The Democratization Process in Turkey: Theory, Legacy, and Prospects

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Turkey's Democratization Process

Edited By Carmen Rodríguez, Antonio Ávalos,
Hakan Yılmaz *and* Ana I. Planet
London and New York: Routledge, 2014, 444 pages, £110.00, ISBN: 9780415836968.

Debating Turkish Modernity: Civilization, Nationalism, and the EEC

By Mehmet Döşemeci
New York: Cambridge, 2013, 240 pages, £57.00, ISBN: 9781107044913.

Democratic Reform and Consolidation: The Cases of Mexico and Turkey

By Evren Çelik Wiltse
Colchester: ECPR Press, 2015, 288 pages, £24.00, ISBN: 9781907301674.

In one of his articles on the requirements of large-scale democracy and political institutions, Robert A. Dahl warns students of political science by stating, "in ordinary language, we use the word *democracy* to refer both to a goal or ideal and to an actuality that is only a partial attainment of the goal."[1] A practical use of this notice in scholarly analyses is to start with the postulate that, "every actual democracy has fallen short of democratic criteria."[2] Amongst others, Turkish democracy, in this sense, is not exceptional in failing to meet the entangled criteria of actual, and ideal democracy. Turkish political history is replete with examples of discrepancies between actualities and aspired democratic goals. Özbudun and Gençkaya identify this lack of congruence in Turkish democratic life as a series of missed opportunities.[3] Alongside these discrepancies, the three books under review here exhibit the characteristics and deficiencies of Turkey's democratization process from a wide range of perspectives. While *Turkey's Democratization Process* places Turkish democracy

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into the theoretical context of comparative politics by characterizing it as a 'defective democracy,' *Debating Turkish Modernity: Civilization, Nationalism, and the EEC* adopts a politico-historical approach and shows how Turkey's understanding of democracy has mostly been influenced by its perception of joining the European Economic Community (EEC), in the 1959-1980 time period, as the equivalent of attaining 'the level of contemporary civilizations.' *Democratic Reform and Consolidation: The Cases of Mexico and Turkey* provides a useful comparison of Turkish and Mexican democracies in terms of the efficacy of different forms of international engagement in democratization processes.

The well-detailed book by Rodríguez, Ávalos, Yılmaz, and Planet gathers scholars from different countries that redound to the diversity in perspectives in analyzing the Turkish case. The editors attempt to frame Turkish democracy within the vast literature of democratization. This is not an easy task because, as they point out, the case of Turkey neither corresponds to the concept of transition nor to *consolidation*. They categorize Turkey as a through Linz and Stepan's theoretical framework of democratic consolidation provided in their book entitled *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. This theory proposes five interacting areas of the democratization process: (i) conditions for free and lively civil society, (ii) relatively autonomous and valued political society, (iii) the rule of law to ensure legal guarantees for citizens' freedoms and independent associational life, (iv) state bureaucracy usable by the new democratic government, and (v) an institutionalized economic society. Likewise, the organization of the book follows a similar path and elaborates on five areas of the democratization process in terms of the evolution of Turkish democracy. Although the book puts Turkish democracy into a theoretical context of consolidation, it does not provide comprehensive criticisms in terms of the already given criteria of consolidation.

In *Debating Turkish Modernity. Civilization, Nationalism, and the EEC*, Mehmet Döşemeci delves into the historical roots of modernization (and therefore of democratization) in the context of EEC membership as perceived by Turkish political actors. He proposes two historical-conceptual categories in explaining this perception: the civilizational approach, which supports joining the EEC on the grounds of a consummation of Atatürk's vision to raise Turkey to 'the level of contemporary civilization,' and the nationalist approach, which basically reflects the view of 'national interest' and opposes Turkey's integration with the EEC. Döşemeci's choice to confine his study's historical breath to the 1980s is a sound one, since after the 1980s the boundaries of 'nationalist' and 'civilizational' would have been intermingled, blurry, and hence difficult. In his comprehensive analysis, he proposes 'stipulatory logic' as an alternative to the civilizational, and nationalist approaches. He defines stipulatory logic as the process of identification and erasure of the 'otherness'

of the other (p. 218). Stipulatory logic as a theoretical tool helps Döşemeci criticize the social scientific literature that takes the EU norms as 'universally correct and objective codes' –a critique that can also be applicable to the norms of democratic consolidation. In this context, Döşemeci's book provides a fresh approach in critically assessing the *idées fixes* of democratic consolidation as presumed and claimed by most social scientists.

Democratic Reform and Consolidation: The Cases of Mexico and Turkey by Evren Çelik Wiltse bridges the previous two books' arguments by substantiating them in a relatively tangible and up-to-date comparison of Turkey and Mexico. Based on an overview of the three books, some common grounds come to the surface in assessing the democratization process in Turkey. First, the process of modernization in Turkey appears to be referred to recurrently by different academics. It is one of the factors that gives the democratization process its character and route. A dominant discourse on *national security* and the *state's survival* constitutes the second issue. Third, *conditionality* sets the other platform in discussing international engagement in democratization.

Thinking of Democratization in Conjunction with Modernization

Turkey's non-linear path to democracy is a product –if not a result– of the socio-political baggage of its state legacy, and its policies and efforts of modern-ization in the form of Westernization. The legacy that Turkey inherited from the Ottoman era has been determinative in its contemporary policies and politics of democratization under the Turkish nation-state.

Turkey has been the legatee of the Ottoman Empire in many respects. Although the establishment of the republic meant to (and did) change political institutions and society, and brought new institutions into existence, the Ottoman legacy was revived to a considerable extent in the new regime, as old and new institutions existed side by side. Therefore, both continuity and change characterize Turkish political life, and identically Turkish democracy. Turkey's modernization process can be counted among the inherited situations in the latter regime. Most scholars agree that the modernization process, which initially started in the Ottoman era and continued in the republic, was state-driven and implemented by state elites, including the military-bureaucratic elites (p. 44). Keyman and Kancı too, talk about a state-centered modernization process in Turkish democracy. They argue that the state-centric view of modernity and its organic portrayal of society functioned as an obstacle to the emergence of civil society in Turkey (p. 149). The immature development of civil society, therefore, appears as one of the repercussions of the state-driven modernization process, wherein the civic dimension of the citizenry was neglected.

As one of the five criteria defined by Linz and Stepan, Keyman and Kancı

focus on the state of the art of civil society in Turkey. Similar to Turan's analysis, they handle the evolution of the civil society-democracy interaction in three periods: 1923-1980 is characterized as the period of state-centric modernity; 1980-2000 as the era of globalization and the transformation of Turkish modernity; and 2000 onwards as the recognizable civil society, democratization, and Europeanization process. In the first two periods, civil society is almost invisible in terms of its autonomy and its contribution to democracy.

Like the Ottoman bureaucratic elite who had shaped modernization within the ideals of a Western nation-state image, the Kemalist elite also focused on the ideal of 'saving the state' (p. 140). The basic parameters of this period promoted the state as the sole and dominant actor in modernization. This rendered the state the sovereign and privileged subject independent from society (p. 140). The state drew and defined the boundaries of politics.

The characteristics of political society in contemporary Turkey have also emerged as outcomes of the country's modernization process. The military-bureaucratic elite appear to be one of the important pillars in this context. The leading role of the military elite in modernization efforts resulted in multiple instances of their direct or indirect interference in Turkish politics. The active role of the military in politics in turn resulted in the fragmentation and instability in Turkish political society. Focusing on

the same issue from the point of view of concern for the party system, Sayarı identifies these characteristics as instability, weak institutionalization and high electoral volatility –which were changed positively after the 2002 elections (p. 104). These features led to the absence of an institutionalized party system, which has hampered democratic consolidation in Turkey.

In explaining the reasons for the weaknesses in the Turkish party system, Sayarı emphasizes how military interventions led to party fragmentation because these interventions disrupted the natural evolution of party politics over time. For example, the military officers' power to veto decisions taken by elected representatives severely weakened the consolidation of democracy (p. 105). However, the rest of Sayarı's explanations are outdated, even though the book was published very recently (2014). In order to explain how the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) overcame military tutelage, Sayarı refers to the 'Ergenekon' case. However, this interpretation requires a serious update, especially after the failed July 15 coup attempt, because the measures previously taken to eliminate military tutelage seem to be transforming into a new phase. Scores of peoples convicted in the Ergenekon case were later acquitted, since both the Ergenekon and the Balyoz case were alleged to have been concocted by the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization.

Although the stabilization of the party system is an important development for democratic consolidation

because it provides the institution-alization of the democratic process, Sayarı correctly warns that a growing tendency to silence political critics and opposition might challenge even a full-fledged democracy. Nonethe-less, the strengthening of the party system and the withdrawal of the active military involvement in poli-tics have brought Turkey closer to a point at which 'democracy is the only game in town,' as Linz and Stepan put it; but only as long as Turkey refrains from equating democracy solely with elections and a party system.

As discussed earlier, during the early Republican period, the state elite held the monopoly on interpreting and ap-plying the ways of modernity. In such an environment, 'national interest' was also formulated by the state elite, as Keyman and Kancı point out. The state elite equated the 'state interest' with 'national interest' (p. 140). Due to this equation, a Republican model of citizenship developed, defined by duties and responsibilities. Thus, especially until the introduction of multiparty politics, the site of civil society was non-existent. However, as Keyder states, in the 1980-2000 period, the state-centric governing of society faced a serious legitimacy and representation crisis. The impacts of economic liberalization and global-ization paved the way for the collapse of the organic vision of society. None-theless, the quantitative development of civil society in this period could not result in a qualitative leap due to the organizational and financial lim-itations of civil society organizations (p. 144).

In the post-2000 period, deepening relations with the EU and the increas-ing global visibility of Turkey were influential in the development of civil society. Despite the recognition of civil society not solely instrumentally but as an effective actor for democrati-zation, the structural problems of civil society have remained in the post-2000 era. The level of citizen involve-ment with civil society organizations has remained low, despite the explod-ing number of these organizations. Thus, the role and capacity of these organizations in policy-making pro-cesses has remained limited (p. 147). However, recently, some civil societal organizations have grown prominent in creating public awareness, partic-ularly in terms of women's rights and more broadly human rights. İlkka-racan also provides an analysis of this prominence in terms of the women's movement as one of the leading forces in Turkish civil society today (p. 154).

Alongside the legacy of continuity, change also characterizes Turkish politics. Craving for inclusion in the European Union (initially to the Eu-ropean Economic Community) is a convenient ground to witness this change from the political institutions of the past, as well as the continuity of the modernization legacy. On the one hand, the intent to join the EU ap-pears as an outcome of the long-last-ing process of Westernization; on the other hand, it was proposed by the state elite as the tool for attain-ing the level of contemporary civili-zations. As Döşemeci too argues, the vast, multifaceted conversation about joining the EEC largely framed how

Turkish elites understood themselves, their people, their culture, and their state. Similar to the previous discussions on the Turkish modernization process, Döşemeci also postulates how the understanding of joining to the EEC was a matter of 'civilization.' However, the 'civilizational approach' as he puts it, was only one among many other factors. The international context –which included fear of communism, economic calculations to secure Western financial aid, and a strategic rationale *vis-à-vis* Greece's membership application "constitutes" some of these factors. The author constructs the main arguments by placing two historical-conceptual categories in dialogue: civilizational and nationalist logics. All in all, joining the EU has always been a matter of 'civilization,' and different political actors in Turkey have always conceived the process of democratization as a matter of 'civilization,' although the 'paths' and 'methods' to civilization have been envisioned differently. Döşemeci proposes that these differences have their origin and provenance in Turkey's past.

Bringing 'National Security' and the 'Survival of the State' Back in Turkish Politics?

The catalyst for the Ottoman modernization process was the goal of saving the state. This view was inherited by the republic and guided its efforts for Westernization. Since concerns about saving the state and state security are natural bedfellows, the discourse on 'national security and the survival of

the state' appeared inevitably. One of the platforms in which we come across this discourse is in the perception of Turkey-EU relations.

Döşemeci's description of national interest (or nationalist) logic is a befitting example at this point because joining the EU, as perceived through the lens of this logic, has mostly been characterized as a threat to national security and the unity of the nation state. At the beginning of Turkey-EEC relations, there was almost unanimous support for membership spearheaded by the state elites and the media. Nonetheless, there were groups opposed to Turkey's integration with the EEC. The common ground for this opposition was concern for 'national interest.' Within the national interest tradition, "the accusation of ignoring, opposing, and betraying the national interest has had far greater political currency than protecting or guarding it" (p. 5). I agree with Döşemeci on this point, since the discourse and tradition of 'national interest' as an exit door or legitimacy-creating tool has been utilized by many different political actors at different times in Turkey.

In terms of the democratic consolidation process, the discourse of 'national security' appears as one of the predominant impediments to the consolidation process in Turkey. Turan emphasizes a paradigm shift from security-maximization into prosperity maximization, and suggests that this shift might render a democratic consolidation more probable (p. 43). He states that security paradigm was

triggered and survived by the military coups. The institutionalization of the political role of the military as a result of highly polarized politics in Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s led to the continuation of the security paradigm (p. 57). Turan argues that since the 1980s, Turkish society has been making a long-term transition from a security maximization to a prosperity maximization paradigm. He proposes that the Özal and Erdoğan periods are characterized by a prosperity paradigm rather than a security paradigm (p. 63). In Turkish politics, where national security has been a dominant discourse, however, Turan's argument seems problematic. Although Özal and Erdoğan have spearheaded a considerable economic agenda and corresponding reforms, the political language of national security has persisted as an overarching motto in Turkish politics.

The Trajectory of Turkish Democracy and Conditionality

The analysis of external dynamics is also worthy of consideration. *Conditionality* in the international context seems to be one of the most apparent issues of consolidation that the three books put forward.

In locating Turkish democracy within a theoretical context of democratic consolidation, it is the general tendency in academia to refer to the Freedom House Annual Reports and to formulate analyses based on the 'free' or 'not free' typology of these reports. Çelik Wiltse brings an in-

valuable contribution in this sense by questioning why certain countries get stuck in the halfway house of 'partly free' status for decades, and comparing Turkey and Mexico, which she treats as test-cases for the *democratic contagion hypothesis*. To test the hypothesis, she establishes parallelism between Mexico-U.S. and Turkey-EU relations.

Although Mexico and Turkey have much in common in terms of their economic development, state-society relations, and state-economy interactions, the gap between Mexico and Turkey has recently been widening in terms of democratic reforms and consolidation. Despite the remaining problems of drug and human trafficking in Mexico, liberal tendencies seem to be rising in its political arena, while its Turkish equivalent keeps the inertia of 'partly free' status. Çelik Wiltse proposes that even though Mexico has underperformed in democratic reforms for years in comparison to Turkey, it has come through its democratic deficiencies more promptly. Turkey, on the other hand, was performing better, but it has underperformed in the last decades despite its close engagement with the EU. The author concludes that the consensual flow of democratic norms that NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) has provided for Mexico does not positively correlate with the ways in which the EU (through its Customs Union) has benefitted Turkey.

The stark contrast between U.S.-Mexico and EU-Turkey relations stems

from the issue of conditionality. While relations with the U.S. have brought extensive economic, socio-cultural, and political integration to Mexico, Turkey's relations with the EU have remained mostly political – that is, based on conditionality, and socio-economic and cultural integration have remained limited. Due to this conditionality, no consensus on the consolidation of democratic institutions could develop in Turkey.

Döşemeci's analysis underpins Çelik Wiltse's findings in assessing the impact of conditionality on Turkish democratization. Based on the post-1980 coup reactions of the U.S., NATO, the IMF, and the EEC, Döşemeci rightly illustrates how the support of Western democracies become strategic and conditional in certain times of crisis. To Döşemeci, the West's reactions to the 1980 military coup in Turkey contrasted with its response to Greece in 1967, "when the EEC came down hard on the junta" (p. 211). All in all, the analyses have valid grounds in arguing that conditionality in Turkey-West relations does not positively contribute to Turkish democracy. Instead, it curtains Turkey's vision in internalizing its experience with full-fledged democracy.

In Lieu of Conclusion

I think the most challenging element in writing about Turkish democracy is that the agenda changes so strikingly and rapidly, and the preexisting scholarly analyses require update.

Turkey's Democratization Process, for instance, cannot escape the short-coming of having some outdated analyses and information as mentioned earlier. The Turkish democratization process has hitherto been reviewed with an emphasis on the state and the dominating political discourse, thereby omitting the individual or the citizen. The disappearance or absence of the individual in Turkish politics illustrates the particular citizenship story in Turkish political life. The perception of the people starts as 'subjects' in the earlier period of the Ottoman Empire, continues as the 'passive recipients' of transformation and modernization in the late Empire and the early Republic, turns into 'citizens' but not-yet 'individuals' later on, and emerges as 'customers' in the 1980s and onward with Özal's economic reforms. Today, they appear to be 'netizens' as they are the active users of the new media to influence politics and to make their voices heard. The importance of media reappears at this point. But still, the conception of politics is not visualized separately in terms of state and society, in which individual voices remain neglected. ●

Endnotes

1. Robert A. Dahl, "What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 120, No. 2 (2005), pp. 187-197.

2. Dahl, "What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?," p. 187.

3. Özbudun and Gençkaya, (2009, p. 3) as cited in Rodríguez *et al*. (2014, p. 4). The original quotation signified the inability of the Turkish experience in constitution-making processes to create political institutions based on broad consensus.