

# JOURNAL OF DEMOCRACY

January 2008, Volume 19, Number 1 \$11.00



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# TURKEY DIVIDED

*Zeyno Baran*

*Zeyno Baran is senior fellow and director of the Center for Eurasian Policy at the Hudson Institute in Washington, D.C. A native of Turkey, Baran writes and speaks widely on Turkey and Turkish affairs. She has done extensive work on the compatibility of Islam and democracy and is currently writing a book on Muslim integration in the West.*

Democratic deepening usually leads to democratic consolidation—but not in Turkey. Instead, deeper democracy is increasingly exposing the profound divisions in Turkish society, and thus making democracy more fragile. The 22 July 2007 parliamentary elections in Turkey must therefore be viewed in the context of an increasingly polarized society. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has Islamist roots, won a second term in office with a clear victory, garnering 46.7 percent of the vote and 341 seats in the 550-member Grand National Assembly, Turkey's unicameral parliament. Yet the preexisting political and social tensions that led to the holding of the elections four months ahead of schedule remain unresolved. In the months to come, two Turkeys will continue to push their competing visions for the country's future. One broad camp comprises supporters of the secular republican tradition founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), while the other is made up of those who want to reshape the Republic, chiefly along Islamist lines.

The period leading up to the July balloting exposed a key fault line in Turkish society. On one side of the divide were those who supported the economic and political reform process that the AKP had undertaken since coming to power in the elections of November 2002. This heterogeneous group was itself divided into two schools. One was the so-called liberal democrats, who considered the AKP's time in office to have been a great success, and who were troubled by increasingly alarmist statements from Turkey's powerful military. They wanted to send a message to the military that in a mature democracy all must respect elec-

tion results no matter which party wins. This group included individuals who had previously suffered after the military coups of 1960, 1971, and 1980, and because of this often sided with political parties or movements that aimed to reduce the influence of the military in politics.

The liberal democrats also wanted more inclusive policies toward the ethnic-Kurdish citizens of Turkey, especially those living in the traditional Kurdish region in the southeast, and believed that the AKP was the best positioned to take on this challenge. According to the International Crisis Group, the parliament chosen in 2002 had approximately 180 members of Kurdish origin, a majority of whom belonged to the AKP.<sup>1</sup> During a landmark August 2005 visit to the southeastern city of Diyarbakır, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan went so far as to state that Turkey has a “Kurdish problem” and it can only be solved by “more democracy, more civil rights, and more prosperity.” While the military, along with the main opposition parties, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), severely criticized Erdoğan’s usage of the phrase “Kurdish problem,” many ethnic Kurds were pleased by what they saw as the premier’s recognition that the issue transcended concerns about terrorism and national security.

Indeed, liberal democrats viewed the AKP’s efforts to bring to the center the traditionally invisible periphery—that is, Kurds and Islamists—as part of a much-needed process of “normalization.” They also considered a key aspect of this process to be the replacement of the old elite (popularly called the “White Turks” due to their European, secular, and urban background) with those who came from the Asian part of the country and tended to be more traditional and openly devout in their practice of Islam (the “Anatolians”).

A second group that strongly backed the AKP was a nexus of devout Muslims and Islamists. They expected the AKP in its second term to deliver on its unstated and unfulfilled promises—above all, the modification of the constitution to permit women to wear the Islamic headscarf in universities. Like many other moderate Islamists across the Muslim world, most Turkish Islamists are committed (at least instrumentally) to democratic elections, since this has proven to be the easiest and most legitimate path to power.

The liberal democrats and the Islamists were united in their support for Turkey’s EU accession process, as each group believed the EU to be the best supporter of its cause. The AKP ran on a pro-EU platform in 2002. After more than four decades of preparatory negotiations beginning with the Ankara Treaty of 1963, the EU finally decided in December 2004 to begin accession talks with Turkey (these commenced in October 2005). Throughout its tenure, the AKP has remained the most pro-EU party in Turkey, and has delivered on some of the most ambitious political and economic reforms required by the EU.

**TABLE—RESULTS OF TURKEY’S 2007 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

PARTY	PERCENTAGE OF POPULAR VOTE	NUMBER OF SEATS
Justice and Development Party (AKP)	46.7	341
Republican People’s Party (CHP)	20.8	112
Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)	14.3	71
Democratic Party (DP)	5.4	0
Independents	5.2	26
Others	7.6	0
Total	100	550

Source: Seçim 2007, <http://secim2007.ntvmsnbc.com/default.aspx>.

Given that Turkish Islamists historically opposed entry to the European Union, seeing it as a “Christian club,” the AKP’s position convinced many skeptics that it had indeed parted with its Islamist past, and—as the leadership claimed—had become more like a European-style Christian Democratic party. Otherwise, why would the AKP be so committed to democratic reforms? And why would it support Turkey’s EU accession instead of calling for the implementation of *shari’a* (Islamic law) and closer ties to Turkey’s Muslim Middle Eastern neighbors?

### Muslim Democrats or Patient Islamists?

This logic, however, reflects a simplistic reading of Islamist movements. Since the 1990s, the vast majority of such groups have radically altered their strategies. Many have moved away from advocating top-down Islamization (which often requires confrontation with the state), in favor of a gradual, bottom-up policy. Consequently, Islamist parties from Morocco to Malaysia are increasingly advocating democracy and freedom, while eschewing references to *shari’a* in favor of slogans decrying corruption and espousing good governance. With their clear advantage in grassroots mobilization (through related charity, educational, and religious networks), some of these parties have already reached the point at which they would win clear majorities in free and fair elections.

The AKP, too, has benefited greatly from this type of bottom-up strategy, but it also learned from the experience of Necmettin Erbakan—the Islamist prime minister whom the secular establishment ousted in the “postmodern coup” of February 1997. Erdoğan has learned that he needs the West, the business community, and the media on his side. His support for Turkey’s EU accession was a natural consequence of this realization. Moreover, the EU has been a key ally on two issues of utmost importance for Islamists: limiting the military’s role in politics and rescinding the headscarf ban in universities. In both cases, the EU

has seemed to align more closely with the Islamists than with the secular Kemalists.

In his attempts to secure a start date for EU-accession talks, Erdoğan in July 2003 pushed through a reform package that significantly curbed the powers of the National Security Council (NSC), a constitutional body which has long been a major vehicle for military influence. Under the new legislation, the NSC is directed by a civilian secretary-general rather than a military one; it can take action only on the initiative of the prime minister, while the deputy prime minister has the authority to supervise the implementation of the NSC's decisions.

On the issue of the headscarf—and of religious freedom in general—the AKP and various Islamist groups have been very disappointed by the gradual shift in the EU's position over time. As the EU began internal debates about the extent to which the public display of religious symbols is acceptable in secular democratic societies, Europeans became more understanding of existing Turkish laws. The first shock came when the 2003 edition of the European Commission's yearly progress report on Turkey, unlike previous years' reports, did not criticize the headscarf ban. This led then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül to criticize the progress report for its silence on this point. Then came the June 2004 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) upholding Istanbul University's 1998 decision to forbid the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in class. The ECHR judged the ban legitimate in order to "protect the rights and freedoms of others" and to protect "the democratic system in Turkey."<sup>2</sup> Basing its decision on the importance of protecting secularism and equality, two principles that "reinforce and complement each other," the Court also noted the emphasis placed in the Turkish constitutional system on the protection of the rights of women. Although this ruling shocked the AKP, the EU remains the principal avenue along which the AKP and its supporters are pushing for greater religious freedom.

### **Defenders of the Republic**

The main objective of the second of the "two Turkeys" is the preservation of the Republic as a unitary, strictly secular, and nationalist country rather than one which adopts federal or confederal arrangements to accommodate the Kurds, permits Islam to make its weight felt in the public sphere, and opens itself up decisively to transnational influences.

This group has been driven primarily by the concern that things are getting worse in Turkey, as the people are insufficiently alert to the many threats that the country faces. Feeling outflanked by internal and external enemies, many of the once mostly pro-Western and pro-EU secular nationalists have changed their positions fundamentally—in part as a result of the Western embrace of the AKP.

Such nationalists worry about Kurdish separatism and Islamism, which have traditionally represented the two existential threats to the Turkish secular republic. And in the new era after 9/11 (in which Islamists who are committed to democracy and who denounce violence receive support from the West) and after the war in Iraq (which has created a realistic possibility of the formation of a separate Kurdish entity for the first time since the aftermath of World War I), the traditional Turkish establishment is increasingly fearful. Not only did the international context change, but the domestic center of power began to shift after the AKP entered government in 2002. The situation had reached such a crisis that both outgoing President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and General Yaşar Büyükanıt, the chief of the General Staff, declared before the 2007 elections that these two threats are now greater than at any time since the Republic's formation.

The secularists' main fear is that the AKP has a secret agenda to turn Turkey into an Islamic republic. They believe that the AKP has mastered the skill of Islamist *taqiyyah*, that is, hiding one's true intentions until one has enough power. Citing statements made by key AKP leaders over the last two decades, secularists remain skeptical that the AKP leadership has changed its (Islamist) thinking rather than just its rhetoric.

As for intentions, two of the AKP's failed attempts made the most news. First was the attempt to introduce a bill in September 2004 that would have criminalized adultery. A warning from Gunter Verheugen, then European Commissioner for Enlargement, ended the initiative. A second major incident was Erdoğan's March 2006 attempt to name Adnan Büyükdenez, the head of Al Baraka Turk, as Turkey's top central banker. Al Baraka Turk is a "special financial institution" established in March 1984 after the late President Turgut Özal (d. 1993) legalized banking in Turkey according to Islamic laws—that is, without the use of interest. As investors registered their shock, President Sezer vetoed the Büyükdenez nomination and the issue was closed. In fact, Sezer vetoed many of the AKP's appointments and initiatives, easing the concerns of secularists who soon came to consider the presidency as the last bastion of their viewpoint. When Bülent Arınç, then parliament speaker and a figure with an Islamist past, expressed his desire to "redefine secularism," it ramped up worries that if the AKP were ever to put one of its own in the presidency, precisely that would happen.

Some secularists became so frustrated with the inaction and haplessness of political parties, NGOs, the media, and other civil society groups, that they began to ask why the military was "tolerating" the AKP instead of "getting rid of them" as the officers had done with Erbakan less than a decade previously. Some even blamed General Hilmi Özkök, the General Staff chief at the time the AKP took office, for being too soft.<sup>3</sup> What is clear, however, is that hard-liners inside and outside the military were

looking forward to General Büyükanıt's promotion in August 2006, as he had a reputation for being tough on both political Islam and Kurdish separatism.<sup>4</sup>

### Turning Away from the West

The secularists also worry that the West fails to grasp why freedom of the public sphere *from* religion—at the core of the Turkish and French conceptions of secularism—is essential in a Muslim-majority country, whereas freedom *of* religion based on the U.S. model can open the way for gradual Islamization. And in light of the seemingly systematic and constant attacks that Islamists, their liberal allies, and the West (mainly the EU) made on the armed forces, secularists increasingly began to see the EU's position on the Turkish military as naïve at best and downright sinister at worst. While secularists feel partially relieved by the EU's belated awakening to the problems of political Islam and the importance of secularism, they also feel that the EU has a record of applying criteria to "Muslim" Turkey that would never be applied to existing, non-Muslim EU members.

Secular forces within Turkey, traditionally the domestic constituency most closely allied to the West, are now also upset by what they perceive as U.S. support for the AKP as a "moderate Islamist" government—one that can serve as a model for the Muslim world. Such a situation would be anathema to the founding ideals of the Turkish Republic. Atatürk made clear that he was creating a *secular* democracy, one in which the separation of government and religion was to be fiercely protected.

Looking closer to home, many secular-minded Turks worry that, after four years of AKP rule, society's commitment to secularism is waning. An October 2007 Pew poll revealed that of the 42 countries surveyed, Turkey has seen the second-largest drop in support for secularism over the past five years.<sup>5</sup> In 2002, 73 percent of Turkish respondents agreed that "religion is a matter of personal faith and should be kept separate from government policy." By 2007, that figure had dipped to 55 percent. An earlier poll by TESEV, a Turkish NGO, found that the number of people identifying themselves first as Muslims (as opposed to Turks or Turkish citizens) has increased by 10 percent since the AKP came to power in 2002, and the number of people saying that they are Islamists now includes almost half the people who identify themselves as Muslims first.

The anti-AKP camp also includes those concerned about Kurdish separatism. This group is suspicious of the AKP's business and political ties with Kurds in Iraq, and thinks that these links may explain why the Erdoğan government consistently opposes any military incursion to strike PKK bases in the northern part of that country. These critics of the AKP believe that the party is concerned first with uniting people—Turks

and Kurds alike—under the umbrella of Islam, and then only second with safeguarding the integrity of national borders.

Over time, the nationalists and the AKP found themselves on opposite sides of almost all of Turkey's red-line issues. As the AKP's position was often aligned with that of the West, anti-AKP groups evolved into anti-Western ones. Some key points of contention have included the AKP's willingness to meet with Iraqi president Jalal Talabani before the problem of PKK terrorism is solved; the AKP's willingness to open the Greek Orthodox seminary in Halki (secularists fear this move as a precedent for opening Islamic ones as well); and the AKP's acceptance of the Annan Plan for Cyprus—a deal that nationalists view as a “sellout” of Turkish interests.

Those wanting to preserve the status quo were further concerned about the impact of global capital. Foreign investors making larger profits than ever before have been inclined to back the AKP as a source of stability, predictability, and easy access to further investment opportunities. Many of these foreign business leaders would not mind a less secular Turkey as long as the markets do well. Hence, the opponents of the AKP also turned against global business.

As the country prepared for the elections, the two Turkeys were drifting farther apart. Of course these are broad definitions and within each of these groups there are many differences; moreover, the various camps did not emerge solely because of the AKP—Turkish history is full of tensions between different groups that take different forms based on the trends and geopolitics of the times. In 2007, the main split was between those whose greatest fear was the threat to democracy (from a military coup) and those whose greatest fear was the threat to secularism (from the Islamists).

It was clear from the first day the AKP took office that the key showdown between the two sides would take place during the spring 2007 presidential election. Hence, both sides began shoring up alliances and preparing for battle many months earlier—with the AKP securing the support of the West, and the opposition getting the military on its side—even as both publicly pretended that all was normal.

The AKP thought that its two-thirds parliamentary majority—which arose as a side effect of quirks in the electoral rules that delivered the party a huge seat bonus in 2002—would enable it to ease its presidential candidate into office by a simple majority vote of the legislature (Turkish presidents are indirectly elected). However, many of the votes that the AKP received in 2002 were not necessarily due to strong sentiment in the party's favor, but rather to strong dissatisfaction with the previous government. Furthermore, quite a number of people voted for the AKP under the assumption that, if the party began to act in a more explicitly Islamist fashion, the military would intervene in one way or another to restore secularism.

Evaluating the parliamentary situation, secularists opted to press for



legislative elections to be held in advance of the presidential poll rather than on the normally scheduled November 2007 date—their argument being that a new parliament would be better able legitimately to choose a president for the next seven years. Erdoğan's government tried to focus the country on economic improvements and made no move at that time to advance the election date. But the government could not silence the voices expressing concern that the premier—who had spent time in jail for opposing secularism and whose wife wore a headscarf—might run for president. His potential candidacy was simply unacceptable to the secularist side.

From January until late April 2007—parties had to announce their presidential candidates between April 16 and 25—Erdoğan kept the country guessing about his intentions amid worsening polarization. Many Islamists in the AKP's base believed that the time had come to have “their man” in the presidency, and feared that if this opportunity passed, it would be some time before another one arose. Nonetheless, reports indicated that Erdoğan would decide to opt for a compromise candidate, possibly Vecdi Gönül, the widely respected defense minister who has no Islamist background and whose wife goes scarfless.

Before announcing his decision, Erdoğan sought the approval of Gül and Arınc, both of whom share the premier's Islamist background and who are the AKP's most powerful figures next to Erdoğan. Reports indicate that choosing a non-Islamist might well have split the party, and that one of the three top leaders would have to be the candidate in order to avoid this. On April 24, as the deadline neared, Erdoğan publicly named the least controversial of the three, Foreign Minister Gül. This, however, was still a major shock to the establishment, which had been expecting someone such as Gönül. Although more moderate in his rhetoric, Gül is believed to be as much of an Islamist as Erdoğan—and Gül's wife also wears the headscarf.

Parliament—or part of it, at any rate—sat for the first round of the presidential balloting on April 27. While it was doing so, a constitutional crisis raged. At its core was the question of whether or not 367 (two-thirds) of the deputies needed to be present for a valid presidential vote to take place. The opposition was staging a boycott, which cut attendance to 361 members. The CHP, the only party other than the AKP with seats in parliament, then immediately brought the case before the Constitutional Court, which indicated that it would announce its decision early the following week.

Late that same evening, the military posted on its website a strongly worded warning about the ongoing discussions on secularism, declaring itself an “absolute defender of secularism” and underlining General Büyükanıt's April 12 remarks to the press that Turkey's next president would need to be “committed to the principles of the republic not just in words, but in essence, and [would have to] demonstrate this in actions.”

Even as many remained shocked by the military's blunt statement, the Constitutional Court ruled on May 1 that a quorum of 367 MPs was, in fact, needed to choose the next president. Gül withdrew his candidacy on May 10, and the next day parliament voted to move the legislative election up nearly four months to July 22. Erdoğan called the Constitutional Court's decision "a shot fired at democracy." Many others thought that the General Staff's online manifesto had clouded the Court's independence, and spoke of an "e-coup."

Compared to other institutions, the Turkish military—which played such a crucial role in the Republic's founding—has enjoyed great legitimacy in the eyes of most Turks. Unfortunately, this has led many people to expect the military to "save" them from internal and external challenges, including illiberal political parties or corrupt governments. Hence, instead of shouldering the duty to make sure that their secular system is preserved through the normal democratic process, a significant number of Turks assume that they can remain passive and count on the soldiers to "put all right" if things threaten to go off track.

General Büyükanıt and the General Staff deserve some credit for acting with restraint in an environment characterized by calls for a coup on the one hand and Islamist talk of "conquering" the presidency on the other. In the uncertain days immediately after April 27, the AKP held a rushed parliamentary vote on a constitutional amendment to make the presidency popularly elected—a transparent ploy to provide for Gül's election as president in case the AKP should lose its single-party rule after the July 22 balloting.

While the AKP and its supporters used the now-familiar arguments for democracy and reform, it was absurd to make such a major change while leaving untouched other key issues such as the immunity from prosecution enjoyed by members of parliament, the lack of transparency in political-party financing, and, especially, the 10 percent threshold that a party must surpass before it can gain even a single seat in parliament. If this threshold were lowered to a more reasonable number, such as 5 or even 7 percent, it would force the existing parties to engage in consensus building, eroding the combative, zero-sum political culture that typifies Turkey today. Since this would reduce the AKP's control over parliament, however, it is not surprising that the government left this untouched.

### **"No *Shari'a*, No Coup!"**

The three months between late April and late July 2007 were an emotional time of charges and countercharges. The AKP camp focused on the military and spoke as if anyone who opposed Gül's candidacy hoped to see a coup. For its part, the opposition argued that Gül's backers were being naïve about the dangers of political Islam, or even wanted to see Turkey living under *shari'a*.

The divide between the two Turkeys became even more pronounced with the start of mass public demonstrations. These began in Ankara on April 14, with organizers making clear their support for Turkey's secular and democratic principles. Urging Erdoğan not to run for president,

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the participants waved Turkish flags and chanted slogans such as "Turkey is secular and will remain secular!" and "We don't want a *shari'a* state!" The second rally took place in Istanbul on April 29, followed by large gatherings on May 13 in the Aegean port city of Izmir and a week later in Samsun on the Black Sea. These focused more on Gül, and were in general against an Islamist president. The most memorable slogan of these rallies, "No *shari'a*, no coup!" summed up perfectly the two poles pulling the country apart and the desire of the majority of the people for a democratic consensus.

perfectly the two poles pulling the country apart and the desire of the majority of the people for a democratic consensus.

The protesters feared that an AKP president would give his party full control over the executive and the legislature along with the ability to influence the judiciary—effectively putting an end to the separation of powers. Moreover, an increasing share of business groups and media sources—which are largely owned by business interests dependent on good relations with the government—were remaining silent. Thus, the main opposition to the AKP before the elections was found not in parliament, business, or the media, but rather in the courts, the presidency, the military, and civil society.

April 14 may therefore be called the start of a wake-up process for Turkish civil society. Rejecting both Islamism and militarism, the demonstrators called on all parties—including the small but vocal coterie of coup promoters—to behave rationally and with the country's best interests in mind. The people were ahead of the politicians in urging the two center-right and two center-left parties to drop their incessant bickering and come together.

After all, many of those who would vote for a genuinely center-left party ended up voting for the AKP, since it cared most about the have-nots, and offered social services, education, and health programs that should have been the policies of the left. Similarly, the AKP has increasingly replaced the traditional center-right parties, which have been unable to recover from an image of being corrupt and ineffective. A good deal of the AKP's success, in other words, has come from its knack for occupying space on both sides of the political spectrum that might be filled by the established center-right and center-left parties were they not so dysfunctional.

As a result of public pressure, the two center-right parties (Mother-

land and True Path) declared on May 5 that they were uniting under the new Democrat Party (DP) banner. After initial excitement, however, the merger swiftly collapsed amid the usual infighting and no joint slate emerged. Traditional center-right voters as well as all those concerned about the health of the democratic process felt keen disappointment.

The center-left parties fared slightly better. On May 18, Zeki Sezer, the leader of the Democratic Left Party (DSP), announced that his party would work with the CHP in the upcoming elections. This was by all means an unnatural alliance, and before the elections there was opposition to CHP leader Deniz Baykal even from within his own party; he was widely considered to be antibusiness, anti-Western, and politically divisive.

In fact, the two strongest *opposition* parties, the CHP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), were portrayed by the business-controlled media first and foremost as antibusiness, anti-EU, and anti-American. Just as the West wanted to see the AKP's one-party leadership continue, so too did Turkish business fear a potential CHP-MHP coalition. Both the CHP and the MHP ran on fear, decrying the damage that the AKP had done and warning of disaster should it remain in office. This approach might have worked had they made an equally strong effort to lay out a positive agenda to go with all the criticism. Adding to the opposition parties' difficulties was the lack of time to prepare for the early elections. The AKP, by contrast, had never ceased its mobilizing efforts over the years, and so on top of all the usual advantages of incumbency had an excellent campaign infrastructure already in place.

Most importantly, the AKP ran on hope and optimism about the future, as well as a fairly good five-year record, especially regarding the country's economic performance. Before the AKP came to power, Turkey had experienced no fewer than seven tumultuous coalition governments stretching back to 1983. This much political instability is deadly to investment, and the Turkish economy charted an up-and-down course, with annual real GDP growth averaging 3.7 percent between 1991 and 2001. The AKP was extremely lucky that it inherited and then successfully implemented the economic-recovery program introduced in March 2001 by former World Bank vice-president and later Turkish economy minister Kemal Derviş. In 2004, inflation fell to single digits for the first time since 1976. Average growth during the AKP's first five years in office was 7.4 percent.

Clearly, the opening of EU-accession talks made Turkey attractive to foreign investment, and overall global market trends helped as well, but the AKP government also showed unprecedented openness to privatization. With such a track record, it is not surprising that the business community strongly supported the AKP, especially when the opposition seemed to be hostile to global capital and privatization. Almost no one among either the Turkish business community or the ranks of international investors wanted to see another coalition government.

Business interests were pleased with the AKP's pro-EU policies and the boost that they gave to international investment. Liberal democrats also looked to EU norms and considered Turkey's rightful place to be within the EU. Even though the EU's favorability rating among Turks (as measured by the Pew poll) has plummeted, going from 58 percent in 2004 to just 27 percent in June 2007,<sup>6</sup> businesspeople, liberals, and Islamists still consider the EU one of their best levers against what they see as the inflexible Kemalist establishment.

By election day, the country found itself in a false dichotomy: If you were for democracy, you voted for the AKP, but if your main concern was secularism, then you voted for the opposition. Yet votes were split among proponents of secularism, as there were many parties in the opposition camp, and the main party defending secularism, the CHP, did not seem able to offer a promising vision for the future.

In the end, the AKP received nearly 47 percent of the vote—a pleasant surprise to the party. Polls had shown its support in the 30 percent range until April; some later polls showed it in the 40s, but few believed that these surveys were objective. The immediate conclusion drawn by AKP supporters was that the military's April 27 statement had backfired, provoking the people to stand with the "democratic" voices against the "coup plotters."

The opposition was devastated. The DP fell far short of winning even a single seat, finishing with less than 6 percent of the vote. The CHP too was hugely disappointed. Despite the massive and energetic rallies for secularism, its total of 20.8 percent only slightly exceeded the 19.4 percent that it won in 2002. The MHP, as expected, entered parliament as the third party with 14.3 percent and 71 seats.

Perhaps the most relevant new actor in the parliament is the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), whose candidates ran as nominal independents to circumvent the 10 percent election threshold—indeed, it succeeded in getting 22 elected on the strength of less than 5 percent of the total nationwide vote. While the DTP had been expected to receive at least another ten seats and seemed to have lost them to the AKP, it nonetheless managed to ensure that, for the first time since 1991, a pro-Kurdish party will be represented in the Grand National Assembly.

Almost before the parliamentary results were in, the country turned to focus on the presidential elections that were slated for August. Erdoğan was reported to prefer a presidential candidate who would keep the tension level between the premier and the establishment low enough that the former could continue with his reform program. Many hoped for a compromise candidate and relief from the atmosphere of intense polarization, while Gül's supporters insisted that the AKP's strong parliamentary showing amounted to a mandate for a Gül presidency.

The five weeks between the parliamentary elections and the new legislature's August 28 vote to choose Gül as the next president were

extremely tense. Liberal democrats and Islamists were united in their mutual rejection of anyone who backed the idea of a compromise candidate. The more extreme Islamists criticized others in their camp for being too timid; there was a clear sense of the tyranny of the majority and less desire to compromise. Fears heightened that the AKP had used conciliation in the past merely as a tactic, and would brook no dissent in the face of its newly reinforced power.

### What Next?

The parliamentary and presidential elections of 2007 opened a new page in Turkey's democratic evolution: For the first time, the Turkish Republic has both a president and a prime minister from Islamist backgrounds whose wives wear the Islamic headscarf. The ruling party returned to power on its own—and with much more legitimacy despite strong attacks from an opposition that once again failed to make itself attractive to voters. A pro-Kurdish party has reappeared in parliament at a time when Turkish patience with PKK terrorism has reached its limits. While the tensions between the two Turkeys remain, neither side wants to be blamed for hurting political and economic stability, and so both observe a measure of restraint.

The military has kept silent since the July elections, while clearly continuing to keep a wary eye on Islamism and Kurdish separatism. The General Staff can hardly be pleased that Gül is president or that the DTP is in parliament, but the soldiers are likely to stay out of the political realm until the next crisis. For now the high command seems to be limiting itself to a “cold-shoulder” approach—General Büyükanıt and other senior officers were conspicuously absent from both Gül's swearing-in ceremony and the opening session of the new parliament.

What new occasions for crisis and conflict may loom? The first and foremost is the new constitution, the drafting of which the AKP commissioned immediately after the presidential election. While many people wanted to see a new “civilian” constitution eventually replace the one drafted by the military after its 1980 coup, the timing and the process caused concern among those who feared the AKP's “real agenda.” Despite the AKP's insistence that the main reason for a new constitution was to usher in more reforms and freedoms, the debate inevitably centered on whether the most important freedom for the AKP is to include provisions that would make legal the wearing of headscarves in public offices and universities.

Another problematic issue related to the constitution was the referendum on whether or not Turkey's eleventh president ought to be elected by popular vote. Of course, the AKP proposed this referendum before the Grand National Assembly made Gül the eleventh president. But various delays pushed the vote on the referendum back to October 21. The ref-

erendum passed with 70 percent; consequently, Gül technically should have resigned and run again, this time seeking a popular mandate. Amid other pressing issues of the day, however, this was not pursued; in fact, the implications for Turkish democracy of a directly elected presidency have received surprisingly little attention.<sup>7</sup>

The debate over constitutional changes and the Gül presidency has also seen a revival of the “second republic” discourse. Coined by President Cemal Gürsel to justify the coup of 27 May 1960, the phrase originally equated the 1960 putsch with the battle borne by those who founded and fought for the Turkish Republic in 1923. In the early 1990s, a later generation of “second republicans” claimed that the first republic handed down from 1923 was neither democratic nor pluralistic, and required reshaping into a “second”—more democratic and less rigidly Kemalist—republic for Turkey to meet successfully the challenges of the twenty-first century. Today’s second republicans hold the same views and hence strongly back the AKP’s proposal to adopt a “less ideological” (read less Kemalist) constitution that would be more liberal regarding public expressions of religion, freedom of speech, and minority rights.

The Kurdish issue is a related and second point of contention. With the increasing likelihood that the Iraqi Kurdish region could reach some form of independence, there have been inevitable spillover effects on some of Turkey’s restless Kurds in the border areas. At a time when PKK attacks are ongoing inside Turkey and the possibility of a military incursion into northern Iraq to eliminate terrorist bases is passionately debated, the rhetoric and actions of DTP members have come under close scrutiny. The statements of some DTP legislators have already raised concern that they may act as PKK spokespeople in parliament. In 1991, MPs from an earlier Kurdish party insisted on taking their oaths in Kurdish rather than Turkish and were stripped of their seats. Members of the DTP who may be tempted to behave similarly could be courting the same fate.

Pulled in various directions by a congeries of hopes and fears, Turks feel unsure about their country’s future. In a recent Pew survey of opinion across numerous Muslim-majority countries, only 31 percent of Turkish respondents agreed that “democracy can function in our country.”<sup>8</sup> That figure was down from 50 percent just four years earlier, and indeed was the lowest of any country in the poll. Such pessimism seems overblown, and may be a product of the tension that Turkish citizens naturally feel as residents of a land whose lot seems to be life in an uncertain and shifting middle ground between democratic progress and democratic crisis.

Turkish politics is vibrant, colorful, and unpredictable. The country has a functional and coherent democratically elected government that has been reelected and has introduced many democratic reforms. And yet the deepening cleavage between the two Turkeys remains, as do the



looming issue of constitutional amendments that might threaten secularism, the resurgence of anxiety over Kurdish separatism, and the soldiers' and secularists' deep consternation over creeping Islamization. With Islamists, liberal democrats and Western governments now broadly sharing the same vocabulary about democracy, whether and to what extent the secular democratic republic established by Atatürk's principles and vision will prevail is the existential question facing Turkey in the coming years.

## NOTES

1. International Crisis Group, "Turkey and Europe: The Way Ahead," Europe Report No. 184, 17 August 2007, 14, [www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/184\\_turkey\\_and\\_europe\\_the\\_way\\_ahead.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/europe/184_turkey_and_europe_the_way_ahead.pdf).

2. This judgment was confirmed on 11 November 2005 at a Grand Chamber hearing of the ECHR: [www.echr.coe.int/Eng/Press/2005/Nov/GrandChamberJudgmentLeylaSahin-Turkey101105.htm](http://www.echr.coe.int/Eng/Press/2005/Nov/GrandChamberJudgmentLeylaSahin-Turkey101105.htm).

3. There have been unproven allegations that hard-liners within the military prepared two coups d'état against the Erdoğan government in 2004, only to find themselves stopped each time by General Özkök.

4. For precisely that reason, Islamists and Kurdish separatists alike viewed Büyükanıt with distaste. Indeed, some tried to frame him as having been behind a November 2005 grenade assault on a bookstore owned by a sympathizer of the terrorist Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) in the southeastern Anatolian city of Semdinli. The accusers' theory was that Büyükanıt belonged to a conspiracy to manufacture unrest that would, in turn, provide the pretext for a nationalist backlash and opposition to EU accession. Investigators did turn up substantial evidence that the intelligence division of the Jandarma (the national-police wing of the armed forces) was involved in planning and executing the assault. Given the suspected infiltration of Islamists into key intelligence and security posts, however, this was not a total surprise.

5. "World Public Welcomes Global Trade—But Not Immigration," 4 October 2007, 37. Available at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/258.pdf>.

6. See Brian J.Grim, "Turkey and Its Many Discontents," 25 October 2007, available at <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/623/turkey>.

7. The AKP wanted the temporary articles 18 and 19, which declared that the eleventh president of Turkey would be elected by the people, to be taken out of the referendum package. On October 8, the Parliamentary Commission on the Constitution approved this. The opposition then brought a lawsuit before the Constitutional Court to overrule parliament's decision to exempt Gül from direct election. On 27 November 2007, the Court dismissed this suit. The judges explained that they were authorized to rule solely on the legality of the voting in parliament, which they found had been fairly conducted in keeping with that body's rules.

8. "World Public Welcomes Global Trade—But Not Immigration," 4 October 2007, 66. Available at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/258.pdf>. Turkey also had the highest proportion—fully 50 percent—saying that democracy was a "Western way of doing things."