

No Women, No Europe

Jan 21, 2010



Articles & Testimony

The first president of the European Union, Herman Van Rompuy, is a known opponent of Turkey's EU membership. Mr. Van Rompuy may find it easy to stick to his position: seven years after the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, rose to power in Ankara, Turkey is sliding away from European liberal democratic norms, including gender equality. Under the AKP, Turkish women are barred from power and are nonexistent in the executive levels of the bureaucracy.

The AKP is rooted in Turkey's Islamist opposition; specifically the Welfare Party, or RP, which was shut down in 1998 by the country's Constitutional Court for violating the secular and democratic principles in the Turkish Constitution. The AKP was born out of the RP's ashes, with RP cadres bringing that party's organizational and financial network to the AKP.

The AKP rejects the Islamist epithet, though, describing itself as a conservative and democratic movement. Conservative as it might be, the AKP does not appear to be a democratic movement. Negative trends in women's empowerment in Turkey since 2002 demonstrate, as noted by Caroline Glick, that the AKP does not practice democracy as a "system of laws and practices that engender liberal egalitarianism."

A recent report by the Turkish prime minister's Office of Personnel shows that women are nearly non-existent in the upper echelons of Turkish bureaucracy. Only two (Nimet Cubukcu and Selma Aliye Kavaf) of the 26 ministers in the Turkish cabinet are women -- one is responsible for education, and the other is in charge of women's affairs. Moreover, there are no women among the 25 undersecretaries (mustesar) appointed by the AKP. Of the 85 deputy undersecretaries (mustesar yardimcisi), only three are women, representing merely 3.5 percent of all bureaucrats at this level.

The list continues, demonstrating a dearth of women in executive positions in the bureaucracy under the AKP. According to a report by IRIS, an Ankara-based women's rights group, of the 139 director-generals (genel mudur) in the country responsible for running government agencies or departments, only eight are women, representing 5.7 percent of bureaucrats at this level. There is only one woman among the 254 regional directors (bolge muduru) of ministries, representing 0.4 percent of top bureaucrats at this level; and only twenty-two of the 942 provincial directors (il muduru) appointed by the AKP are women, representing 2.3 percent of all such directors.

A study of specific ministries illustrates an even bleaker picture of the presence of women in Turkish bureaucracy. In the powerful Ministry of Interior Affairs, of the eleven top bureaucrats (a category that includes the undersecretary [mustesar], deputy undersecretaries [mustesar yardimcisi], advisors [musavir], and counselors [danisman]) none are women. Likewise, there are no women among the 28 top bureaucrats in the Ministry of Finance. Although 40 percent of all teachers in Turkey are women, there are no women among the 27 top bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education. The Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, Energy, Transportation, Public Works, and Health also lack female appointees to the more than 35 executive posts, including advisors, director-generals, counselors, legal counselors (hukuk musaviri), undersecretaries and deputy undersecretaries despite the fact that 35 percent of all engineers and 30 percent of all doctors in Turkey are women.

Women are barred from power under the AKP. Although 33 percent of all lawyers in Turkey are women, there are no women among the nine top bureaucrats in the Justice Ministry. This is especially surprising given the large number of top women jurists in Turkey. For instance, in regards to the high courts, which are independent of the government, 49 percent of the members of the Council of State (Danistay), 20 percent of the members of the Supreme Court of Appeals (Yargitay), and two of the 13 judges sitting in the Turkish Constitutional Court (Anayasa Mahkemesi) -- 15 percent of the body's membership -- are women.

The Ministry of Culture, headed by a former leftist politician who has since joined the AKP, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which retains autonomy to hire and promote bureaucrats, are unique among ministries to have women in executive positions. Thanks to the ministry's autonomy, 30 percent of advisors and 59 percent of legal counselors within that ministry are women, and women constitute 28 percent of Turkish diplomats overseas.

In years past Turkish women served as chief justice and prime minister and as ministers of the interior and foreign affairs. The high courts and the Foreign Ministry present comparative cases of women's empowerment, demonstrating the potential reaches of women's representation in bureaucracy and power when they do not face government discrimination.

Since Turkey started accession talks with the EU in 2005, the country has ostensibly progressed in terms of the EU process. In reality, however, Turkey is regressing from liberal European norms, such as gender equality. Turkey's EU accession has long faced objections from EU member countries including France and politicians such as Mr. Van Rompuy. The erosion of liberal European values in Turkey under the AKP suggests Turkey's EU membership faces not only the French/Van Rompuy hurdle, but also an AKP hurdle, for a country in which women are not empowered cannot hope to join the EU.

Soner Cagaptay is a senior fellow and director of the [Turkish Research Program \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateI02.php?SID=12&newActiveSubNav=Turkish%20Research%20Program&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D12&newActiveNav=researchPrograms\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateI02.php?SID=12&newActiveSubNav=Turkish%20Research%20Program&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D12&newActiveNav=researchPrograms) at The Washington Institute. Rueya Perincek is a research intern in the same program. ❖

RECOMMENDED

BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Grant Rumley

[\(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations\)](#)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Anna Borshchevskaya

[\(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Turkey \(/policy-analysis/turkey\)](#)