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EDITOR'S NOTE

İHSAN DAĞI

AGAIN, momentous events are taking place in Turkey and its neighborhood.

A civil unrest hit Turkey for weeks in May and June over a government project aimed at rebuilding a replica of an old military barrack in Istanbul's Gezi Park.

It started as a protest to protect the park, but went far beyond the original purpose. The protestors attempted to draw a no-cross line for the government, which is increasingly perceived as intervening in individual choices and lifestyles. According to the government, the protests were specifically targeted at Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, and were part and parcel of a global conspiracy to topple their rule. The response of the government was not one of consolation but confrontation.

Thus, the encounter was aggressive. Protests continued for weeks. The police intervened violently, using water cannons and tear gas. Four demonstrators and one policeman died, while hundreds were seriously injured and many were detained. Above all, Turkish politics has become even more fragmented. While the protests in the streets pointed to the void in the formal institutions of the opposition, the heavy-handed reaction of the government underlined growing anxiety about authoritarian tendencies in Turkish politics. It seems that the Gezi protests have shifted the debate about Turkish politics from "who is to govern" to "how should they govern?"

The Gezi Park protests, and the way the government responded to them, foretell that the next two years during which three crucial elections take place – local, presidential, and parliamentary – will be tough, tense, and contentious. Normalcy has passed, and politics is impregnated with the unexpected as we approach a long and hot season of elections.

The politics of protest have taken a different form in Egypt. A military coup toppled Mohammed Morsi, the president of Egypt, on July 3, following days of anti-Morsi demonstrations. It was a moment that dashed our hopes for a democratic evolution of the post-Arab Spring regimes in the region.

The shocking experience of the coup in Egypt is likely to lead the Islamists who took part in electoral politics – and won presidential elections in Egypt – to think twice about taking part in elections. It may also lead them to think that revolutionary means are preferable to power-sharing modalities of a democratic competition. Moreover, the reluctance of the West to denounce the coup in the Middle East will resurface the debate about "Middle Eastern exceptionalism," and erode the trust of the Islamists in both the West and democracy. Thus, the prospect for democracy in the Middle East is not getting brighter.

Yet the Arab Spring had raised the hopes that the people of the Middle East cannot be imprisoned in the false choices of “secular authoritarianism” and “Islamic totalitarianism,” and that there is a third option: democracy with liberties and pluralism. However, after two years of experimentation in democratization, Egypt faced a military coup and now slips from a democratic future into a bloody civil war. It is a lost opportunity, not only for Egypt but also for the Middle East as a whole.

And a personal note of farewell ...

After more than five years as the editor-in-chief of *Insight Turkey*, I am leaving this post as of this current issue. *Insight Turkey* will continue to be an indispensable resource to make sense of Turkish politics and global affairs, albeit under a different editorial team.

Five years ago, when I was asked to undertake editorial responsibility of *Insight Turkey*, I accepted the offer without hesitation. At that time, Turkey was going through a very difficult period. The AK Party’s electoral victory had provoked resistance within the state in the name of secularism. The foundations of Turkish politics were shaken by instances of military interventions in politics; assassinations directed at Hrant Dink (the Turkish-Armenian journalist) and Christian servicemen and missionaries; and judicial attempts to close down the ruling AK Party. In other words, the “old Turkey” was crumbling down with a severe resistance.

Meanwhile a “new” post-Kemalist Turkey was being built with a broad coalition of the conservatives, the liberals, the Kurds, and the Turks under the political leadership of the AK Party.

In such a period of reconstruction *Insight Turkey* strove to understand and explain the actors, institutions, and dynamics of this process. Based on an observation that Kemalist perspectives dominated the literature on Turkish politics, *Insight Turkey* offered a platform to “post-Kemalist” approaches that analyzed Turkish politics as well as foreign affairs. But we also tried to be balanced, and were careful to give space for alternative views as well. At the end, I think we have produced a readable, intellectually stimulating, and politically balanced journal.

The post-Kemalist “new Turkey” that *Insight Turkey* tried to understand, analyze, and explain is now becoming “old” – requiring new conceptual tools and approaches. Yet, I do not have the spirit left to start all over again, at least not as an editor. So, it is time for me to leave. My thanks go to all of our writers and readers. ■