

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TALK ABOUT DEMOCRACY IN TURKEY?

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**ABSTRACT:** *After the July military coup, everybody is wondering what will be the future for the Turkish democracy. For decades, Western countries have been considering Turkey as a model for all Muslims States, adopting in 1928 the path of secular modernization, along Western lines. But till July 2016, this meant military used to intervene through coups d'état every time there was a threaten to stability and constitutional order. Before the July 15 coup attempt, the military was one of the most trusted institutions in Turkey, historically considered as the guarantor of Turkey's secular and democratic character. But on July 15, people took to the streets and confronted the rebellious soldiers. Has Turkish society internalized electoral democracy? Or the Turkish people may have simply substituted one form of autocratic governance for a form of electoral authoritarianism that is the illusion of multiparty democracy. Surely, we cannot find an answer in the overestimated conflict between military, secular elites and Islamic parties. Equally, we cannot consider the political conflict in Turkey as a struggle for democracy, but just a struggle for power. The Erdogan's AKP heralds democracy: its more seasoned politicians have participated in free elections for two decades. But under the AKP, Turkey is not a liberal democracy, despite the multiparty elections and the promises of a new constitution and reforms that would address pivotal issues facing the country—the Kurdish question, human rights, and freedom of expression. The purges adopted after the July coup is just the final corollary of the Erdogan authoritarianism. But if it is clear, it is not clear the Western countries policy. USA and EU continue to be sleeping witness of the violation of civil rights under the Erdogan Government. Probably we, western people, should sincerely ask what do we want to mean talking about democracy in Turkey.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Democracy; Fundamental Rights; Secularism; Islamism; Rule of Law.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1994, Bernard Lewis wrote “An explanation of the relative success of democracy in Turkey, if one can be found, could also be of value in explaining, and perhaps correcting, the failures of democracy elsewhere” (Lewis, 1994:41). People in Western Countries usually assume that old-style programs of Westernization and secularism are the strongest supporters of democracy in the Islamic world. But, analyzing Turkish political history,

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two considerations are due: in Turkey, a major threat to democracy comes from the Westernizing-secularist military that has the responsibility to suspend democracy in order to maintain secularism. Furthermore, we should not reduce the internal conflict in Turkey to a simple conflict between secularism and Islamic religion, between reason and revelation. It is a conflict about personal life and who will hold it. The failed July 15 military coup in Turkey is the final act of a long and complex experiment of democracy in the making with democracy. For years, many believed that Turkey provided the model for Muslim majority nations –states, adopting in 1928 the path of secular modernization, along Western lines, as set out by Kemal Atatürk. (Esposito, 2016:26)

This is one of the relevant reasons of the particular interest in current discussions of democratization in Turkey: it is a secular state in a country whose population is totally Muslim<sup>1</sup>. This Turkey Muslim secularism -due to the Republic's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and also to the enduring respect Turks have for his legacy (Lovell, 2009) - has been living for decades by Western Countries as an antidote to the Islamic fundamentalist influences of Iran, or Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. Such that, the Western countries' interest in Turkey's democratization is clearly evident from the discussion concerning the Turkey's longstanding pursuit of membership of the European Union, and its engagement with the European Union's programs for promoting democracy. For the Turkey's accession to the EU, Turkey must meet the criteria of the *acquis communautaire*, set out in the June 1993 meeting of the European Council in Copenhagen and summarized as follows: 'Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.' (European Council, 1993)

This is not the place to debate the merits of democracy and its meaning, considering that it is never complete. As the doyen of democratic theorists, Robert Dahl has declared: "no state has ever possessed a government that fully measures up to the criteria of a democratic process. None is likely to" (Dahl,1998:42). Before the complexity to define what democracy is, we can use a the definition of democracy that simply refers to a system of constitutional and representative government, in which power can be dismissed and replaced without violence and throughout rules and procedures universally understood and accepted, such as those ones identified by Diamond, Linz and Lipset : the extent of political competition for government office; the level of political participation in that competition; and the degree of civil and political liberties that makes such a competition. (Larry, Lipset, & Linz, 1995). This definition has disadvantages and vantages: surely, it is limited because it takes no direct account of such other relevant considerations as respect for civic, human and minority rights, much more relevant in the respect of discussed state system as Turkish one. But, at the same time, the unambiguous core of a system aimed to the preservation of democracy, offers the best chance for securing and maintaining those other rights that are an essential part of a free society. The Turkish Republic is the only one State of the International Islamic Conference that was able to have a change of government by democratic procedures and to create a government willing to submit to the will of the people. Turkey is a country where citizens' demand for democracy has steadily

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<sup>1</sup> The other one in the world is Indonesia that does not establish any one religion.

grown over the last 15 years. During the last decade it was supposed that democracy was enshrined in Turkey's political culture thanks to two specific reasons: a period of competitive parliamentary elections and political liberalization. In fact, elections in Turkey over the past decades have generally been considered free and fair. They are administered by four bodies: the Supreme Board of Elections (SBE), the Provincial Electoral Boards (PEB), the District Electoral Boards (DEB), and the Ballot Box Committees (BBC). "The SBE is composed of judges elected by and from the Supreme Court and the Council of State for six-year terms. It has overall authority for the conduct of elections, and its rulings cannot be appealed. Eligible political parties can appoint non-voting representatives to the SBE, PEBs, and DEBs. The four political parties that secured the highest number of votes in the last parliamentary elections may nominate non-voting SBE representatives. Although Turkish legislation is generally conducive to the holding of democratic elections, there are increasing concerns about transparency and impartiality in the work of the election administration. The SEB operates under the judicial branch, but the electronic components of elections remain under the control of the executive branch. The list of registered voters and their addresses are provided to the SEB by the General Directorate of Population that serves under the Ministry of Interior. The database called UYAP, which sends local election results to the main server, is administered by the Ministry of Justice (Tol & Hjerno, 2015).

But, at the same time we must underline that the steady progress that Turkey made for becoming a fledged democracy did not prevent it to become "an hybrid regime, a mix of democracy and authoritarianism" (Tamara , Voll, & Esposito, 2016:42). When the Arab Spring inflamed most of the Mena area, Erdogan and its party AKP called for the implementation of democracy: consequently, he had close the relations with Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia's Ennahda and played a constructive role in the region and with Western countries, United States and Europe. But in the same time, the AKP party and President Erdogan, controlling both parliament and the presidency, have worked to preserve their power and to move Turkey toward authoritarianism. The democratic backslide has fed political dissatisfaction and polarization inside Turkey. The 2013 Gezi Park protests presented a challenge and a warning shot to Erdogan and the AKP.<sup>2</sup>

Now Turkey is, clearly, at a very difficult and dangerous crossroad. Demand for democracy is so strong in Turkey, that most Turks "were willing to accept a deeply flawed "democracy" rather than a military dictatorship" (Nisbet, 2016). So, the attempt by a faction of the military to stage a coup to depose Erdogan with the purpose to restore Turkish democracy failed. But the concern is that by rejecting a military dictatorship, a form of autocratic governance has been substituted for an electoral authoritarianism, with the form of multiparty democracy in which civil and political liberties are restricted or denied. The purges inflicted after the military coup confirm this.

"Before July 15, civil liberties in Turkey were *de facto* in the deep freeze. Now they are *de jure* in the deep freeze. On July 27, the Turkish military purged 1,684 officers, including 149 generals, on suspicion that they had links with Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based Muslim cleric who once was Erdogan's staunchest political ally but is now his

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<sup>2</sup> The protest demonstrations were initially triggered on May 28, 2013, against the violent eviction of sit-in protesters to a government urban development plan for Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park aimed to remodel this outdoor space full of greenery and cafes by building a shopping mall and luxury apartments.

biggest nemesis and the suspected mastermind of the coup attempt. On the same day, the government closed down three news agencies, 16 television stations, 23 radio stations, 45 newspapers, 15 magazines and 29 publishers on the same charges. Two days before those actions, warrants were issued for 42 journalists, as a part of an investigation against members of the "Fethullah [Gulen] terrorist organization." (...) In a massive purge, the government sacked more than 60,000 civil servants from the military, judiciary, police, schools and academia, including 1,577 faculty deans who were suspended. More than 10,000 people have been arrested, and there are serious allegations of torture. Witnesses told Amnesty International that captured military officers were raped by police, hundreds of soldiers were beaten, and some detainees were denied food, water and access to lawyers for days. Turkish authorities also arrested 62 children and accused them of treason. The youngsters, aged 14 to 17, were from Kuleli Military School in Istanbul. The students have reportedly been thrown in jail and are not allowed to speak to their parents" (Belkdis, 2016)

What is the future for Turkish democracy? Is it being dragged into worse darkness" as common opinion commented?

Any analysis must consider two general points. There is the unfortunate perception that the idea of democratization is a process belong the Western cultures, with some notion of American democracy in prospect. This perception makes difficult that the people from Eastern countries decide that democracy is the appropriate framework within which they can address their major public issues. (Lovell, 2009) Second, even if many people are beginning to see in the Western form of democracy the best solution, if not the only one, to their problems, the nature and character of democratic systems are usually misunderstood. As Bernard Lewis underlines that "it is exceedingly difficult to grasp the meaning of limited government, of civic and human rights, and of participation, other than by direct personal experience over a long period of time. There are, however, other, more immediately recognizable advantages achieved by democracy that make it more attractive, and two in particular: economic success and military victory--that is, wealth and power (...) It is therefore not surprising that in the past each wave of democratic enthusiasm in the non-democratic world has been preceded, and in large measure encouraged, by some striking military victory of democratic powers over less democratic or undemocratic operations... (...) Continental Europe and Latin American in the 1930s and 1940s offer classical examples of anti-democratic forces that used democratic freedom to win power, and then made sure that they did not lose it the same way. Adolf Hitler rose to power by a free election in a democratic Germany, but there were no more free elections in Germany as long as he remained alive. There are other movements in the world today, very different from Nazism or fascism in their declared programs and ideologies, but sharing their contempt for the democratic institutions that they intend to use and then cast aside (Lewis, 1994:47)

This concerns especially the world of Islam, where the democratic movements face powerful opposition from different movements, collectively and not correctly known as Islamic fundamentalists, united by a deep aversion to the principle characterizing the Western practice of constitutional and representative government. If Islam is inherently incompatible with this form of democracy, it depends on how Muslims face this question: they only can decide about their inheritance and, specifically, how to interpret it before the new needs and challenges.

But it depends also on the difficult political and social relation between the military, secular opposition and Islamists who, although the modern secular State created by Atatürk, remained strong in non-urban areas and in popular piety. Islam and Turkish Muslim identity became more and more visible after Atatürk dead and its progressive development culminated in the last two decades with the electoral success of the Islamist Welfare Party. Since that, it was clear the political crisis between Islamist and military and secular elite.

Crisis never resolved as recent events show.

But, despite its secularism, Turkish nationalism is strongly linked with Islam: "Outside the urban elite, most modern Turks still see Islam as being a prerequisite for any definition of what it means to be Turkish." (Jenkins, 2008:18)

As Omar Topinar said after the Arab Spring and talking about the supposed "pro - western" attitude versus Islamic revival in Turkish policy, "Turkey's population is almost entirely Muslim, and the AKP, a party with Islamic roots, has won three consecutive elections. Many thus assume that Turkish divergence from the West –losing Turkey- is the product of an Islamic revival or Islamization" (Taspinar, 2001)

## **2. A LONG EXPERIMENT BETWEEN SECULARISM, ISLAMISM AND PARADOXES**

For trying to understand Turkey today, it is important to keep its history in mind.

It is too simple to state that Erdogan and his political party, the AKP, are seeking to replace Kemalism with a form of political Islam and that the military is the guardianship of the Turkish secularism. The religion is not the only decisive reason for AKP's power, a power –we must say- that other religious parties never reached before. If Turks are proud of their religion, at the same time they deeply take consideration of the secular principles as the basis "on which their country was established and prospered in the last century" (Taspinar, 2001) Differently from other emerging Muslim States in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern Turkey was created as a secular and this secularism was the crucial difference between Turkey and the rest of the Muslim world.<sup>3</sup>

The realization of the secular state started to be implemented in 1923 with the Atatürk leadership and the proclamation of the Republic. Great changes were made in order to ensure the country's social and peace and modernization, such as the introduction of a Latinized alphabet or the formal emancipation of women, among a number of other major cultural changes. But, overall, he disestablished religion: in fact he replaced Sharia with a Western inspired secular legal system and the Presidency of Religious Affairs took the place of the Ottoman Religious Ministry, all Sufi orders were prohibited and it was introduced a new western inspired civil code. In 1928, removing the constitutional declaration "the State's religion is Islam", Atatürk broke "the final barrier to the emergence of a republic, whose newfound secularism was enshrined in the 1924 constitution, a single ruling party (the Republican People's Party, RPP) and a powerful military" (Tamara , Voll, & Esposito, 2016)

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<sup>3</sup> The term "secularisms" used in Turkish context is based on the French "*laïcité*," that is what we might call "separation"--the principle of separation between religion and the state. It is different from the English word "secularism", often used in the antireligious philosophy.

As underlined by Bernard Lewis, we can consider several explanation for trying to understand why the secularism developed only in Turkey and not in other Muslim States. Turkey alone was never colonized, as were almost all the Islamic lands of Asia and Africa: it means that the Turks were always masters in their own house, and that democratic institutions were neither imposed by the victors, nor bequeathed by departing imperialists (Lewis, 1994).<sup>4</sup> Turkey, alone among the Muslim world, has achieved a relevant economic development and rise in the standard of living, and this by its own efforts<sup>5</sup>: this has produced a professional, technical, managerial, entrepreneurial middle class and an essential part of the civil society, as in the Western-style democratic system with which Turkey, of all the Muslim countries, has had the longest and closest contact, dating back almost to the beginnings of the Ottoman state.

Turkey chose to experiment the westernization, and the Westward political orientation. We cannot exclude that this choice to westernization and secularism was functional in socioeconomic terms and to a nascent bourgeois class. The early modernizers of the Ottoman Empire had tried to catch up with Europe, but they had never thought to deny their Muslim culture. Differently, the new radicalism was due the economic growth that took place during the last Ottoman century and that benefited primarily the non-Muslim Ottomans, who for language and culture could have easier commercial relations with Europeans. It was not the same for Muslim traders and businessmen who, on the contrary, were at a fundamental disadvantage. This situation was the origin of resentment against the non-Muslim Ottoman bourgeoisie and Europe; but at the same time this economic discrimination between Muslim and non-Muslim people gave an impetus to radicalism against Islam: "if being Muslim was an obstacle to business success, to integration in Western capitalism, then this identity should be stored away, made invisible". (Karaveli, 2016)

The 1924 first Constitution of the Republic of Turkey stated that Islam was the "religion of the state," Islam was dropped from the constitution in 1928; in 1937 "secularism" ("*laiklik*") was written into the Constitution, and subsequent constitutions, from 1961 and 1982, have reiterated that Turkey is a "secular" republic. The Turkish attitude towards secularism has never meant freedom of religious expression; it meant just that religion is a private matter, and "overt displays of religion in public buildings is forbidden, takes a restrictive a view of the line between public and private (similar to French laicism). The 'separation of church and state' in the West means essentially that there is no religious test for public office, not that public officials cannot display their religious symbols when they are in office. On this latter issue, the military has voiced its open dissent against particular governments they believed were attempting to implement an Islamic republic". (Lovell, 2009)

In this perspective, the ban on women wearing the Islamic headscarf in public institutions remains the most visible legacy of Ataturk's reforms, and one of the main dividing lines in the cultural battle between secular and religiously conservative. At the

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<sup>4</sup> Sovereign independence may be a only part of the explanation. There are other Muslim countries that were not under imperial rule as Afghanistan, that was effectively independent until the Soviet invasion; or Saudi Arabia, or Syria and Iraq that have been independent longer than the brief period they were under foreign rule.

<sup>5</sup> Turkish economic growth was due, not for external reasons, but to the emergence of new attitudes to economic activity, of new policies for economic development, and of new social elements able to put these policies into effect.

same time, as an army officer, Atatürk played a strong role which after his death became a self-styled guarantor of Turkey's stability and of the secular order. To this end, there have been four military coups or interventions into politics: 1960<sup>6</sup>, 1971<sup>7</sup>, 1980<sup>8</sup>, and 1997<sup>9</sup>.

The military's privileged position began to diminish with the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2002. But till then, the military strongly played the role of the guardianship of the Turkish Republic, as, we must say, in many modernizing countries in which military is considered the most modern institution. In any case, as Max Weber described it, the State is the monopoly of the use of force within a particular geographic space (Weber, 1919): for this reason, a liberal state limits its own use of force within a framework created by law, in which military is a servant of the state, rather than as a servant of one government or another (Lovell, 2009). Turkey's military has exercised its role with a specific goal by the fact that Atatürk left it with an explicit instruction to protect Turkey against external and internal threats, above society and acting independently of it, continuing in this sense the role it took in Ottoman times (Ahmad, 1993). The Turkish model of Government is a mould of civil-military relations in which, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish military "was ideally suited to lead the transition of the nation from a sultanate to a Republic" as it "valued the traditions of the Ottoman past" and "satisfied the public's longing for a stable and legitimate guardian" (Varol, 2013:731). Turkey's military self-perception to be the guardian of national unity has its roots, like many militaries elsewhere, in the difficulty to accept pluralism that is considered the reason of disunity and collapse: any alteration of the Turkish nation-state and its secular framework represents a dare to the official Kemalist Republic. In this perspective, must be also seen the military approach to the Kurdish issue: Kurdish ethnic identity is perceived as a major security problem for the Turkey's territorial and national integrity.

In Turkish Republic, military finds a resonance and endorsement by the public opinion because of several reasons: the venality of many politicians; the public seems uncomfortable with public dissent and division; the military support Kemalism and it is 'broadly representative of the society as a whole' (Özbudun, 1995:251) The Atatürk Republic is characterized by "A political class threatened by the formal and informal role of the military as the ultimate guardian of the regime" and for this it "has critical problems in relinquishing patronage resources." (Umit, 2000)

But this has not prevented a urban based minority elite imposed the Atatürk secular vision, triggering a developing gap between Turkey's Kemalist secular elite and Turkish. "Only the cities and large towns benefited under Kemalism and developed a small class committed to it. The countryside remained virtually untouched by the benefits of modern education, and literacy grew only slowly." (Ahmad, 1991)

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<sup>6</sup> The 1960 military coup intervened, with popular support as the Democratic Party appeared to be constructing a one-party state, but its key role in drafting the 1961 Constitution and creating the National Security Council (NSC), meant a government alongside the NSC, and a system of military justice alongside the civilian judicial system.

<sup>7</sup> The 1971 military coup is described as a 'half coup'

<sup>8</sup> After its coup of 1980, the military drafted the Constitution of 1982 under which it allowed a return to civilian government, but in which military had a privileged place

<sup>9</sup> The 1997 military coup described as a type of 'soft'—or 'post-modern' coup, where military pressure forced the resignation of the Welfare Party-True Path coalition government, and the holding of new elections

In other words, democracy was absent from the Atatürk program, as appeared from its exclusion among the six founding principles of Turkish republicanism: republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, secularism, revolutionism/reforms. At the same time, the alarmist attitude to Kurdish and Islamic identity have been extremely prejudicial for the Turkish democracy: the Kemalist Republic became an illiberal country against its own ethnic and religious identity. As it has been observed: “Ironically, it is the very success of Kemalism that transformed it into a “conservative” reaction. Kemalism, in other words, displays an understandable urge to conserve what has been achieved: a secular nation-state. Especially for Turkey’s politically powerful military, Kemalism represents a “defensive” and “protective” political reflex” (Tsapinar, 2010)

This was the drama and paradox of the Kemalism: its transformation from a “progressive” ideology to a “conservative” reaction, a political crisis between military and secular elites and Islamists. The two main principles of Kemalism, the urge to protect the republic and the urge to Westernize, ended to clash and to feed reaction against the West. Probably, as many observed, it is due to the weakness of the Kemalism. “Because secularism did not separate religion and politics, but rather subordinated religion to the political realm, it promoted the politicization of Islam and struggle between secularists and Muslims for control of the State” (Yavuz, 1997)

## **2. MILITARY OR ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY? IS THIS THE REAL QUESTION FOR TURKISH DEMOCRACY?**

After the Atatürk dead in 1938, the transition from authoritarian to multi-party politics began in 1945 under the new President İsmet İnönü who opened more space to religion: an opposition Democrat Party (DP) was allowed to form, mosques were built and the Islamic faculty at Ankara University was reopened.<sup>10</sup>

The DP won government in free parliamentary elections in May 1950, introducing a new period of democratization, political liberalization and a greater visibility of Islam that was primarily religious, cultural, and not political visibility. Sufi mystics, intellectuals and cultural groups aimed to a religious and moral renewal of society, criticizing the Turkish secularism and reaffirming the centrality of Islam. At the same time, Turkey started to live a new economic development that produce a new group of technocrats, modern and educated and, also, with an Islamic formative influence in their lives. And this distinguished them from the technocrats of the Atatürk era. (Lovell, 2009). The 1960’s rapid industrialization and economic development were also two relevant keys to the reassertion of Islam in Turkish.

But the democratization is not easy, as we know it. The DP government, led by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, quickly took an authoritarian and repressive turn after it assumed power.<sup>11</sup> In response to the opposition, DP declared martial law to suppress the protests and ordered the military to fire on the protestors, forcing the military into domestic politics after more than three decades of civilian rule. But, as it has been

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<sup>10</sup> By 2013 Turkey had 85.000 mosques and 115.000 imams under the control of Diyanet.

<sup>11</sup> During the ten years it governed the Republic (1950–1960), the DP adopted several strong measures such as the suppression of the Republican People’s Party friendly press; and the constriction of disobedient civil servants, judges, and professors into early retirement

commented, “If the military sided with the DP government and obeyed its orders, it would enter politics on DP’s behalf and if it refused, it would enter politics against DP. The military refused to fire on the people and staged a coup d’état on May 27, 1960, “intended rescue the Turkish democracy from the unfortunate situation in which it has found itself.” (Varol, 2013: 237)

Power returned to civilians in the 1961 elections, under a new Constitution that although drafted under the tutelage of a military, is widely considered as the most liberal constitution in Turkish history for the measures provided on the balance of powers and the respect of civil and fundamental rights (Ozbudun,1996) The 1961 is considered a reformist coup “whose accomplishments in the field of democratic, social, and economic development cannot be minimized”. (Ozbudun,1963). More Authors, consider that the 1960 coup established the legal and political foundations of a “more balanced economic growth”, by making social reform to include the previously excluded rural classes an effective part of Turkish politics , and of a participatory democratic society and a pluralist socio-political order that represented major social groups “If the legality and basic morality of . . . [government] repressions are questionable, as in the Turkish case [in 1960], the military man is not likely to feel himself bound by the imperatives of the professional military ethic, which normally exalts obedience as his highest virtue. (Ozbudun, 1963:14). Under the Turkish military’s control, the 1950 two-party system was transformed in a multi-party system from 1961 to 1965: six major parties participated in the democratic elections following the coup (Karpas, 1970) ( Huntington , 1965)

Anyway the political instability following the parliamentary elections that generated a weak coalition government between two ideological rivals, the Republican People’s Party and the Justice Party, triggered a military transition phase in which the military staged further direct and indirect interventions. The National Security Council, established in the 1961 Constitution, became the primary institution for addressing the nation’s political affairs. Even if, under the Constitution, its role was limited to advice on “national security and coordination.”, the military members of the Council expanded this role to many matters of domestic and foreign policy (Heper & Guney, 1996).

The Council decided on school curricula, broadcasting hours for television stations, the laws on terror and capital punishment,. The internal regulations of the Armed Forces also stipulated that the military must defend the country against external and internal threats, also by force. Over time, the military leaders took much power and increased their representatives in the Council: with the revisions brought by the 1982 Constitution, the Council consisted of five military members and five civilians. For this reason, the Cabinet had to give “priority consideration” to the Council’s “decision”, not anymore considered just as simple “recommendations” (Varol, 2013)

The same situation occurred after the 1971 coup known as coup by memorandum during which military forced the resignation of Prime Minister Suleyman Demiral by a memorandum that demanded the end to anarchy, fratricidal strife, and social and economic unrest. If the demands were not met, the military would “exercise its constitutional duty to guard the Turkish Republic”, taking the control of the government. (Sahen, 2010:354)

The following parliamentary elections failed to produce a stable government because none of the six parties won a majority and a government was established only after the left-leaning and secular RPP formed an unlikely coalition with the Islamist

National Salvation Party (Brown, 1989) But also in this case this weak coalition was not able to give stability. On September 12, 1980, there occurred a new military coup, led by General Kenan Evren, to “protect the unity of the nation, prevent a possible civil war, restore the authority of the government,” and to “remove the obstructions to democracy.” (Sahen, 2010:82)

Again, the new 1982 Constitution was drafted under military supervision to strengthen the presidency and the two-party system in order to prevent the parliamentary impasses. With the new constitution “the liberality of the 1961 Constitution” had come to be viewed a “luxury Turkey could ill-afford.” (Jacoby, 2004:138). The second chamber of the parliament created in the 1961 Constitution was abolished; it was imposed a threshold of 10 percent to gain parliamentary seats; it was declared martial law, the Constitution was suspended, all political parties were closed and their leaders imprisoned.

After seventeen years, another military coup-without-arms occurred. Because of the instability and the rise of political Islam in Turkey, the Armed Forces presented to Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, a member of the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*), a list of “recommendations” to curb anti-secular activity by members of the Welfare Party who had made public statements such as: “[But] will the transition be peaceful or violent; will it be achieved harmoniously or by bloodshed?” said by Necmettin Erbakan on Apr. 13, 1994; “If you want the solution, it’s sharia” said by Hasan Huseyin Ceylan on March 14, 1993; and “I will fight to the end to introduce sharia.” said by Ibrahim Halil Celik on May 8, 1997 (Recueil Des Arrêts Et Décisions-European Court of Human Rights, 2003; Banu, 2010:217) Prime minister Erbakan resigned without bloodshed or political upheaval, leading many to dub the 1997 was a “post-modern coup” in Turkey. ( Shambayati, 2008)

The military’s continuing political influence, especially against supposed threats to secularism, was demonstrated by its ‘e-memorandum’ posted on April 24, 2007 to the official website of the General Staff, with the intent of influencing the elections The Justice and Development Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Parti) announced that their candidate for Turkey’s 11th president would be Abdullah Gül<sup>12</sup>. The memorandum says “*Tt has been observed that there is a part of society that is in an ongoing struggle to undermine the basic values of the Turkish Republic, secularism being at the forefront, and those activities have increased in the recent period. The following ongoing activities have been submitted to the relevant authorities under suitable conditions: the desire to redefine basic values, and a wide range of activities, which extend as far as to arrange alternative celebrations of our national holiday, which is a symbol of our nation’s coherence, the independence of our state and our nation’s unity. Those that attempt to carry out these activities exploit the sacred religious emotions of our people without shame, transformed into an open challenge to the government in the guise of religion, in an attempt to conceal their actual purpose. By bringing activities that draw*

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<sup>12</sup> In 2007, the most debated subject in Turkey was the presidential election. The Justice and Development Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Parti) announced that their candidate for Turkey’s 11th president would be Abdullah Gül. On April 24, 2007 AK Party parliamentary group meeting, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that Abdullah Gül would be the candidate for the 11th President of Turkey. On April 27, 2007, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) gathered for the General Assembly to elect the president. In the first round of voting in the presidential election, 361 parliamentarians voted and presidential candidate Abdullah Gül received 357 votes. It was necessary a second round because the quorum of 367 was not reached. On the same day, on the evening, the General Chief of Staff posted the statement on its official website.

attention to women and children, these actions resemble those that attempt to destroy the unity and integrity of our country". (Ural, 2012:729) The purpose of this memorandum seemed to interfere the presidential elections and to influence the judiciary. In spite of all obstructionist interference, the key factor for the AK Party to successfully manage this process could be only the ability to balance Turkey's civil initiative with the military and bureaucracy.

In response to the proclamation, the Council of Ministers gathered on April 28, 2007 gave a response to the General Chief of Staff proclamation that was not defensive, but reactive".....) "...A statement of the General Staff against the government on any matter is unthinkable in a democratic state of law. The Chief of Staff is at the disposal of the government, an institution appointed to the constitution and related laws. According to our constitution, because of the duties and responsibilities of the General Chief of Staff, he is responsible to the Prime Minister..." But at the same time the response mentioned that "It should be clear to everyone that our Government is more supporting and fragile than anyone else in what concerns the principal and indispensable common values indicated in articles 1, 2 and 3 of the Constitution, the unity and integrity of our country, the notability of our nation and the qualifications of Turkey as a secular, democratic and social State of law. Turkey's national unity and integrity and the welfare of the Turkish Nation is possible with the protection of those values. It is not possible to approve any behaviours and acts that are revealed from time to time by real and legal persons against the basic qualifications of our Republic, the Constitution as well as the laws". (Ural, 2012.731)

The memorandum was removed on August 29, 2012, after the collective resignation of the previous military generals and the appointment of the General Necdet Ozel. Since then, military did not interfere anymore in the political life. Not a statement, not a word. It is due also to the different situation established with the Erdogan's government: after eleven years Erdogan came to power, a General on five is in jail for alleged attempted coups as in the famous case of "Ergenekon", a pretext to eliminate dissidents, according to the opposition (Rold, 2013)

The history of the Turkish Republic shows that there are not ideological differences between legal political parties: their differences are over key issues around the respect of their program to the Constitution and their values. This is clear also in the last facts emerging after the failed putsch on July 15 : if everything indicates that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was the victim of a failed Gülenist coup d'état, at the same time we must recognize that both of them have in common many years of staunch alliance and the same ideology: political Islam. "Erdoğan and Gülen have in common the desire to Islamize. Did they break up because of deep ideological divergences? No. Over methodology in reaching a common goal? Perhaps. Because of greed for political power? Probably. But not because one of them decided to abandon political Islam". (Belkdis, 2016)

On the other hand, we have to recognize that all the military coups in Turkey ended voluntarily by the officers themselves: military did not infiltrate civilian institution but chose to wield its institutional influence outside the civilian authorities' control. Also for this reason, despite the military's interventions created robust institutions and liberal measures, it is fair to say that the formal institutions of Turkish politics resemble those of most liberal democracies. A formal independence of judges is guaranteed by the Constitution; legislation is subject to the control of judicial review and its constitutionality is granted by the Constitutional Court; elections to the Grand National Assembly (GNA),

Turkey's unicameral national parliament, have a high voter turnout, and are evaluated by external auditors as being 'characterized by pluralism and a high level of public confidence (Lovell, 2009). But, at the same time, there is a notably lack of clarity in the meaning of terms, such as 'national security', accompanied by legislative loopholes that provide room for suppression of freedoms, such as association and assembly, constitutionally protected. There remain a number of central concerns: the limits to civilian rights, the continuous military interventions into public debates; the independence and impartiality of the judiciary; the extensive nature of corruption; the protection of human rights. 'Turkey's military-drafted constitution fundamentally lacks the inclusiveness, the clearly-defined rights, and the limitations on state power that are crucial for democracy in a multicultural society such as this' (Freedom House, 2007)

Anyway, before the July 15 coup attempt, the military was one of the most trusted institutions in Turkey, historically considered as the guarantor of Turkey's secular and democratic character. But on July 15, people took to the streets and confronted the rebellious soldiers.

What did it mean? Has probably Turkish society internalized electoral democracy?

Probably yes. The Erdogan's AKP heralds democracy: its more seasoned politicians have participated in free elections for two decades. But opponents consider the government as a civilian dictatorship and the judicial system a way to neuter the military, the opposition media, and rival political parties. It was clear during the court case against Ergenekon organisation (Tsapinar 2012).<sup>13</sup> And it is not just that. Talking about the Kurdish minorities, despite the AKP's rhetorical commitment to deal with Kurdish expectations, Erdoğan has not expanded the limited political space for Turkey's ethnic groups. On the contrary, he restored to the classic arguments that cannot be democratization when it is necessary to face the terrorism the consequence was the violence in the Kurdish southeast. Still, the AKP has done nothing for women rights. On the contrary, it eliminated some of the legal obstacles to discriminate women, showing in this way that Erdongan's values and gender equality are not progressive but conservative. (Tsapinar, 2012)

Under the AKP, Turkey is not a liberal democracy, despite the multiparty elections and the promises of a new constitution and reforms that would address pivotal issues facing the country—the Kurdish question, human rights, and freedom of expression. But as it was observed, "the western countries, the United States and the European Union, have largely ignored Turkey's democratic backslide. President Erdogan's government is viewed as necessary for fighting ISIS. He has also helped deal with the European migrant crisis. As a result, President Erdogan has enjoyed a free pass as he steadily erodes civil and political liberties" (Nisbet, 2016)

Anyway, for the first time, the Erdogan government is totally in civilian hands and the military is no longer strong enough to take action.

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<sup>13</sup> The Ergenekon is an organization, with possible ties to the military, which was under process in 2007 with the charge to have planned a coup. The prosecutor accused hundreds of military officials, journalists, and political activists of involvement. AKP critics contended that the Erdoğan government used the case to silence its secular opponents. The AKP responded that it did not control the judiciary. It was later claimed that Gülenists orchestrated the trials which damaged trust between Erdogan and Gülen.

The attempt by a faction of the military to depose Erdogan with a coup d'état aimed to restore Turkish democracy failed. And the paradox is that its failure was determined by the high public demand for democratic governance in Turkey.

Turks had to choose between two options: military dictatorship and elected dictatorship. "The good news is that the coup attempt failed and Turkey is not a third-world dictatorship run by an unpredictable military general who loves to crush dissent. The bad news is that Turkey is run by an unpredictable, elected president who loves to crush dissent." (Belkdis, 2016)

### 3. A STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY?

Over the time, there were several formula that have described democracy in Turkey: all of them, in a way or another, captured the concerns about Turkey's democratization: Turkey has been described as a 'delegative' democracy (Özbudun, 2002:151); as 'functioning if imperfect' (Larrabee & Lesser, 2003); as 'an unconsolidated "procedural democracy"' (Tsakonas, 2000); and because of the military's role—as a 'protected democracy' (Ümit, 2000)

Now, future for Turkey democracy may look bleak. It seems that, rejecting a military dictatorship, the Turkish people may have simply substituted one form of autocratic governance for a form of electoral authoritarianism that is the illusion of multiparty democracy. The attempt gave Erdogan what he wanted: a pretext to fight every dissident. Erdogan's quest for complete political control is unstoppable, with severely restricted civil and political liberties. "The failed coup provides Erdogan the opportunity to further purge political dissent, that reaches deep into the military, political, legal, media and educational segments of Turkish society". (Nisbet, 2016) Declaring a state of emergency for a period of three months, with an option to extend it for another quarter of a year, and suspending the European Convention of Human rights, Erdogan could realize his plans. His ultimate goal is to rewrite Turkish constitution in order to develop a strong, centralized presidency with a subservient parliament and judiciary.

But we must also define the question and first of all, talking about Turkey, we must stop asking if the Islamic character of Erdogan Government is compatible or not with the democracy. It is erroneous to assume that Islam is incapable of democracy. At least in Turkey, where Islam and democracy are connected together by a nexus of relations that may be resumed with two aspects: the Islamization of politics and the politicization of Islam. The first aspect is about political Islam in Turkey, the second one covers all those political, economic, and social areas in which Islam is instrumental

In Islam there are elements that might well contribute to the functioning of free institutions and respect for human rights: "According to the Sunni juridical statements on the institution of sovereignty, the ruler does not derive his authority from descent, and even God is the ultimate but not the immediate source of authority. The immediate vesting of authority is in principle by a process of election and contract, which in Arabic is called *bay'a*, and in Turkish becomes *biat*. The principal obligation assumed by the sovereign under the terms of this contract is to maintain, enforce--and also obey--the Sacred Law, which in principle he did not create and cannot change, and by which he is bound no less than the humblest of his subjects" (Lewis, 1994:45)

The relationship between Islam and democracy in Turkey is regulated by laicism, resulting from a long historical evolution, and believed to guarantee the existence of the democratic system. But Islam is a part of Turkey society and today's laicism manifested itself as a dualism of religion and politics, with religion subordinate to republic.

In this perspective, we cannot talk about secularism against Islamism in Turkey. In the last few decades, Turkey witnessed the establishment of diverse parties that reject the modern state and strive to realize an Islamic model: the National Order Party (MNP) which, founded in 1970 under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan, was banned for being Islamist in 1971; the National Liberation Party (MSP), that formed a coalition government with the Republican People's Party (CHP) and led by Bülent Ecevit in 1973 the first ringing success for political Islam in the country. After seven-year in which all parties were banned, Erbakan became chairman of the Welfare Party (RP) which became the strongest group in the Turkish parliament during the 1995 elections.

As we said before, Gülen and Erdogan come from the same macro-cultural area even if they differ in many respects. But these difference did not exclude they had strong agreement. "Although Gülen and Erdogan never met in person before Erdogan became prime minister in 2003, they were both pious Muslims who opposed both secularism and the army's role in politics. It was the Turkish military's threat to the AKP which turned Gülen into a key ally of Erdogan for a decade. Gülen's followers provided crucial support for the AKP, which subsequently secured them three election victories. In return, Erdogan offered protection to the Gülen community's opaque businesses and pious activities" (Gol, 2016).

The struggle in Turkey is not for democracy and anti- islamism, but a struggle for power.

As recognized, Gülen is arguably Turkey's second most powerful man. Tensions between Erdogan and Gülen began to increase when *Hizmet*, the Gulen's movement grew and its members took the main institutional sits in Turkey. The first clear sign of struggle was with the series of investigations carried out between 2007 and 2013 known as Ergenekon trials. After winning the 2011 parliamentary elections with a majority, Erdogan came to break his alliance with the Gülen movement and in 2013 decided to close down Gülen's prep-schools in Turkey and to pressure other heads of States to do the same. It started a period of reciprocal accusations of high level corruption.

Gülen became the first public enemy and in November 2015, he, with other 122 Gülenists, was indicted with the charge of armed terrorism. After the military coup, that according to Gulen was staged by Erdogan himself. Ankara asked Washington for extradition of Gulen, accused to organizing the coup. If the Washington gives his extradition, Gülen might face the death penalty, the reintroduction of which is highly possible in Erdogan's "new Turkey" (Gol, 2016).

But the struggle between Erdogan and Gulen is not an ideological one. Gulen is considered by his follower as a liberal Islamic modernist and his movement claims openly to work for the spiritual and humanistic tradition of Islam. But who critics Gulen, consider him a threat to the democracy because he wants to install an Islamic dictatorship. Equally, Erdogan continues to proclaims there is no threaten to liberal democracy in Turkey; he is perceived to be the defender of 'civilian rule'. The question is that for granting his concept of democracy he decides to adopt special laws, to suspend the Constitution and to order dictatorial purges against hid opponents and to clamp down on civil liberties

Their contrasts are just for personal power.

In this political climate, a failed coup does not mean that democracy has won. The only results following the failed coup of July 2016 is the Erdogan's more power and greater authoritarian control over Turkish politics. His new popularity will help him to adopt constitutional change and to replay Turkey's parliamentary democracy with an executive presidency as the model living in Russia, with which Erdogan is showing to desire closer relations

Considering this framework, it is interesting to wonder not only if we can talk about democracy in Turkey, and in which terms, but also what is Western reactions before and after the coup.

After his election, President Obama began to court Erdogan whom he considered a Muslim democrat who would be a model for the Middle East. In 2011 Obama named Erdogan together with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister David Cameron as one of the five leaders with whom he had strongest bonds (Crowly, 2016). It sounds strange that now, after the July military coup, the President of the Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Nass wonders "Turkey coup presents dilemma to US and Europe governments: do you support non-democratic coup vs increasingly non-democratic authoritarian leader? (Soylu, 2016)

#### 4. WHAT ABOUT EUROPE UNION?

There would have been better if the European leaders, after expressing their horror at the coup and congratulated the Turkish people for defeating it, had met Erdogan and sat down with him to discuss who collectively ensure an European path for democracy in Turkey. It could have been a good chance for Europe to stand up for its political ideal and democratic values. But Putin met Erdogan instead other leaders of the European Union (Bild, 2016). And European Union, apart its threaten for the landmark migrant deal with the Turkey in March 2016, is a sleeping witness of Erdogan's dictatorial purges against his opponents and all the suspension of civil liberties.

However, as we said, already in 1994 Bernard Lewis wrote "An explanation of the relative success of democracy in Turkey, if one can be found, could also be of value in explaining, and perhaps correcting, the failures of democracy elsewhere".

Nothing more true.

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