Political Islam and the Economy and Politics in Turkey

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Deep Futures (DF) edited/excerpted portions of the paper to ensure brevity and structural consistency with other DF products. DF provides the implications, risks, and opportunities for EUCOM. As with all DF products, the goal of this paper is to convey insight into the European operational environment.

This paper reflects one scholarly perspective. DF welcomes reasoned discussion in which learning is compounded. For this reason, differing viewpoints and additional insight from DF’s pre-publication review are included in text boxes throughout this document. Additional comments may be submitted to the address at the end of the paper.

Methodological Note

This inFocus is the first in a series of three papers publishing A.A.’s work discussing Political Islam and the Economy and Politics in Turkey. This research was conducted in Turkish and English and focused on articles, government websites, and interviews with experts on Turkey.

Abstract of the Series

This series examines what effect political Islam may have on the economy and the political landscape in Turkey. Political Islam is used in this paper to define a movement which includes Islamic traditions and values in its public life. This concept is based on the principles of conservative democracy, in which political parties incorporate traditional and religious values into their party platforms. It can also be thought of as a group of like-minded people with a strong belief system organizing under a secular platform. Political Islam has two main factions in Turkey: the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a political action party and the Gulen Movement (GM), a social movement.

- The first paper in the series explores the primary political groups in Turkey;
- The second paper describes and analyzes the interactions between the players outlined in the first paper, and;
- The final paper in the series extrapolates trends and future possibilities in Turkey.

Part 1: Political Groups

Executive Summary

Political Islam in the Turkish context refers to a movement based on the principles of conservative democracy, a term used by Prime Minister Erdogan to describe his philosophy of incorporating religious values into political party platforms.
Political Islam has two factions in Turkey: the Justice and Development Party (AKP) which is a political action party and the Gulen Movement (GM), a social movement.

The AKP has derived its popularity from its adoption of a centrist position compared to its opposition, being neither Islamist nor Kemalist (secular) in the extreme.

The AKP

The Justice and Development Party- Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP or AK Party), has won the last three national elections in Turkey, holding the majority in the Grand National Assembly. A remnant of the religious right, the AKP took everyone by surprise in adopting a Western outlook, embracing EU mandates in its reform packages, and implementing liberal economic policies. The success of the AKP is partially a result of its adherence to the principles of political Islam, in that since the AKP displayed values of pride in their Muslim identity, traditional Turkish ethics, and a nationalistic Turkish pride, many people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and traditionalists from Anatolia felt closer to the AKP than to the other existing parties. The AKP is also much more unified under the control of its charismatic leader Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan than are other parties which may have a wide ideological spread from left to right. PM Erdogan sometimes defines political Islam as synonymous with conservative democracy, a term used to describe his philosophy of incorporating religious values into political party platforms.

After the financial crisis of 2001, the incoming AKP started pushing for export-driven economic policies as well as a free market economy in Turkey. In addition, the leaders of the AKP established a new Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) office that directly reports to the Prime Minister, and they advocated for incentive-driven export policies for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), a government assets privatization office, and transparency in the financial system.

Political Islam unites the AKP’s core supporters, the Anatolian Tigers, who are devoutly Muslim, economically liberal, and loyal to Prime Minister Erdogan. These businesspeople from Anatolia and the secular elite, which had been and remained the dominant power in business, both benefited from EU-directed reforms, liberal economic policies, and foreign direct investment. They thrived economically and sought regional stability for continued economic growth and modernization. The Anatolian business owners also found a political party whose Islamic values they shared, in contrast to the existing secular ones in the Turkish political landscape. (See Figure 2.1: 2011 Election National Vote Distribution.)

The difference between a devout and a secular Muslim is relevant to understanding the Anatolian Tigers and the success of the AKP party. A devout Muslim is identified as one who practices the Muslim religion as part of daily life, whereas a secular Muslim does not practice the Muslim religion on a daily basis. However, according to a Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) study in 2006, the devout considered themselves to also be secular, and the secular group also described themselves as Muslims. Therefore, these terms are not mutually exclusive when considering how Turks describe themselves. The Anatolian Tigers, and other sympathizers such as the secular business people,
supported the AKP for the last three elections with 35%, 47%, and 50% of the votes to ensure that economic progress continued along with political stability.9,10 (See Figure 2.2: Turkish Election Results 2002-2011.)

The AKP’s appeal is not only due to inclusion of Islam in its platform. One reason the AKP received half of all votes in the 2011 election is its promise to replace the current military-devised 1982 constitution with a civilian one which would protect freedoms. However, it has so far failed to produce concrete progress.

(Mehmet Kalyoncu, Independent Political Analyst)11

The Gulen Movement

The Gulen Movement (GM) is a significant player in political Islam with powerful holdings in media and finance as well as influence on the judiciary system. The GM is the largest social and religious organization in Turkey.12 The network has over 1,000 schools in 140 countries, owns non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business associations, hospitals, media outlets, ten universities, college prep institutions, and banks. The group is well established in the US since the founder moved to Pennsylvania in 1998, and it operates 120 charter schools in 25 states.13,14 The GM presents itself as a platform for interfaith dialogue for religious understanding. Many followers are either volunteers or financial donors to the “Hizmet,” or “Service.”15 Its powerful business arm TUSKON was established in 2005 in Turkey and has been operating in Washington, DC since 2008 and contributing to Turkish foreign policy.16

Gulen organizations are known for bringing top-level academicians, business people, and public servants, including current heads of states, to their events.17

Gulen loyalists own large media assets in Turkey. One of the largest conglomerates, Calik Holding, which has become a household name in the last ten years, holds 20 percent of the Turkish media.18 Calik Holding was able to buy these media assets from the government, which seized ATV-Sabah from another company and sold it later for $1.1 billion, $750 million of it financed by the AKP government.19 In addition, the network also controls the largest circulating newspaper, Zaman.20 Since 2002, because of mutual interests with AKP, the Gulen network-controlled media outlets have significantly increased attacks against opposition parties. For example, three weeks before the 2011 elections, ten opposition party leaders from Republican People’s Party (CHP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) had to tender their resignations because of sex tape scandals published in GM-controlled papers.21 Critics argue that it may have changed

While the GM-controlled papers reported on the scandals and subsequent resignations, the actual recordings were posted on the Internet.

(Deep Futures)
the election results, lowering the number of votes for the opposition, which had a direct effect on the number of seats attained in the Grand National Assembly.\textsuperscript{22}

Even though the Gulen Movement has been supporting the AKP, now that their common opposition has been mostly neutralized, there are signs indicating a deteriorating relationship between the AKP and Gulen. The first sign occurred with the “Gaza Flotilla” incident, in which Gulen issued a criticism against supporters of the flotilla, including the AKP.\textsuperscript{23} A recent incident involves the head of the Turkish National Intelligence Agency (MIT), which reports directly to Prime Minister Erdogan. A special prosecutor summoned the Director of MIT to testify in a public court for a terrorism-related trial.\textsuperscript{24} The Prime Minister refused and immediately acted to change the law so that this would never happen again, giving the Director immunity. In addition, the ranks of the prosecutors were shuffled in the judiciary and police forces as a retaliatory move.\textsuperscript{25}

Although there are many articles pointing to the Gulen Movement’s control of the Judiciary and the Ministry of Interior, the evidence is still largely anecdotal. The Judiciary and the Ministry of Interior control the national police forces and nationwide police intelligence.\textsuperscript{26,27} The GM-controlled media have trumpeted the prosecutions of over 177 current and 77 retired high-level military personnel, journalists, and even elected representatives of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in the “Sledgehammer” and “Ergenekon” cases. Critics argue that the GM and the AKP are seeking justice for the 28 February 1997 events in which the Turkish Military gave an ultimatum to the religious administration to either adhere to the secular constitution or face the consequences.\textsuperscript{28,29} The supporters of the regime argue the Turkish judicial system is working properly to fight and eliminate any domestic or foreign influence that threatens the Turkish democratic process.

With the help of TUSKON and the other Gulen-related social organizations, the eco-system of the Gulen Movement will likely grow exponentially in terms of political influence and business. Even though there are cracks in the relationship with the AKP, both conservative organizations will support each other in the future for the sake of their mutual interests.

\textit{The Opposition}

The secular opposition parties: the Republican People’s Party (CHP), the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP, the main Kurdish party), and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP, the ultranationalist right wing party), are struggling with internal management issues. As a result, they have little influence on Turkey’s economy.\textsuperscript{30,31}

The CHP cannot organize itself to become a true contender either in the political or economic arena. The CHP describes itself as the Kemalist\textsuperscript{32} secular party of the Republic, and while it has been around since the beginning of modern Turkey, the AKP and PM Erdogan have marginalized it since 2002. The CHP’s new leader, Mr. Kilicdaroglu, an Alevi Muslim\textsuperscript{33}, is known as an honest, hardworking man with a proud public service record of almost 30 years, but he cannot match the dynamic nature of Erdogan.\textsuperscript{34}

With Kilicdaroglu at the helm, the CHP was able to increase its share of votes in the latest elections and in the Grand National Assembly as the leaders of the secular segment. However, the second in command in the CHP quit in early May 2012, leaving the CHP management and its supporters scrambling for leaders.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, internal struggles of the party caused their US-trained chief economic advisor to quit after ten months.\textsuperscript{36} This individual, who wished to remain anonymous for this paper, is a well-respected finance professor at a top-tier business school. He highlighted the CHP’s internal management issues as well as the lack of tough leadership from Kilicdaroglu in his decision to
quit. He concluded that internal issues of the CHP distance them from their voter base, which is worried about the future of the Turkish economy. There are 17 deputy directors for the economy in the CHP, but there is no implementation of a comprehensive economic agenda for their voter base to understand and support. Furthermore, he was surprised to see the strong organizational skills that the AKP displayed in reaching out to both secular and devout businessmen, whether they were from their true base or not.

In an interview in May 2012, a retired three-term Grand National Assembly representative from the CHP verified the AKP’s outreach to all voters, CHP’s internal problems, and confirmed that the growing economy and the support of the Anatolian Tigers strengthen the AKP’s base. This man, who also wished to remain anonymous, has been a well-respected member of the CHP since the 1960’s and has had friends on both sides of the political aisle in Turkey.37,38

The remaining two main opposition parties, the BDP and the MHP, are going through some issues as well.39,40 Even though both parties have core bases, neither appeals to the mass public and both seem to have a polarizing effect in the political landscape due to their constant nationalistic messages and lack of economic prowess. Large segments of the population blame the BDP for the militant Kurdish separatist movement, in particular, and this effect is magnified in light of the ongoing Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) attacks in the eastern part of Turkey.

The opposition parties CHP, BDP, and MHP will remain ineffectual because of their internal divisions and lack of cohesive leadership in the short term. If a two-party system becomes the new model, the CHP will need to integrate the Kurdish BDP and the ultra-nationalistic MHP with its Kemalist roots, which may be a difficult task. If that task is accomplished, the opposition may have approximately 40-45 percent of the votes based on the last election results.

**AKP Succession Plan and Alternative Political Maneuvering**

The succession plan for the founders of the AKP, Prime Minister Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul, has been a hot topic since the 2011 elections. According to AKP bylaw number 132, which imposes term limits on its members, no party member is eligible to serve in the Grand National Assembly more than three times.41 Of the current cabinet, 55 AKP representatives, 16 Ministers, the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly, and Prime Minister Erdogan cannot run for the next term. Ministers Ahmet Davutoğlu, Ömer Dinçer, İsmet Yılmaz, Erdoğan Bayraktar, Zafer Çaglayan, Cevdet Yılmaz, and Mehmet Şimşek will be eligible to serve next term.42 (See Appendix A: 2015 AKP Eligibility List-Current Cabinet.)

The cabinet members and the AKP representatives who are not eligible for re-election have been seeking alternatives while voicing their opinions in the media. There are two options available. The first one is to modify AKP bylaw 132 such that it would allow the members to serve three consecutive terms, take a break for one election, and continue serving again. While taking this
mandatory sabbatical, the members could become mayors of their representative cities and continue supporting the AKP.\footnote{43}
The second option is to change the current electoral system based on the French democratic model, which has a President and Prime Minister, to an American model with a broad-powered President. The new model would also eliminate the 550-member Grand National Assembly and create a House of Representatives and a more seasoned Senate chamber. This model would embrace the two-party system and unify the fragmented political landscape, forcing small players to merge. If the AKP were to change the election model in this way, it is probable that Prime Minister Erdogan would seek presidential nomination in 2014.

The continued growth of the Turkish economy may embolden the AKP to expand its political power. However, for the reign of the AKP to continue, three major goals must be achieved. The first goal is to develop a succession plan for the AKP leaders, which must be managed fairly and appropriately. The second goal is the continuation of positive growth of the Turkish economy, which can happen if present policies remain in place. The third goal is maintaining the relative stability of the region in terms of the geopolitical landscape.

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Deep Futures-derived Implications for EUCOM

*Positive effects on long-term Turkish stability and security.* Due to the AKP’s focus on economic growth and “zero problems with neighbors\footnote{44},” the economy is expected to grow, even if the pace slows due to the global economic downturn. Continued growth will help to provide employment opportunities for the fifty percent of the population under the age of thirty.\footnote{45}

*Focus will remain on stability to ensure continued growth.* The corollary to the above is that, in order to maintain growth, the AKP will focus on foreign relations through positive engagement with neighbors and domestic consensus-building. It is likely the AKP will endeavor to keep even relations with the Gulen Movement due to its popularity and influence within and outside of Turkey.

Risks and Opportunities for EUCOM

*The AKP will balance between East and West.* As a NATO member and EU aspirant, Turkey has strong ties to its Western allies. However, Turkey’s desire to dominate regional politics and the AKP’s pragmatic approach to trade and growth will lead Turkey to develop its relationships with its Eastern neighbors and former Ottoman areas such as the Balkans and North Africa. The outcome for US diplomatic and military relations with Turkey will likely hinge on how the US presents its attitude toward Turkey’s Eastern foreign policy; that is, if the US attempts to coerce Turkey into shunning its Eastern neighbors, the Turks will see it as a sign of disrespect for their regional power position. In contrast, the US has an opportunity to improve relations with Turkey and its neighbors by taking a nuanced approach.

*US-Turkish military relations can be buoyed through HA/DR.* Turkey will struggle with refugees from Syria for some time into the future. The US has strong Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) capabilities, and military-to-military contact through relief activities could build new relationships among younger members, now that some longstanding relationships have been severed due to the Sledgehammer and Ergenekon cases.
Term limit maneuvers could be problematic for the US and EU. The handling of AKP members’ term limits could prove politically problematic for the US and EU if Erdogan appears to manipulate due process to ensure his tenure. While the AKP nominally continues to pursue EU membership, it believes it to be unlikely, and therefore, Erdogan may take the risk of falling short of EU standards in order to maintain his position in power.

Areas for Further Research

The Gulen Movement. Reporting on the Gulen Movement’s origins and intentions ranges from conspiratorial to messianic. Where in this spectrum should the US place this well-connected group, and how should the US engage it, or not?

Probability of change in ethos of Turkish Armed Forces. Will there be a philosophical transformation in the Turkish armed forces as a younger generation, more supportive of the AKP, moves into the ranks, or is the secular military culture strong enough to overcome AKP sympathies?

The AKP’s balance between conservatives and secular business elements. If the AKP’s popularity comes at least in part from the perception that its policies are in line with Islamic principles, is the party in danger of a backlash from its more conservative members if it is seen as adopting too Western an outlook? On the other hand, will the secular businesspeople continue to support the AKP if it leans toward more overtly Islamist policies?

Part 2: Social and Economic Environment. The second paper in this series explores the social and economic effects of the AKP’s policies.

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Deep Futures Method Statement: Deep Futures: 1) synthesizes new knowledge from the aggregate of relevant existing knowledge by placing it within Command context, 2) disseminates finished products throughout the community, ideally creating further dialogue and leading to new topics for research which are tailored to the customer, 3) selects topics via Command-focused (top-down) and environmentally-driven (bottom-up) approaches, 4) scopes its research plans to ensure relevance and to identify hypotheses to be tested, assumptions, and gaps in knowledge, 5) researches scholarly repositories using customized IT tools.
# Appendix A: 2015 AKP Eligibility List - Current Cabinet

*Green indicates eligibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>English title</th>
<th>Turkish title</th>
<th>Holder</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
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<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
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<td>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</td>
<td>July 5, 2011</td>
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<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
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<td>July 5, 2011</td>
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<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
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<td>July 5, 2011</td>
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<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
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<td>July 5, 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
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<td>Minister of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>Dışişleri Bakanı</td>
<td>Ahmet Davutoğlu</td>
<td>July 5, 2011</td>
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<td>Minister of the Interior</td>
<td>Minister of the Interior</td>
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<td>İdris Naim Şahin</td>
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<td>Minister of Finance</td>
<td>Minister of Finance</td>
<td>Maliye Bakanı</td>
<td>Mehmet Şimşek</td>
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<td>Minister of Justice</td>
<td>Minister of Justice</td>
<td>Adalet Bakanı</td>
<td>Sadullah Ergin</td>
<td>July 5, 2011</td>
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<td>Minister of Energy and Natural Resources</td>
<td>Minister of Energy and Natural Resources</td>
<td>Enerji ve Tabii Kaynaklar Bakanı</td>
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<td>July 5, 2011</td>
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<td>Minister of Food, Agriculture and Animal Breeding</td>
<td>Minister of Food, Agriculture and Animal Breeding</td>
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<td>Minister of Culture and Tourism</td>
<td>Minister of Culture and Tourism</td>
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<td>Minister of Health</td>
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<td>Minister of National Education</td>
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<td>Minister of National Defense</td>
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<td>Minister of Science, Industry and Technology</td>
<td>Minister of Science, Industry and Technology</td>
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<td>Minister of Labour and Social Security</td>
<td>Minister of Labour and Social Security</td>
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<td>Minister of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communication</td>
<td>Minister of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communication</td>
<td>Ulaştırma, Denizcilik ve Haberleşme Bakanı</td>
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<td>Minister of Family and Social Policy</td>
<td>Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanı</td>
<td>Fatma Şahin</td>
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<td>Minister of European Union Affairs and Chief Negotiator</td>
<td>Minister of European Union Affairs and Chief Negotiator</td>
<td>Avrupa Birliği Bakanı ve Baş Müzakereci</td>
<td>Egemen Bağış</td>
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<td>Minister of Youth and Sports</td>
<td>Minister of Youth and Sports</td>
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<td>Suat Kılıç</td>
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<td>Minister of Development</td>
<td>Minister of Development</td>
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<td>Minister of Customs and Trade</td>
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<td>Minister of Forestry and Water Works</td>
<td>Orman ve Su İşleri Bakanı</td>
<td>Veysel Eroğlu</td>
<td>July 5, 2011</td>
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</table>
1 A.A. was a 2012 National Security Education Program (NSEP) scholar at Georgetown University. His background includes corporate management, entrepreneurship, and international consulting. He also led international project management efforts in technology localization in the Middle-East and Eurasia region. He holds an MBA from the University of Michigan and is a Six Sigma Black Belt. Due to his position in the Turkish business community the author has requested anonymity; consequently, he is only referenced by his initials.

2 This paper was written as part of the Open Source Analysis Project (OSAP) which is a key component of the English for Heritage Language Speakers (EHLS) program. The EHLS program enables native speakers of Arabic, Dari, Hausa, Igbo, Mandarin Chinese, Pashto, Persian Farsi, Somali, Swahili, and Turkish (“scholars”) to develop the professional English skills they need to work effectively in the federal government. EHLS is funded by the National Security Education Program (NSEP), U.S. Department of Defense. The program is managed by the Center for Applied Linguistics; instruction is provided by faculty at Georgetown University. Federal government organizations provide topics for EHLS scholars that correlate to the scholars’ academic and professional backgrounds. These projects are mutually beneficial in that they provide government agencies with analytical support while giving EHLS scholars an opportunity to conduct authentic research, practice analytical thinking, and master the writing style appropriate for professional reports. Since the program began in 2006, a number of agencies have participated in the Open Source Analysis Project ranging from the Defense Intelligence Agency to the Library of Congress.


8 Author finds this explanation as being reasonable and borrowed it from the research of Uygar, Selcuk. “The Islamic Work Ethic and the Emergence of Turkish SME Owner-Managers.” Journal of Business Ethics (2008).


11 Mehmet Kalyoncu is an Independent Political Analyst, and Author of “A Civilian Response to Ethno-Religious Conflict: the Gulen Movement in Southeast Turkey” (New Jersey: Light 2008), and the forthcoming “Reflections on Turkey, Turkish-American-Israeli Relations, and the Middle East” (New Jersey: Tughra Books 2013).


Kemalism was the ideology of the Turkish Republic under General Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) and was enshrined in the Turkish constitution. Its main tenets are civic nationalism which denies ethnic differences in favor of a homogeneous citizenry, and secularism which regards religious involvement in state affairs as a weakness which kept the Ottoman Empire from unity and technological advancement. Michael A. Reynolds, “Echoes of Empire: Turkey’s Crisis of Kemalism and the Search for an Alternative Foreign Policy,” Analysis Paper Number 26, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings. (June 2012); and Nathalie Tocci, “21 Century Kemalism: Redefining Turkey-EU Relations in the Post-Helsinki Era,” Working Document 170, Center for European Policy Studies. (September 2001).

Alevis are a historically persecuted sect of Shia Islam. Men and women worship together in a service incorporating music and dance, and their houses of worship are called “cemevis,” rather than mosques.

At the time of writing this report, BDP’s main web site was attacked by hackers and the only way to reach Facebook through http://www.facebook.com/BDPgenelmerkez.


