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Book Review

Gürkan Çelik and Ronald Haly Linden. *Turkey in Transition: The Dynamics of Domestic and Foreign Politics*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2020.

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The edited volume provides analyses of Turkey's transformation in the first two decades of the twenty first century under AKP. The chapters are grouped under two broad categories: domestic and foreign politics. The book familiarizes the readers with perspectives on a wide scale of issues. On the domestic front, it addresses AKP's governance, economic developments, energy, the evolution(s) of the Kurdish issue, role of religion and *Diyanet*, civil society, and women. On foreign policy, its chapters cover a broad perspective on Turkey's role amidst global changes, impact of Erdoğan's personality and manipulation of identity politics, Turkey's relations with the US, Middle East, Russia, and Europe.

With its wide scope of topics, the book is a successful analysis of Turkey's turn away from democracy under Erdoğan's leadership in the twenty first century. The aim of the volume is stated in the first chapter by the editors: "an in-depth examination of the causes and possible courses of development in one of the most important 'illiberal democracies'". The first chapter presents, together with an overview of each chapter's contribution, an introductory review of Turkey's domestic and international politics from the birth of the Republic to the date of the book's publication. This brief overview is helpful to put the volume into context for the readers unfamiliar with Turkish history and politics.

Gürkan Çelik provides a review of AKP's domestic politics in the second chapter. Çelik successfully identifies and analyzes six key dynamics that shape Turkish domestic politics under Erdoğan: changes in political order, changes in state and society, economic decline and currency crisis, rise of Islamism, nationalism, and militarism, increase in corruption and decrease in

freedoms, and diminished role of civil society. The chapter highlights the turn of AKP rule from a pro-European economic and political success into an illiberal democracy imbued with repression and crises. Çelik rightfully emphasizes the lack of a strong political opposition against Erdoğan coupled with suppression of any potential cases of success for the opposition (e.g. Kurdish political leadership). Despite Turkey's turn into a security state with a tight grip over the judiciary and the media, Çelik concludes that AKP is not as invulnerable as it looks, since the opposition is now more diversified and the Kurdish issue will continue to cause unrest.

In the third chapter on Turkish economy, by Gürkan Çelik and Elvan Aktaş, highlights the déjà vu from the bankrupt state in 2002, which resulted in the single party rule of AKP, to the “flying economy” through the 2007-2008 global recession and sliding back “to a flagging economy.” After providing a historical overview of the Turkish economy up to and during the AKP government, the chapter provides an outstanding analysis of its structural strengths and weaknesses. The young population of Turkey, consistent urbanization, growing tourism, and agricultural surplus have traditionally sustained economic growth despite its ups and downs up until the recent decline. The authors rightly point out the limitations to these factors of growth and identify several dynamics as weaknesses: political instability, geopolitical risks of conflict, unsustainable urbanization, waves of immigration, decline in agriculture and tourism, and unsuccessful reforms in education. The authors suggest that a leap forward in the economy is possible with sustainable growth based on higher quality human capital and high-tech production. Ultimately, the chapter concludes, just like the 2002 financial collapse, an economic revival will most likely rely on the reinstatement of “the secular constitutional democracy with checks and balances” under a “new leadership” with “a new vision.”

Turkey's geopolitics is typically highlighted for its location on the crossroads of energy pipelines. In chapter four, Mustafa Demir emphasizes energy security, strategic location, and foreign and domestic political developments and determinants of Turkey's geopolitics of energy and concludes that Turkey's move away from the West under AKP results in its increased energy dependence on Russia.

Joost Jongerden contributes to the volume with an analysis of how AKP addressed the Kurdish issue with an “opening” first and then reverted to militarized conflict. This fifth chapter makes a series of powerful arguments including how Erdoğan was never seriously committed to a peace process, how AKP's approach was imbued with weakness to resolve the issue and a fear of the secular Kurdish movement, and that AKP's “return to violence was a deliberate strategy”. While hopeful for a return of peaceful diplomacy, the author foresees a grim cycle of violence as long as Erdoğan stays on the current path.

Nico Landman's analysis of the religious landscape in Turkey reviews the roles of *Diyanet*—the state institution that controls all official religious activity, *jamaats*—religious social groups such as Sufis, Nurcu and Gulen movements, and the Alevis—the heterodox Shia groups. In this sixth chapter, Landman makes note of the *Diyanet*'s increased role in controlling the religious rhetoric by openly providing justification for the AKP government.

Just as the sphere of religion has come under Erdoğan's influence, Gürkan Çelik and Paul Dekker argue in the seventh chapter that the current Turkish civil society is not sufficient for

democratic development, “because virtually all civic initiatives are under the active control of the AKP-dominated state”. The image of a Turkey increasingly under the clutches of AKP is reinforced with Jenny White’s study on Turkish women and in chapter eighth her argument that the role of women in Turkish society has been in steady and sharp decline since 2007.

The second part of the volume is devoted to foreign politics. Co-editor Ronald Linden identifies seven key changes in Turkey’s foreign policy environment in chapter ninth: Middle East order, Russian nationalism, European Union’s crises, rise of nationalism and populism, China, energy environment, and the US political shifts. Linden argues that Turkey’s foreign entanglements under AKP “pauses heightened danger and uncertainty”.

In the tenth chapter, Henri Barkey highlights the personification of Turkey’s foreign policy under Erdoğan’s direction. The ideological aspect seeks reviving the sense of national pride, while the instrumental objective is to strengthen Erdoğan’s grab on power. Barkey rightly predicts that as long as Erdoğan’s personalization of Turkish politics continues, his confrontational style will dominate the domestic and foreign politics of Turkey. This style is exemplified in Turkish-US relations.

Following a detailed review of Erdoğan’s increasing challenges against the US on multiple fronts, Aaron Stein argues in the eleventh chapter that consolidation of Erdoğan’s authoritarian rule means the continuation of the current status quo. Turkey’s rocky relations with the West is also reflected in its involvement with the Middle East and Russia. In chapter twelve, Bill Park points out that regarding Turkey’s inconsistent foreign policy in the Middle East, Erdoğan has drawn Turkey into a “serious danger of chronic political isolation” alienating itself from all Middle Eastern countries but a couple. Joris Van Bladel’s analysis of parallels between Putin and Erdoğan in terms of their hold on to power despite weakening state power, looking back to the imperial past from an ideological perspective, and their Eurocentric roots are well made in the thirteenth chapter.

In a similar vein, Hanna-Lisa Hague, Funda Tekin, and Wolfgang Wessels, focusing on the Turkish-EU relations, argue in chapter fourteen, that the change to the presidential system has pushed Turkey further away from EU membership, and leaves “partnership” as the only plausible working relationship scenario between the two. Focusing also on Turkey’s relations with the EU, Juliette Tolay, in chapter fifteen, brings a different perspective and argues that Turkey in fact reproduced and reinforced Eurocentrism by contributing to the European externalization policy. Exemplified in the immigration crisis, Tolay argues, Turkey lost its moral ground at the discursive level, fell to pragmatism since 2016, and using the discursive tools of Eurocentrism it criticizes, Turkey eventually contributed to the Eurocentric paradigm.

It is not a coincidence that the wide-ranging articles on Turkey’s domestic politics reveal a common thread: as Erdoğan strengthened his control over Turkish politics, more institutions have succumbed to his personal dictate and simultaneously democratic rights and freedoms have been significantly curtailed. Similarly, Turkish foreign politics under AKP is a reflection of Erdoğan’s confrontational style, making more enemies than allies, and dimming the prospects of foreign policy successes as Erdoğan’s authoritarian hold on to power strengthens at every turn.

While Erdogan’s “shape-shifter” policy changes on numerous issues are reiterated throughout the book, the editors, Çelik and Linden, in conclusion also highlight other factors that

contribute to the transition of Turkish politics: structural, societal, economic, Kurdish, complexity, regional, and international factors. This volume bears testimony to how change from democratic governance to authoritarian rule can happen quickly and slide an entire nation into increased risk factors both on the domestic and international front. Economic decline, division along ethnic and religious lines, destruction of civil society, and erosion of basic freedoms and rights have accompanied, in this case, Erdoğan's rise to power and strides to remain in power. I highly recommend this book to all students of Turkish history, politics, and authoritarianism.