004 and 2005 so that they will regain the right to

make suggestions to Ankara about human rights, democracy and other issues (İnat, 2017, 52). The Turkish democracy is vulnerable to European fragilities.

Coupled with these vulnerabilities populist rhetoric might also gain votes and keep a nation proud, but when applied to foreign policy and internal democracy, it can bring trouble. In the wake of the April 16 referendum that granted President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan new powers, Turkey's confrontational foreign policy also influenced its internal democratic dynamics (Bekdil, 2017, 2). And it is important to appeal to average Turk in this regard.

In this context, it is not reasonable to observe that, over the course of the past ten years, the rise of Turkey as a preeminent middle power is one of the most remarkable success stories in world diplomacy. (Falk & Farer, 2013, 354). The Turkish retreat "zero problems with neighbors" has given ammunition to critics of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's claim of soft power realism and revealed certain innocence in the original formulation of such a radical rupture with Turkey's earlier more traditional reliance on hard power capabilities, including the centrality of its membership in NATO (Falk & Farer, 2013, 354), which also has led to a Turkish reassessment of Western democratic values.

Turkey's regional and global role exhibits a self-asserting character and seeks multilateralism and domestic structuring of foreign policy comes to mean that a global democratic backsliding may serve to Turkey's foreign policy aspirations. Therefore, Turkey no longer offers the Middle East an influential model for a Western democracy. Coupled with a successful economic stability and regional power status Turkey seeks to adopt new strategies.

The decline in expectations with respect to EU membership leads Turkey to allocate more resources into Libya, Syria, the Balkans and Caucasus; however, the relations with Europe are also sought to be kept in order not to damage trade relations and immigrant deal. Democratic standards and values become of secondary importance. The reason for this is that the Turkish public opinion has become disillusioned with the EU membership. The rise of Islamophobia and democratic backsliding in Europe, coupled with economic crisis has made public opinion indifferent to Europe. However as the migrant crisis is central to relations:

“By the end of the summer, both the Dublin Regulation and the Schengen Agreement were wobbling under the weight of such a large influx of migrants. EU leaders began discussing different ways to distribute migrants in the European territory and ease the burden on border countries – i.e. Italy and Greece. Since no unanimous agreement was achieved over how to manage migrants within the EU territory,

efforts were directed at addressing the issue with countries of origin and transit and one actor was identified as the provider of the solution to the political chaos in the EU: Turkey. Due to its open door policy, Turkey is home to 2.8 million registered Syrians” (Benvenuti, 2017, 9).

Despite the interdependency with respect to migrant crisis, The AK Party also wanted to expand the resources to people who would further integrate with world markets and, most important, the Middle East, North Africa, and the former Soviet republics. The AK Party didn't stress the need for Europe to do business as much as Turkish business elites. And that meant that the AK Party didn't feel obliged to comply with the EU reforms that had largely been responsible for its rise to power (Hansen, 2017, 118). And the quality of democracy did not become as essential as it was once. The majority of public opinion keeps partly supporting this view to this day.

The public is also open to manipulation and channelization and that is one issue that Turkey has vulnerabilities. Turkey exhibits vulnerabilities in the face of possible attempts to manipulate public opinion. Deliberately misleading publications pushed by domestic and international actors potentially interfere with a transparent democratic process. It is wise for Turkish decision-makers to encourage civility, and design tools and policies to evade such possible interventions (Yurdakul, 2020, 17). The aim may be to distract audiences or dissuade them from believing an account or explanation that is not offered as part of the array of narratives (Costello, 2018, 2).

One way to argue the quality of democracy passes through the question that whether Islam and democracy are compatible and to what extent the conservative Turkish government can manage to interiorize democratic values. Turkish Islamism has been labelled by a nationalist constituent that differentiates it from similar expressions of political Islam around the world. Even if Turkish Islamists recognized the umma as the supreme nation of all Muslims, the glorification of Turkey's Ottoman legacy was often linked to a claim for Turkish leadership in the Muslim world and despite the various Pan-Islamist initiatives built by Saudi Arabia between the 1960s and the 1980s, Turkey's Islamist authors have tended to build a distinct discourse, in which Turkey is to emerge as the sole suitable leader of the Muslim umma, and there is no reference to any existing state-led initiative (Calabro, 2017, 158).

For a long time after the Middle Eastern countries gained their independence Turkey was held as an example of democracy in the region but to some political Islamists of Turkey, Turkey was also a country with deep Islamists roots and It should reassert its identity even though this could lead to a clash with democratic values; however, the Islamic

utopianism view in which was the leader of the Muslim world did not wake much interest in most of the Muslim countries. Even Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries harshly criticized this Pan-Islamist ideology. This is one of the reasons why D-8, designed by Necmettin Erbakan, became unsuccessful.

Another reason why Turkey and the Turkish democratic model came into conflict with those Muslim countries is that the “Turkish illiberalism “(Stein, 2017, 4) is on the rise and “promoting the possibility that Turkey can manage relationships with powerful countries that are American adversaries (Stein, 2017, 5) has caused anxiety among those countries which have good relations with the West. Therefore, Turkey struggles to cast a role to itself between Muslim and European countries.

Although it is not as popular as it was once the 'strategic depth' doctrine calls for an activist engagement with all regional systems in the Turkey's neighborhood (Murinson, 2006, 948). Turkey proposes that the United Nations needs to be restructured and the collective security mechanism ought to be revised to enable it to respond adequately to 'global strategic realities. (Murinson, 2006, 950).

To recast a new role in domestic and foreign policy and Turkey uses the means of public diplomacy: “public diplomacy refers to a government’s engagement with foreign societies in ways that improve these societies’ perceptions about that government’s country. (Ülgül, 2019, 161). It attempts to increase the positive image of a country within foreign societies and influence those societies positively and also at the individual level, it is possible to assert that President Erdoğan is more inclined to conduct personal diplomacy than any other Turkish leader to date. One can argue that Erdoğan has significant trust in his ability to show strong leadership, which reflects his determination to control the domestic and foreign policies of his country (Ülgül, 2019, 174).

However, if one looks to Turkish democracy from a historical perspective, the need to dissolve the anti-democratic governmental structure formed especially after the 1961 Constitution, and produced by internal powers that are closed, bureaucratic and detached from the public and also vulnerable to being occupied by movements via filling state cadres. And the possibilities of change for Turkey in terms of meeting the new democracy and political system needs of the 21st century (Uçum, 2017, 23) calls for attention.

Another issue is that the multidimensional turmoil, which the international order experiences today is primarily fueled by the efforts of the United States to exploit its hegemony and to further its economic interests at the detriment of others’ economic growth. (Duran, 2019, 9). In the struggle between liberalism and nationalism, consolidated

democracies are increasingly siding with the latter. This trend, in turn, deepens the gap between liberalism and democracy (Duran, 2019, 11). This deeply influences Turkey's domestic and international positions. Erdoğan's address at one of the Sessions of the United Nations General Assembly offered insights into how Turkey positioned itself within the international system of the new era (Duran, 2019, 16) in this respect.

One can also argue that "Turkey was never a fully functioning democracy, but members of the U.S. government and policy community always believed that the Turkish political system was democratic enough. Elections were held regularly, they were free and fair, the military handed the reins of government back to civilians after coups, and Turks wanted to join the EU. As a result of the AKP's wide-ranging reforms in 2003 and 2004, many in Turkey and the West believed the party would be a steward of the country's democratic transition" (Cook, 2018, 14).

This position is associated with the fact that Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has pursued a balanced foreign policy based on a sustainable effort to deepen Turkish ties with regional countries while preserving relations with the transatlantic community and powers in Turkey's near abroad. The challenge for Western governments does not stem from Turkey's efforts to deepen relations with its neighbors. Instead, the point for the United States and Europe is how Turkish politicians are using foreign policy as a tool for political gain—and how this trend could erode domestic support for Turkey's alliance with Europe and the United States (Stein, 2017, 1).

Some newer democracies, however, may not be as well equipped to resist those rulers who limit or destroy individual liberties in their quest to garner more rents. In nascent democracies such as Poland, Hungary, and Turkey through a gradual democratic recession of the institutions are observed. Backsliding toward illiberal policies has the affirmation of democracy because leaders in these relatively new democracies understand how to play to a Western public opinion which is less prudent in its use of political terms (Coats, et. al., 2018, 278).

Moreover, the concept of elitism and the definition of elite as well has transformed within the Turkish democratic tradition. Elitism offers an authoritarian politics because it violates the most basic norm of modern democracy, the principle that power does not belong to anyone forever. Elitism identifies power with the ruling elite and closes the political sphere to alternative symbolizations and attempts to define it. Within this elitist structure, those in opposition are outside of legitimate politics. They cannot save themselves from being pushed and are demonized. To this kind of elitism, the ruled part of society is corrupt, unreliable, and

rude. For this reason, power cannot be left to the control of the society; state power must be in the hands of the elite. This situation reveals specific political practices and structures. Accordingly, the demands of the society should be filtered in the context of the interests of those in power, or worse, they should be ignored. Society cannot know what is good for itself (Aslan, 2019, 107).

The state of democracy in Turkey cannot be evaluated without taking into consideration the contexts of global democracies that are claimed to be in decline. In fact Turkey has a relatively long tradition of democratization, however, the domestic and foreign challenges it faces beclouds its attempts to carry out quality improvement in democracy. The declining of democracy is observed not only in the functioning of basic democratic institutions, freedoms, political and social equality, and participation in political decision-making mechanisms but also in public opinion.

4. Conclusion

The problems established democracies face, democratic recession and diminishing of quality of democracy, compel us to reconsider the idea that democracy is without alternatives. Democracy's ideological rivals offer hybrid regimes in which democratic elements exist but the conditions for a full democracy are not met. This indicates the fragility of democracies and the Turkish democracy is vulnerable to many challenges democracies face.

Turkey has a tradition of a top-down oriented democracy and skepticism to liberal democracy can be kindled quite easily due to internal and external factors that shape the country's political landscape. The debate on the quality of the democracy is connected with long term conflicts that strain Turkey on regional and international levels.

The tentative relations with the EU and other Western powers mark the democratic course of Turkey and threaten the quality of fragile democracy. In fact, the political elite began to change in Turkey with a motivation stemming from the Europeanization of the country. But this transition did not bring about a deep-scaled change in the quality of democracy. Although the change of elites in Turkish political life gave rise to the establishment of elected elites in power, it did not give a fresh orientation to its democratic institutions.

In this regard, most of the research on the global crisis of democracy indicates that today democracies do not collapse suddenly, but gradually decline. They state that some leaders who come to power with competitive elections exhibit authoritarian tendencies and sometimes may

attack democratic institutions. They point out that political parties should defend democracies and prevent autocrats coming to power.

Although it has an authoritative origin, the modern crisis of democracy is not a form of fascism; rather, it is a reconsideration of democratic institutions. A moderate authoritarianism has almost always existed in Turkish democratic tradition. However, the expectation towards for a stronger and high-grade democracy has always accompanied this authoritative tendency.

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