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THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTEMPORARY TURKEY'S FUTURE: TENSION BETWEEN AK PARTY AND THE HIZMET MOVEMENT

ABSTRACT

Without doubt, tension between Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Hizmet Movement is of vital importance for both Turkey and international society. This conflict is also important for Turkey's future when considering the concept of democracy. In this context, this tension has been mentioned by both academic and associated political interests worldwide. Therefore the importance of the outcome of this issue is going to be one of the key factors deciding Turkey's political and social future. To clearly understand and make predictions concerning Turkey's future, it is important to understand not only the actors involved and their normative and ideological perspectives; the deeper problematic areas of the Turkish state should also be explored. This paper outlines almost ten years of Turkey's social and political life under these two main opposing actors. This study will try to find a rational answer to the question of "what will be the outcome of this tension surrounding Turkish democracy for the political arena and civil society?" In this respect, the contemporary meaning of civil society, its importance for a healthy democracy and the relation among the state, the government which controls all state apparatus and the civil society organisations is explained. The final part provides further details about the AKP and Hizmet Movement and the subjects of their tension.

Key words

Democracy, Civil Society, Authoritarianism, AKP, Hizmet Movement

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Introduction

Since 2002, Turkey has been governed by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which is an atypical top-up and ideologically paradoxical political party. Without doubt, this length of time in power is a very significant success in modern Turkish political life. Turkey's current president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was the former Prime Minister and founder of the AKP. His charisma and political experience as well as the AKP's pragmatic political positions and normative coalitions have been substantially important for their success. In other words, despite the fact that the AKP has declared itself as a reformist and conservative democratic party, by examining its history and many normative and practical turning points it becomes obvious its actions are contrary to its self-description.

It can be also argued that from the very beginning of the foundation of the AKP until 2007, it incorporated democrats, liberals, social democrats, religion based communities, prominent scholars and other ideological perspectives (Kahraman, 2007, p. 51). By using the benefits and opportunities of these various coalitions, in the early years of the AKP a small liberal transformation was launched within the Republic of Turkey's legal and political structures. The AKP acted in accordance with European Union criteria regarding the principles of liberty, freedom of religion and democratization in such areas as educational reform, having an open market economy and military guardianship. Despite these positive policies, the AKP has been converting itself into a type of contemporary autocratic structure. At this stage it has begun to give up its normative, social and informal coalition ties (Kahraman, 2007, pp. 53–55).

Among the varying social coalition partners of the AKP, the Hizmet Movement should be defined as a special ally. The Hizmet Movement is a network organised in accordance with the ideas of the Islamic scholar and preacher Fethullah Gülen, the indisputable moral and ideal vanguard of the Movement. The Hizmet Movement is based on contemporary Islamic ideology and is transnational and volunteer based, involving numerous volunteers who come from different religions and schools of thoughts. It is reported that the Hizmet Movement has expanded into almost 160 countries by using its volunteer workers and educational centres. In this respect, it is related to both Turkey's and the world's economic, social and political issues (Pandya, 2012, pp. 34–38).

Despite the fact that this coherent coalition continued for many years, the relationship between Hizmet Movement and the AKP worsened after 2010 because of their perspective differences regarding foreign policy, education, communal rights and individual and media freedoms. In addition to these conflicts, the highest tension began with the corruption investigations of 17 and 25 December 2013¹ that involved the then prime minister and other ministers of his cabinet. According to the government, the Hizmet Movement was actually attempting to perform a civil coup d'état through these judicial investigations. Conversely, I argue that the AKP government was trying to pacify the Hizmet Movement by counteractions in light of the abovementioned differences in various policies (Öztürk, 2014, p. 113).

From this point of view it is possible to define this situation as more of a struggle and tension between the governmental state and the civil society, which plays a prominent role in the principles of contemporary democracy. In this respect, I will clarify the AKP's history and its main turning points. Therefore the first part will mention how the AKP converted itself into a severe governmental state. Secondly, I will try to define the activity domains and political ideas of the Hizmet Movement. Thirdly, I will briefly cover the struggle between the AKP and the Hizmet Movement and their main areas of controversy. In conclusion, I will interpret the current struggle not only in regard to the relationship between the state and the civil society but also to the importance of contemporary modern Turkey.

1. AKP and its Conversion

The AKP was established in 2001 by the reformist, contemporary, young wing of the pro-Islamist Virtue Party (Refah Partisi), and won as a single party at the first general election. Without doubt, the previous unsuccessful coalition governments and instability of the economic situation contributed significantly to this achievement; however, this does not provide a full explanation. To clarify the matter, the AKP's main policies, economic positions and outlooks should be defined.

¹ The investigations made public on 17 and 25 December 2013 revealed the largest corruption and bribery scandal in the history of the republic, in which some members of the AKP government as well as family members of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were allegedly implicated.

From the very beginning of its establishment, the AKP has defined itself as a conservative, democratic and liberal political party and movement. It is clear that this ideological definition is set in an extreme frame. According to Kahraman (2007), one of the main reasons for the AKP framing their ideological definition in this way has been to draw large and different Turkish groups into their fold. In other words, from its beginning, the AKP had tried to gain the favour of the newly-emerging conservative bourgeoisie, liberals, lower and lower-middle class conservative Sunni Turks and Shafi'i Kurds living in the periphery (Kahraman, 2007, p. 48).

Since the beginning of its rule in 2002, the AKP has played two different and contrasting roles in the economy. On the one hand, it has implemented democratization and social justice and attempted to be fair to different social groups in its discourses (Öztürk, 2013, p. 4). On the other hand, it has pursued an aggressive economic and political attack against those who held a different political and world view, especially the working class sectors of the population. According to Boratav (2009), the AKP established an eclectic structure employing the world's contemporary dominant economic and social system, which can be called neo-liberal, free market-based capitalist economic order (p. 128).

Although the AKP started with sustainable development and stable peace claims, it did not follow its declarations. For instance, after the 2007 General Election in which the AKP won a landslide victory, and its attempts to tame the Turkish Armed Forces leadership during a protracted inter-oligarchic rivalry proved to be successful, the AKP embraced even more aggressive policies against various larger groups in Turkish society. Nonetheless, after 2007 AKP has been gradually giving up the European Union accession process, which constitutes the first turning point for the party. On the one hand the AKP has been able to consolidate its supporters; on the other it has created a formidable opposition which includes political parties, civil society organisations, scholars and journalists (Uzgel, 2009, pp. 33–36). From this point of view it is possible to argue that these periods were the beginning of the AKP's turn into an authoritarian party.

Even though the AKP garnered almost fifty per cent of the popular vote in the 2011 general election, since then it has employed more non-democratic policies, and Erdoğan has begun to use more authoritarian discourse. For example, he may speak disjointedly about women stating they should have at least three children, about abortion as murder, about people who drink as sick alcoholics and about protestors as an immoral bunch of looters. It should also be noted that during the Gezi Park protest in June 2013 he used the Turkish police in perhaps the harshest show of force in Turkish political history (Coşar, 2013, pp. 92–96).

It has become obvious that both the AKP and Erdoğan have become more authoritarian and have attempted to bring all civil and free areas under their control. In other words, civil society organisations, labour unions, media, the academic world and independent thought organisations have all been labelled by the AKP as defectors. The AKP has been using negative propaganda as a control mechanism to eliminate ways in which these organisations stand against the AKP's main policies. It is important to note that after 2010 the AKP converted the country from a civil government to a governmental state. This means that the AKP has been putting state's institutions and apparatus under its control with the use of dominant policies. In addition, recently the AKP has introduced many prohibitive policies that infringe freedom and democracy in Turkey, affecting the electoral process, political pluralism and citizens' participation as well as freedom of expression and belief.

2. The Hizmet Movement, its Description and Activity Fields

Although contemporary Turkey is defined as a secular state, Islam has played a dominant role in its normative and behavioural background. In other words, even if individuals are outwardly politically and socially secular, they often behave to a great extent as cultural Muslims both in their private and public life. Because of this it is easy to demonstrate how Islamic groups, communities, movements and organisations based on Islamic teachings have always been important actors for exploring and analysing the cultural and political processes of Turkey (Öztürk, 2012, p. 8).

For almost twenty years, the Hizmet Movement has been one of the most prominent movements following Islamic teachings and has gradually been getting the spotlight on itself, unlike other similar Islamic movements. Especially in the last two decades the movement has become prevalent in both popular and academic discussions. The Hizmet Movement has been organised following the ideas of an Islamic scholar and preacher Fethullah Gülen, who is considered the indisputable moral and ideal vanguard of the Movement. His charismatic influence is observed in all elements of the organizations and activities of the movement. Yet, Gülen's ideas notwithstanding, it is important to clarify that the Q'uran and Muhammad's teachings, which constitute the basis of Islam, are also vitally important for the movement (Öztürk, 2012, pp. 13–14).

According to Gülen, "Hizmet Movement comprises of volunteers, who with their profound sense of responsibility feel they need to contribute in solving the

problems of their own societies and of the entire world". In addition, Hizmet Movement's main guiding principles are love, understanding, democracy, dialogue, freedom, peace and equality (Gülen, 2009, p. 27).

Nevertheless, it is possible to find numerous descriptions of the Hizmet Movement. For instance, according to Ergil (2010), the Hizmet Movement is a transnational civil society organisation which is serving mainly educational fields. From his point of view, one of the main reasons to describe it as a civil society organisation is based on its unique structure which is entirely free from governmental and state control. Moreover, according to him it is not only a basic civil society organisation; it remains globally active. In addition to these arguments, he also claims that one of the main aims of the Hizmet Movement is to contribute to the current Islamic Renaissance. He also argues that it is difficult for the Hizmet Movement to place an emphasis on Islam. According to this, he declares that although most of the Hizmet Movement's volunteers and its core cadre are Muslim, they do not support mixing ideology and religion. Overall, his understanding of the Hizmet Movement is a civil society organisation which has a huge impact on many different areas (Ergil, 2010, pp. 18–21).

Similar to Ergil, Pandya (2012) considers the Hizmet Movement as a Turkish, contemporary Sufi Muslim, voluntary, transnational and humanitarian civil society organisation which is the largest and most powerful civil society group in Turkey. It is mostly active in education, health, media, financial aid and charity work. She also emphasizes the Hizmet Movement's humanitarian work and argues that the Hizmet Movement and its associations are prominent members of both Turkey's and international civil society, educated in fundamental humanitarian issues, such as philanthropy, charity, peace, women's rights and welfare (Pandya, 2012, pp. 3–9).

It is important to note three main points about the Hizmet Movement. According to Yilmaz (2003), one of the foremost characteristics of the Hizmet Movement is its transnational structure. In this context, it is possible to find schools, dialogue platforms and associations, health and charity foundations, media outlets, business entities and volunteers in almost 160 countries worldwide. Secondly, it is difficult to define its structure as an official body. It is a volunteer based global movement. Finally, it is also very difficult to categorise its volunteers under the same umbrella. In this respect, volunteers of the Hizmet Movement fall under a broad spectrum. Its main pillar includes the basis of Islamic teachings and Turkish culture, yet it has numerous volunteers from other religions and countries (Yilmaz, 2003, pp. 226–227).

As noted earlier, Hizmet Movement's volunteers have been establishing numerous organisations and institutions both in Turkey and worldwide and are involved in services in many fields. Among them, education is particularly substantial and visible as it has many important functions. The Hizmet Movement considers education as its primary area of activity and, in comparison to other movements, is the most influential in this field. For instance, they have universities, private exam centres, high schools, primary schools and nursery schools from Latin America to Asia. Due to this massive expansion of their schools, they have been able to establish personal and associational networks. Additionally, they aim to instil through education more normative and common values in new generations (Özdalga, 2007, pp. 136–140).

Secondly, the media domain is also a prominent part of the Hizmet Movement. They have been active in the field of media for almost forty years and own ZAMAN, Turkey's largest newspaper, which is delivered to more than thirty five countries. In addition, according to reports from the International Federation of Audit Bureau of Circulations, it is the most reliable and highest circulated newspaper in Turkey. The Hizmet Movement also has other newspapers, academic outreaches and interests, publishes other semi-academic journals and magazines and owns press houses and TV and radio channels. (Turam, 2009, pp. 124–126).

Thirdly, from the beginning of the organization, volunteers – who are usually owners of small and medium-sized enterprises – have been a key driving force for the Movement. In other words, from the late 1970s until recently, businessmen of differing levels who trust both Gülen's ideas and the Movement's service structure have supported the Movement's efforts in the domains of education, media, health and associations. It is obvious and natural that this sort of voluntary and collective activity among businessmen also provides the means to create a business network (Başkan, 2009, p. 8).

Apart from these activity areas, Hizmet Movement's relations in the political arena are another moot subject. Despite the fact that the Hizmet Movement has been declaring itself as a transnational, Islamic oriented and service based civil society organisation, it has always kept indirect relations with political life in Turkey. Although numerous political actors who were mainly right wing tried to establish close relations with Fethullah Gülen, he never supported any political party directly. In 1994 Gülen declared: “[T]here can be no return from democracy”; in 2010 he said: “Let even those buried in the graveyards rise and vote in the referendum”; today he speaks about politics as much as he ever did. The referendum declaration was when the Hizmet Movement made its greatest impact in the political arena.

However, according to Turam (2007), the Hizmet Movement and the AKP had been working in a coalition until 2009–2010 and, as she argues further, the Hizmet Movement supported AKP policies and decisions, affecting them directly. It is possible to argue that the Hizmet Movement has supported the AKP by using its intellectual platforms, media and public figures. They have also worked as a soft power of the AKP government through their schools and cultural activities outside of Turkey. It seems logical from this perspective as they share values and outlook for Turkey's future (Turam, 2007, pp. 34–39).

Coşar (2013) argues that the population of the movement and the rise of the AKP symbolized a “marriage of convenience” between the state, the government and the Hizmet Movement (pp. 49–50). There are many similarities between the AKP's general party program and the aims of the Hizmet Movement which have been declared in its platforms, such as the attitude towards the EU membership of Turkey. In this respect, for the first time, the Movement has extended its support to a political party in a definite way through its media and volunteer networks. Specifically, after the AKP rose to power, the Hizmet Movement's daily activities in almost all spheres gained visibility in terms of its relation to the private and public sectors (Öztürk, 2012, p. 99).

3. Tension between the AK Party and the Hizmet Movement

Besides the fact that the AKP and the Hizmet Movement had been coordinating their efforts against the military, old bureaucracy and other guardianship mechanisms, after 2011 they gradually have found other common fundamental areas (Çakır, 2014, p. 47). The AKP received huge public support in the 2011 plebiscite which included some important constitutional changes. This meant that with the 2011 plebiscite the AKP has gained a huge influence on high level jurisdiction, the police force and education system. After 2011 the AKP became more authoritarian and began to pacify the Hizmet Movement just like other groups which opposed AKP policies (Çakır, 2014, p. 32). Although many groups and civil society organizations have been standing against AKP policies, it is the tension between the AKP and the Hizmet Movement which is prominently visible, mostly because the Movement is stronger than these smaller groups and it has an eclectic normative structure with the AKP as an ally. Whereas the AKP was able to eliminate other opposing groups comparatively easily, it is more difficult to oppose the Hizmet Movement because of its transnational and widespread structure. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, supporters of the AKP

and the Hizmet Movement come from almost the same age groups. Moreover, their social bases overlap. In this context it is possible to argue that because of this, the tension between them has become stronger and more visible (Çakır, 2014, p. 36).

There is no doubt the AKP's policies on the media and freedom of speech as well as its state control oriented governing methodology mostly contrast the Hizmet Movement's main approaches; however, the tension is visible in a different area. The greatest tension began with the corruption investigations of 17 and 25 December that involved the prime minister and other ministers of the cabinet. According to the government, the Hizmet Movement was actually trying to stage a civil coup d'état through these judicial investigations (Öztürk, 2014, p. 113). According to Erdoğan, the Hizmet Movement is not a civil society organization but a sort of illegal organization that has stood against the elected government and the state. Therefore, Erdoğan began to speak against Hizmet and established judicial policies against both Fethullah Gülen and the movement's voluntary activities, including schools, intellectual platforms and charity organisations. The press and social media characterized the government's actions as a "witch-hunt" against the Hizmet Movement. In response, Erdoğan declared that the Hizmet Movement is a sort of "parallel state"². After that, the AKP government and President Erdoğan³ have been oppressing the Hizmet Movement by police investigations into their schools, media outlets, intellectual platforms and charity organisations, using public declarations to manipulate and change perception.

² The creator of the concept of a "parallel state" is an American political scientist and historian Robert Paxton. Paxton, who still works as a professor emeritus at the history department of Columbia University, used this concept for the first time ever when he was doing research on Nazi Germany for his doctoral thesis. But it was with the publishing of Paxton's 2004 book *The Anatomy of Fascism* that this concept gained fame and global recognition. In this work, Paxton explains the political and psychological methods used by Fascist regimes in Italy and Germany.

³ On 20 January 2012 the Parliament of the Republic of Turkey passed a law concerning new rules and procedures by which Turkey's future head of state would be elected. According to this law, Turkey's next head of state was to be elected by popular vote, in lieu of the Parliament, for the first time since Republican Turkey was founded. Based on the official election results, the former Prime Minister and head of the ruling party, the AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected in the first round as the 12th President of the Republic of Turkey for a period of five years, winning more than 52 per cent of the votes on 10 August 2014.

Conclusion

Although political and social tensions have always existed between Turkey's left and right wings, between Sunni and Alevi Muslims, between labourers and business owners, nowadays tension between the AKP and the Hizmet Movement is different and prominent in many ways. One of the main reasons is that on the one hand the AKP is a political party which almost entirely controls the state apparatus and has converted itself into a governmental state by establishing an eclectic body; on the other hand, the Hizmet Movement is an Islamic based transnational civil society organisation which carries power both among the bureaucracy and in the international arena. This tension involves a power struggle not only inside Turkey but also far beyond its borders. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the AKP and the Hizmet Movement have been feeding from the same social structure, which is polarized. At the end of the day, this struggle and its final round will be a definite indicator of the future of Turkish democracy.

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