

## Turkey's Next Step: Learning to Share

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### **A made-by-AKP-only constitution would lack legitimacy in the eyes of half of Turkey, including many large businesses, Kurdish nationalists, liberal and secular Turks, and women.**

**T**oday, Turks are electing their new government. Even though the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, is likely to win the general elections for the third consecutive time since 2002, Turkey will remain woefully divided between the AKP's supporters and opponents. While potentially about half of Turks are voting for this party, it is likely that the other half are not. Yet Turkey, the only country in the world that blends together Islam, Western values, democracy and Islamist politics, can find a way to keep its two halves unified. The solution is in the next step: making the country's first civilian constitution together.

Today, Turkey is a very different country than it was in 2002 when the AKP came to power. Back then, the party, rooted in political Islam, represented a counter force to challenge the secular parties that had governed the country since 1950.

The AKP also had a message of moderation, saying it was abandoning Islamism and instead moving toward the center. At this time, the party embraced the European Union accession process and pushed for liberalizing reforms that included rights for Kurds. These moves helped build a rainbow coalition of supporters around the AKP, ranging from Kurdish nationalists to large businesses, liberals and Islamist-conservatives.

Ten years later, the AKP is the underdog no more, and the coalition that brought the party to power has all but disappeared.

After ruling for almost a decade, the AKP has become the establishment par excellence. Unlike in the late 1990s, the pro-AKP and Islamist-conservative groups now dominate large parts of the Turkish media, academia, business world and airwaves.

At the same time, though, popular support has proven to be the Achilles' heel of the AKP's success. Moderation brought the AKP popularity. Yet the more popular it became, the more the AKP felt it could ignore centrist consensual politics and the liberal vision for EU membership. In due course, the party abandoned the EU process and instead started to go after those who disagree with it, including independent media and the courts.

For example, according to a recent OSCE report, with 57 journalists in jail, Turkey is the country with the highest number of journalists in prison -- more than either China or Iran.

Furthermore, after amending the country's constitution in 2010, the AKP now single-handedly appoints a majority of the high court without a confirmation process.

Ten years later, Mr. Erdogan still has the support of Islamist-conservatives, but the rest of his coalition has abandoned him. Liberals have left the AKP for its lackluster commitment to Europe. Large businesses are disheartened by heavy-handed treatment of secular companies by the AKP, who attempt to force these secular businesses to toe the party line. In a recent case the AKP slapped Dogan Media Group -- the country's biggest media conglomerate -- with a record \$3.5 billion fine, which combined with an earlier fine of \$500 million exceeded Dogan's net worth.

Also gone are Kurdish nationalists who are disappointed that Mr. Erdogan's fix to the Kurdish problem is more religion for the Kurds, not more rights.

Meanwhile, secular Turks have regrouped around the main opposition, the Republican People's Party, or CHP. For almost a decade, the CHP was a feckless force. Whereas the AKP was teeming with dynamism, the CHP remained stale and unimaginative. Since then, the CHP has changed by electing a new party leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, in 2010, and morphing into a mass liberal party. With a record number of women in the new party assembly, and a fresh approach to the festering Kurdish problem (such as the recent proposal to implement Kurdish education), the CHP has emerged as a mass force.

The AKP can technically draft and adopt Turkey's new constitution. And if it is to become a first-rate society, Turkey needs its first civilian constitution. Nonetheless, a made-by-AKP-only constitution will lack legitimacy in the eyes of half of the country, including large businesses, Kurdish nationalists, liberal and secular Turks, and women, just as a constitution made only by the liberal Turks would lack legitimacy in the eyes of AKP supporters.

The key is for both sides to realize that neither owns Turkey, for the AKP and non-AKP halves of Turkey are equally large in size and importance. Secular and

liberal Turks have to adjust to this reality; unlike a decade ago, Turkey now has a large, established Islamist-conservative elite, and a political party supported by many people. None of this will simply disappear.

By the same token, though, the AKP has to realize that secular liberal Turkey, incorporating at least half of the country's population and many of its large businesses, is too big for it to take over and digest or just ignore. Reality necessitates that both halves of the country work together toward a new constitution lest Turkey splits, potentially violently, in the middle. That would be bad for the Turks, and for those watching Turkey, the only experiment in the world that brings together Islam and democracy.

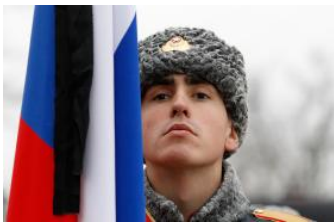
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