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***INSTITUTIONAL OPPRESSION AND NEO-LIBERALISM  
IN TURKEY***

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## *Abstract*

In October 2005, the EU has formally started accession talks with Turkey whilst indicating that the progress of negotiations is dependent on the advancement of pro-democracy reforms in the country. The Turkish military defies this call in favour of its heavy influence in politics which is consolidated since September 11 for bordering the oil-rich nations of Muslim and Turkic 'brothers' as a NATO ally. However, the army's strong position in the domestic setting is largely maintained by the historical and structural challenges of neo-liberal policies in Turkey to the economic foundations of democracy. In order to implement a neo-liberal programme dating back to the 1970s, an uneasy but considerable democratisation process was replaced with what is called in this paper 'institutional oppression' led by the military. Since then, the fundamental promise of the official rhetoric of 'catching the level of contemporary civilisations' has lost its direction in political terms. At the expense of democratic ideals, institutional oppression sustains one of the world's largest 'emerging market' economies in Turkey and, not least for this reason, appeals to the hegemonic powers of globalisation as a 'role model of democracy' to be promoted in all Muslim and Turkic countries. Bearing all these issues in mind, the present study is devoted to a historical analysis of institutional oppression and its relation to the neo-liberal project in Turkey.

## *Introduction*

During imperial times, caliphate sultans had long obstructed the emergence of a strong bourgeois class and democracy by forbidding land ownership and commerce to Muslims who comprised the major component of their subjects.<sup>1</sup> Although Mustafa Kemal proclaimed a secular Republic at the end of the Great War, he also became bogged down in monopolising the reins of power through the single-party rule of the Republican Populist Party (RPP) until his death at the outset of World War II. The rival Democrat Party (DP) ascended to office after the 1950 elections and acquired the mandate to govern once more in 1955 by generous subsidies to its rural grassroots.<sup>2</sup> The 'irrational' use of national resources was heralded as 'a legitimate ground' by the army for its 1960 intervention with the support of pro-industrialist and 'from-above' modernist leftists gathered under the umbrella of the RPP.<sup>3</sup> Elections were staged in 1963, but civil politics were again interrupted by the 1971 pronunciamiento, overthrowing a slightly moderate descendant of the DP from office. Despite the objections of RPP cadres, the military also arrested sympathisers of a so-called 'National Democratic Revolution' (NDR) that sought to promote an 'anti-imperialist Kemalism'.<sup>4</sup> The NDR's supporters, especially those in bureaucratic positions, were not 'compatible' with a 'technocrat cabinet' assigned by the military until the 1973 elections in order to make structural adjustments to the economy for the implementation of the

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<sup>1</sup>Halil Inalcik, *Osmanli Para ve Ekonomi Tarihine Toplu Bir Bakis*, 2001, *Dogu Bati*, 4(17), pp.9-42.

<sup>2</sup>Geoffrey Edwards and William Wallace, *A Wider European Community?*, A Federal Trust Paper, 1976, p.36.

<sup>3</sup>Berch Berberoglu, 'Turkey: the crisis of the neo-colonial system', *Race and Class*, 1981, vol.XXXII, no.3, 1981, pp.277-291.

<sup>4</sup>Ahmed Samim, 'The Tragedy of the Left', *NLR* 126, March-April 1981, pp. 60-85. The army also made an ill-concealed use of far right thugs, costing up to 300 lives by the time of the 1971 coup. Emre Kongar, *Turkiyenin*

low tariff prescriptions of the OECD.<sup>5</sup> Students of the NDR doctrine argued that reductions in trade quotas would undermine the independence of industrial development.<sup>6</sup> Noticeably, imports had increased from a 7 per cent annual average of GDP in the 1960s to 14 per cent in 1978, the year that saw an initial acceptance of a neo-liberal programme. Intermediate goods were responsible for 90 per cent of this rise, forging ahead a 'montage industry'.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, both the 1960 and 1971 military interregnums lent themselves to greater recognition of civil institutions in Turkey. In return for leftist intellectuals' support of the 1960 coup, the army introduced a relatively democratic constitution in 1961.<sup>8</sup> Labour was given the prerogative to become organised and to strike. In 1963, the first trade union confederation came on the scene. Concessions to labour were also in line with a growing need for 'effective demand' due to industrialisation, although it increasingly became a 'montage industry' in the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Yet this shift gave an impetus to industry. Between 1960 and 1970, the share of industry in GDP went up from 15 per cent to 18 per cent, reaching over one-quarter in 1978.<sup>10</sup> Disillusioned by the 1971 coup, intellectuals had also begun to distance themselves from the army and made approaches to a rapidly growing working class: The ratio of industrial and service sector jobs to the working age population had increased from 19 per cent in 1960 to 22 per cent in 1970 and further increased to 30

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*Toplumsal Yapisi*, Remzi Kitabevi: Istanbul 1985, Vol. 2, p. 567. We will return to the utilisation of far right paramilitaries by the army later as a widening strategy both during and after the transition period to neo-liberalism.

<sup>5</sup> OECD, *Country Report: Turkey*, Paris 1970.

<sup>6</sup> Dogan Avcioglu, *Turkiye'nin Duzeni*, Bilgi Yayınevi: Ankara 1973, pp.125-127.

<sup>7</sup> SIS (State Institution of Statistics), *The Statistical Yearbook of Turkey*, 1979, p.125.

<sup>8</sup> Bulent Ecevit, 'Labour In Turkey As a New Political Force', in Kemal Karpat, *Social Change and Politics in Turkey: A Structural-Historical Analysis*, ed., Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973, pp151-181

<sup>9</sup> Caglar Keyder, 'The political economy of the Turkish democracy', *NLR* 115, May-June 1979, pp.3-44.

<sup>10</sup> SIS 1999, p.33.

per cent in 1978.<sup>11</sup> Under the leadership of intellectuals in the 1970s, a left wing trade union confederation, DISK was formed as a counterweight to the Association of Businessmen, TUSIAD. Union density had risen to 27 per cent in 1978 from 2 per cent in 1960. In the same period, the average of real wages surged by half, and the share of bottom quintile in national income doubled to 5.7 per cent.<sup>12</sup> When these occurrences are considered along with the abandonment of totalitarian monarchism for a republican and secular state and then the introduction of multi-party elections, it would be fair to refer to a democratisation process in Turkey from the end of the Great War to the 1970s, albeit not an easy one. Such a process, however, was encroached upon by institutional oppression in conjunction with the introduction of neo-liberalism.

To analyse institutional oppression in this study, its major aspects will be considered in a systematic manner. It will first be shown that the oppressive regime gained a distinctive character in the neo-liberal era. As we shall see, the resistance of labour and protectionist capital was suppressed through a bloody transitional period to neo-liberalism, resulting in the military coup of 1980. Then, in order to secure the implementation of the neo-liberal project, the military regime's presence was rooted into various institutions.

Challenging the interests of the working class, the regime crushed democratic opposition, yet devised its mouthpieces and rigged elections that also provided a specific premise for the emasculation of protectionism. Focusing

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<sup>11</sup> Labour force figures used in this study have been standardised by the OECD, and include 'formal' and 'informal' employment. OECD, *Labour Force Statistics*, Paris 1975, 2000.

on another characteristic of institutional oppression in Turkey, the paper will subsequently highlight the regime's opportunistic approach to ethnic and religious spectrums, respectively. It will be asserted that, whilst promoting neo-liberal capital accumulation within ethnic and religious spheres, the army paved the way for the Kurdish upheaval, far right jingoism, Mafia/corrupt civil politicians and pro-Islamic tides. Ironically, such developments cast the military in the role of the 'final resort' for many within the elite and public who came to view it as the only instrument that could hold the country together. The last part of the study, however, will argue that a sustainable future for the country depends on smarter responses by the democratic opposition to institutional oppression.

### ***A Bloody Transition to Neo-Liberalism***

Leading Western countries, such as the US and UK, liberalised capital transactions in the early 1970s and fully left money standardisation with gold. Thus, they terminated the basic principles of the international monetary settlement of the post-war period, known as the Bretton Woods System. The departure from existing conventions ignited expansion in stock capitals, finance sectors and 'capital migrations'. However, it also challenged democracy in the world.<sup>13</sup> As Chomsky commented:

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<sup>12</sup> To give an idea of the national income in general, it is useful to note that GDP grew from \$33bn in 1960 to \$91bn in 1978. (All values given in this study are based on the 1990 real prices and exchange rates). *Turkiye'nin Toplumsal Yapisi*, Table X-7, p.468, World Bank, *World Tables*, OUP: Oxford 1985.

<sup>13</sup> A specific account of 'seigniorage' regarding its implications for Western economies and globalisation is provided by Riccardo Parnobi, 'The Dollar Standard', in Jeffrey A Frieden and David A. Lake, *International Political Economy: Perspectives on Global Power and Wealth*, St. Martin's Press, Inc. New York, 1987, pp.285-297.

Liberalising the movements of capital worldwide since the Bretton Woods system, essentially dismantled from the early 1970s, has proved a powerful weapon against democracy.<sup>14</sup>

Under the global conditions of the early 1970s, Turkey was one of the ideal locations in the world for the initiation of export substitution policies and capital outflows as the socialist block restricted alternative options. OECD remedies for the Turkish economy were adjusted toward foreign capital liberalisation.<sup>15</sup> However, as indicated earlier, Turkish industrialists had just committed themselves to the 'montage industry' through the increased imports of intermediate goods at the beginning of the 1970s. Large capital holders were against the sudden shift of the West to neo-liberalism, since the prospect of competition with foreign investors threatened the ownership of companies by domestic entrepreneurs, which had been safeguarded through the protectionist regulations of the government up until then.<sup>16</sup> An anti-Western stance became popular when Turkey occupied Cyprus in 1974, after a military junta in Greece had attempted to annex the island. Prime Minister Ecevit rejected any negotiation with the West and the junior partner in his coalition government, the pro-Islamic National Salvation Party, publicly declared the 'Christian World' an enemy.

To create a reconciliatory climate in Turkey, the World Bank announced in 1975 that the Turkish economy was on the verge of 'defaulting'. The establishment was not impressed by this call as the country was actually

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<sup>14</sup> Noam Chomsky, 'Finance and Silence', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1 January 1999.

<sup>15</sup> OECD, Country Report: Turkey, 1973.

enjoying a buoyant economy, with no less than a 7 per cent surge in that year.<sup>17</sup> Then, citing the occupation of Cyprus, the US Administration enacted a military embargo on Turkey in 1976. However, recent studies have underpinned Ecevit's long-standing claim that America's aim was to pressurise for neo-liberal policies rather than avert 'Turkey's invasion against the British influence on the island'.<sup>18</sup> Defying the 'embargo diplomacy', succeeding Prime Minister Demirel intensified 'friendly relations' with the USSR to obtain financial credits. Instant grants, especially for the Iron and Steel Industry, greatly contributed to a 10 per cent economic growth in 1976. This preceded the freezing of cheque payments to Turkey by Western banks and GDP subsequently slowed down by two-thirds in 1977.<sup>19</sup> A workers' protest on May Day ended in the loss of forty lives, since far right militants of the Nationalist Movement Party (NMP) had opened fire on demonstrators. Notably, the army, together with international arms smugglers, had supplied weaponry to the NMP's mobs as 'sons of the nation against communism' in order to end the military embargo by coercing civil politicians to accept the neo-liberal doctrine.<sup>20</sup> The deployment of NMP militants was carried out through the 'Special Warfare Division' (SWD) originally set up by the Nixon Administration in cooperation with the NMP as a 'back up plan against the expansionist ambitions of USSR towards the South'.<sup>21</sup> After staging the

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<sup>16</sup> Korkut Boratav and Erinc Yeldan, *Turkey - 1980-2000: Financial Liberalisation, Macroeconomic (In)Stabilisation, and Patterns of Distribution*, Working Paper, No.25, Bilkent University: Ankara, 2001, p.6.

<sup>17</sup> Fikret Baskaya, *Paradigmanin Iflasi*, 1991, Doz Yayinlari, Istanbul, p.71

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Dennis Sewell, 'Divide and Rule in Peace', *New Statesmen*, 1996, August 23, p.32; Brendan O'Malley, and Ian Craig, *The Cyprus Conspiracy: America, Espionage and the Turkish Invasion*, I. B. Tauris & Company: New York 2000, pp.57-63.

<sup>19</sup> SIS, 1978.

<sup>20</sup> *Turkiye'nin Toplumsal Yapisi*, p.543.

<sup>21</sup> Desmond Fernandes & Iskender Ozden, 'United States and Nato Inspired Psychological Warfare Operations', *Variante*, Volume 2, No 12, Spring 2001, p.11.



embargo, Congress banned American armaments to the SWD as well. In response, the Turkish government decided to dismantle the SWD but the army did not allow this and continuously guarded paramilitary groups to combat the 'enemies from inside'.<sup>22</sup>

As killings soared to 1,200 in 1978, the government agreed with the IMF on a programme for 'export-substituted development' and the embargo was lifted before the army declared marshal law nationwide. The chief executive of Lockheed, a US-based arms maker, was also arrested for arms smuggling, even though investigations into the issue were shelved after the assassination of journalist Abdi Ipekci, who was leading research into illegal activities in the guns' and ammunitions' market.<sup>23</sup> The government started lobbying in the parliament to lift constitutional restrictions on the liberalisation of financial and commodity markets, but it soon became clear that the majority of MPs were not prepared to endorse neo-liberal reforms due to fears of losing their electoral support from labour and financial support from the protection-leaning businessmen.

To raise the army's appetite for neo-liberalism, on the other hand, the Carter Administration encouraged the military to develop its own 'private business' in the cargo industry through IMF credits, and, in 1978, the army set up one of the largest export fleets in Turkey, OMSAN.<sup>24</sup> Although the chief of staff, Semih Sancar, rejected 'junta conspiracies', America's financial incentives

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<sup>22</sup> 'United States and Nato Inspired Psychological Warfare Operations', p.12.

<sup>23</sup> Erçument Isleyen, 'Ipekci'de Susurluk Imzasi', *Milliyet*, February 1999.

<sup>24</sup> The financial assistance for OMSAN was provided under a special programme of 'Economic and Military Co-operation with Turkey' which guaranteed \$375m in 1978, in addition to \$3bn for 1979, and \$3.5bn for 1980. International Monetary Fund, *IMF Surveys*, 8 May 1978 p.142; 6 November 1978 p.351; 21 April 1980 p.126.

created splits in the military command chain, and subsequently he went into early retirement. The position was filled by a 'surprise' name, General Kenan Evren. According to conventional practices in the army, he was expected to retire after completing his last assignment in the Aegean sub-army, but his 'prestige in the Pentagon' was heralded by pro-American journalists as an invaluable asset for the job.<sup>25</sup>

The weakness of the government became evident in its failure to announce a neo-liberal package until 1980 with a set of cabinet decisions. Yet constitutional restrictions on the liberalisation of markets and foreign investments were still remaining, and it was becoming increasingly formidable to eliminate them for the implementation of neo-liberal programmes. As the austerity prescriptions of the IMF triggered declines in wages and fomented strikes across the country, the resistance of MPs to the approval of neo-liberal reforms at the expense of the electorate became greater.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the attacks of far right militants against workers culminated in a total of 5,000 murders. Most politicians complained that, although the embargo had been lifted and marshal law had been introduced, the army had not acted quickly enough to assist the government's attempts to halt the bloodshed.<sup>27</sup> In September 1980, Kenan Evren together with his four fellow commanders, seized power as the 'saviours' of the country, and President Carter expressed his joy by saying that 'our boys finished the job' when he heard the news.<sup>28</sup> The neo-liberal media in the West, such as *The Economist*, acclaimed the

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<sup>25</sup> Cuneyt Arcayurek, *Buyuklere Masallar, Kucuklere Gercekler 1: Demokrasi Donemecinde Uc Adam*, Bilgi Yayinevi: Ankara 2000, p.201.

<sup>26</sup> Tuncer Bulutay, *Employment, Unemployment and Wages in Turkey*, ILO/SIS: Ankara 1995, p.306.

<sup>27</sup> Demirtas Ceyhun, *Biz Karabiyikli Turkler*, Gundogan Yayinlari, Ankara, 1991, p.134

coup as 'a forward step for democracy', although the junta suspended all political parties, trade unions and civil society organisations.<sup>29</sup> Many members of parliament, including Prime Minister Demirel, were arrested. He accused the West of 'reserving democracy for their people, at the cost of ours'.<sup>30</sup> What follows will show how an oppressive regime was institutionalised by the military in order to ensure the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies.

### ***Institutional Oppression***

Since 1980, Turkey has continuously opened its economy to the world. For the proponents of neo-liberalism, the results of economic reforms have been pleasing. GDP has grown from \$97bn to \$336bn between 1980 and 2005.<sup>31</sup> The ratio of international trade had also climbed to over one-third of GDP up until Turkey joined the European Customs Union in 1995, and to half of it in 1998, from a 12 per cent annual average in the 1960s and 1970s. By 2005, there was no substantial change in the ratio of trade to the economy.

Following the liberalisation of foreign investments, annual capital inflow rose from \$97 million in 1980 to \$3bn in 1998.<sup>32</sup> An important breakthrough in foreign investment was observed in 2005 when it rose to \$10 mostly because of the start of accession talks with the EU. The neo-liberal reform project mapped out a privatisation programme as well; roughly \$20bn in revenue

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<sup>28</sup> M. Ali Birand '12 Eylul Belgeseli', Show TV, 1997, Episode 3.

<sup>29</sup> The Economist, Third Time Lucky, 1980, September 20, p.15.

<sup>30</sup> Cuneyt Arcayurek, *Buyuklere Masallar ...* p.207.

<sup>31</sup> US Department of State (1998) Country Report on Economic Policy and Trade Practices: Turkey, US Department of State, Washington. OECD, *National Accounts*, Paris, 2001 & 2006.

<sup>32</sup> During this period, the surge in foreign capital mostly came from foreign investments in government debt securities rather than foreign direct investment in industry (FDI). In 1998, for example, a \$805 million FDI was accompanied by \$2,300 million foreign investments in government debt securities. IMF, *Financial Statistics*, 1999, Geneva, p.123.

proceeded from sales between 1986 and 2000.<sup>33</sup> A sluggish proceeding of privatisation operations in succeeding years has also been intercepted in 2005 with a record level of \$10bn.<sup>34</sup>

After the establishment of neo-liberalism in the country, however, the previous coupling of democratisation with economic development derailed. In this sense, the case of Turkey lends much support to MacEwan's postulation that:

Neo-liberalism prevents the implementation of programmes that would allow people to exercise political control over their economic affairs, involve people in solving their own economic problems, and serve the material needs of the great majority.<sup>35</sup>

Once the military came to power, it abolished the relatively democratic constitution of 1961 and introduced a number of laws that 'deregulated' financial and commodity markets. To give the economy an outward-orientation, the military also assigned IMF-favoured Turgut Ozal and his cadres to the Ministry of the Economy. Ozal stipulated all necessary economic reforms, and the State Planning Organisation started to implement them. Because of a growing public pressure in Europe, however, Brussels froze economic relations with Turkey in 1982 for the retrieval of elections. The military permitted elections in the following year, but before that, it had secured a victory to Ozal's newly established Mother Land Party (MLP). To parachute the neo-liberal MLP to office, the military barred the Justice Party

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<sup>33</sup> In 2000, acquired revenues from privatisation were around one-third of the total income expected from all sales. PPF, Public Participation Fund, *Privatisation Report*, PPF: Ankara 1998 and OECD, *Revenue Statistics*, Paris 2000 & 2005

<sup>34</sup> OECD, *Revenue Statistics*, Paris 2005.

(JP) and the RPP from joining the race as the main parties of the centre since, unlike them, the neo-liberal MLP had no readily available capital or labour backing.<sup>36</sup> Capitalising on proscription practices, the MLP took office in 1983. Later, in support of Turkey's first formal application for EU membership in 1986, JP and RPP cadres were allowed, via a referendum, to participate in contests, yet the MLP again emerged as the 'victorious' party in the 1987 elections. This second victory of the MLP was also implanted in a military constitution introduced in 1982. The constitution enabled party leaders to choose top candidates to run in any region and, in doing so, instigated what critics dubbed 'the reincarnation of monarchy by turning elections into an assignment system'.<sup>37</sup> Through the use of lavish loans public funds in the first term of power, Turgut Ozal created sponsor-candidates for his party and engaged in luxury campaigns. The introduction of a new 'hidden-budget' law, in particular, helped Ozal to cover up his corrupt 'subsidies' to neo-liberal entrepreneurs for 'imaginary exports' on fake documents.<sup>38</sup>

Whilst gaining political power, Ozal wanted to distance himself from the military in order to develop a 'democratic image' before the electorate, especially in his second term. Most notably, he tried to privatise what the army regarded as 'militarily sensitive companies' such as those in the Machinery and Chemical Industry (MKK) and the Military Electronic Industry (ASELSAN). From the army's point of view, however, the strategic importance of Turkey had become even greater after the Cold War, and therefore, 'militarily

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<sup>35</sup> Arthur MacEwan, *Neo-Liberalism or Democracy? Economic Strategy, Markets and Alternatives for the 21st Century*, Zed Books: 1999, p.5.

<sup>36</sup>Sevket Pamuk, 'Anavatanin Sermaye Tabani', *Onbirinci Tez*, 1986, 5(23), pp.72-97.

<sup>37</sup> ODP (Freedom and Solidarity Party), *Party Programme*, 2002, p.12.

sensitive' companies could not be privatised, but more resources had to be allocated for military purposes. No company in these industries was sold and the country's defence spending became one of the largest budgets in the World, increasing to the current 7 per cent level of GDP in 2005 from a 3% annual average in the second half of the 1970s.<sup>39</sup> In this 'success' of the military, the growing geo-political importance of the army for the USA had played an important role. To reinforce the southern flank of NATO, the US wanted the army to become modernised. For this purpose, the US also urged Turkey in 1996 to initiate a \$150bn-worth military renovation programme. It is not known what proportion of the money was extracted from the 'hidden budget' of the government.<sup>40</sup> However, geo-political accounts were no end to the story.

In the domestic setting, a powerful military was crucial to secure the continuity of neo-liberal project against the 'resistance' of civil politicians. Civil politics had a potential for pragmatist aberrations from 'economic openness' in order to 'mend fences' with the well-established protectionist capital before the neo-liberal project. To reduce the influence of protection-leaning investors on parties, the military set up various barriers. Most notably, whilst the abolition of the public scrutiny on the financial sources of political parties created corrupt sources for the neo-liberal MLP, it became difficult for these investors to maintain a decisive influence on major political parties. In an attempt to augment parties' chances of winning elections, all party leaders began to

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<sup>38</sup>Ugur Mumcu, 'Belegeriyle Hayali Ihracatcilik', 1985, *Cumhuriyet*, June 25.

<sup>39</sup>Gungor Aras, 'Askeri Harcamada Dunya Birincisiyiz', *Milliyet*, 28 March 2002; OECD, *Revenue Statistics*, Paris 2006

<sup>40</sup>Perihan Cakiroglu, 'Dunyaya Silah Satan Turkiye', *Milliyet*, 7 April 1997.

appoint sponsor candidates, not only from among corrupt businessmen, but also from drug barons who thrived in the milieu of army-led neo-liberal policies, as will be discussed later. The influence of protectionist businesses was also limited on small parties, whose number had increased to dozens after the mid-1980s by operating as political extensions of certain companies. Through the constitution, the army introduced a nationwide ten per cent threshold, and votes for smaller parties were thereby redistributed to the larger parties. Yet the 'danger' of protectionism was far from disappearing. Opposition to Turkey joining the European Customs Union in 1995, for example, was led by the second largest conglomerate of Turkey, Koc Holding, which declared the Union to be an 'unfair competition mechanism against domestic producers'.<sup>41</sup>

Nor was it inconceivable for civil politicians to compromise over the neo-liberal project in favour of electoral 'populism' toward a deeply frustrated working class. Pro-market policies in agriculture, such as the lifting of tariffs for imports and mechanisation for exports, have created millions of unemployed peasants. Privatisation, automation and new management strategies have also constrained employment prospects in urban areas.<sup>42</sup> Even though the ratio of industrial and service sector jobs to the working age population (WAP) had gone up to 30 per cent in 1978, from 19 per cent in 1960, growth has stopped in the neo-liberal era –down to 27 per cent in 2004. Consequently, the total labour force had plunged to below half of the WAP in 2004, from

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<sup>41</sup> Oral Calislar, 'Basbakan Kim Olsun', *Cumhuriyet*, 1995, December 29.

<sup>42</sup> Theo Nichols, Nadir Sugur, Erol Demir and Aytul Kasapoglu, 'Privatisation in Turkey: Employees' Views on Privatisation in the Turkish Cement Industry and Some Comparisons with Britain', *Work, Employment and Society*, vol.12, no.1, 1998, pp.1-24.

three-quarters in 1978.<sup>43</sup> By the end of the Nineties, the proportion of shantytown dwellers had already doubled to half of the total population in cities, and the share of the lowest fifth in national income had decreased by one-third.<sup>44</sup> From 1978 to 2004, the real earnings of white collar and industrial workers had roughly slumped by two-thirds and one-third, respectively.<sup>45</sup>

The benefits of pro-market labour policies, on the other hand, have been considerable, especially for export-oriented companies in the manufacturing industry and the military.<sup>46</sup> Although the average annual growth rate in manufacturing output per employee had been no more than 3 per cent between 1960 and 1978, it was recorded as twice that by 2004.<sup>47</sup> However, the military has become the biggest benefactor of neo-liberal policies in general. To ensure not only the political guardianship but also the 'economic leadership' of the army with respect to neo-liberal policies, Washington continuously deployed IMF credits in the service of the military for its various commercial activities. The Commerce Bureau of the US State Department has also kept providing the American Exim Bank with 'special assurance letters' to secure credits for such activities of the army that are free-from legal accountability and tax responsibilities.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> OECD, *Labour Force Statistics*, Paris 1975, 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2005. A rise in the schooling ratio and annual growth rate of WAP has also contributed to the decline in the participation rate since 1980, but its impact has been residual. See, Surhan Cam, 'Neo-Liberalism, Labour and Emerging Market Experience – Turkey', 2002, *Capital & Class*, 77, pp.89-114.

<sup>44</sup> Altan Oymen, 'Altakiler ve Usttekiler', *Milliyet*, 3 November 1997.

<sup>45</sup> ILO, *Bulletin of Labour Statistics - 1985, 1999, 2005*, Geneva.

<sup>46</sup> Between 1980 and 2004, exports quadrupled to 65 per cent of manufacturing and 25 per cent of GDP. SIS 1986, 2001, 2005.

<sup>47</sup> OECD, *National Accounts, Main Aggregates, 1984, 2000, 2005*, Paris vol.1.

<sup>48</sup> The US Department of State, Foreign Commercial Service, *Country Commercial Guide: Turkey*, The US Department of State, 2001 Washington, see pp.38 & 108.



Currently, the military owns the third largest company in Turkey, OYAK, which originated from a military pension fund.<sup>49</sup> In the neo-liberal era, OYAK has become a conglomerate in the finance and manufacturing sectors. Since the very beginning of the privatisation programmes, it has taken over companies as a 'private' initiative. For instance, in the cement industry, the first privatised sector, OYAK owns half of nearly twenty companies. In time, it has also taken over companies in various industries from telecommunications to banks. In addition to OYAK, the army owns a sister company, the Foundation for Strengthening the Military, which is two-thirds the size of OYAK. The army also holds the largest shares in the 'militarily sensitive' industries of the MKK and ASELSAN. Altogether, the army emerges as the largest 'commercial company' in the economy and the largest of exporting companies as well as the largest buyer of privatised companies.<sup>50</sup> Further, retired generals become permanent members on the managerial boards of export-oriented companies with inflated salaries. To secure the continuity of neo-liberalism under these circumstances, the army has institutionalised an oppressive regime in daily politics.

A survey in 2002 suggested that three-quarters of parliamentarians considered the army, along with its 'collaborators' in the media, as the ruler of the country.<sup>51</sup> For this, the army has equipped the National Security Council (NSC) with extensive powers. 'Veteran' generals hold key positions in the NSC, and report directly to the military. The NCS's opinion on any issue is

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<sup>49</sup> Taha Parla, 'Merchantile Militarism in Turkey', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Fall 1998, No.19, pp.29-53.

<sup>50</sup> *Milliyet*, 'Oyak Genel Muduru Nihat Ozdemir ile Bir Soylesi' 2000, 3 July; Istanbul Sanayi Odasi, En Buyuk Besyuz Firma Listesi, [http://bornova.ege.edu.tr/~muhkulup/sirketler/ilk\\_500.htm](http://bornova.ege.edu.tr/~muhkulup/sirketler/ilk_500.htm); Ihracatci Veri Bankasi, KOBİ Veri Siteleri, <http://www.igeme.org.tr/tur/kobi/kobi.asp>

headlined in mainstream newspapers, the owners of which are usually kept satisfied by lavish loans.<sup>52</sup> In general, the NSC operates as a preventative mechanism against the 'dangers' of democratic alternatives in political affairs. In the name of national security, for example, it continuously dismisses the objections of opposition parties to the legal unaccountability of ruling parties' use of the 'hidden-budget'. The election system was also given to the tutelage of the Supreme Court (SC), the Supreme Election Committee (SEC) and the State Security Court (SSC) that operate under military scrutiny in accordance with the 1982 constitution. The SC has so far turned down numerous electoral bills, including those designed by the cross-party alliances of backbenchers to increase intra-party democracy by reducing the power of party leaders. The SEC has arbitrarily banned hundreds of 'untrustworthy' candidates from standing in elections. The SSC has prosecuted dozens of elected MPs for joining political campaigns to protest the negative implications of neo-liberal policies for democracy and labour.<sup>53</sup>

In particular, the army takes every possible precaution to protect neo-liberal policies against the working class. The military constitution has restricted strikes for blue-collar workers, excluded white-collar workers from unionisation, and increased the power of the cabinet to issue incessant decrees to stamp out legal strikes. Between 1978 and 2004, union density halved to 10 per cent because of the 'liquidation' of union activists by the

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<sup>51</sup> Mehmed Ali Birand, 'Turkiye'yi Asker ve Medya Yonetiyor', *Milliyet*, 26 April 2002.

<sup>52</sup> Metin Heper and Taner Demirel, 'The Press and the Consolidation of Democracy in Turkey', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1996, 32(2), pp.107-123.

<sup>53</sup> *The Role of the Military in Recent Turkish Politics*,

police and employers thanks to the military regulations.<sup>54</sup> The Employment Code requires the military-led National Intelligence Organisation to inform employers about the ‘fingerprint history of militant workers’. In 2001, for example, nearly one quarter of the labour force was estimated to have been discriminated against in recruitment or subjected to unfair dismissals.<sup>55</sup> Before leaving power ostentatiously in 1983, the army had already imprisoned 60,000 ‘traitors’, but since then disappearances and those reportedly committing suicide in detention centres have been countless.<sup>56</sup> It is not possible to estimate the current number of political prisoners as official crime definitions are distorted, however, some statistics which became publicly available in 2002 indicated that 149,000 people were ‘wanted’, whilst one-quarter were indicted with ‘offending the regime’.<sup>57</sup> The violation of human rights and torture/ill-treatment across the country have become so common that in almost all annual reports of Amnesty International, Turkey is highly ranked among those nations suffering from repressive policies.<sup>58</sup>

To constrain the political criticism of intellectuals, the army also brought in a military-led Higher Education Council (HEC). Since the early 1980s, it has sacked hundreds of scientists and stripped academics of titles for breaching HEC regulations. Notably, over one hundred academics-writers were awaiting

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<sup>54</sup>Surhan Cam, Job Security, Unionisation, Wages and Privatisation, *The Sociological Review*, 1999, Vol.47. No.4. pp.698-714; Institut des Sciences du Travail, Universite Catholique De Louvain (2004) *Monographs on the situation of social partners in acceding and candidate countries intersectoral level summary*, Research project conducted on behalf of the Employment and Social Affairs Directorate-General of the European Commission, Project No VT/2002/0215, p.10

<sup>55</sup> A. Ekinci, ‘Turk Usulu Guvenlik Anlayisi’, *Radikal*, 7 May 2002.

<sup>56</sup> S. Coşkun, *Türkiye de Politika*, Cem Yayinlari: Istanbul 1995, p.122.

<sup>57</sup>*Hurriyet*, ‘Polis 149 bin kisiyi ariyor’, 2002, June 22.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Amnesty International, *Country Reports: Turkey*, 2000 and 2005, Geneva.

trial in 2002 for propagating anti-establishment ideas.<sup>59</sup> Pressures on academic life have been stepped up in economic terms as well. In accordance with IMF prescriptions for 'fiscal discipline', public spending on education was halved to 2 per cent of GDP between 1980 and 2004.<sup>60</sup> Under-resourced and suffering from teaching overload, it becomes increasingly difficult for academics to contribute to, or stay in touch with, current knowledge. Instead, the regime produces its mouthpieces at universities. Most notably, these demagogues blame the poor not only for their own poverty but also for the country's underdevelopment, alleging that they 'pillage' national resources by grabbing public sector jobs through patronage, and invading the lands of the state to construct shantytowns.<sup>61</sup> The liberal media keeps a day-to-day record of such obfuscatory 'inventions'.

Because the dispersal of democratic ideologies is suppressed by the all-pervading power of the military, the army maintains an 'indisputable legitimacy'. The oppression of democratic currents assists the wider circles of society's view of the military as a 'most respectable institution'.<sup>62</sup> However, such a 'legitimacy' based on the persecution of opposition is no proof of 'hegemonic consent', since the latter is categorically based on convincing people of the legitimacy of authority.<sup>63</sup> In this respect, the Turkish case is hardly idiosyncratic. Referring to a similar political phenomenon, observers

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<sup>59</sup> Human Rights Watch World Report, *Turkey*, 2002, p.356, [www.hrw.org/wr2k2/pdf/turkey.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/wr2k2/pdf/turkey.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> OECD, *Public Revenues*, Paris 2001, 2005.

<sup>61</sup> For a debate on this issue see Tahire Erman, 'The Politics of Squatter (Gecekondu) Studies in Turkey: The Changing Representations of Rural Migrants in the Academic Discourse', *Urban Studies*, vol.38, no.7, 2001, pp.983-1001.

<sup>62</sup> For a debate on popular perceptions of the army, see J. Salt, 'Turkey's military "democracy"', *Current History*, February, 1999, pp.72-78.

point out that the Molla Regime in Iran or Haydar/Ilham Aliyev in Azerbaijan, for instance, has some sort of 'public support'.<sup>64</sup> In Turkey, however, the prevalence of oppression in general necessitates a specific debate on its relation to neo-liberal economic policies within the context of ethnic and religious domains. Accordingly, we will now examine how the army's attempts to promote neo-liberal capital accumulation within these domains have deepened, on the one hand, repression whilst paving the way for the Kurdish upheaval, far-right currents, corrupt/Mafia politicians and Islamic tides, yet, on the other, have lined up many behind the military against such developments.

### ***Ethno-Politics***

The Kurdish people are a core element within the ethno-politics of institutional oppression. The centuries-long independence struggle of the Kurds, who have never been totally subjugated, cannot be reduced simply to neo-liberal politics. However, this does not vindicate official propaganda depicting a bloody war against the Kurds since the initiation of neo-liberal economic policies as the inevitable price to pay to 'crack down on separatist traitors' for the sake of national unity. Even research commissioned by the international agencies of neo-liberalism, such as the IMF and World Bank, acknowledges the impact of economic conditions on civil wars in the World. In an influential report for the World Bank, for example, Collier and Hoeffler concluded:

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<sup>63</sup> Although Gramsci criticised 'hegemonic consent' for –civil- rulers as a demagogical product of the 'organic intelligentsia', he distinguished it from repression of the opposition by the use of force in 'domination'. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers: New York 1972, p.12 & pp.169-170.

<sup>64</sup> *The Economist*, 'A New Way to Squeeze Reformists', January 12 2002, p.58.

Economic characteristics – dependence on primary commodity exports, low average incomes, slow growth, and large diasporas – are all significant and powerful predictors of civil war.<sup>65</sup>

In the mid-1950s and afterwards, the government developed several dam projects on the Euphrates and Tigris to generate electricity to the country and to irrigate lands in the densely Kurdish populated Southeast ‘for the socio-economic assimilation of Kurds to the Turkish society by alleviating the uneven underdevelopment of the region’.<sup>66</sup> Due to capital shortage, however, the construction process remained at a slow pace until the World Bank raised credits in the early 1980s as part of export promotion policies. In 2004, more than half of the total \$30bn investment had been completed.<sup>67</sup> Even so, the economic gap between the Southeast and the rest of the country has not narrowed but widened. The share of the region in gross national income roughly halved to 4 per cent between 1982 and 2004.<sup>68</sup> In this period, official Kurdish policy also became increasingly oppressive; at least 35,000 Kurds were killed in a war which has also claimed the lives of 5,000 mostly conscripted soldiers garnered from poor families.<sup>69</sup>

Neo-liberalism has undermined the economic conditions of the Kurdish people in respect of both animal husbandry and arable farming, which are the main occupations of the Kurds. Animal husbandry has been adversely affected; firstly, by the privatisation of the meat and animal food industries and then by

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<sup>65</sup> P. Collier, and A. Hoeffler, *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy*, World Bank Policy Research Paper, 2000, p.21.

<sup>66</sup> For a comprehensive account of official Kurdish policy, see Mesut Yegen, ‘The Turkish state discourse and the exclusion of Kurdish identity’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.32, no.2, 1996, pp.216-229.

<sup>67</sup> Official Website for the South Anatolian Project (SAP), <http://www.gapturkiye.gen.tr/english/region/index.html>

<sup>68</sup> SIS, 1986, p.172, 2001, p.174 and 2005, p.176

the removal of tariffs on meat imports. The sheep population, the dominant livestock in the Southeast as well as in Turkey, fell from 50 million in 1980 to 28 million in 2004.<sup>70</sup> In particular, although the irrigation project had raised cotton production in the region to more than half of the total across the country in 2004 from virtually nil in the early 1980s, the state continuously fixes very low official prices for the cotton in order to promote export-oriented textile companies.<sup>71</sup> Farmers have become so impoverished that they cannot afford to pay their credit debts to the state.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the Kurdish people cannot benefit from new jobs in the export industries either, since investors tend to stay close to the main ports in the Western parts of the country rather than in the war-torn region.<sup>73</sup>

The government has not been short of promises to promote the industrialisation of the region as a way of creating prosperity and peace for the Kurdish communities. In effect, however, it has consolidated the marginalisation of the Southeast by allocating rather low shares to the region from its incentives for export-oriented companies; in 2001, for example, the proportion was less than half per cent of the total.<sup>74</sup> Further, in an attempt to prevent industrialisation through the evolution of feudal relations to capitalism in the Southeast, the State also forbade land trade for both small and large farmers. The NSC strictly keeps any sort of economic and entrepreneurial activities under control “as they risk accelerating the insurrections of the

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<sup>69</sup> N. Alpay, ‘Sorumluluk Kimde’, *Radikal*, 7 May 2002.

<sup>70</sup> SIS, 1985, p.287; 2000, p.308 and 2005, p.301

<sup>71</sup> Türkiye-AB Ticaret Sanayi ve AKTC Urunleri Birinci Alt Komitesi, [dpt.gov.tr/imalatsa/ab/001207/textiles.doc](http://dpt.gov.tr/imalatsa/ab/001207/textiles.doc)

<sup>72</sup> *Aksam Gazetesi*, ‘550 Citci Borc Bataginda’, 12 January, 2003,

<sup>73</sup> *The Guardian*, ‘Standing Against the Rising Tigris’, July 17, 1999.

<sup>74</sup> Kemal Avci, ‘Tevsikte Aslan Payi Batinin’, *Ozgur Politika*, 3 January 2003

Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) by creating either new sources for its 'protection racket businesses' or an economically strong Kurdish elite favouring independence".<sup>75</sup> Nor is the establishment convinced that the emergence of an organised Kurdish working class in the Southeast would be less of a threat than the existing peasantry communities to 'the indivisible unity of the country' once it encounters the severe implications of neo-liberal policies as happened in the Western regions.<sup>76</sup>

The government has upheld the migration of impoverished Kurds from the Southeast as an official 'solution' to the social unrest in the region. For this purpose in particular, the state not only let down hundreds of thousands of families when their homes and lands were left under water by dams, but also introduced a policy of forced-migration accusing the people of 'harbouring terrorists'. In general, over 3 million Kurds have been uprooted from 4000 villages/hamlets since the early 1980s.<sup>77</sup> However, instead of de-escalating the war, migration has expanded armed conflicts toward the Western cities, although they have started to lose momentum since the capture of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the PKK, in 1999. More recently, the government has decided 'to take serious action' to encourage agro-industrial sectors in the region. Nevertheless, the NSC largely limited investment opportunities to the American and Israeli entrepreneurs. By this strategy, the government hopes to gain the support of US-based lobbies against the international condemnation of oppressive policies toward the Kurds as the military steps up

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<sup>75</sup> Pacific Environment Research Center, *The World Commission on Dams and Export Credit Reform*, The Corner House, World Economy, Ecology and Development, 2000, p11.

<sup>76</sup> George Monbiot, 'The Hidden Goals of the Turkish Government', *The Guardian*, 14 October, 1999.

<sup>77</sup> Amnesty International, *Country Reports*



attacks on those who try to go back to their villages after experiencing economic difficulties in the cities.<sup>78</sup>

To persuade people that the war is not about the discontent of the Kurds but the 'betrayal of a few secessionists', the establishment reminds the public of the failure of a pro-Kurdish party, the HADEP (known by its Turkish initials) to pass the ten per cent national threshold in elections. As far as the official rhetoric is concerned, the HADEP's failure to pass the threshold, despite Kurds making up 15 per cent of the total population, reflects the paucity of support for the HADEP from Kurds in the Western provinces due to their successful integration in society.<sup>79</sup> However, the government forbids academic research to assess the accuracy of such a claim. The official view ignores, for example, the danger of growth in intimidation and killings, if the minority Kurds of Western constituencies enable the party to pass the national threshold without having local MPs in most cases.<sup>80</sup> HADEP's difficulty in entering parliament, however, demonstrates how nationalism is manipulated and marshalled behind the army. Since the closure of another pro-Kurdish party by the State Security Court of the military, after it gained several seats within a left-wing party in 1987, no party has embarked upon a similar alliance with the HADEP for fear of losing electoral support.<sup>81</sup>

A far-reaching campaign against 'imminent territorial disintegration' has also fostered jingoism among the supporters of the far right NMP, and the military has made semi-official use of the NMP's militant wing to terrorise Kurdish

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<sup>78</sup> *Kurdish Observer*, 'Harput: Gap is Being Sold', 27 September 2002.

<sup>79</sup> Ahmet Taner Kislali, 'Turkluk ve Kurtluk', *Cumhuriyet*, 15 April 1997.

<sup>80</sup> Chris Morris, 'Kurdish File', *BBC News*, 10 March 2000, Friday, 01:53 GMT.

villages. For this purpose, the army has formed 'counter-guerrilla' groups from NMP fanatics as well as 'militia-forces' from the tribes of local warlords, and shielded paramilitary organisations by extending military immunity to them.<sup>82</sup> However, it is not possible to fully understand the rise of the far right without taking drug trafficking into account. Whilst the war has led to a political 'vacuum' in the South East, the army officers have deployed mobs of the NMP to utilise the region as an entrance route for heroin transfer from Asia to Europe.<sup>83</sup> In addition to taxpayers' money, a vast amount of income from the drugs trade has been diverted to the war effort, a total sum of \$95bn.<sup>84</sup> Yet, even such an amount is below the drug turnover 'obtainable' in less than two years; its annual scale is estimated to be \$50bn.<sup>85</sup> Around 80 per cent of heroin dispersed in European markets passes through Turkey.<sup>86</sup>

The laundering of 'dirty money', initially carried out in various institutions ranging from universities to football clubs, has snowballed into ubiquitous corruption and spawned a generation of corrupt/Mafia politicians. Convicted political leaders of the Mafia, such as Mehmet Agar and Mustafa Bayram, were allowed to remain in parliament after symbolic fines.<sup>87</sup> The NMP and the broader cohorts of corrupt politicians publicly hailed these criminals as 'patriots', arguing that their investments, especially in the construction sector,

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<sup>81</sup> I. Cevik, 'Yilmaz Enlists HADEP for elections alliance', *Turkish Daily News*, 25 July 2001.

<sup>82</sup> CDAI, The Conference of the Defence Association Institute, *A Strategic Assessment: Canada's Response to the New Challenges of International Security*, CDAI Publications, 1999, Ottawa, p.19

<sup>83</sup> OGD, Observatoire Geopolitique des Drogues, *The World Geopolitics of Drugs: Annual Report*, Paris, 1999, p.109

<sup>84</sup> Sukru Elekdag, Savasin Bilancosu, *Milliyet*, 2002, May 21.

<sup>85</sup> Yakup A. MIM, 'Hukümet Ayaga Kalk', *Ozgur Politika*, 1999, October 13. The PKK is also engaged in the drugs trade, although the amount said to be derived from its activities appears to be low compared to the overall magnitude. The highest estimation so far, made by a Belgian court in 2002, which found the PKK guilty of drug trafficking, was roughly \$4bn annually, *De Standard*, 2002, May 3.

<sup>86</sup> *The Economist*, Another Powder Trail, 2001 October 21.

<sup>87</sup> *The Economist*, A Turkish Lover of Picassos, 2001, March 29.

promote national interests by the export of construction materials and services to Asian countries.<sup>88</sup> Apart from such euphemistic claims, one thing is certain, corrupt politicians continuously 'legitimise' the illegitimate in order to enable export companies to make 'unfair profits'. In 1999, for example, the largest 500 companies in the export-oriented manufacturing sector achieved eight-fold more profits in the finance sector than in industrial production. In stock markets, companies plunder the small savings of people through false bankruptcies. Instead of taking legal action, the government strikes 'fat loan' deals with such companies to bail them out of 'bankruptcy'.<sup>89</sup>

Due to growing concerns about corruption, the public demands widespread transparency in political and economic affairs. As an expression of such demands, millions of protestors in 1998 condemned politicians by turning off the lights across the country for a period of time every night over two months.<sup>90</sup> However, the military is not keen on risking any revelation about the individual wealth of generals, one of whom was ranked as 'the richest soldier in the World' according to a survey conducted by *Time* no more than three years after the 1980 coup.<sup>91</sup> The army not only blockaded distribution of the magazine in that year but also the proceedings of most corruption-related cases in succeeding years. Since 1997, for example, civil hearings into what is publicly called the 'Susurluk Case' have not been concluded because it has

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<sup>88</sup> *The Economist*, 'Bit by bit ugly facts come out', 1999, January 29, p.21.

<sup>89</sup> Bulent Kent, 'Turkey Today: Cheap Labour Platform for Transnational Capital', *World Socialist*, 2000, September 27.

<sup>90</sup> Avni Ozgurel, 'Temizlenmeyi Istiyor muyuz?', *NetHaber*, 2000, November 23.

<sup>91</sup> *Time*, 'The Richest Soldiers in the World', September 1983, p.28

indicted some army officers with involvement in the drugs trade.<sup>92</sup> The NSC repeatedly warns judges against ‘smearing the military by the misuse of legal freedoms’.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, when the army fails to prevent corruption reaching the headlines due to occasional fights among corrupt/Mafia gangs, the ‘economic mechanisms’ of neo-liberalism kick in; once a political dispute erupts over corruption, international financiers run away. Notably, following a row between Prime Minister Ecevit and President Sezer in 2001, \$5bn fled the country over night, sparking off a currency crisis.<sup>94</sup> Either by benefiting from such incidents or withholding legal inquiries, the military officers effectively disguise their illicit liaison with NMP-led drug smuggling operations from the populace, thereby acquiring specifically the reputation of being ‘the cleanest institution’, compared to ‘blatantly corrupt’ civil politics.<sup>95</sup>

Partly because of a chauvinist sentiment fostered by the war against the Kurds and partly because of economic power supported by drug trafficking, the NMP has enjoyed an upsurge in the parliamentary spectrum. Although its electoral share had been no more than 6 per cent on average in the 1960s and 1970s, this proportion tripled in the 1999 elections through the injection of ‘black money’ into a campaign which promised the party had reformed itself.<sup>96</sup> The liberal media argued that the ‘NMP was no longer the murderous gang of the late 1970s’.<sup>97</sup> From this point of view, however, the slaughtering of Kurds

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<sup>92</sup> In 1997, some officials and pro-MHP drug barons were found dead together in a notorious car crush in Susurluk province. Investigations into the accident pointed to the involvement of high ranking military officers, such as Veli Kucuk, in the drugs trade. Enis Berberoglu, ‘AB Dusmani Susurluk Koalisyonu’, 2002, *Radikal*, June 10

<sup>93</sup> *Milliyet*, ‘Boyle Bir Komutan Yok’, 2001, January 12.

<sup>94</sup> For a critical debate on the insufficiency of regulations in international finance systems, see M. Ul Haq; I. Kaul and I. Grunberg, *The Tobin Tax: Coping with Financial Volatility*, University Press 1996.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Turkey’s military “democracy”’.

<sup>96</sup> SIS 1999, pp.233-235.

<sup>97</sup> Fikret Bila, ‘MHP Merkeze Yaklaşıyor’, *Milliyet*, 2000, February 9.

was perfectly 'justified' to maintain national unity. Instead of condemning the NMP for the killing of Kurds or its involvement in the drug trade, many 'left-wing' columnists also hailed the party for its nationalistic Euro-scepticism amidst intensified talks over Turkey's bid for membership of the EU.<sup>98</sup> The pro-NMP campaign in general served for a new wave of neo-liberal policies. After the 1999 elections, it came to power as a coalition partner with the Democratic Left Party (DLP). Until then, opposition by stake holding bureaucrats, as well as workers, had prevented weak governments from completing the privatisation of public enterprises.

Nor had the army intervened to help the government to overcome the opposition to privatisation, despite being the leading power behind the neo-liberal project. The previously mentioned reservations of the army about the privatisation of 'militarily sensitive' companies played an important role in this. Further, the slow pace of privatisation gave the army, the largest buyer of public companies, the time to accumulate new capital to buy more companies. Nevertheless, soon after the NMP joined the coalition, the government doubled the extent of privatisation in 2000, although it had hitherto purported to 'damn the selling out of national assets'.<sup>99</sup> In particular, being the army's collaborator in pursuing corrupt and jingoistic policies, the NMP threw its weight behind prioritisation of the military as a bidder in privatisation auctions. For example, in addition to some other companies, the largest chunk of the state banks was sold to OYAK through shady deals. The fraudulent nature of

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<sup>98</sup> Saruhan Oluc, 'Avrupa Birliği Bahane' *Radikal*, 2002, June 15.

<sup>99</sup> The 'extent of privatisation' refers to income obtained from sales. In 2000, \$10bn in revenue came from privatisation that was equal to the total amount obtained up to that time. OECD, *Financial Market Trends*, no.79, June 2001, Table 1.

tender offers also helps to explain why the so-called leftist DLP entered into a coalition with the NMP. In 2001, Husammettin Ozkan, a wealthy businessman and the state minister from the DLP, had been charged with 'sleaze bidding' but the coalition instantly ruled out the case.<sup>100</sup>

Together with the DLP, the far right NMP lost office after the 2002 elections, yet its influence within the establishment remains. During the coalition government, the NMP supplemented the bulk of bureaucrats with its cadres who continue to enlarge their circle with further emplacements. Nurtured by the drug trade, they have grown into a 'pan-Turkist clan' in bureaucracy urging political unification with Turkic Republics in Central Asia.<sup>101</sup> The wider strata of the political elite are not oblivious to the threat from far right currents, especially in respect of their high ranking jobs in the public sector. Even so, the elite eschew confrontations with the army over its part in the escalation of far right currents not only because they view the military as too strong to antagonise, but also because they believe that the far right emplacements can only be stopped by the army, and it will have to take action against them at some stage.<sup>102</sup> The elite hold the view that the military inherently despises the rhetoric of brotherhood with Central Asian Turks since a decisive proportion of generals belongs to ethnically heterogeneous families which migrated from the Balkans after the Great War.<sup>103</sup> Thus, the discontent of the elite with far right tides, as well as that of general public with the war in the Southeast,

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<sup>100</sup> Saruhan Uluc, 'Sorusturmanin Kaderi', *Radikal*, 2002, January 26.

<sup>101</sup> David Makovsky, 'New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy', *SAIS Review*, The Washington Institute for the Near East, Winter-Spring 1999.

<sup>102</sup> Yalcin Dogan, 'Milli Siyaset Belgesi Yururlukte', *Milliyet*, 1997, December 12.

<sup>103</sup> For a debate on this issue see Ayse Kadioglu, 'The paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1996, 32 (2), pp.177-193.

boosts the perpetuation of institutional oppression by the military in effect, rather than presents a challenge to it. The next section will also show how the army has taken, on the one hand, advantage of Islamic currents by rallying them in the service of the neo-liberal project, yet, on the other, has appealed for public support to 'guard secularism against fundamentalism'.

### ***Religion and Politics***

An understanding of the basic patterns of global policies toward Islamic tides can assist insight into the religion politics of institutional oppression in Turkey. Most notably, in the early 1980s, Osama bin Laden and the mujahedeen were supported by the United States in its efforts to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan. After September 11, however, Washington commenced demonising anything that it could possibly associate with Islam as a way of shutting out 'all enemies of America'. As Edward Said commented

We are able to discriminate between terrorism of the sort that resulted in the World Trade Center bombing and what it is that the Palestinians are doing to fight the Israeli military occupation, but 'terrorism' has now become synonymous with anti-Americanism.<sup>104</sup>

Following the initiation of neo-liberal policies in the early 1980s, Islamic waves began to surge in the domestic realms of Turkish politics. Yet their chief advocate, the military, had no intention of sharing its material and political supremacy with the 'clergymen of God'. In the late 1990s, the army started to highlight 'the growing perils of religious currents' with a populist demagoguery

emphasising 'the secular and republican regime of the people'. Such guardianship was not only against Islamic fundamentalism but also the economically deprived stratum of society because it specifically challenged the electoral pledges of pro-Islamic politicians 'to promote social fairness unlike other parties'.<sup>105</sup>

For a systematic analysis of the army's relation to Islamic currents, we will first consider how the army actively encouraged such trends in the early 1980s and afterwards. To start with, an Islamic Trade Union Confederation, the HAK-IS has considerably grown under military tutelage. In addition to oppressive policies to debilitate trade unions, the army benefited from the HAK-IS championing the idea of an Islamic brotherhood with employers as opposed to conflict-oriented trade unionism.<sup>106</sup> Although its share in total union membership was less than 7 per cent average in the late 1970s, this proportion had almost doubled by 1998.<sup>107</sup> The HAK-IS' expansion was partly due to the military allowing only this Confederation to operate in the workplaces of the army-owned enterprises. More importantly, it also reflected the army's support for 'Islamic companies' where, too, only the HAK-IS was permitted to organise workers.<sup>108</sup>

'Islamic mercantilism' at large was utilised by institutional oppression to serve the neo-liberal project. The early 1980s were a transitional period for the

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted in David Barsamian, 'An Interview with Edward Said', *Progressive*, 12 May 2002, p.12.

<sup>105</sup> AKP'nin Parti Programı, 2002, p.17

<sup>106</sup> Serdar Sen, *Refah Partisinin Teori ve Pratigi: Refah Partisi, Adil duzen ve Kapitalizm*, Sarmal Yayınevi: İstanbul 1995, pp. 29-46. For a recent debate of trade unions in Turkey, see Nichols, T., Sugur, N. and Demir, E. (2002) 'Beyond cheap Labour: Trade Unions and Development in the Turkish Metal Industry', *Sociological Review*, Vol.50, No.1, pp.23-47.

<sup>107</sup> HAK-IS Web-Site, <http://www.hakis.org.tr/tanitim.htm> and Ministry of Work and Social Security Web-Site, [http://calisma.gov.tr/istatistik/sendika\\_oran.htm](http://calisma.gov.tr/istatistik/sendika_oran.htm)



export of products not yet ready to sell to developed countries, for example, dated commodities, such as old-fashioned typewriters or 'tin cars' of poor quality. Therefore, Middle-Eastern Muslim countries were sought to provide markets for Turkey's exports. In an attempt to approach these countries, Kenan Evren, the Chief General of the 1980 junta, managed to become the 'honoured guest' of the Islam World Conference convened in 1983. Following more diplomatic manoeuvres, the Middle East became a major destination for exports.<sup>109</sup> Cosy relations with Muslim countries brought about concessions to pro-Islamic segments in Turkey. The army, for example, converted all elective modules of 'comparative ethics and religion' in schools to compulsory by-heart readings of Koranic Verses. Religious Imam Schools also mushroomed.

Whilst cutting expenditure on education in order to comply with IMF prescriptions, the government allowed Saudi charities to fund clergy schools.<sup>110</sup> Further concessions were accorded to 'Islamic companies' through tax exemptions 'to compensate for their interest-free trade' ordained by Islam.

The 'politicisation of religion' in the parliamentary setting has accompanied the unfolding of 'Islamic companies'. Even though the pro-Islamic National Salvation Party had gained no more than 8 per cent of votes in the 1960s and 1970s, it was banned after the 1980 military coup like other parties.<sup>111</sup> Yet its cadres were permitted in 1983 to come to office within the army-blessed MLP

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<sup>108</sup> Leyla Boulton (1998) 'Turkish Finance and Industry', *Financial Times*, 1998, December 3.

<sup>109</sup> Sencer Ayata, 'Patronage, Party, and State: the Politisation of Islam in Turkey', *Middle East Journal*, 1990, vol.50, no.1, pp.40-56.

<sup>110</sup> For a comprehensive debate on this issue, see Bahattin Aksit, 'Islamic education in Turkey: Medrese reform in late Ottoman times and Imam-Hatip schools in the Republic', in R. L. Tapper, ed., *Islam in Modern Turkey. Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State*, 1991, pp.145-170.

<sup>111</sup> SIS, 2000, pp.233-235.

in order to implement neo-liberal policies. As the conventional representatives of 'shopkeepers', they commenced internationalising small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the neo-liberal era. Islamic groups appealed to Turkish 'guest workers' in Germany who had hitherto been frustrated by the military at the beginning of the 1980s. When the army freed interest rates in 1981 for capital accumulation, workers outside the country invested remittances with Turkish Bankers. Yet the military provided no legislative buffer for small savers when bankers collapsed due to high interest rates in 1983.<sup>112</sup> Then, the religious decency rhetoric of Islamic groups became a new hope for these investors and they supplied much of the financial capital to the so-called 'Anatolian Tigers', whose share rose to one-quarter of total exports in 1997, particularly by successful gambits in textiles.<sup>113</sup>

Benefiting from the economic power of SMEs, Islamic groups gained electoral momentum. Before the 1987 elections, they defected from the MLP to the Refah (Welfare) Party and a decade later in 1997 joined the government as the major coalition partner, garnering one-fifth of votes. The Refah administration paid one of its first international visits to Capitol Hill as 'proof' of its goodwill toward the USA.<sup>114</sup> This move was no surprise given that the petty bourgeoisie sponsors of the Islamic Party, SMEs, relied heavily on international credit agencies. Once the Refah Party took office, pro-Islamic policy makers started to prioritise members of MUSIAD, the association for

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<sup>112</sup> *Hurriyet*, 'Islami Holdinglerde Banker Faciasi Olacak', 1999, January 13.

<sup>113</sup> 'Anatolian manufacturing Industry within the context of the world and Turkish economy'

<sup>114</sup> Umit Cizre-Sakallioglu, 'Rethinking the connections between Turkey's "Western identity" versus Islam', *Critique* 12, 1998, pp. 3-18.

the SMEs of Anatolia, in dispensing IMF loans.<sup>115</sup> The favouring of SMEs was an apparent frustration for members of TUSIAD, representing the large businesses of Istanbul, which subsequently conducted a campaign in the media against 'the coming of sharia', the Islamic Order. The army thwarted this, partly because the redistribution of resources was by no means 'irrational', but helpful for the accumulation of neo-liberal capital as far as the State Planning Organisation was concerned.<sup>116</sup> The generals also thought that keeping the Refah Party in office would undermine its popularity as had happened to other parties since they could not deliver electoral pledges to voters due to budgetary constraints.<sup>117</sup>

However, in the following several months of administration, Refah advisers proved to be cleverer and bolder than the army had assumed, designing policies in order to tackle fiscal shortfalls. Most notably, the Refah Party permitted waived imports to citizens living abroad for a special fee, hoping to obtain millions of dollars. Unlike the other parties, the Refah Party was determined to augment its popularity in office and this was not good news for the 'secular ideology' of the army in the long-term. In particular, waived car imports posed an immediate threat to the economic interests of the military by jeopardising the exorbitant profits of the army's OYAK car company in domestic markets, a joint venture with the French Renault.<sup>118</sup> Alarmed by such developments, the army in 1998 coerced the government to step down, using the threat of force. After the dismantling of the government, the Islamic

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<sup>115</sup> Ayse Bugra, 'Claws of the 'Tigers'', Private View, Autumn 1997, pp.24-31.

<sup>116</sup> SPO (State Planning Organisation), *2020 Yilinda Turkiye*, DPT Yayinlari: Ankara, 1998.

<sup>117</sup> Ely Karmon, The Demise of Radical Islam in Turkey, Middle East Review of International Affairs, vol.1, no.4, pp.63-85.

Refah Party was closed down by the State Security Court. The army also 'named and shamed' many SMEs sponsoring the Islamic party and removed their no-tax privileges. This induced the crumbling of the 'Anatolian Tigers' at the height of the 'Asian crisis'; half of the textile companies had subsequently passed to foreign investors by 2001.<sup>119</sup>

Secular intellectuals expressed support for the 'war on the Refah Party'. Ignoring the army's role in the rise of the Islamic tide, the elite hurled democratic values overboard and lined up behind the military. Most intellectuals argued that 'soft strategies' against Islamists would engender sharia as had happened in Iran.<sup>120</sup> This defensiveness also echoed the elite's concern over its economic dividends that were being hampered by Islamic competitors in a varied range of activities from the media to fashion industries and high-ranking jobs in the bureaucracy.<sup>121</sup> In the face of Islamist threats, the Alevi, the largest of the religious minorities, also gave their support to the army. Comprising roughly 15 per cent of the population, the Alevi traditionally practise a secular teaching within the Anatolian hermeneutics of Islam and their political consciousness is historically informed by fundamentalist massacres against them. In July 1993, for example, at an Alevi cultural festival in Sivas, fundamentalist mobs set fire to a hotel where many Alevi participants had taken refuge. The police's failure to interfere resulted in the killing of dozens of Alevis. The dignitaries of mostly poor Alevi communities keep presenting gifts to the army generals, a pitiful tribute to elicit their

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<sup>118</sup> J. Barham, 'Leaving Protectionism Behind', *Financial Times*, 1998, December 6.

<sup>119</sup> Turkish Treasury, 2002, <http://www.treasury.gov.tr/english/ybs/ybsyeniing.htm>

<sup>120</sup> Ilhan Selcuk, 'Uygurlik Kanla Gelir', 1998, *Cumhuriyet*, February 29.

support and protection.<sup>122</sup> The broader sections of the poor, however, remained loyal to 'pro-Islamic' politicians, and in doing so, sustained the rise of a new pro-Islamic party, the Justice and Development Party (JDP).

Electoral support for pro-Islamic politics in general does not simply stem from religious propaganda. It feeds on the needs of the poor and their hostility to corrupt government.<sup>123</sup> After losing their confidence in corrupt mainstream parties, poor shantytown dwellers have become a bastion of pro-Islamic parties.<sup>124</sup> Endemic economic crises have also consolidated this situation as a result of escalating poverty. In pursuit of dragging Turkey into US-led military action in Afghanistan 'in retaliation for September 11', the IMF bailed out the Turkish economy in 2001 from default with a \$16bn stand-by agreement.<sup>125</sup> The cost of economic turbulence to the poor, however, became most evident; in 2002, one in six people was reported to live in danger of starvation that had been eradicated for decades after the Second World War.<sup>126</sup> In that year, the pro-Islamic JDP garnered one-third of votes in elections and gained almost two-thirds of seats since other parties had failed to pass the ten-per cent threshold, except for the RPP of the 'centre left', mostly supported by Alevi communities.<sup>127</sup> To counter such outcomes, the military had already accused the leader of the JDP, Tayyip Erdogan, of promoting 'religious hatred' and the State Security Court had prohibited him in 2000 from participation in politics.

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<sup>121</sup> Nilufer Göle, 'Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: the making of elites and counter-elites', *Middle Eastern Journal*, vol.51, no.1, 1997, pp.46-58.

<sup>122</sup> David Zeidan, 'The Alevi of Anatolia', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol.4, no.4, December 1999, pp.74-89.

<sup>123</sup> Binnaz Toprak, 'Politicisation of Islam in a secular state: the National Salvation Party in Turkey', in: S. A. Arjomand, ed., *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, 1984, pp.119-133.

<sup>124</sup> See Sencer Ayata, 'Patronage, Party, and ...

<sup>125</sup> *Financial Times*, 'IMF's Choices', 16 October 2001, p.22.

<sup>126</sup> Boulton, Leyla, 'Turkey's youngest cabinet minister calls for teamwork', *Financial Times*, 2002, December 2.

After the elections, the establishment used the ban on Mr. Erdogan to make a political deal with the pro-Islamic government.

At the end of long negotiations 'mediated' by the columnists of the main dailies, the army agreed not to deploy the Supreme Court to cancel constitutional changes designed by the JDP to enable the pro-Islamic leader to stand in the first by-elections. For this, however, the party officially declared 'a full-commitment to secular principles like the Christian Democrats in Europe'.<sup>128</sup> Such a move irritated radical cadres at the core of the party, but they could not resist what was on offer. Erdogan assured his aides that after taking the premiership, he would find a way to refuse the JDP's election promise to scrap the legal immunity of MPs indicted in over 30 corruption cases against pro-Islamic deputies.<sup>129</sup> This was not only a relief to JDP cadres but also to the army since corruption trials always raise public doubts about the integrity of generals involved in such scandals. The JDP's abandonment of anti-corruption pledges was by no means a smaller blow to its mostly poor electoral supporters than compromising with 'secular benchmarks', but they were to be let down further. To retrieve the electoral prerogatives of their leader, the party's high command dropped another election promise regarding a job creation programme that would be funded through curbing military expenditure and renegotiating IMF terms to advance 'social programmes'.<sup>130</sup> Thus, the 'anti-Islamic' policies of the army became a new front against the egalitarian demands of impoverished populations. The final part will argue that

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<sup>127</sup> *Milyet*, 'Sandik Sonuclari', 2002, November 26.

<sup>128</sup> Fikret Bila, 'AK Parti Seriatci mi?', 2002, *Milliyet*, December 17.

<sup>129</sup> Bekir Coskun, 'Serh', *Hurriyet*, 2003, January 4.

<sup>130</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 'TOBB baskani ile bir soylesi', 2002 December 7.

it is not possible to solve the socio-economic and political problems discussed so far without a mature opposition to institutional oppression.

### ***Can Democracy Win Against Institutional Oppression?***

In recent years, protectionist threats to neo-liberalism have been in decline since the government has provided financial assistance to protection leaning large companies in order to shift their businesses to exports.<sup>131</sup> As protectionist propensities among business circles abate, businessmen become more united against the political elite for greater power. In 2002, TUSIAD argued that 'corrupt politicians should be got rid of if the democracy is to be lifted to the EU standards'.<sup>132</sup> It has also started to complain about unfair competition from the army's OYAK Company due to its no-tax privileges. Such attempts are backed by SMEs as well. In particular, they hope to avoid the previously mentioned 'military retribution for harbouring Islamic menaces in Turkey'.<sup>133</sup> However, the 'democracy campaign' of businessmen against the political elite is handicapped by their growing dependency on oppressive practices toward the working class.

The lambasting of corrupt politicians by businessmen was largely a 'twisted' reaction to the failure of the government to deliver its capital tax-reduction promise at the expense of the poor and the economic foundation of democracy. The government's plans were prevented by the IMF in order to raise capital taxes as a way of funding Turkey's debt payments -which peaked

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<sup>131</sup> *Economist*, 'Changing Face of the Koc Group', 2003, January 16

<sup>132</sup> TUSIAD, *Turkiye'de Demokratiklesme Perspektifleri ve AB Kopenhag Siyasal Kriterleri*, TUSIAD Yayinlari: Istanbul 2002.

at three quarters of GDP when the economy was near-default in 2001.<sup>134</sup> In fact, employers' contributions to social security and corporate taxes were so low – 5 per cent of GDP in 2001, half below the EU average - that they escalated an 'effective demand shortage' along with poverty.<sup>135</sup> Businesses tend to avoid difficulties with stringent domestic markets by shifting to an outward orientation through not only exports but also overseas investments that amounted to \$10bn in 2001.<sup>136</sup> To reduce capital taxes at home, capitalists urged the military to use its influence on the government by complaining about OYAK's no-tax privileges. Yet the difficulty with this strategy was that the OYAK-supported strength of the army was vital for business circles to maintain social stability if capital taxes were reduced.<sup>137</sup>

Ignoring the anti-corruption rhetoric of pro-Islamic JDP, Tayyip Erdogan, who became Prime Minister after the by-elections in April 2003, has outlawed legal inspections into the unscrupulous sales of state companies.<sup>138</sup> Instead, he introduced a new labour law that envisaged diminishing job security for thousands of employees, especially in SMEs.<sup>139</sup> Despite its electoral pledges, the pro-Islamic government also continues to forge ahead with the construction of the new Ilusu dam in the Southeast to promote agricultural exports. The dam has already driven Kurds away from several villages, left an ancient Kurdish town, Hasan Keyf, under water, and could contribute to

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<sup>133</sup> Douglas Frantz, 'Military Bestrides Turkey's Path to the European Union', 2001, *The New York Times*, January 14.

<sup>134</sup> OECD, *Statistics on the Member Countries*, 2002, Paris, pp.38-39.

<sup>135</sup> TUSIAD, *Sektorel Durum Analizi: Sorunlar ve Cozum Onerileri*, Tusiad-T/2002-05-320, Istanbul, May 2002, pp-19-24.

<sup>136</sup> Metin Munir, 'Performance Falls Short of Potential,' *Financial Times*, 1999, June 15; Finance Bank, *Yillik Bulten*, Hazine Satis Birimi, 2002, Eylul 28, p.117.

<sup>137</sup> Murat Celikkan, 'Sermayenin AB Makyaji', *Radikal*, 2002, October 31.

<sup>138</sup> Hanife Senyuz, 'Ihalede AKP Usulu', *Radikal*, 2003, January 23.



'water-wars' in the Middle East. The Ilusu dam, along with other dams, creates water-shortages in neighbouring Syria, provoking it to shelter Kurdish paramilitaries in the Bekaa Valley. Defying the listing of the PKK among 'terrorist organisations' by the USA and EU after September 11, the Kurdish opposition groups launched a new organisation, the KADEK. In an attempt to soothe the Kurds, Brussels has specified that averting Turkey's ultimate exclusion from the EU's expansion depends on an urgent abolition of the ban on the Kurdish language and the death penalty on political prisoners, including Abdullah Ocalan.<sup>140</sup> In the public domain, the army opposed the exclusion prospect as an 'unfair treatment of the centuries-long struggle of the nation to become Westernised', yet it also kept sending threatening letters to columnist who supported 'pro-Kurdish reforms at the cost of national unity'.<sup>141</sup> Because the Bush administration has pragmatically tied some IMF loans to the 'urgent bills' to maintain Turkey 'on a pro-Western track', the reform package has been legislated but it has failed to address poverty and oppression at large.<sup>142</sup>

Although poverty and oppression have constituted a growing barrier to Turkey's accession to the EU since the initiation of pro-market policies, Brussels avoids releasing designated funds to initiate sustainable economic policies in Turkey along with other candidates.<sup>143</sup> Favouring cheap imports from Turkey in particular, Brussels avoids trade sanctions against the

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<sup>139</sup> *Milliyet*, 'Is Guvencesi diye geldi Isveren guvencesi oldu' 2003, March 17.

<sup>140</sup> Mumtaz Soysal, 'Buyuk Cullanisin Ayiraci', *Cumhuriyet*, 2002, July 17.

<sup>141</sup> Enis Berberoglu, 'AB Dusmani ...'

<sup>142</sup> Murat Belge, 'Haricten Gazel', *Radikal*, 2003, April 27

<sup>143</sup> Chris Rumford, 'Placing democratisation within the global Frame: Sociological Approaches to Universalism, and democratic contestation in contemporary Turkey', *The Sociological Review*, 2002, Volume 50, No.2, pp.258-278.

military's companies, although the army breaches ILO conventions by using the forced labour of conscripted soldiers.<sup>144</sup> Nor do EU governments refrain from issuing trade licences for arms exports to Turkey, despite international denouncements on moral grounds.<sup>145</sup> The army's superiority to the law is also occasionally ratified by the European Human Rights Court in an attempt to help the military keep itself 'clean' from Islamic currents. The court arbitrarily turns down complaints about the legal unaccountability of the military in firing, or coercing into early retirement, 'untrustworthy' army officers. Such dismissals play a key role in the perpetuation of institutional oppression, not only by rooting out 'anti-secular' officers but also any sort of intra-military faction against corrupt and hawkish propensities within the army as one of the greatest fears of generals.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, in order to secure political stability in Turkey's emerging market economy, and the army's co-operation in the 'war on terror', the American and British governments publicly purport that the Turkish army is not an obstacle but a guarantor of the 'democracy role-model' in the region.<sup>147</sup> This, however, showed how deeply the attitudes toward Turkey's future are split among the Western countries, and how dangerously the fascistic inclinations are close to the surface in Turkey.

When the Copenhagen Summit of December 2002 declined to give a firm date for the start of accession talks with Turkey, it made specific references to the heavy influence of the military in civil politics. In particular, opposition groups within the EU tried to devise an associate membership status for

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<sup>144</sup> 'Merchantile Militarism in Turkey', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Fall 1998, No.19, pp.29-53.

<sup>145</sup> D. Wighton; J. Kampfner and J. Burns, 'Arms Sales: Blair tells Cook to ease off block', *Financial Times*, 1997, October 3.

<sup>146</sup> Adnan Ekinci, 'AIHM'de TSK Cekincesi', *Radikal*, 2003, January 10.

Turkey, together with Russia and the Ukraine, as a way of keeping the country at arms length.<sup>148</sup> Such attempts encouraged fascistic leanings within the establishment. The military initiated an intense political campaign for a puppet Turkmen state in Northern Iraq, heralding it as ‘the only way to prevent the possibility of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq and escalated Kurdish separatism in Turkey’.<sup>149</sup> The army’s mouthpieces in the media had no qualms in citing ‘the historical rights of the Ottoman Empire’ in the oil reserves of Kirkuk.<sup>150</sup> Fortunately, three-quarters of the public opposed aggressive policies, fearing the economic and humanitarian costs of the war.<sup>151</sup> In the face of public pressure, one-third of pro-Islamic MPs also lined up with the opposition party and rejected America’s plans to use Turkish military bases to attack Iraq.<sup>152</sup> However, the TUSIAD and MUSIAD urged the pro-Islamic party to open Turkish airspace to the USA, hoping to obtain credits from IMF in addition to dividends from the Iraqi oil reserves.<sup>153</sup> Ironically, some pro-European intellectuals also supported hawkish generals after the Copenhagen Summit. They maintained that the participation of the military in the invasion of Iraq could be a strong leverage to push the EU to revise its position towards the country.<sup>154</sup>

However, the lining up of the various sections of the elite and the public behind the army in the face of civil war, far right currents, corruption or Islamic

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<sup>147</sup> Jack Straw, Speech Delivered in the Commons, 2002, *BBC Parliament*, March 18.

<sup>148</sup> The Economist, *The World in 2003*, December 5, p.71.

<sup>149</sup> Sami Kohen, ‘Savasin Getirileri ve Goturuleri’ *Milliyet*, 2003, January 9.

<sup>150</sup> Mahfi Egilmez, ‘Petrol Alacagi Gercegi’, *Radikal*, 2003, January 14.

<sup>151</sup> Osman Uluogay, ‘Savas Politikasi’, *Milliyet*, 2003, January 7.

<sup>152</sup> For a debate on the invasion of Iraq and Turkey’s attitude toward the USA see, Tariq Ali, ‘Re-Colonizing Iraq’, *New Left Review*, 2003, May-June, pp.5-21.

<sup>153</sup> Murat Celikkan, ‘Sermaye Savas Istiyor’, *Radikal*, 2002, January 16.

<sup>154</sup> Cetin Altan, ‘Ic Politikaayla Dis Politika Lahmacun Oldu’, *Milliyet*, 2003, January 23.

tides has so far proven to be a debacle and consolidated oppression. Corroborative attachments have also led to an increasing proportion of the poor having to bear the brunt of neo-liberal economic policies. Inequality has reached such a level that it requires even greater courage on the part of intellectuals to criticise it on a class-basis, since they may well join the ranks of the growing poor following likely dismissal, if not imprisonment. Defeatism, on the other hand, endangers most unaffordable outcomes for the people of the country. They are in danger of becoming either human-shield for imperialist aggressions in the region or victims of the expansionist adventures of far right currents in the ultimate stage of full-scale fascism. The conducting of international and domestic affairs in peaceful and sustainable ways can only be ensured by democratic control over political institutions.

Pro-democracy reforms required by the EU for accession talks with candidate countries may not secure an end to Brussels' reservations on Turkey's accession to the club in short term. Ongoing accession talks with Turkey are expected to take at least a decade. Even so, further reforms would help promote both public scrutiny of relations with the EU and a concrete ground for wider democratic campaigns to challenge institutional oppression in general.' The pro-Islamic government has already removed some executive powers of the NSC by taking the opportunity of 'accession reforms. The legitimacy of the actions top generals has also begun to be questioned publicly. Indeed, a juridical report compiled in March 2006 accused the present chief of the staff, Yasar Buyukanit of the military abuse and provocation of the Kurds. The incident, added by the following dismissal of the prosecutor because of the army's pressure, caused a widespread public

scepticism. Although the military continuously condemns 'fundamentalist plotters', a growing number of civilian secularists have begun to appreciate that the oppressive nature of the regime obstructs democratic alternatives to the popularity of 'pro-Islamic' politicians. Considering all these, a well-balanced conclusion would require putting the emphasis on the paradoxical rise of both challenges to, and opportunities for, combating institutional oppression in Turkey.