



The Political Implications of Erdoğan's Disease

The health situation of the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has become one of the most popular topics in Turkish politics. Indeed, Turkish and international media made extensive reports about Erdoğan's health and political future because of the unexpected operation of the Turkish Prime Minister that took place after his visit for a routine checkup, at the Marmara University Hospital on November 26. It had been said that Erdoğan would rest at home for a few days but the extension of that period caused various speculations about his health.

The German magazine, Der Spiegel, while discussing the various claims about Erdoğan's disease stated that, without him, not only the AKP but also Turkey would be led into chaos. Furthermore, the Economist magazine forecasted a power struggle within the AKP and mentioned the Deputy Prime Minister, Bulent Arinc, as one of the major candidates for its leadership. Actually, the Economist found many similarities concerning the fragile relation of Putin - Medvedev and that of the AKP's leading figures. However, the Deputy Prime Minister rejected these claims and stated that the party is in total solidarity. The related polls and surveys show that many AKP voters would not vote for the party without Erdoğan. This result is another proof of who the real leader of the AKP is.

The Turkish media make extensive reports concerning Erdoğan's health and the political turmoil caused by his illness. On the one hand, the conservative, nationalist and liberal parties expressed their best wishes to Erdoğan. On the other hand, the Workers' Party accused the nationalist MHP of being the AKP's puppet and the MHP replied that the official website of the Workers' Party has been using the Prime Minister's disease as a political tool. The main opposition party, CHP, also expressed their best wishes to Erdoğan. However, the Peace and Democracy party (BDP), announced that they will defeat Erdoğan while holding public demonstrations against the cleansing operations targeting the KCK in eastern cities. Actually, the participation in those demonstrations was massive throughout the week.

Finally, the Prime Minister managed to host the U.S. Vice President, Joe Biden, on the 3rd week of December, after cancelling his program and resting for three weeks. According to Aydinlik newspaper, they mainly discussed the situation in Syria during their meeting but Der Spiegel reported that Joe Biden was closely interested in Erdoğan's disease.

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The European Union and Turkey: A Troubled Relation

A new round of debates has been triggered in the media concerning the EU - Turkish relations in a period that the European Union faces an economic downturn and Turkey is presented as a role model for the Middle East. The Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc made a statement on that issue at the Bali Democracy Forum, Indonesia. He stressed that Turkey is the leading country in the Middle East and America's biggest ally adding that due to the economic and democratic crises in the EU, Turkey should behave more cautiously towards it. After that, Turkish political parties and various newspapers criticized the current Turkish - EU relations.

The British Sunday Times argued that Turkey, a regional power, is moving away from the EU. Indeed, the newspaper's journalist, Mathew Campbell, claimed that Turkey's desire to join the EU is being reduced with each passing day. In his article, Campbell writes that although Britain supports Turkey's membership in the Union, France is prejudiced against Turkey. President Sarkozy, while participating in a TV program during the same week that the aforementioned article was published, stressed that Turkey does not belong to Europe and backed his claim by discussing the Armenian Genocide Law. Erdoğan wrote a letter to Sarkozy asking him to reject the new law concerning the Armenian Genocide that is similar to the one in Switzerland that bans the denial of this Genocide. In addition, thousands of Workers' Party activists in Turkey, Germany and France stressed that the Armenian Genocide Law is an imperialist lie. After the implementation of the aforementioned law, Turkey recalled its ambassador from France.

Furthermore, conservative media, such as Zaman and Yeni Safak, supported the option to freeze Turkish - EU relations after Cyprus undertakes the EU presidency and argued that the freedom of Turkish Press should be an answer to the country's critics. However, Mehmet Altan (Star newspaper) and other liberal writers argued that Turkey's democratic development requires the continuation of the process. In addition, the CHP deputy Safak Pavey, accused the government of disregarding the human rights and establishing its own dictatorship, in one of her most famous speeches. The political scientist Cengiz Aktar stressed that since the 85% of business investments in Turkey were made by Europeans, a future relations cut would harm both Turkey and the EU.

Finally, the whole discussion about the Turkish candidacy for the EU membership takes place while, according to surveys mentioned in the Turkish Press, the Turkish citizens' desire to join the Union has dropped from 73% to 38% and the EU requires the complete fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria.

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Youth Activism in Turkey

A heated debate is taking place in Turkey about the recent youth mobilizations and the following university students' arrests. The Turkish public opinion believes widely that the students' actions play an important role in shaping the agenda concerning the environmental issues, education rights and foreign policy.

The attitude of the political parties and the media vary a lot towards university activists since they have been characterized as simple citizens fighting for their rights or even as terrorists. Turkey's ruling party, the AKP, argues that those activists are well organized but still a minority which disrupts the universities' peace.

Student actions got famous after the Hopa riots and the arrests of 21 students. In Hopa, Erdoğan's hometown, students were mourning the activist Metin Lokumcu who lost his life by tear gas but after clashing with the police many of them were arrested at their homes. Meanwhile, a court argued that student members of the radical left were terrorists. However, the opposition media, the People's Houses, the Communist Party of Turkey and some student organizations announced that those students were arrested on false ground.

The first case of students' arrests took place on December 2. The deputy leader of the main opposition party, CHP, and several lawyers attended the case to support those who were accused. Furthermore, journalists, music groups and famous Turkish actors as well as the BDP deputy Sirri Süreya, academics and university students cut their hair in front of the court to support them, because the court had accepted the students' haircut as an evidence of their guilt. After the first case, innocent students who were kept in prison for 6 months criticized the government. The same week, additional youths who protested by throwing eggs to the Minister for EU Affairs, Egemen Bagis, were arrested.

The protest of a member of the Turkish Youth Union, Nesimi Yigit Eryilmaz, has also drawn much attention from the media. The Minister of Energy called the young activist who was shouting slogans during a speech and asked him to express himself. The young man

presented his ideas concerning Turkish foreign policy and castigated the arrests of journalists. He also talked to CEMMIS' Turkey Report and criticized Turkey's stance towards Syria adding that some of the Turkish Youth Union's members would go to Syria in order to support local leftist parties. According to him, Turkey has become a U.S. soldier in the Middle East. Finally, on December 17, Radikal newspaper's headline was dedicated to the aforementioned student actions and the Time magazine awarded its "Person of the Year" title to protestors across the globe.

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