

## FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

Since the founding of the Turkish Republic, competing conceptions of Turkish identity have existed. Among many examples, the role of Islam has been contested, Kurdish and Turkish nationalisms have clashed, and various identity-based movements have ebbed and flowed, shaping political cleavages. National identity contestation has also spilled over into Turkey's relationship with its Western allies, its patronage of the Muslim world, and the conceptualization of its role in the Turkic societies to its East.

Over the course of Justice and Development Party (AKP) rule, Turkey's prevailing national identity has incrementally pivoted into a fusion of Islamism and nationalism. Further solidifying this pivot is the recent political marriage of the AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), uniting pious Sunni Muslim and ultra-right Turkish nationalist constituencies. This alignment has led to deepening polarization along political and ideological lines. While around half of Turkey's society does not share the AKP's vision, its members are deeply fractured amongst themselves and crippled by the shrinking space for critical expression in the public sphere.

Meanwhile, the presence of 3.5 million registered Syrian refugees, which are predominantly Sunni Muslim, and the likely permanence of a majority of them has created a new demographic, exacerbating concerns that they will redefine Turkey's identity. Their integration into Turkish society is also fueling grievances among segments of the population over labor force competition, contributing to a rise in tensions between host communities and Syrian refugees in Turkey's major urban centers.

As long as political elites across the spectrum continue to stoke identity debates and exploit the refugee issue for their own gain, tensions over identity will remain at a boiling point. Unfortunately, these problems are unlikely to dissipate under conditions of emergency rule and ahead of the high-stakes presidential elections slated for 2019, where we can expect Us versus Them-themed nationalist discourse to dominate.

In this issue of TPQ, our authors parse the underlying dynamics of ongoing identity struggles to better comprehend how they are contributing to a sense of deep insecurity among Turkish society and simultaneously influencing the country's foreign policy axis. Some of the larger questions that animate this collection of articles include: To what extent are identity politics driving Turkish foreign policy? Is there a "new nationalism" emerging in the post-coup era? What are the core components of Neo-Ottomanism? How is Atatürk's legacy being contested and appropriated by Turkey's

main political parties? How is education increasingly being used as a tool to shape the identity of future generations? Is Turkey's drift from the West permanent?

In his article, Dr. Cenk Saraçoğlu, Associate Professor at Ankara University's Faculty of Communication, examines the AKP government's involvement in the Syrian conflict through the prism of its broader Islamist nationalist project in Turkey and the region. Islamist nationalism is predicated on three main pillars according to Dr. Saraçoğlu: the redefinition of the country's national sphere of influence; a proactive and revisionist foreign policy; and building Pax Ottomana in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire. Dr. Saraçoğlu argues that Ankara's ambitions began to fade in the wake of the Arab Spring reversal, which saw Assad cling to power and Mohammed Morsi ousted. The increasingly complex dynamics of the Syrian theatre, defined by the involvement of powerful regional actors, continued to chip away at the underpinnings of AKP's ideological project. The government's incursion into Afrin against the PYD in Syria, as well as Erdoğan's very public appraisals of Atatürk, should be evaluated within the context of the crisis of Islamist nationalism and out of political and ideology exigency, asserts Dr. Saraçoğlu.

Also exploring the intersection of identity politics and foreign policy in his article is Dr. Umut Uzer, Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Istanbul Technical University. Comparing the early Republican era to the AKP era, Dr. Uzer points out that the AKP government has pursued a more "activist foreign policy" – particularly towards the Middle East – which has increasingly reflected the Islamic orientation of the party in power. The desire for regional leadership, Turkey's mediator role in neighborhood conflicts, and patronage of the Muslim world are all hallmarks of the new foreign policy under the AKP, argues Uzer. Parallel to this, the government has invested in a soft power discourse oriented towards more engagement with the Middle East. Uzer notes that Turkish soap operas are a particularly powerful tool for soft power projection, both a means of disseminating Turkish values and culture and as a means of attracting Arab tourism. Taken together, the author concludes that the AKP is orientating the country's identity away from the Western secular tradition and towards the Middle East.

In his article, Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills at the OECD, outlines the educational framework that will prepare future generations with the tools necessary to navigate an increasingly complex and volatile world. In this respect, the OECD's "Education 2030" geared towards building a common understanding of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, is a valuable model explains Schleicher. Highlighting the importance of creating new values and empowering agency among young people, Schleicher contends that modern education requires a very different

approach to learning and teaching compared to models of the past. Still based heavily on regurgitating knowledge and memorization, the Turkish educational system is not up to global standards points out the author: PISA results show that Turkish students have difficulty in collating information and applying it in novel situations. With one foot still in the past, Schleicher contends that the future success of Turkish students will hinge on the country's capacity to facilitate a system transformation that ushers in 21st century learning.

Further contributing to the topic of education, Svante E. Cornell, the Director of the American Foreign Policy Council's Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, explains how the expansion of religious schooling under the leadership of Erdoğan through imam hatip schools is Islamizing Turkey's education system at the expense of secular education. Cornell, who is also a Co-Founder of the Institute for Security and Development Policy in Stockholm, points to a series of contentious education reforms since 2010 which have contributed to a sharp rise in imam hatip schools, funneled more government funding into such schools, and increased the number of hours of religious education in regular state schools. Cornell draws attention to the fact that the Ministry of Education claims it is responding to popular demand, yet the enrollment rates in such schools remain low, not to mention the conversion of regular schools into imam hatip ones is agitating segments of society. Furthermore, Cornell underlines that the Islamization of Turkey's education system augurs poorly for the success of future generations as imam hatip schools are vastly outperformed by secular schools from an academic perspective: Only 18 percent of imam hatip graduates are able to pass the university placement exam and enter university.

Tensions over the trajectory of the country's education sector underscore the way the AKP has incrementally injected religion into public life since the party came to power in 2002, and are reflective of a wider secular-religious divide. The predominance of the Sunni-Muslim faith as a cementing factor of Turkish identity has been used to push other religious or nonreligious convictions to the fringe, leaving little room for freedom of expression.

In her contribution, Dr. Umut Azak, an Associate Professor at Okan University, provides a detailed overview of the growing atheist movement in Turkey and the role it can play in strengthening the country's democracy. Dr. Azak draws attention to the difficulties facing the recently formed Atheist Association of Turkey (AA) – the only explicitly atheist and legally recognized organization to operate in a Muslim majority country. Although AA has helped increase the visibility of atheism in Turkey, the author asserts that both secularist and Islamist policies have stigmatized atheism and limited atheists' freedom of expression. This is a product of both Turkey's predomi-

nantly conservative society and the limits of constitutional secularism, which favors the Muslim majority over the rights of religious minorities or non-religious groups. Drawing upon some statistical data on atheism and levels of religiosity in the country, Dr. Azak concludes that around three percent of Turkey's population are atheists and that Turkey is the only Muslim-majority country where atheism is measured to be over 0.1 percent. The author concludes that atheist mobilization is offering a new pathway to a more inclusive form of secularism in Turkey and a way of challenging Islamization policies.

Turkish domestic troubles are having ripple effects for the diaspora in Europe, sometimes sowing discord between host countries and diaspora communities and contributing to the perception of “the long arm of Ankara,” as Yörük Bahçeli puts it in her article. Bahçeli, a reporter at Thomson Reuters in London, focuses on the integration challenges Dutch-Turks have faced in the Netherlands since their arrival in the mid-1960s. She explains that the shift in the Dutch integration policy discourse from a “multicultural model” – which encouraged the existence of “parallel diasporic communities” – to a model which situated Dutch values at the center and placed more demands on immigrants, contributed to the increasing alienation of the Turkish diaspora. It is within this context that Erdogan's AKP rose to power and engaged in a systematic effort to engage and mobilize the diaspora in Europe, including in the Netherlands. Bahçeli draws attention to polls that indicate young Dutch Turks are particularly susceptible to rhetoric coming out of Ankara as they feel less welcome in the Netherlands. Turning to the diplomatic crisis that erupted over AKP ministers being barred from campaigning in Rotterdam in favor of a “yes” vote before the referendum, Bahçeli argues that reasons behind the protests of Dutch-Turks were more varied than initially perceived. Many of them were protesting the rightward swing in the Dutch political scene rather than in support of the AKP, notes Bahçeli. In light of the narrowing of Dutch integration policies and high political polarization in Turkey, Bahçeli expresses the need for a novel approach to integration so that Dutch-Turks are no longer used as political pawns between Amsterdam and Ankara.

Contributing to the literature on comparative conflict studies, Mehmet Özkan, Associate Professor at the Turkish National Police Academy and Director for Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency in Colombia, compares the peace processes in Colombia and Turkey (both initiated in 2012) to extrapolate key factors that spell the success or failure of peace negotiations. In Colombia, a peace deal was reached between the Colombian government and the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016, ending five decades of war. On the other hand, the peace negotiations between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Worker's

Party (PKK) collapsed in 2015 and spiraled into a renewed outbreak of the conflict. Özkan identifies three key elements that contributed to the success of the Colombian case: (1) favorable regional dynamics, (2) a weakened terrorist organization, and (3) well-structured and defined peace negotiations. Özkan underlines that the absence of a structured roadmap for peace rendered Turkey-PKK negotiations more fragile to political turbulence despite the fact the two sides garnered support from their respective constituencies. Additionally, the complex regional context in which the Turkey-PKK conflict is situated – the outbreak of the Syrian war and the subsequent emerging power of the Syrian Kurds – had a debilitating impact on the reconciliation process. Colombia’s success in isolating the particulars of the peace process from external dynamics and adopting a less stringent approach to cease-fire violations during negotiations, offer valuable lessons for Turkey, concludes Özkan.

In her article, Çağla Diner, Assistant Professor at Kadir Has University in Istanbul, discusses how the AKP’s conception of Turkish identity dictates and shapes gender relations and roles in Turkish society. Civil society organizations that are government-oriented (GONGOs) play an important role in disseminating the AKP’s conservative discourse on gender, argues the author. Diner focuses her analysis on one such GONGO which wields significant influence – The Woman and Democracy Association (Kadın ve Demokrasi Derneği, KADEM) – which claims the President’s daughter as one of its founders and current Vice President. According to Diner, KADEM’s advocacy works to maintain Turkey’s deeply-entrenched patriarchy intact by rejecting the principle of gender equality in favor of “gender justice,” enshrining the role of women as wives and mother, and propagating the “authentic core values of the Turkish woman.” While other independent civil society organizations face bureaucratic challenges and are largely marginalized, KADEM’s unparalleled access to the state allows it to fill the void and frame the gender debates in Turkey in a distinctly conservative way, posits Diner.

Contextualizing Meral Akşener’s newly founded İyi Parti (Good Party) within the Turkish political party system, Ödül Celep, an Associate Professor of Political Science at the International Relations Department of Işık University in Istanbul, suggests that the party may have the potential to breathe new life into the opposition bloc and contribute positively to Turkey’s democracy in the long run. Amidst increasing public disillusionment with traditional parties and the inability of the opposition to mount a legitimate challenge to the AKP, Akşener’s new party could offer a genuine alternative. However, Celep contends that this hinges upon taking several important steps, including disavowing the radical right, ultranationalist legacy of the MHP, promoting intra-party democracy and gender equality, and developing a new constructive discourse on the Kurdish issue. While early signs are positive – such as

Akşener's decision to abandon certain nationalist MPH symbols, the promise to promote intra-party democracy culture, and embrace secularism and pluralism – Celep warns that optimism should be cautious as it is yet to be seen whether the İyi Party will be a political actor that breaks the conventional political discourse in Turkey or merely becomes an offshoot of the MHP.

In her article, Dr. Najiba Mustafayeva, a Research Fellow at the Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SAM), highlights the acute situation along the Line of Contact (LoC) in Nagorno-Karabakh and cautions that current tensions could develop into large-scale conflict with potentially far-reaching regional and global security implications. From the Azerbaijani perspective, Armenia's unconstructive attitude in the peace settlement process led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group – co-chaired by the US, Russia, and France – could drive Baku to see military means as the only way forward. Furthermore, according to Mustafayeva, Yerevan's belligerent rhetoric and provocative actions – such as the acquisition of Iskander-M tactical missiles from Russia and conducting military drills in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan – demonstrate Armenia's feeble commitment to conflict resolution and bringing an end to the status-quo. Against the backdrop of rising tensions and stagnating international mediation efforts, Mustafayeva stresses the need for the Minsk Group to overcome structural problems and recommit to conflict resolution. The latest statement by the Minsk Group's Head of Delegation – which stressed the equal rights of the two communities in reaching a solution – was encouraging in Mustafayeva's view, and may present an opportunity for headway in the conflict resolution process.

Tunisia is often hailed as the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring. In his article, Guillaume Allusson, a recent graduate of Columbia University, determines that while Tunisia has indeed taken meaningful steps forward in protecting civil and political rights, its democratization process has paradoxically fostered socially repressive measures. Allusson sheds light on the conservative stance of Tunisia's two main political parties – Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes – towards blasphemy and homosexuality, arguing that both parties are guilty of systematic discrimination and stigmatization. Regarding the former, Allusson explains that blasphemy is largely not tolerated owing to Islam's primary role in Tunisian politics and society; in other words, free speech does not include the right to blasphemy. Regarding homosexuality, Allusson notes that future depenalization is unlikely due to a number of factors: the homophobic nature or indifference of Tunisian society and the political imperative for the Tunisian government to curb the rising influence of Salafism, which requires not agitating conservative Muslims.

This season, TPQ was present at a couple of regional events which provided us with an opportunity to expand our network and learn more about the complex international issues that we take up in our journal. In late February, I attended a Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Oil-and Gas East Med Workshop organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in the Dead Sea in Jordan. The discussion revolved around the geopolitically volatile East Med region, where it is becoming increasingly more challenging to develop and export gas, as well as create avenues of regional cooperation.

On 14 March 2018, our Managing Editor Erhan Arslan attended an event organized by Swedish organization Jarl Hjalmarson on “Developments in Turkey.” The topics under discussion included recent trends in the Turkish economy, state of emergency conditions, Turkey-EU relations, the refugee crisis, and Turkey’s media landscape.

We would like to extend a special thanks to QNB Finansbank, the premium corporate sponsor of this issue. In addition, we would like to thank our online sponsor, Garanti Bank. We also appreciate the continuing support from our other sponsors: Beko, Halifax International Security Forum, TEB, and Turcas Petrol.

A very special acknowledgement goes to our long-standing media partner, Hürriyet Daily News, for the outreach they continue to provide.

As always, we are indebted to the authors of this issue for sharing their expertise and opinions. As our readers, please share your feedback.

Süreya Martha Köprülü