

# THE CONSOLIDATION OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN TURKEY

## LA CONSOLIDACIÓN DEL ISLAM POLÍTICO EN TURQUÍA

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**Resumen** || Hasta finales del siglo XX, la posibilidad de que un partido islamista gobernara en Turquía era mínima, debido al carácter profundamente secularista sobre el que fue fundada la república hace casi cien años y al papel que las fuerzas militares habían ejercido como guardianes de la regla secular y del kemalismo en general. Sin embargo, brevemente en 1996 y luego de manera ininterrumpida desde 2002, un partido perteneciente a la tradición islamista turca ha estado al frente de Turquía. Esta larga hegemonía ha implicado transformaciones sociales e institucionales en el país, en las que las figuras de Erdoğan y su partido, el AKP, han sido fundamentales. El reciente ascenso del islam político en Turquía es la consolidación de un proceso iniciado décadas atrás, cuyo trasfondo son algunas órdenes religiosas que incursionaron en la política electoral, mediante un proyecto a largo plazo que alcanzó sus mejores resultados en el siglo XXI.

**Palabras clave** || Turquía, Islamismo, Órdenes religiosas, Erdoğan, AKP

**Abstract** || Until the end of 20th century, the possibilities for an Islamist political party to rule in Turkey were minimal. It was due to the secularist character on which the Republic was founded almost a hundred years ago and the role that the army deployed as guardian of secular rule and Kemalism, in general. However, briefly in 1996 and later uninterruptedly from 2002 on, a party belonging to the Turkish Islamist tradition has ruled Turkey. Such long hegemony has implied social and institutional transformations within the country, and the leading roles played by Erdogan and his party, the AKP, have been crucial. The recent rise of Political Islam in Turkey is the consolidation of a process that initiated decades ago whose background is the religious orders that involved in electoral politics through a long-term project that reached its best results in the 21st century.

**Keywords** || Turkey, Islamism, Religious Orders, Erdogan, AKP



## Introduction

The Secularism was one of the main (if not the most important) pillars on which the Republic of Turkey was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923. Besides other principles (like Nationalism, Republicanism and Reformism), and tendencies (like Westernization and Europeanization) that guided the Kemalist agenda, a strict separation between State and Religion and the confinement of the latter to the personal private sphere, marked the commencement of Modern Turkey. However, such radical laicism put aside the reality of a mostly Muslim society (even more after the population exchanges during the prior years) in which the religious orders had played an important role during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and whose immediate precedent, the Ottoman Empire, was a Muslim body while the Sultan (since 1517) performed simultaneously both figures as Emperor and Caliph. From an exegetical point of view, Islam does not separate religion and politics as some instructions provided by the Quran itself and certain *Hadith* suggest. If that statement were accepted, then Secularism and Islam would be incompatible.

The establishment of the Republic brought with it a wider complication. Unlike other monotheist religions, Islam has not experienced Reformist movements or currents. Because of this, as Nasr addresses in a book that draws up the historic and civilizational implications of Islam, "its religious life and thought remain for the most part within the framework of orthodoxy and tradition" (Nasr, 2003: 173). Then Secularist Turkey was an attempt to establish a Modern state on a traditional society which has been the origin of its tumultuous points of break throughout almost a hundred years and the cause of its permanent complexity. Although the consolidation of the Republican Turkey had some difficulties in its initial

decades, especially in the aim at forging a uniform national identity, the deepest contradictions started to emerge once the Islamic organizations, banned since 1924, were officially or implicitly authorized to reappear in the 1950's.

The most important of those organizations was the Nakşibendi sufi order that had incidence in the foundation of the Political Islam in Turkey which in its turn has followed a traceable sequence through several political parties created since 1970 and whose final (current) point is the AKP led by Erdoğan. The ascending prominence of Islamism in Turkish Politics and the consequent threat to Secularism were one of the triggers for military interventions during the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The cyclical *coups d'État* were assumed as defense and reimplantation of Republican values and the Army was an institution called to endorse the secular fundamentals of the Turkish nation. However, the AKP consolidation initiated a new era not only in Political Islam but also in Turkish Politics that have turned the tables and produced deep transformations in society. Therefore, the 2016 coup attempt had a different nature compared to previous interventions. It was rather a struggle between two religious factions that had dissimilar origins but were former partners. The apparently irreversible turning to Islamization seems the precursor of a new Turkey in the gates of the centennial of the Republic. The events that made such structural changes possible as well as the implications and prospections for Contemporary Turkey is what this article pretends to illustrate.

## Background

At the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> Century, religious orders already had an important social status within the Ottoman Empire, especially in Istanbul and Anatolia. Under the *Tasavuf* or Sufi tradition,



many fraternities (*tarikats*) were created, among them the Mevlevi, the Bektaşî and the Nakşibendi congregations whose networks were composed of several branches (*kol*) and lodges (*tekkes*) all around the Empire. The Islamic clergies played an important role in Ottoman society, performing as spiritual leaders, judges and legal experts on the Sharia. The figures of ulemas, müftis and şeyhs (being the Şeyhülislam the most important) had notable influence in social circles and often were necessary to legitimize political acts by the government. The proximity of some of these orders with certain sectors within the Empire implied their intervention once the reformist wave initiated. Therefore, after the "Beneficial event" that bloodily suppressed the Janissaries in 1826, the Bektaşî order, recognized as linked to them for almost three centuries, was officially closed. The Bektaşî's survival belongings were confiscated and given to the Nakşibendis. The government availed the opportunity to control the Islamic organizations. Such regulations were deepened during the *tanzimat* (reforms) period (1839-1871) that extended state control over the religion in general (not only Muslims) and introduced some secularist measures, for instance in legal procedures and education.

Despite its purposes to liberalize the Empire, the *tanzimat* confronted opponents from different sides. On one hand, in the 1870's the Young Ottomans movement was nonconformist because it pursued a more radical reformism and Westernization. On the other hand, the Islamic groups, headed by the Nakşibendi order, looked with suspicion the increasing of secular power detrimental to the Sharia and its interpreters. Although a constitution was approved in 1876 and the reformism led into the 1908 revolution triggered by the Young Turks, it did not mean the disappearance of Islamic critics. On the contrary, in 1909 an attempt of religious counter-revolution was

experienced and in the same year another Islamic fraternity came into light, the Nurcu order whose one of its offshoots will be the Gülenist movement.

The coming of the Republic implied the victory of Secularism and the consolidation of nationalistic, reformist, populist and radical policies. Regarding religion, in 1924 the Caliphate was abolished, and the members of the Ottoman dynasty were expelled out of the country. Almost simultaneously, the new constitution created the Directorate of Religion Affairs (*Diyanet*) as an institution to guarantee the official control over religion. As Zürcher mentions in his review on the history of Modern Turkey, the Kemalist concept of Secularism "meant not so much the separation of church and state as the subjugation and integration of religion into the state bureaucracy". (Zürcher, 2017: 235). In this sense, a new law on Education was also released and the Islamic schools as well as the religious education in general were eliminated. These measures provoked a rebellion in 1925 headed by the Sheikh Sait, which involved religious and Kurdish nationalistic claims. The rapid defeat of the stirred-up groups motivated the closing down and prohibition from that point forward of all the Islamic orders, including the Nakşibendi, and the denial of a separate Kurdish identity (the Kurdish language was banned in public spaces). In the following years, reforms such as the introduction of Latin alphabet (that completely liquidated religious influence on education), changes in dressing codes, and the introduction of the metric and weights and measures systems contributed to the consolidation of Kemalist program and the preeminence of a secular state.

However, as Zürcher points out, "while the government succeeded in suppressing most expressions of popular religion, at least in the towns, this did not, of course, disappear. To a large extent, the *tarikats* simply went underground" (2017: 193).



Moreover, the strict control over religious expressions generated resentments and reactions against the Republican policies. Through the suppression of religious expressions “the Kemalists politicized Islam and turned it into a vehicle for opposition. One could say that, in turning against popular religion, they cut the ties that bound them to the mass of the population” (Zürcher, 2017: 194). The hiding that Islamic orders lived during the 1930’s (when Nurcu movement had an important revival) and the 1940’s was slowly lifted since 1950 when the One-Party system that ruled for 27 years was officially dismantled and the Republican’s People Party (*Cumhuriyeti Halk Partisi - CHP*) founded by Atatürk, lost the first Multi-Party elections which were won by the then-new Democratic Party (DP). Because of a complex electoral system, despite having obtained only 53% of the votes, the DP won 84% of the seats in the Parliament.

The extreme change in the government meant a deceleration but not the end of the implementation of Republican program in Turkey. Actually, during the 1950’s the rapprochements with Europe were strengthened and the Turkish participation in the Korea War facilitated its entrance to the NATO. In the nascent scenario of the Cold War, Turkey aligned with the West. At the same time, re-emergence of religious orders was officially and socially tolerated as they became increasingly independent in spite of the pretended official co-optation. According to Cornell, in a very interesting article about the influence of Nakşibendi order in Turkey “to reduce the growing shortage of clergy, the state created faculties of theology and Islamic institutes. In parallel to these state-controlled organizations, the religious brotherhoods gradually started emerging from underground” (Cornell, 2015). Among the congregations that reappeared were the Mevlevi, the Nakşibendi, and the Nurcu movement. Although all of them are Sufi

orders, they have different approaches to Islam. In the case of the first, its members are followers of Mevlana or Rumi, a Persian poet who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, and whose life lessons are considered the base of a very recognized wing of mystical Islam. The order remains until today and its center is the city of Konya in Central Anatolia. In its turn, the Nakşibendi order, in particular the Khalidi branch, was created at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> Century by Khalid Al-Baghdadi and experienced a fast and extended spreading through Turkish and Kurdish regions of the Ottoman Empire. The influence of Nakşibendi order-Khalid branch on Turkish Politics has been wide and can be considered as the origin of Political Islam in Turkey. In this regard, Cornell considers that “its ideas have exerted strong influence on numerous spinoff movements, including practically all of the politically relevant Islamic social movements in the country today. Almost all religious orders and communities in Turkey hail from the Khalidi order” (Cornell, 2015, par. 12). The most important of these movements is the İskenderpaşa lodge in Istanbul, founded by the preacher Mehmet Zahid Kotku in 1958. Within this fraternity, the *Milli Görüş* (National Vision) movement, the origin of Islamist political parties in Turkey, was conceived during the 1960’s. Finally, the Nurcu order, as mentioned, was created in 1909 by Sait Nur, with an important stimulation during the 1930’s, and its main offshoot, the *Hizmet* (service) movement, headed by Fetullah Gülen was formed in the 1970’s.

The Nurcu played an important role in 1954 and 1957 elections both of them won by the ruling party, the DP. The existence of independent Islamic organizations was not only tolerated by the new government but also legitimized by it when openly accepted the Nurcu support for electoral purposes. During campaigns, the leader of DP and Prime Minister, Adnan Menderes, publicly appealed to



Islamic arguments, highlighting the Muslim character of Turkish society. These rapprochements between the government and religious organizations became a serious concern for social sectors loyal to Secularism, mainly the military. "Within the army, which regarded itself as the keeper of Atatürk's heritage, the feeling that the DP was betraying the Kemalist traditions was especially strong" (Zürcher, 2017: 236). As a result, the 1960 coup took place, Menderes was overthrown (later executed), the DP was dissolved, and a new constitution was launched in which the prohibition of the political use of religion was included.

The first reset of Turkish Political System contributed to configure a wider and more complex political spectrum, with the CHP moving to the center-left and the new Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi* - AP) capturing the moderate right wing. There was an empty space that was taken by the extremes at both sides with the appearance of radical revolutionary movements and Ultra-Nationalist groups. At the same time, a mass migration of Turkish worker men to Europe (especially to Germany under the figure of *Gastarbeiter*) initiated. The social sectors that were not aligned in these ideological trends became the main target of the nascent Political Islam. As indicated, in the heart of the İskenderpaşa lodge in Istanbul, led by Kotku, the Milli Görüş movement was conceived. It is the origin of Political Islamism in Turkey. Regarding this, Leiken offers an interesting conceptual approach to Islamism in opposition to Salafism. For him, while the "Salafists wish to return to the golden age of the Prophet and his Disciples, Islamists accept modern society but want to reform it in a fundamentalist direction (...) preserving tradition while borrowing selectively from the West" (Leiken, 2011: 64). The latter can be divided in three types: the *missionary* that aims at changes by preaching like the Tablighi activists in India; the *jihadi* that pursues political

changes through violence in the way of revolutionary movements like the Gamma İslammiya in Egypt. The Salafism has also a jihadi version which is composed of fundamentalist groups. Finally, the Islamism can be *Political* which "seeks to replace secular law with some version of Sharia" and "engages in electoral politics" (ibid.: 65). In Leiken's opinion the Muslim Brotherhood is the perfect model of Political Islamism.

The Milli Görüş then had as main objective the participation in elections and the conquest of political power. Its activism soon extended to Turkish diaspora in Europe where became an important organization within Turkish communities in the following decades in dispute with the official Diyanet and later the Gülenist movement. A disciple of the İskenderpaşa fraternity, Necmettin Erbakan, was elected for the Parliament in 1969 as representative of Konya, running as independent. One year later, he establishes the National Order Party (*Milli Nazım Partisi* - MNP). In those days, the Ultrationalists founded their own party, the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* - MHP) whose youth organization will be known as the "Grey Wolves" (*Bozkutlar*) that will have relevance during the 1970's when Turkish democracy suffered a serious deterioration. A violence wave led into a new military intervention in 1971. Consequently, the MNP was closed down. However, in 1972 a spinoff party was created, the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi* - MSP) that participated in elections in 1973 and 1977 obtaining representation in the Parliament during that troubled decade for Turkey. As a reaction against the political violence held by extreme rightist and leftist organizations which coincided with an economic crisis and political instability with constant alternations in the government between the AP and the CHP, a new coup occurred in 1980, followed by a strict and bloodily military rule for three years that dissolved all the political parties (including



the CHP that re-emerged under its original name only in 1992), banned from political activity to old political leaders (including Erbakan) and facilitated the transition of economic model from Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) -that dominated Turkey in prior decades- to Neoliberalism.

In 1983, with the return of the democracy, new political parties were formed. Among them there was the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi* - AVP) led by Turgut Özal who acted as Prime Minister until 1989 and was the promotor of economic liberal reforms. Özal was Kurdish origin and an İskenderpaşa lodge's member. Even so, its party did not represent Islamism at all. This role was played by the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* - RP) founded by Erbakan although he could not participate in elections. Because of this, only in 1987, when the banning for old politicians was lifted, his party ran for the first time in electoral process. Despite not having reached the 10% threshold required to grant representation in the Parliament, the RP increased its votes in the 1989 local elections, obtaining some mayoral offices in Eastern Turkey, and two years later, won 62 seats in the National Assembly performing almost 17% of the votes. During the 1980's Turkey had experienced the beginning of the war against the Kurdistan's Workers Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* - PKK) which had been created in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan. The Kurdish Question re-emerged after several decades hidden beneath the pretension of a unified national identity. At the same time, the Gülenist network expanded throughout Turkey basically thanks to the opening of schools and universities and was ready to initiate its international projection, first in the Balkans, later in Central Asia and other latitudes including USA. Although some former Nurcu members joined the MNP in the 1970's, the Gülenism soon dissociated itself from Milli Görüş movement and embraced its own cause.

The 1990's was also a troubled time for Turkey. On one hand, the proliferation of political parties and the distribution of seats in the Parliament generated an effect of ideological non-distinction among the secular parties which were also attained to old forms of political organization. The impossibility for any party to obtain absolute majority within the Assembly took to constant weak coalitions sometimes conformed by politicians apparently irreconcilable in ideological terms. On the other hand, a set of economic crises hit the country during that time known as the "Lost decade" of Turkey. The Political Islam represented in the RP took advantage of both situations. In 1995 general elections, the RP was the most voted party obtaining 21% of the votes and 158 seats. As Delibas states in a book that analyzes the rise of Islamist parties that preceded the AKP, "the economic problems of the 1980's and the 1990's were followed by the political problems of increased party fragmentation, high electoral volatility and organizational decline" (Delibas, 2015: 18). In June 1996, Erbakan became the first Islamist Prime Minister in Republic of Turkey's history after a coalition with center-right representatives. His government was hardly criticized by other political forces and in February 1997 an ultimatum was launched by the military who demanded a diminishing of Islamist influence in the education, economy and the state bureaucracy. The process finished with the Erbakan's renunciation in June 1997 in an episode that has been called a "post-modern coup". In following January, the Constitutional Court banned the RP and Erbakan was definitely expelled from political activity. For those years tough for another reasons, the infiltration of Gülenist members in public institutions was already known and the theory of a "parallel state" gained adepts.

The Milli Görüş movement faced the challenge



of running in politics without the Erbakan's leadership for the first time since its creation. In February 1998, the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi* - FP) was founded by former members of RP, including the then incumbent Mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was incarcerated the same year for reciting in public a poem which was considered an attack against lay fundamentals of the nation. Despite having performed well in general and local elections in 1999 obtaining around 15% of the votes in both contends, the party was also banned by the Constitutional Court in 2001 and led into the final split of Political Islam in Turkey. "The party divided in the middle and became two different parties: the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - AKP) under the leadership of Erdoğan representing the center-right ideology, and the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi* - SP) representing the traditionalist line of Erbakan's Islamic ideology" (Ibid., 92). Along these events, Fetullah Gülen in his turn, imposed a self-exile in USA where he went for medical treatment in 1999.

### The AKP era

After a severe economic crisis that affected the country in 2001, the AKP participated for the first time in elections in 2002. The results were an earthquake for Turkey politics. AKP obtained 34% of the votes and because of the electoral system won absolute majority in the Parliament. It granted the first non-coalitional government since 1987. However, as Zürcher highlights, results were not a consequence of an increasing Islamism in the country but rather a rejection to traditional political parties that had not been able to deal with the crises during the last decade. Therefore,

voters were prepared to follow anyone who could

offer hope. There the figure of Erdoğan was crucially important (...) The Turks voted for Erdoğan because they believed he could put end to *yoksulluk* (poverty) and *yolsuzluk* (corruption), not because they wanted an Islamic state. (Zürcher, 2017: 330)

Judging by the economic results, at least during the first decade in power, Erdoğan did not disappoint his followers. The economic performance of Turkey during the 2003-2013 period was impressive, with an average of 7% in GDP growing (except for 2008 and 2009, the international financial crisis years), reaching a 11% peak in 2011 (World Bank, 2019). In the same range of time, its economy size expanded more than a double and entered the Top 20 of richest countries (Ibid.).

In terms of foreign policy, the initial years of AKP implied a rapprochement with the European Union. Upon to Yabancı, who reviews the recent relations between the Europe and Turkey regarding the access process by the latter, "During its first term office (2002-2007), the AKP indeed strengthened basic freedoms, restricted the role of the military in politics by altering the structure of the National Security Council, and increased penalties for torture and maltreatment during detention" (Yabancı, 2016: 2). This was a "Golden era" in virtue of which "in December 2004, the EU decided that Turkey had sufficiently fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria on democracy and human rights and that negotiations could start in October 2005" (Lagendijk, 2012: 167). The Turkish miracle was coming true while other disputes were internally fought. Erdoğan made an alliance with Gülenism to confront the Kemalism within the public institutions. As a result, in 2007 an investigation against several high-range secularist members of the armed forces was launched by the judiciary. What was known as the Ergenekon trials led into the incarceration or





dismissal of many military officers. Nevertheless, later it was revealed that the evidence was fabricated by the persecutors, all of them members of the Gülenist network.

Following to Taşpınar, when analyses the failed 2016 coup in Turkey, "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). In the middle of that dispute, Erdoğan launched a purge of Gülen members or sympathizers within the state and labelled such organization as terrorist. The same year, the Gezi protests that initiated in Istanbul but rapidly spread all over the country, marked the definite turn of Erdoğan government towards Authoritarianism. What started as a complaint against an infrastructure project in a park became the trigger of an irreversible process. "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" (McManus, 2018: 287).

The Authoritarianism also implied the starting point of Islamization in Turkey. It has signified deep changes in Turkish society. The debate around the headscarf in 2008 lifted the ban of use in public spaces and six years later the prohibition was eliminated even for public institutions. Some measures such as restrictions in selling and consumption of alcohol, the prohibition of mixed (male-female) dormitories in universities, the restoration of the religious marriage led by müftis, the elimination of the Theory of Evolution from public school curricula, among others in similar sense, have been introduced as well as "non-official" decisions regarding TV programs, movies or artistic expressions that have been implicitly or openly censored. At the same time, cultural changes are being held, represented in the denominated

"neighborhood pressure" (*mahalle baskısı*) which can be described as the "pressure by religious people on secular people to be more Islamic, as scientific proof of their amorphous fears" (Hansen, 2017: 55). It can be perceived in the rejection to liberal dress codes by women, the kisses in public, and the feeding out of time during Ramadan or the repudiation to LGBT expressions. Similar suggestions on the role of the women or the desired model of family are recurrent by civil servants including Erdoğan. Even in foreign policy, AKP initiated in 2011 a "Neo-Ottoman" approach, strengthening links with former Empire territories and Turkic countries in Asia detrimental to the relation of Turkey with Europe which has deteriorated. In general, a new Turkish identity (that appeals more to its Ottoman Muslim roots than to republican and liberal values) is increasingly becoming predominant in society.

In 2014 Erdoğan, still within a parliamentary system, became the first president elected by popular vote. Although in 2015 he failed in a reform initiative to turn Turkey into a presidential regime, in practice he concentrated functions, overshadowing the Prime Minister. Such concentration turned more evident after the attempted coup in July 2016 and the consequent declaration of the state of emergency. According to majoritarian opinions, the military group that tried to overthrow Erdoğan in that summer belonged to Gülenist organization.

Gülen's well-known encouragement of his followers to pursue careers in government was a harbinger of a slow-motion Islamic social, cultural and political revolution (...) Gülen's own belief that the best protection against the security-judicial establishment was to conquer it from within". (Taşpınar, 2016, par. 7)

The coup attempt provoked a new purge



in state institutions and an international crusade to find all the supporters of Gülenism. Even a request for the extradition of Gülen was submitted before the American government. The persecution of *fetullahcılar* (as Gülen's followers or Hizmet organization members are known) accentuated authoritarianism in Turkey, leading to the closure of numerous mass media, considered loyal to the Coup perpetrators, and the seizure of numerous companies accused of financing the military intervention. In addition, thousands of civil servants (including more than 3,000 university professors, military and police members) were withdrawn or suspended from office. The purge has affected more than 120,000 people and nearly other 30,000 people have been arrested for their links to FETÖ (*Fetullahcı Terör Örgütü*) as the Turkish government has called it, 22,000 of which have already been sentenced (in many cases to life sentences) and more than 7,000 are awaiting trial. Simultaneously, the war against the PKK has deepened. After the break-up of last negotiations in 2015 (rapprochements had initiated in 2012), a new offensive has been implemented with negative consequences on Human Rights, including basic civil liberties and persecution to journalists.

In this context, the Parliament approved a constitutional reform to transform the political system from parliamentarian to presidential, a decision that was submitted to a referendum in April 2017. Erdoğan won albeit by a very narrow margin. In 2018, under pressure because of the collapse of the Turkish lira, following a diplomatic incident with the USA, Erdoğan called for early Presidential and Parliamentary elections in June of that year, in which he was the winner. With reference to the National Assembly, the AKP reached non-absolute majority but the support by right-wing MHP was granted. The AKP winning streak was interrupted in the local elections in March 2019

when it lost the mayor offices of Turkey's major cities, including Ankara and Istanbul. In the latter case, after allegations of irregularities, the Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey (YSK) annulled the results and called for new elections in June. However, the replay of the contest increased the gap between the contenders (initially 24,000) to 800,000 votes. Moreover, such results erected Ekrem İmamoğlu (elected mayor of Istanbul) as the renewed figure of the CHP to run for the presidency in 2023.

### Conclusion

The pillars on which the Republic of Turkey was founded and the worship personality towards Atatürk make the Islamism not only a political opponent but also a counter culture that calls into question the uniform narrative (sometimes imposed) along the Republican period. According to Delibas, "In Turkey, the central focus of the debate is on the threat of 'Islamic Fundamentalism' to the modern, secular, democratic republic and the principles of Atatürk" (Delibas, 2015: 7). The consolidation of Islamism in Turkey is a reality that beyond the politics, as suggested, is drawing up a new Turkish identity, at least the predominant. Upon to Hintz, in her research on contemporary political identities in Turkey, "the now frequent references to Turkey's glorious Ottoman past and conservative values of Islam as the basis of societal interaction are antithetical to the Republican Nationalist concept of the 'model citizen': Western, modern, and secular" (Hintz, 2018: 3). However, as she warns, there are other identities in Turkish society that do not share the previous characteristics and among them can be included Ultra-Nationalists, Kurds, Alevis, and leftist groups out of the current political parties.

There are two questions remaining. Firstly, are there possibilities for a change? As seen, the democracy,



despite its deterioration, offers opportunities to win just like happened in last local elections. Without a doubt, the 2023 elections will be a watershed for Turkey. It will imply the definitive consolidation of the AKP or the beginning of its end. Many factors will influence in the results such as the way in which opponents be able to make coalitions aimed at a unique candidacy against Erdoğan or an effective participation of international observers in order to avoid fraud. Of course, due to the charismatic leadership and the almighty figure that Erdoğan represents, most of the victory possibilities for AKP lay on his capacity to run again for President.

The second question is if an eventual AKP end will also imply the end of the Political Islam in Turkey. The majority Muslim population and Socio-Cultural transformations in Turkey in the last two decades turn very difficult to turn back to the absolutist secularist principles of the Republic. Therefore, a policy of tabula rasa in the way that the foundation of Modern Turkey did almost a hundred years ago does not look plausible nowadays. Therefore, it is important to discuss what the role of Political Islam and Islamist Political parties in Turkey will be. A final mention can be done regarding the polarization within the country, that although not likely the conflict during the 1970's could lead to new cycles of political violence. As Zürcher points out, "whether on the secularist side or on that of the Islamists, that people see current events through the prism of a traumatic history often leads to distortions and demonization of the other side" (Zürcher, 2017: xiv). In the struggle for prevalence, consequences could be unfortunate. In any case, in the centennial of its creation it seems that a new Republic will be born. In it, tensions will stay due to the complex characteristics of Turkey.

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