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Domestic Situation of Republican Türkiye in 2000–2024

Sytuacja wewnętrzna w republikańskiej Turcji w latach 2000–2024

• Abstract •

The beginning of the 21st century is one of the most interesting periods in the history of modern Türkiye as it is characterized by confrontation between Secular and Islamic circles. At the beginning of the 21st century, the success of the Justice and Development Party of the Islamist orientation was undoubtful. The ground for it had been prepared by the 1990s, when the Welfare Party of the Islamic orientation took the leading position and won the majority in the parliament for the first time in the history of Türkiye. At the beginning of the 21st century, such a development of events had a shocking effect both on the secular authorities of Republican Türkiye and on Western politicians. Türkiye, as a member of NATO and a candidate country for joining the European Union, faced a historic choice: would it turn into a state based on Islamic truth and values, or would it remain a secular state. Between 2000 and 2024, the secular authorities (both military and civil) ignored the true causes of the socio-political situation created in the country and failed to reveal the reality. However, many of these causes were artificially created by them.

The purpose of the presented scientific paper is to depict the current issues of Türkiye's internal policy in 2000–2024, namely, to study the role of the Islamic Justice and Development Party and

• Abstrakt •

Początek XXI wieku to jeden z najciekawszych okresów w historii współczesnej Turcji, charakteryzujący się konfrontacją środowisk świeckich z kręgami islamskimi. U zarania nowego wieku ugrupowanie o orientacji islamistycznej – Partia Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju – odniosło niewątpliwy sukces. Podwaliny tego sukcesu upatrywać należy w latach 90. XX wieku, kiedy to proislamska Partia Dobrobytu po raz pierwszy w historii Turcji zdobyła większość w parlamencie. Na początku XXI wieku taki rozwój wydarzeń wstrząsnął zarówno świeckimi władzami republikańskiej Turcji, jak i politykami Zachodu. Turcja, jako członek NATO i kandydat do Unii Europejskiej, stanęła przed historycznym wyborem: przekształcić się w państwo oparte na prawdzie i wartościach wywiedzionych z islamu albo pozostać państwem świeckim. W latach 2000–2024 władze świeckie (zarówno wojskowe, jak i cywilne) ignorowały prawdziwe przyczyny sytuacji społeczno-politycznej, jaka wytworzyła się w kraju, i nie ujawniały rzeczywistego stanu rzeczy. Wiele z tych przyczyn było sztucznie kreowanych właśnie przez władze.

Celem prezentowanego artykułu jest przedstawienie aktualnych problemów polityki wewnętrznej Turcji w latach 2000–2024, a mianowicie zbadanie roli proislamskiej Partii Sprawiedliwości

its leader – Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – in the life of the country.

The chronological framework of the paper covers the years 2000–2024. This was mainly due to the fact that at that time a new era started in the political life of Türkiye. This period was characterized by the subsequent rise of political Islam in the socio-political life of the country, which brought great success to the Islamic Justice and Development Party and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Thus, the study of the issues mentioned in the presented work will clarify some of the problematic issues of Türkiye's internal policy in the 21st century.

Keywords: Türkiye's internal policy; problems; Justice and Development Party; "New Türkiye"

i Rozwoju oraz jej lidera, Recepta Tayyipa Erdoğan, w życiu kraju.

Ramy czasowe problematyki podjętej w artykule wyznaczają lata 2000–2024. Wynikało to przede wszystkim z faktu, że w tym czasie rozpoczęła się nowa era w życiu politycznym Turcji. Okres ten charakteryzował się wzrostem znaczenia islamu politycznego w życiu społeczno-politycznym kraju, co przyniosło wielki sukces Partii Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju oraz jej liderowi Recepowi Tayyipowi Erdoğanowi. Stąd też analiza zagadnień poruszonych w prezentowanej pracy pozwoli na wyjaśnienie niektórych problematycznych kwestii polityki wewnętrznej Turcji w XXI wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka wewnętrzna Turcji; problemy; Partia Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju; „Nowa Turcja”

Discussion

At the beginning of the 21st century, in the first round of the presidential elections in the Republic of Türkiye, which took place on April 27, 2000, Ahmet Necdet Sezer received 281 votes of MPs and beat by 220 votes the incumbent President Nevzat Yalçıntaş, who received only 61 votes. In the second round, which took place on May 1, 2000, Sezer had 314 votes, and in the third round of the elections, held on May 5, Sezer managed to secure the support of 330 MPs and become the tenth president of the Republic of Türkiye (Makaradze, 2019b, p. 225).

On May 16, 2000, Süleyman Demirel was officially removed from office as president. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, taking the oath before the parliament, formulated the main provisions of his political course. In the republican Türkiye, he again recognized secularism (laicism) as an unshakable principle of the country's political system, without which the organization of state and public life in democratic Türkiye would be unthinkable.

In his speech, Ahmet Necdet Sezer actually declared the existence of a republican Türkiye based on the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which, in his opinion, no force could destroy.

In July-August 2001, the Islamic-leaning Felicity Party led by Recai Kutan and the Justice and Development Party led by former Istanbul Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were formed in Türkiye.

Since the end of 2002, there have been active discussions in Turkish political circles about the possibility of holding early parliamentary elections. Despite the government's denial of mentioned possibility, most analysts initially believed that the situation in the country provided real grounds for such a development.

On November 3, 2002, early parliamentary elections were held in Türkiye, with voter turnout at 80%. According to the results, of the 19 parties participating in the elections, only the Justice and Development Party and the Republican People's Party overcame the 10% barrier:

	Party	Percentage	Deputy
1.	Justice and Development Party (AKP)	34.1	363
2.	Republican People's Party (CHP)	19.02	178
3.	Independent Party		9

Following the vote, the Justice and Development Party won 363 of the 550 parliamentary seats, which was a sign of the party's sole accession to power. After the triumphant victory in the 2002 elections, the Justice and Development Party came to power. After the elections, the question of the future Prime Minister was on the agenda. One of the real candidates was considered to be Abdullah Gül, the First Deputy Chairman of the Justice and Development Party for Political Affairs, who had considerable experience in political activity. It should also be noted that after the elections, President Sezer became sympathetic to the former Chairman of the Turkish National Audit Office, Vecdi Gönül. At that time, prominent Turkish statesmen Abdülkadir Aksu and Bülent Arınç were also mentioned as possible candidates for the post of Prime Minister, although politicians believed that the new Prime Minister's term would be short-lived, since Erdoğan's political bans were set to expire in January 2003.

On November 18, 2002, President A. Sezer assigned the post of Prime Minister and the formation of the 58th government to Erdoğan's First Deputy Abdullah Gül (Makaradze, 2019b, p. 228). After the appointment of Abdullah Gül as Prime Minister, the issue of the need for the parliament to quickly adopt amendments to the constitution that would remove legal obstacles to the election of R.T. Erdoğan as Prime Minister came to the fore.

On March 14, 2003, Erdoğan became Prime Minister of the Republic of Türkiye, having received an official order from President Sezer to form the 59th government.

The Justice and Development Party positioned itself as a moderate Islamic and conservative force.

In 2007, the government proposed a package of amendments to the constitution, including direct elections of the president.

In April 2007, the Turkish political scene was dominated by the incumbent president (Ahmet Necdet Sezer), the army, trade unions, university rectors and opposition parties on one side, and the ruling Justice and Development Party on the other.

The main reason for the confrontation between the parties was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's nomination for the presidency, which was followed by a half-million-strong opposition rally in Ankara on April 14–15, 2007.

On July 22, 2007, parliamentary elections with 42.5 million voters were held in Türkiye. Three political parties overcame the 10% barrier:

	Party	Percentage	Deputy
1.	Justice and Development Party (AKP)	46.58	341
2.	Republican People's Party (CHP)	20.87	112
3.	Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)	14.27	71
4.	Democratic Party (DP)	5.41	–
5.	Independent Party		26

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party increased its share of the vote from 34.1% to 46.58% compared to the 2002 parliamentary elections, although the party had fewer members in the parliament than in the previous one. This was because two opposition parties overcame the 10% electoral threshold.

On August 20, 2007, there was held the first round of the presidential elections, which was boycotted by the opposition parties in the Supreme Assembly (Mejlisi). As a result, in the first round of the elections, the only presidential candidate, Abdullah Gül, received 367 votes in a secret ballot, which was not enough to win. According to the Turkish constitution, a presidential candidate had to receive a constitutional majority of votes in the 550-seat parliament in the first and second rounds.

On August 28, 2007, the Turkish parliament elected a new head of state by a majority in the third round. 56-year-old Abdullah Gül assumed the powers of the head of state from the current president of the country (Ahmet Necdet Sezer) at the Çankaya residence in Ankara.

On October 21, 2007, in a referendum held in Türkiye on constitutional amendments initiated by the ruling party (1. The president is elected by the population, not by parliament; 2. The presidential term is reduced from seven to five years;

3. The president has the right to run for a second term; 4. Parliamentary elections were reduced from five to four years; 5. Reduction of the parliamentary quorum from 367 to 184, etc.), the changes were supported by 68.95% of the participants (Makaradze, 2019b, p. 230).

Despite the success of the Justice and Development Party, secular-minded forces did not cease their activities. One of their last bursts of activity occurred in 2008, when they filed a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court demanding a ban on the ruling party. The case was decided in favor of the party.

On February 21, 2011, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Türkiye submitted a proposal to the Mejlisi to hold parliamentary elections on June 12, 2011. The Parliament approved this proposal on March 3, 2011.

On April 11, 2011, political parties presented their lists of candidates for the Supreme Electoral Council. Six of the 24 political parties refused to participate, while the remaining 18 expressed their full readiness to fight.

On July 12, 2011, parliamentary elections with 50.2 million voters were held in Türkiye. Three political parties overcame the 10% threshold:

	Party	Percentage	Deputy
1.	Justice and Development Party (AKP)	49.85	327
2.	Republican People's Party (CHP)	25.98	135
3.	Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)	13.04	53
4.	Independent Party	6.58	35

As we can see, the Justice and Development Party won the parliamentary elections triumphantly and convincingly. In general, the ruling party was able not only to increase the number of votes it received, but also to win in 61 of the 81 provinces of Türkiye (including Istanbul, Ankara, Trabzon, Antalya, Artvin, etc.).

After the parliamentary elections of June 12, 2011, the most pressing issue in Türkiye became amendments to the constitution. In a referendum held in September of the previous year, this issue was supported by 58% of the population.

In the package of constitutional amendments developed by the Justice and Development Party, one of the most important issues was the reorganization of the justice system, aimed at weakening the political influence of the military.

The victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's party in the elections of July 12, 2011, once again demonstrated the course pursued by the Justice and Development Party and supported by a significant part of the Turkish population.

At the initiative of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye was to move from a parliamentary republic to a presidential system of government, according to amendments to the Constitution and the Law on Presidential Elections. After the changes, power would be consolidated in the hands of the president. The leader, elected by direct vote, could hold office for a renewable five-year term (Makaradze, 2016, p. 85).

The presidential elections held on August 10, 2014, were one of the most important in the history of the Turkish Republic. In the first direct presidential elections, former Prime Minister and leader of the Justice and Development Party Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won with 51.79% of the vote, and on August 28 of the same year, Ahmet Davutoğlu became Prime Minister.

In his campaign speeches, Erdoğan stated that if elected, he would not be a mere symbolic president, but would fully utilize the powers granted to him. He emphasized the achievements of the Justice and Development Party and presented his vision of a “new Türkiye” to the public.

The victory of Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party was the result of the fact that Turkish society was tired and exhausted by the actions of the elite, which had been formed over decades and was deeply mired in corruption. In comparison, the representatives of the Justice and Development Party, with their greater honesty, simplicity, and closeness to the people, were more promising.

Erdoğan managed to achieve something almost impossible in modern Turkish history – he significantly reduced the untouchable and powerful military elite and removed it from political leadership.

As the generals weakened, the unity of religious leaders grew in direct proportion. The Directorate of Religious Affairs became one of the most influential structures in the Turkish state system. During Erdoğan’s rule, 7,300 mosques were built in Türkiye as a result of the reform of the education system, religion became a compulsory subject in higher military schools, religious studies was introduced in the middle grades of secular schools, and the ban on girls attending religious services was lifted. Wearing headscarves on school grounds, which was previously unthinkable, was abolished.

On June 7, 2015, there were held parliamentary elections in Türkiye, in which the ruling Justice and Development Party lost its majority in the 550-seat parliament and received 256 mandates, the Republican People’s Party took second place with 132 seats, the Nationalist Movement Party took third place with 82 seats, and the People’s Democratic Party took fourth place with 80 seats.

Following the elections, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu failed to form a coalition government with other political parties in parliament, which led to the

Turkish President dissolving the government and calling the 26th snap parliamentary elections in the country.

On November 1, 2015, in snap parliamentary elections Erdoğan used all state mechanisms at his disposal to ensure the victory of the Justice and Development Party, and it indeed regained the majority in parliament lost in June 2015.

The ruling party received 49.4% of the votes in the elections, while its main opponent, the Republican People's Party, gained 25.4%. Pro-Kurdish and nationalist parties overcame the 10% barrier and received seats in parliament. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu called the election results a victory for the Turkish people and democracy.

On the evening of July 15, 2016, the attention of the world media was focused on the events in Türkiye. About 300 people have been killed in attacks by armed groups in several parts of the country aimed at overthrowing the government.

On Friday evening, tanks appeared in Ankara and Istanbul, opening fire on the Turkish parliament building and the presidential palace. Airplanes fired cannons at the headquarters of the national intelligence service in the capital.

On July 15, it was also reported that on the night of the coup, when President Erdoğan was returning to Istanbul from vacation, two rebel fighters tried to attack his plane, but for unknown reasons the attack did not take place, so Erdoğan arrived safely in Istanbul.

Around 150,000 people, including judges and high-ranking military officials, were arrested on charges of attempted coup.

Following the coup attempt, Turkish law enforcement agencies dismissed 37,500 civil servants and police officers and suspended the licenses of 21,000 teachers (Makaradze, 2019b, p. 293).

Official Ankara blamed former imam Fethullah Gülen for the July 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye, although the Pennsylvania-based religious leader categorically denied any involvement in the uprising (Fethullah Gülen died on October 21, 2024).

On April 16, 2017, Türkiye's ruling Justice and Development Party held a constitutional referendum that called for the country's transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system, the abolition of the prime minister's position, an increase in the number of seats in parliament from 550 to 600, and the creation of a Supreme Court and the Turkish Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK).

On April 16, 2017, as a result of a constitutional referendum, Republican Türkiye switched from a parliamentary to a presidential system of government, which was one of the most decisive steps in the political life of Türkiye since the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

On June 24, 2018, early presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Türkiye, which were won by President R.T. Erdoğan.

The political parties showed the following results in the parliamentary elections held on June 24, 2018:

Party	Percentage	Deputy
Justice and Revival Party (AKP)	42.6	295
Republican People's Party (CHP)	22.6	146
Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)	11.7	67
Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)	11.1	49
Good Party (İYİP)	10.0	43
Prosperity Party (SP)	1.3	0

After the presidential inauguration on July 9, 2018, R. Erdoğan began his presidential activities.

On March 31, 2019, local elections were held in Türkiye. It must be said that these were not ordinary elections. The election campaign took place in an extremely polarized environment, as the parties viewed these elections as a kind of vote of confidence in the 17-year rule of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his party.

On May 14, 2023, presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Türkiye, and a second round of presidential elections was held on May 28.

In the presidential elections in Türkiye on May 14, 2023, the incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received 49.5% of the votes, narrowly missing out on victory in the first round.

After winning the presidential elections in Türkiye, Erdoğan almost completely changed the composition of the executive government, with the exception of the ministers of culture, tourism and health. Particular attention was paid to the changes in the government's economic team, where Mehmet Şimşek took over the post of Minister of Treasury and Finance, and Hafize Gaye Erkan took over the post of head of the Central Bank of Türkiye. According to experts, these changes may indicate that Türkiye wanted to abandon its unconventional macroeconomic policy and move to a traditional economic model, which is associated with a record devaluation of the national currency and rising inflation.

On March 31, 2024, local elections were held in Türkiye. This was a major political event for the country, which revealed significant changes in the political landscape.

Elections were held in 81 provinces of Türkiye. Mayors, city council members, and village heads were elected.

The opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) won an important victory. It retained control of Istanbul and Ankara, as well as of other major cities.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) suffered significant losses. CHP candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu won the Istanbul mayoral election again. This was a significant blow to President Erdoğan's party. CHP candidate Mansur Yavaş also retained his post as mayor of Ankara.

These results are seen as a serious challenge to the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The elections showed growing support for the opposition, especially in major cities. The elections took place against the backdrop of Türkiye's economic difficulties, high inflation, and the devaluation of the lira. In the Kurdish-dominated southeast, the results were more mixed, with different parties making gains. International observers said the elections were largely peaceful, although there were some reports of irregularities. These elections are considered an important event in the political history of Türkiye, which showed changes in public sentiment and the balance of political forces.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remains the President of Türkiye. He has held the post since 2014.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the analysis of the domestic politics of Türkiye in the 2020s has shown that the most important factors are:

- to strengthen the political dialogue with the opposition parties, especially taking into account the results of the local elections;
- to create platforms for reaching consensus on important issues;
- to prioritize reducing inflation and stabilizing the currency;
- to carry out structural reforms to strengthen the economy and attract foreign investment;
- to enhance the independence of the judiciary;
- to ensure media freedom and pluralism;
- to strengthen anti-corruption mechanisms;
- to ensure transparency of public contracts and tenders;
- to improve social policy and continue the integration of ethnic minorities and dialogue with the Kurdish community;
- to ensure the protection of minority rights and their participation in political processes;

- to collaborate with major opposition-governed cities to implement infrastructure projects and more.

Türkiye's future depends only on the further deepening of the culture of democracy and the principles of government accountability to the people. Neither a military coup nor an authoritarian political rule is the line that the Turkish Republic should follow.

It should be noted that the Europeanized part of Turkish society is quite numerous, it is already politically active and will not easily abandon the principles of secularism. At the same time, it can be noted that the part of Turkish society that carries a Western mentality, and especially the youth, with its worldview and demands, have already risen above Atatürk's secularism and occupied positions of high European standards of democracy and human rights. As for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, although he remains a strong political figure, it is possible that the recent crisis in Türkiye may change his approach over time.

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