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**A SURVEY OF TURKISH POLITICS
SPRING 2018**

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FOREWORD

This assessment prepared for DPI by prominent writer, columnist and former Wise Persons' Committee Member, Ali Bayramoğlu, explores the internal and external dimensions of the current political situation in Turkey and assesses the country's direction and likely scenarios in terms of its political order and foreign policy. Following an analysis of the country's current AKParty-led political trajectory, the paper identifies and discusses three fixed items on the political agenda, namely: state of emergency practices, the government's Kurdish policy; and the delicate balances of foreign politics. It goes on to examine the potential constitutive elements and interactions of Turkey's domestic and foreign policies, including the potential effects of forthcoming elections on Turkey's internal political life and trajectory, as well as the likely effects of potential change to regional balances on domestic policy and *vice versa*. The author concludes that Turkish politics are currently hanging in the balance. On one side is a difficult, risky and even conflicting structural transformation in an authoritarian trajectory, and on the other side is political normalisation stemming from the nature of political problems and relations.

This paper follows assessments previously prepared by the author for the Democratic Progress Institute (DPI), as well as other diverse voices in Turkey, and forms part of a continuing appraisal by DPI of the situation on the ground, which takes into account different views and perspectives. It contributes to DPI's ongoing evaluation of the situation in Turkey at a time of significant political change, both externally and internally, and not least in the run-up to elections in June 2018.

Further assessments of this kind will continue to be provided by the Institute, with the aim of creating a space for the sharing of a broad representation of viewpoints, thus broadening bases for constructive dialogue in relation to democratisation and resolution processes in Turkey. The views and opinions expressed in the assessment are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of DPI.

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INTRODUCTION

A wave of populism, an authoritarian institutionalisation, a long-term state of emergency regime eroding freedoms, the attempt to become an independent power under the guidance of the motto “securitarian hegemony and a fully sovereign state”, and an accompanying wave of combative international and regional affairs – influenced by all these, it is obvious that Turkey has entered a new political zone.

The direct and indirect results of this situation (Ankara’s increasing interventions in the Middle East, its Kurdish policies, its immigrant policies, its changeable and critical relations with the US, Russia and Iran, the deployment of its military forces) concern everyone from the Kurdish movement to Middle Eastern countries, from the EU to international institutions; in short, anyone who has relations with Turkey and the region.

Where is Turkey going, where will it arrive? We need to answer these questions. What are the constituents of this phase Turkey is in, what are its internal and external dynamics? Will this phase become permanent? In other words, in which direction will Turkey’s political order and foreign policy progress? What are some likely scenarios? How will Turkey’s state of affairs interact with regional and foreign developments, and within which parameters?

This report will try to answer these questions in light of Turkey’s internal dynamics, political spectrum and actors, as well as its foreign policy and conditions.

I. THE POLITICAL TRAJECTORY OF TURKEY

The AK Party-led political trajectory of Turkey currently rests on two main axes.

1. Populist advances

The first axis is the construction of a political leader-oriented populist order. The first and foremost evidence of this is that a majoritarian and plebiscitary structure, in which there are minimal institutional filters and levels of authority (which are the essential constituents of a democratic order) between the leader and the public, one which creates a de facto unity of power is becoming more entrenched every day by new developments and practices.

In addition to restructuring the political system, the populist advancement is also significant in terms of political sociology; that is to say, it indicates the new trajectory of the government along this line. As is the case in many similar examples of populism, this is an attempt to construct a new nation in which only some parts of society are included, and the others are excluded. This campaign of construction, run by Erdoğan along lines of “legitimate vs. illegitimate” and “acceptable vs. dangerous citizen/behaviour” is reflected in various areas such as security measures, practices of “administration”, the monitoring of the press, legislation and the renewal of the state personnel.¹ This is an extraordinary situation, even taking into account the traditional partisanship and clientelism of the country’s political culture; and as a significant development in Turkish social and political life it instigates and even aims for a profound social polarization.

2. A Return to Grand Narratives of the Right

What, then, is the political configuration and choices that accompany this populist framework? The answer to this question indicates the second axis as far as the political state of affairs is concerned. The ideological configuration of this personalized government style or “authoritarian populism” is made up of the AK Party’s post-2015 trajectory and alliances, as well as the grand ideological narratives of the Turkish right and for some part, the founding state ideology. The power bloc led by the AK Party has been attempting to counter new political input and transformations in the country and the region by adopting such narratives. It has chosen to answer its fundamental domestic and foreign problems by policies formulated under the influence of these narratives. As for populism, it stresses the perceived victimhood

¹ A defining instance of this occurred recently. On 19 March 2018, a group of students handing out sweets in Bogazici University to celebrate Turkey’s Afrin operation and to commemorate the dead soldiers were protested by another group of student saying that “there can be no sweets for occupation and massacre”, and tensions rose between the two groups. The president immediately intervened and said: “The faithful, native and national youth is handing out sweets for Afrin and those treacherous, communist youths attempt to overthrow their table. These are terrorists. We will find out about them and won’t let them study in universities.” Following his statement, 7 students were taken into custody. This example demonstrates the state of protesting, debate and freedom of thought in the country; it also points to the results of the populist order and an arbitrary political mechanism. According to Article 7 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 10 in the Turkish Constitution, education is a constitutional right even for convicts. For this to be challenged by a political authority, and for that authority to see himself as having the right to decide the limits of “legitimate” citizenship is the most striking result. These ideological narratives, which have been dominant in Turkish political and social life for a while now, can be summarized in four parts.

of Muslims and the Turkish nation, and expresses a hypothetical alliance between different segments of society; a challenge constructed through this perceived victimhood.

First and foremost is the presence of a *nationalism* absolute in its concerns about survival, one based on a continuous mobilisation against both domestic and foreign enemies, legitimizing isolation and security policies while employing military values. The first attribute of this nationalism is that it feeds an “*anti-politics*” stance which obstructs the interaction between social demands and political decisions, and criminalizes difference and debate, as well as opposition. Another significant input regarding this new wave of nationalism is a national victimhood discourse, which is a constituent of populism that is built on claims such as “Western interference in Kurdish terrorism” or “US presence behind the coup attempt”. This mentality feeds on discourses of victimhood, and invites society to participate in a reactionary activism by centering its politics around the idea of a national resurrection; it also legitimizes use of (even physical) force and a culture of sacrifice by rendering these everyday values.

Secondly, there exists a “*personalised centralisation*” based on the dominance established by ‘political supply’ over ‘social demand’ through plebiscitary means as well as the discourse of a strong state. In order to understand current Turkish politics it is necessary to see the two sides to this centralisation. The first has to do with the political system, and it rests on the identifications between nation-leader and politics-state. Often accompanying it is a majoritarianism and a mentality of national will as it is represented in the person of the leader. This mentality sees all mechanisms of control and monitoring as elitism, and seeks to eliminate them. The destruction of institutional or practical autonomous areas and balancing structures is a crucial part of this centralisation, as well as a point of intersection between populist tendencies and the tradition of Turkish politics. The second side has to do with social systems. On the scale of values and importance regarding the field and activities ranging from economics to culture, this expresses the hegemonization of the political actor, action and power. When politics subsumes these fields and robs them of their autonomy, a totalitarian response is formed.

Thirdly, the idea of “*uniqueness*”, a central concept in the mentality of the Turkish right, is reactivated in both discourse and practice. In today’s Turkey, this idea of uniqueness is

formulated as being “national and native” and compared to the past, more emphasis is placed on culturally Islamic values and belonging. This discourse has become one of the pillars of Erdoğan’s populism and the new political order. The emphasis on uniqueness naturally overlaps with nationalism and in essence, it implies a political sensibility distant from Western and even universal values. There is a longing for attributes such as the people’s cultural and traditional values, intuition and knowledge to prevail over universal principles and values like human rights and the state of law, and to become the primary points of reference.

Fourthly, there is the “*discourse of danger and threat*”, which has been an essential part of Turkey’s political and legal life from the days of cold war to times of military tutelage. This discourse makes the trio “distrust-doubt-precaution” the determining factor in political outlook as well as the climate and decisions. Descriptions of imagined enemies both domestic and foreign serve to restrict freedoms, politicize the judiciary and emphasise the idea that there can be only one right way, as well as cementing the securitarian mentality. In the past, as well as today, this discourse has always been used to create a climate of obedience to the patriarchal power and to foster anti-Western sentiments. What changes from time to time is merely the subject of the danger and the threat; the discourse is permanent and it is one of the fundamental signs of authoritarianism.

These four themes and the atmosphere formed around them define the latest stage of the populist authoritarian political trajectory triggered by the city uprisings of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) in 2015 and which intensified after the coup attempt of 2016.²

² In order to follow the gradual development, the following assessments made for DPI may be consulted:

August 2017 evaluation: <http://www.democraticprogress.org/news/assessment-report-by-ali-bayramoglu-politics-and-the-kurdish-problem-in-turkey-after-the-constitutional-reform/>

March 2017 evaluation: <http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Turkeys-New-Political-Paradigm-and-the-Kurdish-Question.pdf>

August 2016 evaluation: <http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Ali-Bayramoglu-assessment.pdf>

II. FIXED ITEMS ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA

There are three fixed items on the political agenda that feed into this atmosphere. These are (1) state of emergency practices, (2) the Kurdish policy of the government, and (3) the delicate balances of foreign politics.

1. State of emergency practices

State of emergency practices are the most significant indicators as well as enablers of the current political trajectory. There is no doubt that the state of emergency regime is a state of exception (as well as exemption) which increases the powers of the ruling power, restricts fundamental rights and freedoms, and obstructs legal remedy. This state of exception is on its way to becoming the ordinary regime of Turkey. Indeed, the state of emergency regime announced on 20 July 2016 following the coup attempt of 15 July has been extended nonstop for 20 months now, and there are no signs that it will end anytime soon. At the same time, it is used beyond its intended purpose in all aspects,³ and a variety of institutions and laws are in the process of being designed within the framework and mentality of the state of emergency. This has extensively damaged the field of fundamental rights and freedoms as well as the judicial order.⁴ The then Commissioner for Human

³ The state of emergency regime authorizes the executive body to issue decrees having the force of law and thus acting in a legislative capacity. It is a constitutional provision that decrees having the force of law don't overstep the bounds of their subject matter, and that they don't make regulations extending to the post-state of emergency period. However, the decrees are being used in a capacity that exceeds the precautions taken against the military coup attempt of 15 July; they completely substitute the legislature. Indeed, using the decrees having the force of law, 54 separate laws and decrees that mostly don't have anything to do with the state of emergency have been amended.

⁴ According to the statistics announced by the Human Rights Association and Turkey Human Rights Foundation on 10 December 2017, International Human Rights Day:

- 113,440 public servants have been dismissed by the decrees having the force of law.
- 969 companies have been seized by the state and curators have been appointed to them. Their economic activity equals 41 billion Turkish liras, and they employ approximately 47 thousand workers.
- According to a verbal statement from the Ministry of Justice, by July 2017 169,013 people have been taken into custody, 50,510 of them were arrested, 43,489 were released on condition of judicial control.
- Based on the power vested in them by the state of emergency, governors of multiple cities have banned various meetings, demonstrations and activities for once or indefinitely. The banned activities range from a meeting on the negative effects of geothermal power plants to high school and university festivals, from culture, art and nature festivals to LGBTI+ activities.
- 185 media and press outlets were shut down, and only 23 of them were allowed to reopen. 174

Rights of the Council of Europe Nils Muižnieks's remarks contained in the "Memorandum on freedom of expression and media freedom in Turkey" summarize the extent of the damage:

"The space for democratic debate in Turkey has shrunk alarmingly following increased judicial harassment of large strata of society, including journalists, members of parliament, academics and ordinary citizens, and government action which has reduced pluralism and led to self-censorship. This deterioration came about in a very difficult context, but neither the attempted coup, nor other terrorist threats faced by Turkey can justify measures that infringe media freedom and disavow the rule of law to such an extent."

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also prepared a similar report and warned Turkish officials.⁵

The air of violations and arbitrariness accompanying the state of emergency regime is at the center of all perceptions and attitudes regarding politics, around which opponents and supporters are greatly polarized.

2. Kurdish policy

The second fixed item on the agenda is the government's Kurdish strategy in Turkey and the Middle East.

a) In terms of domestic policy

This strategy is reflected in domestic policy in two ways.

An intense and systematic campaign of oppression (arrests, prosecutions, the stripping of MP statuses, the closure of civil organizations and press outlets) targeting the legal and legitimate representatives of the Kurdish political movement is at work. In this way, the

journalists are in jail.

- 15 private universities were shut down. A majority of the 1128 academics who signed a peace petition on 6 January 2016 were dismissed from public service. By 24 December 2017, 5,577 academics had been dismissed from their university posts, most of them leftists or dissidents.
- The activities of 19 trade unions and confederations were terminated. During the state of emergency 1,412 associations and 139 foundations were shut down. It was claimed that most of these foundations and associations were linked to the Gülenist organization, no particular reason other than supposed "ties with external organizations" was given for the rest.

⁵ <http://t24.com.tr/haber/bmden-turkiyeye-cagri-ohal-kaldirilmali,585982>

Kurdish field of politics is criminalized and restricted to the point of destruction.⁶ In political discourse and legal practices the Kurdish problem is seen as merely a question of terrorism, and Kurdish politicians as either terrorists or alleged terrorists. Erdoğan's following statement from November 2016 summarizes the situation very well: "The members of the PKK and other terrorist organizations within the state are identified one by one, and they are treated as they should be. You see, everyone from MPs sitting on the throne of immunity to mayors, all who aided and abetted terrorist activities are paying for it and they will continue to pay."⁷

On the other hand, the Kurdish issue itself has become an object of crime in itself, and even its bare mention is punished. The discussion of the Kurdish issue by social actors, civil organizations, intellectuals and academics is stifled through various sanctions⁸ and in addition to being labeled as "terrorism", the Kurdish issue is ignored in public space and in the press.⁹

b) In terms of regional policy

The foreign policy aspect of the strategy regarding the Kurdish issue is following a similarly severe trajectory. More will be said on the background of this situation, but a brief summary is as follows. Following the civil war in Syria, the PKK found the opportunity to lay down roots in North Syria along the Turkish border using the PYD (Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party). Over time the Kurdish movement in Syria, a branch of the PKK, became an ally

⁶ According to the December 2017 statement of the Human Rights Association and Turkey Human Rights Foundation, "After 15 July 2016 8930 HDP members were taken into custody and 2782 of them were arrested. With the state of emergency decrees, 94 municipalities were seized, 89 of them belonged to the Democratic Regions Party, 74 elected co-mayors in the seized municipalities were arrested, 28 HDP province co-chairs and 89 district co-chairs were arrested, 780 HDP province and district officials were arrested. During the state of emergency, 11 HDP MPs have been arrested including the co- leaders Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, the MP statuses of 7 MPs including Figen Yüksekdağ have been stripped. 9 MPs are still in jail."

⁷ <http://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/61114/turkiyenin-yeni-guvenlik-konsepti-konferansinda-yaptiklari-konusma.html>

⁸ The most clear example of this is that the majority of 1,128 academics who signed a peace petition regarding the events of 6 January 2016 in Turkey's Southeast were dismissed from public service. The Istanbul Prosecutor's Office has sued 148 Peace Academics in accordance with the Anti-Terror Law because of the petition (by the end of 2017). With the latest decree having the force of law dated 24 December 2017, 115 more academics who signed the petition were dismissed from their university posts. Similarly, individuals who criticized Turkey's Afrin operation on social media were sued, and on 30 January 2018, members of the Executive Board of Turkish Medical Association were taken into custody on account of an anti-war declaration.

⁹ In 2016 only, 17,322 people have been sued for propagandizing for illegal organisations. (The declaration of the Human Rights Association and Turkey Human Rights Foundation on 10 December 2017, International Human Rights Day.)

of the US as the only efficient local power in the fight against ISIS and thus expanded its legitimacy; it also started to control a part of Syrian territory. This raised the hopes of the Kurdish movement and increased the extent of their claims. Indeed, the 2015 urban uprisings that took place in Southeast Turkey in order to bring the PKK's Syria model to Turkey and to strike a blow to Erdoğan's rule, which they thought to be weakened, had their origins and their strength in these claims. Under these new conditions, Turkey's Kurdish issue would naturally cross national borders and the developments would severely affect Turkey's perspective on the Kurdish issue. As the problem became regional, powers such as the US and Russia become involved in the Kurdish issue by means of the Syrian conflict, and this involvement rendered this effect to more traumatic. The relations of military aid and strategic cooperation between the US and PYD-YPG (People's Protection Units) will particularly be decisive in the matter.¹⁰ Following this development, Ankara started to regard the internal and external aspects of the Kurdish issue as a whole. The developments in Syria were seen by the Turkish political elite as the Kurds' progression towards becoming a state, and a risk for Middle Eastern borders to be changed; fueling the fires of already existing fears of division. As a result of these policies of anxiety, the Turkish government chose to deny the new developments in the region and the Kurdish issue, rather than try and adapt, and change its policies accordingly. Erdoğan revised his entire policy within this framework. The hierarchy between Turkey's four traditional sensibilities regarding its Middle Eastern policy—its Palestine-Gaza-Hamas engagement, anti- Assad stance, keeping the Iran and Shia expansion at arm's length and blocking the Kurdish expansion in the Middle East— quickly changed and the Kurdish issue became top priority. It became prioritized to such an extent that even the harsh attitude towards Assad was relaxed in this framework. Due to the attempted independence referendum, relations with Barzani's Iraqi Kurdistan turned sour to an unexpected degree. The Shia concerns became less important as Turkey became closer to Iraq and Iran on this matter. Turkey built its Middle Eastern strategy on preventing Kurdish independence in Iraq, destroying the Kurdish corridor which formed in Syria along its own border from 2011-2012 onwards, and bypassing a potential North Syrian federation. The shared concern of various actors within the system of Turkish politics is one of Iraqi and

¹⁰ Another significant factor in this matter is that the AK Party sees the 2013-15 resolution process as responsible for its 10% loss of votes in the June 2015 general elections.

Syrian Kurds coming together and establishing a point of attraction for Turkey's Kurds and inspiring a united Kurdistan.

Turkey started to pursue its policies primarily through strategic "targeted locations". These are the region to the east of River Euphrates in Syria (al-Bab, Afrin, Manbij) and the PKK-controlled Sinjar region in Iraq. The strategy was to dismantle the PKK-PYD control in these regions. To this list Mosul and Kirkuk might be added; Turkey has an extreme sensitivity towards the idea of potential Kurdish control of these areas. Following this political trajectory, Ankara adopted a policy of using the threat of military force and actual use of force in the Middle East from the middle of 2016 onwards.

Within this framework, the government's first action was the Jarablus- al-Bab operation dubbed Operation Euphrates Shield, carried out by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) with the support of the Turkish army. The ostensible purpose of this operation was to stop ISIS's attacks on Turkey along the border. The real purpose, however, was to secure a safe zone in order to stop a potential unification of the PYD's Kobane and Afrin Cantons. Indeed, the timing of the operation was mainly determined by US-supported YPG forces moving to the west of River Euphrates on 6 August 2016, taking Manbij from ISIS and approaching the Afrin Canton. The operation which began in August 2016 and ended in March 2017 cut Afrin off from the Kurdish movement and Turkey secured a five thousand square kilometer area under its control. In terms of Turkey's domestic policy, this was the beginning of the military renewing its image, which the coup attempt of July 2016 had harmed quite a bit, and of military values escalating in society.

During the autumn of 2017, Operation Euphrates Shield was followed by Ankara's harsh and threatening policies and even military shows of force towards the referendum organized by the regional government of Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey had opposed the idea of an independent Kurdistan from the day Barzani first mentioned it, and following the referendum and its results, it became one of its harshest opponents. Alongside Iran and Iraq it became a main actor in creating a strong atmosphere against Kurdish independence and in suspending the results of the referendum.¹¹ It is necessary to emphasise that Erdoğan, various members of

¹¹ One week before the referendum, on 18 September an extensive military operation began on the Iraqi border in Silopi-Habur, which lasted for 20 days and continued after the referendum. Joint military drills of Iran and Iraq accompanied it. The Minister of National Defence said "may your sword be sharp" and later, the

the government and, subsequently, leaders of the opposition voiced harsh, insulting and threatening anti-referendum sentiments, which worked on a symbolic level as well.¹² These statements offended Kurdish communities in Turkey, and also served to reinforce the anti-Kurdish sentiments among the Turkish public.

Another crisis which brought about Turkey's third reaction during the days of the independence referendum took place in Kirkuk. The overwhelmingly Kurdish local council of Kirkuk, which is a disputed territory according to the Iraqi Constitution, made a decision to hold a referendum for joining Iraqi Kurdistan in April 2017, and then wanted to join the independence referendum for Iraq. Turkey's reaction to this announcement was harsh, and even smacked of irredentism.¹³ The crisis abated when the central Iraqi government deployed troops to the disputed territories and appointed a Sunni Arab governor to Kirkuk to replace the Kurdish governor.

Following these two developments in Iraq, in October 2017 debates on Afrin, the Kurdish canton in Western Syria commenced. Responding to the claims that the PYD would form a corridor towards Afrin to the south of al-Bab, Erdoğan said:

“For us, already there is this matter of Afrin in Syria. Afrin is in fact PYD's project to reach the Mediterranean Sea. We always clearly stated what our position was regarding this matter. As Turkey, we will not allow a corridor of terror opening onto the Mediterranean Sea in the north of Syria. We will intervene, whatever the cost may be. Remember, this is

President said: “The actions of the armed forces in Silopi were not for nothing. We might suddenly come one night, and we will” – these words defined this exercise. Another development was the one-year extension of an authorization permitting the government to carry out cross-border operations in Iraq and Syria with the support of the CHP-AKP-MHP in the Parliament on 23 September 2017, two days before the referendum. Rather than being seen as a routine practice, the extension of this authorization was seen by the public as a warning regarding the referendum. Increasing the level of its threats and warnings, after the referendum Turkey closed its airspace to the North Iraq Regional Government on 16 October.

¹² This statement of Erdoğan was significant: “As soon as we turn off this valve they're done for. All their income and everything, it's over. If the trucks don't go there, they won't have any food or clothes. They will be in such a state. Why? We have to, it's sanctions.”

¹³ Erdoğan's following statement makes it very clear: “Kirkuk is a sensitive subject. The Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, you know, they wanted to make it appear as if Kirkuk was theirs. Those are important areas, no one can behave as if they own those areas. There are Turkmen living there, looking at history, the Turkmen have a serious claim there. We say, ‘we want to protect the rights of whoever lives there’. We know that the Kurds have no claim there. They are there as invaders. They have power and they have always tried to take Kirkuk by that power. However, the central government will do what needs to be done about Kirkuk. Our interviews with Iraq and Iran continue. Whatever needs to be done will be done. We will do it for Kirkuk and Mossul. We will stand next to the inhabitants of those places, of their real owners.”

what the Euphrates Shield Operation was for. Jarablus, Rai, when we get to al-Bab in the region, that's an area of 2 thousand square kilometers. This is a project to separate that area from this one. Operation Euphrates Shield succeeded in this. Is it completely over? It isn't. We are similarly determined on the matter of Afrin. Things are going as planned.”¹⁴

The Afrin operation began on 20 January 2018. In March, the YPG withdrew from Afrin's center and Turkey gained command of the region. So Erdoğan's government got what it wanted here as well. There was a critical aspect to the Afrin operation: this time, the main protagonist was not the FSA but the Turkish Armed Forces. The Afrin operation was the first overt combat between Turkish military and YPG forces. This had serious reverberations on Turkish political life, which can be summed up as the rise of nationalism, of oppression and polarization. The anti-Kurdish alliance in the political arena began to be thoroughly reflected in the media and society. According to polls, the ratio of Turkish public supporting the operation was 85 %.¹⁵ The US kept its distance from the operation and was even critical of it towards the end; as a result relations between Turkey and the US became tense, and anti-Western sentiment voiced by a populist-nationalist discourse gained ascendancy. Opposing the war, and mentioning the Kurdish issue in a political context were met with political and social sanctions in such an atmosphere. Every day Erdoğan announced the numbers of the killed Kurdish YPG fighters,¹⁶ and used insulting language with expressions such as “they went to hell”; this created a silent but profound reaction in the bosom of the Kurdish population of Turkey. A public opinion survey conducted in Diyarbakir in those days showed that 83.2 % were against the operation.¹⁷

The latest development took place in Sinjar. After the Afrin operation ended, Erdoğan started to repeatedly and forcefully bring up Manbij first, and then the matter of Kurdish forces withdrawing to the east of the Euphrates. However, Americans don't look favourably on this matter. The French President Macron also explicitly spoke of his opposition to Turkey's intervention in Manbij in a statement issued on 29 March 2018. Following this,

¹⁴ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/afrinde-gozumuzu-karartiriz-40558556>

¹⁵ <http://t24.com.tr/haber/mak-danismakliktan-afrin-anketi-halkin-destegi-yuzde-kac-operasyon-basarili-olacak-m,547809>

¹⁶ Most recently, in the Samsun meeting of the AK Party on 24 March he said: “The resurrection movement has restarted with Afrin. As of today 3733 terrorists have ben deactivated in Afrin.”

¹⁷ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/344590/samer-arastirdi-kurtler-afrin-operasyonuna-nasil-bakiyor>

Erdoğan set his sights on Sinjar, previously bombed by the Turkish army in April. Regarding Sinjar, a strategic point of passage between Iraq and Syria and the main line of connection between the PKK and PYD, Erdoğan made the following threatening statement on 19 March: “See, a second Qandil is being built there. Where is it? In Sinjar. We may enter Sinjar suddenly one night, and clear the PKK from there as well.” In another speech, he stated that unless PKK militants left Sinjar and Qandil in the north of Iraq an operation would be inevitable. Following this statement, on 27 March Iraq’s Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said that he ordered the army to completely secure the country’s borders, and that in his interview with the Turkish prime minister, he had explained that he would stop foreign fighters from using Iraqi territory in their cross-border attacks on Turkey. Al-Abadi’s statement was influenced by Turkey’s policy of (compared to the past) risk-taking military activism as much as the recent changes in Turkey’s Syria policy and the détente between Iraq and Turkey. The National Security Council’s 28 March 2018 Memorandum contained the following sentences: “It was stated that the terrorists in Manbij needed to be removed from the region at once; otherwise, Turkey would not hesitate to use initiative here, as in other regions (...) it is expected first and foremost of the Iraqi government to curb the activities of this organization in the region, and if it cannot do that, Turkey will do it.”

One branch of Turkey’s policies regarding the Kurdish issue which have emphasised the use of military force in the region is the attempt to form zones of security and control in Syria, and to rebuild the demographic structure in these areas to the detriment of the Kurds. The press reports that in Afrin, preparations are underway for “forming a police force composed of the FSA and local forces, maintaining public order, public works and construction, and the return of the displaced inhabitants of Afrin.”¹⁸ Another sign is a statement made by Interior Minister Soylu in January:

“I am speaking as the Interior Minister here. Today, in Azaz, Jarablus, Marel we have district governors, police commissioners, gendarme commanders and we have established peace there, enabling a hundred thousand people to return to their own lands, to the memories of their mothers, fathers and grandfathers – we did this.”

Hasan Şindi, spokesperson to the “Afrin Liberation Congress” which convened on 18 March in

¹⁸ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/serpil-cevikcan/afirin-de-neler-olacak-ankara-nin-2630726/>

Gaziantep, said: “A governor will be appointed to Afrin, Afrin will belong to Antakya and there will be coordination between the governors of Afrin and Hatay.”¹⁹ These developments shed light on the demographic and administrative aspects of Turkey’s policy. They indicate that Ankara wants to participate in the establishment of Syrian peace by restricting the Kurdish field of politics and strengthening its own hand.

Turkey’s military activities have various consequences in terms of domestic politics as well, and it is necessary to look at them in all their aspects. An anti-Kurdish alliance was formed in the Grand National Assembly in May 2016 when the AK Party, MHP and CHP lifted the immunities of Kurdish MPs; this alliance has only got stronger with the participation of military circles and nationalists outside of the assembly. Turkey’s regional policies and military operations are lauded by this alliance, and only HDP represents the idea of engaging the Kurdish issue through politics.

A similar tendency is at work in terms of society-politics relations. Turkey’s military venture coincided with a rise in nationalism. Significantly, Turkey’s military operations and policy of threatening are perceived in terms of concepts such as “conquest” and “holy war” by the average citizen; terms which signify power and political expansion. They are perceived as “military and political victories”, “Turkey’s show of force”, its “daring to challenge the US”, and “rebirth/resurrection”. The AK Party’s discourse of cultivating self-esteem and equating itself with the great powers in foreign policy has been replaced, at least for the conservative public, with the deed itself.

3. The balance of power in Syria and the Turkish policy

The crucial question is this: how did Turkey come to be using military force against the Kurds in the region? Turkey was not able to do anything for a while against the Kurds’ regional advancements in Syria because of its conflicts of interest and tensions with Syria, Russia, the US and Iran. It only watched the developments in Syria; so how was Turkey able to cross this threshold?

This was made possible by the conflicts and balance between the powers in the region and

¹⁹ <http://sendika62.org/2018/03/afrine-vali-atanacak-bolge-antakyaya-ait-olacak-483455/>

Turkey's attempts to make use of these, and pragmatically rearrange its relations to this end. We briefly touched upon this subject, but let us look at it more closely.

Shortly after civil war broke out in Syria, in 2012²⁰ Turkey made its plans on the presumption that Assad would soon be toppled. Ankara's priority in its Syria policy was calculating what would be done after Assad was gone. It needs to be said that Iran's political pursuits played an important role in these calculations. The AK Party saw Shia expansionism as a decisive factor in the fight surrounding Assad. It was thought that there was the risk of a potential "Shia-Nusairi (Alawite)" belt and a corridor of hegemony opening into the Mediterranean Sea with Hezbollah. This was a risk, because it threatened Turkey's claim to be the protector of the Sunnis; a claim which rose during the Arab Spring. As a result Turkey engaged Assad with all its might, since it thought that he would soon be gone. Together with several Gulf countries, it helped rebel opposition groups with logistics and guidance.

Turkey was mindful of the Kurdish groups in Syria; however, it did not think that organizations like the PYD, which were not powerful back then, would be a problem in the short period of time during which Assad was expected to fall. Even during the 2014 siege of Kobane Turkey had not yet changed its mind. At that time, the Kurds in Syria were definitely not a priority in Turkey's list of problems and targets. A similarly ambivalent attitude towards ISIS and other radical organizations was displayed for a long time, because they were thought to be temporary. The AK Party government supported some of these in their fight against Assad, and some it merely observed as units playing into its own motives, as was the case in the Kobane issue.

The anti-Shia engagement in Iraq during this period meant that Turkey's attempts to display its weight in Iraq's domestic affairs caused tensions. The really important problem, however, was that differences in opinion and interest with its ally the US began to grow. The

²⁰ https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/davutoglu-esada-omur-bicti,Nsez_e7zmEO7uz5O9Pv6hw Between March – August 2011 Turkey contacted Assad and asked him to stop the conflict and reach out to the opposition, but when Assad increased his oppression of the opposition, Turkey gradually came to the point of counting down until Assad's overthrow. Davutoğlu first contacted the Syrian opposition in October 2011. In mid-2012 he would say: I don't think this period (Assad's overthrow) will last long. We need to speak in months or weeks instead of years. https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/davutoglu-esada-omur-bicti,Nsez_e7zmEO7uz5O9Pv6hw In September 2011, in an off-the-record briefing to a group of journalists and editors-in-chief including me, he gave 6 months to the Assad regime.

US's primary target was ISIS, whereas for Turkey it was the Assad regime. The differences in opinion prevented an effective cooperation from taking place. Under such circumstances, the US approached the Kurds as potential local allies and the PYD-YPG fulfilled its need for an oppositional force on the ground. This was the crucial point, as things began to go wrong for Turkey. Not only did the Assad regime keep resisting, but the PYD also gained new strength. The first serious act of cooperation between the US and the PYD, initiating a new period, was the Tell Abyad operation in June 2015. As a result of this operation, ISIS-controlled areas between the provinces of Kobane and Jazira were captured by the PYD with air support from the US. Kurds thus got rid of ISIS and united the two cantons. A year later, on June 2016 the US-backed Manbij operation was realized by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) comprised mostly of YPG. With the capture of Manbij, the Kurds crossed to the west of the Euphrates, which the Turks had announced as their red line. In November 2016, the same combination of forces started the Raqqa operation. During this period the PYD consolidated its rule in al-Hasakah and Kobani, as well as in Afrin, which it would later lose. Tell Abyad, Manbij and Raqqa were now ruled by city councils set up by the SDF, in which YPG comprised the majority. The PYD bypassed its rival Kurdish organization ENKS (Kurdish National Council). Most importantly, relations between the US and PYD became permanent.

Following these developments, Turkey started its counter moves in 2015. It requested the replacement of the YPG in the Manbij and Raqqa operations, but the US did not look favourably on it. Turkey's scope for movement in the region was decreasing further, and Russia's active involvement in the Syrian War in 2015 did not help. In addition to the disagreements between Turkey and the US, the problems experienced with the Syria-Iran-Russia front exploded into a big crisis in 2015. This crisis first reared its head in 2015 when Turkey shot down a Russian jet and it subsequently blocked Turkey in every possible way. Ankara's planes were not allowed to enter Syrian airspace, not even to reciprocate ISIS bombing Turkey's border towns. The crisis lasted for almost a year. Turkey hit rock-bottom during this period in terms of its Middle Eastern policies.

Turkey tried to get out of this corner it had painted itself into by changing its Middle Eastern policies from 2016 onward. As stated above, Turkey changed its priorities regarding its Syrian policy and made the Kurdish issue its top priority. Within this framework, criticizing the Assad regime did not exactly take a back seat, but goals such as Syria being run by the

Sunni opposition or toppling the regime were given up. This was the first element of the new regional policy. From this point on, Turkey started to renew its relationships. It struck a more cooperative and eager note with the US concerning ISIS. It should be mentioned that the increasing ISIS activity and bombings in Turkey also played a part in this. The first significant result of this change was that relations with Russia got gradually better. This was how the al-Bab (Euphrates Shield) operation was made possible. It's important to note that the operation started on 26 August 2016, 20 days after the Putin- Erdoğan meeting took place. According to the Russian press, Moscow allowed Turkey's al-Bab operation in exchange for Aleppo.²¹

The second element of the new, changed policy was Ankara curbing its reaction to Shia expansionism. Within this framework, relations with Iran and Iraq improved. From 2017 on, there was actual cooperation. Right after cooperating on the evacuation of civilians and opposition forces from Aleppo, in December 2016 Russia, Turkey and Iran came together in Moscow and came to agreement on the ceasefire and political process in Syria. Towards the end of January 2017, these three countries became the guarantors for Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and impartiality in Astana. By assenting to these principles, Turkey showed that it had radically changed its stance towards Assad, and that its priorities regarding the future of Syria rested entirely with the Kurdish issue. Indeed, in the joint declaration of the three countries Syria's multiculturalism was emphasised and it was said that "the rights of every ethnic group would be respected" – this was enough for Turkey. This meant that Turkey would follow a strategy of "area control" against the Kurdish population through Turkmen and Arabs. In September 2017 Idlib, the site of heavy conflict, was declared a no-conflict zone and the Turkish military became responsible for the opposition forces in this area; this furthered the Russia-Iran-Turkey cooperation. Turkey was gradually removing its support from the opposition to the West of Syria, and the regime was occupying the areas left empty by Turkey by whatever means. Turkey was recompensed for this in Afrin. Russia and indirectly Iran allowed the Turkish military and the FSA to abolish the Kurdish canton in Afrin. Russia withdrew its troops from the area. The Assad regime did not deploy its forces, and Iran was measured in its reaction. As a result, in exchange for their

²¹ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/el-bab-icin-uc-iddia-40264678>

gains in the West, Russia, Iran and Syria allowed Turkey to act in Afrin.

Owing to this balance and these relationships Turkey was able to break out of its pre-2015 restrictions from 2016 onward, and create a partial space for manoeuvre for itself. For now, it has got what it wanted in preventing the Kurdish corridor from being formed.

However, it needs to be said that the current situation is far from being permanent: the political balance is too fragile, Turkey's regional policy might create new problems and there is the risk of being isolated. Indeed, with regard to the Kurdish issue there is a clear differentiation between the US-PYD on the one hand and Russia-Turkey on the other. Relations between the US and the Kurds have become fairly permanent and forward-looking; whereas relations between the US and Turkey are tense as never before. If the Ankara threat of Manbij persists, unlike Afrin this will be a cause for tension between Turkey and several EU countries such as France and Germany.²² Turkey's rapprochement with Russia raises problems with the Western front which is mobilised against Iran and very concerned about Russia; at the same time, considering the Russia-Iran-Syria bloc and their mutual interests, relations with this bloc are also highly precarious. Indeed, shortly after the end of Afrin operation the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said that Turkey needed to hand Afrin over to Syria²³, and Erdoğan reacted to him.²⁴

III. STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OR CONJUNCTURAL STATE OF AFFAIRS?

Two interrelated questions arise at this point:

Is Erdoğan's regional policy sustainable and what is the relation between the breaking points of this policy and the balances of Turkey's internal politics?

Does the authoritarian course of Turkey's political power indicate a temporary phase or a

²² Turkey started its Afrin intervention by pointing out the attacks carried out against itself from this area. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that between 1 January 2017 and 20 January 2018, there has been "700 instances of harassing fire" and upwards of 90 missile attacks. (<http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-43469338>)., In terms of international law, Ankara pointed to UNSC's resolutions 1624(2005), 2170(2014) ve 2178(2014) on the fight against terrorism and the right to self-defense. (<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bozdag-zeytin-dali-harekati-mesru-ve-ulusl-40716661>)

²³ <http://www.dw.com/tr/lavrov-türkiye-afrinin-kontrolünü-suriyeye-devretsin/a-43311849>

²⁴ <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2018/04/10/son-dakika-cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-rus-bakana-afrin-tepkisi>

structural transformation?

In order to answer these questions, assessments of domestic and foreign politics carried out so far need to be complemented by evaluations regarding the future interactions on this political field. There are two factors which will influence the political balances.

1. Elections

First is the 2018-2019 electoral marathon. Local elections will take place in March 2019. The electoral reforms of the constitutional referendum prescribed that the parliamentary and presidential elections would take place on the same day in November 2019. However, leaders of the AK Party and MHP, which form the majority in the Parliament, agreed to bring these elections forward and the electoral schedule changed. The parliamentary and presidential elections will now be held on 24 June 2018.

It is known that after the presidential elections Turkey will abandon the parliamentary system and adopt a presidential system based on the concentration of powers. The crucial question here is whether Erdoğan will be the president or not. Considering that during the 2016 constitutional referendum Turkey was split into two equal camps, pro- and anti-Erdoğan, with 51% and 49% rates, this question is still very important. If Erdoğan loses the presidential elections, it will mean a reshuffling of the cards in all areas from the populist order to the state of emergency regime, from the Kurdish strategy to foreign policy. This may occur in different forms.

Erdoğan and his party may win all three elections. Erdoğan may win the presidency but the AK Party-MHP alliance may not be able to win the majority of seats in the Parliament. The question of who will win the two metropolises, Istanbul and Ankara in the local elections is also important in terms of general politics. The AK Party has controlled these cities for a long time now and if even one of them is controlled by the opposition, it might mean a relatively majoritarian display in the political structure.

a) Electoral legitimacy and its potential effects

Despite all its democratic shortcomings, a cornerstone in Turkey's political narrative has almost always been free elections. The Ottoman Empire adopted the parliamentary system

in 1876. With the foundation of the Republic, the relation between the legitimacy of political power and elections has always been decisive, and the importance placed by the citizens on elections has remained the same. Even during the oppressive atmosphere of the one-party period elections were the only area of freedom. Indeed, great changes in Turkey's political power (Democrat Party, Justice Party, Motherland Party, AK Party) have always been brought about by elections. Even military juntas have declared a swift return to parliamentary order from their first days. Apart from insignificant arguments between the political parties, there has been no serious problems regarding electoral safety in Turkey since the beginning of the multi-party period. Finally, the rate of electoral participation, a fundamental indicator of electors' making a claim to their own votes, is 85% in Turkey, much higher than the rate of Western democracies (according to the latest elections the US is 50%, France 65% and Germany 75%).

Accordingly, it is necessary to note that the effect of the forthcoming elections on the political life and trajectory will not only spring from their results. The mere existence and atmosphere of the elections may have an influence on the political conditions. It is still unclear whether the state of emergency will be lifted before the elections or not. However, it may be supposed that before or after the elections, even if Erdoğan's rule continues, the state of emergency regime will reach its limits of practice at some point; in terms of politics, intra-state balances, and the relations between the system and EU institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights. With the lifting of the state of emergency, tens of thousands of people who have suffered from the arbitrary practices of this regime will have recourse to legal remedy. It is clear that such a situation would signify a return to "political normalisation" whatever its results, even if it means a chaotic and contentious political atmosphere.

b) The return of the Kurdish Movement

Another and perhaps more important input is the opportunity of the oppressed Kurdish movement to renew its presence, power and legitimacy through the elections. As of today, 6 of 59 MPs of the HDP, the legal political representative of the Kurdish movement, have been stripped of their MP status; 9 MPs are in jail; 411 new summary reports have been sent from courts to the Parliamentary Speaker's Office in order to lift the MP statuses of other

HDP MPs.²⁵ Latest data indicates that 93 out of 103 mayors from the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party), the other representative of the Kurdish movement, have been dismissed.²⁶

The elections of 2018 and 2019 will upset this mechanism to some extent. There is no electoral threshold for the local elections and considering the behaviour of the voters, all these municipalities seized by the government will return to elected BDP leaders and the Kurdish movement will be activated in the region once again. Looking at the predictions for the general elections, almost all assessments and polls emphasise the likelihood of HDP's crossing the 10% nationwide threshold. It is clear that in such an outcome, HDP will enter the parliament once again with new MPs, expressing the continuity of the party and its power of representation. As of now, because of official policies the Kurdish issue is made into one of the pillars of authoritarianism in Turkey; with such a return, it can actually contribute to the revitalization of democratic politics. Obviously there is no absolute correlation between the two. Erdoğan's rule and the sanction of international powers might mean that the return, under various pretences, might give way to a new wave of oppression.

2. External dynamics and foreign policy

It's clear that Turkey's political trajectory is sensitive to external dynamics and particularly to regional balances. In other words, any potential change to these balances has the power to affect domestic politics, especially the Kurdish issue. Therefore it's necessary to look at the big picture in Syria and in the Middle East.

ISIS, Kurdish organizations, regime forces and the opposition are the four local actors who have been fighting in Syria for a long time. ISIS is almost out of the game. However, the space vacated by ISIS is quickly filled by other actors and the fight for sharing the territory rages on. The three major foreign powers in Syria, the US,

Russia and Iran have a considerable military presence and expectations in the country. For Russia, Syria and its sovereignty are the conditions sine qua non for its own return to being a grand superpower and reaching the Mediterranean Sea. A similar situation is true for Iran's

²⁵ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/politika/2018/03/25/126-milletvekili-hakkinda-561-fezleke/>

²⁶ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/basbakan-binali-yildirim-bugun-itibariyla-ankara-yerelhaber-2460884/>

grand Shia policy. For Iran, the Nusairi rule and Assad are as strategically important as the sovereignty of Syria. These interests and expectations bring Russia and Iran together against the West. The US explains its own presence in Syria with the threat of ISIS and the growing danger of Iran. These claims and policies show that alliances and tensions will continue among these powers.

It is possible to identify four faultlines in Syria, some of them based in the Middle East.

The first of these is related to the rivalry and tensions between the US and Russia. The US is in alliance with the YPG, Russia with Iran and the regime. The US-YPG coalition has been mobilized against ISIS for a long time, whereas the other bloc is trying to bring the Western and Southern parts of Syria under Assad's control again. Within this framework, they target both ISIS and also the Syrian opposition, perhaps more than ISIS. However, the map of encounters is about to change. These two blocs have started to find themselves in opposite camps in order to control the areas vacated by ISIS. Around mid-February, they experienced a serious military encounter in Deir ez-Zor in the south of Syria. Due to the intervention of US air forces, 300 mercenaries connected to Russian private security firms were wounded or died.²⁷ In Northern Syria, Russia and the US are in the process of staking their claims. The east bank of the Euphrates, as well as the Manbij area to its west are controlled by the US-YPG whereas the area to the east of Euphrates is more or less controlled by Russian forces. Indeed, it is clear that Turkey realized its Afrin operation with the permission of Russia, and that this area was left to Turkey and the FSA instead of the PYD for a limited amount of time. Even now the Russians are getting ready to apply pressure on Turkey to leave this area to Assad. It is equally clear that Russia and the US are both very concerned about each other's area of dominance. Russia's activities in the Middle East and its alliance with Iran disturb a lot of other countries, too. Indeed, it came to light that in January the US, England and France secretly met in Washington for Saudi Arabia and Jordan's new Middle Eastern strategy. The goal, it was said, was to restrict Russia's increasing power in the Middle East first; Iran was the second in line.²⁸ It is also evident that the recent deportation of Russian diplomats by NATO, the US and their allies is increasing the tensions in the Middle East.

²⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-43083864>

²⁸ <https://tr.sputniknews.com/columnists/201802271032422675-abd-ingiltere-fransa-suudi-arabistan-urdun-gizli-toplanti-washington-nato-turk-kurt-catisma-israil-iran-suriye-ortadogu-harita-gorus/>

The second faultline is the tension and race for domination between the US and Iran in a way that concerns the whole Middle East. For a long time now Iran has been defined as a national security risk for the US and Syria is gradually turning into a base which the US is settling in order to surround Iran.²⁹ One side of this particular tension touches on the Shia-Sunni hostilities, a major faultline in the Middle East which occasionally breaks into actual combat in Yemen and Iraq. Some Gulf countries, chief among them Saudi Arabia, are major actors in these tensions and they are allies to the US in a variety of ways. The long-lasting cold and even secret war between Iran and Israel also plays an important role. When an Israel plane crossing into Syrian airspace to shoot down an Iranian drone was shot down by Syrian air defence systems, Israel targeted and struck targets belonging to Iran, Hezbollah and the regime in Syria; this raised some question marks.³⁰ France's active participation in foreign politics initiated by Macron as well as its sensitivity regarding Syria; England's concerns about Russia and Iran; these are all constitutive elements of the anti-Iran front.

The third faultline is a result of the Assad-Iran duo's policy of stoking the fires of conflict, as evidenced in Eastern Ghouta and Idlib; despite the ceasefires and agreements of no-conflict zones, they have not let go of their claims of ruling over the entirety of Syria again. Claims that Assad used chemical weapons in these areas have brought the Syrian regime and the West against one another, and through the Syrian regime, Russia as well. At the same time, the regime is not pleased with YPG's wide territory and its control of rich oil reserves, and this dissatisfaction may give rise to new conflicts.

The Turkish-Kurdish tensions constitute the final faultline. This faultline has come to the fore with the Afrin operation and Turkey's sensitivity regarding Manbij and Sinjar means it is still continuing; as a result, it intersects with other faultlines and becomes instrumentalized within such a framework. It is clear that since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Syrian Kurds have been among the greatest beneficiaries of the civil war. Despite their recent difficulties in the field, the loss of Afrin, and their absence in the Geneva and Astana processes, the PYD-YPG represent a strong position. They control the Eastern side of the River Euphrates to the Iraqi border. Their control extends to Raqqa in the South. To the east

²⁹ <https://www.ntv.com.tr/dunya/pentagondan-irana-baski-aciklamasi,hsiC2r-oNkesSS006hZHJg>

³⁰ <https://www.ahaber.com.tr/dunya/2018/02/11/guney-suriyede-israil-iran-savasi>

of the Euphrates, they continue to be a major power within the SDF in Manbij. Indeed, before the loss of Afrin they controlled 23% of Syrian territory. Today they are still the second biggest force in the country after the regime and their dominance is largely protected by the US. Another important point is that the US's protection may continue for a long time. It seems as if Kurds will be among the important local actors in the US's Iran policy. Information leaked from the strategy meeting against Russia and Iran in Washington, attended by five countries, contained the claim that "ways were sought for including YPG and SDF in Geneva".

Seeing as this is the big picture, where do Turkey and its political claims fit? How may this balance affect Turkey in the coming period?

In order to answer these questions, it's necessary to know the positions of these powers in the equation.

Despite their problems, Turkey and the PYD are emerging as the two indispensable US allies in the region. The US is not maintaining the harsh attitude it adopted during the Afrin operation towards Turkey. It wouldn't be wrong to claim that Washington is trying to establish a policy of balance between Turks and the Kurds. Currently Manbij is the highest priority for the US, Turkey and the PYD and this policy of balance may play out in Manbij in the near future. The US may persuade YPG forces to withdraw to the east of Euphrates and keep Manbij under its own control.

Generally speaking, Russia knows how to maintain a balanced policy with regard to Turkey and the PYD. It uses these relations to its own ends. Opening Afrin's gates to Turkey was a typical example of this. Although the Russians are concerned about the PYD's relationship with the US, they are maintaining their relationship with it as an important regional power within Syria. They are favourable towards Kurdish autonomy, but they are also keeping in mind their allies Iran and Syria's aversion to the idea for the moment.

By making use of the space between the US and Russia and making some concessions to the Assad regime, Turkey seems to have got closer to its goals, especially compared to the past. Uniting its safety zone, which extends to al-Bab, with Afrin and controlling it as well as preventing the formation of its dreaded Kurdish corridor all indicate this. However, it needs

to be said that its current targets, Manbij and Sinjar, do not give much room for manoeuvre. Al-Abadi's government does not permit Turkey to carry out operations in its territory, and unless extensive negotiations take place, it is unlikely Turkey will carry out such an operation unilaterally. A military operation in Manbij is out of the question.

The latest power balances in the region, as well as the points of resistance Ankara is to encounter from now, on are no longer compatible with the military activism it has maintained until now. In other words, Turkey is at the limit of its opportunities in terms of military challenges. It is likely that these factors will lead to the possibility and even necessity of bargaining, negotiations and politics regarding the Kurdish presence in the region. Ankara might arrive at a point where it chooses this option.

Indeed, concerning the Kurdish issue and regional politics, Turkey is not moving along a path advantageous to itself. As the post-ISIS era draws closer, two major fronts are formed in the Middle East. To one side are the US, England, France, Israel and Saudi Arabia. The PYD is already considered as a part of this group. On the other side are Russia, Iran and Syria. Turkey the NATO member and EU candidate has strayed from the Western bloc and got closer to Russia and Iran in order to make a path for itself regarding the Kurdish issue; however, amidst the increasing tensions it does not have the means to direct or even keep in balance this contradiction. The relations with Russia and Iran themselves are wholly based on interest and are precarious. Also, although they have taken a step back on the subject, their sensitivity to the matter of Sunnism is an established ideological element for the AK Party.

In conclusion, Turkey's regional policies are not sustainable. Under current conditions, Turkey faces the risk of a great isolation and losing ground, as was the case from 2011-2015. If these risks are actualized, they might have severe effects on Turkey's domestic politics. They might cause conflicts, or clear the path for politics, at least where the Kurdish issue is concerned.

These are the potential constitutive elements and intersections of domestic and foreign policies. Finally, the triad of 2018-2019 elections with its variety of potential outcomes, the partial clearing of the Kurdish political arena following the elections, changing balances in the region, the narrowing of Ankara's space for military manoeuvres, contradictions and deadlocks in foreign policy, all have the power to affect Turkish politics. Based on the data, it

is possible to say that Turkish politics is weighing on a sensitive pair of scales. On one side is a difficult, risky and even conflicting structural transformation in an authoritarian trajectory, and on the other side is political normalisation stemming from the nature of political problems and relations.