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## Book Review: 'Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party'

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## Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party

Edited by Ümit Cizre

London: Routledge 2007, 238 pp., ISBN 041539645X, US\$130.00 (hardcover).

The coming of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in the November 3, 2002 general elections represented “a major turning point” for Turkish politics.<sup>1</sup> The first book-length attempt to analyze the party and its effects on Turkish politics was M. Hakan Yavuz’s edited volume, entitled *The Emergence of a New Turkey*.<sup>2</sup> Ümit Cizre and her colleagues now have written another book analyzing the roots, identity and policies of the AKP: *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The making of the Justice and Development Party*. Cizre’s edited volume differs from Yavuz’s in that it puts forward some arguments which constitute the basis of the analyses in subsequent chapters; the resulting internal cohesion makes Cizre’s collection a more focused read than Yavuz’s volume.

Contributors to Cizre’s edited volume share the common goal of critiquing the AKP’s ‘u-turn from the politics of change/reform.’ This criticism traverses the entire book, stretching from Cizre’s introductory chapter to the other individual articles. In her introductory chapter, Cizre argues that “the conservative-nationalist instincts of the AKP seemed to reawaken” after 2005 because the AKP “shares with the conservative right-wing’s ... distaste for the politics of difference and a disregard for fundamental freedoms and minority rights” (10). She draws a sharp distinction between the first period, in which the AKP initiated

and sustained a politics of change, and the second period when it pursued a politics of retreat from its reformist agenda. All of the authors in the collection offer their own answer to account for this change, but Cizre raises a tumultuous question about the AKP’s cordiality towards democratization itself by asking “whether the 2003 democratic alterations in the civil-military equation [the AKP’s most important reform in accordance with democratization process] were motivated more by the mechanical preconditions for further alignment with the EU than a democratic discourse that originated from the party itself” (12).

The fact that ‘the new Islamism’ represented by the AKP has many differences from the old Islamism represented by the National Outlook Movement (NOM) is the second argument which traverses the entire book. This idea is most extensively analyzed in Menderes Çınar and Burhanettin Duran’s co-authored chapter, which can be read as a brief outline of Turkish Islamism with such subtitles as “the peculiarities of Turkish Islamism,” “Kemalism and Islam,” “The National Outlook Movement versus Kemalism” and “The AKP and transformation of Islamism.” After underlining the fact that “Islamist movements have been transforming their discourses and programs in every part of the Muslim world” and that there is a “newly emerging (post-)Islamist discourse” prone to share “universal values

like democracy, human rights, and civil societies,” Çınar and Duran present the story of the AKP “as an interesting case of transformation for Islamism” (20-21). The main problem in this chapter is the authors’ reduction of said transformation to the process of change from the National Outlook Movement (NOM) to the AKP, a reduction which comes at the cost of downplaying the intellectual, economic, and social roots of this transformation. Such a reading risks misrepresenting the latter factors; as a result, readers unfamiliar with Turkish politics might misconstrue the transformation of Islamism in Turkey. The authors also have a moral thrust of their own; they consequently depict the NOM as a problematic movement with problematic positions on democracy and liberalism. However, they fail to evaluate the new Islamism critically, not only with all of its virtues, but also in its vices and shortcomings. As such the reader is left with the impression that the old Islamism of the NOM is intrinsically bad, and the new Islamism represents progress toward a better order. Here the authors buy into the popular and uncritical notion that moderate Islam is essentially good and needs to be promoted.

Ahmet Yıldız’s chapter focuses on the differences between the NOM and the AKP in the context of their differing political stances. Yıldız analyzes several critical questions, such as the content of the AKP’s political identity (i.e. conservative democracy), how that identity is used as “a tool of political legitimacy” (45), the relationship between the AKP and new Islamist concepts, and the factors that explain the change from the NOM to the AKP. Yıldız then concludes that the current situation is

not the result of “a voluntary change... but one encouraged by structural conditions” (51). However, Yıldız leaves several questions unanswered, such as what these structural conditions are and how they underpin the transformation of Islamism in Turkey. In the second part of the chapter, Yıldız tests his argument that “the AKP’s Islamism is quite different from that represented by” the NOM (56) by comparing the policies of these two movements toward secular red lines, and in terms of the country’s heated debates about education, women, the consumption of alcoholic beverages in public, secularism and nationalism.

Kenan Çayır’s chapter can be read as the complement of the previous one. Like Yıldız, Çayır also focuses on the difference between the NOM and the AKP, but differs significantly from Yıldız and the other contributors in his approach. Çayır seeks to explain the AKP’s changes “not merely [in] the ‘political’ sphere but in the ‘non-political’ ones” (75). He calls the 1970s and 1980s a period of “collective Islamism” which he defines as a perspective that understands the West and Islam as separate entities. To approach the “non-political” sphere, Çayır studies characters represented in Islamic studies novels, and the writings of Islamic intellectuals (64-68). After comparing the discourses of the Islamic novelists and intellectuals of the 1990s and 2000s with their predecessors, Çayır reaches the conclusion that there now exists a new interpretation of Islamism which can be termed “self critical Islamism.” Such a reading of the change in Islamism makes possible the argument that the 28 February Process is not the only dominant factor behind the changes in the perception of Islamic actors (75). The

first three chapters of the book thus aim to explain the transformation of Islamism in Turkey, but present insufficient analyzes with which to explain the structural factors behind the transformation because they do not sufficiently address “the political economy of Islamic discourse”.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to their co-authored chapter, Burhanettin Duran and Menderes Çınar, in their independent chapters, bring strong criticism to bear against the AKP. Duran focuses on the international dimension rather than the domestic one in explaining the reasons behind the AKP’s search for legitimacy in the eyes of the secular establishment. He calls the international developments which have favored the AKP as “opportunity spaces” (81) and underlines his contention that they existed only up until the beginning of the EU accession process in October 2005. According to Duran’s analysis, the new international relations “no longer provide an ‘opportunity space’ to the AKP (89). Duran’s conclusion, which stems from a comparison of these two periods, is that the use of foreign policy for domestic transformation is insufficient and has limits. According to Duran, “inter-elite consensus is a *sine qua non* of the consolidated democratic rule in Turkey” (101) and therefore the AKP should focus on “desecuritizing the identity issues of Turkey” such as secularism and the Kurdish question by engaging in “politics of consensus” with the secular elites (93). Duran also makes the most provocative argument of the book by introducing the AKP as a party keeping “some affinity with the Islamist ontology” and not cutting “ties with Islamic movements in Turkey” (85). The fact that Duran underlies the continuities while other

chapters focus on the differences between the NOM and the AKP proves a valuable contribution in explaining why the AKP leadership chooses conservative democracy as an identity for the party (86).

Menderes Çınar directly links the transformation of Islamism to the 28 February process in the introductory part of his chapter. This signals reductionism and a problematic approach, since overemphasizing the importance of the 28 February process may lead to the claim that the AKP is a masked party with a hidden agenda. In the rest of the chapter, Çınar argues that both the secularist state elite and the AKP have produced their own exclusive communities. By means of the phrase ‘the communization of state’, Çınar indicates that for the secular elite, the criteria for legality is to be “devout believers of Kemalism” (114) and for the AKP, it is the Friday prayer and having a wife with headscarves, possessions and practices which yield “important merit in recruiting personnel for the bureaucracy” (126). Turkish society is thereby divided into two communities which are mutually exclusive. The secular community manifests itself in mass protests or the so-called Republic Rallies organized by “the new middle class... [responding] to perceived threats to their lifestyle.”<sup>4</sup> The AKP’s community manifests itself in the fact that the AKP gives some concessions to the secular establishment on democratic issues (124) in order not to lose its previously hard-won political and bureaucratic gains. For Çınar, the main reason behind the AKP’s concession strategy is its “inadequate understanding of democracy, its lack of a strategy for democratization, and its consequent inability to pursue Europeanization consistently”

(126, 122-123). Çınar thus shares the view that the AKP “is a culturally conservative movement that harbors strong authoritarian tendencies and a vigorous nationalistic vein.”<sup>5</sup>

Analyzing the relationship between the AKP and the military, Ümit Cizre divides the AKP’s policies toward the military in this period into two phases. For Cizre, while the AKP demystified “national security” and changed the civil-military balance by realizing the August 2003 Harmonization Package in the first period, the “second period of minimal or no engagement with the democratic management of the military” (145) represented the “erosion of the AKP’s oversight over the military” (153). Cizre holds the military responsible for the differences between the two periods. In her view, “the armed forces are on the offensive, counterbalancing [the military’s] partial loss of political influence by actively creating new instruments” (147). The conditions which encourage the military in sharpening “its attempt to shape public discourse against the AKP” are related to the reversal of international support for the government by the EU and the United States (150). Nor is the AKP innocent in this process, for it “attaches a higher premium to avoiding a possible threat of a coup from the military than on establishing democratic civil-military relations” (154). Cizre concludes the chapter optimistically, however, by expressing her sense that the AKP “is now [being] forced to... reposition itself towards a more realistic, constructive and democratic strategy” (161).

Ali Resul Usul’s chapter analyses the transformation by citing the perception of

Islamic groups towards the EU. This chapter focuses on the differences between the attitudes of the NOM and the AKP toward the West and toward Turkey’s integration with the EU. Despite the AKP’s Euro-enthusiasm, Usul underlines some difficulties which are likely to constrain the progress of the AKP’s EU policy (183). Among these, Cyprus and the Kurdish issue are the foremost.

İbrahim Dalmış and Ertan Aydın’s co-authored chapter illustrates the social profile of the AKP’s deputies, supporters and members by using opinion poll data collected by ANAR and Pollmark. Another reviewer of the book, Şaban Kardaş, believes that the empirical data presented in this chapter disconfirm the analyses of the earlier chapters. For Kardaş, Aydın and Dalmış’s research clearly shows that the AKP is situated within the center-right position in Turkish politics, and indicates that studies that focus exclusively on the transformation of Islamism lead to an incomplete account of the AKP and its policies.<sup>6</sup> Kardaş is right on the grounds that Aydın and Dalmış depict the AKP as a representative of right-wing politics, and not a rigid follower of a particular ideology, as was the case with earlier parties of the NOM (220). This broader basis for analysis comprises a major distinction between this chapter and previous ones which analyze the AKP more narrowly in terms of the transformation of Islamism. However, Aydın and Dalmış accept that “the AKP’s identity was based on the leadership cadre [of the party]” (220) and that, all in all, this cadre is the outcome of the “evolving discourse” of the NOM and the “remarkable changes in the mentality” that came about as a result of the develop-

ments of the 1990s (208). Therefore, the chapter can be read as empirical evidence for the arguments presented in the previous chapters as well.

Overall, *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party* makes an important contribution to the literature on contemporary politics in Turkey. The reader who has the

advantage of hindsight to evaluate the arguments in the book and compare them with the developments that took place after the presidential election would find many prophetic clues to help decipher Turkey's current crisis. All things considered, readers may come to accept Duran's observation: "it is a Herculean task to solve the identity problems of Turkish politics without creating tension and conflict" (90).

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#### Endnotes

1. Ali Balcı and Nebi Miş, "Turkey's Role in the 'Alliance of Civilizations': A New Perspective in Turkish Foreign Policy?", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, (September 2008) (forthcoming).
2. M. Hakan Yavuz, *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006).
3. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chapter 4; Ahmet İnsel, "The AKP and Normalizing Democracy in Turkey", *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 102, No. 2-3, (Spring/Summer 2003), p. 279.
4. M. Hakan Yavuz and Nihat Ali Özcan, "Crisis in Turkey: The Conflict of Political Languages", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 14, (Fall 2007), p. 122.
5. İnsel, "The AKP and Normalizing Democracy in Turkey", p. 301
6. Şaban Kardaş, "Turkey under the Justice and Development Party: Between Transformation of 'Islamism' and Democratic Consolidation?," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 17, (Summer 2008), pp. 175-187.

## Human Rights in Turkey

Edited by *Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat and foreword by Richard Falk*

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, 376 pp., ISBN 978-0-8122-4000-9, US\$69.95.

*Human Rights in Turkey* provides a comprehensive picture of the present conditions of human rights issues and government policies in Turkey. It consists of eighteen essays focusing on a wide range of human rights, including freedom of the press, religion, and association; religious and ethnic minority rights; the rights of the displaced; and women's rights. Domestic

factors such as human rights education and international influences particularly from international human rights organizations are also examined. The academic backgrounds of the contributors are diverse, with the authors ranging from political scientists to policy specialists, which leads to a lack of theoretical uniformity across the chapters. Nevertheless, the variety of ap-