Turkey, Its Changing National Identity and EU Accession: Explaining the Ups and Downs in the Turkish Democratization Reforms

ELISABETH JOHANSSON-NOGUÉS a,* & ANN-KRISTIN JONASSON b

a Institut Barcelona d’Estudis Internacionals (IBEI), Spain, b Centre for European Research at University of Gothenburg (CERGU), Sweden

ABSTRACT The analysis of the bumpy Turkish EU accession reform process has largely been steeped either in a Rational Institutionalist logic of ‘opportunity costs’ both for the EU and for Turkey, or assessed as a question of the Turkish (in)compatibility with European values. We have, in contrast, chosen to focus on a different variable—the changing Turkish national identity—in the context of the Turkish EU accession and democratization reforms. Exploring the dynamics of the Turkish national identity has allowed us to gain additional and tentatively more nuanced understandings about the Turkish reform process. The article discusses the advances and set-backs which the Turkish democratization reforms have experienced in the years spanning 2002–2010.

KEY WORDS: Turkey, national identity, European Union, accession process, democracy, reform

Academic analysis of the Turkish bid to join the European Union (EU) has broadly tended to fall into two categories. A first set of authors has scrutinized the Turkish accession process by way of the same conceptual parameters as applied to the Central and Eastern European countries in the context of Eastern enlargement 1997–2004. Their approach has been based on rational actors’ calculations of rewards and punishments, that is, ‘opportunity costs’, for carrying out reform (Park, 2000; Avci, 2005; Patton, 2007; Schimmelfennig, 2008; Çelenk, 2009). A second set of authors has tended to analyse EU—Turkey relations from the perspective of Turkey’s compatibility or not with the EU socio-economic, political and cultural identity (Muftüler-Bac, 2000; Emerson & Tocci, 2004; Schimmelfennig, 2009).

We find these approaches, while stimulating, insufficient to explain fully the ups and downs which the Turkish reform process has experienced from the period spanning the 2002 elections, which brought the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power, to the present day. The above mentioned sets of conceptual frameworks tend to conclude that external factors are the main explanatory factors for the acceleration as well as...
deceleration of the Turkish reform undertakings. Their argument would be that the EU, first by opening accession prospects, and later negotiations, is the principal rationale for motivating Turkish advances in democratic reform, while the Union’s subsequent perceived ‘back-tracking’ on EU membership promises is held to explain the recent reform sluggishness (Tocci, 2005). Turkey’s reform progress, according to such accounts, is largely a ‘victim’ of the treacherous whims of European capitals (Pridham, 2006; Onis, 2009; Ulusoy, 2009).1 Turkey is, in other words, viewed almost as a secondary actor in its own reform undertakings.

The purpose of the present article is to offer an alternative view on the Turkish reform process in the context of EU accession in the period spanning 2002–2010, with a special focus on efforts to deepen and consolidate Turkish democracy. While the EU undeniably acted as a catalyst for increased reform activity in Turkey, we contend that the internal dimension of the Turkish democratization efforts is much more important than it is usually given credit for in academic analysis. Our empirical findings point to a—perhaps surprisingly—less significant role for the EU as the principal factor explaining the ebbs and flows in the Turkish reform process. The article instead accords much more importance to the changing Turkish national identity as the factor which best explains both the progress on reforms (2002–2004) and the relative lack thereof (2005–onwards). By placing Turkish national identity centre-stage and by exploring how different Turkish actors have responded to the notion of a changing Turkishness in the past decade, with reference to different aspects related to the efforts to ‘deepen’ democracy in the country, we are confident that a more nuanced picture of Turkey as an aspirant to EU membership can be offered. Our account is, in the words of Polat (2006, p. 514) ‘less a case of European modernizers leading recalcitrant Turks out of ignorance and obscurity through top–down political reforms, than one of Turks reclaiming their agency via an empowered civil society’ and other relevant actors. However, opening the Pandora’s Box involved in re-defining national identity has not been an undivided blessing for Turkey, as we will see. Our conceptual approach thus helps us both to highlight advances as well as set-backs in the context of Turkey’s road to the EU and predict obstacles for future democratic reform processes.

The first section will provide some conceptual parameters related to collective identity formation and change. The second will describe the principal actors contributing to a changing Turkish identity. The third section will analyse the ups and downs of Turkish democratic aspirations in view of the conceptual parameters laid out and provide an assessment of the current state of affairs.

**Identities and the Changing Notion of Turkishness**

Identity, much simplified, can be said to be the outcome of a reiterated constitutive process composed of two distinct phases. First, a notion of a ‘Self’ is constructed and, second, the Self is inserted into a social context in which it interacts with and receives input from a set of specific and generic ‘Others’. The constitutive process then returns to the initial phase, where the external input is processed by the Self and either gives rise to a self-affirmation (preserving the Self as is) or a self-redefinition (allowing the Self to mutate, evolve and adapt to the social context).

Collective identities, such as those of states, nations, ethnic groups and so on, are formed in similar processes. In the first phase, the collective ‘we’ takes shape by assigning
the collective real or imagined attributes and meanings. These assignations contribute to
the perception of the group as individually distinctive and as different from other actors
(Snow, 2001). The feelings of a common bond, cause, threat and/or fate that constitute the
shared sense of ‘we’ also motivate groups of actors to act together in the name of the
collectivity (Steinberg, 1998). At the second stage the collective Self is placed in a social
context. Coming into contact with other actors (the Other) and/or specific social structures
unleashes dynamics whereby the collective either reaffirmsthe identity it has initially
attributed to itself or adapts the initial ‘we-ness’ to the new circumstances. Ignatieff (1998,
p. 18) therefore points out that the collective identity ‘is not fixed or stable: it is a
continuing exercise in the fabrication of illusion and the elaboration of convenient fables
about who “we” are and what significance ‘we’ have in relations to non-members of the
collective.

At times, the contact with the Other does not trigger a uniform response from the
collective Self. Some parts of the collective may feel positively vindicated by the Other,
while other parts of the same collective perceives that the external input highlights
shortcomings in the group’s identity. In the ensuing contestation of the Self, each of the
collective’s sub-groups tries to stress the identity traits (genres) which they think are the
most conducive to the collective Self as a whole. If conclusive, such dialectic processes
lead to a new identity synthesis (i.e. a modification of the notion of Self) (D’Andrade &
Johnson, 1983).

As highlighted by this approach, the Other may play a catalysing role in initiating the
dialectic, but external factors do not by themselves bring about the change. Rather, the
Other can be said to trigger change by drawing attention to existing non-congruent identity
genres contained within the collective Self. However, it is the interplay of internal
contradictions and the decision of in-group actors to opt for a new identity synthesis that
eventually brings about the actual change. As Ford and Ford (1994, p. 763) put it: ‘[i]n the
absence of these internal contradictions, the same external forces would have no
consequence.’ This interplay explains why some collectives respond to external stimulus
and others do not; it also explains why there is normally a considerable variety in observed
responses to external input when different collective Selves come into contact with the
same Other. 2

Most collectives are immersed in identity dialectics of this kind on a permanent basis.
For example, many countries in the world today are engaged in a constant domestic debate
as to whether the majority group is adequately providing for and guaranteeing the rights of
minority groups (e.g. ethnic, linguistic, social classes, etc.) as according to international
standards. Many countries are also constantly assessing the need or not to adapt their
national outlooks to current international tendencies, changing security climates, events in
neighbouring countries, and so on. In both cases the external stimulus may act to empower
sub-groups within the collective to begin questioning the status quo and advocating
change, and a new national identity synthesis may emerge if other parts of the collective
perceive such advocacy as legitimate. The constant scrutiny of the collective Self and its
identity are therefore, in many ways, dynamic processes which can be said to be essential
for the future cohesion, solidarity and well-being of the collective. Indeed, when such
introspection stops, the days of the collective as a single unit will begin to decay or face its
final countdown.

It is our contention that Turkey is currently involved in such an identity dialectics
process where the Turkish national identity is being contested by major social and political
actors. The dialectics was surely accelerated and catalysed by the EU decision to grant Turkey candidate status in 1999 and open negotiations in 2004. However, the essence of the current debate in regard to ‘Turkishness’ both precedes these dates and has evolved in parallel.

**Turkish Identity and Its Contending Actors**

The dominant Turkish identity discourse since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 has been Kemalism. This narrative arose with the Republic’s founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and centres on two essential genres: secularism (state control over religion) and nationalism (ethno-cultural homogeneity and territorial unity) (Patton, 2007). The expression of this variant of Turkishness has been a vision of a highly centralized state under tutelage of the Turkish armed forces, where individual freedoms (e.g. expressions of ethnic plurality and religion) are subordinated to the security, safety and unity of the Republic (Aydinli, 2009). Its adherents saw the Kemalist ideology as a formula to modernize Turkey and to transform the previous multinational and multi-religious Ottoman Empire into a nation-state with a modern administrative structure and coherent national identity (Kadıoğlu, 1996; Ulusoy, 2009). The Kemalist narrative can therefore be thought of, as Kadıoğlu (1996, p. 177) argues, as essentially ‘a manufactured, official identity’ based on identity genres which prior to 1923 were unknown to the population at large in Turkey. However, even if it lacked organic roots inside Turkey, Kemalism became accepted by a majority of Turks during the early years of the Republic and later during the Cold War as a necessary means by which to consolidate the nascent Turkish Republic amid domestic fears of further externally imposed divisions of the Republic (i.e. the Sèvres syndrome), and in an international bipolar context plagued by superpower tensions (Aydinli, 2009; Sarigil, forthcoming). Kemalism remained the dominant identity discourse throughout the bipolar era and, in spite of repeated attempts to challenge its dominance, it remained fairly unquestioned by most of the population.

As the Cold War was coming to an end, however, a more relaxed domestic and international climate in Turkey enabled a host of previously suppressed identity discourses to resurface and take on a more prominent role in Turkish social and political life. These previously marginalized sectors of social and political debate would experience a significant advance in the 1990s, although many of them had already begun to coalesce in the 1970s and 1980s. As Yilmaz (2009, p. 57) notes:

> the 1990s were a time of economic, political as well as cultural crises. Perhaps the most important facet of politics in the 1990s was the politicisation of identities. It was the first time that there appeared on the public political scene movements organised around Kurdish, Sunni Muslim and Alevi identities. This was quickly followed by political and civic movements, which attempted to mobilise their followers by appeals to gender, region, life/style, sexual choice, age and other subjective and mostly symbolic issues, feelings and attachments.

In the new domestic and international context, the Kemalist ideology thus found itself having to share the public space with other increasingly prominent and cohesive identity discourses, as other groups both in the political elite and civil society gained increased public acceptance (Kadıoğlu, 2005).
A first prominent testimony to Turkey changing were the 1995 electoral gains of the Refah Party, a political party organized around an Islamist platform. The outcome of the general election meant that for the first time in the history of the Republic, the office of the Prime Minister was held by a person not stemming from the usual Kemalist circles. This event was monumental, as Yavuz (1997, p. 63) argues, in that it ‘marked a psychological break in Turkish history’ and indicated that voters were ‘searching for new relations between state and society’. However, once in office—in coalition with the centre-right True Path Party (TPP)—the Refah Party’s rather narrow focus on religious-ideological issues would provoke irritation not only from the parliament and its coalition partner, but even among its own adherents and among those wishing to see Islam as a more prominent element in the national identity. For example, Refah’s continuous confrontation with the secular elements of the State resulted in restrictions on practising Islamic rituals in public, and party leader Necmettin Erbakan’s rapprochements with countries such as Iran and Libya further alienated moderate Muslims from the party (Kalyoncu, 2006). Hence, rather than sparking an effective dialectic among sub-groups to produce a new national identity synthesis and opening up to greater diversity, Erbakan’s party contributed to a public rejection of the narrowly constructed identity genres the Refah offered. The coalition government was eventually ousted in 1997 in a so-called ‘soft coup’ by the Turkish armed forces (Patton, 2007, p. 340).

Yet another opportunity for scrutinizing national identity would appear with the European Union’s decision to grant Turkey EU candidate status in 1999, which initially generated great public expectation of a deep and sustained overhaul of democracy in Turkey. However, political infighting in the coalition government composed of the Democratic Left Party (DSP), the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and the Motherland Party (ANAP) which had come to power in 1999, resulted in lacklustre reform efforts. The coalition government’s failure to deliver undermined the Turkish public’s confidence that the traditional Kemalist political parties could spearhead reform. The 2002 general elections therefore sent a strong message for change. This was not only obvious from the strong electoral showing by non-traditional political parties (AKP) and independent candidates (pro-Kurdish), but also the virtual obliteration of the traditional political parties, with the exception of the Republican People’s Party (CHP).

The 2002 general elections can therefore be said to have consolidated and legitimized the contribution of two particular groups of actors—the AKP and pro-Kurdish forces—to the current debate on what Turkey is and what Turkishness entails. These two actors, together with Kemalists, have become dominant voices in a densely populated Turkish political and social landscape. The view of national identity which the AKP represents—which is not necessarily representative of all Turkish Islamic groups or political parties—is decidedly much more plural, even if perhaps much less clear-cut, in terms of what specific identity genres it is trying to advance compared to Kemalism. The AKP appears to want to perform a delicate balancing act between secular and religious interests, and between the ethnic Turkish majority and Kurdish, Armenian and other minority groups (Kuzmanovic, 2004). The AKP also professes less inclination for the controlled democracy so characteristic of Kemalists, championing more openness and transparency in government and governance, although, as we will see, such liberalism also appears to have its limits.

The third voice which has gained an increasingly central, if somewhat intermittent, role in Turkish social and political life since the 1990s is that of the Kurds. The pro-Kurdish
advocates are neither as strong, nor as cohesive, as the Kemalist camp or, the relatively so, AKP supporters. The internationally best known pro-Kurdish group is the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), but other pro-Kurdish activists include national political parties (e.g. People’s Democracy Party (HADEP) and its different successors), members of AKP and political and social organizations. The pro-Kurdish camp is united in its desire to see greater political recognition and socio-economic improvements for the Kurdish people living in Turkey. However, they are divided over the approaches to achieve such an aim (whether by full independence or within the framework of the Turkish state). This is a division which inevitably dilutes their overall impact on Turkish politics (Uslu, 2007). Unlike the separatist PKK, the pro-Kurdish non-separatist groups champion a more diverse Turkish national identity and citizenship definition, which include recognition of Turkish and Kurdish ethnicity, cultures and minority languages (Yegen, forthcoming). The non-separatists would also like to see greater democracy, rule of law, guarantees for human rights and more regional autonomy (less centralized Turkish state), which they claim would benefit both Kurds and Turks.

There are thus three principal sub-groups engaged in the current dialectic on the Turkish national identity (Kemalists, AKP and Kurds). This marks a difference compared to only two decades ago where the national discourse was the jealously guarded exclusive terrain of a fairly repressive and orthodox Kemalism. However, our discussion here of these three sub-groups should not be read as entailing any prejudice towards other actors, such as the emerging Turkish civil society, whose lobbying activity and associations are becoming increasingly capable of contributing to national identity-debates as well. Our chosen trio here only serves the purpose of typifying three of the currently most dominant contributors to a changing Turkishness. It is also worth noting that these three sub-groups are not necessarily adversaries, with exclusive and non-compatible identity outlooks. They are also, perhaps paradoxically, potential partners for each other in driving certain identity-related issues towards a new synthesis. As we will see, they overlap on a number of issues relating to how the State should be organized (democratization, greater social liberalization), while they diverge on the speed, depth and the specific content of some of these reforms. The jury is therefore still out on how this identity brokerage among political elites and between elite and public will shape and push Turkishness in the early decades of the twenty-first century.

The Turkish Democracy Reform Process

The initial impetus to conform to the EU conditionality on democracy can, as we have seen, be traced to the DSP–MHP–ANAP coalition government in 1999–2002. However, the major push for reform would come after the 2002 elections, when the AKP accelerated reforms; six major reform packages prompted by EU accession criteria were passed between 2003 and 2004. We contend that democratic reform in Turkey was possible and perceived as advancing relatively smoothly in the period 2002–2004 because of two factors. First, the democratization reforms undertaken related to relatively uncontroversial aspects concerning the ‘deepening’ of the Turkish democracy (e.g. improving governance, administrative improvements) and hence did not touch any of the more sensitive issues of national identity. Second, some of the more controversial reforms introduced in this period (e.g. greater political rights for the Kurds, civil–military relations) could still be adopted with relative ease, because the needed identity re-definitions or synthesis which allow
these reforms to be acceptable to Turkish society at large had already emerged prior to their adoption. Democratic reform would, however, begin to slow from 2005 onwards once the practical implications of the EU accession related reforms became clear at the stage of implementation. Social and political contestation would also grow as some of the more sweeping reforms entered into the stage of implementation or when the AKP government began to touch controversial topics where positions are still too far apart to be able to produce a new synthesis on Turkish national identity. It is increasingly evident that the massive collective identity re-think which is inherently interlinked with further progress on democratic reform in Turkey is a nationally painful process, and even if advances have been made, the consolidation of such progress is still far from self-evident. Some of the spinier issues are, for example, civil liberties, the expansion of Kurdish rights and the balanced relationship between different state bodies.

**Civil Liberties**

There is long-standing public pressure in Turkey to change the Turkish Constitution, which is held to be repressive of individual liberties.\(^6\) The DSP–MHP–ANAP coalition government began reform in the framework of the EU’s democracy conditionality with the passage of a series of bills in 2001 and 2002 regarding the easing of restrictions on broadcasting and education in minority languages other than Turkish and lifting the state of emergency in the Kurdish provinces. The incoming AKP government continued these efforts, and additional reform packages were accepted by the parliament, including crucial reforms in areas of freedom of speech, cultural rights and freedom of association. The fourth reform package (January 2003) includes thirty-two articles and envisages amendments to sixteen different laws to strengthen civil and political liberties, including a lifting of restrictions on freedom of association.

However, since then, enthusiasm for reform has been significantly reduced both in government circles and in the political opposition camp. Two concrete examples of issues where positions are too far apart to admit an identity synthesis are the use of the headscarf in public institutions, and the repeal of Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code relating to freedom of speech.

First, the AKP, since in government, has tried to soften and/or revoke the Constitutional prohibitions of Islamic symbols in public places. According to a Gallup poll, nearly half of the Turkish women wear a headscarf (Rheault, 2008). The AKP, alongside growingly active Turkish women—and human rights organizations on this matter (cf. Kadioğlu, 2005), has since its first legislature championed the cause of those women who would like to wear a headscarf in public institutions, but it has met staunch opposition both from Kemalists and, perhaps more surprisingly, from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In 2008, the AKP succeeded in pushing through a parliamentary proposal for an amendment to the Constitution, making it possible for women to attend university wearing the headscarf. The Government has couched its discourse on the headscarf as being a symbol of greater individual liberties and basic religious freedoms by allowing for expressions of faith and Islamic identity in public life (Patton, 2007, p. 348).\(^7\) Later the same year, the law was nevertheless declared incompatible with the principles of the Constitution, by the strongly conservative Kemalist Constitutional court.\(^8\) The headscarf ban had earlier, in 2005, been submitted to review at the ECHR, which in its verdict upheld the headscarf ban in universities (Leyla Şahin v. Turkey). Since then, ECHR judges
have rejected more than a hundred applications from students wearing headscarves (Turkish Weekly, 2006). The ECHR’s judgment has further buoyed the arguments of the more orthodox Kemalist supporters that allowing female headscarves in public institutions would represent a much feared Islamization of Turkish social and public life and a serious reversal of the cherished principle of state secularism as a keystone in the Turkish national identity.

However, with opinion polls and specific studies indicating a gradually growing popular acceptance of headscarves, the issue is a difficult one to ignore even for the Kemalist camp (Toprak & Uslu, 2008). An illustrative example of this took place during the 2009 local elections, when the Kemalist CHP tried to attract the conservative and devout Muslim voters by, for the first time in the party’s history, proclaiming party membership open to veiled women. This trial balloon backfired somewhat, nevertheless, when a (normally non-veiled) member of CHP (Kıymet Özugür), wishing to test the party’s resolve on the matter dressed up in a black hijab concealing her face and tried to get onto an election bus in Istanbul and was for this viciously attacked by the CHP members onboard the bus (Today’s Zaman, 2009a). The incident raised questions both about the adequacy of the communication lines between party leadership and grass root levels, but also about the sincerity of the CHP’s initiatives in favour of religious freedoms. The incident still points to the fact that even traditionally Kemalist political parties are trying to grapple with formulas to broaden their interpretations of the Turkish national identity.

Second, sections of Turkish civil society have long pushed for greater freedom of speech, which although in some respects is ample, has certain areas which are off-limits. The advocates for greater freedom of speech thus saw support for their quest in the EU accession process. At the core of the controversy is Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code which penalizes any act of ‘insulting Turkishness’. The Article has been used frequently in the past decades to silence politicians, intellectuals or journalists, for example Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk, who has in many ways questioned the secular and unitary state of affairs in Turkey or offered different interpretations of what Turkish national identity is and should be. The outspoken Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who had repeatedly been critical of both Turkey’s denial of the Armenian genocide and of the Armenian diaspora’s campaign for its international recognition had been convicted several times under Article 301. Dink was in 2007 tragically assassinated by an ultra-nationalist who disagreed with the journalist’s ideas (Özel, 2008). This act shows that determined groups are fearful of the consequences of the types of reinterpretation of the Turkish national identity proffered by Pamuk, Dink and others.

Reacting to strong social pressure for change in 2008—with an active civil society, writers and intellectuals playing a significant role—the AKP pushed through a motion in the parliament to reform, but not abolish, Article 301 as some elements of public opinion and activists (as well as the EU) had demanded. According to the new, less restrictive wording, Article 301 penalizes ‘insulting the Turkish nation’ and requires the permission of the Minister of Justice to file a case. Nevertheless, while the reference to the Minister of Justice might stem the tide of politically motivated Article 301 trials, the new phraseology does not sufficiently guarantee protection for freedom of speech and hence does not represent a redress of the much criticized Penal Code adopted in June 2005 which stiffened penalties for the expression of opinions deemed to insult the nation or harm national interests (Patton, 2007). The AKP government seems to side with the conservative Kemalists on being reluctant to allow greater freedoms of speech and Prime Minster
Erdogan has even warned major newspapers to control their columnists (Cumhuriyet, 2010). Turkish opinion polls reveal that public opinion remains divided over the Prime Minister’s action. When asked about rising tension between some columnists and Erdogan, 51.3 per cent said the latter was wrong in his statements to ask the former to restrain themselves (Today’s Zaman, 2010c).

In sum, whether in terms of the headscarf or in terms of Article 310, there is a decided social demand for greater personal freedoms in Turkey which resonates rather well with the EU’s democracy criteria. However, in the absence of a consensus in terms of the degree of freedom such greater civil liberties should reach, no new Turkish identity synthesis has been forthcoming. The headscarf continues to be a moot point for those who see it as a symbolic first step towards what they fear will become a slippery slope of greater Islamization of Turkish society. Article 301 has become a bone of contention between those who hope for a rejuvenated and more vigorous social debate matching any mature West European democracy, and those who fear where that will lead in terms of safeguarding traditional values and ways of life, as well as perhaps eventually fragmenting and eroding the basis for the continued existence of the Turkish Republic.

The Kurdish Issue

The attempts to bring Turks and Kurds together into a collective and plural Turkish-Kurdish ‘we-ness’ have been extraordinarily complex. The 1999–2002 Ecevit coalition government, prodded by the EU, would take some modest first steps by including provisions opening up broadcasting and education to mother tongues other than Turkish (Gurkan & Beris, 2004). The 2002 AKP electoral victory drew many votes from many of Turkey’s predominantly Kurdish provinces and therefore appeared to provide a much broader reformist mandate for the Government ‘to launch a new democratic opening to deal with the Kurdish problem while fighting separatist terrorism’ (Ozel, 2008, p. 10). A reform package of 23 January 2003 paves the way for a retrial of imprisoned Kurdish Democracy Party (DEP) deputies. Further reforms the same year included the repeal of Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law and extending freedom of broadcasting in Kurdish. Moreover, the package provides guarantees for the use of Kurdish names. The AKP government also passed a reform package in 2004 that expanded educational and cultural rights for minorities, in particular granting the right to teach the Turkish language. In a speech in Diyarbakir in August 2005, Erdogan expressed his determination to resolve the ‘Kurdish problem’ through democratic means (Patton, 2007, p. 339), implicitly recognizing that the Kurdish problem was not simply an economic and security issue (Onis, 2009, p. 30), but also had other dimensions (linguistic, identities, etc.) which needed to be effectively resolved through the democratic process.

The reform process would meet setbacks when in 2005 the Turkish Constitutional Court banned the pro-Kurdish political party HADEP on charges of aiding the PKK and carrying out activities challenging the State. The proscription did not elicit much comment from the AKP government, in spite of the fact that such a ban is highly controversial in a democratic setting and in spite of strongly voiced EU concerns. In December 2009 the Court also shut down the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) on similar charges of links with the outlawed PKK. The EU called the 2005 case a troubling departure from the Turkish political and democratic reform efforts, and the Commission and the European...
Parliament were put off further by a retrospective Turkish decision the same year to uphold the Constitutional Court’s verdict (Avci, 2005).

In 2009 the AKP tried to launch a second and much expanded reform process, the so-called Democratization/Kurdish initiative to come to terms finally with the long-standing Kurdish problem. The initiative held out the prospect of greater recognition of Kurdish minority rights, such as Kurdish education, changing village names into Kurdish ones, as well as accelerating the implementation process of the Kurdish-related reforms already adopted under recent reform packages. However, this initiative also met staunch opposition from different quarters.

Kemalists have consistently pointed to the risk to the unity of the nation of all pro-Kurdish initiatives. Kemalists tend to assert that EU-conditionality on minority guarantees has weakened the Turkish state, acts to undermine the effective fight against terrorism and encourages Kurdish separatism (Patton, 2007, p. 346). This was the thrust of the irate response by Turkish Armed Forces General İlker Başbuğ, when in 2004 the European Commission urged Ankara to ensure greater cultural and political rights for the Kurdish people. Başbuğ stated that ‘nobody can demand or expect Turkey to make collective arrangements for a certain ethnic group in the political arena, outside the cultural arena, that would endanger the nation-state structure as well as the unitary state structure’ (cited in Yegen, forthcoming, p. 11). However, there have also been divisions in the ranks between more conservative and more progressive Kemalists. The then CHP parliamentary group deputy chairman, now party leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu triggered some controversy within his own party when in early 2010, speaking before a Kurdish audience, he expressed his backing for the idea of a general amnesty inherent in the Democratization initiative if that would help settle the Kurdish issue. The then CHP leader Deniz Baykal, however, denied that Kılıçdaroğlu’s statement reflected any official policy line by the party (Today’s Zaman, 2010d). Kılıçdaroğlu later retracted his words, but his statement reveals that Kemalists are beginning to recognize that the traditional Kemalist approach of suppression has not worked and that there is a need to re-think the Kurdish issue.

A second source of opposition to the Government’s Democratization initiative is a set of Kurdish activists. The PKK, on the one hand, perceives itself to be the target of the reform process and fears that the AKP initiative is aimed at destroying the party’s internal cohesion (Today’s Zaman, 2009c). Also the recently banned Kurdish Democratic Society Party, DTP, decided against supporting the initiative, stating that it could only support such a move if the Government was ‘taking steps for the sake of the people and the elimination of violence, not only for the elimination of the PKK’ (Today’s Zaman, 2009c). Other pro-Kurdish groups are sceptical of the Government’s overtures because of the AKP’s inconsistent line on Kurdish issues. Ever since the regional government in Iraqi Kurdistan was established in 2004, the AKP has displayed considerable ambivalence towards the Turkish Kurds, more often than not appearing to side with the Kemalist fear of Kurdish secession and a weakened Turkish state. As Yegen (forthcoming, p. 13) reports, this has given rise to a ‘policy of disengagement’ where state agencies have refrained from co-operation with pro-Kurdish DTP municipalities or failed to implement Kurdish rights provided for by Turkish laws. There has also been an increase in court cases against Kurdish mayors or Kurdish parliamentary deputies for speaking Kurdish during public service. These cases of official discrimination against the Kurds and their representatives have at many levels undermined the credibility of the AKP government among Kurds to
spearhead the democratization reform processes and catalyse a new identity synthesis whereby both Turkish and Kurdish identity genres are catered to.

Turkish public opinion appears unsurprisingly to be divided on the AKP’s Democratization initiative. Initially, one opinion poll stated that while 43 per cent approved of it, 39 per cent opposed it (Today’s Zaman, 2009b). Interestingly, however, as many as 62 per cent disapproved of the negative attitude of both the Kemalist and the Kurdish opposition to the initiative, encouraging Dagi (2009) to draw the conclusion that ‘people are more progressive than the pro-status quo forces assume’, and that ‘they want to see some new methods employed to address the Kurdish question’. Based on data on social integration, the statistics also show among Turks and Kurds a ‘public will to live together in a democratic and plural country’ (Dagi, 2009). However, the same polls also show that Turks fear that the enhancement of Kurdish rights may eventually foster a secessionist movement and a full 70 per cent of the Turks polled worry that the Kurds want to establish an independent state (Dagi, 2009).

The experience of the AKP Democratization initiative appears to indicate that the Turkish public today is deeply divided over introducing major changes in Kurdish rights as expected by EU conditionality. The tribulations of the AKP’s Kurdish overtures vividly reveal the difficulty the ethnic Turkish majority is experiencing in accommodating the Kurdish ethnic identity within a plural Turkish-Kurdish collective ‘we’. The Turkish majority seems to want both to give greater rights to the Kurdish, and other minorities, similar to what most minorities enjoy in Western European societies, while also fearing the consequences of such rights for the unity of the country and the cohesiveness of the State. Consequently, no identity synthesis has been forthcoming in relation to the Kurdish issue. The Kurds themselves have not been able to play more than a modest role in driving forward a new Turkish-Kurdish identity synthesis for their internal division into numerous platforms and, hence, their political fragmentation, as well as for the PKK’s firm belief that the Kurdish issue can only be resolved by armed conflict and secession.

Reform of State Institutions and Guaranteeing the Separation of Powers

The AKP has continued the path initiated by the Ecevit coalition government in terms of reforming state institutions. The period encompassing 2002–2004 saw rapid reforms in response to EU democracy criteria, contributing to a realignment of power and the right of initiative among different state bodies in Turkey. Since 2005, however, the advances towards changing the state structure in conformity with EU stipulations have met greater resistance, especially in relation to the armed forces, judiciary, presidency and government.

First, the period 2002–2004 saw important reforms involving the armed forces such as the July 2003 reform package which eliminated the structural means with which the Turkish military has influenced the political system in the past and introduced greater scrutiny of military expenditure. The package also introduced changes in the structure of the National Security Council (NSC), importantly making civilian representatives outnumber military. Furthermore, the parliament approved a bill in December 2003, attempting to remove policies of secrecy governing the NSC’s staff, by-laws and regulations, and allowing decisions on these matters to be published in the Government’s Official Gazette (Avci, 2005, pp. 139–140). There have also been reforms to abolish the State Security Courts and provide parliament with full control over the military budget.
The bill passed on the 14 July 2004 also ended the practice of having members of the military sitting on the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), Supreme Board of Radio and Television (RTUK), Communication High Council and the Council of Protecting Minors from Harmful Publications. In 2010 the Government asserted its democratic right of oversight over the military branches and of suspending military personnel.

The deeper reforms which came after 2005 have met greater resistance as a consequence of touching highly sensitive issues for the armed forces. The Turkish military has traditionally enjoyed a large and respected role in Turkish political life, and internally they have reacted with ambivalence towards their now much more circumscribed role in public life (Aydinli, 2009). The military leadership, responding to what seems to be the logic of more progressive Kemalism, has been rather acquiescent to this reduced role and to the armed forces conceding greater public accountability. Indeed, the AKP government and the military leadership have collaborated on many fronts and, on others, the armed forces have taken their own initiatives. Still, the sweeping change to the military’s rationale and identity in a new Turkish identitarian landscape has not been to the liking of some segments in the military. The latter, in the spirit of conservative Kemalism, have assigned the military a ‘self-ascribed, historically determined role as guardian of authoritarian secularism’ (Patton, 2007, p. 353) and as a guarantee of state unity. Over recent years there have been several allegations of military coup attempts against the AKP government, which have been referred to the wider Ergenekon trials. Moreover, the highest echelons of the military have also accused the Government of having launched a smear campaign against the military and having fabricated evidence against it, aiming to undermine its power. The then General Chief of staff, İlker Başbuğ, has even—in a much criticized statement—asserted that the military at one point might ‘run out of patience’ (Today’s Zaman, 2010a).

The Turkish armed forces are therefore in the grips of a process of identitarian redefinition of their role and core purpose in the reforming Turkish state. As a consequence, reforms are not unequivocal. At the same time, as the Protocol on Co-operation for Security and Public Order (EMASYA), used by the military to take charge of internal security when law and order broke down, has been shelved, there has been no repeal of Article 35 of the internal service regulation of the army, which gives the military the duty to protect and secure the Turkish Republic from ‘internal threats’ (Today’s Zaman, 2010b). The armed forces have also been supported by the Turkish Constitutional Court which in January 2010 annulled the law (celebrated by both the AKP and the EU) making it possible to try military personnel in civilian courts (Star Online, 2010). The Court’s ruling was, however, later overturned by the September 2010 referendum on the Turkish Constitution.

Second, another state institution which has come under scrutiny as a consequence of democratization reform efforts is the judiciary. In the period 2002–2004, there were timid attempts to reform the 1982 Constitution in terms of the Turkish justice system. In March 2010, an encompassing constitutional reform package was introduced in the Turkish Parliament including a whole new set-up and functioning of the Constitutional Court and Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), which appoints all judges and prosecutors in the country, as well as legal arrangements to make it more difficult for the Constitutional Court to close political parties; it also paves the way for civilian courts to try military personnel (Draft constitutional amendments proposal, 2010). The constitutional reform package was submitted to the September 2010 referendum and the public gave it broad backing.
However, similarly to the military, the judiciary has reacted ambivalently when faced with reforms. For instance, when the MHP appealed the 2002 reform package to the Constitutional Court, the appeal was rejected (Avci, 2005, p. 136). However, the dominant discourse of the judiciary has since 2005 been decidedly more conservatively Kemalist, and the judiciary has been taking upon itself the role of the last bulwark upholding the founding principles of the Republic. In terms of the 2010 reform package, the Constitutional Court has admitted that constitutional reform is needed in order to improve its democratic credentials to support Turkey’s bid for EU membership, but it must be achieved through a ‘broad consensus’, according to the progressive Kemalist Court Chairman Hasim Kilic, to avoid unnecessary tension and heavy damage (Star Online, 2010). The judiciary appears concerned with the direction national identity is taking with the AKP-promoted reforms, namely towards de-Kemalization of state institutions, and their unease is manifested in their staunch intents to halt the process. According to Patton (2007, p. 349), ‘[t]he judicial branch’s illiberal, anti-democratic views stem from its statist priorities that put the interests of the state above the rights of individuals.’ Judicial independence is thus a pending assignment in Turkey, due to clashing world views and lack of an identity synthesis.

Third, yet another institution which has undergone reformist change is the office of the presidency. In the 2002–2004 period there were no reforms relating to the presidency. However, in 2007, the term of President Sezer came to an end, and a new President was to be elected. As pointed out by Özel (2008), the presidency has enormous symbolic political significance in Turkey. In a general sense, the presidency represents the power of the civilian and bureaucratic elites over the civilian political class, the secularist state elite’s interests and prerogatives vis-à-vis the elected government (Özel, 2008, p. 6). The 2007 election of Abdullah Gül as President therefore caused a stir in most of the conservative Kemalist strongholds.

It has been argued that the AKP’s insistence on pressing for Gül’s candidacy was causing unnecessary tension between different branches of the State. Moreover, Özel (2008, p. 11) asserts that ‘[a]rguably, their [AKP] militancy in electing Gül lost them the trust of many who are not their natural constituents and contributed to the continuation of the polarisation over secularism.’ Oniş (2009, p. 32) also contends that the AKP endorsement of the Gül presidency contributed to a ‘further polarization of Turkish society and to a parallel increase in political instability’ for its lack of resonance with the desires of a general population. Still, Oniş (2009, p. 25) also finds that:

the chain of events associated with the broad nationalistic backlash involving the ‘e-intervention’ on the party of the military during a presidential election process and the subsequent ‘Republican rallies’ proved to be rather counterproductive [for Kemalists] in the electoral sphere. Ironically, this set of events has helped to punish the nationalistic parties on the right and the left of the political spectrum. In fact, paradoxically the AKP was able to enlarge its base of electoral support in the months leading up to the general election in 2007 as vast segments of the Turkish electorate displayed their resentment against top–down interventionism in the democratic political progress.

Özdalga (2008) contends that:
The CHP increasingly used the politics of fear and, in a quest to defend secularism at all costs, it projected the image of being prepared to sacrifice democracy in defence of republican values. Indeed, the party leadership demonstrated its willingness to ally with the military by endorsing the ‘e-intervention’ in April 2007.

The CHP’s readiness to support such anti-democratic measures—together with a less than consistent election campaign in the 2009 elections—has translated into a loss of votes for the party. The ‘e-intervention’ of 27 April 2007, and the Ergenekon case thus show how sensitive the issue of a pro-Islamist political leadership is to the conservative Kemalists within the military, and the judiciary.

Finally, the Government as a state institution and actor in Turkish political life has become more prominent. The consequences of the reform process of other state bodies have entailed a redistribution of power of initiative and action that has favoured the Government more than any other institution, compared to previous administrations. In the struggle for democratization, the Government has gained increasing powers at the expense of the military and the judiciary. However, the Government is still facing strong resistance, not least from the judiciary and the opposition, making the task of implementing certain national policies related to Turkey’s endeavours to achieve a ‘deepened’ democracy arduous.

The realignment of power and the right of initiative among state bodies was meant to design a different governance system in terms of relations between state bodies and the separation of power in Turkey. However, the Turkish people are divided over how they regard this realignment. According to the 2007 World Values Survey, an overwhelming majority of 93.1 per cent think that a democratic political system is a very or fairly good way to govern the country (World Values Survey, 2010). At the same time, it is difficult to ignore that a substantial part of the Turkish population (33.8 per cent) thinks that having the army rule is very or fairly good, and as many as 50.1 per cent agree, to a greater or lesser extent, that it is an essential characteristic of democracy for the army to take over when the Government is incompetent, whereas 49.8 per cent does not (World Values Survey, 2010).

Such ambivalent opinions are also evident in terms of the Turkish public’s perceptions of the Government. On the one hand, as Aydinli (2009, p. 587) would have it, the Turkish public’s confidence in government has been boosted by the AKP’s stable and strong political leadership. Such public approval is surely based on memories of the relative instability and ineffectiveness of the many pluri-party coalitions which had governed the country prior to 2002. On the other hand, the AKP government’s approval ratings still trail other state bodies’, often for being seen as pursuing party interests more than state interests. Polls show that while 63.6 per cent has a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Government, 86.4 per cent of those polled has a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the army and 75.7 per cent has a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the judiciary (World Values Survey, 2010). People appear in general to favour a lessened political role for the military and the judiciary in Turkey’s political life. At the same time, the public however still seems to expect these bodies to be the utmost guarantors in terms of national security and stability. The pragmatic, albeit nebulous, middle-ground—captured in the slogan ‘[n]either Shari’a nor Coup’ (Aydinli, 2009, p. 587)—seems to be the new character trait of Turkishness capturing a wide following.
The separation of powers in the Turkish state has, as we have seen, become yet another battlefield prompted by EU democracy conditionality where status quo actors and progressive forces clash. All state bodies seem to contain reformist segments which embrace the chance for a shift in the division of formal powers between the different institutions, while at the same time also being home to elements which are reluctant to change in the current set-up. The question of the best way of ensuring separation of powers—the foundations of a solid democratic order—is therefore proving highly divisive. Moreover, the lack of trust among the different state bodies also appears to hinder the necessary redistribution of power. Finally, public ambivalence to such reform processes poses severe impediments to finding a new formula to advance towards greater separation of powers and a solid democracy. The continued identity dialectic inside and between different state bodies as well as between the State and the public therefore currently constitutes a serious impediment for Turkey’s ever deepening democratization processes.

In the above discussion we have tried to illustrate the different forces currently pushing and shaping the evolving Turkish national identity, as well as the main conditioning factors in the move towards a ‘deepening’ of democracy in Turkey. As we have seen, the EU plays a rather secondary role in this process. The Union was without doubt a key catalyst in triggering the reforms in specific areas of democracy through the accession conditionality. Moreover, the Union’s values, in an abstract sense, have undoubtedly provided the basis for reformist thinking although, as Kuzmanovic (2004, p. 5) interestingly notes, such values have become the focus of a highly plural interpretation of their meaning and implementation among different sub-groups inside Turkey. However, in the aftermath of its decision to grant Turkey candidate status and open negotiations, the EU subsequently became, as we have tried to show, a rather peripheral actor to the Turkish reform processes.18 Put differently, the EU (as the Other) has indeed stimulated debates by drawing attention to existing non-congruent identity genres in reference to democracy contained within the collective Turkish Self. The actual reform process for eventually achieving a truly ‘deepened’ democratic governance is, however, largely endogenous and responds to the interplay of internal contradictions and actors inside Turkey. This metamorphosis has so far, as we have also seen, only begun and in many areas of reform a new Turkish identity synthesis has yet to coalesce.

We therefore maintain that the EU as an anchor for democratic consolidation is less significant in Turkey, than it was in the case of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). In contrast to the latter, the prospect of EU membership has not triggered a uniform democratic reform process in Turkey, but left the country divided. Maybe then, as Burnell (2008, p. 39) hints, for the EU ‘the easy “victories” have now been won’ as a chaperone of democratic transformation in candidate countries. The Union’s alleged ‘transformative power’ (Leonard, 2005) will perhaps be demonstrated over time as having been limited to the post-communist CEECs. Turkey—and the Western Balkan countries—has so far proven to be much more resistant to the Union’s transformational wand. This in turn raises difficult questions about the effectiveness of the EU’s democracy conditionality. Conditionality and external incentives may be efficient for rule adoption (cf. Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005), but nonetheless such incentives may be less relevant in relation to rule implementation and true democratic consolidation. Indeed, as the same authors (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005, p. 210) point out themselves, ‘the influence of the EU depends on the initial conditions in the candidate countries’.
For countries that are not democratic front-runners, ‘EU democratic conditionality [is] not sufficient to bring about democratization and democratic consolidation’ (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005, p. 214). Sustained compliance with democratic reform therefore needs convinced domestic stakeholders capable of bringing about a national consensus to underpin such processes. Turkey thus has to rely on its domestic political and social will to deepen democratic reform and a national identity synthesis, rather than on EU democratic conditionality. The encouraging sign is that these debates are presently underway, and involve both state and society in a fairly broad fashion. This indicates that the Turkish collective ‘we’ is a dynamic matter and such dynamism is bound to prove essential for the cohesion, solidarity and well-being of Turkey in the twenty-first century.

Conclusions

Since the foundation of the Republic, the dominant discourse on the Turkish national identity has been in the hands of the secular, Kemalist elites and perceived by its followers as essential glue for holding the Turkish state together. Today, this monolithic Kemalism has given way to a much more plural, if yet open-ended, identitarian landscape of what constitutes Turkishness. Such cognitive change has, as we have noticed, been accelerated in the context of the EU accession. However, for want of a new clear-cut identity synthesis on a host of issues related to the reform processes, democratic ‘deepening’ has become a stop–start exercise.

Our article has highlighted some issues which have sparked most controversy in the context of Turkish democratization reforms. After the initial honeymoon period (2002–2004) where things mostly went smoothly, as the foundations of the State were largely left untouched and the reform packages proposed were largely in line with the existing identity synthesis of the collective ‘we’, things began to change. As from 2005 onwards, Turks have had to face deep challenges to the social and political system they were familiar with. First, in terms of civil liberties there is great public support for greater individual freedoms and freedom of expression in Turkey, but no new identity synthesis has so far been possible. The question of freedom of expression has become pivotal between those who hope for a rejuvenated and more vigorous social debate on par with any Western European mature democracy, and those who fear where that will lead in terms of safeguarding traditional values and ways of life, as well as perhaps eventually fragment and erode the basis for the continued existence of the Turkish Republic. In terms of minority rights, principally the Kurdish, the AKP’s 2009 Democratization initiative put many thorny issues on the table. However, it was attacked by those who fear that greater Kurdish rights will intensify calls for Kurdish independence and the Kurds themselves who have lost faith in the central government as provider of a solution to their complex situation. Both the Turks and the Kurds are thus still struggling with how to accommodate their different identities within the collective ‘we’. Finally, in terms of the reform of the state institutions, it is in part an elaborate game about political power. However, there are also real fears about where releasing the brakes on the old tutelage system of the Turkish democracy—with the military and judiciary as the guarantors of the Turkish state against threats of separatism and Islamism—will take Turkey. An overwhelming majority of Turks supports democratization as well as greater transparency and accountability in government, but they are not (yet) sure where the reform processes will leave them. The considerable
politicization of the roles of the different state institutions and the separation of power has therefore, so far, impeded a consensus on what a democratic Turkish identity entails.

Today, Turkey thus faces a crucial and polarizing question—how much is Turkey to deviate from the secular, nationalist road paved by Atatürk into some hitherto unknown path in the name of democratization? So far, the Turkish national identity has shown modest advance of becoming more plural where different conceptions can co-exist without clashing. However, there are still issues which provoke much controversy and many of them are questions which cause increasing fear and concern inside Turkey, making the reform of or the preservation of the current notion of Turkishness the main spanner in the Turkish democratic reform wheels. Moreover, in the increasingly polarized situation in Turkey, where the Government, pro-Kurdish forces and the Kemalist circles fiercely argue that their route is the route to true democracy, the allegiance of the people is pivotal. The burning question thus becomes: whose side is the Turkish public on? Whose democratic orientations will the Turkish public embrace? Or will there be a new national identity synthesis forthcoming through compromise between different ideological strands? This process of finding an identity synthesis on what a democratic Turkishness entails is, to our mind, far more determining for the future of Turkey than the mere prospect of EU membership.

Acknowledgements

Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués wishes to acknowledge the financial support from the Programmea Nacional de Movilidad de Recursos Humanos de Investigación, Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación, Spain. Ann-Kristin Jonasson wishes to acknowledge the financial support from CERGU. The authors are deeply indebted to an anonymous referee for his/her insightful comments.

Notes

1 This view is also the preferred one in determined governmental circles in Ankara (Interviews, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ankara, 2007) and at the Permanent Delegation of Turkey to the EU (Interviews, Brussels, 2008).

2 This explains why the Turkish democratization processes catalysed by the EU will not necessarily resemble the democracy reform processes in Central and Eastern Europe prior to Eastern enlargement. The prospect of the EU membership has triggered different dynamics of self-affirmation and self-redefinitions of the collective Self in all these accession processes.

3 Individual liberties were so down-prioritized in the early days of the Republic as to cause one of the first opposition parties that was founded in November 1924, the Progressive Republican Party—led by ex-officers like Ali Fuad Cebesoy and Rauf Orbay, to argue for ‘restoring the sovereignty of the people over that of the state’. The party was banned in 1925 (Kadroğlu, 1996, p. 186; Yegen, forthcoming).

4 The ‘Sèvres syndrome’ refers to the—during the Cold War widespread, but today perhaps less so—conviction in Turkey that the country was/is surrounded by enemies intent on dividing the country, similar to the partition imposed on the Ottoman government by the victorious western powers at the end of World War I (Treaty of Sèvres).

5 Although this would not entail that specific groups, from time to time, during the Cold War did not try to challenge the predominance of Kemalism. However, on the whole the Turkish citizens accepted the logic of Kemalism and resigned to military intervention into the political life by ways of different coups to fend off any challenges to the Kemalist ideology (Kadroğlu, 1996).

6 The Constitution was the result of the 1980 military coup. In a 2003 European Commission public opinion survey, 73 per cent of surveyed Turks felt that human rights violations in Turkey were widespread and 80 per cent that there was no freedom of expression (as cited in Avci, 2005).
It is worth noting that such a perception of the headscarf issue stands in contrast to a much more variegated view from civil society organizations acting as advocates for a change on this matter. Their concerns range from a perception of equal rights and opportunities in the higher education system to a broader reading of women’s rights and concerns of discrimination in the wider Turkish society (cf. Kadıoğlu, 2005).

Newspapers report that the AKP is considering reopening the issue of headscarf and give it greater priority in view of the 2011 elections (Hürriyet Daily News, 2010a).

Hürriyet Daily News (2010b) has indicated that in 2003 when the AKP came into power, Turkey was ranked 116th in worldwide press freedom. In 2009 it was 122nd and in 2010 it fell to 138th.

According to the law, former DEP deputies who were granted a retrial by the European Court will have the right to apply to Turkish courts for a retrial within a year. The imprisoned leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) Abdullah Öcalan is excluded from this right.

Despite the fact that the reform package of August 2002 had recognized that right, no significant action had been undertaken until then.

In several reported incidences, some civil servants have denied registering the traditional Kurdish names although the Turkish Supreme Court had recognized this right.

Öniş (2009, p. 33) explains the AKP silence as a consequence of the pending court case against the AKP at that time.

Although analysts are probably right in pointing out the mitigating factor that the Democratization initiative is a project of the political party in government, not a project which was designed to reflect the broad preferences of the Turkish state and society (TESEV, 2007; Today’s Zaman, 2009d).

These controversies notwithstanding, Hürriyet Daily News (2010a) reports that the AKP is likely to re-open its Kurdish initiative again in 2011.

Underlining the advisory status of the military-dominated NSC, new measures limited the number of times the NSC meets, enabled appointment of a civilian head to the NSC’s secretariat and allowed greater parliamentary scrutiny over military expenses. According to the amendments, a deputy premier can be appointed to oversee the execution of some of the NSC’s recommendations, a duty previously carried out by its secretary-general.

Ergenekon is a clandestine group in Turkey’s military and security forces, including former generals, charged with plotting to overthrow the Government. According to the evidence gathered by Turkish prosecutors, five coup attempts, named ‘Sarikiz’, ‘Ayisigi’, ‘Yakamoz’, ‘Eldiven’ and ‘Balyoz’ have been made since the AKP came to power (Daily Star, 2010).

Although among the political elite in Ankara the preferred thesis continues to be, as we have noted (cf. Endnote 1), that the set-backs in Turkey’s accession process are more a consequence of Turkey being a ‘victim’ of the treacherous whims of European capitals (i.e. attributing a central role to the EU). There is relatively little readiness to recognize shortcomings in the reform processes as a consequence of unresolved domestic Turkish debates.

References


