

**POST-ISLAMIST POLITICAL PARTIES AS AGENTS OF
DEMOCRATIZATION IN MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES**

by
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**POST-ISLAMIST POLITICAL PARTIES AS AGENTS OF
DEMOCRATIZATION IN MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES**

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ABSTRACT

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backsliding

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the literature on democracy in Muslim-majority countries by exploring the attitudes and policies of post-Islamist political actors towards democracy and the conditions under which they contribute to democracy. It focuses on post-Islamist political parties as agents of democratization in Muslim-majority countries. It explores how post-Islamist transformation of former Islamist actors has affected the political trajectories of the AKP in Turkey and Ennahda in Tunisia as the parties were in governance, comparing two cases through cross-national comparisons combined with process-tracing. This thesis takes Turkey and Tunisia and two political parties, AKP and Nahda, as two different but comparable examples. In addition to agency-based factors such as discourses, policies, intra-party relations and interactions with other parties, exogenous factors, that is, domestic and international constraints on the post-Islamist actors, and their responses to these constraints are also included in the analysis. The thesis argues that both countries have experienced democratic reversals, led or contributed to by post-Islamist parties, albeit in entirely different ways, and that the post-Islamist transformation of former Islamist actors is necessary but not sufficient to sustain a democracy. It also shows that post-Islamism is an interactive category, affected from the governance processes of these parties.

ÖZET

POST-ISLAMIST POLITICAL PARTIES AS AGENTS OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES

ZEYNEP İREM ATALAY-ÜSTÜN

SİYASET BİLİMİ DOKTORA TEZİ, MAYIS 2023

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. FUAT KEYMAN

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslamcılık, post-İslamcılık, siyasi partiler, demokratikleşme,
demokratik gerileme

Bu tezin amacı, post-İslamcı siyasi aktörlerin demokrasiye yönelik tutum ve politikalarını ve hangi koşullar altında demokrasiye katkıda bulunduklarını araştırarak çoğunluğu Müslüman olan ülkelerdeki demokrasi literatürüne katkıda bulunmaktır. Bu ülkelerde demokratikleşmenin aracıları olarak post-İslamcı siyasi partilere odaklanmaktadır. Post-İslamcılık, eski İslamcı aktörlere kapsayıcı/demokratik idealler sağlayan analitik bir kategoridir. Bu çalışma, eski İslamcı aktörlerin post-İslamcı dönüşümünün, Türkiye’de AKP’nin ve Tunus’ta Ennahda’nın siyasi yörüngelerini nasıl etkilediğini araştırmakta ve süreç takibi ile birlikte ülkeler arası karşılaştırmalar yaparak iki örneği karşılaştırmaktadır. Kendini karşılaştırmalı siyaset içinde konumlandırıran bu tez, Türkiye ve Tunus’u ve iki siyasi partiyi, AKP ve Nahda’yı, iki farklı ama karşılaştırılabilir örnek olarak ele almaktadır. Bu partilerin söylemleri, politikaları, parti içi ilişkileri ve diğer partilerle etkileşimleri gibi faktörlerin yanı sıra, post-İslamcı aktörler üzerindeki yerel ve uluslararası kısıtlamalar ve bu kısıtlamalara verdikleri tepkiler de analize dahil edilmiştir. Bu çalışma, temel olarak, her iki ülkenin de, tamamen farklı şekillerde de olsa, post-İslamcı partilerin öncülüğünde veya katkısıyla demokratik gerileme yaşadığını; eski İslamcı aktörlerin post-İslamcı dönüşümünün bir demokrasiyi sürdürmek için gerekli olmakla birlikte yeterli olmadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, post-islamizmin, bu partilerin yönetim süreçlerinden etkilenen interaktif bir kategori olduğunu göstermektedir.

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To my Ayşe and Mehmet

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1. INTRODUCTION

Overall aim of this thesis is to contribute to the literature on democracy in Muslim-majority contexts by exploring the attitudes of religiously-oriented political actors towards democracy and the conditions under which they contribute to democracy. In this study, which focuses on post-Islamist political parties as agents of democratization in Muslim-majority contexts, I have shown that both countries that are the focus of this thesis have experienced democratic reversals under the leadership/contribution of post-Islamist parties, albeit in entirely different ways, essentially demonstrating that the post-Islamist transformation of former Islamist actors is necessary but not sufficient to sustain a democracy.

By post-Islamism, which I will elaborate on later, I mean an analytical category in which religiosity meets (pluralistic notion of) democracy/modernity/secularism, and which provides former Islamist actors with inclusive/democratic ideals. It refers to a change of belief, normative framework, and religious/political discourse in which former Islamist actors abandon Islamism as an ideology aiming for an Islamic order and move into a rights-oriented, civil-secular state-aspiring ideology. It represents a conviction/discourse change on the part of former Islamists, involving the promotion of secularization at the state level while preserving religious/moral values at the societal level. It represents a shift in vision, where religiosity merges with rights, freedom, and pluralism, and where considering and/or allying with other views becomes important. I take the post-Islamist transformation (and the accompanying change in values/discourse) as a reference point to make sense of/evaluate the democracy-related attitudes of these former Islamist actors and to identify changes, if any, in these attitudes over time. Of course, it is also worth noting that, as I mentioned in the analytical chapter, there is no consensus in the literature on what Islamism is and who Islamists are. While there are scholars who treat Islamists as a single category, as members of a single political project, there are also scholars who treat them as various groups with different goals, practices, and strategies. It should be noted that for the sake of this thesis, in line with the definition of post-Islamism,

I do not consider Islamism as a static phenomenon, but as a dynamic phenomenon that changes with its internal dynamics and external needs. As such, as will become clear throughout the thesis, the modus operandi of post-Islamism is also not linear. Post-Islamism is a dynamic concept, affected by governance processes.

This thesis approaches Turkey and Tunisia, and two political parties, Harakat al-Nahda (Renaissance Movement, hereafter Ennahda) and Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, hereafter AKP) as two cases, different yet comparable. Hence, the thesis, actually, locates itself in comparative politics, comparing two cases through cross-national comparisons, aiming at accumulating our knowledge about the relationship between the parties that are coming from Islamic/conservative backgrounds and their democratic performances as they are in governance. These political parties share a common post-Islamist ideology and identify themselves as conservative-democrat and Muslim-democrat, respectively. The way both blend Islam and democracy has also been cited by analysts as a model for other Muslim-majority countries, as I've elaborated in the analytical chapter and the Ennahda and AKP chapters. Furthermore, both cases have seen their democracy scores drop significantly following the adoption of constitutional amendments or a new constitution that put all power in the hands of a single person and removed checks and balances on the executive.

However, the thesis also recognizes that these parties in governance had different paths and specificities. Throughout the case studies one can actually see the differences. The key difference is that the AKP has never lost an election, while Ennahda was first neutralized by President Saïed in a constitutional coup and then, was completely politically sidelined by Saïed through a new constitution and electoral law. However, over the course of a quarter of a century they have learned from each other; they have influenced each other and in that sense they are comparable. Both cases show how democracies become fragile to coup attempts and even regime breakdowns as these parties were in governance. And yet, while in the case of Turkey, the democratic backsliding is AKP-led, in Tunisia, Ennahda's neglect of competition, an important element of the definition of democracy, contributed to the process of democratic reversal. Moreover, there have been important studies on the subject, with special emphasis on Gümüşçü's (2023) *Democracy or Authoritarianism: Islamist Governments in Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia*, which is also based on comparative analysis, as I detail more in the analytical chapter.

While the post-Islamist transformation represents a change of conviction and discourse on the part of former Islamist actors, as Olivier Roy (2016, 13), rightfully, argues, "political actors' beliefs often play less of a role in shaping their policies

than the constraints to which they are subjected". Therefore, domestic/international constraints on post-Islamist actors and their responses to these constraints are also included in this analysis. In other words, this thesis involves an analysis of the interaction of agent-based factors (policies, discourses, intra-party and inter-party interactions) and structural factors (that is, international and domestic constraints, such as the domestic political environment/pressures from a secularist establishment, the country's economic indicators, the existence of an IMF program and/or EU conditionality, Western support).

In order to identify changes in these parties' attitudes towards/policies on democracy over time, I used a process-tracing methodology for the period between their rise to power in their home countries and their decline in their categories/scores in international democracy indices. According to Freedom House, which measures the concept of democracy in terms of average freedom based on the degree of political and civil liberties in a country, Tunisia, which was categorized as "not free" in 2011, moved up to "free" in 2015 under a coalition government that included Ennahda, and dropped to partially "free" in 2023 following the adoption of a new constitution in 2022 that concentrated all power in the hands of a single person. Similarly, Turkey, which was classified as "partly free" by Freedom House in 2002, when the AKP came to power, was rated as "not free" in 2018 after a national referendum approved a package of constitutional reforms that would formally introduce a "Turkish-type" presidential system concentrating all power in the hands of a single person.

In this thesis, more specifically, I argue that, in the case of Turkey, the democratic backsliding took place when a leader who had concentrated power in his hands moved away from the post-Islamist line after the removal of the domestic/external constraining factors on the government, whereas in the case of Tunisia, the pluralist understanding of democracy referred to by the post-Islamist paradigm was over-emphasized and the element of competition inherent in the definition of democracy was pushed to the background.

Briefly looking at the chapters in the thesis, in the analytical chapter, after showing that until the Arab Spring only one out of four Muslim-majority countries had democratically elected governments, that in most of these countries rulers came to power through facade elections, and that most of these governments repressed opposition parties by banning, shutting down, denying them access to the media, and so on, I then turned to the literature on such regimes, which combines elements of democratic and authoritarian systems. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a large literature on this topic, because a few years after the Third Wave of Democratization around the world, it became clear that many of the regimes that were

part of this process had not transitioned to democracy, and that these regimes were not limited to Muslim/Arab contexts; hence the academic interest in such regimes. Then, under the sub-heading Islam and Democracy, I discussed the arguments of modernization theory and orientalist discourse that argue that Islam is structurally incompatible with democracy because of something missing in its essence, and the arguments that challenge these arguments, namely that Islam and democracy are compatible. Objections to the argument that Islam is the other of democracy argue either that this assumed contradiction stems from different interpretations of Islam (emphasizing the need to make a distinction between Islamists and Islam), the Qur'an and even democracy, or that the development of democracy in the West is not independent of religion, but that religion is a contributing factor in the process of party realignment and polarization. In the section on Islamists and democracy, I discuss empirical studies on the commitment of Islamist groups to democracy, as the wide participation of Islamists in elections and their good performance, sometimes in collaboration with ideological rivals, in the political openings initiated by authoritarian regimes since the late 1980s has shifted academic interest to investigating the mechanisms, processes, and institutions that lead to a shift towards moderation (or radicalization) in the beliefs and practices of Islamist groups, with also an interest in how to conceptualize Islamism. Post-Islamism and democracy and the analytical trajectory of the research are the final subtitles of this chapter.

In the third chapter, I argued that the growing strength of the military vis-à-vis civilian institutions that characterized Turkey in the 1990s culminated in the 28 February process, which not only led to a shift from Islamism to post-Islamism among the younger generation of Islamists within the RP/FP, but also motivated even the barely surviving three-party government coalition to embrace democratic reforms, which in turn led to Turkey's official recognition as a candidate for full membership in 1999. I then argued that the EU anchor and the increasing power of the military vis-à-vis civilian institutions were two important structural conditions that influenced the mobilization of pro-democracy forces throughout the 1990s, and that the February 28th process interacted with these two conditions to accelerate their mobilization. Thus, when the AKP came to power in 2002, Turkey was already on the path to EU membership, with an accompanying process of economic measures.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, I discussed the AKP's democracy journey from its rise to power until 2018. I started a new chapter in 2011, the AKP's third term, because by 2011, the internal/external constraining factors on the AKP, i.e. the factors that could have forced it on the path of democracy, were no longer in effect. That is, with the deterioration of relations with the EU (and the disappearance

of the incentive for EU membership) (2005/2006), the disappearance of the market (2008/2009) and the secular military-led establishment (2010) as constraining factors on the government, in 2011 the AK party was now unshackled and in a position to take the country in a more democratic or more authoritarian direction. In the 2011-2015 period, both pluralist and majoritarian notions of democracy were in competition within the party, but after 2015/2016, with Erdoğan's rapid takeover of the party, the party rapidly shifted towards a nationalist/Islamist line, accompanied by authoritarianism.

In chapter six, I discussed the Tunisian case, i.e. how Ennahda, despite being the strongest party in parliament since 2011 and a permanent member of governments for most of the post-revolutionary period, contributed to the reversal of democracy by persistently over-prioritizing consensus and constantly postponing the transition to a position where it competed for the popular vote by promoting its own policy positions, which led to an irreversible disillusionment of the people with political parties/democracy and a turn towards populist anti-establishment actors in 2019. Therefore, I started the seventh chapter, when Saïed, a populist President, came to power, even though Saïed carried out his constitutional coup in 2021 and consolidated his one-man rule from that point on by destroying/marginalizing every institution created after 2011.

The Conclusion chapter is also a chapter comparing the democratic perspectives and journeys of Ennahda and AKP. However, as I noted at the outset, while both Tunisia and Turkey have experienced democratic reversals under the leadership/contribution of post-Islamist parties, they have done so through completely different processes. The common conclusion is that post-Islamist transformation is not sufficient for democracy to survive in Muslim contexts.

2. ANALYTICAL CHAPTER

2.1 Hybrid Regimes and The (Muslim) World

In the academic literature, concepts of Islam and democracy have, mostly, been considered to be clashing with each other. The main reason for this was that when the 3rd wave of democratization swept Southern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa between 1974 and early 1990, many Muslim-majority countries, especially Arab Middle Eastern states, even those which established formal democratic institutions such as elections to elect the chief executive and legislature, had remained authoritarian since those elections lacked fairness and freedom, two core principles that provide equal playing field to the opposition parties in liberal democracies. Then, as Carothers (2002, 5) explains, it was a period that trends of seven different regions of the world converged to generate a global trend. And this trend was moving “away from dictatorial rule to more liberal and often more democratic governance”. In line with this global trend, this period saw the fall of right-wing authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe, the replacement of military dictatorships by civilian, elected rules in Latin America, the fall of authoritarian regimes in South and East Asia, the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, dissolution of the USSR and the establishment of 15 post-Soviet Republics, and finally, the fall of one-party regimes in many sub-Saharan African states. (Carothers 2002, 5).

Then, it becomes apparent that this was a time that Fukuyama (2015) in an article called “The End of History?” argued that the world has reached the end of history since the final alternative to liberal ideology was also eliminated as the USSR disintegrated into 15 separate countries which were undergoing economic and political reforms to turn into liberal democratic orders.

Then, the expansion rate of democracies in the world particularly in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s was huge. According to the Freedom House data based on political rights and civil liberties, in 1974, there were 39 democratic states in the

world out of 142 independent states; by the end of 1990, there were 76 democracies in the world, which comprised less than half of the independent states in the world; and by the end of 1995, 117 of 191 independent states were democracies, which comprised more than 60% of the independent states. (Diamond and Plattner 2001).

When it comes to the Muslim contexts, as Esposito and Mogahed (2007) stressed, by 2007, only one in four Muslim-majority countries had democratically elected governments; and in multiple Muslim-majority countries, rulers were routinely being elected president in façade elections by gaining from %90 to %99.9 of votes. For instance, Tunisian President Ben Ali's vote rate was 99.4% in 1999, and %94.5 in 2004, and Mubarak's election rate was 99.4% in 1999, and 94.5% in 2004. Also, many of these governments had the power to control the opposition through licensing, banning, or dissolving political parties and non-governmental organizations as well as through controlling their media access. For instance, in Egypt, after the Muslim Brotherhood won one-fifth of the seats in the 2005 legislative elections, Mubarak cancelled the local elections scheduled for spring 2006, perceiving the Muslim Brotherhood's increasing popularity as a threat to his rule. Likewise, two years later taking office, King Abdullah of Jordan has dissolved the parliament, two more years he delayed holding the elections for "security" reasons (Esposito and Mogahed 2007, Chapter 2, 314-318).

In other words, until the Arab Spring, even those Arab Middle Eastern regimes that decided to hold elections remained authoritarian. In these authoritarian electoral regimes, incumbents'/governing single-parties' electoral manipulation are "so severe, widespread, and systematic" that outcomes of electoral contests are not uncertain anymore; hence, [electoral contests] do not qualify as democratic" Schedler (2006, 3). Schedler (2006, 3) calls these types of regimes *competitive authoritarianism*, and explains the main characteristics of elections in these regimes as follows:

"... Elections are broadly inclusive (they are held under universal suffrage) as well as minimally pluralistic (opposition parties are allowed to run), minimally competitive (opposition parties, while denied victory, are allowed to win votes and seats), and minimally open (opposition parties are not subject to massive repression, although they may experience repressive treatment in selective and intermittent ways".

Undoubtedly, polities as such, combining elements from democratic and authoritarian systems have not remained limited to Muslim/Arab contexts since it became apparent after a few years into the Third Wave that, many of those regimes part of the Third Wave transition process were not democratic, or not transitioning to democracy, and hence scholarly interest in these kinds of regimes emerged (Dia-

mond 2002, 23). These policies combining democratic and autocratic elements in a significant measure have taken multiple names in the literature. How various scholars defined hybrid regimes derived from their definition of another concept, which is democracy or authoritarianism, and through analyzing the deviations from that concept. For example, Collier and Levitsky's (1997) "democracies with adjectives" attach different labels to different types of sub-types of democracies. Similarly O'Donnell's (1994) "delegative democracy" is used for such democracies in which incumbents tend to see themselves over any kind of horizontal accountability mechanism due to being popularly elected. Zakaria's (1997) *illiberal democracy* focuses on violations of civil rights. Similarly, (Diamond 2002, 22) defines, hybrid regimes as "the regimes] which have the form of electoral democracy but fail to meet the substantive test." Carothers (2002, 9) refers to them as "the gray zone." On the basis of the experiences of Third Wave countries, he argues, a transition is not always to a full democracy, since out of almost 100 transitory countries of the Third Wave, only 20 turned into successful functioning democracies, while some others less progressed or and in some others like Belarus and Turkmenistan, authoritarian regime resolidified. Yet, most of them entered a political "gray zone"; and you can get stuck in a gray zone or move from one gray zone to another.

Carothers' (2002) study was particularly important to show that the main assumptions of the Transition Paradigm did not hold anymore for the Third Wave countries. According to the assumptions, any country moving away from dictatorial rule was considered a transitional country, and in line with this assignment, especially in the first half of the 1990s took any attempt for political liberalization as a step toward democracy. Also, the transition paradigm assumed that all transitions occurred in a three-stage process, the first stage of which was a crack in the authoritarian rule between hard-liners and soft-liners; the second stage involved the collapse of the regime and establishment of democratic institutions, such as a democratic constitution, and competitive elections; and the final consolidation stage involved the transformation of "democratic forms... into democratic substance" through the holding of elections regularly, reforming the state institutions, and "the overall habituation of the society to the new democratic... rules of the game." Although democracy practitioners acknowledge that stagnation and reversal of the process were also possible, Carothers, rightfully, argues that this view which defines any deviation from the process only along the path was problematic, since it did not give place to any movement that does not conform with the path itself. (Carothers 2002, 7). In Carothers' (2002, 10,14) account, many countries in the gray zone either ended up as feckless pluralism, or as dominant power politics, which are two broad "political patterns" in grayzone. In other words, as he argues, these two political patterns "include ele-

ments of democracy but should be understood as alternative directions, not way stations to liberal democracy”. While the former one was too much of an elite-based system, where the citizens are too isolated, and governments cannot solve the major problems of the country, dominant power politics was a pattern in which either a person or a party dominates the system till such a point that alternation of power does not look possible in the close future, and the line between the state and ruling party gets too blurred. Undoubtedly, what was particularly remarkable with the transition paradigm was that starting with Rostow’s (1970) seminal article, its “no preconditions” assumption was definitely a more optimistic perspective toward democratization compared to modernization theory dating back 1950s, 1960s which rested democratization on some structural prerequisites such as economic development, the presence of a middle-class, etc; transition paradigm mainly put the main emphasis on the political intentions and actions of its political elite and their “ability... to fend off the contrary actions of remaining antidemocratic forces” (Carothers 2002, 8).

Also, many of the scholars working on hybrid regimes take the reference point as autocracy instead of democracy. And this approach shows itself in different labels they attach to similar types of non-democratic regimes with facade democratic institutions. Schedler’s (2006) *electoral authoritarianism*, Sadiki’s (2009) *election fetishism*, which he defines as regimes “which hold elections but produce little or no democracy,” Levitsky and Way (2002), *competitive authoritarianism* all refer to these kinds of regimes. In this regard, Levitsky and Way (2002, 53)’s focus is mainly on procedural aspects of democracy, and when defining competitive authoritarianism as a hybrid regime, their main concern is that elections are not fair. In this regard, first, they stress that there are four minimum criteria that modern democratic regimes should meet. Accordingly,

“Executives and legislatures are chosen through elections that are open, free, and fair; 2) virtually all adults possess the right to vote; 3) political rights and civil liberties, including freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom to criticize the government without reprisal, are broadly protected; and 4) elected authorities possess real authority to govern, in that they are not subject to the tutelary control of military or clerical leaders”.

To them, although violations in one or more of these principles can also occur in full-democracies, what differentiates competitive authoritarian regimes is that “violations of these criteria are both frequent enough and serious enough to create an uneven playing field between government and opposition”. Then, incumbents skew the playing field to such an extent that the opposition’s ability to compete is

seriously compromised in these regimes. Particularly systematic and massive use of electoral manipulation is an important characteristic of these regimes.

In the words of Levitsky and Way (2002, 53),

“Although elections are regularly held and are generally free of massive fraud, incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters, and in some cases manipulate electoral results. Journalists, opposition politicians, and other government critics may be spied on, threatened, harassed, or arrested. Members of the opposition may be jailed, exiled, or—less frequently—even assaulted or murdered. Regimes characterized by such abuses cannot be called democratic”.

Then, with the trend of democratic recession in the world, scholars showed an interest in the question of, why is democracy and freedom regressing in the world? Diamond (2015, 144) drew attention to Freedom House scores that, both number of democracies and average freedom (based on the two seven-point scales on political rights and civil liberties) kept increasing or stayed steady from 1974 till 2007, yet after that point both trends have reversed with an increase in the rate of democratic breakdowns, decline in the quality of democracy in multiple large emerging-markets, which he calls “swing states,” deepening of authoritarianism in big countries, democracy’s performing poorly in established democracies, including the U.S. He argued, out of 25 democratic breakdowns after 2000, only 8 was a result of the direct military coup; the majority of them were a result of “subtle and incremental degradations of democratic rights and procedures that finally push a democratic system over the threshold into competitive authoritarianism ...i.e. below the minimal standards of democracy”. He mainly argues that bad governance is responsible for this trend. Likewise, Fukuyama (2015) also tries to explore the question, “why is democracy performing so poorly?” Fukuyama, first, makes a distinction between neo-patrimonial and modern states and criticizes that the democracy-promotion community has not paid enough attention to state-capacity problems, i.e. enforcement of laws by both citizens and public officials at the same time, and delivery of public services in an impartial manner, and hence, led to the emergence of neo-patrimonial states but not modern states. Then, to him, at low levels of per capita income, democracy has been a driver of clientelism. Establishing a parallel with Huntington’s (1968) argument that if the development of political institutions fails to keep pace with social change and mobilization of new groups in politics, political disorder emerges, Fukuyama (2015) argued that failure of development of state institutions (with its capacity to enforce law and provide public goods) in pace with democratic institutions also would be a failure in the emergence of modern democratic states.

With rising populism in the world, there has been an increase in the scholarly interest in linking populism to democratic reversals, and hybrid regimes. In this respect, Levitsky and Loxton (2013) mainly link populism to competitive authoritarianism through weak political parties and weak institutions. In other words, the theory of the authors is that populism is the immediate preceding cause of competitive authoritarianism because it is an already anti-establishment type of politics, it prepares the way to get rid of the horizontal accountability mechanisms, which are the institutions of the existing representative system; so the populist leader that comes to power, faces the hostile institutions (particularly, legislatures and courts); the constituency supports the effort to get rid of these institutions, and so the populist leader has the incentive to get rid of these institutions that can put horizontal accountability, i.e. checks and balances on him; and then, the incumbent gets unchecked control over institutions, skewing the playing field, and the system turns into a competitive authoritarian system. But, this article does not respond to the question of why populist leaders come to power in some countries, but not in others, and Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) respond to this question with another study.

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, 2-5,7,78) mainly explore the causal factor behind a global trend: While during the Cold War, three out of four democratic breakdowns occurred through coups d'état, after the Cold War most of the breakdowns in different parts of the world occurred at the hands of elected leaders, slowly, and in barely visible steps through subverting the democratic institutions although the democratic veneer is sustained. Here are the means through which “elected autocrats” subvert democracy through turning “institutions [into] . . . political weapons:”

“packing and . . . weaponizing’ the courts and other neutral agencies, buying off the media and the private sector (or bullying them into silence), and rewriting the rules of politics to tilt the playing field against opponents. The tragic paradox of the electoral route to authoritarianism is that democracy’s assassins use the very institutions of democracy—gradually, subtly, and even legally—to kill it”.

Soccer game metaphor explains how elected autocrats subvert democratic institutions even better:

“To consolidate power, would-be authoritarians must capture the referees, sideline at least some of the other side’s star players, and rewrite the rules of the game to lock in their advantage, in effect tilting the playing field against their opponents”.

In a comparative historical perspective, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, 19-21) identify patterns in the way populist leaders come to power around the world, as they find

striking similarities between the ways in which Hitler, Mussolini, and Chavez came to power, despite their vast differences; they also identify successful cases where populist leaders were prevented from coming to power. Then, they develop a “litmus test” with “key indicators of authoritarian behavior” to detect a to-be authoritarian politician before he comes to power. If a politician meets even one of the following criteria, he must be filtered and prevented from taking office primarily by political parties who are the “gatekeepers” of democracy. Accordingly,

“We should worry when a politician 1) rejects, in words or action, the democratic rules of the game, 2) denies the legitimacy of opponents, 3) tolerates or encourages violence, or 4) indicates a willingness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media”

An important point they make is that presence of a political system with well-designed checks and balances is not enough to sustain a democracy; these checks and balances must be reinforced by unwritten democratic norms, most important of which are “mutual toleration, or the understanding that competing parties accept one another as legitimate rivals, and forbearance, or the idea that politicians should exercise restraint in deploying their institutional prerogatives” (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 8). Since extreme polarization kills democracies, particularly in the presence of extreme partisan polarization, critical mass of leaders’ building such norms and playing by these unwritten rules to learn cooperation is very important to sustain democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 221). Another point is that, when would-be authoritarians emerge as significant electoral contenders, mainstream political parties should align even with their ideologically distant opponents to prevent them from taking office and to sustain democracy since history shows Italian, German, Venezuelan routes to authoritarian governments were beset with prodemocratic parties’/actors’ aligning with extremists on their ideological flank to increase their vote share/to come to power. Even if would-be authoritarian takes power, rather than getting into institutional warfare with him, still combating him with democratic institutions with broad democratic coalitions cross-cutting partisan divisions is very important (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 228).

2.2 Islam and Democracy

The question of compatibility between Islam and democracy has always led to controversy among scholars. Until very recently, Islamic exceptionalism regarding democracy has been widely emphasized by scholars based on the premise that

there is something inherently missing in Islam that makes it structurally incompatible with democracy. One widely emphasized argument, in this respect, was that as Islam was a “comprehensive way of life” and “*din wa dawla*, that is, religion and the state” (Esposito and Voll 1996), and that, secularization as a prerequisite of democracy/modernity was missing in Muslim contexts.

Taking secularization as part of democratization and modernization dates back to the modernization theory of the 1950s and 60s which mainly assumes that as people in a country become wealthier and more educated, the importance they attach to religion decreases. For instance, one of the most recent modernization theorists, Inglehart (1997, 9,341) argues that “economic, cultural, and political change go together in coherent patterns; and they are changing the world in broadly predictable ways”. In this regard, once a country gets in the trajectory of modernization with industrialization, the related social, cultural, and political changes follow. These are changes such as mass education, urbanization, bureaucratization, increased political participation, etc. To Inglehart, modernity gives way to post-modernity with a generational time lag, and post-modernity erodes the values of industrial society, and hence, leads to a decline in respect for authority, and to increased emphasis on subjective well-being and quality of life concerns as well as to increased secularization as the values of post-modern society (Inglehart 1997, 45-47). Then, the post-modern shift entails moving away from religious and bureaucratic authority, i.e. deemphasizing all kinds of authority, due to the feeling of security which renders the need for absolute rules and societal/religious norms that mainly serve to keep society together unnecessary (Inglehart 1997, 39). Yet, it was widely emphasized that, as Gellner (1991, 2) also argued, “the secularization thesis” holds true in the world except for the Muslim contexts, since industrialization, modernization processes have eroded the “political and psychological impact of religion” and brought “science” to the fore in all other contexts to varying degrees. Yet, he argues, “no secularization has taken place in the world of Islam. . . Somehow or other, Islam is secularization-resistant”.

Islamic exceptionalism to democracy has been particularly part of the Orientalist discourse. Bernard Lewis (1996, 54,61), in this respect, states that, Islam, both as a religion and a civilization, is not compatible with democracy since “in Islam, . . . there is from the beginning, an interpenetration, almost an identification, of cult and power, or religion and the state”. Particularly, he states, the “neo-Islam of fundamentalists. . . are hostile to liberal democracy since they see it as a corrupt and corrupting form of government”. Iqtidar (2011, 12-13) criticizes the irony in the academic literature that it both assumes that secularism is a universally applicable concept, loaded with positive connotation as a prerequisite of modernity/democracy,

and defines Islam with its “innate absences” as Weber did when explaining why Islam would not give rise to capitalism, and takes Islam as a concept inherently in clash with secularism. She further argues much of the popular media and scholarly writing conflates Islam and Islamism, and maintains that “Islam/Islamism not only poses a threat to secularism, it is the most potent threat”. Huntington (1993, 40) takes the approach of taking Islam in tension with democracy one step further, and talks about a clash between the Islamic world and the Christian Western world in terms of “western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets...[which] often have little resonance in Islamic cultures”. Tibi (2012), on the other hand, makes a distinction between Islam and Islamists, and argues that not Islam, but Islamists “create deep civilizational rifts between Muslims and non-Muslims” as Islamists classify all non-Muslims as “kuffar-infidels- and thus enemies of Islam” (Preface). To Tibi (2012), this is true not only for Islamists who engage in violence but also for those who pursue peaceful means since all Islamists share the goal of establishing an Islamist state irrespective of the means used to this end. Therefore, in Tibi’s account, Islamists, who pursue “religionized politics...[to promote] a political order that is believed to emanate from the will of Allah and is not based on popular sovereignty,” only become triggers of polarization between secularism and “their political religion,” and hence, “cannot be partners in the search for a democratic peace.” On the other hand, to Tibi (2012, 1), what we need to do is, subscribe to a “civil and liberal Islam with a secular perspective”, since Islam itself, does not presuppose a certain type of government, but only provides “certain political values” as an “ethical framework”.

And yet, the approach that takes Islam as “the other of democracy” (Derrida 2005) has gained acceptance in the literature, and many studies have supported this approach through large-N quantitative analyses. For example, Barro (1999) identifies that, be the concept of democracy measured through political rights or civil rights, in Muslim-majority countries, there is a negative relationship between Islam and democracy even when other “determinants of democracy” such as per capita GDP, the gap between female and male educational attainment, etc. are controlled for. Likewise, Karatnycky (2002) argues, in his quantitative analysis, conducted on the basis of 2001 Freedom House survey that “a non-Islamic state is nearly 3 times more likely to be democratic than an Islamic state.” He identifies “a dramatic gap” in democracy between Muslim-majority countries and the rest. Rowley and Smith’s (2009, 273) study also supports the Islam-democratic deficit hypothesis; they conclude that “there is a deficit both of democracy and freedom in Muslim-majority countries; ...not fully explained by poverty or oil but appear to have

something to do with the nature of Islam itself”.

Then comes to the fore Muslim scholars who emphasize the importance of the interpretive process of the Qur'an and Islam to have an understanding compatible with democracy and human rights as there have been multiple interpretations of the Quran and hence, also of Islam. Words of An-Na'im (2011, 187), a Muslim law professor, is important in this respect:

“... There is no such thing as the only possible or valid understanding of the Qur'an, or conception of Islam, since any understanding is informed by the individual and collective orientation of Muslims as they seek to derive normative implications for human behavior... And consequently, a change in the orientation of Muslims will contribute to a transformation of their understanding of the Qur'an and, hence, of their conception of Islam itself”.

For instance, as Akbarzadeh and MacQueen (2008, 4) stress, Tariq Ramadan's “humanist approach to Islam” moves beyond the assumed contradiction between shari'a and secular law since Ramadan argues that both the secular law of the West and the Islamic law rests upon the core values of “fairness, equity and justice”.

Likewise, Eickelman and Piscatori (2004, 46-53) provide us with examples of different interpretations of the concept of *din wa-dawla*, suggesting that there is not unanimity in the Muslim world in terms of interpretation of this concept. On one hand, they refer to scholars such as Fazlur Rahman who criticizes the exploitation of Islamic concepts by political groups while Islamic precepts were supposed to morally inspire politics, and Indonesian intellectual Madjid (b.1939) who rejects the argument that Islam requires an Islamic state and, in this regard, advocates secularization, as well as to Islamist movements who have eschewed politics believing that involvement in politics corrupts the believers, and who have criticized other Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood that aspired to rise to power. On the other hand, they refer to Ayatullah Khomeini, whose “theory of Islamic government puts the fuqaha (sing, faqih) at the center of power,” and emphasizes the necessity of a ruler who is both just and knows the shari'a, which is “the sole law”. Authors also stress as an indicator of the separation of religion and politics in Islamic history that even the Caliphate after the death of the Prophet was only a temporal institution with political and military authority, since succession of the religious authority was not possible, as some Muslim scholars argue. In addition, authors argue that not long after the death of the Prophet and the establishment of the dynastic rule, it was possible to identify bifurcation of the legal system along shari'a courts and secular-type diwan al-mazalim (board of grievances).

Scholars like Esposito and Voll (1996, 3-6) also stress that since the medieval Islamic civilizations of Umayyads and Abbasids, “non-state structures with distinct authorities in religious life existed. First, the ulama, “the learned scholars of faith,” and different schools of Islamic law, later “mystic brotherhoods,” emerged as important structures, “autonomous and separate from the state, and sometimes in conflict with the state institutions.”. Authors even stress that since the 1970s, Islamization and democratization, i.e. participation in political processes and evolution of their societies into ones explicitly identifiable as Islamic, have been the dual aspirations of established Islamic movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jamaat-i Islami as well as the newly established Islamic movements.

Yet, it also becomes apparent that apart from different interpretations of Islam, different conceptualizations of democracy also shape how scholars evaluate the relationship between Islam and democracy. In this respect, Tamimi (2001) particularly stresses the importance of Bin Nebi’s “Democracy in Islam” lecture in Paris in 1960, the written form of which was later translated into Arabic by Rachid Ghanouchi, the leader of Tunisia’s Ennahda, during his time in prison, in re-evaluating the relationship between Islam and democracy after all those years from 1950s till 1970s Sayyid Kutub had influenced Islamic thinking with his complete rejection of democracy. As Tamimi (2001, 113-119) explains, Bin Nebi argues that the assumed contradiction between Islam and democracy mainly derives from how we define these concepts; the Western notion of democracy is a historical legacy of the discursive processes of the French Revolution, Renaissance and Reform in Europe; then, to him, defining democracy as the rule of the people, and Islam as worship of Allah gives the impression that there is a tension between these concepts. On the other hand, Bin Nebi argues that if we define democracy as a behavior pattern that honors humans rather than a political process, this contradiction fades, since giving a high value to humans is the essence of Islam as well, as the verse “we have honored the children of Adam” in Quran suggests; in this regard, Islamic values of honoring the human and legitimizing resistance against any subjugation makes Islam compatible with democracy. Then, Tamimi (2001) also mentions Muslim thinkers who reject the argument that Islam is in tension with democracy. For example, Tawfiq Ash-Shaw establishes an association between liberal democracy and Islam by emphasizing the importance of *shura* in Islam. Likewise, he mentions scholars who identify the Islamic roots of liberal democracy. For instance, Ghannouchi argues that Europe has benefited from the Islamic civilization in their journey from feudalism to liberal democracy, and, also Hassan Turabi argues that the Europeans’ democratic thinking derived “from their contacts with the Islamic political *fiqh* (jurisprudence)” (Tamimi 2001, 80-81).

In Tamimi’s (2001, 89) work on Ghannouchi, the leader of the Ennahda movement in

Tunisia, we also find how Ghannouchi integrates Islam and democracy. It becomes apparent that he sees Western liberal democracy as the best available system in the world, particularly taking into account the procedural aspects of it, i.e. democratic institutions and mechanisms such as elections, alternation of power, civil liberties, etc. although he also thinks that in terms of its philosophical underpinnings, Western liberal democracy has certain flaws, and that an ideal democracy would be based on “a philosophy that recognizes the dignity of man, and protecting it from falling into the pits of hegemony and servitude... [and,] such philosophy can only be found in Islam”. Yet, to Ghannouchi, the Western type of liberal democracy is compatible with Islam mainly because of the relationship it established between the ruler and the ruled by transferring the legitimacy from an autocrat to the people, and hence, due to being a system based on the will of the people. As Tamimi (2001, 90) stresses, Ghannouchi’s view of compatibility between Islam and democracy mainly derives from the assumption that “government in Islam embodies a civilian authority whose political conduct is answerable to the public”. In other words, to Ghannouchi there is no place for theocracy in Islam because as the concept of *al-amr bil-ma’ruf wan-nahy . . . amil-munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) dictates, if individuals/groups consider that policies of the rulers are wrong or misguided, it is their duty to oppose or criticize and try to change them. *Shura* principle is very important in this respect as a mechanism between the people and the political authority. Besides, in his frequently cited interview, published in *the observer* in 1992, he articulates this compatibility quite clearly, again, drawing attention to the procedural aspects of democracy:

“If by democracy is meant the liberal model of government prevailing in the West, a system under which the people freely choose their representatives and leaders, in which there is an alternation of power and in which civil liberties and human rights are guaranteed, Muslims will find nothing in their religion to prevent them from applying democracy... It would not be in the interest of Muslims to imagine an incompatibility between democracy and Islam... [Ghannouchi also adds that] democracy is needed for its worth. It is the set of mechanisms that Muslims can greatly benefit from today in order to re-establish their own *shura*-based system of government.” (Tamimi 2001, 90)

Some other scholars argue that not Islam, but other factors need to be blamed for being impediments before democracy. Lust-Okar and Jamal (2002) argue that the democratic transition depends on domestic institutional structures, such as the authoritarian regime type implementing political liberalization - since incumbents’ preferences over institutional mechanisms of reform varied between presidents (of one-party states) and monarchs (of monarchies), presence of independent insti-

tutional mediatory mechanisms between the incumbents and the opposition, and whether political opposition can coalesce against incumbents or not, etc. Also, some other scholars find that oil is a more important impediment before democracy than Islam. For example, in a pooled time series cross-national data from 113 states between 1971 and 1997, Ross (2001, 357) finds that Islam has a very insignificant effect on authoritarianism; while “oil impedes democracy thesis is both valid and statistically robust.” He finds that oil is associated with authoritarianism through three causal mechanisms: “the rentier effect” which provides government to impede the demand for democracy through low taxes and high government spending; “a repression effect” by giving the incumbents the opportunity to establish internal security forces as a vehicle of repression, and “a modernization effect,” since societies’ failure to industrialize impedes them from demanding democratization. Similarly, Przeworski et. al. (2000) reject that religion is an important variable to account for transition to democracy in a study that they model transition to and from democracy by analyzing a large cross-section time-series dataset, encompassing a time span from 1950 to 1990, and country n of 135; they make a dichotomous classification of political regimes (as democracies versus dictatorships), and find that wealth of a country (as measured by per capita income) makes both democracies and dictatorships endure.

Undoubtedly, what has been particularly problematic about the assumed religion-democracy dichotomy is that development of democracy in the West has not been independent of religion since religion has always been an important marker of identity in the West as well; and as Hashemi (2009, 2-3) stresses, “in societies where religion is a marker of identity, the road to liberal democracy, whatever other twists and turns it makes, cannot avoid passing through the gates of religious politics”. He maintains that this is also what the historical record of the development process of democracy in the West (particularly in Anglo-American tradition) shows, as religion has happened to be one of the most divisive issues in the public sphere, and hence, democratic development has been in concert with religious politics (not in opposition to it) through debates, bargaining, and negotiation over the role of religion in politics in the West too. As he stresses, for secular ideas to be part of the political culture, it must be in a bottom up process, and a result of democratic negotiation and bargaining over the normative role of religion in politics/government. And third, as the historical record of the development of democracy in the West, particularly in the case of Catholicism, shows democratic development necessitates religious reformation, i.e. “reinterpretation of religious ideas with respect to the moral basis of legitimate political authority and individual rights;” and religious groups can be part of this democratic development through engaging themselves in

this reinterpretation process.

In fact, religion still happens to be an important marker of identity and a dividing line between political parties in the West as well. For instance, in Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, 167-171)'s study we find an account of how, first, race in the 1960s, and then, religion in the 1970s have become drivers of party realignment, and dividing lines between Democrats and Republicans as two deeply polarizing issues that take place behind the unraveling of basic norms of mutual tolerance and forbearance. More specifically, the authors explain how throughout most of the twentieth century American political parties were ideological "big tents", encompassing diverse constituencies, as both parties overlapped on the potentially polarizing issues of race and religion, with conservative whites in the South voting Democratic, and evangelical Christians voting for both parties. Yet, first, with the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act which enfranchised blacks and ended the single-party rule in the South, a partisan realignment started with still unfolding consequences today, as the Democratic party started to solidify as the party of predominantly liberals and blacks and the Republican party started to solidify as the party of white racial conservatives, and hence these parties started to represent different cultures and values. Then, the second drive of partisan realignment happened to be the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, as evangelicals started to enter politics en masse, and with Reagan, the Republican Party embraced the Christian Right and adopted increasingly pro-evangelical positions, such as opposition to abortion, support for school prayer as well as opposition to gay marriage, and evangelicals started to vote Republican. As authors argue, by 2016, 76 percent of white evangelicals identified themselves as Republican while Democratic voters increasingly turned secular. Religion, thus, appears to be a contributing factor to the process of partisan realignment and polarization; and religious politics turns out not to be unique to Muslim-majority countries.

Stepan (2012)'s thesis of "twin tolerations" is also an important critique of the religion-democracy dichotomy argument by giving religion a role in the democratization process. "Twin toleration" refers to the religious camp's promise to take the popular legitimacy and democratically elected political authority as the sole authority, and the secular state's being respectful to all beliefs as well as to their right to political participation. In Stepan's (2012, 60) account, when political elites on both sides of the religious/secular divide show commitment to "twin tolerations," democratization automatically follows. He also argues that the lesson provided by West European democracies as a necessary condition for democracy is not "rigid or hostile separation" of church and state but "the constant political construction and reconstruction of twin tolerations" since many European countries that were once

divided on the place of religion in the public sphere resolved their conflict through “[the] democratically negotiated freedom of religion from state interference”. Then, as the model Western European democracies have provided to the world is not strict/hostile separation between religion and state but the “twin tolerations,” and as there can be a variety of patterns of religious-state relations compatible with democracy, Stepan proposes the replacement of strict secular principles with the model of “twin tolerations.”

Besides, Esposito and Mogahed (2007) stress on the basis of findings of Gallup surveys conducted in 35 predominantly Muslim countries between 2001 and 2007 that, populations in Muslim-majority countries do not see any contradiction between “democratic values and religious principles.” Then, they argue that, according to Gallup survey findings, what populations want is “neither a theocracy nor a secular democracy... but a third model in which religious principles and democratic values coexist.” Besides, although they acknowledge sharia’s role “as a source of legislation,” they also don’t want “religious leaders directly in charge of drafting legislation” (Esposito and Mogahed 2007, Ch. 2, Sec., What Do Muslims Believe ...?).

Etzioni (2011, 570), also, on the basis of poll data provided by Gallup and Pew studies between 2006 and 2011, argue that people in Muslim-majority countries support some combination of Islam and democracy. For instance, while 2007 Pew study found that majorities in almost all of the polled Muslim countries supported equal treatment of citizens by the courts, freedom of expression, and fair multiparty elections, 2010 Pew study found that majorities in Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, and a sizable minority in Indonesia supported such harsh/illiberal punishments as sentencing to death of those who denounce their Islamic faith, cutting off the hands of thieves, and stoning of adulterers. Moreover, 2010 Pew study found that majorities in countries such as Indonesia, Egypt, Nigeria, Jordan Pakistan, Lebanon, and plurality in Turkey favor more influence of religious authorities in national politics; and besides, according to 2006 Gallup study, while the majority in eight of nine countries said that “shari’a should be at least a source of legislation in their country,” majorities in four countries said that shari’a “should be the only source.” Finally, 2011 Pew Poll in Egypt found that more than 70 percent of the public found that “democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government,” at the same time, nine in ten also said that “they wanted law to be based in Islam, with 62 percent saying law should strictly follow the Quran”.

To Esposito and Mogahed (2007), one to be blamed for the lack of democracy in Muslim-majority countries is not religion, but history and politics. As they noted,

while it took centuries and revolutionary/civil wars for the West to move from monarchies to modern secular democratic states, many Muslim-majority countries lived under colonial rule for centuries, and when they finally became nation-states in the mid-twentieth century, it was still the colonial powers who decided on/approved their borders and unelected leaders (Esposito and Mogahed 2007, Ch. 2, Sec., Why Is Democracy Absent ...?).

Bokhari and Senzai (2013) also stress with regard to the process that resulted in the establishment of nationalist states that long before Islamists emerged as major political forces in Muslim contexts, during the times when the Arab-Muslim world was declining in material and intellectual terms and Europe was rising, trend among the elites, such as Ottoman Empire's Rifa Tahtawi (d.1873) and British India's Sayyid Ahmad Khan, was to embrace Western secularism with a concern of catching up with the West. Yet, as the masses were concerned with protecting their culture in this process, what we today know as the Islamist vs. secularist divide emerged for the first time. They stress that, then, it was the secularists who rose first, obtained Western encouragement, and became the political elite in the post-colonial regimes; and those elites, out of concern that the religious masses would not adopt their secular worldview and that Islamists would seek to go back to the "dark ages," built authoritarian systems. In these decades-long authoritarian regimes, politics has emerged as an elite-driven enterprise, and Islamists have emerged as the main opposition force who reacted to the secular nationalist states and demanded adherence to religious principles. To Bokhari and Senzai (2013, 40-41), Islamist ideology remained unchallenged and underwent no major evolution since the 1970s, mainly because "its principles faced no major real-life tests" in the absence of democracy.

2.3 Islamists and Democracy

As Jillian Schwedler (2011) argues, recently, abstract debates over the compatibility of Islam and democracy have been replaced by "the empirical studies of the practices and commitments of Islamist groups."

As Bokhari and Senzai (2013, 3) argue, although Islamism's gaining ground dates back to the 1940s, most social scientists started to acknowledge it with 1979 Iran revolution, which toppled the pro-Western Shah regime and established the first Islamist polity in the world. And yet, such dramatic events followed one another with events like the seizure of Makka's Grand Mosque in 1979 by militant salafis with an allegation that the corrupt, pro-Western Al-Saud family did not have legitimacy

any more; 1979 Soviet intervention of Afghanistan, which initiated a mobilization in the Muslim world from different national and ideological backgrounds to send islamist forces to take place in the war on the side of the islamists; the 1980 Iraqi war against an expansionist islamist rule in Iran; assassination of Anwar al-Sadat in Egypt by junior military officers affiliated with an islamist group in 1981; brutal suppression of an insurrection led by the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria in 1982, leading to the death of almost 50 thousand people in Hama; the birth of Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1983 as a radical Shia movement, known with its suicide attacks in embassies of the U.S., France and Israel; the founding of the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas in 1987 as the main competitor of secular nationalist Fatah, and its acting as the leader of palestinian intifada against Israel (Bokhari and Senzai 2013, 15-16). That is, starting from the 1980s, kidnappings, bombings, armed conflicts in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, also Paris subway bombings, U.S. embassy attacks in Nairobi and Dar es Salam as well as in Bali, Madrid, London, Glashow, etc. and 9/11 attacks in the U.S. followed one another (Brown et.al. 2006, Karam 2010). Consequently, almost since the 1980s, in the Western consciousness, not only has Islamism become almost “synonymous with violence” (Karam 2010, 62), but also has Islamists been considered to be lacking any potential to contribute to the discourse on democracy.

And yet, another thing that became apparent starting from the late 1980s as authoritarian rulers initiated political openings was that, Islamists widely participated in these elections, and fared well at the end, sometimes in cooperation with their ideological rivals. Then, the interest of the academic community shifted from studies taking religion as an impediment before democracy and tracing secularism as the measure of democracy, to studies exploring the mechanisms, processes, and institutions that caused a change in the beliefs and practices of Islamist groups towards moderation (Wickham 2004, Clark 2006, Bayat 2007, Browsers 2009, Tezcur 2010, Tepe 2012), which Schwedler (2006) defines, in a narrow sense, as “movement from a relatively closed and rigid worldview to one more open and tolerant of alternative perspectives” since to Schwedler (2006, 3), a party moderating on one dimension can remain conservative or radical at another, and hence, it is not possible to assess the changes cumulatively along a single radical-moderate continuum. Brown et.al. (2006) also stress that even among most moderate mainstream Islamists, they identify “gray zones,” i.e. issue areas about which the thinking of Islamists are not clear, such as pluralism, civil and political rights, women’s rights, religious minorities, etc. that derive from the tensions within each group with respect to the direction of the movement between rival factions, i.e. between those who support the old goals of forming an Islamic state/ implementing shari’a, and those who support employing

peaceful political means. Yet, still, as Brown et.al. (2006, 4,8) stress, analysts who follow these Islamic groups closely over the years assure that there is an evolution in the thinking of these groups.

While much of the literature on Islamist parties employed the moderation through inclusion thesis to explain the similar transformation experienced by Islamist parties (Clark 2006, Wickham 2004), there have also been scholars who take the exclusion of Islamist political groups as the mechanism behind either their moderation (Cavatorta and Merone 2013) or radicalization (Hafez 2003, Hamid 2010). As Ahmad (2009, 8) states in his study that he explored the transformation of Islamism in India, “Islamism is not a static, fossilized entity, immutably locked into a dead end.” He suggests that Islamists have a complex relationship with secular democracy, and are affected directly by the political environment in the country. As his study shows, while Jamaat-e Islami’s youth group SIMI – Student Islamic Movement of India – radicalized due to the rise of Hindu nationalism that targeted Muslims during the 80s and 90s, Jamaat e-Islami’s participation in the elections, and the electorate’s disavowing radical islam led to moderation in its ideology as well as its forging alliance with its “former ... other’ – secular, atheist, even Hindu pontiffs” and democratization in the internal decision-making mechanisms.

In the moderation literature, “exclusion” is mostly used to refer to state repression of opposition political groups through means like jail, exile, or imposition of strict rules not to let their inclusion in the political system, it is also used to refer to societal rejection, i.e. societies’ not seeing their ideology and political categories as relevant ones. For instance, Cavatorta and Merone (2013, 872) employ two mechanisms of exclusion, i.e., state repression through imprisonment and exile, and societal rejection as the means that incited the Tunisian Ennahda Party/ movement, which was never given the chance to participate in the political system, to re-elaborate its political categories to be relevant in the society.

According to the moderation through inclusion thesis, through inclusion into pluralist political processes, Islamists are “socialized into the mechanisms of compromise and bargaining, the very foundation of the liberal democratic game,” and these processes lead them to review their strict ideological viewpoint “regarding the nature of the state and the extent of liberal rights.” (Cavatorta and Merone 2013, 863). As an important “moderation through inclusion” scholar, Schwedler (2007, 56), in a study that she examines three aspects of Islamist political parties’ inclusion (i.e. participation in elections, cooperation with ideological rivals and whether Islamists experience any moderation), shows that these parties widely participated in pluralist elections when authoritarian incumbents initiated political openings; and

in their first elections, most of them “[won] significant but not majority blocks in parliament [by winning] typically... 20-40 percent of the seats” due to their large, well-established networks in their communities. Some of these electoral victories were that of Hizbullah in Lebanon, of Yemen’s Islah Party in 1993 by winning the second largest block, and of Hamas in Palestine in 2006; besides, in Jordan in 1989 in the first elections after the suspension of the Constitution in 1967, members of the Muslim Brotherhood competed as independents since political parties were illegal, and the block dominated by them won 40 percent of the votes. Schwedler (2007, 57-58) shows that another characteristic of these political openings is that in many instances, Islamists engaged in cooperation with their ideological rivals to do well in the elections. Then, two things become clear through this analysis: when Islamists were given the opportunity to participate in the political system, they not only complied with the democratic rules of the game but also developed strategies to fare well in the elections. This also becomes clear in Kienle’s (1998) article in which the author suggests how Muslim Brotherhood developed strategies to fare well even in 1990’s unfair elections, conducted in a deliberalization process in Egypt, while multiple other parties responded to the unfair conditions by boycotting the elections. More specifically, as Kienle, 224 stresses, while 1987 election outcomes were important for the election of the largest number of opposition deputies after the dissolution of the single party system in 1976-1977, in 1990 elections candidates of the regime party, NDP, won 79 percent of seats compared to 68 percent in 1987 elections thanks to gerrymandering and a Supreme Constitutional Court ruling that made major changes in electoral law, biased in favor of the regime party, and which were promulgated to the opposition only two months before the elections. While parties such as Hizb al-Wafd, Hizb al-Amal (the labor party), and Hizb al-Ahrar (Liberals Party) boycotted the elections, Ikwan al-Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood) members decided to compete in elections through independent candidates to fare well.

Yet, to Brown et.al. (2006, 5), Islamists have turned into advocates of democracy mainly because it was not possible for them to be successful in closed authoritarian systems. As they explain, after the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, similar movements were born in other countries in the 50s and 60s, and by the late 1970s, they became major players in many Arab states, pursuing the objective of establishing an Islamic state. Their ideology, mainly based on the necessity of returning to Islam as a panacea to major crises in the Arab region, as exemplified by the long-time slogan of “Islam is the solution” of the Muslim Brotherhood, have supplanted pan-Arabism and socialism that swept the region until the 1970s; and they have emerged as the only viable opposition against the autocratic regimes.

As the mass movements of the twentieth century, they had the advantage of being well-embedded in societies with their good organization, since it gave them the opportunity to mobilize their supporters. Yet, their worldview evolved into more moderate and pragmatic ones, particularly after these goals proved unattainable and led to splits in these movements with the regime repression. Then, the majority in these movements directed their attention toward creating grassroots networks, and human rights, democracy, political participation, and elections started to find their way into their rhetoric and political strategies. Then, in many countries that were characterized by repression of Islamist organizations, either through forbidding their legal participation (like Egypt) or through making them go to exile (like Syria and Tunisia), Islamist opposition movements evolved into advocates of democracy.

Ayoub (2005) also stresses that strategies adopted by Islamists vary depending on the nature of the political system in which they function. And closed political systems have mainly contributed to the growth of Islamists since these authoritarian regimes in Muslim-majority countries mainly eliminated the secular opposition through the use of mukhabarat (intelligence) effectively, and the void in the political and intellectual arena is most of the time filled with Islamists. According to Ayoub (2005, 956-958) Islamists had two advantages in repressive regimes of Muslim-majority countries: First of all, Islamists have always had the chance to infiltrate institutions like mosques and affiliated institutions, which are outside the formal control of the state, and use these areas to spread their political message. Secondly, in these repressive authoritarian regimes which are not responsive to the demands of the society at large, Islamists can act as the main social service provider, particularly for the vulnerable populations, through charitable networks, and hence gain a constituency that can survive even in the face of state repression. This is how Islamism as an ideology and political movement survives in these repressive contexts.

For instance, Wickham (2002, 95) gives an account of how under the rule of ineffective repressive systems that deny the opposition groups' access to the political system, Islamists filled the institutional void left open by the regime in the periphery. In this regard, as he explains, starting from the late 1970s, particularly in the interstices of Egypt's authoritarian state, Islamists engaged in Islamic institution building in the periphery and led to the emergence of "substitute sites" of service provision and alternatives sites of political contestation, to the emergence of a kind of substitute state in the periphery into which Islam is incorporated. Wickham called this Islamic institutional building in the periphery "parallel Islamic sector" and defined it as a sector "largely independent of-and competitive with-the cultural, religious and service-oriented arms" of the state, and grouped them in three

categories as private mosques; Islamic voluntary associations such as welfare societies, cultural organizations, health clinics, and schools; and for-profit commercial and business enterprises such as Islamic banks and investment banks. To Wickham (2002, 95-97), what was particularly important about such “autonomous zones,” emergence which was particularly aided by the regional oil boom of the 1970s that led to the generation of resources/private capital beyond state control and created wealth for investment in communal projects, they turn into sites that made Islamists’ mobilization of the mass public possible during 1980s and 1990s.

As it becomes clear that Islamists have found substitute arenas to mobilize the masses under the authoritarian middle eastern regimes, as Bokhari and Senzai (2013, 21) also argue when a wave of political liberalization swept the region during the 1980s and 1990s, “Islamists were ready” for competitive elections and democracy turned into a powerful tool in their hands to promote change against the autocratic rules that tried to maintain the status quo.

Yet, as Brown et.al. (2006) also argue, it was particularly the post 9/11 environment that has strengthened the liberal trends in Islamist groups since Arab rulers had felt a pressure to provide their publics with greater political participation opportunities due to the new discourse on democracy that permeated the Arabic world. And it has primarily been participation in normal politics that gave Islamists the incentive to adapt to the changing circumstances. Bokhari and Senzai (2013, 4) also explain that the learning process for Islamists has continued and diversity has increased since their emergence in the first decades of the twentieth century; and as they argue, this diversity has kept increasing through fragmentation, mainly along ideological and strategic lines, during the seventy-year time period in which Islamists functioned as the marginal political opposition in their respective countries in a region dominated by secular nationalist authoritarian leaders, although all Islamists have kept sharing the common goal of “changing the secular geopolitical status quo.” In their account, while radical and militant Islamists have remained apolitical in this period, a significant number of Islamists adopted the democratic route and engaged with secular civil society actors. Yet, to Bokhari and Senzai (2013, 17-48), in the post 9/11 period, the US-led pressure on the Arab/Muslim world further exacerbated the polarization among Islamist groups in the world, as many became more radical and many others decided to moderate their views. Just as in this period transnational jihadism’s strategic weakening motivated many radical and militant Islamists to reexamine their attitude toward democratic politics and to establish political parties to participate in elections in the post-Arab Spring political environment (such as Egyptian Salafis al-Nour party), it would be possible for these conditionalist Islamists to join “participants” as well. It was such a learning process that motivated

the Muslim Brotherhood, who embraced democracy very early on albeit as a means to establish an Islamic state at the beginning, to turn into actors who embrace and value democracy as an end in itself and to view it almost “synonymous with the envisaged Islamic state” after their repression under autocratic rules of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak.

2.4 How to Conceptualize Islamism

In the literature, there is not a consensus over what Islamism is and who the Islamists are. While there are scholars who treat Islamists as diverse groups with different objectives, practices, and strategies albeit with the common dedication to implement shari’a, and who use different labels to capture this variation among Islamists, there are also those scholars who treat Islamists as a single category of analysis, as members of a single political project. Besides, there is a lot of confusion with regard to such concepts as Muslim, Islamist, fundamentalist, etc. as these concepts are used interchangeably, creating an “analytical confusion, [as these terms are often] thrown around lightly, . . . without a real understanding of their connotations and limitations” (Denoeux 2002, 56). That is why, any substantive discussion of how Islam in the hands of political actors manifests itself in politics requires a clear conceptualization of “Islamism.”

As one of those scholars who take Islamism as a monolithic ideology, Tibi (2012, 1-2,4) argues that Islamism is not only an ideology against democracy but also a deviation from Islam itself. To him, Islamists unite in their aspiration to establish a shari’a state and return to an (imagined) Islamic past and Islamic system of governance which has never existed before. Then, to Tibi, what Islamists are actually doing is “invent[ing] Islamic tradition.” In his words,

“Islamism grows out of a specific interpretation of Islam, but it is not Islam: It is a political ideology that is distinct from the religion of Islam. . . [It is not] a revival of Islam. It does not revive but rather constructs an understanding of Islam not consonant with its heritage. Islamism calls for a return of Islamic history and glory, but the state to which it seeks to “return” is, in Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase, an invented tradition. The Islamist utopia, an imagined system of divine governance named *hakimiyyat Allah* (God’s rule), has never existed in Islamic history. . . The religionization of politics is carried out in the name of an imagined *umma* (community). The resulting political order is known as a shari’a state. Islamism can therefore be identified as an ideology that

connects *din* (religion) with *dawla* (state) in a shari'a-based political order".

Moreover, since Islamism, in his view, rejects many concepts of modernity, including the nation-state as the basic political unit of the modern age, the notion of "nationness" referred to by Islamists' "imagined umma" is "ambiguous," unlike Anderson's notion of "imagined community" which refers to a notion of "nationness" in which an audience relates itself to a modern nation-state. And the radicalism of the Islamists should be judged not by their resort to political violence, but by their opposition to many of the concepts that underlie modernity. As part of this radicalism, to him, Islamist ideals are inherently in tension with modern notions of politics and political order; and that is why, once in office, Islamists suppress all opposition to their rule, which, according to Tibi (2012, 5), is what the AKP government has done even in democratic-secular Turkey.

Yet, to Tibi (2012, 3), the lesson to take from Islamist ideals and their imagined system of governance is the importance of not conflating Islamism with Islam. As he noted, just as Europe's totalitarian communist and fascist regimes contradicting the European Enlightenment rose, Islamism also rose as a totalitarian ideology in contradiction with the "humanism of Islam;" and we cannot put the blame neither on the European Enlightenment nor Islam for the rise of these totalitarian systems.

Denoeux (2002, 61) also makes an analysis of Islamism with respect to its relationship with modernity. He stresses that expressions of "Islamism" and "political Islam," which are used interchangeably, are the phenomena dating back to the 1970s, and "refer to the rise of movements and ideologies drawing on Islamic referents – terms, symbols and events taken from the Islamic tradition – in order to articulate a distinctly political agenda". More specifically, in an analytically useful definition, he defines Islamism as follows:

"Islamism ... is a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives. It provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition".

In his analysis, Islamist movements/ideologies' relationship with modernity and the West is "two-sided." On the one hand, he argues, Islamists view the West as the corrupting cultural/political force on Middle Eastern societies, and hence, make harsh criticisms against modernity and the West; their reliance on concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition, and avoiding Western terminology is also a reflection of this critique. On the other hand, to him, Islamism bears modernist characteristics in

terms of the technology used and the profile of the leaders and main cadres of Islamist movements, since the ideologues and main cadres of these movements are graduates of modern, secular education systems and members of the “new middle class” that scholars, throughout 1960s, predicted would be the promoters of Westernization/secularization in their respective societies (Denoeux 2002, 61).

We infer from the definition of Denoeux (2002) that it is not possible to talk about a monolithic Islamism and that what is common for all Islamists is the instrumentalization of Islam for political change/purposes. In this regard, there are scholars who make different typologies of Islamists. For instance, Bokhari and Senzai (2013, 20) argue that what Islamists have in common is their commitment to implementing sharia, that their disagreements revolve mainly around how to define and operationalize sharia, and that different views on these two points are what distinguish moderate Islamists from radical ones. As Schwedler (2006, 8) argues, notions of “moderate” and “radical” have been widely employed in the literature, as “moderate... [refers to ones who] seek gradual reform within the existing system, while radical [refer to the ones who] seek revolutionary change often through the use of violence”. Yet, in the literature, different labels are also used to make a similar differentiation among Islamists. For instance, Brown et.al. (2006) used the name “mainstream Islamist organizations” for the ones that renounce violence and engage in peaceful political activity to realize their goals, while Bokhari and Senzai (2013, 43) made the differentiation on the basis of their attitudes toward democracy, and used the name “participator” for those Islamist movements who think that Islam and democracy are compatible and that their integration is “both desirable and possible”. Moreover, to Bokhari and Senzai (2013, 43), there are also ones, among Islamists, who believe in the compatibility of Islam and democracy only with certain reservations as well as those who totally reject such a compatibility; and this variance in attitudes of Islamists toward democracy, mainly, is a function of competing interpretations of,

“the Qur’an, Sunnah (prophetic traditions), ijma (consensus), qiyas (analogical reasoning), the historic debates over *usul al-fiqh* (the principles of Islamic jurisprudence), and *fiqh* (juristic rulings).

On the other hand, Fuller (2003, xi,45) is also a scholar who thinks that when we talk about Islamism what we are dealing with is something much “looser and vaguer than a specific ideology” since Islamism has many forms. Then, as he wants to capture the broad spectrum of Islamist expression “from radical to moderate, violent to peaceful, democratic to authoritarian, traditionalist to modernist” in a single definition, he argues that, an Islamist is,

“the one who believes that Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and who seeks to implement this idea in some fashion”.

To Fuller (2003, 45), Islamism encompasses political movements, institutions, agendas, and philosophies in such a large spectrum that even their summation in a coherent whole is not possible. Still, what unites them is their drawing inspiration from Islam, their “almost obligatory call for an . . . Islamic government’ or . . . Islamic state,” even though the precise definition of these terms is unknown and open to different interpretations by different parties, and their agenda for change rather than support for the status quo. Furthermore, Fuller (2003, 44) also argues that although radicals and moderates employ different policies, both of them try “to exploit the same body of thinking and to rationalize their activities”. Another important point he makes is that most of the Islamist movements are “functionally progressive – that is, [not only do they promote] change [but also, they] introduce modern political ideas and practices even if in Islamic garb”. Besides, Fuller (2003, 46) also advocates the idea that Islamist parties are in a process of evolution, sometimes towards embracing the elements of liberal democracy, and sometimes towards the opposite direction, toward radicalism and violence; and what motivates Islamist movements to adopt a policy position is needs and aspirations of a society, local political culture, local experiences and pressures. Then, it would not be wrong to argue that those movements which can adapt to the needs and aspirations of society maintain their relevance.

2.5 Post-Islamism and Democracy

Then comes to the fore a relatively new concept, post-Islamism, which was coined in the 1990s to describe a relatively new phenomenon/discourse and phase of development in the Muslim world that was argued to have emerged as Islamic movements in the Middle East suffered from major failures and shortcomings, and Islamist ideology as an “alternative” lost its “credibility.” Hence, post-Islamism is assumed to be a stage of development in a Muslim context, emergence of which necessitates the prior failure of Islamism. (Lauziere 2005, 241-244).

Bayat (2016, 12,50), the scholar who first employed the concept of post-Islamism in 1996 to explain the transformation of Iran with the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and the death of Khomeini in 1989, also stresses that it is important to

view Islamism not as a static phenomenon, but as a dynamic one that evolves with its internal dynamics and external necessities. Yet, to Bayat, the concept of “moderation” does not explain this evolution from Islamist ideology to post-Islamist ideology, since “moderation” inherently lacks the capacity to show the direction and dynamics of change. Although “moderation” refers to a movement away from radicalism, it maintains relativity since what is perceived as moderate by one person can be viewed as radical by another.

As Bayat (2016, 29) explains, post-Islamism, in its early usage, was employed as a historical category, to explain the transformation experienced in Iran after the death of Humeini, rather than an analytical one. As Bayat explains, in Iran, the Islamic State led to the emergence of both internal and external opponents who advocated the secularization of the state and yet emphasized the persistence of religious and moral values in the society, including many former advocates of the Islamic State who came to an understanding a religious state is detrimental both to the state and the religion. Yet, post-Islamism turned into an analytical category as many other Muslim societies such as Indonesia, and Morocco experienced post-Islamism in different degrees and depths, and widths, after the criticism and evolution of Islamic groups/movements in these societies. In other words, support for secularization at the state level, and yet, the persistence of religious/moral values at the societal level has been the most defining element of post-Islamist transformation in Iran, and later, of Islamist groups/movements in other Muslim societies which have also gone through similar internal criticism and evolution processes.

In this regard, for the purpose of this thesis, what makes post-Islamism particularly important is that it “promises to make Islam compatible with democracy” (Bayat 2016, 13,48,51,53). Then, for the sake of democracy in Muslim societies, Islamism emerges as a “problem,” while post-Islamism emerges as a “solution”; post-Islamist ideology unites Islamic paradigm with democratic ideals, and hence, has a “liberating potential.” In other words, it provides Muslims with inclusive/democratic ideals as well as with loyalty to their religious values/beliefs. Then, the prefix “post” is used to refer to the criticism coming from inside, and hence, represents a rupture from the obligation-oriented and exclusionary Islamist ideology and its evolution to an inclusive, rights-oriented, civil/secular state aspiring ideology. Then, as Bayat argues, the emergence of post-Islamism necessitates a historical background; and, religious plurality, secularity, tolerance, and democracy emerge as the elements of post-Islamist discourse that destroy the Islamist paradigm. Then, he argues, in all post-Islamist transformations the common point is that all point to “a change in vision;” a rupture in the “Islamist ideology package” characterized by the monopolization of religious truth, exclusion, emphasis on obligations, towards acceptance

of obscurity, inclusion, and flexibility in principles and practices. Thus, a discursive and/or pragmatic rupture from the Islamic paradigm is what characterizes post-Islamist ideology.

Bayat (2016)'s (2016, 23-26) in-depth comparison of post-Islamism with Islamist ideology helps us grasp the virtue of post-Islamism better for the sake of democracy. He defines Islamism as ideologies and movements aimed at creating an "Islamic order," an Islamic state with shariah laws in Muslim societies. As he argues, Islamists' desire to capture the state power/control the state mainly derives from the Islamic principle of "ordering the good and forbidding the evil." Then, Muslims view the state as the ultimate power/means they would use to realize this principle. In this regard, normative perspectives of Islamists emphasize the obligations of individuals more than their rights; and hence individuals emerge as subjects with obligations more than citizens with rights. Then, although the means that Islamists employ to reach their ends vary, all of them employ a religious language and conceptual framework, and advocate a conservative societal order, and this makes them intolerant towards different views and lifestyles. Islamist ideology is characterized by its emphasis on religiosity and obligations, and this is what differentiates Islamist ideology from the post-Islamist worldview.

Then, Bayat (1996) defines post-Islamism as follows: (1996, 46),

"Post-Islamism. . . [is] a condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, symbols and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted, even among its once ardent supporters. As such, post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic, but rather reflects a tendency to secularize religion. Predominantly, it is marked by a call to limit the political role of religion. . . . [It] is associated with the values of democracy and aspects of modernity; . . . [and] is expressed in the idea that Islam does not have answers to all societies' social, political and economic problems. [It] implies an understanding that not only is Islam compatible with modernity, but its very survival as a religion depends upon achieving this compatibility".

In this regard, what we get from Bayat's definition and analysis is that post-Islamism is a stage, a "condition" that comes after a certain period of experimentation with Islamism, and is characterized by a political secularization process; and what leads to its occurrence are the contradictions and shortcomings of the Islamist experience itself. In the case of Iran, these failures and shortcomings were mainly the Islamic State's lack of capacity to find solutions to social and economic problems during the normalization period after the Iran-Iraq war, and the ulama's losing its independence after the fusion of religion and state in the Islamic state first time in the modern

history of Iran, which also undermined Islam, to some religious leaders. Then, in the words of Bayat (1996, 46-52), “in a sense, post-Islamism seeks to save Islam as faith by undoing Islam as politics”.

In 2007, Bayat, 11 wrote again that,

“Islamists become aware of their system’s anomalies and inadequacies as they attempt to normalize and institutionalize their rule. Continuous trial and error makes the system susceptible to questions and criticisms. Eventually, pragmatic attempts to maintain the system reinforce abandoning its underlying principles. Islamism becomes compelled, both by its internal contradictions and by societal pressure, to reinvent itself, but it does so at the cost of a qualitative shift. The tremendous transformation in religious and political discourse in Iran during the 1990s exemplifies this tendency”.

Then, he also adds that post-Islamism is not only a “condition” but also a “project,” an endeavor:

“[It] is a conscious attempt to conceptualize and strategize the rational and modalities of transcending Islamism in social, political and intellectual domains. Yet post-Islamism is neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic nor secular. Rather it represents an endeavor to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty. It is an attempt to turn the underlying principles of Islamism on its head by emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality instead of singular authoritative voice, historicity instead of fixed scripture, and the future instead of the past. It strives to marry Islam with individual choice and freedom, with democracy and modernity, to achieve what some scholars have termed “an alternative modernity.” Post-Islamism is expressed in acknowledging secular exigencies, in freedom from rigidity, in breaking down the monopoly of religious truth. In short, whereas Islamism is defined by fusion of religion and responsibility, post-Islamism emphasizes religiosity and rights.”

Yet, it is also important to stress that Bayat (2016, 50-51) also rejects calling post-Islamism “liberal Islam” since how post-Islamist movements deal with individual liberties shows great variance. In fact, to Bayat, in many post-Islamist experiences, there is a clash between post-Islamist morals and liberal values, and most of the time this results in a sort of “intolerant democracy,” which refers to post-Islamist rules’ practice of democracy by limiting some of the individual liberties.

As French scholar Lauziere (2005) explains in an article that he intends to expose the weaknesses of post-Islamist theory through an analysis of the discourse of Yasin, an Islamist thinker in Morocco, among these shortcomings/failures were the increasingly authoritarian character of Islamic republic in Iran, with discretionary powers

of Mullahs, Islamists' failure in generating an Islamic order in Egypt and Algeria and hence, "illusory" perception of Islamist order, and elsewhere Islamists' failing to cope with repression and containment policies of secular states. To Lauziere (2005, 241-243), as a result of all these failures/shortcomings, a number of scholars reached to the conclusion that "the holistic, populist, and often revolutionary" Islamist ideology, which aspires to establish an Islamic state and rule every aspect of society in line with Islamic principles, has come to a dead end; and they called the new era that was dawning, post-Islamism. To Lauziere (2005, 243), more specifically, scholars of post-Islamism have mainly relied on the following "historical narrative,"

"Post-Islamism assumes a chronological sequence in which Islamism rose, failed, and critically needed to reconsider its political, social and intellectual nature. According to this scenario, the 1970s were the prime of Islamism. During that decade, the Muslim Brotherhood's radical offshoots gained ground in Egypt following the defeat of Nasserism. In Pakistan, General Zia ul-haq toppled the socialist regime of Ali Bhutto in 1977 and allowed the political ascent of al-Mawdudi, his disciples, and his ideas. The decade culminated in Iran with the resounding victory of the Islamic revolution over the shah's regime in 1979. The gradual passage to post-Islamism occurred only later, after political disillusionment began in Iran in the mid-1980s and intensified with the global debacle of Islamism throughout the 1990s."

To Lauziere (2005, 244), as part of this narrative, the 1970s were portrayed as an era that was characterized by the rise of Islamists, who were influenced by Qutb, Khomeini, al-Mawdudi, in reaction to the "bankruptcy" of secular nationalist regimes, and who turned into main political opposition in the 1970s. Then, in this narrative, the 1970s turn into a "yardstick for identifying the later signs of post-Islamism."

Kepel (2000, 23) also wrote that, almost a quarter century after its birth, Islamism got into a stage of re-evaluation, since Islamist movements politically failed everywhere in which they were co-opted into power by secular governments as in Malaysia or Pakistan, or got into war with the state as in Algeria, or rose to power as in Sudan and Afghanistan. To Kepel (2000, 26), like in Iran during the presidency of reformist Mohammad Khatami, at the turn of the 21st century, Islamist movements/parties everywhere are striving to transform themselves into democratic movements by adopting democratic values such as universal human rights, women's liberties, freedom of expression, that they once decried as values of the West. And Kepel, 26 calls this a transition from yesterday's "militant Islamism" to tomorrow's "... Islamic democracy' of tomorrow, to ... post-Islamism".

Mahdavi (2011, 94) also makes an analysis of the transformation of Iran in the

post-revolutionary period in terms of post-Islamism, mainly emphasizing the emergence of the Green Movement in Iran, the first civic social movement in the Middle East, as the trademark of post-Islamist trend in Iran. When explaining the rise of post-Islamism, he also talks about the effect of “secular exigencies on religious discourse”. In his study, an important point he makes is that like Islamism, post-Islamism is not monolithic. In this regard, in multiple Muslim countries, various political/intellectual movements, such as the Centre Party in Egypt, Justice and Development Party in Turkey, Imran Khan’s Movement for Justice in Pakistan, and others, have been called post-Islamist. Yet, to Mahdavi (2011, 95), still there are also common themes among all post-Islamist movements. Accordingly,

“[Post-Islamism] is a radical call for a critical dialogue between sacred and secular, faith and freedom, revelation and reason, tradition and modernity, religiosity and rights, and local and global paradigms.”

In this regard, he also compares and contrasts post-Islamism with Islamism as follows:

“Post-Islamist discourse is neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic, nor is it a radical break from Islamism. It implies that islam is neither the solution nor the problem. There is a continuity and change between Islamism and post-Islamism. Similar to Islamism, post-Islamism accepts public religion. Contrary to Islamism, it rejects the concept of Islamic state. While religion might play a constructive role in civil society, the state is a secular entity no matter who the statesman is. . . Hence the concept of Islamic state marks a distinction between post-Islamism and Islamism, including moderate Islamism”.

Then, Olivier Roy (2016, 10) also talks about a post-Islamist trend in the Muslim world, and takes the rise of Islamist parties with democratic credentials as the confirmation of his well-known “failure of political Islam thesis.” He argues that what failed was Islamist parties’ utopian Islamic state ideal, and the salafists’ ideal of establishing an Islamic society through strict application of religious texts (7-9). Thus, he also takes Islamists’ rejection of the concept of an “Islamic state” as a key indicator of moving toward post-Islamism. He identifies main drivers behind this trend as follows: The first one is the prison and exile experiences particularly of Islamists in the Arab world. To him, often as a result of prison experiences where Islamists met secularists and human rights advocates, and of exile experiences in Europe, Islamists came to an understanding that taking into account/engaging in alliances with other views is important. The second factor he mentions is the “cultural gap” between older Islamists and younger more educated, individualistic generations as the younger generations’ understanding of “religiosity (the way the adherent expe-

riences his or her faith)” which is more individualized and more compatible with democracy, differed from old generations’ understanding to a large extent and led the Islamists to come to an understanding that the world has changed, and that Islamism cannot address the problems of the existing social, political realities.

Roy (2016, 10) defines new generations’ understanding of “religiosity” as follows:

“Islam as a theological corpus has not changed, but religiosity has. And this religiosity, liberal or not, is compatible with democratization because it delinks personal faith from traditions, collective identity, and external authority. Young . . . born-again’ Muslims have found their own way. . . They have criticized the cultural Islam of their parents and have tried to construct their own brand of Islam. . . This individualization and diversification have had the unexpected consequence of disconnecting religion from daily politics, of bringing religion back into the private sphere, and excluding it from that of government management”.

And Roy (2016, 13-17) describes the effect of this “cultural gap” on Islamism as follows: “This does not mean that the Islamists have disappeared, but that their utopian ambitions have proved to be no match for existing social, political, and even geostrategic realities”. Then, he argues that although re-defining the role of religion in politics may not give way to the secularization of a society, it would definitely lead to a new form of “political secularism,” and to the rise of Western-compatible kinds of religious activism.

Boubekeur (2007, 76-79), who examines the changes in the socio-political mobilization practices of politically engaged Muslims in the West, especially those who have moved from Islamism to post-Islamism also notes that particularly “young Muslims have been searching. . . for the ambiance of a . . . cool’ Islam, freed from the stigma of the . . . old’ Islamist rhetorics. . . [based on] the political and militant use of religion”. Then, mobilization practices are “reinvented,” and the new rhetoric employed for the integration is far from being “aggressive and radical, . . . in opposition to modernity and Western cultural standards;” it involves an emphasis not only on “normative religious corpus,” but also on “Islamic culture of prestige whose codes need to be mastered – codes largely secularized and based on the aesthetic norms of the West, on its liberalism, and on its efficiency and competitiveness”.

2.6 Analytical Trajectory of My Research

How do democracies in Muslim-majority countries evolve? This is the question guiding the analytical trajectory of this thesis. By exploring the answer to this question, I am expecting to contribute to the literature on the compatibility of Islam and democracy. For this, I draw on the post-Islamism concept described above. And taking post-Islamism as an analytical category in which religion meets (pluralistic notion of) democracy, in line with the above definitions, I seek to answer the question of how this transformation affects the development of democracy in Muslim-majority countries.

In line with the above definitions, I take post-Islamism as an analytical category in which religiosity meets (pluralistic notion of) democracy. Hence, this definition treats Islamism not as a static phenomenon, but as a dynamic one that changes with its internal dynamics and external requirements (Bayat 2016, 12). As we have seen above, broadly, the post-Islamist move can be taken as a break from the obligation-oriented and exclusionary Islamist ideology and its evolution into an inclusive, rights-oriented, civil/secular state-oriented ideology after experiencing Islamism for a certain period of time and seeing its shortcomings and contradictions (Bayat 2016, 13,46). Thus, since the post-Islamist move represents a change of normative framework and religious/political discourse on the part of former Islamist actors, I take this move as a point of reference in this thesis to make sense of/evaluate the democracy-related attitudes/performances of former Islamist actors and to identify changes, if any, in these attitudes over time.

To explore how democracies evolve in Muslim-majority contexts, the thesis will focus on two democracies, Turkey and Tunisia, featuring politically powerful post-Islamists who emerged as key drivers of democratic development. In other words, this thesis is also built on the premise that promoters of political change/democracy can come from a broad range of ideological backgrounds, including Islamism. In this regard, it will rely on an analysis of two post-Islamist (i.e, ideologically similar) parties, Tunisia's Ennahda Party and Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), that had moved out of Islamism, and their effect on/contribution to the democratization/democratic reversal processes of their respective countries.

Both the AKP and the Ennahda, which identify themselves as conservative-democrat and Muslim-democrat, respectively, rose to power and emerged as key drivers of democratization in their respective countries. Ennahda, which became legal after the Arab Spring, turned into a key political actor in post-authoritarian Tunisia.

It rose to power immediately after holding the first free and fair elections in 2011 with almost zero political experience beforehand since its main cadres are composed of former diasporas who were exiled in the UK and France for long years during Ben Ali era, and of those who stayed in Tunisia, but suffered in Tunisian prisons; and while the party never came to power as a single party government, it was part of coalition governments in Tunisia until Saied's seizure of power in 2021. Like Tunisian Ennahda, Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) also rose to power immediately after it was established, although its main cadres had political experience beforehand in the previously banned Islamist parties of Welfare and Virtue Parties.

Besides their sharing a common post-Islamist ideology and the fact that both parties have been in power for a long time and have directly influenced the democratization and democratic backsliding processes of their countries, another similarity is that the way both parties have blended democracy and Islam has, at one point, been cited by analysts as an example for other Muslim-majority countries. We have seen that even before the Arab Spring began, a TESEV survey in 2010 showed that the AKP's blend of Islam and democracy was supported by 66% of Middle Eastern societies. In the first years after the revolution, Ennahda also openly stated that it took the AKP as a model. As for Nahda, its emergence as a model was mainly the result of its voluntary withdrawal from power in order not to disrupt the democratic transition in the face of intense secularist pressure. Ghannouchi himself, in an interview with the international press at the time, spoke of his goal of establishing the first democratic model in the region that combines Islam and modernity.

And yet, as we will see, both countries have seen their democracy scores drop significantly following the adoption of constitutional amendments/new constitutions that put all power in the hands of a single person and removed checks and balances on the executive. Accordingly, Tunisia, which was categorized as "non-free" in 2011, according to Freedom House, which measures the concept of democracy through average freedom based on the degree of political freedoms and civil freedoms in the country, rose to the category of "free" in 2015 under the coalition government including Ennahda, and regressed to partially "free status" in 2023 following the adoption of a new constitution that concentrated all power in one person in 2022. Likewise, Turkey, categorized by Freedom House as "partly free" in 2002, the year the AKP came to power, was rated "not free" in 2018, after a national referendum approved a package of constitutional reforms that would formally introduce a "Turkish-type" presidential system that concentrates all power in the hands of a single person. As for the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) democracy index, which focuses on political institutions and freedoms, Tunisia was upgraded to hybrid regime status in

2011 after the revolution and to flawed democracy status in 2014 but fell back to hybrid regime status in 2021, when the current president Saied stalled the functioning of parliament in a constitutional coup, and reached its lowest score in 11 years with a score of 5.51 in 2022. Although the EIU's democracy index has consistently ranked Turkey as a hybrid regime under AKP governments, which is defined as a regime with significant irregularities that often prevent elections from being both free and fair, Turkey's score was above 5 until 2017 but dropped to 4.88 in 2017 and 4.37 in 2018. Moreover, according to this index, which was first published in 2006, Turkey's score was close to 6, that is, the flawed democracy category, until 2014. In 2014, it started to decline towards 5; in 2016 its score dropped to 5.04; and in 2017 it dropped below 5 with 4.88, and approached the authoritarian regime category.

And yet, if a normative framework is one thing that plays a role in the attitudes/actions of movements/parties, international/domestic constraints are the others. As Roy (2016, 13) also argues, "the convictions of political actors often play less of a role in shaping their policies than the constraints to which they are subject". Then, Roy also draws attention to the effect of constraining and conviction-changing factors on political actors. Thus, this thesis also involves an analysis of the interaction of agent-based factors (policies, discourses, intra-party and inter-party interactions) and structural factors (that is, international and domestic constraints, such as the domestic political environment, the country's economic indicators, the existence of an IMF program and/or EU conditionality). Therefore, one of the aims of this thesis is to explore the extent to which these actors' democratization efforts are driven by domestic/international constraints.

In order to identify changes in these parties' attitudes towards democracy over time, I used process-tracing methodology, a basic tool of qualitative analysis, based on the unfolding of events or situations over time, characterizing key steps and thus getting a good picture of a series of specific moments, and good analysis of change or sequencing (Collier 2011), for the period between their rise to power in their home countries and their decline in their categories/scores in international democracy indices. I employed a comparative approach to identify similarities and differences across cases. I also conducted semi-structured and face-to-face interviews in both countries with senior figures from the respective parties and researchers familiar with the subject. In Tunisia, interviewees included Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi, former Nahda ministers Samir Dilou, Nawfel Jamali and Nouredine Bhiri, senior party figures Riadh Bettaieb and Mehrezia Labidi, as well as Moncef Marzouki, who served as Tunisia's president from 2011 to 2014, secular Nidaa Tounes MP Wafa Makhlouf and professor Abdeljelil Temimi. The majority of the interviewees in Turkey are names who witnessed the first decade of the AK Party. Two of the

interviewees are still politically active in the AKP, while the remaining 8 interviewees parted ways with the party at different dates, but all of them after 2014. Due to my assurance that I will not use their names, I will refer to them using different codes such as AA, BB, CC, ... etc. I also asked former/current AKP figures about Tunisia's Ennahda, as many of them told me that they had met with Ennahda figures on behalf of the AKP in the first years after the Arab Spring and explained the AKP experience. A researcher/journalist who is familiar with both Tunisian and Turkish politics was also among my interviewees.

Finally, in order to understand from which point the democracies of Tunisia and Turkey experienced a reversal, it is necessary to define democracy, democratic transition, and democratic consolidation. We know that minimalist procedural definitions of democracy which are made through procedures of political institutions, such as elections, and which intend to make an empirical analysis between these formal political procedures and the outcomes is widely recognized in the comparative political science perspective. In this respect, we know that Dahl (1971), in this well-known book *Polyarchy* takes the key characteristic of democracy as the responsiveness of the government to the preferences of all its citizens, who are considered as political equals. In the words of Dahl (1971, 2), democracy is a "political system one of the characteristics of which is the quality of being completely or almost completely responsive to all its citizens." And for the government to be responsive to the preferences of its citizens, citizens should have three fundamental opportunities, which are, to formulate their preferences, to signify these preferences through unilateral or collective action, and to have weighed these preferences equally by the government in the conduct of government irrespective of what the source/or content of the preference is. Yet, for these opportunities to exist, institutions of society must provide at least eight guarantees. These are, the freedom to form and join organizations, the right to vote, eligibility for public office, the right of political leaders to compete for support/vote, alternative sources of information, free and fair elections, and institutions for making government policies depending on votes and preferences. In Dahl's account, these eight institutional guarantees are the procedural minimal conditions that must be present in a democracy. We know that in Dahl's (1971) account, these institutional guarantees provide us with a two-dimensional theoretical scale to order different political systems on the basis of the extent of permissible opposition (public contestation, or political competition) and the extent of inclusiveness. Thus, in Dahl's (1971, 3-4) account, democratization involves at least two dimensions, i.e., right to oppose (public contestation) and right to participate in elections and office. For the definition of a completed democracy transition, I will rely on that of Stepan and Linz (1996, 3), who define it as follows:

“A democratic transition is complete when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of free and popular votes, when this government *de facto* has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*”.

Furthermore, Stepan and Linz (1996, 6,12,13) define a consolidated democracy as “a political situation in which, democracy has become the only game in town; where no groups act to overthrow the government and the actors in the polity know that conflicts will be resolved according to established norms”. Furthermore, a consolidated democracy is identified in their work as an “interacting system” with five arenas, which are a state with a usable bureaucracy, a rule of law which is of crucial importance as a legal guarantee of freedoms not only of the majority but also of minority, a relatively autonomous political society which produces the laws (i.e., the legal framework) and democratic procedures as well as the regulatory framework (for economic society) which is enforced by the state apparatus, an institutionalized economic society, and free and lively civil society which not only provides legitimacy for the political society but also emerges as a major check on the state.

As we will see, Tunisia experienced a reversal of democracy before the democratic transition was completed. Although a constitution very close to Western standards was adopted in 2014, for instance, the constitutional court, which has very important tasks in democracies, such as resolving conflicts between powers and reviewing the constitutionality of laws, could not be established because the candidates did not receive enough votes, even though the parliament convened several times. Turkey’s constitutional amendments in 2017, which concentrated power in the hands of a single person, have been a setback for a country that does not yet have a consolidated democracy.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the most important recent study on political trajectories of Islamist parties is by Gümüşçü who explored the reasons behind the different political trajectories of Islamist parties in a comparative method. She compares Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey to explore the reasons for the different democracy experiences/paths of the three Islamist parties that came to power in the three countries. She explained why the Muslim Brotherhood that came to power after the Arab Spring in Egypt and the AKP in Turkey undermined democracy in the post-2011 period, while Ennahda in Tunisia committed democracy, based on intra-party dynamics, and in a comparative method. In sum, in Gümüşçü’s study, the balance of power within these parties between electoralists with majoritarian and exclusionary tendencies and liberals who commit to pluralist and inclusionary politics explains

why some Islamist parties commit to democracy while others do not.

More specifically, in Gümüşçü's study, electoralists are Islamists who see democracy as all about elections and believe that they have the moral superiority, have majoritarian, exclusionary tendencies, do not commit to or prioritize the normative requirements of democracy such as pluralism, deliberation, power-sharing, mutual tolerance, forbearance, etc., and therefore think they are entitled to rule hegemonically. Therefore, under their rule, democracy can turn into a zero-sum game, hence the tyranny of the majority. "Liberal Islamists" are those who recognize the value of democratic politics beyond its immediate benefits and internalize democratic norms and principles. Thus, Islamist parties dominated by liberals are committed to pluralist democracy and the liberal democratic norms, while parties dominated by electoralists, where liberals are weak, tend to be hegemonic. Power balances are determined by who commands key (organizational) resources. Ultimately, what distinguishes Ennahda in Tunisia from the other two parties in Turkey and Egypt is the marginalization of electoralists within the party. In the case of the AKP in Turkey, although the liberals were initially able to tilt the balance of power in their favor, the electoralists were later able to tip the balance in their favor.

In what follows, in a similar comparative approach combined with process-tracing, I explore how post-Islamist transformation of former Islamist actors has affected the political trajectories of the AKP in Turkey and Ennahda in Tunisia as the parties were in governance. As the cases are different yet comparable, they provide important analytical openings to see how post-Islamist transformation is not sufficient for democratization, how they actually operate in democracy but are fragile to coup attempts and even regime breakdowns. As mentioned above, the political trajectories of these parties also reveal that post-Islamism is a dynamic concept affected by the governance processes of these parties.

First, I will focus on the AKP, which emerged as a democratizing/transformational actor, especially in the first period of its rule, and then, shifted to an increasingly authoritarian line after 2011, with Islamic undertones, when the domestic and external constraints that may have had an impact on it disappeared. After 2015/2016, with the complete purge of moderate, post-Islamist figures within the party, we've seen an acceleration of authoritarianism, accompanied by a nationalist and Islamist line. In the case of the AKP, in addition to agency-based factors such as discourses, policies, intra-party relations and interactions with other parties, the incentive for EU membership, the market, the existence of a powerful military-led secular establishment and the struggle against it, the relations with the West, are factors included in the analysis.

3. THE FEBRUARY 28TH PROCESS AS A TURNING POINT IN TURKEY'S DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS

3.1 The Attitude of the Post-Republican Turkish State Towards Religion

Before answering the question of whether and how the AKP, which was established in 2001 and rose to power in 2002, established the relationship between religion, state, and politics, and differentiated itself from the former Islamist parties, out of which it was also born, and whether it represents a post-Islamist identity in Turkey, first we need to set forth clearly how the Turkish state established the relationship between religion and modernity since the establishment of the Republic in 1923 as well as the domestic and international context of the 1990s which laid the foundation for the emergence of the AKP. An analysis of the domestic and international context of the 1990s refers to the events that led to the empowerment of the armed forces vis-à-vis the civilian politicians throughout 1990s, the Memorandum that the armed forces imposed on the coalition government of the Islamist RP and the center-right DYP that ruled the country between June 1996 and June 1997, the discourses of the Islamist RP and the FP which was established after the shutdown of the RP, what criticisms the reformists in the FP had against the National Outlook tradition, what domestic and international factors strengthened the hand of the reformers and made their rise to power possible.

We can safely argue that the Turkish state, established in 1923 after an independence war, followed the European and, more specifically, the French model when formulating its relationship with religion. In other words, it perceived religion as a threat before the modernization process of the country, and tried to erase the imprints of religion from the society as much as possible. Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2009), in their well-known book *God is Back*, make a good summary of two different models with regard to the relationship between religion and modernity, two

distinct modernization paths, generated by the French and the U.S. revolutions. Accordingly, since in France, the established churches took the side of the old establishment vis-à-vis democracy/liberty, the revolutionaries treated religion as part of the old regime and assumed that the modernization process would marginalize religion; in other words, the French model assumed a clash between religion and modernity. On the other hand, the U.S. model assumed a (possible) compatibility since the founding fathers' more positive views of religion and the development of an Americanized version of Christianity led religiosity to grow together with modernity after the revolution.

And yet, as Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2009) stress, although the revolutions in the U.S. and France started two different versions of modernization processes in the world, it was the European version that was widely adopted in the world till the beginning of the 21st century; in this respect, important intellectuals from Karl Marx to Weber to Nietzsche to Freud explained why they saw religion as a kind of oppression or a kind of tutelage that needs to be dismissed. The authors add as the idea that modernity required the dismissal of the tutelage of religion pervaded the world, not only did Marxist dictators such as Lenin and Mao push atheism on their societies, but also "less dogmatic leaders in the developing world," such as Atatürk in Turkey, Nehru in India, Nasser in Egypt and Pahlavi in Iran treated religion as a symbol of backwardness and an impediment before progress, and worked hard for the religion to lose its effect in society. Then, as it was believed that the "modern man had outgrown God," not only did the Americans were treated as an anomaly for their version of modernization, but also secular viewpoint became the common characteristic of the most popular books of the 1990s such as Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) and Kissinger's *Diplomacy* (1994). The authors also explain how religion faded away as a study area by stressing that not only did the word "religion" not take place in the index of Kissinger's nine-hundred-page masterpiece, but also articles on religion were published only half a dozen times between 1980 and 1999 in four primary international relations journals. Finally, in the millennium issue, the magazine *Economist* announced the Almighty's "passing into history."

And yet, this 2009 book draws attention to a recent reverse trend, the trend of the revival of religiosity, which emerged particularly in the developing world in general, including the old communist countries, and its raising awareness among Western liberals with the question of "what if secular Europe is the odd one out?" (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009, 38). Relying on global estimates of religious observance, the authors argue that the rate of people with attachment to four main religions in the world, i.e. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, increased

from 67 percent to 73 percent between 1900 and 2005, and is expected to increase to 80 percent in 2050. Moreover, the authors stress that what was particularly striking about this revival of religion trend was that religion was now using the things that were predicted to demolish it – such as democracy, markets, and reason – to grow stronger. In addition, in much of the world, it was primarily the educated, upwardly mobile sections of the population, the new middle classes that led this trend of revival of religion; this revival of religiosity was accompanied by the rise of prosperity. In other words, religiosity became integrated into the modernization processes of countries. Then, this book argues that many modernizing countries which saw an increase in religiosity at the turn of the 21st century would also follow America's example rather than the European model. Then, now it was the turn of the U.S. style¹ modernization to spread in the world. Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2009) also give an account of how the U.S. grew stronger as it became more Christian on the basis of two texts, Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), and the American Constitution (the First Amendment), both of which set forth the "competitive mechanism"² behind religion's revival".

Then, the authors detail how the free market mechanism, pluralism, and the "competitive spirit" it created, and choice/tolerance for peoples' choices that competition entails, transformed religion into a "bottom-up affair," leading to the growth of first Methodism and then Baptistism in the US in the period immediately after the revolution, when "churches had to let people in the door;" and explain how Christianity became a driving force and contributor to the democratization/modernization process in the U.S.³. What particularly matters for the purpose of this thesis is the

¹For the purpose of this thesis, another important point the authors emphasize is that since the American Revolution had a purely secular character, and the Founding Fathers were dealing with a purely "political" problem, which is the problem of prevention of tyranny, i.e. how to prevent people with power, either priests or rulers, from dictating their will on common people, neither the religiosity of certain Founding Fathers such as Patrick Henry, John Jay, and John Witherspoon nor the recognition of Jesus by some of them as a "moral teacher" impeded the realization of this compromise. In this context, both the separation of church and state and the division of powers were dealt with as political problems; in the resolution of this political problem, both the Bible and philosophical/theoretical works of Aristotle, Montaigne, and Locke were benefited; and the solution that was found, brought about "the survival of religion in the modern world" (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009, 144).

²Accordingly, in the *Wealth of Nations* Smith highlights how religions also work with free-market by comparing the performances of established and non-established clergy in proselytizing. To the book, non-established clergy does a better job in proselytizing thanks to the workings of free-market, since he relies on the collection plate of the common people for income, but not on the political establishment. When it comes to the First Amendment, to the authors, it has been the main drive of religiosity in the U.S. since it created the conditions under which church membership occurs purely on a voluntary basis. Accordingly, the First Amendment, which declared that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" was an important compromise that got rid of an established church, turned religion into a matter of "individual conscience rather than statecraft," and established "a firm distinction between public reason and private faith." Hence, this compromise worked both ways: not only did it prevent the state from interfering in religion but also it kept the church away from politics (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009, 59).

³According to the data provided by the authors, the Methodists became the largest religious group in the country as the rate of the Methodists increased from three percent in 1887 to one-third of all church members by 1850; and overall church-going Americans increased from seventeen percent in 1776 to thirty-four percent in 1850. The number of clergy increased three times as fast as the population in this period. And

authors' stressing that people are increasingly living in a world in which religion is not dictated but chosen in the marketplace of religions and that even Europe which is "the heartland of secularization" could not remain exempt from this pluralism of/ competition between religions/sects due to the growing number of religious minorities, which increased the awareness of European people about their own religions as well (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009, 42-65). The extent that pluralism reached, led Peter Berger to make the following argument, as the authors quoted: "We thought that the relationship was between modernization and secularization. In fact, it was between modernization and pluralism". The authors also explain that in modernizing countries religion and religious charities have also filled the vacuum of security mechanisms⁴ as well.

According to the authors, people's choice of their own religion has had implications in public life⁵, with people's religious affiliation increasingly reflected at the ballot box. Thus, they argue, the rise to power of the AKP in Turkey, the Hindu nationalist BJP in India, and the Law and Justice Party in Poland, which came to power "on the promise of a moral revolution," had much to do with the trend towards the revival of religion in the modernizing world (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009, 44-65).

Therefore, what is particularly important for this thesis is that although there have been two different models of modernization in the world in the last 200 hundred years, the Turkish state, like many other countries in the world, has followed the European model of modernization since the founding of the Republic, trying to erase the public manifestation of religion, assuming that religion would disappear from society with modernization, and repeatedly, shutting down Islamist parties on the grounds that they were the focus of anti-secularist activities; and that the AKP's rise to power is part of the global trend of increasing religiosity and its integration into modernization processes.

by 1860, overall Evangelicals composed of eighty-five percent of the church-going Americans. Furthermore, the authors stress, this process is contributed by the "Americanization of religion" as the theology of Evangelicals in the U.S. rejected "hierarchy and tradition," as well as the idea of salvation through mediation, and stressed the importance only of the Bible and one's own conscience. Also, the authors add, Evangelicals were "compulsive institution builders;" the societies they formed, such as the American Bible Society, and the American Sunday School, etc., became important places where people generated social bonds with each other, and hence these societies contributed to the emergence of "social capital" in a society with "no traditions, or common habits, to forge links between their minds," in the words of Tocqueville. And finally, we also know that the Evangelicals generated the spine of the Whig Party, which later generated the Republican Party. This whole process explains how Christianity became a driver of and a contributor to the democratization/modernization process in the U.S. (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009, 61-333).

⁴To Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2009, 336) if migration is one factor, economic development levels not high enough to afford high welfare spending, or higher levels of income but low welfare spendings for cultural reasons as in the cases of Korea and China, are other factors that increase the demand for religion and the need for religious-based charities in modernizing countries.

⁵According to Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2009), the increase in religious civil wars is another manifestation (since in the 1940s and 1950s the rate was only one in four).

Why the founding cadres of the Republic adopted the European model of modernization, despite its alignment with global trends, needs further elaboration. Berkes' (1964) analysis of the adaptation of the Ottoman Empire to global changes and challenges in the last two hundred years, culminating in the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, on the basis of the secularization/modernization of society is a well-known one, in this sense. Berkes provides a narrative, from the early nineteenth century onwards, of the emergence of religious and modern/secular institutions as two separate and opposing sources of power, and the emergence of modernization, Westernization, and secularization as indispensable parts of each other in the eyes of military and Westernized elites, while religion emerged as backwardness, irrationality and an obstacle to progress (modernization).

Then, in this account, secularization/systemic change that started during the reign of Mahmud II in the Ottoman Empire in the army then moved to education and then changed the legal system. And at the point where it moved to education, traditional institutions based on religion and religious institutions and new modern institutions began to emerge as two sources of power, creating a wider gap between the modern and the religious in the Ottoman Empire⁶. Then, the systemic change continued during the reign of Abdülmecit who came to power in 1839 and introduced major legal changes⁷ into the system. After the Tanzimat, the millet system was more or less abolished, religion was pushed to the background and the system became more secularized. The process of revolutionizing the legal system continued with the adoption of the Constitution of 1876, which introduced the Ottoman Empire to

⁶More specifically, Berkes (1964) explains how in the 16th century the revenue of the military went away with the discovery of the new continent America since the trade center switched from east Mediterranean to North Atlantic, and how the Ottomans started to lose wars against both the West and the Russians starting from 1680s, and then, how the question of how to fix the army came up starting from 1710s and led to the effort of learning from the European experience. In this regard, Berkes gives an account of how in a cycle of war-defeat-introversion process, came the total massacre of janissaries and the establishment of a modern army in 1825 by Mahmud II, how the modern army is educated by French instructors, in French, modern sciences and martial arts, and how this process started an unintended process of social transformation as well as a political one by creating a demand for instruction in French as well as a demand for science education in the society and by paving the way for modernizing the education system since as a result of the opening of sultani high schools in 1840s and the muslim peoples' sending their kids to these schools in 1860s education system became focused on French education and bifurcation of education institutions occurred, with the emergence of those institutions that are controlled by the clergy and those that are controlled by the state. Therefore, traditional institutions that rested on religion and religious institutions versus new modern institutions began to emerge as two power sources. In other words, to Berkes, all these reform processes ended up creating a bigger rift among the modern and the pious in the Ottoman Empire.

⁷In Berkes' account (1964), in line with the treaty of 1839, a number of laws, commercial code, administrative code, and also civil code were fully changed or introduced for the first time by adaptation of various Western practices. In the edict, the equality before law was introduced for the first time, the Sultan accepted the idea of limited government, and also established the reorganization of officialdom into bureaucracy for the first time as well. After the adoption of the Constitution in 1876, that is, by the end of the 19th century all legal realms were secularized since in a short time all laws except for the family law were taken from the hands of the religious judges to the secular realm for all communities. Yet, as Berkes explains, the Ottoman military kept on failing to perform. Then, the finances collapsed, and the misperformance of the military created a lull in the social modernization of the society by the establishment of a rather heavy-handed and absolutist regime of Abdulhamid II, who by relying on a clause in the Constitution, suspended the activities of the assembly in 1878. Although the Constitution assumed that it would be a temporary step, it lasted for 30 years.

representative institutions for the first time.

In Berkes's (1964) analysis, the reign of Abdulhamid is an important phenomenon, which came out of Tanzimat period, but also a reaction to that period as he established a neo-patrimonial rule, worked in committees in the palace, and connected with the rest of the society through networks of religion, i.e. through unofficial connections with religious communities. And he built up his title as the Caliph. As the Empire started to decompose and fall, using religious titles became more important. So, religion became a hinging mechanism⁸ between Sultan and the masses bypassing the established bureaucracy.

However, as Berkes (1964) explained, towards the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, a form of nationalism developed in the form of national resistance against the occupying forces of the First World War. In this process, Ottoman society began to experience mass politics for the first time in 1908. The Committee of Union and Progress transformed itself into a political party. Eventually, politics became less associated with the palace and more with popular processes, and in a sense became more secularized. Therefore, his argument is that Ottomans, just like any other Empire, in the last two hundred years, went through this process of coping with nationalism, creating a new form of political system, dissociated from tradition and religious bases; and that, out of this process came out a certain understanding of secularization for the Turkish case.

Turan (1991, 37,43) also stresses that to the military bureaucracy who established the Republic, the main reason behind the decline of the Ottoman Empire was "too much tradition (including religion) and not enough modernity," and that is why they engaged in an assertive secularization project after the establishment of the Republic. He explains the post-independence war process, and the emergence of a certain understanding of the secularization/modernization process in the context of generating a nation and a common political culture as follows:

[The Independence War] "was waged in the name of political community, a nation, whose characteristics were not explicitly spelled out... With the successful completion of the war, and then the establishment of the Republic, efforts were launched to shape the population which remained within the boundaries of the state into a new political community. Mem-

⁸ As a result, Abdulhamid thought he could fight with nationalism, the most important matter of the time. In other words, the reform process after Tanzimat came under stress with another revolutionary idea that came from the West: nationalism. This nationalism in the Ottoman Empire was based on racial-religious grounds though, and first developed in the Balkans (one nation per church). All Christian communities rose up against the Ottoman Empire between 1821 and 1908 and declared their independence. And in 1912, the Ottoman Empire lost the war against nationalist forces. Ethnic/religious-based Turkish nationalism also developed at the end of the 19th century and promoted the establishment of a new Turkish state in a land called Turkistan (Berkes 1964).

bership in the new political community was acquired by being a citizen of the nation-state. Citizens were expected to develop a Turkish national identity, in this way enhancing their feelings of attachment to the political community. This required changing the basis of community membership, which had been, up to that point, religious. The secularizing reforms of Atatürk were intended... to achieve that very purpose”

As noted above, the republican elite who adopted the European version of modernization, viewed religion (Islam) as a threat before modernization and assumed that religion would fade away in the society through modernization. Turan (1991, 33) called this modernization/secularization process, which constituted “the essence of Kemalist reforms” in the Republican period, “polity dominance secularization,” a term coined by Donald Smith, and defined as “the initiation of an open governmental attack on the religious basis of general culture, and the forcible imposition of secular ideology on the political culture”. As Heper and Güney (2000, 637) stated, not only during the single-party rule (1923-1946) but also in the multi-party period the secularist state elite kept a close watch on Islam; the only difference was that in the multi-party period limited religious openings were allowed as such considerations as electoral competition and search for a common moral core in the society in the face of the threat of communism came into the picture.

Thus, we can safely argue that the founders of the Republic, who had a military background, identified the state and main principles of the Republic, the primary one being secularism, as the main values that must be safeguarded, and the secular bureaucracy led by the military proclaimed itself the primary guardian of these values. In other words, as Heper and Güney (2000, 637) stated, the military which emerged as the “object” of modernization in the nineteenth century, became the “subject of modernization” as well as the ultimate guardian of the main principles of the Republic although during the single-party rule between 1923 and 1950 the military was subordinated to the civilian rule. To the authors, although during the center-right DP’s single-party rule in the 1950s, the military’s guardianship role was shared with the center-left CHP, starting from the 1960s the military, again, emerged as the sole protector of the Republic with the fragmentation and polarization of civilian politics and the change in the position of the center-left CHP “from the center to the periphery”. Then, we can argue that the military tutelage has been the main characteristic of the Turkish political system, and we will see that the military’s efforts to design Turkish politics reached its peak in the mid of 1990s.

The military’s guardianship role and political autonomy, undoubtedly, had legal/constitutional bases as well. Since 1960, Turkish democracy has not only been interrupted by military interventions, but each time the military has handed over

power to civilians only after establishing mechanisms to maintain its influence in politics. In this respect, the National Security Council (NSC), which was initially introduced by the 1961 Constitution, became the main mechanism through which the military consolidated its power vis-à-vis civilian governments. As Sakallıoğlu (1997, 157-158) stressed, although the NSC was initially designed to provide the military with a mechanism to “voice its opinions on matters of national security,” and although initially, the civilian members outnumbered the military members in line with the more liberal stance of the 1961 Constitution, both the number/weight of the military members in the NSC and the functions of the NSC increased through 1973 amendments and 1982 Constitution. Accordingly, while the 1973 amendments enhanced the power of the NSC by authorizing it to “make recommendations to the government,” 1982 Constitution further strengthened the NSC by adding the clause, “its recommendations would be given priority consideration by the Council of Ministers”. Then, these legal/constitutional changes, to Sakallıoğlu (1997, 157), brought to the fore “a double-headed political system,” in which “the civilian council of ministers coexisted with the NSC on the executive level”. Furthermore, not only had the military the chance to operate its own justice system alongside the civilian court system, but also after 1980 a separate criminal court system, called the state security courts, was established for the trial of cases concerning the security of the state.

Another legal mechanism that empowered the military vis-à-vis civilian politics had been the Internal Service Act of the Turkish Armed Forces, which was adopted in 1961. Accordingly, while Article 35 of the Act (in 1961) authorized the military to “defend the Turkish Fatherland and the Turkish Republic as defined by the Constitution,” Article 85 further described this function of the military as “defend[ing] the country against the internal as well as external threats, if necessary by force” (Heper and Güney 2000, 637). Then, it is possible to argue that both the NSC and the Internal Service Act of the TAF symbolized the institutionalization of the power of the military vis-à-vis civilian politics. Due to this positioning of the military as the ultimate defender of the principles of the Republic against external and internal threats, civilian-military relations in Turkey have always been problematic.

Some scholars have a more positive view of the military’s interference in civilian politics, though. For instance, Heper (2005, 215-216), after acknowledging that Turkish civil-military relations differentiate from the ones in liberal democracies in which “civilian government has the last word” and the military “is consulted by the civilian government on issues related to security,” argues that Turkish civil-military relations are characterized by two behavioral patterns, depending on the competence of the civil governments in solving problems. Accordingly, in the presence of

a competent government that gained the confidence of the military in solving problems, the civilian governments had the upper hand and were able to sideline the military. Özal's prime ministership, characterized by successful economic policies, and the 1999-2002 three-party coalition between Bülent Ecevit, Devlet Bahçeli, and Mesut Yılmaz, during which both structural reforms to alleviate the economy and democratization steps were undertaken, represented such periods, to Heper. And, in his account, when the military did not have confidence in the competence of the government in solving problems, the military and the civilian government turned into hostile adversaries, and during such periods the military obtained too much autonomy.

In another study, Heper and Güney (2000) brought a different perspective to the issue though, and argued that although the Republican elite (including the military officers) viewed democracy as an integral part of westernization, they mainly advocated what Sartori (1987, 51-54) called "rational democracy," which had serious implications over state-society relations. According to Sartori, 52, who distinguished between rational democracies of the French type and empirical democracies of the Anglo-American type, the former was the product of a "revolutionary rupture" and represented "a complete break with and rejection of the past," while the latter emerged "in a process of gradual...historical growth" and represented "a departure, a demand for the right to move forward on the path of freedoms that already existed in England".

To Sartori (1987, 52-54), the main implication of this differentiation was that in a rational democracy of the French type, "those who wrote about politics (and formulated abstract principles of politics) and those who engaged in politics...[were] sharply separated." Thus, "abstract principles" and "imaginary society," which Sartori, quoting Tocqueville, defined as "[the society] above real society...the society in which everything seem[s] simple and coordinated, uniform, just and rational," became the main features of this kind of democracy. Furthermore, another implication was that in this perception of democracy, "the rationally-trained mind...[is] concerned with the State, ...not with government...[because] the latter are fluid and changing occurrences, while the State is a fixed structure". ...Therefore, "rationalist democracies are always in danger of becoming imaginary democracies, far from reality..." to Sartori.

It is possible to argue that these efforts of the state elite to create an "imaginary society" had certain unforeseen societal implications, in the Turkish case. For instance, İlter Turan (1991) identified the state's "compulsory modernization" efforts as one of the reasons for the politicization of Islam. And the causal process was that the mod-

ernization steps taken by the state from above-created resistance to change in society, especially in the periphery, among those who were deprived of the resources/skills to influence the ruling center, and Islam. . . “was the most readily available ideological framework to which people could turn for guidance,” in the words of (Turan 1991, 43). To Turan (1991), an alternative causal factor for the politicization of Islam was the socioeconomic change process that created “losers,” such as “small merchants, craftsmen, and small shopkeepers,” who resorted to religion to express their dissent, particularly when they could not explain the socio-economic change around them “on rational grounds.” Yet, to him, the fact that the Nation Party, as the representative of religious-based opposition against the secularist CHP, could not garner enough votes in the 1950 elections and instead the secularly-oriented center-right DP, which was known for its tolerant stance toward religion and which was “responsive to the pragmatic needs of the population,” including the religiously-oriented ones, won the elections, and the fact that religiously-oriented parties increased in number, particularly towards the end of the 1960s, leads us to conclude that more than the cultural change-based explanation, socio-economic change-based explanation of the politicization of Islam was more valid (Turan 1991, 43-45).

3.2 The National Outlook Tradition in Turkey

Regarding Islamist parties in Turkey, we can first emphasize that the most important political figure representing Islamism from the 1970s to 2000s was Necmettin Erbakan. Starting from 1969, he established Islamist parties, which were closed down one after another for being the focal point of anti-secular activities. Although Erbakan called the ideology of these parties “the National View/Outlook,” it was an Islamist ideology and involved radical rhetoric. The Islamist character became most manifest in Erbakan’s differentiation of the constituency of the National Outlook parties from the constituency of other parties by calling the former “believers.” His sentence, “we have believers while other parties have voters,” is quoted a lot in this regard.

Erbakan’s National Outlook rhetoric/identity involved frequent references to the Ottoman past/identity. He defined the National Outlook ideology as the self, history, morality, and identity of this nation. In an interview, aired in 2012, he said, “[all other] parties defined as leftist or liberal or center-right have no place in our (Ottoman) history. Was Sultan Fatih a leftist or a liberal? He was a National Viewist.” He drew a bold line between National Outlook parties and all other parties in the

country, accused all other parties in the country of not being compatible with the unique history and geography of this country, and called them imitators of the West and partners/collaborators of Zionist institutions. He added, “Starting from the ‘age of happiness’ (Golden Age in Islamic history) until the failure of the attempted siege of Vienne in 1683, including Umayyads, Abbasids, Seljuks, and Ottomans in between, we (implying as Muslims) owned the material power in the world, established a world of happiness and maintained it for a long time.” In his account, these Muslim states delivered the best service to humanity thanks to their (Islamic) faith. Yet, after the failure of the siege attempt of Vienna in 1683, Zionists captured the material power of the world and built their own order in the world. Then, according to Erbakan, today we all live in the Zionist order. Dollar as today’s world money, and all international organizations, such as the UN and the WTO, serve Zionism by creating unfair conditions for the rest of the world and transferring all the money in the world to Zionists. In his account, the main goal of Zionism is to establish the Great Israeli state, to capture the control of the countries from Morocco to Indonesia, and to destroy Turkey, which not only repulsed the Crusades in history, but also prevented the establishment of the Great Israel till today (Erbakan 2012).

Then, Erbakan presented the National Outlook ideology as the most recent successor of Islamic-faith-based ideologies, capable of fighting Zionism, and with a potential to provide the salvation of this nation (and humanity). In this regard, “the National View”, and “the Just Order,” the order proposed by this ideology as an alternative to the capitalist system, were presented by Erbakan as a panacea to the problems deriving from the unfair conditions created by Zionists. To Erbakan (2012), this fight of the National View against Zionism is the fight of truth against falsehood. And although the National Outlook parties came to power as coalition partners multiple times before, it was on June 26, 1996, that Erbakan became the prime minister of a coalition government after the Welfare Party (RP) took 21% of the votes in the national elections.

Then, as Turan (1991) rightfully noted, in Turkey it was not possible to identify a religiously-oriented party, whose discourse was based solely on religious elements. In other words, the discourse of the National Order Party, which was established in 1969, and all other successor National Outlook parties were composed of multiple elements, and religion (morals) was only one of them. And what appealed more to the electorate, particularly to the ones marginalized in the society through socio-economic change, were the socio-economic elements of their discourse, such as the Just Order discourse, rather than the religious elements (Turan 1991, 47).

As we will see below, the success of RP mayors in the 1989 local elections and the

subsequent political vacuum created by the corrupt image of the center-left coalition partner SHP and the failure of the coalition government of center-left SHP (Social Democratic Populist Party) and center-right DYP (True Path Party) parties to manage the economy enabled the rise of the Islamist RP, which took advantage of the political vacuum and targeted the urban poor, both through the Just Order discourse and the activities of grassroots organizations. The RP, then, increased its vote share first in the local elections held on March 27, 1994, and then in the general elections held on December 24, 1995, bringing the National National Viewist RP to power.

Then, a closer look at the Turkey's political environment in the 1990s provides us with the conditions that gave rise first, to the Islamist RP and then, to the post-Islamist AKP. An analysis of the political environment in the 1990s also helps us understand how and why the AKP differentiated from the former National Outlook parties of the RP and the FP (the Virtue Party).

Although the Turkish political landscape in the beginning of the 1990s was characterized by the rise of social democrats (SHP) who won mayorship in multiple major cities as well as in Istanbul in the 1989 local elections and then became a coalition partner of center-right True Path Party (DYP) between 1991 and 1995 in a coalition government, a series of events led to the social democrats' fall out of favor with the society and Islamists' filling the void left by the social democrats.

The first of these events was the corruption scandal at the Istanbul Water and Sewerage Administration (ISKI), which operates under the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. This scandal, which led to the prosecution of the Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality as well as many ISKI executives, made the headlines of media organizations as the SHP's deception of the public because it raised questions such as whether ISKI tenders were transferred to the SHP's coffers to be used for party financing and whether the tenders were rigged, and the public opinion was formed that the SHP's local administrations had become synonymous with bribery and corruption. In April 1994, what followed this scandal of late 1993 was a very severe economic crisis that led to the sudden impoverishment of the society (32. Gün 2012a).

The currency crisis in 1994 mainly driven by the DYP-SHP coalition government's attempt to carry out a massive public sector borrowing⁹. And at the end of this pro-

⁹The government with increasing public sector borrowing rates in early 1990s, decided to control the interest rates and pursued treasury borrowing which at the same time diminished the domestic borrowing options. Domestic borrowing auctions were cancelled one after another, and Turkey found itself in an economic crisis atmosphere. Treasury started to rely on cash advances from the Central Bank. The approach to finance public deficit with heavy monetization only after led to sudden dollarization of individuals. The long due interest hike did not prevent this escape from Turkish liras to US Dollars (32. Gün 2012a)

cess¹⁰, the April 5, 1994 decisions, i.e. fiscal measures to reduce public expenditures, came to the fore. TL devalued by 150% in total during the crisis. On April 5, 1994, TL was devalued again. The state froze public sector salaries, stopped hiring processes, and raised additional taxes. As a result of these decisions, inflation reached its highest level since World War II, almost 150%. That year, the economy shrunk by more than 6 percent, leaving many businesses in debt struggle and leading to lots of debtor bankruptcies, leaving five hundred thousand people unemployed and the public poorer. This was the domestic economic environment before the 1995 general elections.

3.3 The RP's "Just Order" Discourse and Its Success in 1994 Local Elections

It becomes clear that when Turkey was moving towards the 1994 local elections, the society was fed up with the coalition government of a social-democrat and a center-right party. The political void created by the corrupt image of the SHP in the society, was compounded by the ineptitude of the coalition government in economy. The RP which had won multiple mayoralties in few cities, like S. Urfa, K. Maras, Konya, Sivas and few districts of Istanbul in 1989 local elections, and shown good performance in these local governments, was aware of this void; and to fill that void, towards the 1994 local elections, not only did it target a new constituency, which is primarily the urban poor, but also it adopted new strategies such as playing music/songs in campaign rallies and employing housewives, whose regular visits to households helped the grassroots party organization build organic relationship with their constituency. As Ruşen Çakır (1994, 188) also noted, all RP mayoralties in Istanbul were in districts, residents of which were primarily low-income people. And they mainly functioned as welfare agencies which distributed coal, food supplies during Ramadan, clothes to the youth, and even had the children circumcised, and got the ill treated.

With the need to become appealing to the new target constituency, the political discourse also had to move beyond the Islamic discourse; and "the just order" program of the RP emerged in this context. A RP deputy, Yasin Hatipoğlu (2012), defined

¹⁰The country's foreign exchange reserves decreased from 7 billion dollars 3 billion usd in a couple of months. There was a devaluation of TL by more than half of its value. Besides, the government which had local elections ahead refrained from engaging in cost-cutting measures, and the current account deficit increased to 6 billion dollars. The USD/TL exchange rate increased from 15.000TL/USD in January to 38.000TL/USD in April. Foreign and local banks stopped lending money to businesses, and companies started to teeter on the brink of bankruptcy. Millions of people lost their jobs (32. Gün 2012a).

in an interview the Just Order in this context as follows: “It is an order without robbers, scammers, oppressors; hence, it is also an order without any robbed and any oppressed people.” Mustafa Kamalak (2012), another RP deputy also argued that in the 1994 local elections, the RP promised a different Turkey, in which no one would tyrannise or submit to tyranny; and this promise became manifest in the campaign slogan of “the guarantor of Turkey.” Therefore, the RP, through the work of its grassroots organizations and its “Just Order” rhetoric, exemplified the growing demand for religion, a trend seen in many modernizing countries towards the turn of the century, and religious institutions filling the void of security mechanisms in the modernization process of societies.

The Just Order discourse, with its overtly left-wing overtones with much emphasis on addressing the problems of the poor and oppressed, was also not exempt from the party’s general Islamic discourse, as exemplified in the Just Order booklet (1991) published by the party. For instance, on one hand, it involved the secular promise that in the Just Order there would not be strikes or lockouts since this order would render both strikes and lockouts unnecessary. On the other hand, it was stressed that in the Just Order the sinking ship (which refers to Turkey at the time) would float again as this order would turn the blessings given to this country by Almighty Allah (Cenab-ı Hak, as it takes place in the booklet) into fortune.

It is possible to interpret the RP’s use of increasingly more secular strategies with electoral calculations, and its aim to expand its electoral base as the RP’s adoption of the procedures of democracy and its orientation towards elections. This was the case, for instance, for Heper (1997, 37) who argued that the enlargement of the support base of the party was a “strategic decision,” made in the 4th Congress of the RP, held in October 1993. Moreover, Ruşen Çakır (1994) attributed this strategy change to the Islamic liberals in the party who, for long, tried to carry the party to a more liberal platform. As he stated, Islamic liberals that once took part in the 2nd Republic demarche started by Özal, and who targeted to carry the liberalization program, carried out by Özal in the economy, to the political field, joined back to the RP after the death of Özal and tried to pull the RP to the liberal platform since then. And yet, to Çakır (1994, 122-123), Erbakan’s words, “what is present in Turkey is the tyranny of the minority over the majority instead of majoritarian democracy,” also signalled that Erbakan favored a majoritarian democracy which involved “tyranny of the majority over the minority.” And as we will see, the military officers in Turkey who increasingly became stronger vis-à-vis civilian politics throughout the 1990s, had serious concerns about the Islamist RP.

3.4 Political Environment Before the 1995 General Elections

Then, in the 1994 local elections, the center-right competed with two parties, while the center-left competed with three parties. This fragmentation of the Turkish party system also contributed to the success of the RP in the elections; and although both of the center-right parties, i.e., the True Path Party (DYP) and the Motherland Party (ANAP) won 21% of the votes, the real winner of the election was the RP, who increased its vote share from 9.8 percent vote and 74 municipalities in 1989 local elections, to 19% votes and 329 municipalities in total, involving 5 metropolitan and 22 provincial mayorships. The party's capturing the mayorships in Istanbul and Ankara, two large cities known to be the vote storages of the center-right and the center-left, suggested that the RP's new discourse aimed at capturing the labor vote in the suburbs worked well and that now it was marching towards power in the next general elections in 1995.

Towards the 1995 general elections, apart from the rise of the Islamist RP which pumped into both the the secular public and the military, the self-proclaimed guardian of the secular principles of the state since the establishment of the Republic, the fear that the secular character of the state would be in danger, other characteristics of the domestic political/economic environment were a deep economic crisis, the center-right¹¹ and the center-left parties' losing their credit in the eyes of the public, and increasing terrorist acts by the PKK¹² which was responded by the state with the sidelining of the pro-Kurdish political movement, and which led the military to consolidate its power within the state as the conductor of the war against the PKK. We will see that all these factors played into the hands of the state establishment vis-à-vis civilian politics, and made the adoption of state discourse on the basis of security, and the disregard of democracy or human rights by the state, possible. At a time when PKK terrorists were increasingly infiltrating Turkish territory for terrorist activities, then Prime Minister Çiller left the fight against terrorism entirely to the military, which signalled the beginning of the adoption by the state of solely the security viewpoint for the resolution of the PKK problem.

Moreover, during this period when the fight against terrorism was based on a security perspective, Kurdish opposition parties were shut down one after another. This led

¹¹Then, another incident that contributed to the center-right's loss of credibility in the eyes of the public was a corruption scandal known as Civangate, which resulted in the bankruptcy of Emlakbank, a state bank.

¹²Especially after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and his massacre of Kurdish people in Halabja, and almost 5 hundred thousand Kurdish peoples' influx to the Turkish border, there was an increase in PKK terrorism in the country before the 1995 general elections.

the legal Kurdish opposition to radicalize and harden its discourse. In this regard, for instance, the HEP (People's Labour Party) was the first pro-Kurdish party to have been established in 1990 by the Kurdish intellectuals who had origins in the social-democratic SHP and yet, were expelled from the party for attending the Kurdish conference in Paris. In 1991, 18 members of the HEP were elected deputies on the SHP ticket, and yet as Leyla Zana, an MP of the HEP, added a sentence in Kurdish to her vow, the SHP leader İnönü asked for their resignation. Thus, Zana and her friends who left the SHP returned to the HEP, and yet, in a short while the party was closed down after an investigation process. As mentioned above, the same cadres established the ÖZDEP, ÖZEP, and DEP (the Democracy Party) one after another. And this process resulted in the sentencing of the DEP deputies to prison. Fehmi Işıklar (2012), the leader of the HEP, explained this gradual radicalization process as follows in an interview: "[In the HEP,] we were conducting politics throughout the whole country, dealing with the problems of the labor, the villager and the shopkeeper... Naturally, our politics was more embracing and addressed a larger constituency... Gradually, it got tighter and squeezed into the region."

And prior to the 1995 general elections, the most positive political development was in relations with the EU. In 1994, Çiller-Karayalçın (DYP-SHP) government signed a Customs Union agreement with the EU after the EU's acceptance of Greece's condition that Greek Cypriots' full membership talks would also start, and the EU member countries' promises that southern Cyprus would not be given full membership unless a final settlement would be reached.

As for the growing fear in secular institutions and public opinion about the rise of Islamism, there were several events in the 1990s that reinforced this fear. The emergence of the tapes of RP deputy Hasan Mezarıcı, the demonstrators carrying Arabic banners and green flags with three white crescents, at the big rally organized in Taksim on February 13, 1993, to protest the Serbian atrocities in Bosnia, the emergence of allegations that the RP received financial aid from Libya and Saudi Arabia, etc. On top of all, Erbakan's following words in a group meeting on April 13, 1994, led the fear among the seculars to reach its peak: "The RP will rise to power; the just order will be established; what is the problem then? Will the transition will be tough or smooth? Sweet or bloody?" as the April 14th headline in the Milliyet newspaper of the time, "Erbakan spoke 'bloody'" and "Regime anxiety in the government" headlines revealed. The allegations that the money collected by the RP for aid to Bosnian Muslims was transferred to his own account and that Ercümelek, known as the party's cashier, lost all the money in the banks through stocks, interest and repos during the economic crisis and millions of dollars evaporated (Hürriyet Aug. 26, 1997).

As mentioned above, the military was the primary state actor in the 1990s. However, allegations of a “deep state” were also widely voiced among intellectuals at the time, and one of the events allegedly directed by “deep state” actors was the “Gazi incidents” in March 1995, which brought the Alevi population in the Gazi neighborhood of Istanbul to the brink of war with state actors, primarily the military and police (Cumhuriyet Mar. 12, 2022). Also, in 1995, a major cross-border operation was launched in the spring to strike and destroy PKK settlements. In the 1990s, both the police and the military became so hardened in the fight against terrorism that what was happening in Turkey’s southeast was “a manhunt that no one dared to talk about,” in Birand’s (2012a) words. Moreover, the number of unsolved murders increased to such an extent that from May 1995 onwards, mothers whose children had disappeared in custody began an act of civil disobedience, visiting political parties, the Parliament, and the police to find out what had happened to their children (Amnesty International 2021).

Besides, the state, whose main objective was to destroy the PKK, reacted very harshly to criticism in the 1990s. An example of the state’s intolerance at the time was the State Security Court’s seizure of an academic report, on the Kurdish question, prepared by Doğu Ergil, an academic, based on interviews he conducted with hundreds of people in six provinces where Kurds lived in large numbers, upon the request of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB). Moreover, politicians of the day criticized the report using state jargon. For example, according to the daily *Milliyet* dated August 8, 1995, Mesut Yılmaz likened the report to a CIA report, while Çiller stated that he had “no interest in or knowledge of the report.” Ergil (2012) explained, in an interview, the questions explored by this study called “the Eastern Question” (Ergil 1995) as follows: “What do the Kurdish population in the conflict zones think about the Kurdish identity? What do they think about the PKK? What do they think about the Turks? How do they view their relationship with the Turkish state?” Birand (2012a) described the perspective offered by this report, the main conclusions of which are presented below, as a “civilian” perspective, but as he emphasized, the state did not need an alternative perspective at the time, especially not a civilian one:

“The Kurds were repressed by the PKK but they still didn’t perceive the PKK as a terrorist organization. They believed that the real source of repression was the state... [Besides,] most of the Kurds had no intention to leave Turkey; they did not aspire for a separate state. Their demands mainly involved speaking in their mother tongue, finding jobs, and receiving equal treatment from the state.”

3.5 The RP's Success in the 1995 General Elections

Towards the 1995 general elections, following the merger of the center-left parties SHP and CHP and CHP leader Baykal assuming the leadership of the united SHP/CHP, the coalition government between the center-left CHP and the center-right DYP broke up when Baykal wanted to leave the coalition and the DYP was unable to convince anyone to enter into a coalition with it. And on December 24, 1995 elections, although the Islamist RP, the center-right ANAP (19%) and DYP (19%) had very close vote rates, as was expected before the elections, the RP which won 21.3% of the votes, had the highest vote rate.

The results of the 1995 general elections, with three parties getting very similar vote rates, signalled the establishment of another coalition government. Since the RP won the elections, President Demirel gave the task of forming a government to Erbakan. However, since Erbakan could not convince any party leader to become a partner in the coalition government, the task of forming the government was given to Çiller, who also failed in establishing the government. As noted by Birand (2012b), for the military, secular business circles, the central media, and secular public opinion, the coalition of the DYP and ANAP, two center-right parties with no ideological differences, was the ideal solution to deal with rising Islamism. While the ANAP leader Mesut Yılmaz was the third leader in line to put together the government, and was in preparation for meeting with the RP leader again, as the then Speaker of Parliament M. Kalemli (2012) stated in an interview, Karadayı, the then Chief of General Staff, called Kalemli and said that he was very concerned that some worrying events would occur if ANAP and REFAH became coalition partners and asked Kalemli to do his part to prevent this. In response, Kalemli said that he had convinced Çiller to enter into a coalition with Yılmaz. Moreover, it was not only the military but also the owners of mainstream media organizations who forced Çiller into this coalition (Mutlu 2012). Under these circumstances, the DYP-ANAP coalition was established with also the outside support of the center-left DSP. These events which set forth how political coalitions were designed by the military-led state bureaucracy in the 1990s support our claim that the empowerment of the military-led secular coalition increasingly rendered civilian politics powerless during the 1990s. However, this government was short-lived, as the Constitutional Court ruled that the RP's application on the grounds that the vote of confidence in Parliament was invalid was justified, and the government fell.

3.6 The Start of the DYP-RP Coalition on June 28, 1996

In an interview, Arınç (2012a), who was a RP deputy at the time, said that Erbakan's only goal was to become prime minister and to have the opportunity to express himself better in his meetings with the military and other ruling powers.

In the compromised system of rotating prime ministership, Erbakan took office as the first prime minister. The military was very uncomfortable with Erbakan's premiership from the very first day, and some of Erbakan's steps further reinforced these concerns. In this regard, Erbakan's first foreign visit to Iran (and the debates on the axis shift that followed), his visit to Libya in 1996, and the fact that Gaddafi almost accused the Turkish state of committing genocide against the Kurds, saying "Turkey's future does not lie in NATO, in American bases or in making the Kurdish people suffer" (Milliyet Jun. 10, 2009), and that Erbakan remained silent on these remarks, led to a rapid increase in reactions against Erbakan.

In addition, after this visit, Erbakan brought up the idea of establishing a common market among Muslim countries and the establishment of the D8 among eight Muslim countries to rival the EU and G7 of the West. In an interview, Erbakan (2012) justified this proposal by saying that not only was the population and geography of Muslim countries twice that of the EU and the G7 but also their (Muslims') contributions to faith and knowledge were incomparable. Against this background, he added, they should become world leaders again and this was the reason why he made his first visit to the D8 countries.

Undoubtedly, it was not only the idea that Turkey was moving away from the West that worried the secularists. Chanting slogans such as "Victory belongs to Islam even if we shed our blood" and "The Islamic movement cannot be prevented!" after Friday prayers, for example, as reported in the daily *Cumhuriyet* November 26, 1994, after Friday prayer at the Beyazıt Mosque; and Erbakan's remarks in 1996 that the day would come when rectors would bow in front of headscarved girls raised concerns among the secularists. Moreover, the Susurluk¹³ accident, which marked the year 1996 and revealed, in Birand's (2012b) words, "how the state had dirtied its hands in the fight against terrorism," was de-emphasized by Erbakan for the sake of the continuation of the government, despite the public outcry against the network of relations it revealed, and this accident turned into an anti-RP campaign.

¹³The Susurluk accident is widely known as the accident in which a member of parliament and tribal chief named Sedat Bucak, a police chief named Hüseyin Kocadağ, a well-known nationalist militant named Abdullah Çatlı were found together in a car and the relationship between the state, politics, and the mafia came to light. The public reaction against these relations led to the resignation of Mehmet Ağar, then Minister of Interior.

Arınç (2012a) later described Susurluk as the event that destroyed the RP, arguing that then the party's de-emphasizing the accident for the sake of the continuity of the government and the comfort of the DYP, which was the coalition partner of the RP, had been to the detriment of the image of the party in the society. Hence, the rumor that in the group meeting on November 23, 1996 Erbakan described the accident as fiddle-faddle (non-sense), further increased the reaction to the party. And then, the protest movement called "one minute of darkness for constant light," which first started as a call to end corruption, evolved into a movement against the Islamist RP as well. Ufuk Uras (2012), who was then a member of the civil society organization called "the citizen initiative for constant light," which was the organization that started the one minute of Darkness movement in the first place, argued that they could not prevent the movement from evolving into an anti-RP movement at the time.

3.7 Towards the February 28 Coup: Steps to Further Strengthen the Military against the Civilian Government and Events that Raised the Military's Concerns

We can safely argue that, in the 1990s, terror organizations and political Islam happened to be the primary means of the military to enhance/increase its own power. And in the second half of 1996, and the beginning of 1997, the military took steps that further empowered the armed forces vis-à-vis the civilian government. Besides, increasing use of the media in this process also enhanced direct contact of the military with the public. As a result, political fights ceased to be between political parties in this process and turned into a fight between military-led state bureaucracy and the RP.

The first one of those steps that further empowered the military was the military's West Working Group (BÇG) initiative, which worked as a mechanism through which the General Staff monitored the implementation of the decisions of the National Security Council by the government. At the time, even the then Minister of National Defense Turan Tayan¹⁴ said, "There is a mistrust against the RP regarding the basic principles of the Republic. And I regret to say that I don't trust them either." Another regulation that further empowered the armed forces vis-à-vis the civilian government in January 1997 was the regulation establishing the Prime Min-

¹⁴As it is written in daily Milliyet (Feb. 2, 1997), Tayan also referred to such items on the agenda of the RP such as headscarf, working hours, ... as well as mosque projects in Taksim and Çankaya. ... as political demonstration."

istry Crisis Management Center. First of all, this regulation declared that in the event of a “crisis” all the powers of the Prime Minister would be transferred to the Secretary General of the National Security Council, although it was unclear what was meant by “crisis.” Secondly, this regulation paved the way for the military to establish direct relations with public institutions by authorizing the Chief of General Staff to establish crisis centers in provinces and districts it deemed necessary. Thirdly, security investigations were introduced for new hires and the Secretary General’s approval was required for all government employment decisions. And finally, military members were appointed to state institutions such as TRT, YÖK, and RTÜK (Prime Ministry Crisis Management Center Regulation 1997). All these steps brought civilian cadres under the control of the military.

And finally, as mentioned above, another important tool of the military’s war against the RP during this period was the secular mainstream media, to which it organized special briefings and passed on the news. Can Ataklı (2012), who was a columnist for the daily Sabah then, said in an interview that the news in Ankara was written in consultation with the commanders, either by directly quoting the commanders or by speculating on what the commanders would say. On the road to the overthrow of the Refahiyol government, the press began to frequently publish recordings of speeches by RP MPs such as Şevki Yılmaz and Hasan Hüseyin Ceylan. To Birand (2012c), these were tapes that were served by “invisible hands” both to prove that the RP was against the Republican regime and Atatürk and to prepare the society for the overthrow of the government by forming a front against the RP.

Then came to the fore, on November 10, 1996, in his party’s Enlarged Provincial Council meeting, anti-secular statements of the mayor of Kayseri of the RP, Şükrü Karatepe, who was later sentenced to one year in prison for provoking the public towards hatred and hostility via religious discrimination, and whose punishment was also ratified by the Supreme Court of Appeal. According to the media outlets, Karatepe expressed in his party meeting the following: “Don’t let my fancy appearance trick you into the impression that I am secular... This system should change as it is the remnant of single-party rule, is old-fashioned, views people as slaves, and treats those who vote for those who rule as they are nothing” (Hürriyet Oct. 10, 1997).

Around the same time, the sudden emergence of a marginal sect called Aczmendi and a national scandal, whose main actors were Aczmendi leader Müslüm Gündüz and a woman named Fadime Şahin, indirectly targeted the RP as well. While Erbakan (and the RP) kept escalating the tension in society with the announcement of such projects as building huge mosques in Taksim and Çankaya, opening the

Hagia Sophia to worship, letting religious foundations collect skins of the sacrificial animals, letting state employees take time off for prayer during working hours, The final straw was the iftar hosted, on January 11, 1997, by Erbakan to members of the Presidency of Religious Affairs and sect leaders who, for the first time in the history of the Republic, entered the Prime Minister's residence with their turbans and robes (Ergin 1997).

The resignation of a significant number of deputies from the DYP and the establishment of the DTP by former DYP deputies under the leadership of Hüsamettin Cindoruk in order to punish Çiller's DYP, which entered into a coalition with the RP, marked the period (Milliyet Jul. 27, 1997). The disintegration of the DYP was carried out by "political engineers" and most of the people who resigned from the DYP and joined the DTP were close to Demirel, the founder of the DYP (Erandaç 2012).

Toward February 28, 1997, one final incident that further irritated the military was the Jerusalem Night held by the RP mayor of Sincan, Bekir Yıldız, as a commemorative ceremony for the Palestinian intifada. And yet, the night which was also attended by the Iranian ambassador to Turkey conveyed further messages with the speeches of both Yıldız and the ambassador, the performed play, and the hung portraits of both Hamas and Hizbullah leaders. And finally, Bekir Yıldız's words, "The world should know, the patience of Muslims should not spill over. If it does spill over, they know what the consequences will be," led to his dismissal from office by the Minister of Interior affairs, and to his getting arrested (Hürriyet Oct. 16, 1997). Two days after the Jerusalem Night, the battle tanks of the military rolled out on the streets of Sincan to threaten the Refahyol coalition, as suggested by the statement of Çevik Bir, the deputy chief of the general staff, "we made a balance check for the democracy" (Milliyet Feb. 21, 1997).

As Savaş (2012), the then Chief Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeal told in an interview, following the visit of Chief of General Staff Karadayı and Secretary General of the National Security Council Kılıç to President Demirel, Demirel wrote a letter to Erbakan on February 4, 1997, and asked him to abide by the laws to maintain the order, practice the reform laws cited in the article 174 of the Constitution under the title "Preservation of Reform Laws," prevent the placement of Islamist cadres in state institutions, inter alia, judicial institutions, armed forces, universities, the police organization, schools, local administrations as well as the Directorate of Religious Affairs. And finally, days before the February 28, 1997 meeting of the National Security Council, the then commander of the Naval Forces, Güven Erkaya, declared, reactionary Islam (irtica) as a more significant threat than

the PKK terror (Hürriyet Mar. 9, 2009).

3.8 The February 28, 1997 National Security Council Meeting

The National Security Council (NSC), which convened once every month under the chairmanship of the President and conveyed advisory decisions to the government, met again on February 28, 1997.

Birand's February 28th Documentary series, aired in 2012, provide important details about the NSC meeting that day. Accordingly, from the military front, first, the Naval Force commander Güven Erkaya began to talk and criticized the government with very harsh accusations. In Akşener's account, Erkaya indirectly blamed Erbakan for giving support to reactionary Islam. And as she noted, Erbakan maintained his conciliatory attitude by saying that there may be such people in the party but he never approved of them. The DYP, as the coalition partner, refrained from taking the floor, contenting itself with affirming that it would do its part to ensure that the eighteen-point list of measures presented to the government would be implemented, if not immediately signed. Erkaya gave this list of decisions prepared by the commanders to Erbakan and demanded that all the decisions on the list be implemented. In Birand's (2012d) words, this list was presented from the military members to the RP "not as a list of recommendations, but as a list of directives, a memorandum." Although Erbakan did not sign the list of decisions immediately in order to work on it further, the military members of the NSC announced these decisions to the press after the meeting.

The Memorandum involved many resolutions that the RP would abstain from accepting. The most important item was the increase of uninterrupted primary school education from five to eight years with the purpose of closing down the middle schools of İmam Hatips. Other items involved affiliating all Quran courses with the Directorate of Religious Affairs to prevent illegal courses, abolition of Tariqats, enforcement of the law on attire especially in public institutions, as well as bringing restrictions on the business activities of green capital. Afterwards, to prevent Erbakan from gaining time, the General Staff made a written statement stressing that sanctions would follow if the resolutions were not enforced (Miş 2018).

This memorandum was, undoubtedly, the military's confrontation with the RP, and this is how the mainstream media saw the meeting, as the daily Milliyet's headline of March 1, 1997, "Regime fine-tuned in 9-hour meeting" suggested. Erbakan, who

insisted on not signing the resolutions, visited other party leaders in those days to seek their support. The daily *Türkiye* called this visit of Erbakan to other parties' leaders "a moderation tour, ... in order to decrease the tension and to find a way to carry out the 'the February 28th reconciliation'" (*Türkiye* Mar. 3, 1997). And yet, Erbakan could not find the support he was looking for. And, on top of all, came the statement of the secretary-general of the General Staff, "The TAF only acts in conformity with those who abide by the principles of the state (he uses the phrase, Atatürk's principles) (*Sabah* Mar. 3, 1997).

Nevertheless, on March 4, 1997, Erbakan asked the secretary-general of the NSC to revise the resolutions, particularly the ones closing down the middle part of the Imam Hatip schools, bringing restrictions over tariqats, and demanding the come back of article 163 of the Turkish Penal Law which had punished the acts intended to the change the social, economic, political, and judicial order of the state on the basis of religious principles, and had been removed during the reign of Özal (*Milliyet* Mar. 5, 1997). Moreover, various trade unions such as *Türk-İş* (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions), *DİSK* (Confederation of Progressive Labor Unions), *TESK* (Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen), *TOBB* (The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey) and *TİSK* (Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations), which are known as "the civil initiative", "initiative of the five," "our gang," "destruction squad," expressed their support for the MGK decisions in a joint statement, in which they argued that "the NSC has not brought any suggestion that would suspend the democracy or abolish the parliamentary system." Their support was crucial since they formed part of the "unarmed forces" which, as one force commander put it on the front page of *Hürriyet* on December 20, 1996, gave the armed forces the task of finding solutions to the political problems that society expected from the armed forces. Following the briefing given by the commanders to the unions on May 3, 1997, *TİSK* President Baydur described the briefing as a "meaningful embrace" and wrote in *Yeni Yüzyıl* newspaper on May 3, 1997, that "as civil society organizations and unions, we will carry out this task together with the military if necessary." Then five unions together, on May 27, 1997, issued the statement, "reactionary Islam has turned into a major threat before democracy in today's Turkey... Our people no longer have any confidence in this government... [It is necessary] for this government to be replaced by another one" (Çelik 2012).

On the other hand, another "initiative of five" formed by five civil society organizations and unions, including the Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (*KESK*), the Union of Turkish Architects and Engineers (*TMMOB*), the Turkish Pharmacists' Association (*TEB*), the Turkish Dental Association (*TDB*) and the Turkish Medical Association (*TTB*), issued a joint statement using the slo-

gan “neither sharia nor coup” to express their stance on the February 28 MGK decisions. In a declaration issued on March 10, 1997, these unions criticized the February 28 MGK decisions and stated that “the declaration issued after the MGK meeting of February 28, 1997, is an open memorandum; this memorandum has once again demonstrated that the MGK acts not as an advisory body but as a supra-parliamentary and supra-governmental decision-making body.” They also stated that “we are in favor of democracy, not military coups against political Islam; military coups do not bring solutions, democracy does,” and emphasized that they rejected the dichotomy between political Islam and military coups because, from their point of view, political Islam and military coups are “two sides of the same coin that feed each other, not oppose each other” (Çelik 2012).

In the meantime, with deputy PM Çiller’s statement, “the [NSC] resolutions are binding for the government; they certainly are,” finally, on March 5, 1997, Erbakan had to sign the February 28th resolutions. Accordingly, daily Sabah wrote in the headline on March 5, “The hodja [referring to Erbakan], accepted without any reservation: 18 resolutions negotiated for 9 hours in the NSC meeting, are accepted unanimously in a 38-minute long council of ministers meeting.”

Erbakan, who still had no intention of implementing the decisions, developed the strategy of leaving the rejection of these decisions to the Parliament, but Parliament Speaker Kalemli did not allow the Parliament to convene to discuss the NSC decisions, saying, “It would be inconvenient to deal with these decisions directly in the Parliament” (Sabah Mar. 7, 1997); and the government had to withdraw its proposal. Nevertheless, the government’s reluctance to implement the February 28 decisions further increased the military’s motivation to replace the government with a new government that would implement the decisions. As Birand (2012d) noted, since the military did not want to overthrow the government through a coup, it developed a strategy of convincing secularists that the RP was a threat to the Republic by organizing “irtica/reactionary Islam briefings¹⁵” for different segments of society such as judges and prosecutors, members of the press and academics in order to force the government to resign under public pressure. In its April 30, 1997 issue,

¹⁵ A news report of the period sets forth the content of the briefings:

“... [General] Türkeli has reminded that the Constitution’s Articles 1., 2., and 4., and Article 35 of TAF Internal Service Act assigns the military the duty of protecting and looking after the secular Republic... [He] has stressed that, if necessary, the TAF is even resolved to engage in armed confrontation against the internal and external enemies. In the briefing, it has been stressed that Imam Hatip schools raised the administrative cadres of political Islam. In the briefing, hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) speeches of a few RP deputies have been presented as proof of rising political Islam in the country. It has been stated in the briefing that Libya promoted reactionary Islam in Turkey through the Islamic Salvation Front, of which Erbakan is claimed to be a member. In the briefing, it has also been stressed that the National Outlook Organization in Germany collaborates with the PKK with regard to acts against Turkey” (32. Gün 2012b).

under the heading “shock briefing,” *Hürriyet* newspaper stated: “The General Staff . . . announced in the briefing that the fight against reactionary Islam (*irtica*) . . . had become more important for the regime than the fight against external threats.”

Bayramoğlu (2012), a columnist for *Yeni Yüzyıl* newspaper, stated in an interview that if one of the duties of newspapers during the February 28 period was to guide the society, another duty was to act as a weapon for the armed forces. For this reason, in the briefings given to the press, not only how the military could take control of the situation when necessary, but also the duties assigned to the press by the military. Although the secular mainstream media played a crucial role in the February 28th process as the main “unarmed force” of the secular coalition led by the military, an interview with Zafer Mutlu (2012), the then editor-in-chief of *Sabah* newspaper, also noted that this cooperation with the military was not always voluntary and that military commanders gave strict instructions to media bosses. Mutlu said that the then Second Chief of General Staff instructed him many times and that in many cases these instructions were “very direct” and included the dismissal of several columnists who criticized the military intervention. Then, as part of the secular coalition, *Sabah Daily* used the headline, “history will not forgive Çiller” on May 13, 1997. And it added, “Turkey is going through very tense days due to the RP, which rose to power thanks to Çiller’s greed for power.” The following day, on May 14, 1997, it used the headline, “Open call to DYP deputies: Historical duty is awaiting you” (Selvi 2012). And finally, on May 21, 1997, Vural Savaş, the Chief Prosecutor at the Supreme Court of Appeal, announced that he filed a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court against the RP and demanded its closure on the grounds that the party became the center of anti-secular activities.

On June 10, 1997, in the last briefing, the General Staff had said that they would resort to arms if necessary against the reactionary movement that aimed to destroy the Republic. The briefing was reflected in the newspaper headlines of those days as follows: On June 11, 1997, *Hürriyet* used the headline “Shock accusations against RP by the military”. It continued, “In the briefing given by the General Staff to the prosecutors, it was argued that Erbakan, Justice Minister Kazan, and the RP were involved in an organized act of *irtica*.” *Hürriyet*’s June 12, 1997 headline read “We will resort to arms if necessary.”

An important step in the process leading to the closure of the RP was the increasing resignations of DYP deputies, including two ministers, from the party. As Birand (2012d) emphasized, these resignations, which made the DYP the weakest link in the coalition government, took place at the suggestion of the Presidency or the General Staff and out of fear of a military coup if the MPs did not bring down the

government. It seems that President Demirel shared this fear, as Aktuna (2012), the then Minister of Health who resigned, emphasized in an interview that after his resignation Demirel praised him for resigning to protect the regime.

On June 18, Erbakan ve Çiller reached a compromise in their talks on how the government would continue in the face of social tension. Accordingly, Çiller would take over as Prime Minister, the BBP would enter the government and early elections would be held. After this agreement, Erbakan submitted the government's resignation to President Demirel on the same day. Reportedly, In his meeting with Demirel, Erbakan informed him that the RP, DYP, and BBP had reached an agreement, that the Council of Ministers and the government program were ready and asked that Çiller be given the task of forming the government. And Erbakan submitted his resignation to the President on June 18, 1997.

And yet, still President Demirel tasked ANAP leader Yılmaz with putting together the government out of the fear that a military coup would follow since in an interview he told that he would have been responsible for the continuation of the tension in the country if he had tasked Çiller with forming the government. In the interview Demirel (2012) particularly stressed that he had reached that decision on the basis of his coordination task derived from Article 105 of the Constitution. And Çiller accused Demirel of making a "Çankaya coup" with this decision (Milliyet Jun. 21, 1997).

3.9 ANASOL-D Coalition Government and the Sprouting of an Opposition/Wing Called "Reformists" within the National Outlook Party, Virtue Party (FP)

Yılmaz formed the ANASOL-D coalition government with Ecevit's center-left DSP and Cindoruk's center-right DTP, and with the outside support of Baykal's center-left CHP. And yet, even after the Refahiyol government was gone, the military was not done with intervening in politics since it wanted to ensure the enforcement of the February 28th resolutions. Then the first act of the new government happened to be the adoption of the Protocol on Cooperation for Security and Public Order, publicly known as EMASYA, which authorized the military to intervene in civilian security-related events, conduct operations, and collect intelligence without the approval of the civilian authorities. And yet, more importantly, this protocol authorized the military to conduct security screening for each individual prior to employment by the state, and hence, put the civilian bureaucracy under the control of the military.

However, the military kept insisting that the government was not committed enough to the war against Islamism as the judiciary was not assessing the reactionary Islam denunciations coming from the General Staff quickly, Imam Hatip graduates were still allowed to enter other departments besides theology departments (32. Gün 2012b). And Yılmaz (2012) responded to these criticisms by arguing in an interview that it was not possible to assess the attitude of the General Staff in the February 28th process in a single template, as the General Staff did not only include those who aspired for the political resolution of the problem, but also who aspired for the escalation of the problem in order to increase their own power, and it was this latter group who was unhappy about the political resolution of the conflict as it prevented from a military coup to occur. Yılmaz added that he kept struggling with this latter group of people. Furthermore, in Birand's (2012e) account, PM Yılmaz once complained in a meeting with journalists that he was annoyed by the Islamist hunt among state employees and that the Western Working Group was not still abolished during the new government; he even complained that some of the military members, were using the threat of reactionary Islam to extend their tenure in office.

And then, one key event during the Prime Ministry of Mesut Yılmaz was his speech targeting the military in a party group meeting by saying,

“...I urge everyone who claims to be the guarantor of democracy: Everyone and every institution must pay the same attention to the functioning of democracy. Democracy cannot be alaturka or alafranga. There cannot be democracy for civilians and democracy for the military” (Hürriyet Mar. 25, 1998).

And yet, the Chief of the General Staff and all force commanders responded to Yılmaz's call for “returning to the barracks,” by signing and announcing a joint memo in which they stressed that the fight against terror and reactionary Islam was the duty of the TAF deriving from the laws and, no office would dissuade the TAF from carrying out this duty for the sake of his interest/ambition (Milliyet Mar. 21, 1998).

Then came two consecutive hits to the RP, first with the shutdown of the party and then with the conviction of the Istanbul Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; and these two hits played major roles in the sprout of an opposition/wing called “reformists” in the subsequent National Outlook Party, the Virtue Party (FP). Thus, the RP was closed down on the grounds of violating the strict secular principles of the state, as announced by the then chief justice of the Constitutional Court, Ahmet Necdet Sezer. Besides, Erbakan and six senior members of the party were banned for five years from political activity (Hürriyet Jul. 5, 2000). And yet, Erbakan held a press

conference after the decision and called on his supporters to show restraint with the following words:

“The Constitutional Court is the highest court in Turkey. Its decisions must be respected by all institutions. Even if these decisions are grave errors of law. This does not negate the fact that in a state of law, decisions, even if erroneous, must be obeyed and respected.” (TV5 Jan. 16, 2021).

The National Outlook tradition, accustomed to the closure of their parties, founded the Virtue Party (FP) immediately afterwards. However, as noted above, the second blow to the party came when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the RP mayor of Istanbul, was sentenced to 10 months in prison by the DGM for inciting religious hatred with a poem he read while addressing supporters in Siirt, in the southeastern part of the country. In an interview, Arınç (2012b) stressed that the closure of the RP, and the subsequent imprisonment of Erdoğan triggered the idea a new roadmap was needed as well as the debate on whether the new roadmap should be within the party or outside of it.

And this chaotic environment became even more chaotic with the disinformation process conducted by the General Staff regarding the statements of Şemdin Sakık, one of the leaders of the PKK, who was captured on April 10, 1998, in an operation organized by the armed forces in Northern Iraq. More specifically, according to Birand (2012e), the General Staff prepared a document called “Andıç,” signed by Çevik Bir, the second chief of the General Staff, and attached it to Sakık’s testimony with an action plan to be implemented as of April 24, 1998, with the aim of wearing down certain names, such as himself, Cengiz Çandar, Chairman of the Human Rights Association (IHD) Akın Birdal, and institutions, including the FP, Milli Gazete, IHD, etc. in the country¹⁶.

¹⁶In Birand’s account, the action plan included adding the following items to Sakık’s statement and informing Sabah and Hürriyet newspapers about it

“Declaring that the Human Rights Association is under the control of the PKK and ensuring its closure. Making accusations against the chairman Akın Birdal. To put the FP in a difficult situation by revealing that the RP and the PKK are in cooperation. To show the public that some politicians and businessmen were supported by the PKK. To discredit some journalists, such as Mehmet Ali Birand and Cengiz Çandar, by spreading through the media that they were working for the PKK in exchange for money” (Birand 2012e).

Birand (2012e) further detailed the action plan as follows:

“The general staff sent to media outlets Hurriyet and Sabah and TV channel KanalD testimony of Sakık on a paper without any headline. Sakık had told that certain well-known journalists wrote in favor of the PKK in return of money. According to the testimony, IHD chair Akın Birdal was getting orders from Öcalan. Welfare Party, Milli Gazete, and Akit newspapers were in collaboration with the PKK. The article of Oktay Ekşi, then lead-writer of Hurriyet Daily, entitled “Let’s meet the despicable,” suggested how those news affected the public opinion. And at the time, no one was aware of it that all those news were made-up.”

And he explained the consequences of publication of those news as follows:

When the year 1999 was just around the corner, the minority ANASOL-D government, established with the outside support of the CHP to prevent the RP from coming to power again, was hardly surviving. And after the outbreak of the Türkbank scandal which exposed that Yılmaz used his post to help a businessman acquire Türkbank, which was a state-owned bank, Baykal withdrew his support from the government and ANASOL-D government fell after losing a vote of no-confidence in the parliament (Hürriyet Nov. 26, 1998). Snap elections came to the fore once again as the only option in a period of political uncertainty.

3.10 The Ongoing Civil-Military Conflict in the DSP-MHP-ANAP Coalition and the Emergence of the Intra-Party Opposition, Led by Abdullah Gül, in the FP

The results of the 1999 elections, in which Ecevit's DSP got 22% of the votes, Bahçeli's MHP got around 18%, Kutun's FP got 15% and Baykal's CHP was below the threshold, pointed to a coalition government. And yet, before the establishment of the coalition government, a political crisis occurred with the walk of Merve Kavakci, a newly elected FP deputy, into the parliament with her headscarf on May 2, 1999. Not only was she heavily protested by the secularist front in parliament, but she was not allowed to be sworn in, was expelled from parliament, and was finally stripped of his citizenship for not declaring her U.S. citizenship. Moreover, the prosecutor of the State Security Court at the time, Nuh Mete Yüksel, raided Merve Kavakçı's house one night to arrest her. As reported in Milliyet, Yüksel later defended his action with the following words: "I took action because I received an official statement that Merve Kavakçı was no longer an MP. I will never give up on a path that I know is right" (Milliyet Oct. 27, 1999). Finally, Demirel, who attended a TV program in those days, called Kavakçı's coming to the parliament with a headscarf, provocation, and separatism (Hürriyet May. 4, 1999). Kavakçı incident costed a lot to the FP as immediately after Kavakçı's swearing-in attempt in the parliament, on May 7, 1999, the then Chief Prosecutor of the Court of Appeals filed a closure case against the FP (Hürriyet Jun. 22, 2001).

And finally, on May 28, 1999, Ecevit's DSP formed a coalition government with

"The following day both Hurriyet and Sabah published the names of the people accused by the General Staff. After a while, Akin Birdal was shot by groups who concerned themselves with the claims. Daily Sabah suspended Çandar's column for a while and dismissed Mehmet Ali Birand... And it took two years to be understood that all these accusations were made up by the General Staff and that they were added to the testimony afterward."

Bahçeli's MHP and Yılmaz's ANAP. The first test of the coalition government came on June 29, 1999, when Öcalan was sentenced to death by the State Security Court on charges of treason and separatism (Yeni Şafak). This decision was upheld by the Court of Appeal in November 1999 (Hürriyet Nov. 26, 1999). And yet, the ultimate decision remained with the government; and then, the coalition government, of which the nationalist MHP was a member, took a sound step by deciding to suspend Öcalan's execution and wait for the final ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). And in this process, on December 12, 1999, the EU officially recognized Turkey as a candidate for full membership. In 2002, the same coalition government abolished the death penalty for peacetime offences as part of accession talks with the EU, and the Turkish State Security Court has commuted the death penalty of Öcalan to life imprisonment. Finally, PM Erdogan fully abolished the death penalty in Turkey in 2004.

And on May 5, 2000, as President Demirel's seven-year term expired, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the head of the Constitutional Court, was elected as the new President in the third round with 330 votes from parliamentarians.

In the early 2000s, the White Energy operation, which was launched to investigate allegations of corruption and bribery in energy tenders, turned back into a military-civilian debate when the debate over who initiated this operation began. What led to the clash between the armed forces and the government was a high-ranking military officer's statement on January 8, 2001, to the daily Hürriyet that it was the armed forces, not the government, who initiated the corruption operation. On the day the news was published, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit first made a harsh statement and said, "The government is wanted to be sidelined". Then Deputy Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz said, "Some circles are trying to make politics and politicians look dirty. Is there a longing for military rule?" (Hürriyet May 27, 2002). Furthermore, as Birand (2012f) noted, after the White Energy operation, the gendarmerie, who initiated the White Energy Operation, started to inspect almost all public institutions.

And yet, the event that changed the course of Turkish politics that year was the opposition that started to sprout in the Virtue Party, the National Outlook Party which was established under a different banner after the closure of the Welfare Party. The Virtue Party's chairman Recai Kutan was a name hand-picked by Erbakan as Erbakan himself was barred from politics for five years for violating the constitution. And as mentioned above, after Kavakçı's attempt to walk into the parliament wearing her headscarf, a closure case was opened against the Virtue Party as well. In this atmosphere in the 1st Ordinary Grand Congress of the Virtue Party held on

May 14, 2000, first time in the history of National Outlook parties, an intra-party opposition became visible, and the younger generation of politicians, who were opposed to the one-man rule, the language used in the party, the cadres composed of old age groups, and adopted strategies in the party, nominated their own candidate for the leadership of the party to challenge the hardliners of the party. Concerns of the reformists became apparent in the words of Bülent Arınç (2012b) who told in an interview,

“Erbakan had big ideals, and yet, people became alarmed with his suggestions such as an Islamic currency called the dinar, and Islamic common market, Islamic security organization rival to NATO, and Islamic peace forces; and such remarks prevented us from expressing our real concerns. . . In the face of closures we started assessments as to how service-producing, wise, long-lasting politics can be done in Turkey.”

Abdullah Gul, who ran against Erbakan’s appointed candidate Recai Kutan in the election, and who complained about the overcentralized structure of the party in the speech he delivered in the Congress, won 521 of the votes of the delegates while Kutan won 633 of the votes. This result of the election, undoubtedly, marked a split in the party. Since till that day Erbakan was viewed in the party as the unconditionally obeyed leader, the congress in 2000 marked the first time that the party (in fact, all national outlook parties) got introduced to democratic procedures and politics. These democratization steps on the part of the Islamist FP did not match the overall trend in the country as the February 28th process led by the military, and hence, the military’s design of the political sphere was intended to last very long, for one thousand years, as the then Chief of Staff Kivrikoğlu declared, as reported in daily Hürriyet on Sept. 4, 1999.

Moreover, in 2001, a very important incident that exemplified the armed forces’ intervention in civilian politics occurred in the National Security Council (NSC) meeting on February 19, 2001, in which President Sezer sided with the armed forces, and accused the then Prime Minister Ecevit of interfering in the legal investigation of the White Energy case. At the beginning of the NSC meeting, then President Sezer not only accused the Prime Minister of obstructing the fight against corruption in front of the bureaucrats but also threw the constitution booklet across the table towards Ecevit. And Ecevit, who immediately left the meeting with Deputy Prime Ministers Husamettin Ozkan and Mesut Yilmaz, spoke to the press and defined the incident as a state crisis.

This argument at the top of the state in 2001 led to an economic crisis which hit the economy very hard. The Istanbul stock exchange collapsed, interest rates

rose dramatically, foreign capital left the country in mass, many companies went bankrupt, and people lost their jobs. Here is a summary of how the economic crisis affected the economic indicators. According to experts,

“[The crisis] cost[ed] Turkish economy \$20 billion, or 10% of the country’s GDP in 2001. While the stock exchange lost nearly 30% of its value within days, interest rates skyrocketed 7,500%. That year, the Central Bank hemorrhaged \$7.6 billion in currency reserves, the Turkish economy shrank 5.7%, and inflation jumped to 88%. Exchange rates for the “old” Turkish lira – before it was revalued in 2005, shedding six zeros to change 1 million liras into one “new” lira – also suffered. The lira went from 623,000 Turkish liras buying one dollar to 1.225 million liras per dollar – thus, losing about half its value. . . The unemployment rate of 6.5% as of 2000 climbed to 8.5% in 2001 and 10.3% in 2002” (Ergocun 2020).

Although the economic program that had to be followed to get out of the crisis was obvious to the coalition partners, as Mesut Yilmaz, then the deputy prime minister stressed in an interview, the political environment was not suitable for its implementation since it was a coalition composed of three parties, all of which had re-election concerns and own political interests; that is why, they needed to appoint someone who could implement the economic program without pursuing any personal political goal. That is why Kemal Derviş, then the Vice President of the World Bank, was invited to the country; and he took office as the Minister of State responsible for Economic Affairs on March 13, 2001. Then, the government adopted a program called “transition program for a strong economy,” a law that enhanced the autonomy of the Central Bank and banking system reforms (Ergocun 2020).

The Islamist Virtue Party was also closed down amid the economic crisis atmosphere on June 22, 2001, for violating the secularist articles of the Constitution. And yet, the split in the Virtue Party became official as the traditionalists in the party established another National Outlook party called Felicity Party (SP) while the reformists in the party decided to go their own way, and did not join the party. It becomes clear that the assessments that started in the Virtue Party further intensified with the closure of the Virtue Party. Erdoğan’s (2012) following words indicated that it was the demands of the society that guided the new route taken by the reformists in this process:

“We came to an understanding that it was because of a mismatch between the society [and the National Outlook Parties] that neither the Salvation Party (MSP), nor the Welfare Party (the RP) nor the Virtue Party (FP) could come to power in single-party governments. . . We reached to the conclusion that the change was necessary. Public opinion

polls...pointed us in a certain direction... And after the closure of the FP we decided to be reborn as a completely new party.”

It is possible to say that the need for reformers to part ways with traditionalists was the most important change effect of the February 28th process in Turkish politics. And the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which Erdoğan described as democratic, conservative, reformist, and modern at its founding ceremony, was officially established on August 14, 2001. As Fikret Bila, a columnist, also stressed, both Gul and Erdogan emphasized that they were not a religiously-oriented party, and Erdoğan widely used the phrase, “we put off the National Outlook shirt” and claimed that the AKP was not a continuation of the previous Islamist parties but of the center-right Democrat Party (DP) of the 1950s (Bila 2003). Still, the founders of the party still could not convince the secular press and public of this change, and the secular media started to respond to these claims by televising old speeches of Erdogan. One of those speeches was particularly striking as Erdogan argued in that speech that secular and Muslim identities were two separate identities that cannot exist together; then, a person would either be Muslim or secular, but not both (Hürriyet Aug. 21, 2001).

One important sign of change in the AKP emerged in the new party’s view of the European Union (the EU) as the former National Outlook parties defined the EU as a Christian club. The AKP founding cadres stuck to the EU membership goal starting from the establishment of the party. The words of Arınç (2012c), one of the founding members of the party, are of crucial importance in this regard:

“I was one of the opponents of the EU when I was in the previous National Outlook parties. Among us there were those who identified the EU membership as treason with regard to our faith, our culture, and integrity of our territory. It was only in the course of the February 28th process that I started to conceive the EU as a standard for law and democracy. And I saw that certain mechanisms which did not take domestic demands into consideration, could only democratize within the EU membership process. For that purpose we had to proceed swiftly towards the EU membership.”

The elections in which the AKP rose to power were conducted on November 3, 2002. And when we look at the political atmosphere that contributed to the making of the decision to hold elections in 2002, the major health problem of Ecevit, and the accompanying process of the break-up of the center-left DSP. And yet, the final hit to the coalition government came from the nationalist MHP since Bahçeli, the Deputy Prime Minister and the MHP leader, made a call to hold snap elections to the surprise of other coalition partners on July 7, 2002, (Hürriyet Jul. 7, 2002). And

finally, 449 deputies in the parliament voted on July 31, 2002, in favor of the renewal of the elections (Hürriyet Jul. 31, 2002). Still in this election environment, the coalition government was able to pass through the parliament the EU harmonization laws, including the abolishment of the death penalty for peacetime offenses.

Erdoğan-led AKP has emerged as the most ambitious candidate in the election campaign period according to pre-election polls (Cemal 2002). And since the main characteristic of the political environment in the 1990s was the powerlessness of civilian politics vis-à-vis the state bureaucracy led by the armed forces, the AKP under the leadership of Erdogan prioritized democratic reforms in its agenda and placed it at the center of its electoral campaign. In the electoral campaign, he said, “We do not only want to rule single-handedly, that is not enough, we would like to reach the necessary number (of deputies) in the parliament to pass the laws single-handedly. We would like to overcome the obstacles before democracy” (32. Gün 2012c).

Apparently, there was a belief among mainstream secular parties that the armed forces would prevent the AKP from coming to power. This consideration became apparent in the campaign speeches of party leaders such as DSP leader Ecevit and ANAP leader Yılmaz. For instance, Ecevit told in a TV program prior to the election,

“I have never trusted the polls much, but there are claims that AKP will come first and HADEP will pass the threshold. If these claims come true, Turkey could face a very serious regime problem, even problems beyond the regime” (Hürriyet Jul. 22, 2002).

Similarly, Mesut Yılmaz used the following words with regard to the AKP:

“The AKP has a problem with the state and its principles. If it comes [to power], it will fight with the principles and institutions of the state. It will abuse the beliefs of the people. This party has already given all the signals that it will settle scores with the state. With this mentality, the AK Party will lead Turkey to a new February 28” (Hürriyet Nov. 1, 2002).

In this process, the AKP also received two blows from the judiciary. First, the Constitutional Court ruled that Erdoğan could not be a party founder, stating that he was “not qualified to be elected as an MP” on the grounds that he had been convicted under Article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code. The Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) also rejected Erdoğan’s candidacy, citing “participation in ideological and anarchic activities” in Article 76 of the Constitution, which regulates the

qualification for parliamentary election (CNNTürk Jun. 30, 2011). Then the second shock came when Sabih Kanadoğlu, the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Court of Appeals, filed a closure case against the AKP 9 days before the elections, citing the case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who resigned as a founding member but did not leave his post as chairman. He also asked for a precautionary measure to prevent Erdoğan from using the duties and powers of the general presidency (Hürriyet Oct. 23, 2002).

Under such circumstances, such a landslide victory of the AKP on the November 3, 2002 elections was even beyond expectations as the AKP won 34.2% of the vote, while the runner-up CHP won 19.3% of the vote. After the February 28th process, which rendered civilian politics powerless in the face of the state bureaucracy such as the judiciary and the armed forces, and the economic crisis of 2001 following the earthquake of August 17, 1999, it became clear that the public turned its back on traditional secular parties other than the CHP due to the loss of credibility of the ruling coalition in particular and civilian politics in general in the eyes of the public. After the elections, the center-right leaders Çiller and Yılmaz resigned from the leadership of their parties and thus the center-right in Turkey collapsed, the center-left DSP, which had received 21% of the vote in the previous elections in 1999, received only 1.5% of the vote, and the center-left YTP (New Turkey Party), founded by those who left the DSP, received only 1% of the vote.

As the retired vice-admiral Atilla Kıyat (2012) stated, in an interview, for the armed forces, the AKP coming to power in a single-party government was as shocking as the RP coming to power in a coalition government with the DYP; and in this regard, the armed forces considered the AKP as a threat that would steer Turkey away from the West, and would drift Turkey into reactionary Islam as well. Then, it is not surprising to find that the military tried to impose the spirit of the February 28th process on the new period that started with the rise of the AKP to power in a single-party government as well, and although the AKP tried to stay away from issues related to religion/religious symbols when it took office, these issues/symbols emerged as issues of conflict at the beginning of this period. After all, the February 28th process led by the military was intended to last very long, for one thousand years, as the then Chief of Staff Kivrikoğlu declared.

After the AKP's winning the elections, although the task of putting together the new government was given to Abdullah Gül, in a short while the political ban on Erdogan was lifted with the support of the CHP; and with the renewal of the elections in Siirt, where Erdogan recited the poem that led him to be imprisoned, on March 14, 2003, Erdogan became the Prime Minister of the country.

3.11 Concluding Remarks

This analysis of the 1990s gives important lessons to us: First of all, it becomes clear that although what marked the 1990s was the armed forces' fight against the PKK terror and Islamism/political Islam, a closer look suggests that what shaped Turkey in the 1990s was the armed forces' efforts to gain control over civilian politics to preserve the status quo. The February 28th process seems to have served that purpose as well. Nevertheless, by creating the conditions for the emergence/mobilization of democratic forces against the anti-democratic camp led by the state bureaucracy led by the armed forces, the armed forces also created the conditions for the dismantling of the status quo.

In summary, with regard to the main characteristics of the 1990s, we can reach the following conclusions:

PM Çiller's leaving the fight with the PKK in late 1993 to the armed forces led the Kurdish question to be viewed by the state only as a security issue. The military, relying on this task and on the basis of the security viewpoint, not only responded to the increasing terrorist acts as the conductor of the war with the PKK, but also the state discourse on the basis of security led to the sidelining of the pro-Kurdish political movement, to the disregard of democracy and human rights, and to the state's closing itself to any opening as well as its giving harsh responses to any criticism. Then, as the military emerged as the primary state actor in the 1990s, the state showdown emerged as the new state policy and further consolidated the power of the military within the state, and as the military consolidated its power in the state civilian politicians had neither the courage nor the power against the military to voice any objection on any issue.

If the combat with the PKK was an issue that further increased the power of the military within the state, the other issue was the rise of the Islamist RP in the 1994 local elections, and then, in the 1995 general elections. We saw that towards the mid-90s, it was the domestic economic environment characterized by the corrupt image of the social democrat SHP and ineptitude of the coalition government of a center-left and a center-right party in dealing with a deep economic crisis, and hence, the center-right and center-left coalition partners' losing their credit in the eyes of the public, and the success of the RP municipalities that gave rise to the Islamist RP. The Islamist RP filled the political void through its Just Order discourse which targeted primarily the urban poor and through the work of its grassroots organizations. As the rise of the RP pumped into the military, as the self-proclaimed guardian of the

secular principles of the Republic, the fear that the secular character of the state would be in danger, the new security-based approach and the policy of trying to sideline the Islamist identity-based parties was enforced on the Islamist RP as well. And as the military got stronger, it has generated an anti-Kurdish, and anti-Islamist coalition around itself.

What we witnessed after the RP's winning the highest rate of votes was the General Staff's trying to prevent the RP from rising to power in a coalition government in the first place, and then, trying to bring the RP-DYP coalition government down in a very strong military-led coalition composed of secular actors such as the secular business circles, secular unions, mainstream media outlets, the judiciary, the Presidency, and the secular public. Then, as the military gained more power in civilian politics, the political fight stopped being between political parties but turned into a fight mainly between the military and the Islamist RP, and psychological war served as the main tool, and the media served as the primary weapon in this fight by enhancing the direct contact of the military with the public. We particularly saw that the military played an important role in the course of reactionary Islam briefings given to different sectors of society to convince the secular camp that the RP was a threat to the Republic. And the judiciary took part in this secular coalition since the Chief Prosecutor at the Supreme Court of Appeal filed a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court against the RP in mid-1997, closing down the RP, convicting the RP Mayor in Istanbul for inciting religious hatred with a poem he recited.

We've seen that in this process, the military took certain steps to increase its own power vis-à-vis the civilian government through certain mechanisms such as the Western Working Group and the Prime Ministry Crisis Administration regulation, both of which increased the power of the military in public institutions. Interviews with the actors of the period show that President Demirel also took an active role in bringing down the coalition government between the DYP and the RP by directing the resignation of the DYP deputies in this process since he wanted to prevent a military coup from occurring.

In addition, we've seen that even after the break-up of the Refahyol government, i.e. during the Anasol-D government, which was established with the external support of the CHP to prevent the RP from coming to power, the military kept interfering in politics and further enhanced its power vis-à-vis the civilian government in order to ensure the enforcement of the February 28th process resolutions. In this regard, the EMASYA protocol provided the military with an important mechanism to put the civilian bureaucracy under the control of the military. And during the reign of this government, too, the military kept using the media as its primary weapon and

even engaged in a disinformation process to discredit certain names and institutions in the country as set forth by the Andıç document prepared by the General Staff. Prime Minister Yılmaz's repeated harsh criticism of the military's interference in politics and lack of respect for the proper functioning of democracy shows that the military's positioning of itself above the civilian government was also a problem under secular governments.

And finally, after the 1999 snap elections which were held in a period of political uncertainty that came to the fore after the fall of the Anasol-D government through a vote of no-confidence, a three-party coalition was established under the leadership of Ecevit. We've seen that before the establishment of the government, a political crisis occurred with the walk of a newly elected FP deputy, Merve Kavakçı, into the parliament wearing her headscarf. Then, her removal from the parliament among the protests of the secular front in the parliament was followed by a raid carried out by the State Security Court Prosecutor Nuh Mete Yüksel who intended to arrest her. President Demirel's calling Kavakçı's entering the parliament with her headscarf on as a provocation, and then the opening of closure against the FP by the then Chief Prosecutor of the Court of Appeals, all signalled the emergence of a secular coalition against the Islamist FP. In this environment, the election of the former president of the Constitutional Court, to have known as an ardent secularist during his presidency, as the new President of the Republic is also worthy of attention. And yet, the three-party coalition period was also marked by the armed forces' intervention in civilian politics, and this intervention was exemplified by an argument at the top of the state in a National Security Council meeting in February 2001 between PM Ecevit and President Sezer, the latter of whom sided with the military when the gendarme targeted the civilian government with corruption allegations against the government.

Before the establishment of the three-party coalition in late May 1999, what changed the course of Turkish politics was the holding of the 1st Ordinary Grand Congress of the Virtue Party held on May 14, 2000, since it was the first time a National Outlook Party (an Islamist party) witnessed an intra-party opposition. This opposition movement in the party, later, became known as the reformists (versus the hardliners in the party), and nominated their own candidate for the leadership of the party. They voiced criticisms as to the one-man rule in the party, the cadres composed of old age groups who made up the hardliners in the party, top-down imposition of politics as well as how unrealistic and far from the reality of the world dreams/concerns of the hardliners were. The embracement by the reformists within the Virtue of democratic values/procedures and these reformists' distancing from the unrealistic Islamist dreams after an introspection (assessment of the past) pro-

cess, undoubtedly, makes it possible to call this reformist movement a post-Islamist one.

And yet, it is important to stress that although the February 28th process primarily involved the crystallization of a military-led anti-democratic coalition, albeit a secular one, that cracked down on Islamist parties and led to the birth of reformist (post-Islamist) cadres out of them, it becomes clear that the meaning of the February 28th process went beyond that since the February 28th process served the military to increase its own power vis-à-vis all civilian governments, including the secular ones, and led to the emergence/mobilization of democratic forces in the face of the military-led coalition. And the AKP which emerged as the most assertive party in the 2002 elections assumed the leadership of these forces and the public turned its back on the traditional secular parties except for the CHP since the parties that were part of the most recent coalition government showed ineptitude and lost favor in the eyes of the public, and since the civilian politics in general was rendered powerless by the military.

Finally, as it becomes clear that the February 28th process emerged as a turning in terms of both the birth of a post-Islamist movement out of an Islamist one and the emergence and empowerment of a military-led anti-democratic coalition and the emergence of democratic forces opposed to the anti-democratic coalition, the AKP undertook the leadership of the democratic forces in a democratization process that was already in progress as suggested by the start of the EU membership process and adoption of EU harmonization laws by the three-party coalition government even after the election decision was made and the accompanying process of economic measures as advised by the IMF and the World Bank to get Turkey out of the economic crisis.

4. TURKEY'S DEMOCRATIZATION IN STRUGGLE WITH OLD TURKEY

In the literature, there is almost a consensus that the AKP, despite the Islamist background of its leaders, emerged as a democratizing force for a while, although views on the building blocks of democratic backsliding diverged. This thesis intends to make a contribution to the literature in this regard.

I argued in the previous section that increasing empowerment of the military vis-a-vis civilian institutions that characterized '90s Turkey, culminated in the February 28th process, which not only led to the move of the younger generation of Islamists in the RP/FP from Islamism to post-Islamism but also motivated even the hardly-surviving three-party government coalition to adopt democratic reforms, which led to the official recognition of Turkey as a candidate for full membership in 1999. Then, I argue that while the EU anchor and the increasing empowerment of the military vis-a-vis civilian institutions over the 1990s, were two important structural conditions that influenced the mobilization of pro-democracy forces, the February 28th process interacted with both of these conditions and accelerated the mobilization process of pro-democracy forces. Thus, when the AKP rose to power in 2002, Turkey had already got on the EU membership track, and it was accompanied by other pro-democracy forces. And on the part of the younger generation of Islamists, the result had been to move from Islamism to post-Islamism, since these Islamists who established the AKP brought harsh criticisms to the National Outlook tradition's perception of both Islam and democracy.

4.1 The AKP's Post-Islamism and Conservative-Democrat Identity

While I employ the term post-Islamist to define the transformation of the formerly Islamist actors who established the AKP, it is also possible to identify other schol-

ars who call the AKP post-Islamist due to its critique of the National Outlook parties' traditional Islamist perspective, and emergence as a democratizing force, which promoted Turkey's membership in the European Union (EU). For instance, Dağı (2004) identifies a learning process associated with the 1997 post-modern coup; and in this regard, gives an account of what the transformation from Islamism to post-Islamism meant for the political (and intellectual) representatives of this transformation. Then, to him, this transformation meant a change of discourse, convictions, as well as ideals on the part of these actors; and the 1997 post-modern coup, which marked the crackdown of the Kemalist establishment on "[the] visibility and power of Islam in the political realm," and the disruption of all "social bases [of Islam] with its educational, commercial and solidarity networks," marked a sudden turn in the change of their thinking/discourse of former Islamists since it led them to come to an understanding in the late 1990s that Islamism could not offer solutions to "real problems," and that all ideologies, including political Islam, had failed in the age of globalization. Then, the Islamists reconsidered such modern political notions as democracy and human rights and became more interested in preserving the "social bases" of Islam, i.e. social and economic networks, rather than the political bases of it. This involved the essence of "conservative democratic" identity of the AKP, to Dağı (2004, 136-143). More specifically, in this account, post-Islamism takes place as "a new form of Islamism, ... [which] does not propose an alternative social and political order," unlike Islamism of the 1980s which believed in the possibility of "Islamization of politics and society as well as knowledge," which referred to refuting/falsifying the Western concepts/theories and replacing them with Islamic ones. Then, unlike the old Islamists who had challenged the West, the Western modernity, the Western concepts/theories, and also the Kemalist ideology, which suppressed "Islam's social, political, and intellectual representation" in the name of implementing a Westernization program in Turkey, by calling them "anti-Islam," the intellectual/political representatives of post-Islamism reconciled with the West, moved to embrace modern political notions such as democracy, rule of law, a "West/modernity-referential" discourse, the language of political/civil rights, and even perceived the West and the Western institutions such as the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights as their allies in their fight with the Kemalist state ideology, guarded primarily by the military and the high judiciary. Thus, such a radical shift in the discourse/values of former Islamists not only provided them with allies at home as this shift "blur[red] their ideological differences with their secular/liberal counterparts, but also provided these former Islamists with both "discursive legitimacy" and "popular legitimacy, the former of which enabled them to obtain leverage against their adversaries who cannot "categorically" oppose such universal modern notions, and the latter of which enabled them to have "people

power,” which they believed they had enjoyed, in the face of “the state power” of the state bureaucracy, mainly composed of the military and the judiciary.

Undoubtedly, the AKP’s reconciliation between Islam and democracy also involved advocacy of Anglo-Saxon type of secularism which provided some public space for the activities/social engagement of religious groups (Dağı 2004, 139). Those who focused on this critique of the total “exclusion of religion from the public sphere,” i.e. of the “assertive secularism” (Kuru 2007) promoted by the state, called the AKP’s perspective “post-secular,” which is defined by Göle (2012) as “going beyond the [islam/secularism] divide and searching for new articulations that will not lead to exclusionary practices.” Then, to Göle, the main importance of the post-secular experience of the AKP is its dealing with the differences in the society, i.e. with pluralism, since, in her words, “the real thing of Turkish democracy is to rediscover the thickness of the heterogeneity of the society.” Hale and Özbudun (2010), borrowing from Kuru (2007) the differentiation between assertive and passive secularism, define the AKP’s attitude toward secularism as “passive secularism,” which is, to Kuru, 20-22,571, a conception of secularism in which “the secular state play[s] a ‘passive’ role in avoiding the establishment of any religion, [and] allows for the public visibility of religion,” as well as “a pragmatic political principle that tries to maintain state neutrality toward various religions”. Then, they also stress that the pluralist notion of democracy adopted by the AKP meant the rejection/critique of the majoritarian notion of democracy adopted by the RP; and reach the conclusion that the AKP not only rejected assertive secularism, but also the Islamist ideology which has the claim of Islamizing the society through the exercise of state power.

The pluralistic notion of democracy found its clearest expression in key documents of the party, primary one being the Party Program (2002, 13-14, 19-20), which involves such phrases as, “The saying ‘No one is free until we are all free’ is one of the fundamental principles of our party; . . . freedoms constitute the foundation of democracy; [and] no individual and institutional restraint can be imposed [on these freedoms] . . . [since] diversity is considered as a source of richness”. In the Program, the Party promised that human rights standards in the country would be elevated to the levels envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention of Human Rights, the Paris Charter, and the Helsinki Final Act. In addition, in the party program, frequent references are made to such universal values as the rule of law, centrality of the individual, tolerance, compromise, and respect for diversity; it is also stressed that citizens and civil society organizations would participate in the policy-making process to create synergy in the society. On the economic front, pluralism/liberalism showed itself through advocacy of a free market economy, freedom of enterprise, and the state’s playing only regulatory and

supervisory roles, and the program also involved social-democratic tones with an emphasis on more equitable distribution of income and social justice. And also, the importance of intra-party democracy, common mind (ortak akıl), and collective politics have been emphasized in the party program. Apparently, leader oligarchy and lack of intra-party democracy were addressed in the program particularly as a critique of the National Outlook tradition since in the speech Erdoğan delivered during the establishment ceremony of the AKP, he said,

“Today marks the date of the collapse of the leader oligarchy, and the replacement of the monopolistic based leadership notion with a leadership notion representative of the common mind” (Akdoğan 2004, 13).

Besides, the AKP’s decisiveness in keeping its distance from identity politics, which the AKP believed to have radicalized the politics, as exemplified by the National Outlook and Kurdish-identity based parties (Akdoğan 2004, 17), and the emphasis on “limited government” as opposed to an unlimited, arbitral, imposing one emerged as other important elements of the conservative democratic ideology of the party. The following perspective of the AKP can be read as a critique of the imposing character of the Turkish state since the establishment of the Republic:

“The state should withdraw to its essential/original functions, and be small, albeit effective; and it should not be the one who defines and shapes the citizens and imposes its preferences on them; it should serve the citizens as the one which is defined, shaped and checked by them” (Akdoğan 2004, 17).

And the pluralist perspective manifested itself in the AKP’s approach to secularism with the following phrases from the AKP Program (2001, 19-20) regarding religion and secularism:

“Our party considers religion as one of the most important institutions of humanity, and secularism as an inseparable part of democracy and a safeguard for freedom of religion and conscience; [our party] is also against the interpretation of secularism as hostility against religion. . . Essentially, secularism ensures that people affiliated with any religious faith practice their prayers in comfort, express their religious views freely and live accordingly and that people with no religious affiliation live accordingly. In this respect, secularism is a principle that ensures freedom and societal peace. [Also,] our party finds the abuse of religious values and ethnicity through being employed as political material, unacceptable. The party finds attitudes and practices that hurt pious people, and putting [these people] through different treatment on account of their lifestyles and preferences anti-democratic and against human rights and freedoms. On

the other hand, [the party finds it] unacceptable to exploit religion for political, economic and other purposes, or to impose restraints on people affiliated with different faiths and lifestyles by use of religion”.

The party’s notion of secularism also found expression in the words of Erdogan who recommended secularism to Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya in the post-Arab Spring uprisings process, in September 2011, with the following words:

“[In Cairo, he said,] in Turkey, the Constitution defines secularism as the state’s being at equal distance to all religious faiths. I... am Muslim, ...[and] the Prime Minister of a secular country. In a secular regime, people have the freedom of being religious or not... Secularism is not being hostile to religion. Don’t be afraid of secularism... [And then, in Tunisia, he added,] secularism is a characteristic of not a person, but a state. A Muslim leader can rule a secular country in a successful manner. We have to pay attention to the following: A secular state... safeguards all religious faiths, be it a Muslim, a Christian, a Judaist, or an atheist. This is the essence [of secularism.] [And finally, in Libya, he explained that this approach to secularism also takes place in the party program of the AKP, adding, this perspective] has nothing incompatible with Islam.” (Sözcü Daily Aug. 12, 2018).

Akdoğan (2004), then advisor to Erdogan, elaborated on the party label conservative democracy, also quoting the statements of Erdoğan, in his book entitled *The AKP and Conservative Democracy*. In this respect we find that the party’s notion of conservatism does not entail advocating the preservation of the past (status quo) and being closed to change, but being opposed to radical/revolutionary change and social engineering and advocating evolutionary/gradual change and moderation since, in the words of Akdoğan, 13-17, “societal change is the primary and permanent change,” and since they believed in the importance of practicing politics on the basis of “compromise, integration, and tolerance instead of conflict, division, and polarization”. This emphasis on rejecting radical transformation exceeding the natural pace of life also can be interpreted as a critique of the RP/FP tradition’s notion of conservativeness. When it comes to the values that must be preserved as part of the AKP’s understanding of conservativeness, family, traditions, and societal acquisitions are mentioned among such values. Then, as Akdoğan, 18 stressed, a conservative democratic ideology of the party emphasized “modernity that does not exclude tradition, universality that acknowledges locality, and change that is not radical”.

Then, we find a discussion about which ideology the AKP has adopted on the basis of the values stressed in the party program. To Hale and Özbudun (2010, 24), the values adopted in the Program signified “a more liberal than a conservative

ideology,” and the AKP appeared to be more of a “conservative or liberal party of the Western type” although the AKP leaders avoided the use of the liberal label. Öniş (2006, 14-15,115) likened the AKP to “a European-style social democratic party of the third way” specifically for the party’s “capitalizing on the material benefits of globalization whilst aiming to correct some of its negative consequences at the same time”. To him, by the European standards, the AKP portrayed the image of a third way political party more so than the CHP, which he defined as much more “conservative” in some respects, and more “inward-oriented”. When it comes to more specific characteristics of the AKP that makes it a political party of a third-way, he mentions them as follows:

“[The AKPs’] emphasis on the benefits of the market, the need to reform the state in the direction of a post-developmental regulatory state, its concern with social justice issues, its commitment to multiculturalism and extension of religious freedoms and its transnationalism as exemplified by its commitment to EU membership and the associated set of reforms”

Similarly, Öniş and Keyman (2003, 100-101) defined the AKP’s ideology on the basis of its program as “a synthesis of communitarian (or conservative) and liberal elements. . . [which] reconciles the free market with community values, religious beliefs, societal norms, and local traditions”. And they identified the main principles as to the AKP’s approach to governance as follows:

“The first is an effective and ‘postdevelopmental’ state that is democratic, transparent, and accountable to society, but at the same time ‘caring’ and not afraid to play a role in overseeing the economy. The second pillar. . . is a market that is regulated closely enough to keep it honest and to prevent destructive side effects and externalities but with plenty of free space left for enterprise, innovation, and investment. Third and finally, there is social justice. . . This term refers both to the need for some basic level of fairness in the distribution of material goods and services and to the need for full equality of respect and recognition across Turkish society that no citizen is treated individually on the ground of religious affiliation or ethnocultural identity”.

Öniş and Keyman (2003, 101) also argue that what differentiates the approach of the AKP to the issue of social justice from that of the CHP is that it does not take it as an “indirect problem,” the primary solution of which lies in economic growth, but as a problem, that must be dealt with policies promoting “fairness and equal respect”.

Undoubtedly, there are also those who establish a parallel between the AKP and the

center-right tradition in Turkey on the basis of the AKP's synthesis of conservative and liberal values. To Hale and Özbudun (2010, 25-27), the only difference was that the AKP's emphasis on liberal values and the pluralist notion of democracy and "sensitivity to religious values" were much more pronounced. In addition, they stressed that the common themes the AKP shared with other center-right parties were "Turkish nationalism, sensitivity to traditional and Islamic values, a commitment to technological modernization while preserving conservative social values, and a constituency-service-oriented conception of the party (as opposed to the tutelary approach of the CHP)".

Then, Yavuz (2003, 260) defined the ideology of the AKP as "simultaneously Turkish, Muslim and Western;" and argued that this hybrid character/pluralist aspect, which was the common characteristic of the center-right tradition in Turkey, was adopted out of "political necessity" to address "diverse lifestyles in the country," with the goal of appealing to a broader electorate. Furthermore, he stressed, while the RP was able to win the vote of the Kurdish and the Turkish nationalist electorate, blending them with Islamic identity between 1987 and 1999, the 2002 election represented "the nationalization of Islamism as Turkish Islam and the ethnicization of the Kurdish identity;" and hence, in this election the AKP was primarily supported by "Sunni Muslim and Turkish nationalist provinces" as it emerged as the representative of the "ethnoreligious and society-centric nationalism". Besides, as Yavuz (2003) stressed, while the AKP's notion of Turkishness was defined in religious terms, and hence, referred to "Turkish Muslims," the main characteristic of its understanding of Islam was its being "modernist and western-influenced." Then, the AKP both nationalized and Westernized Islamism, to Yavuz (2003, 261). And he said, it was this Westernized character of the AKP's Islamism, the accompanying notion of secularism, based on the "rearticulat[ion of] the Ottoman Islamic ethos as the spirit of tolerance, accommodation, and coexistence of faiths, cultures, and ideas," and the notion of Westernism characterized by the advocacy of "bottom-up modernization," recognition of the autonomous character of civil society, "respect for the popular will," that made the AKP appealing to the secular, urban, well-off Turks who saw the AKP as the party that could fix "the corrupt and authoritarian political structure".

4.2 The AKP's "Quiet Revolution"

There is almost a consensus that the AKP, despite the Islamist background of its leaders, emerged as a democratizing/liberalizing/transforming force. Democratization efforts that started during the 1999-2002 tripartite coalition to align with the EU standards, continued during the single-party rule of the AKP. In this regard, particularly the first term of the AKP rule which continued till 2007 was characterized by a huge transformation process, which the AKP itself defined as "a quiet revolution." And this transformation process increased the international appeal of the Turkish example.

As mentioned in the previous section, after the European Council gave candidate status to Turkey in 1999 in Helsinki, Turkey started a comprehensive reform process to fulfill the EU membership requirements, which are also known as the Copenhagen "Political" criteria. In this context, in 2001 and 2004 major constitutional amendments were made, the former having been undertaken during the DSP-MHP-ANAP (1999-2002) tripartite coalition, and the latter having been undertaken during the single party rule of the AKP. These constitutional amendments in 2001 and 2004 led to the change in one-third of the Constitution (MFA 2007, 5). Of the nine harmonization packages that were adopted between 2002 and 2006 to change existing Turkish legislation in order to align with EU standards, three (in February, April, and August 2002) were also undertaken during the three-party coalition government before the AKP's rise to power (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 55-62). And these constitutional amendments and harmonization packages primarily involved reforms to improve human rights and liberties and expand the scope of Turkish democracy in general, and more specifically to normalize/democratize civil-military relations, to provide for greater gender equality, and to improve freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, prevention of torture and mistreatment and minority rights, as well as international protection of overall human rights.

In this regard, for instance, while the constitutional amendments, undertaken by the three-party coalition government, abolished the death penalty for crimes, excluding those committed during the war and related to terrorism, first in August 2002 the terror crimes exception was removed, and then in 2004, during the AKP rule, death penalty was completely abolished through constitutional amendments. The other important constitutional amendment in 2004 concerned the Article 90 of the Constitution, the original version of which argued that international agreements duly put into effect bear the force of law. And the amended article stipulated that in

the case of a conflict between domestic law and international agreements concerning fundamental rights and freedoms due to differences in provisions on the same matter, the provisions of international agreements shall take precedence. As Hale and Özbudun (2010, 56), rightfully, stressed, while the total removal of the death penalty meant the removal of the obstacle before the ratification of the 13th Additional Protocol to the European Convention of Human Rights, the importance of the amendment involving Article 90 was that it enabled the Turkish Courts to more effectively implement the European Convention on Human Rights and other international instruments of human rights. Furthermore, the amendment to the Article 38 of the Constitution also contributed to the supremacy of international law over domestic law by bringing an exception to the rule that no citizen shall be extradited to a foreign country because an offense, the exception being the obligations resulting from being a party to the International Criminal Court. Another important constitutional amendment concerned the abolition of State Security Courts, which were established in 1973, and then incorporated into the 1982 Constitution, for the trial of cases concerning crimes against the security of the state, and which involved military judges/prosecutors. Since the presence of military judges and public prosecutors in state security courts led the ECHR to find Turkey in violation of fair trial principles spelled out under Article 6 of the ECHR, first, in June 1999, i.e. during the tripartite coalition government, military judges and public prosecutors were removed from these courts, and then, in 2004, these courts were completely abolished through constitutional amendment Hale and Özbudun (2010, 56).

Further steps were taken to normalize/democratize civil-military relations in Turkey through both constitutional amendments and harmonization packages. To this end, the first step taken was opening the military's state properties to the financial supervision of the Court of Accounts, first by the Seventh Harmonization Package adopted in 2003, and then by the constitutional amendment in 2004, which abolished the last paragraph of Article 160 of the Constitution, which stipulated that "the procedure for auditing, on behalf of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, of state property in possession of the Armed Forces shall be regulated by law in accordance with the principles of secrecy required by national defense" (MFA 2007, 3-4). Besides, constitutional amendments in 2004 also removed the member nominated by the Chief of the General Staff from the Board of Higher Education. Furthermore, the seventh harmonization package also brought limitations to the trial of civilians by military courts. The amendment brought to Article 11 of the Law on the Establishment and Trial Procedures of Military Courts put an end to the trial of civilians by military courts in criminal offense cases committed by civilians. The package also added an article to the Law on the Court of Accounts that made it possible for the Court

of Accounts to audit state property possessed by the military, upon the request of the parliament. Furthermore, Article 4 of the Law on the National Security Council and the Secretariat General of the National Security Council was amended to revise the duties/authority of the Council. In this regard, Articles 9 and 14 of the Law were removed to abolish the executive powers of the Secretariat General. Article 13 was amended to restrict the duties of the Secretariat General to secretarial duties. According to the amended Article 5, National Security Council shall meet in every two months, not one month. This article also removed the authority of the Chief of General Staff to call a meeting. The amended Article 15 allowed for the appointment of a civilian Secretary-General, arguing that the Secretary-General would be appointed upon the proposal of the Prime Minister and the approval of the President. The package removed Article 19 of the Law, which provided that “the Ministries, public institutions and organizations and private legal persons shall submit regularly, or when requested, non-classified and classified information and documents needed by the Secretariat General of the National Security Council.” The package also provided a bylaw, published in 2004, to regulate the rules and procedures in parallel with the amendments. The parliament also passed a law in December 2003 declassifying the bylaw and the staff of the Secretariat General of the National Security Council (MFA 2007, 17-18).

Turkey amended some notorious articles in its penal code in response to repeated criticism of restrictions on freedom of expression in Turkey in the European Commission’s progress reports. In this respect, the first harmonization package, which entered into force in February 2002, involved an amendment to Article 159 which made reductions in the upper limit of sentences for persons who “openly insult or deride Turkishness, the Republic, the Grand National Assembly, the moral personality of the Government, the Ministries, the military or security forces of the State or the moral personality of the judiciary” (MFA 2007, 5-6). The first harmonization package also brought an amendment to Article 312, which had penalized expressions “praising a criminal act, calling for disobedience to the law or inciting hatred on the basis of class, race, religion, sect or territory,” arguing that such expressions would constitute a crime only if they “endangered public order” (MFA 2007, 6). The new Penal Code that entered into force in April 2005 (Article 216) further diminished the scope of expressions that would constitute a crime by establishing the condition of “reveal[ing] a clear, imminent or serious danger in terms of public security” as the criterion for the definition of the crime. Then, the Article 159 was amended by the third harmonization package one more time to further expand the freedom of expression by fixing the ambiguity in the wording of the Article (MFA 2007, 6). In this regard a paragraph was added stating, “those written, oral or visual expressions

of thought made with the sole purpose of criticism and without the intention to insult or deride the institutions in question would not constitute a crime” Hale and Özbudun (2010, 58). And finally, the seventh harmonization package amended the same article, again, in the context of freedom of expression to diminish the minimum prison terms for the crime defined in the article (MFA 2007, 15). And article 159 was finally replaced by Article 301, which took effect on June 1, 2005, as part of the penal code reform, which was adopted to enable increased freedom of expression in order to fulfill the conditions prior to the start of accession negotiations with the EU. Article 301 made it a crime to publicly denigrate “Turkishness, the Republic, the parliament, the courts, the military or the security forces.” And yet, jail terms increased for the offenses committed abroad, and also it was left to the judgment of the courts/state attorneys to decide whether an expression would comprise only a criticism or a denigration (Leicht 2006). On April 30, 2008, multiple amendments were made on the article, including the introduction of the obligation to get the approval of the Minister of Justice to file a case. Furthermore, the prison terms were reduced, and some broad concepts were replaced with more specific ones to avoid misuse of the article. In this context, for instance, in the new version of the article, instead of “Turkishness,” “Turkish nation” was employed, and also instead of “Republic,” “the State of Turkish Republic” was employed.

Amendments were also enacted to Article 1 and Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law to expand the freedom of expression. In this context, first, the first harmonization package reduced restrictions on freedom of expression by reducing prison terms. Then, the sixth harmonization package narrowed down the definition of terror through an amendment to the Article 1, stipulating that for an act to be defined as an act of terror, it must be accompanied by “use of force or violence.” The sixth package also completely repealed Article 8 of the same law, which had prohibited all sorts of separatist propaganda, stating, “no one shall make written or oral propaganda or hold assemblies, demonstrations against the invisible integrity of the State of the Turkish Republic, its territories and the nation.” (MFA 2007, 5,11).

Besides, the second reform package made improvements in the area of freedom of expression by amending the Press Law. In this context, some of the activities listed under Supplementary Article 1 as press-related offenses were removed; and an amendment was made to Supplementary Article 2 to reduce the penalty terms. Article 16 was amended to remove the section on “publishing in a language prohibited by law” (MFA 2007, 7). The third harmonization package contributed to press freedom by lifting restrictions on broadcasting in different dialects/languages used by Turkish citizens in their lives, such as Kurdish. The third package amended Article 31 of the Press Law, abolishing prison sentences for press-related offenses.

Subsequently, the new Press Law adopted on June 24, 2004, further expanded the freedom of the press and introduced stricter rules on the seizure of press materials. Finally, the fourth package introduced provisions in the Press Law to protect the press from being forced to disclose its sources of information, in line with a case law of the European Court of Human Rights (MFA 2007, 4-11).

The harmonization packages and the new Civil Code, which entered into force on January 1, 2002, also improved the exercise of freedom of association. In this context, with the second harmonization package, Article 4 of the Law on Associations was amended to abolish the provision prohibiting ex-convicts from establishing associations. Article 5 was also amended to remove the prohibition on forming associations “to protect, develop, or expand languages or cultures other than the Turkish language or culture or to claim that there are minorities based on racial, religious, sectarian, cultural or linguistic differences.” An amendment to Article 6 also removed the provision on the prohibition of the use of languages prohibited by law by associations. Article 34 was amended to allow associations to form federations; and Article 38 was amended to allow student associations to enjoy greater freedoms. The third harmonization package further expanded freedom of association by amending Articles 11 and 12 of the Law on Associations; and facilitated the activities of associations established in Turkey abroad as well as the activities of associations established abroad in Turkey. The fourth harmonization package which entered into force on January 11, 2003, further enhanced the exercise of freedom of associations. In this context, Article 6 was amended to allow the use of foreign languages in unofficial and international correspondence of associations. Articles 11 and 12 regarding the activities of associations established in Turkey abroad and the activities of associations established abroad in Turkey were repealed. Article 91 of the Civil Code was also amended to remove the procedure for associations established abroad to obtain permission from the Council of Ministers to operate in Turkey; responsibility in this area was transferred to the Ministry of Interior on the advice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, Article 92 was amended to emphasize situations where “international cooperation would be beneficial” and other restrictions on international cooperation were removed. Articles 91 and 92 were also amended to add provisions to further facilitate cooperation between associations. An additional provision also extended the amended Article 92 of the Civil Code to cover non-profit organizations as well. Furthermore, the seventh harmonization package, which entered into force on August 7, 2003, further enhanced freedom of association by reducing restrictions and simplifying procedures. For example, Article 38 was amended to allow students enrolled in higher education institutions to engage in association activities on a wider range of topics. And with an amendment

to Article 10, the time the Minister of Interior can use to evaluate an association's statute was reduced (MFA 2007, 6-17).

And finally, in July 2004, the Turkish Grand National Assembly adopted a new law on associations. This law was described by TÜSEV, one of Turkey's leading NGOs, which provided technical assistance in its drafting, as the most progressive law on associations in more than 20 years. This law involved such revisions as follows:

“Associations are no longer required to obtain prior authorization for foreign funding, partnerships, or activities. Associations are no longer required to inform local government officials of the day/time/location of general assembly meetings and no longer required to invite a government official/commissary to general assembly meetings... Associations are permitted to open representative offices for federations and confederations internationally. Security forces are no longer allowed on the premises of the association without a court order. Specific provisions and restrictions for student associations have been entirely removed...” (TÜSEV 2004).

The harmonization packages also involved improvements in the freedom of peaceful assembly. In this regard, while the existing prior permission procedure (from the Ministry of Interior) for foreigners attending meetings and demonstrations was maintained in the Article 3 of the Law on Assembly and Demonstration Marches, a “notification” procedure was introduced for foreigners attending meetings/demonstrations. Article 10 also reduced the period of “prior notification” for a meeting organized by Turkish citizens. Furthermore, as part of the seventh harmonization package, Articles 15 and 16 of the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations were amended to reduce the maximum period for regional governorates to postpone meetings/demonstrations. Furthermore, according to the amended Article 17 of the same law, meetings/demonstrations could only be banned in the presence of a “clear and present danger that a criminal offense will be committed.” The amendment also decreased the maximum time period an assembly/demonstration could be postponed/prohibited from two months to one month. Also according to the amended Article 19 of the same law, provincial governors could prohibit all the assemblies and demonstrations in their provinces only for one month, and only in case of “a clear and present danger that a criminal offense will be committed” (MFA 2007, 9-16).

The harmonization packages also led to significant changes in deterrence against torture and ill-treatment. In this context, the second harmonization package amended Article 13 of the Civil Servants Law, enabling compensation to be claimed from perpetrators of ill-treatment in line with European Court of Human Rights judgments.

Furthermore, Article 16 of the Law on the Establishment and Trial Procedures of the State Security Courts was amended to improve the rights of persons detained under the jurisdiction of the State Security Courts to defense and access to a lawyer. The fourth harmonization package amended Article 2 of the Law on the Prosecution of Civil Servants and Other Public Officials and abolished the requirement of obtaining permission to prosecute civil servants and other public officials for torture and ill-treatment offenses. Article 245 of the Criminal Code closed the door to suspended sentences or fines in cases of torture and ill-treatment. Article 316 of the Code of Criminal Procedure was amended to stipulate that the written statement of the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Court of Appeals cannot be served to the suspect or his/her defense counsel. The Seventh Harmonization Package added Additional Article 7 to the Criminal Procedure Code to ensure that torture and ill-treatment cases are prioritized and dealt with without delay. The amendment also provided for the continuation of hearings in these cases during the judicial recess (MFA 2007, 8-15). Besides, in 2004 the Law on the Compensation of Loses Resulting From Acts of Terror and Measures Taken Against Terrorism (Law No. 5233) was enacted for victims of terrorism. The purpose of this law was to compensate for such damages by reaching peaceful settlements with the natural/legal persons in question. In this context, the government issued guidelines for the procedures; and victim compensation committees in charge of compensation procedures were established in all provinces. The committees started to accept applications, and in this regard, in 2006 the ECHR ruled in the case of *İçyer V. Turkey* that the new compensation scheme of Turkey was effective that had to be consumed before making applications to the ECHR. Moreover, in 2008, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe ended its examination of the *Doğan* case after concluding that Turkey has been taking measures to prevent similar violations and ended its examination. And in 2011, the ECHR also declined hundreds of applications concerning the damages resulting from terrorism, declaring that Turkey's domestic legal procedures were effective and operable (Codexter 2013, 3-4).

The harmonization packages also improved minority rights. In this respect, the third harmonization package involved an amendment to Article 4 of the Law on the Establishment of Radio and Television Enterprises and permitted the use of different languages and dialects Turkish citizens used in their daily lives, such as Kurdish, in radio and TV broadcasting. The same package also amended the Law on Foreign Language Education and Teaching, lifting restrictions on the learning of different languages and dialects used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives. The sixth harmonization package involved amendments to the Law on the Establishment and Broadcasts of Radio and Television Stations. In this regard, Article 4 was

amended to allow the use of local languages/dialects in both public and private broadcasting (MFA 2007, 9,14).

The harmonization packages also introduced amendments to improve freedom of religion and to resolve legal problems regarding immovable properties belonging to non-Muslim community foundations. In this context, the third harmonization package allowed community foundations to acquire immovable property with the permission of the Council of Ministers. Subsequently, with the fourth harmonization package, Article 1 of the Law on Foundations was amended, and the condition of being subject to the permission of the Council of Ministers for the acquisition of property by community foundations was made subject to the permission of the General Directorate of Foundations. This package also simplified the procedure for the acquisition of property by those trusts. Furthermore, the sixth package amended Article 9 again to extend the time period for the community foundations to register their immovable properties from six to eighteen months. Furthermore, the additional article of the Construction Law was amended to allow non-Muslim communities to build places of worship upon the decision of the relevant administrative authorities (MFA 2007, 8-14).

As mentioned above, the new Civil Code, which entered into force on January 1, 2002, under the tripartite coalition government had also made significant improvements in human rights to align with the EU standards. In this context, the new Turkish Civil Code (TCC) primarily reinforced gender equality in the family and public life, protection of children/vulnerable persons, and freedom of association (MFA 2007, 5,160-163). In October 2001, Articles 41 and 66 of the Constitution were amended to eliminate inequality between husband and wife within the family. In this regard, amended article 41 defined the family as an entity “based on equality between the spouses;” and in this context, added the phrase, “[the family] relies on the equality of husband and wife” to the clause “family is the basis of society”. Article 66 was amended to remove the clause “the nationality of a child born to a Turkish mother and foreign father is regulated by law.” And in 2004, Article 90 was amended to state that “these agreements may not be applied to the Constitutional Court on the grounds of unconstitutionality”. Furthermore, Article 10 of the Constitution was amended to obligate the state to take measures to ensure that there is no discrimination between men and women and that women are provided with equal rights and opportunities in all areas in practice.

As Çakırca (2013, 166) explained, the new Civil Code was primarily revised to build equality between spouses in several ways. Some of the changes made for this purpose are as follows:

“... The new TCC provides women and men with equal legal capacity and the right to exercise that capacity. Women and men also share equal representational authority (Article 189), as well as equal entitlement to engage in legal transactions with each other or third parties (Article 193). Spouses have equal rights over matters relating to the family domicile (Article 194). Thus, neither of the spouses alone can annul a rental agreement related to the family home, transfer ownership of the house nor limit rights related to the domicile without the consent of the other partner... Women, without any restriction, may also purchase, manage, and sell property or goods. Articles 167, 168, and 169 of the former TCC have been dropped from the new TCC due to their incompatibility with gender equality. According to these former provisions, compulsory execution between spouses was forbidden and a wife had to get court approval before signing as a guarantor for her husband”.

And here are the most important improvements made in the field of human rights with the adoption of the new Criminal Code, which entered into force on April 1, 2005:

“Genocide, crimes against humanity, immigrant smuggling and human trafficking are adopted as newly created crimes (Articles 77-80). Penalties for honor killings (Article 82) and torture crimes (Article 84) are increased. Obstruction of the exercise of union rights (Article 84) and of the right of petition (Article 121) is made a criminal offense, as well as discriminatory behavior in economic and professional activities (Article 122). The penalty for insulting someone on the basis of his/her religious, political, social, and philosophical beliefs or opinions is increased (Article 125). Eavesdropping on private conversations, violation of the right or privacy, and recording of personal data are made criminal offenses (Articles 133-135). Crimes against the environment are introduced (Articles 181-182). Penalties for insulting the President of the Republic are reduced (Article 299). Incitement to hatred on the basis of differences of social class, race, religion, sect or region is made punishable only if it creates a ‘clear and present danger’ for public security (Article 216)” Hale and Özbudun (2010, 62).

Undoubtedly, it was not only the post-Islamist transformation (a conviction/vision change) but also the EU accession process and the IMF stabilization program, which were already on track when the AKP took office, that were important factors in the two pillars of the success story of the early years of AKP rule: economic growth and democratization. Indeed, in our face-to-face interviews, ex/current members of Parliament (MPs) also mentioned the influence of both factors. In this context, as a former minister (FF¹⁷) emphasized, when the AKP came to office it kept pace not only with the reform process that had begun under the tripartite coalition, but also

¹⁷Interview with an AKP deputy, Ankara, December 16, 2018.

with the IMF stabilization program adopted in 1999, during which time Turkey's economic indicators improved significantly. As he added, both the smooth-going EU membership process and the improving economic indicators convinced people that they were sincere. According to the World Bank data, starting from 2002 till 2008, Turkey's GDP per capita kept increasing; although a slight decrease occurred in 2009 due to the global financial crisis, an upward trend started again after 2009 and continued till 2013. Besides, while in 2002, the GDP per capita in Turkey was 80% of the world average, it increased to 98% in 2011, and the gap with the world closed. Democratization and economic growth have gone so hand in hand that as FF stressed, they told people about the improvement in economic indicators as the achievement of democracy, then.

Particularly the EU accession process, which had already begun when the AKP came to power, was considered a chance for democratization by the interviewees. And yet, they also widely mentioned that the fact that they came to power prepared also enabled them to use this process well. In other words, many interviewees¹⁸ also attributed the success of the AKP in the first years of government to intense debates/assessments they made in the February 28th process to set forth the main principles of the new party. For instance, FF said, "we were lucky that Turkey's EU membership process was already on track," acknowledging the role of the supportive international environment in Turkey's reform process. And yet, he also stressed that, when undertaking the democratization reforms, they were able to maintain the broad perspective, although the February 28th process had primarily victimized the "religious segment of the society." Another former AKP minister, DD¹⁹, also stressed that although immediately after November 2002 elections, Turkey was given a two-year time period to meet the Copenhagen criteria in the Copenhagen Summit in December 2002, Turkey was able to meet the criteria; and then on December 16, 2004 opening of Turkey's accession negotiations was decided. Then, he stressed, the AKP's success in democratization occurred, mainly, as a result of all the assessments they made as to the inconsistencies, contradictions, and failures of the National Outlook tradition after the closure of the RP in the context of preparations for a

¹⁸On the other hand, it is also worth stressing that only one interviewee did not agree that the AKP came very prepared to power. BB (Nov. 18, 2019), a former AKP MP, rejected the claim that the AKP had adopted, from the beginning, a clearly defined set of values and a worldview. To him, the reason behind this unreadiness was that the party could not accumulate political experience based on a clearly defined worldview before coming to power; and hence, it was caught unprepared by power. As he said, although in those days it was thought that they made too much preparation before rising to power, it later came to the fore that preparations were not enough without a world view and clearly defined policies/solution proposals for major issues/problems. In his words, "a party has to have a vision as to the labor, the women, the youth, the political parties, etc.; and it has to come on the scene in times of crises with its solution proposals, or with reactions." Then, to him, since the AKP lacked a clearly defined worldview and a political experience based on that worldview, it rose to power without a developing culture of democracy. Then to him, that was the major reason why the AKP could not go further in the democratization path.

¹⁹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister, Ankara, December 8, 2018.

new party; and at the end of the discussions, they came up with a text that involved suggestions regarding the approaches, policies, cadres, and leadership of the new party. In the words of DD, “it is possible to find assessments as to the conditions under which the AKP was established, and the primary principles of the AKP in that text.” As he stressed, the assessments were mainly on the characteristics of the state in Turkey, the perceptions on the National Outlook ideology, and on why the National Outlook ideology failed although it was able to rise to power. As he said, they mainly stressed in this text that “a more advanced democracy” “and “an advanced human rights perspective” should have been the main focus of the new party. And then, he said, these principles came to the fore, again, as the principles of the AKP. Another important point he made was that although the EU membership process emerged as a very important motivating factor for them to undertake many democratization reforms in a short period of time, it was not their only motive, and that they sincerely wanted to consolidate the democracy in Turkey. This view in DD’s words found its clearest expression in 2005 when Erdogan said “if the EU would not give membership to Turkey, we would call the Copenhagen Criteria, ‘Ankara Criteria’ and would keep going in our [democratization] path” (Hürriyet Sep. 3, 2005). And to DD, this perspective also represented “a reconciliation between the modern age and religion;” and that’s why the AKP set an example to the Muslim world.

In line with a post-Islamist perspective, Mustafa Yeneroğlu (2019), another former AKP deputy, also called the AKP’s claim when the party first took office, “doing politics in a Muslim manner;” which he equated with the rule of law principle. As he said in an interview,

“Before the AKP took office, the pious in the society were excluded from the center; they were otherized. And we came to power to combat with the cruelties these people faced. We said, from now on, we will not let anyone torment us; and neither will we torment anyone. We will institutionalize this principle. This was the starting point of the AKP” (Yeneroğlu 2019).

Another former AKP minister (GG²⁰), also stressed that they undertook detailed research and discussions before the establishment of the AKP as to the principles that must be adopted, and mistakes that must be avoided. In this context, he particularly stressed that while the National Outlook parties had “two faces,” they aspired for a modern party, with only one face. In his words,

²⁰Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister, Istanbul, February 19, 2019.

“The [National Outlook Parties of Erbakan] had two faces. On one hand, a political party organization that fulfills the legal/constitutional requirements. On the other hand, a “dava” perspective, based on a very traditional understanding of Islam and organizational structure, dating back to the Emevites. And this Emevites style brought about a one-man rule, demagogic slogans, and a political perspective of living in the past and far from the contemporary understandings of democracy and human rights. And in daily politics, there was no transparency in the party; sometimes decisions were made that were against the expectations of both the constituency and the executive board; and the anti-imperialist attitude was based on irrational explanations. Then, we reached a deadlock and established the AKP. We aspired for a contemporary party, without two faces (i.e. acting solely on the basis of law), with an organizational structure different from the RP, and which brings rational explanations to its acts and discourses. And the political stance/program of the party was determined with long theoretical research and discussions among us... We were very sincere; as modern politicians with Muslim-identity, we believed in democracy.”

GG also added that they particularly elaborated on state-religion relations when writing the key documents of the party. And he stressed that when they were asked about these issues, particularly by the foreign press, they emphasized that they took religious freedom as part of fundamental rights and liberties. In his account, forming policies on the basis of pre-determined goals, and maintaining one-face, i.e. acting solely on the basis of law, was the main perspective that guided the first years of the AKP rule. In this regard, he summarized the domestic approach at the time as being not aggressive but unifying and expanding liberties. On the economic front, he said, they implemented rational policies in five-year programs in that direction, the first steps of which were taken by Kemal Derviş. And he summarized the foreign policy approach as being compromising, solving problems through diplomacy, and attaching importance to stability in the region. To this end, he stressed, they made attempts even to solve the Cyprus problem through dialogue, and it became apparent that who was responsible for the deadlock was the Greek side. He stressed they established healthy relations with the U.S., and the rejection of the March 1st motion of the government by the parliament was a good example in this context.

Another former AKP minister (HH²¹) who began his active political life in the National Outlook parties, also told that even in his very young age he used to question the RP’s and FP’s style of doing politics and opposition, and methods of propaganda. And yet, he stated, within the organizational structure of the RP/FP, his objections would not have any effect on the overall policies decided on by the head-

²¹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister, March 8, 2019.

quarters, although he was a provincial head of the party. And then, he explained, when the reformists' movement started in the party, the first thing that impressed him was that their arguments were much more suited to the human nature, and wrapped them up warmly. In this regard, he talked about the preparation process of the FP congress in which Abdullah Gül competed against Recai Kutan for the leadership of the party. As he stressed, Abdullah Gül had visited their province in this process and explained the claims/priorities of their movement. Accordingly, their first priority/main claim was doing politics on the basis of "common reason." The second claim was doing politics on the basis of foreseeability; that is, according to Gül, people were supposed to foresee how they (the AKP) would behave in the face of an event. This claim was particularly important to build trust in their relationship with the electorate. And then, the third item mentioned by Gül as a priority was being transparent. "All these claims also involved an objection to how politics was done in the FP," as he stressed. As he added, this discourse based on common reason, foreseeable politics, transparency, and building trust was very new to them. "In the political platforms such as the MSP/RP/FP, from time to time they were making unforeseeable moves in the existing conjuncture; they were wearing us out," he said. Then, he stressed, since this discourse of the reformists/renovationists bundled up the whole provincial delegation, in the congress the whole provincial delegation, except for one person, voted for Abdullah Gül.

Another former AKP minister (JJ²²), also stressed that some of the policies and discourses of the RP/FP tradition were neither realistic nor compatible with the expectations of the society and global trends; and that the role of religion in politics emerged as the most important issue that differentiated the renovationists from the traditionalists. He argued that in the February 28th process, their assessments about the parties in the FP/RP tradition showed them that employing any religion as an argument, as an ideology in politics, harmed both the religion itself and the adherents of that religion; and that they reached to the conclusion that politics must be done through contemporary political arguments, political and economic concepts, but not through religious concepts. Then, when the AKP was established, in the words of JJ, "it was composed of a significant number of people who were able to establish the divergence and intersection points between religion and politics very well, and who had embraced the idea that it was not right to transform religion into an ideology for political purposes." Then, although the AKP has been almost always read through the political genius of Erdogan, JJ argued that particularly in the first years of rule decisions were made with "common reason," sometimes after intense debates, and objections at administrative bodies. In this regard, she argued that as

²²Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister, October 23, 2019.

provincial heads, as members of administrative councils of the party, or as ministers in the council of ministers they had made their objections, expressed themselves, and engaged in intense debates comfortably.

Furthermore, JJ also argued that another issue that they had evaluated before the party was founded was why political parties in Turkey could not be institutionalized and did evolve into something else on the way, drifting away from being democratic organizations. That is, according to his account, they established from the very beginning that the political parties in Turkey cease to be cadre parties over time and turn into either a political community/cemaat or a political company, transforming the relations within the party as well. That is, he said, “over time relations within the party turn into either a sheikh-disciple relationship or an employer-employee relationship.” And he explained that as a safeguard, they constituted term limits for both the leadership and the cadres of the party, such as the three-term limit on parliamentary candidacies and the four-congress term limit for the chairman. Then, to him, the most significant reason behind the authoritarian turn of the AKP was that it could not realize the necessary transformation in itself by the due date since Erdogan, after his rise to the Presidency, did not want to give up the leadership of the party. In other words, in JJ’s account, the AKP transformed from a cadre movement to an authoritarian, oligarchic structure, with the corrupting influence of power.

Then, why the AKP has gone through an authoritarian turn emerged as an empirical puzzle not only for students of democracy but also for the former/current AKP deputies/ministers, who were convinced that the AKP was well-prepared for power thanks to all the assessments, debates they had made before the establishment of the party. Affirming JJ’s perspective, FF²³ also stressed that they could not maintain the broad perspective and continue with the democratization steps “when the rule of the pious became the established order.” In this respect, he stressed, when the power accumulates, this power has a toxicant character, particularly in the absence of controlling/checking mechanisms. And as to the results of the accumulation of power, he said:

“not only did we lose democracy, we also lost the rule of law, the institutions and the foreseeability that the rule of law ensures. Moreover, [he said,] we even started to perceive the law and the institutions as tutelage; we started to call everything that keeps us, that hinders us, tutelage.”

²³Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

And then, like FF, HH²⁴ also argued that the AKP case represented the confirmation of the saying, “power corrupts, absolute power absolutely corrupts.” Then, in his words, the AKP experience taught that even though at the outset the party was guided by core principles, as long as power and authority are not balanced sufficiently by checks and balances and accountability, the party can easily deviate; and that this is an issue that can not be left to the mercy of the ruling elite.

Still, all former AKP deputies/ministers interviewed agree that the AKP took an authoritarian turn after Erdogan increased his power and became concerned with perpetuating his power although the party emerged as a democratizing/transforming force in its first years in power. I intend to disclose this process, analyzing the evolution of AKP’s discourse/policies, and intra-party and inter-party relations in relation to domestic/international constraints on the AKP rule. I mainly argue that although the AKP rose to power after going through a post-Islamist transformation process following a self-assessment/self-critique process, the democratic backsliding took place when the party leader who had concentrated power in his hands moved away from the post-Islamist line after the removal of the domestic/international constraining factors on the government. Then, the post-Islamist transformation did not suffice for further democratization with the removal of domestic and external constraining powers over the AKP, which in the first place had maintained the unity in the party, and with the empowerment of the leader who was able to sideline the experienced AKP cadres one-by-one after the post-Arab Spring process.

4.3 The AKP’s Battle against the Old Turkey and the 2007 Presidential Election Crisis

As Hale and Özbudun (2010) stressed, when the AKP rose to power if one fear of the military concerned their notion of secularism, another fear concerned their notion of nationalism. In other words, the military-led state establishment not only feared that the AKP would Islamize the state/society, but they also feared that the party would undermine the nation-state to solve the Kurdish question. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the military’s self-proclaimed mission of preserving secularism and (Turkish) nationalism, the two principles of the homogenous Kemalist nation-building/maintaining project, and hence the military’s emergence as a “quasi-political party, with its own vision of politics and its own grass-roots supporters” dated back to 1961, in which article 35 of the Internal Service Law was

²⁴Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

adopted (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 247). Then, the AKP as a party with Islamist roots and with leadership coming from an Islamist past, has faced the questioning of its real intentions by the military-led secular sector. On the other hand, as the AKP engaged in efforts to limit the power of the military in politics in line with the EU norms, the military also got concerned that the AKP's EU membership goal would lead to the emergence of ideological divisions within the military and also would cost it lose of its "autonomy over its own recruitment, promotion, and budget," as well as social/economic privileges (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 240).

As a result, after the AKP's rise to power, both the military and the AKP engaged in efforts to "delegitimize" each other despite the case that when the AKP took office, the Chief of the General Staff was Hilmi Özkök, a democrat military figure known for being supportive of democratization of civil-military relations, unlike most of the high-ranking officials, characterized by being pretty suspicious of the AKP's real intentions (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 249).

The AKP's goal of limiting the power of the military in domestic and foreign policy areas, and its use of the EU norms in this regard, became visible during the March 1 motion in an interview Davutoğlu gave in a TV program, in which he stressed that one of the key considerations behind the decision not to allow in the US troops was the concern for impeding the declaration of an emergency rule in the southeast since it would have caused problems with the EU. Then, it becomes clear that as soon as the AKP came to power, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the March 1st resolution dealt a serious blow to the relations between the AKP and the military (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 249). The military, as an actor which increased its power, particularly through conducting a war against the PKK throughout the 1990s, was, undoubtedly, disturbed by this attitude of the AKP since the AKP was reluctant to deal with the PKK through military force. This attitude, for instance, showed itself also in 2006 as Erdoğan²⁵ told a group of journalists that "there is no need to conduct an operation against the PKK when they are not attacking" (HaberTürk Oct. 5, 2006).

While I argue that the tactical alliance between the AKP and the Gülen movement started in 2007, we find that the military-led state bureaucracy's concerns about the infiltration of the Gülen movement into state institutions were first voiced at the MGK meeting on June 24, 2004. Indeed, both President Sezer and the military wing of the Council had requested that this item be put on the agenda. The reports

²⁵It is worth stressing that the same conversation also involved Erdoğan's efforts to decrease the tension with the military since he stressed that he was open to meeting with the state actors, including the President and the military officials, who are concerned with the Islamism threat, to make a definition of the (irtica) threat and to come up with a proposals package over the necessary precautions to take and ways to moderate these actors and carry them to the center (HaberTürk Oct. 5, 2006).

submitted to the Council revealed that the Gülen movement's efforts to penetrate the bureaucracy were particularly noticeable in the police force where they had taken over critical units (Ntvmsnbc Jun. 24, 2004). In the assessment made by the General Staff at the meeting, it was stated that "It is evaluated that the Gülen community will increase its cadre activities at all levels of the state by giving the impression that it is in good relations with the existing system and that if measures are not taken, it will insidiously take over the system in order to destroy the secular, democratic and social state of law..." It was also stated that "in line with its strategy, the community in question gives messages of 'tolerance and peace', disguises its goal of overthrowing the existing order and replacing it with an order based on religion under the guise of moderation, and reaches a power where no power can force it to step back." (Ergin 2017). According to the assessment, in order to achieve its goals, the Gülen movement was trying to infiltrate the Ministry of Education, the police force, and the army.

In their 2007 interviews, we find the military officials claiming that the AKP, in the absence of its own educated cadres, utilized the educated cadres of the Gülen community (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 250). Moreover, in the same days, the infiltration of the Gülen organization into the police and the judiciary was also mentioned by a minister (Cemil Çiçek), who complained that in every step these members of the organization took, they only thought about the benefit to their community rather than the benefit to the government (Hakan 2007). The minister's remarks were important not only as an acknowledgment of the Gülenists' efforts to infiltrate state institutions but also as a sign of friction between him and some ministers. Around the same time, an academic also expressed his concern about the Gülen organization's penetration of state institutions in his column in *Radikal* newspaper, arguing that the rising trend of Islamic activism in state institutions was particularly dangerous because it would lead Turkey to move towards a neo-feudal structure based on faith-based networks rather than a democratic regime based on the rule of law (İnsel 2007).

While interviews with AKP ministers and MPs of the period reveal that they were not aware of the existence of an organization that had infiltrated the state at the time, interviews with senior military officers in 2007 show that the military was accusing the government of using the Gülen organization against them. For example, they alleged that the 2005 attack on a bookstore in the Şemdinli district of Hakkari, which killed one person and injured several others, and which then turned into a source of the fight between different state institutions, was used in this context; and that Ferhat Sarıkaya, the prosecutor in the Van case, who prepared the indictment in March 2006, linking the incident to the then Commander of the Turkish Land

Forces Büyükanıt and three other high-ranking officers, had close links to the Gülen organization (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 252). The military and some CHP MPs then, such as Mustafa Özyürek, believed that the accusations against Büyükanıt were part of a campaign to prevent his appointment as Chief of General Staff, as he was the strongest candidate for the post at a time when Hilmi Özkök's term was coming to an end. Some AKP MPs, far from defending the military in the face of such accusations, positioned themselves on the side of the indictment. For example, Adıyaman MP Faruk Ünsal said, "The indictment prepared by the chief prosecutor's office did what we could not do." Similarly, a Manisa MP said, "The Van prosecutor's office completed the work we left unfinished. It reminded us of the general rules of universal law and our constitution that apply to everyone." (Sabah Mar. 06, 2006).

As this event turned into a source of fight between different state institutions, it becomes apparent that the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) also positioned itself on the side of the military since in April 2006 it dismissed Karakaya from office upon the General Staff's call for those with constitutional responsibility to take action after the indictment. Furthermore, after the High Court of Appeal ruled that "the offenses have not been properly constituted and that the case falls under the jurisdiction of the military court," (European Commission 2008, 10) the case was transferred to the Van military court, which decided for the release of the accused. And yet, the European Commission, in its 2008 report, qualified the HSYK's dismissal decision as "disproportionate," and argued that this decision "raised questions on the independence of the HSYK from other state institutions" (European Commission 2008, 10). Furthermore, it is claimed that after this indictment Büyükanıt who was appointed as the Chief of the General Staff, became even more confrontational against the government and its policies, and the military increased its assertiveness in the preservation of its political autonomy and social/economic privileges (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 240,252).

Undoubtedly, it was not only the military but also the high judiciary, and the Presidency that the AKP had to confront in the first years of its rule, a confrontation that, contrary to conventional wisdom, actually worked in its favor by helping the party maintain its position as a democratic force, as one former minister (HH²⁶) put it. In his words, "the presence of Ahmet Necdet Sezer in the Presidency seat and the tutelary mechanisms which hanged over civilian politics like the Sword of Damocles, restrained the AKP, compelled it to move warily, and led it to get in close contact with the EU without wasting time."

²⁶Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

The AKP cadres made frequent visits to the West to confute the accusations that they were hypocritical, and worked hard for the start of EU negotiations. In this process, the AKP adopted harmonization packages in cooperation with the opposition. And as agreed at the EU Council in December 2004, accession negotiations have been launched on October 3, 2005. It was followed by the start of the opening of the chapters and related legislative amendments. And in the words of HH²⁷, in this period of close relations with the EU, the AKP “untied the laces of the tutelage (of secular establishment) one or two each” through democratization reforms although they “kept hearing the footfalls of the old Turkey” in this process. In his words, the AKP took all these democratization steps, also combating many “sabotage attempts” on these positive steps. In this context, as reminders of “the old Turkey,” he listed the following events, that occurred after the rise of the AKP to power on the November 3, 2002 elections:

“the murder of Necip Hablemitoglu on December 18, 2002, the synagogue bombing on November 15, 2003, in Beyoglu, killing 25 people; the attack against the HSBC building on November 20, 2003, killing 11 people; on the same day, the attack against the British Consulate General in Istanbul, killing 51 people; Şemdinli bombing on November 9, 2005; the killing of priest Santoro on February 5, 2006, in Trabzon; the bomb attack to Cumhuriyet Daily Newspaper on April 16, 2006; the Council of State shooting on May 17, 2006, killing a high court judge, and wounding 4 others; the assassination of Turkish Armenian journalist Hrant Dink on January 19, 2007; Zirve Publishing House murders, called the missionary massacres by Turkish media, on April 17, 2007; April 27, 2007 e-memorandum; “the 367 decision” of the Constitutional Court in May 2007; the closure case filed against the AKP in 2008...”

Thus, to HH²⁸, the government took steps to improve democracy and human rights and eliminated to a large extent the pressures over the democratic system. Undoubtedly, in this context, one of the most important crises the AKP government experienced was the one that occurred in April 2007, when the seven-year presidential term of President Ahmet Necdet Sezer was coming to an end.

The President was not only an important check/balance on the powers of the AKP who already controlled the Prime Ministry and the Parliament but also the last bastion of assertive secularism, as he was praised for “speak[ing] up for secularism [and] vetoing laws he deemed in violation of the secular constitution” (BBC News Apr. 14, 2007). The office of Presidency, apart from having been designed by the

²⁷Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

²⁸Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

1982 Constitution as an institution to counter-balance “popular temptations of the government,” was also attributed a special meaning by the assertive secularists as “the house of Atatürk,” and with its function in maintaining “the purity [ideological unity] of the regime,” primary values being “the Kemalist ethos of secularism and nationalism” (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 242). Then, the possibility that PM Erdoğan, or another name with an Islamist past and with a wife wearing a headscarf would become the next president, raised concerns among the military, the judiciary, and the secular civil society since they took that possibility as the loss of the last bastion of secularism to the Islamists and as another step towards the Islamization of the state.

The debate over credentials of the the next president started in January 2007 with the statement of main opposition (CHP) leader Baykal who argued that the Prime Minister could not be the Commander-in-Chief and that the presidency of a person unable to adapt to the armed forces should have been impeded. Moreover, in March 2007 he indirectly made a call for military action by stressing, “Erdoğan should not be President; I believe the armed forces will not remain indifferent to this”. Then, on April 12, then Chief of the General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt told reporters that the next President should be someone not with “so-called” but “genuine secular credentials (Reuters Jul. 30, 2007). It was followed by the warning of the then President Sezer that the Islamic radicalism threat in Turkey was “stronger than ever.” And then came the Republican protests, which were mass rallies, the first of which was held in Ankara on April 14th, two days before the start of the presidential election process, with the goal of preventing PM Erdogan from running for President of Turkey. In this regard, the main slogan of the secular rally also was, “Turkey is secular and will remain secular forever” (BBC News Apr. 14, 2007). Other slogans were, “No pass to headscarf in the Cankaya Palace!” “Neither Shariah nor military coup,” and “Look at us! Count! How many are we here?” (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 245).

In fact, although there were parallels between the concerns of the military and secular nationalist demonstrators, and although retired military officers and “illiberal Kemalist associations” (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 244) such as the Atatürkist Thought Association (ADD) were among the organizers of these mass rallies, as stressed by Ayata (Milliyet May. 21, 2007), a scholar, the main component of the Republican rallies were “the new middle classes,” who made up an autonomous movement, derived from their own dynamics. Accordingly, these new middle classes, unlike the traditional ones composed of merchants and property-owners, obtained their socio-economic status through education. And these new middle classes, stressed democratic demands, such as individual rights, human rights, free elections, rule of

law, and limitation of government with checks and balances. And yet, it was added, they also associated Islamism with tribal and religious-based networks and felt concerned that Islamists would engage in gradual Islamization of both the state and the society, and would intervene in their lifestyles, in this regard. To this analysis, it was this possibility of the AKP's monopolizing the power that caused these people to feel threatened, and insecure about the orientation of the country, and set them in motion (Milliyet May. 21, 2007).

Scholars Hale and Özbudun (2010, 264) have also made the argument that, despite the AKP's reference to the concept of pluralist democracy in its party program, Erdoğan's "communitarian" understanding of democracy, combined with a majoritarian understanding of democracy based on "the idea of a Turkey divided between a winning majority and a losing minority," has led traditional secular groups to feel threatened. More specifically, they argued, since Erdoğan perceived religion and nation, i.e. "Islamic solidarity and Muslim nationalism" (i.e. religion as the new glue of the nation) as two sides of the same coin, adherents of which developed common political/economic interests, irrespective of their ethnicity, and that who were bound by religious and (Muslim) national ties developed interests different from those groups who were left out of this tie, he viewed these two groups as opposing political forces, and refrained from developing a language of compromise with the latter group. Thus, they added, while the AKP sought to abolish "the authoritarian nation-building project of the state," instead, it tried to build a "new Turkey," through a new nation-building project characterized by "Islamic undertones;" and the Islamization process that led secular people to feel threatened took place at "the network level," which was used for both "political mobilization and social mobility". With the entry of Islamic ideas and values in public spaces/institutions, including all levels of bureaucracy, and the accompanying change of political language, patterns of conduct, and lifestyles in those public spaces, traditionally secular segments of society were seized by the fear that long-term implication of this gradual Islamization would be the Islamization of the state and society. And yet although Ayata portrayed the demonstrators as the concerned/threatened new middle classes aspiring for freedom in their lifestyles and consumption habits and for the promotion of democratic values in the country, as Hale and Özbudun (2010, 245) put it, the views of these secular nationalist Turks also displayed many inconsistencies, as they claimed to defend secularism, liberalism, democracy, and individual rights, but their slogans included support for the military's involvement in civilian politics and opposition to the EU.

The nomination of Abdullah Gül for the presidency was announced by PM Erdoğan on April 24, 2007, in the group meeting of the AKP. Since the central decision-

making body of the party, i.e., Central Executive Committee (MYK), had given full authority to Erdoğan for the determination of the party's presidential candidate, according to news reports of the time, Erdoğan made this decision with little consultation, primarily consulting with his senior Arınç, to whom he proposed other names such as Vecdi Gönül, and who responded to Erdoğan that either Erdoğan or Gül or himself should have been the AKP nominee (Milliyet Apr. 30, 2007). Since Erdoğan's possible candidacy was met with civil society resistance on April 14th, it was argued Erdoğan did not announce Gül's candidacy until the last minute.

Gül's nomination was followed by the mobilization of the opposition parties, the high judiciary, the military, and the secular civil society to stop his rise to the presidency. Thus, "the Republican meetings" of the civil society was followed by the boycott of the first round of the elections by the opposition, the CHP's taking the election to the Constitutional Court, and a military e-memorandum only hours after the CHP's appeal to the court.

The first round of the elections was held on April 27. Since the opposition boycotted the first round of the elections, Gül competed in this round as the only nominee. The secular-leftist CHP not only attended mass demonstrations against the possibility of a president with an Islamist background and whose wife wears a headscarf but also appealed to the Constitutional Court to cancel the first round of the presidential election on April 28, claiming, a quorum of two thirds for attendance (367 deputies) for a presidential election to be valid was not met.

Then, as Sadullah Ergin stressed in an interview, the Court made "the 367 decision" in four days, although up to 2007, all ten of the presidents had been elected with the meeting quorum of 183/184. In his words, "the parliament was *de facto* impeded from electing the President" (Ergin Jul. 18, 2020).

In fact, "the 367 requirement" was first alleged in *Cumhuriyet* daily, on December 26, by the former Chief Prosecutor of the Supreme Court, Sabih Kanadoğlu, who had argued that the two-thirds majority requirement did not only refer to the number of votes a candidate had to win to be elected in the first two rounds but also referred to the minimum number of deputies that must be present in the parliament for a presidential election to be valid. To Kanadoğlu, due to this constitutional requirement, it was impossible for the AKP to elect a President, without getting the support of the opposition, and the opposition would ask for the renewal of parliamentary elections under those circumstances. In other words, as DD²⁹ stated, "the 367 requirement" was first invented by the lawmakers outside the parliament, but it

²⁹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

was later adopted by the military. Then, as he explained, “the 367 issue,” was imposed by the military on the opposition parties, apart from the CHP, which willingly boycotted the elections; and hence, the Justice Party, under the leadership of Erkan Mumcu, and the True Path Party (DYP), under the leadership of Mehmet Ağar, were also impeded from entering the parliament and from attending the elections under the pressure of the military. The following words of Erkan Mumcu as to the presidential elections also justify the words of DD: “if we had gone to the parliament to support Gül, the parliament would have been bombed” (Gültekin 2014).

The military weighed in with a statement, publicly known as “the e-memorandum,” released at midnight. In the statement, we find that the military expressed its concern over the presidential election process, which turned into a discussion of secularism, and directed harsh accusations against the AKP. In this regard, the AKP was accused of disturbing the fundamental values of the state, particularly secularism, through its activities such as “requests for the redefinition of [these values] and attempts to organize alternative celebrations [referring to the Holy Birth Week Celebrations] instead of our national festivals symbolizing the unity and solidarity of our nation.” To the e-memorandum, “some circles,” which referred to the AKP, were “in an open challenge against the state,” and “tr[ied] to hide their real goals under the guise of religion.” And reminding of its role as the guardian of secularism, the military stressed its readiness to step in if needed (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 241).

The government members convened urgently at night to decide on the tone of the response. They would either try to de-escalate the tension with their response or would give a harsh response to challenge them; and the government chose the latter option. Cemil Çiçek, the then-government speaker, held a press meeting; and not only said that the government was committed to the secular system, but also stressed that the General Staff was an office answerable to the prime minister, and was not in a position to make inappropriate remarks targeting the government. Furthermore, according to the government’s response, this declaration from the General Staff could only be interpreted as an attempt to affect the judicial process. We can also safely argue that the international environment, at the time, created room for the military’s intervention in politics since in late 2005 Turkey’s accession process *de facto* came to a halt as “the Cyprus issue” came to the fore as a stumbling block in the accession talks, and in late 2006, the EU announced that it decided to suspend the opening of 8 chapters. Then, although the European Union responded to the e-memorandum through the Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn’s words that the presidential election was “a clear test case” to measure whether the Turkish military respected the rules of “the democratic game” and its role in this game (BBC News

Apr. 28, 2007), there was not a significant reaction indeed.

On April 28, Deniz Baykal, the leader of the center-left CHP also held a press conference, in which he positioned himself on the side of the e-memorandum, and accused the AKP of using democracy as a means to harm the Republic and the unity and integrity of the nation. In his account, the domineering/self-opinionated attitude of the AKP harmed the politics, democracy, and the Republic at the same time and caused the issuing of an e-memorandum.

On May 1st, the Constitutional Court cancelled the first round of the presidential election, in line with “the 367 view” of Sabih Kanadoğlu, on the grounds that the Parliament did not meet the requirement of a quorum of two-thirds of MPs to make a valid vote although this requirement had no real precedent. And since the opposition deputies kept boycotting the elections, the parliament failed to reach the required quorum in the subsequent session as well. As a response, Gül withdrew his candidacy, and the AKP called a snap election, also proposing a number of constitutional amendments, the most important of which involved the election of the president through popular vote. To impede the AKP’s takeover of the presidency, in the 2007 elections, the center-left CHP and DSP and the center-right DYP and ANAP took merger decisions and joined the election in a single list. While the former parties joined their forces under the CHP banner, and the latter ones joined their forces under the Democrat Party (DP) banner.

On the part of the AKP, the transformative effect of the 2007 elections occurred through pushing Erdoğan to undertake a significant revision in candidate lists to suggest that the party was moving more to the center. In this context, prominent names of the CHP such as Ertuğrul Günay and Haluk Özdalga, two prominent Alevi intellectuals/writers Reha Çamuroğlu and Hüseyin Tuğcu, and prominent names of the center-right such as Mehmet Sağlam were nominated. At the same time, over 150 former AKP deputies, primarily of Islamic-orientation, were purged as well as the vocal critics, such as Ertuğrul Yalçınbayır, Abdullah Çalışkan, and Ersönmez Yarbay (*Dünya Bülteni* Jun. 4, 2007). Kenan Çamurcu, an analyst of Islamic politics, evaluated these purges as the replacement of “native” politicians who would criticize Erdoğan’s policies with the “guest” politicians for Erdogan not to “lose his authoritarian control,” though (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 253).

In the snap elections held on July 22, 2007, the AKP increased its vote share to 47% with an increase of 12%, while the vote rate of the center-left CHP decreased to 21%, and the far-right MHP entered the parliament by winning 14% of the vote. The main importance of the 2007 election results was that despite the fact that both the military-led state bureaucracy and the center-left CHP conducted an in-

tensive campaign in the country as to the threat of Islamization of the state and society by the hands of the AKP rule, “the AKP was able to convince more people than assumed about the transformation it went through; [and] it became apparent that those who thought that the AKP would turn Turkey into a second Iran, were only a minority,” as stated in the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* then (DW Jul. 23, 2007). This assessment was affirmed by public opinion polls as well, since Ağırdir (2007) found that 78% of the electorate identified the “economic conditions and expectations” as the most critical factor behind their decision, while only 11% identified “the threat to secularism” as a decisive factor. Mehmet Ali Birand, a journalist, also noted then that both economic and political factors contributed to the AKP’s increase in votes and that the most important economic factor was that people were convinced in the first term of the AKP rule that it was the AKP, not the opposition parties, which would increase their economic welfare (Birand 2007). And as to the political factors, he argued that the secular coalition of “the military-the CHP-and the nationalist forces,” also advocated by the Constitutional Court’s “367 decision,” worked to the disadvantage of those actors, including the center-right DP which took the side of the secular coalition in the course of the “367 debate,” by creating a “wronged” image on the AKP side. Finally, in this election, since only 20% of the Kurdish vote was cast for the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), whose votes decreased from 6.2% in 2002 to 4% in 2007, and hence, since only 22 independent Kurdish candidates, who later merged under the banner of DTP, could enter the parliament, it became also apparent that “the pious Kurdish” vote, which made up 50% of the Kurdish vote, was cast for the AKP, and increased the expectations from the AKP regarding the resolution of the Kurdish problem (Birand 2007). And most importantly, as another German newspaper *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* also argued, the AKP case was, again, widely assessed as “a new model capable of combining Islam and democracy” (DW Jul. 23, 2007).

Altan Tan, a politician of Kurdish descent also portrayed a clear picture of how the AKP increased its vote share in the Kurdish-populated east/southeast. He argued that the southeast was originally the vote base of “the National Outlook, and that even in the 1984 local elections in which the Welfare Party (the RP) could not win the mayoralty of Konya, it could win the mayoralties of Van, Batman, and Urfa. Moreover, in the 1987 general elections, the voting rate of the RP in Turkey was 7.15% while it was 25% in the southeast. And yet, when the RP got into a coalition with the MHP in 1991, the constituency in the region resented and voted for the HADEP instead till 2007. Then, to Tan, the increase of the AKP’s vote share in the southeast region in the 2007 elections should be assessed as the end of this resentment. And when it comes to the factors that contributed to ending this

resentment, to Tan, first of all, the speech Erdoğan delivered on August 12, 2005, in which he said, “Kurdish question is my question,” affected the population in the region in a large measure. Furthermore, like the public in the rest of the country, the region’s population also was influenced by “the victimization” of Abdullah Gül, as a pious politician. Third, they were impressed by Erdoğan’s solid/strong stance in the face of the military memorandum as well. And fourth, the military confrontation with the PKK in the election period, and Mahir Kaynak’s words, “after the elections the terror will be over,” led to the emergence of too many speculations in the region, since the local population perceived that as a conspiracy to undermine the AKP government. And also the military’s press for incursion into Iraq, with the support of the center-left CHP and the nationalist MHP; the AKP’s resistance to that, and the local population’s support for the AKP in this debate over an incursion into Iraq as a population tired of war, also increased the electoral support of the AKP in the region. Fifth, the social welfare fund, known as FAK-FUK-FON, as the green card practices increased their support for the AKP. And finally, as Tan stressed, the Gülen community was the strongest religious community in the region like in the whole country; and this community – which was already in conflict with the military – went all out and more than even for the electoral success of the AKP. Overall, to Tan, the electoral success of the AKP in the region stemmed from the expectation of integration (not assimilation) and improvement of their situation and should be considered as the people giving the AKP a chance in this regard. Thus, as Tan stated, the Kurds no longer voted solely on the basis of their ethnic identity as a result of their integration process; and they perceived this election as “a peace referendum” (Tan 2007).

Although the 2007 presidential election process “trauma” of the AKP led the party to increase its vote share in the 2007 elections, on many respects it worked to the disadvantage of the AKP and the Turkish democracy.

First of all, as S. Ergin (Jul. 18, 2020) told in an interview, the presidential election process emerged “as the most obvious example of how the high judiciary engaged in practices to restrain and hinder the AKP since the AKP’s rise to power.” An important point he made, in this context, was that although the AKP may have had prejudices against both the high judiciary and the military deriving from the past, their practices throughout the AKP rule proved that the prejudices of the AKP were not baseless. Thus, he said, “the events that paved the way for the Turkish-type presidential system occurred in those days.” More specifically, Ergin said, if the impositions of “367 decision” and “27 April e-memorandum” had not occurred then, Turkish-type-presidential-system decision may not have been made today.” In this regard, he said, after “the 367 decision” was imposed on the party,

the proposal to amend the constitution to overcome that challenge came from the center-right ANAP (the Motherland Party). As he explained, then, as AKP Group Deputy Chairman, he met with Süleyman Sarıbaşı, his counterpart in the ANAP. And in Ergin's account, the rest of the process developed as follows:

"They mainly told us, they would come to the parliament to meet the required quorum for the presidential election to be valid but they would not vote in the election. If they had done it, the necessary quorum would have been reached. But still, they put forward undertaking a constitutional amendment as a condition to come to the parliament. What were the proposed amendments? The president shall be elected through popular vote. Tenures of deputies shall decrease from 5 to 4 years; and small parties in the parliament shall introduce a presidential candidate if their total vote rate reached 10%. Then, we agreed on these items. They asked us to declare these amendments; and I held a press meeting on behalf of the AKP in the press room. They said ok at first, but one hour later they called us and asked for the AKP chairman to confirm it as well. Then, PM Erdogan came to the parliament; and we held another press meeting together, announcing that our party was committed to these amendments. And yet, it wasn't enough either. . . . The ANAP [had] few visitors in its headquarters, which you may guess. And this is how the ANAP left halfway through the process. And yet, we had already pledged the society that we would undertake these amendments. That is why before holding the elections, these amendments were passed by the parliament. . . And the MHP, which was able to form a group in the parliament after the elections, came to the general assembly to meet the quorum, required for a presidential election to be valid. And this is how we elected the President." (Ergin Jul. 18, 2020).

Then, as Ergin also stated above, after the elections, surprisingly, it was Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of nationalist MHP, who untangled the presidential election knot, by arguing that the AKP, as the party that rose to power by the will of the people, had the right to get its own candidate elected president through parliament and that the MHP would attend the presidential election to remove the hurdle of 367-deputies-sitting-in-parliament requirement facing the AKP. Finally, Gül was renominated and elected in the third round of the election on August 28, 2007.

When it comes to the proposed constitutional reforms package, as mentioned above, apart from the election of the President by popular vote, it involved reducing the presidential term to five years, renewable for another five, and reducing the quorum of deputies for parliamentary decisions to 184. And yet, the amendments, which were passed by the parliament on May 31, 2007, were vetoed by President Sezer. Since the parliament readopted the bill without changing a word, President Sezer was unable to veto it for a second time, and instead, he sent it out for a referen-

dum; and also both Sezer and the main opposition center-left CHP applied to the Constitutional Court to annul the amendments on the grounds of procedural errors, and complaining that the proposed reforms would disturb the balance of power and threaten the country's stability. Surprisingly, in early July the Court ruled 6-5 in favor of the government; in other words, the Court ruled that the constitutional reforms package was valid, and opened the way for a referendum (BBC News Jul. 5, 2007).

Also, the military made another move before the referendum took place; and İlker Başbuğ, then Ground Forces Commander, made a speech at the Turkish Military Academy in which he pointed out that anti-secular movements and ethnic nationalists were recent threats (to the founding principles of the state) who were trying to build a political structure on the basis of religious or ethnic nationalism, and who had never so politicized before. In this regard, he argued that "Turkish Armed Forces will always stand with those who want to preserve this [unitary/nation-state] structure and secularism." In the same speech, he also stressed that secularism was the cornerstone of the founding principles of the state, and argued as to the debate over a draft constitution that "secularism definition in the constitution should not be open to discussion" (MSI Sep. 24, 2007).

The referendum took place on October 21, 2007, and was supported by all parties, except for the CHP, which defined the package as "an imposition." In this regard, the Kurdish-nationalist Democratic Society Party (DTP) declared that it would support the amendment package to support not the AKP, but democracy. Other parties that supported the package in the referendum were the social-democrat SHP, the far-right Islamist and nationalist BBP, which defined the direct popular election of the president as "a historical opportunity" ahead of the Turkish nation, the Islamist SP, which argued that it had supported direct election of the President for the last 40 years, and the center-right DP and ANAP (İHA Oct. 15, 2007). As for the far-right Turkish-nationalist MHP, it declared that it would support the proposal in the parliament "out of its sense of responsibility," and yet, called for a "no" vote in the referendum (HaberTürk Oct. 17, 2007).

However, what later became clear is that although the majority voted "yes" in the referendum, the mid-term implications of the popular election of the president was not debated at length while making the decision on the popular election of the president. Thus, confirming Ergin's above-mentioned statement that it was the impositions of "367 decision" and "27 April e-memorandum" that brought to life today's presidential system, FF³⁰, also told in our interview that due to the

³⁰Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

“minority psychology, the psychology of the oppressed and excluded,” due to the struggle the party had to wage against the (ambitious) secularist coalition that opposed the AKP’s nomination of its own candidate, the party took its decision to elect the president by the people from a very “narrow perspective.” More specifically, he said, regarding the motivation behind this decision, the consideration was that if the president was elected by the people, candidates disconnected from society would not be elected President, and candidates who were able to establish good relations with “the pious segment of society,” which makes up the majority segment in society, would be elected President. Thus, he added, having a popularly elected President and a Prime Minister (PM) created problems that they could not foresee at the time, and the system could work only for six months with an elected President and an elected PM. To him, it was after this experience with an elected PM, they also said, “what’s the point of having a PM anyway? Let’s completely abolish that position.” Thus, he argued, “the event that initiated the downhill trend in democratization was the new law the parliament passed in 2007 to ensure the direct election of the President.” Then, his statement showed that the decision made from a narrow perspective prevented them from foreseeing the potential problems posed by the increased political weight of the presidency, the primary problem being its potential to initiate the move into a more authoritarian line.

The second reason why the presidential election knot in 2007 proved detrimental in the longer term for Turkish democracy was that this election process witnessed for the first time the emergence of a conflict/distrust between Erdoğan and Gül, the latter of whom was widely described as the AKP’s “second man,” whose opinion was sought in important issues, a moderate figure with a balancing role (Girasun 2021) although the conflict was exposed to the public much later, through a memoir book, entitled *İçimde Kalmasın, Tanıklığımdır*, written by Ahmet Sever (2018), the chief advisor to Gül for 12 years. Moreover, this process of deepening distrust, which resulted in the political marginalization of Abdullah Gül, continued to include other moderate figures and resulted in their marginalization as well. Hence, we learn from the Sever’s book that although the AKP had increased its vote share in the elections, held in response to both “the 367 crisis” and the military e-memorandum issued in the aftermath, Erdoğan considered someone else, a presidential candidate whose wife does not wear a headscarf, not to confront the military; and yet, Abdullah Gül did not back down on his decision to become the presidential candidate since he wanted to confront the military which tried to design civilian politics. Then, on August 14, 2007, Gül held a press conference, without notifying Erdoğan, to announce his candidacy for the Presidency. In his press conference, he said that to keep the promise they gave to society during the election campaign period, he decided to

run for the presidency. In this regard, Ahmet Sever also confirmed in an interview that 2007 emerged as the year in which distrust between Gül and Erdogan started to surface. What becomes clear is that (dis)trust problem that emerged between Gül and Erdogan in the 2007 presidential election process deepened over the years, and was followed by Erdogan's efforts to politically sideline Gül, with the support of pro-AKP media. As we will see later, the sidelining efforts by Erdogan of the second man in the party with a "balancing" role against Erdogan, also created a rift in the party and played a role in the democratic backsliding in Turkey. And this process of purging has continued, expanding to include other moderate figures with a balancing role against Erdoğan.

The third and final factor that caused the 2007 presidential election process to have negative repercussions on the AKP and Turkish democracy was the involvement of Gülen organization in the AKP's election campaign, and the AKP's getting into a tactical alliance with this organization, as stressed above. As it was written in an online news portal (Güldoğan 2017), it was the first time that the Gülen organization gave "full support" to the AKP, including intelligence support. It was also added that the Gülen organization convinced the government which felt threatened by the military-led bureaucratic tutelage in the process which started with the April 27th e-memorandum, that it could overcome this challenge through their cooperation, by also submitting evidence in this regard. And to the news portal, the government did not reject this cooperation since the Gülen community had already reached a certain level of power within both the police department and the judiciary. To this article, Gülen organization's full support to the AKP derived from their feeling threatened by the Republican Protests, since these protests directed rage not only to Erdoğan but also to the Gülen organization, and since the community could not develop a presence within the military by that time yet. And then, while the 2007 elections marked the AKP's attainment of "the real (full-fledged) power," it also marked the Gülen organization's attainment of significant opportunities in return for their support to Erdoğan in the face of the "military tutelage" threat, and the organization's step by step turn into "the deep state" by dominating the key positions in state institutions, including municipalities and governorates, and the state broadcaster *TRT* (Güldoğan 2017). This article also argued that the Gülen organization, which started to impress the secular and liberal circles through such initiatives as the Abant Platform and Turkish Olympics, informed the government through its intelligence that "[the alleged] Ergenekon organization was in preparation for a coup plot," and convinced the government of the existence of the coup plan (Güldoğan 2017). As Sadullah Ergin, the minister of Justice between 2009 and 2013, explained in an interview, when the Ergenekon indictment came to the fore,

all ill-treatments, vetoes/cancellations, and threats the AKP had to face, generated “reasonable doubt,” and caused the AKP and the government to believe in those indictments. He said, “the party had to adopt every bill twice in the parliament like a student who repeats every year at school.” Then, on Sept. 16, 2008, the AKP got involved in these judicial (investigation and prosecution) processes by filing a petition for intervention in the lawsuit “as a victim,” Ergin (Jul. 18, 2020) explained.

Although the AKP has been involved in the Ergenekon/Balyoz (Sledgehammer) trials “as a victim,” it is fair to say that these trials have also put the government in a difficult position. Indeed, then Prime Minister Erdoğan, President Gül, and many other ministers continued to express their discontent with the widespread arrests of active and retired military officers, including former Chief of General Staff İlker Başbuğ (2008-2010), on charges of attempting to overthrow the government as part of the alleged Balyoz and Ergenekon coup plot cases. For instance, Abdulkadir Selvi (2011), an Ankara-based journalist, wrote in his column that both PM Erdogan and President Gül were disturbed by the recent operations conducted as part of Ergenekon/Balyoz indictments, including the arrest of journalists Nedim Şener and Ahmet Şık, the confiscation of an unpublished draft copy of a book that Ahmet Şık wanted to publish under the title of the Imam’s Army, as well as the police raid at Radikal Daily to search for copies of the unpublished book. Selvi wrote, he had also noticed such disturbances on the part of the government after the court decided to arrest 163 military suspects in the Balyoz case. As he explained, after this decision, PM Erdogan met with the then Chief of the General Staff Koşaner, and stressed the need to make a distinction between the suspects who took part in the preparation of the coup plan and the ones who took place in the planned seminar out of duty. The same disturbances had also occurred with the decision to arrest 102 suspects in the context of the alleged Balyoz coup plot case in 2010 (Selvi 2011). Likewise, on January 10, 2012, Erdogan stated regarding the trial of former Chief of the General Staff İlker Başbuğ under arrest that “to take the path of trial without arrest... has always been my thesis, and we always hope for it to be this way” (Daily Sabah Jan. 10, 2012). Similarly, on January 28, 2013, Erdogan also publicly criticized long detention periods and widespread arrests and detainments of army generals, and expressed his concern about how the fight with terror would continue given that only a few high-ranking officers remained outside. As it was stated in the news report, prior to these remarks of Erdogan, these concerns had also been voiced in the trilateral meeting between the then President Gül, PM Erdogan, and Chief of the General Staff Necdet Özel (Hurriyet daily news Jan. 28, 2013). Similarly, Abdullah Gül (2013), when assessing the arrest of Basbug, criticized the long detention periods saying, “it was sad to find that long detainment periods were

becoming punishments in themselves.”

And then-Justice Minister Ergin (Jul. 18, 2020) stated that only after “the February 7 conspiracy against MIT,” which was considered to mark the peak of the self-confidence of FETO, did the government become aware of the FETO organization in the judiciary. Thus, as HH³¹ stressed, February 7, 2012, marked the date the fight with the FETO started. He, even, stressed, to set forth how Gulenists’ penetration into all state institutions went unnoticed, that although the Presidency of Telecommunication and Communication was a very recent institution, established in 2006, they found out that only in a few years Gulenists comprised over 90% of the employees of this institution.

Overall, what we get from the 2007 presidential election process is the following:

First of all, the AKP’s move to introduce its own presidential candidate turned into a conflict between the assertive secular establishment and the AKP over who controls the presidency, and into an avenue for the mobilization of secularist civil society, since the secularist establishment and civil society did not want to lose the presidency, the last bastion of secularism, to the AKP, a party with Islamist roots.

Secondly, the AKP’s “multi-layered response,” which involved “a sharp response” to the military, the proposal for the direct popular election of the president, and call for snap elections, accompanied also by a massive campaign conducted by the AKP-owned state machinery, local governments as well as Islamic networks in Anatolia to further convince people that the AKP was not “a threat,” but “a hope” for them, all contributed to the AKP’s success in framing the conflict with the military-led secular coalition as the resistance of “the military/the status quo” to “democracy/democratic change” as well as to “the election of a pious president,” i.e. to the inclusion of pious people into the public sphere. Then, the AKP was able to win both the presidential and parliamentary elections and end the “dual sovereignty” in the country by also winning the presidency, i.e. the last bastion of assertive secularism (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 257-8).

And thirdly, I argue that the 2007 presidential-election process proved detrimental for Turkish democracy in the mid-term by paving the way for a referendum package that involved the popular election of the President, by giving rise to the distrust between Erdogan and Gül, the second man of the AKP with a “balancing” role against Erdoğan, and finally, by giving rise to the collaboration between the Gülen movement and the AKP.

³¹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

4.4 Crises Continued: New Constitution Promise in 2007 and the Closure Case against the AKP in 2008

In 2007 another incident that caused concern among the secular groups and brought the assertive-secular state bureaucracy and the AKP face-to-face was the AKP's initiative to craft a new constitution. As HH³² stressed, the preparation of a new constitution was promised to the society prior to the 2007 elections in return for the AKP's coming to power as a single-party government again. Then, this promise took place in the 2007 election manifesto, which defined the new constitution as "a social contract designing the state-society-individual relations on the basis of rights, freedoms and responsibilities" (AKP Election Manifesto 2007, 21). The election manifesto stated that the new constitution should guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms in line with the principles and standards of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and the "European Convention on Human Rights." Besides, although the majority of the people voted in the 2007 elections with economic considerations, both the increasing AKP votes in the Kurdish-populated east/southeast and the post-election survey conducted by Ağırdir which suggested that 14% of the vote derived from "democratization" demands, showed that the demand for a new constitution, a new social contract that would consolidate democracy in Turkey, was certainly one of the reasons people voted for the AKP.

And HH³³ explained, prior to the 2007 elections a leading constitutional law professor Ergun Özbudun was assigned the task of establishing a team to make a draft constitution in line with the pre-determined guidelines/principles, such as generating an advanced parliamentary system, with measures to consolidate the democracy and to limit the excessive powers of the president. And in his account, the draft constitution, prepared by a team of leading law professors, such as Serap Yazıcı, Levent Köker, Zühtü Arslan, etc., was further developed in a one-week long workshop held in Sapanca in the aftermath of the elections. And as he added, they announced that they would improve this package more by taking the views of universities, non-governmental organizations, political parties, and all segments of society till the end of 2007 and that they would enact it before the beginning of the parliament's summer recess in 2008. In an interview with Sadullah Ergin (Jul. 18, 2020), he emphasized that they could not enact the package because they were threatened with a closure case against the party by the Supreme Court of Appeals Chief Public Prosecutor's Office if they announced the package. As he noted, the Supreme Court

³²Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

³³Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

of Appeal asked them in a message not to announce the draft constitution and not to bring it to the floor. And he stressed that they had to step back, under those circumstances.

Some scholars have emphasized that after the AKP's electoral victory in 2007, the secular establishment perceived the AKP's attempt at a new constitution as a threat. In the words of Hale and Özbudun (2010, 260-261), they saw this initiative as an attempt by the AKP (and its liberal supporters) to "purify the state from Kemalism," that is, to redefine the founding principles of the state. They summarized the main characteristics of the draft constitution that created concern among the secular establishment as follows:

"[It] celebrates a market economy and private ownership as high ideals; redefines Turkishness; has Kurdish taught as a second language in government schools; restructures the Constitutional court, along with its duties; ends the autonomy of the military by subjecting the decisions of Supreme Military Council to legal review; and reduces the powers of the Turkish president. [And also,] the AKP seeks to resolve the headscarf issue through a constitutional change in the Higher Education Council. . . The proposed draft has a number of articles that would lead to the total decentralization of the state, open new avenues for the redefinition of the state as a bi-national (Kurdish and Turkish) polity, and also undermine the Kemalist version of the separation of state and religion".

And yet, as HH stated, even though the AKP backed down from the new constitution initiative, shortly afterwards, just 5 months later, a closure case was filed against the party; and the AKP government had to rule for 4 to 5 months under a closure risk. The closure case was opened for the amendments to abolish the headscarf ban at universities. In then-Justice Minister Ergin's (Jul. 18, 2020) words, "the closure case was opened just because of adding a sentence to the Article 42 of the Constitution regarding the right to education".

Unfolding of the events that resulted in the initiation of a lawsuit against the ruling AKP demanding its closure was mainly triggered by Erdoğan's words, "even if the headscarf is being worn as a political symbol, can that really be accepted as a crime? . . . We will solve this problem in the shortest time possible," in response to a reporter's question concerning the use of a headscarf as a "political symbol" in his visit to Spain (Hürriyet Jan. 15, 2008). And then, came the support of MHP leader Bahçeli to abolish the headscarf ban, particularly in the universities. Bahçeli made a written statement two days later, arguing, there was no need to wait for the new constitution to abolish the ban, but an amendment to the Article 10 which originally stressed, "state organs and administrative bodies should abide

by the equality principle in all their acts,” would suffice. Bahçeli stressed in his statement that, after the phrase “in all their acts,” the following phrase should have been added: “in the provision of and in benefiting from all kinds of public services” (Cnnturk Jan. 17, 2008). Then, the AKP and the far-right MHP commissions reached a deal over the amendment of the articles 10 and 42 of the Constitution. In this context, while the phrase, “in benefiting from all kinds of public services” was added to Article 10, Article 42 which provided for the right to education was revised as follows: “Noone can be deprived of the right to higher education due to any reason not explicitly written in the law. Limitations on the exercise of this right shall be determined by the law” (BBC Turkish Feb. 9, 2008). And the parliament voted to end the ban with 411 votes against 103, for which the then secular newspaper *Hürriyet* used the headline “411 hands rose for chaos” (Hurriyet Feb. 10, 2008).

The constitutional amendment to allow the wearing of a headscarf at higher education institutions once again led to the mobilization of the secular establishment. Although the AKP government had defended the changes as “a requirement for Turkey joining the European Union” and as “a women’s rights issue,” it was heavily protested by the secular sectors of society, including almost 50 non-governmental organizations and women’s groups, who shouted the slogans, “Turkey is secular and will remain so,” and “this is Turkey, not Iran,” out of the fear that the move was part of the AKP’s Islamization plan of the society (DW Feb. 4, 2008). And the opposition parties CHP and DSP took the amendment to the Constitutional Court for its annulment and suspension on the grounds that it violated the Constitution’s principle of secularism (Hürriyet Feb. 27, 2008). And the Constitutional Court both annulled these amendments and instituted a stay of execution of their implementation. However, on March 14, Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya, the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals, filed a lawsuit to the Constitutional Court against the AKP on the charge that the party violated the principle of separation of religion and state in Turkey and requested both the closure of the AKP and the ban from politics for five years of seventy-one leading members, including PM Erdogan and President Gül. While the Welfare party was also closed for being the center of anti-secular activities, this time the same accusation was made against a party, ruling the country single-handedly, and with an overwhelming majority in the parliament (Hürriyet Mar. 14, 2008).

The filing of a closure case was immediately reacted by MHP leader Bahçeli, who argued that the closure of a party ruling the country for the last 65 months would have very severe political consequences by rendering all the acts/actions of the gov-

ernment debatable/questionable (MHP Mar. 15, 2008). AS HH³⁴ noted in our interview, although in that process the MHP promised to do its part to defuse the closure case, including giving support for a constitutional amendment, it stepped back because of the pressures on it.

At least seven votes in favor were required for the court to issue a closure order and ban the party's leading figures from politics. Then, on March 31, six to five votes for closure impeded the closure of the party. And yet, the court, in which eight out of eleven judges were appointed by Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the former President who was also known to be an ardent secularist, instead ruled the party be deprived of fifty percent of the state funding which, to Robert Tait in *the Guardian*, "implied that the AKP has been guilty of anti-secularism but not sufficiently to justify closure." Then, as he rightfully argued, the decision made with a narrow margin sent the message to the governing party that it was "on probation." In the words of Hasim Kilic, who was then the chief justice, the ruling of the court meant "a serious warning" to the AKP. That is, the purpose of the court decision was to keep the AKP away from controversial matters related to religion, matters which from their illiberal perspective would jeopardize the (assertive) secularist character of the state.

4.5 The AKP's Fight for Survival, the 2010 Constitutional Amendment Package, and the Ending of the Old Turkey as a Constraint on the AKP

As Sadullah Ergin, the then Justice Minister, stressed in an interview, the process till the announcement of the non-closure decision by the Constitutional Court in 2008 was a very tense one for the governing AKP, since it had to rule under a closure risk at a time when the markets also started to be affected from the mortgage crisis in the U.S. When the Constitutional Court announced its non-closure decision, he said, the AKP as the governing party decided to look ahead and focus on the countries' problems, and yet, only 53 days after the closure case was concluded, they heard that another closure preparation was going on in the Court of Appeals. That being the case, said Ergin, the governing party made the following assessment: "We won the elections by winning 47% of the vote and went through a closure case, and only 53 days later another closure case investigation started. They will not let us work." And he added, "the governing party had two options then: It would either be always set for its closure or make regulations to make the judiciary act

³⁴Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

within its legal limits. And he added, “it was all those experiences that prompted the government to prepare the 2010 Constitutional amendment package.” In other words, in Ergin’s Jul. 18, 2020 account, the AKP found itself in a “survival problem” although it was the ruling party with a parliamentary majority. And the 2010 constitutional amendment package came to the fore as the primary means to resolve its survival problem, caused by “judicial activism,” in his words. As HH³⁵ defined in our face-to-face interview “judicial activism” as “the long-maintained activist image of the judiciary, . . . which was not only characterized by a single ideological mold but also attempted to mold public and private lives of individuals as well.” The package involved important amendments to the constitution in this respect, and called by BB³⁶ “a civilianization package,” in our interview.

Some of the amendments to the package concerned the improvement of the rights/liberties; and in this regard, ensured the positive discrimination for women, children, kins of martyrs and veterans or other disadvantaged groups, the protection of personal data, the right to travel, the improvement of labor union rights, public servants and other public employees’ collective agreement rights, and the introduction of the ombudsman system for the resolution of the problems between state institutions and citizens. Furthermore, with a mechanism inspired by the European Court of Human Rights, citizens were allowed to make individual applications to the Constitutional Court.

As for the “judicial activism” problem, the Constitutional Court was restructured with the introduction of an electoral model parallel to the models used in Europe. In this regard, the number of Constitutional Court members were increased from 11 to 17, and unlike the original model in which all the constitutional court members were appointed by the Constitutional Court, the new model authorized the parliament to choose some of the members. The package also involved an amendment to Article 149 to make it harder to ban political parties. In this regard, a quorum was required for the Constitutional Court to convene, and the minimum number of votes required for the closure of a political party or for the annulment of constitutional amendments was revised as three-fifths instead of the former two-thirds. In addition, an amendment to the Article 84 stipulated that even if a political party was closed, the posts of deputies of that party would endure until the end of their elected term. Besides, as HH³⁷ noted in our interview, Article 125 of the Constitution was amended to prevent the judicial bodies from exerting their judicial review

³⁵Interview with an AKP deputy.

³⁶Interview with a former AKP deputy, Ankara, November 18, 2019.

³⁷Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

power arbitrarily over the acts and actions of the executive body, to draw limits to this power, since Paragraph 4 of Article 125 had originally stipulated that “judicial power is limited to the verification of conformity of the actions and acts of the administration with law.” In this regard, a sentence was added to the paragraph, stressing that, “. . . in no case it can be used as a review of expediency.” Furthermore, the paragraph 2 of the same article had also originally brought judicial immunity to the acts of the President and the decisions of the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ). The article was also amended to open YAŞ decisions that resulted in the expulsion from the Armed Forces to judicial review. Besides, an amendment to Article 145 forbids the trial of civilians by military courts other than during times of war. These amendments, undoubtedly, meant the extension of the civilian/democratic sphere. Furthermore, an amendment paved the way for the Constitutional Court to act like the Supreme Council, and try the Chief of General Staff, force commanders as well as the Parliament Speaker in case of the abuse of their power.

As Ergin, the then Justice Minister, explained in an interview, two of the amendments in this 26-item package were particularly very important in terms of showing the lessons their experiences with “the judicial activism” taught them. One of these amendments undertaken to prevent judicial activism was Article 8, which could not receive the required 330 votes in the parliament and was removed from the package, regulated the closure of political parties; according to this amendment, if a Supreme Court of Appeal prosecutor were to file a closure case against a political party, first, he would prepare an indictment, and then, a special parliamentary commission, in which all political parties in the parliament were represented in equal numbers, would convene. In other words, Ergin explained, if five political parties had groups in the parliament, the ruling party would give 5 members, and the opposition would give 20 members to the 25-member commission. In other words, Ergin (Jul. 18, 2020) explained, although this article meant that the ruling party was yielding itself to the opposition parties, it also pointed to a fact: “in the face of the point the judicial activism reached, the opposition parties looked safer to the AKP”.

To Ergin, the other important amendment undertaken to cope with “judicial activism” was the amendment to the Article 159 of the Constitution, which concerned the structure of the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK). As he said, their experiences in government, from day one, showed them the drawbacks of having an HSYK composed of members with the same ideological position, and hence, the importance of enhancing pluralism in the judicial body by preventing any single group/sect/ecole from dominating the judiciary. Although the 2010 constitutional amendment package has been widely cited as the primary means of the FETO’s leak into the judiciary through an amendment to this article, Ergin, rejecting these

accusations, arguing that they wanted to come up with a formula in the package that would generate an HSYK with a pluralistic structure, i.e., one composed of members from all social and political strata. Then, in his account, they wanted to come up with a formula in the package that would generate an HSYK with a pluralistic structure, i.e., one composed of members from all social and political strata. According to this formula, he stated, each judge and prosecutor would vote for a single person as opposed to a list; and hence, he stated, people would both run for election individually, and seek the support of other people individually. As he explained, this was the formula that they proposed, adopted in the commission, and passed by the parliament. And yet, he explained, before the referendum took place on September 12, the main opposition party, CHP, filed an application with the Constitutional Court for the cancellation of certain amendments, particularly the ones related to the structure of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK). And the constitutional court annulled the amendment to the structure of the HSYK by majority decision (Ergin Jul. 18, 2020). Then, they amended the article and agreed on every group in the judiciary to come up with its own list for the HSYK election.

On the same day as the cancellation decision, as Ergin (Jul. 18, 2020) stressed in an interview, he told the press that “the model they had proposed/stipulated was based on a pluralist structure, and yet, the model that came out after the cancellation promoted a majoritarian structure...” Moreover, Ergin stressed, the Constitutional Court violated the constitution by reviewing the constitutional amendments on substantive grounds, and hence, behaving like a legislative body (Milliyet Jul. 8, 2010). In the interview he gave to Ruşen Çakır he said, the mistake was “so obvious and so clear” that 4 months before the HSYK elections he could see that such a regulation would give rise to a majoritarian structure. And to him, the main opposition party, CHP, thought when appealing to the Constitutional Court for cancellation that YARSAV, the secularist group, was the only organized group in the judiciary with its almost 1500 members, and that they would win all the seats in the HSYK if they voted for a bloc list in the elections. In other words, the CHP thought that the leftist (secularist) group made up the majority in the judiciary, and hence, would benefit from such a regulation. Then, in 2010, the CHP had been the pioneer of this regulation. And yet, Ergin said that in the HSYK elections, YARSAV could not get its own list elected and that another organization, the Gulenists’ organization, was elected instead. Ergin explained how the Gülen organization had its members elected, and how they discovered the Gülenists’ presence in the HSYK as follows:

“The FETO organization prevented certain names in the primary list

from being elected, and instead, got certain names from the alternate list elected in the course of HSYK elections. In other words, . . . they engaged in dislocations between primary and alternate lists in the elections. And. . . only in the course of the February 7 MIT crisis did we (as the government) clearly find out that those names carried from the alternate list were acting in collaboration with the Gulenists. [In Ergin’s words,] although calling the MIT undersecretary for testimony was clearly against the MIT Act, these names in the HSYK did nothing but instructed the public prosecutor in Ankara that Fidan’s statement be taken. And then, the same day we rewrote the article in question in the MIT Act by adding the phrase, “no investigation shall be opened against the MIT officials without the permission of the PM;” and it enacted into law in a few days” (Ergin Jul. 18, 2020).

As a result, to Ergin, then Justice Minister, opposed the argument that the 2010 referendum package has been the primary means of the Gulenists’ leak into the judiciary. In other words, if the CHP had not intervened in the amended (HSYK) article by violating the constitution, a pluralist structure would have emerged in the judiciary, and hence, the FETO’s strengthening in the judiciary would not have occurred.

In the referendum, almost 58% said ‘yes’ while 42% said ‘no.’ Gülen organization leader Fetullah Gulen’s words, “if it were possible, we would wake up even those in the graves, and make them vote ‘yes’ in the referendum; I think they would get up,” became a symbol of the organization’s support for this referendum package then. Liberals, whose support for the AKP increased in 2007, also supported this referendum package by saying “yes, but not enough!”. One of those names, a columnist, Yıldırım Oğur (2021) defended the importance of this referendum result for Turkish democracy with the following words:

“The referendum. . . ended the military-civil bureaucratic status quo, established in 1961. . . Thus, the military, which kept the balance in favor of the secularists against the demographically more crowded conservatives, for 50 years, . . . and the judiciary, under its influence, has remained officially out of the equation; a kind of distorted Turkish-style separation of powers system got broken. The question of ‘how will the military react,” summarized as military tutelage has disappeared; the AKP has freed from its chains, the secularists have lost their last assurance. . . The AKP, freed from its chains with the removal of the question, “what will the military say?” could lead the country to two paths: it could either go to democracy or authoritarianism.”

Thus, by 2010, not only did the AKP no longer have a survival problem arising from “judicial activism,” but there was also no obstacle to further democratization steps as the Constitutional Court was divested of the arbitrary option of party closure

and the tutelage powers of the military and judiciary were largely eliminated. In other words, assertive secularist state institutions ceased to be constraining powers over the AKP after this referendum. As Ogur also put it, from this point on, the unshackled AKP would lead the country to one of two paths: either to democracy or authoritarianism.



5. THE POST-2011 PERIOD AKP RULE: THE DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING STARTING WITH ERDOĞAN'S INCREASING POWER

In the period after the 2011 elections, particularly in the first years, democratization steps were taken. Although the 2010 referendum was, subsequently, blamed for the authoritarian turn of the AKP and was placed to the target-board in this regard, significant democratization steps such as the new constitution initiative in 2011, which was promised to the electorate one more time in the 2011 election manifesto, arguing that 2004, 2007 and 2010 constitutional amendments provided a basis for the new constitution (AKP Election Manifesto 2011, 32), the Kurdish resolution process, and the removal of the headscarf ban were also made possible by the liberation of the party from its chains with this referendum (Oğur 2021). Former AKP deputy BB³⁸'s following words are very important in this context: "The 2010 constitutional referendum package was a very democratic package, gave the impression that accounts were settled with the 1980 coup, involved a justice notion, and led to the blow of a 'democracy breeze' in the country."

On the other hand, the democratic backsliding has started as Erdoğan increased his power in this period through the issues highlighted in the three pillars, all three issues' seeds being sown during the 2007 presidential election crisis. As mentioned above, in this regard, the tactical alliance which started in 2007 with the Gülen organization, turned into a battle with the FETÖ-initiated crises, the first one being the MIT crisis in 2012. The distrust problem that emerged in 2007 between Erdoğan and Gül deepened with the differences of opinion that emerged on different issues (Gezi, December 17/25 corruption allegations, the AKP policy in Syria) during this period and expanded to include other people, resulting in their being sidelined by Erdoğan in 2015/2016. As HH³⁹, a former AKP minister noted in our interview, "although the AKP won the battle against 'the old Turkey,' it lost what

³⁸Interview with a former AKP deputy.

³⁹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

he called ‘the big battle,’ i.e., the battle against itself.” As former minister GG⁴⁰ noted in our interview, there were two types of profiles in the party from the very beginning: “one being self-trained in party organizations and the other being more intellectual, with a more global perspective.” And he said, “in a gradual and systematic manner, the former profile seized the full control of the party.” And finally, the process which started with the election of the president by popular vote in 2007, continued with Erdoğan’s insistence on the institution of the presidential system, and the steps he took in this direction.

Furthermore, alongside the loss of power of the secular establishment, the deterioration of the relations with the EU, the tangential passage of the 2008/2009 financial crisis in Turkey, which boosted Erdoğan’s self-confidence, the Arab Spring, and the resulting prolonged war in Syria emerged as background factors with effects on these pillars. And, as Erdoğan increased his power in the party, the pluralist perspective started to take a backseat, while the majoritarian notion of democracy, adopted by the RP, as well as other characteristics of the National Outlook parties, such as traditional understanding of conservativeness with a *dava perspective* and leader oligarchy, one more time, came to the fore.

5.1 Background Factors Contributing to the Post-2011 Period

Deterioration of the Relations with the EU and Removal of the Market Fear

As we have already noted, the 2010 referendum was an important step in removing the secularist establishment constraint over the AKP. However, we’ll see that other constraining powers with an impact on the AKP, also disappeared in close proximity to each other.

Before the elections took place on June 12, 2011, relations with Turkey’s EU accession process had already *de facto* come to a halt as “the Cyprus issue” emerged as a stumbling block in the accession talks, and hence, the EU had already ceased to be a constraining power on Turkey, i.e., a power keeping Turkey on the democratization path/track. Also, with the Arab Spring protests’ spread across the Middle East starting from late 2010, Turkey had already carved out a new role for itself in the region.

The AKP, even before its rise to power, embraced the EU membership goal and

⁴⁰Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

tried to convince the EU countries as well as the U.S. that the AKP was sincerely committed to the EU and the market norms as well as the IMF-program initiated by the previous government. As former AKP minister FF⁴¹ stressed in our interview, after the party was established they worked hard both in the country and abroad to convince everyone that the AKP that can work with the IMF and work for the EU membership goal, that whatever is feared about the National Outlook parties was not valid for the AKP, and that fears in this regard were groundless. In this regard, he explained, Turkey's taking the two-year deadline to meet the Copenhagen criteria in the Copenhagen summit in December 2002, its meeting the criteria in December 2004, and the start of the negotiations, convinced the public as well as the world about their sincerity. On the economic front, he said, the AKP decided for the continuation of the IMF-program, inherited from the previous government, with slight changes to it.

On the other hand, to another former minister, KK⁴², the other side of the coin was that the AKP founders' foreign visits were also motivated by two strong fears, which were the fear of the market, and the fear of the secular establishment. He said, all founding cadres as well as Erdoğan were aware of it that that a financial crisis, followed by the election, had destroyed the prior broad-based government, composed of a center-right, center-left, and nationalist party, and representing 53% of the electorate, that is, the market discipline destroyed parties of the previous government in 2002. To KK, this fear of the market ensured that Erdoğan delegated the economy program and its implementation to technocrats in accordance with international norms, which were in force at the time, and that did not interfere with it at all. He also argued that the AKP cadres had also learned the lesson taught by the February 28 process that there was no place for political-Islam-based parties in the system. Then, in his account, the EU also functioned as a shelter for them as the representative of the democratic/liberal line that the party had adopted then. Then, he said, "Are we sincere? Or adopted that line because of the circumstances/fears? To prolong the life of the party?" And he added, "if they were adopted in principle, there would be a return to 'the normal' from subsequent deviations." "We call it 'the mean version,'" he said. "So there comes the shock, it takes you off the road slightly, but because it is the main path, you go back in." And yet, as he stressed, on the part of Erdoğan, who later took over the control of the party, the return has always been to his "factory settings."

It is possible to infer from the two interviews mentioned above that the EU relations

⁴¹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁴²Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

were important in two ways: both to prove that the party sincerely embraced the democratic/liberal line and to ensure protection from the secular establishment. In fact, Erdoğan's above-mentioned words, "if the EU would not give membership to Turkey, we would call the Copenhagen Criteria, 'Ankara Criteria' and would keep going in our [democratization] path" (Hürriyet Sep. 3, 2005), pointed to a strong commitment to the democratization process, irrespective of the EU membership. And yet, we will see that as the EU's stopping being a constraining power over the AKP, primarily with the emergence of the Cyprus issue as a stumbling block, coincided with the AKP's gradual move away from the democratization path. In other words, the EU has proven to be an important force that has kept the AKP on the path of democratization.

Why and how did the relations with the EU start to deteriorate? In fact, as stressed in a TEPAV report (Dec. 2009), "the Cyprus issue" started to affect the relations with the EU since Southern Cyprus received the candidate status in 1995; and its effect further increased with Turkey's receiving the candidate status in 1999. As it is stressed in this report, when the EU leaders agreed to start accession negotiations in Dec. 2004, the result document stressed that Turkey's intention to sign "the additional protocol for the expansion of Turkey's customs union to include all newly member states," was "welcomed." The EU mainly asked for the adoption of this protocol, since Turkish ports were closed to trade from the Greek Cyprus since 1987, and hence, these goods' direct transportation to Turkey was not possible. While Turkey signed the protocol, it also announced that it did not mean the recognition of the government of Greek Cyprus. And, on September 21, 2005, the EU announced that if Turkey did not implement this protocol, the whole accession process would be affected from this; and in late 2006, it announced that it decided to suspend the opening of 8 chapters, alleged to be related to the Customs Union and that it would not be possible to even temporarily close any chapter if the ports/additional protocol issue was not solved. While the ANNAN plan to resolve "the Cyprus issue" was approved by the Northern side, and rejected by the Southern side in 2004, in the aftermath the EU Council proposed "to end the isolation of the Northern side by starting financial aid and trade with them;" and yet, at the end, only the financial aid was approved by the Council. And, in return, Turkey announced that it would not open ports to trade from Southern Cyprus until the EU lifted its embargo on the Turkish, northern part, which is recognized only by Turkey (TEPAV Dec. 2009). As KK⁴³ noted, "Turkey's accession process became a very long-term 'let's see' issue when the EU associated Turkey's accession process with the Cyprus issue."

⁴³Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

To the AKP's first minister of foreign affairs, Yaşar Yakış, Erdoğan had determined EU membership as "an absolute goal," and that, to this end, before the start of the negotiations, Turkey approved the Annan plan, which envisaged a federative structure for a solution in Cyprus as well as followed a dynamic policy which surprised the EU so that the Turks on the island also approved the plan. "It was the Greeks, not the Turks who rejected the plan," he said. And yet, even though the Greek side rejected the plan, the EU gave full membership to the Greeks, as the representative for the whole island. And to him, the first rupture on the EU membership path on the part of Erdoğan happened that day. He explained Erdoğan's disappointment and the following course of the relations with the EU as follows:

"When the Greek side became a full member, he got really disappointed with the EU. That disappointment, that deception shook [Erdoğan's] trust in the EU. That distrust continued to multiply in the next period... Due to the Cyprus problem, the negotiation process that started... in 2005 got fully blocked. Only 16 of 35 negotiation chapters were opened" (DW Aug. 14, 2021)

Undoubtedly, the rising opposition to Turkey in Europe also played a role in freezing the Turkey-EU negotiation process. In France, the ascendance to the presidency of Sarkozy, who made his opposition to Turkey's EU membership a key element of his electoral campaign in 2007, and his announcement after winning the elections that he would "block the opening of discussions on the key area of economic and monetary policy" to block Turkey's entry talks in 2007 despite the fact that Turkey had undertaken difficult political and economic reforms and fulfilled the requirements, emerged as another factor that contributed to the failure of the accession process (the *New York Times* Jun. 25, 2007). As it was stated in the *New York Times* (Jun. 25, 2007), not only did such an initiative of Sarkozy come "at a very critical time" for Turkey, since Turkey undertook significant political/economic reforms required for EU membership although 2007 was an election year in Turkey, but also, as EU diplomats stressed, the area of economic and monetary policy had "political and symbolic" importance and opening of the chapter in this area would speed up the eventual membership in the Euro. Furthermore, EU skepticism towards Turkey's EU membership further crystallized in this process as no EU member objected to Sarkozy's this initiative, which "[was] the first time a chapter [was] being blocked on the grounds that it would bring Turkey closer to full membership," as Sinan Ülgen, an EU expert stressed. Such skeptical attitudes on the part of the EU led to growing frustration on the part of the Turkish public opinion and played into the hands of the Turkish nationalists in the country although then chief negotiator Ali Babacan stated after this initiative of Sarkozy that Turkey would continue integrating its leg-

isolation irrespective of which chapters are closed or opened (New York Times Jun. 25, 2007). KK⁴⁴ also noted in our interview that he kept telling the Westerners the following: “If Turkey does what it takes to become an EU member, it does not matter if Turkey becomes an EU member or not. Look at Switzerland. Look at Norway. Who wants to become Norway of the EU? Or Switzerland of EU?” Another former minister, DD⁴⁵, similarly emphasized that although the EU accession process was a very important motivator for them to implement a large number of democratization reforms in a short period of time, it was not their only motivation and that they sincerely wanted to strengthen democracy in Turkey. Then, the real importance of the “EU breeze” was that it enabled democratization reforms to take place “at this pace”.

Yet, not only did “the EU breeze” stop blowing over Turkey for reasons mentioned above, but also, as FF⁴⁶ noted in our interview, the EU itself also weakened after the 2008/2009 global economic crisis and ceased to set an example to Turkey concerning how democracy would create welfare since people started to argue that human rights and freedoms were not enough to create prosperity. As for the impact of the global financial crisis on Turkey, Erdoğan stated in late 2008 that the crisis would pass Turkey tangentially; although in the first 9 months of 2009, the Turkish economy shrunk by 8.4%, the international credit rating agencies Fitch and Moodys raised the credit score of Turkey, also stating that “Turkey coped well with the crisis” (Milliyet Jan. 11, 2010). Then, as Balta (2021, 3) stressed, Turkey’s economic growth and the accompanying infrastural projects were easily introduced not only as “domestic achievements,” but also as “a symbol of the power of the state” after 2008. Thus, in this period, in which the AKP engaged in an effort to present itself as a multi-regional actor, Erdoğan presented jealousy of the foreign countries as the reason behind their conspirations against Turkey. As Aslan (2016) who identified the anti-EU/anti-Western elements in Erdoğan’s populist rhetoric through a critical discourse analysis of his speeches between 2011 and 2014, also stressed, in multiple instances, Erdoğan presented the EU/Europe as inferior to Turkey in terms of their in terms of their economic standards, particularly by referring to the economic growth rates achieved by the AKP vis-a-vis Europe in general, and to the most severely affected countries by the 2008/2009 financial crisis, such as Italy, Spain, and Greece, in particular. Thus, the fact that the 2008/2009 financial crisis did indeed pass Turkey tangentially, apparently, helped PM Erdoğan overcome his fear of the market as

⁴⁴Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁴⁵Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁴⁶Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

well.

Therefore, the Cyprus issue, the rising anti-Turkey sentiment in Europe, and the weakening of the EU after the 2008/2009 financial crisis not only pushed the AKP rule, and Erdoğan in particular, away from the EU, but the tangent of the crisis to Turkey also allowed Erdoğan to get rid of his fear of the market. According to KK⁴⁷, as Erdoğan's fear of the market diminished, his intervention in economy management started to increase as in other areas.

In his own words in our face-to-face interview,

“He did not get too much involved in it. So he delegated the job. . . Thus, he was hands-off because of market fear. When we said, ‘if we do this, the market would react like this,’ he listened. Then, with the right model and a performance-based culture, the AKP demonstrated that Turkey can prosper without oil, without natural gas. . . But over time, that is, as he got stronger, as he conquered all power centers, he evolved towards his factory settings. . . The factory setting was not the Copenhagen criteria. It was actually the 70s perspective.”

As he noted, even the weakening of the EU would be used to the advantage of Turkey, and Turkey would become a valuable asset then, rather than a liability; but Erdoğan's harsh reactions and distancing from the EU values played into the hands of opponents of Turkey.

In this period of strained relations between Turkey and the EU, the EU/West began to be “negatively represented” in Erdoğan's discourse, and constructed as a “homogeneous” entity and binary oppositions against the AKP government (Aslan 2016). Hence, Europe/the West took place in these speeches not only as “democratically/economically inferior to Turkey,” but also as “an unwanted intruder in Turkish politics,” “an essentially discriminatory entity” (Aslan 2016). In this regard, in multiple instances, Erdoğan accused the EU and its institutions of intervening in the domestic affairs of Turkey, and of being “insincere,” “dishonest,” and “uninformed about Turkey.” What further draws attention is that Erdoğan accused the EU/the Europe/the West of being “discriminatory” not only against Turkey but also against the Muslims in general in this period. In this regard, for instance, in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Israeli strike towards Gaza in 2014, he accused Europe of keeping its silence and presented Turkey as “a just,” “grandeur” force protecting the Muslim interests with reference to its Ottoman past. In Aslan's (2016) words, “Ottoman history and its ‘grandeur’ serve as the founding myth for Turkish

⁴⁷Interview with an AKP deputy.

foreign policy in its wider neighborhood as opposed to the ‘silence’ and ‘smallness’ of the EU and the West over which it enjoys normative superiority.” In addition, Erdoğan’s words, “we are faced with a new Crusader alliance,” serves not only to reduce reactions of the West “to a religious/civilizational issue,” but also “to construct Islam [and/or the Muslim world] and the West as two disparate monolithic and homogeneous units,” in line with Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis (Aslan 2016).

Finally, as the AKP’s post-Islamist transformation was realized through the adoption of a West/modernity reference discourse, particularly with the identification of the West and the Western institutions as important allies in the fight against the assertive state ideology, the distancing from the EU already carried the potential of deviating from the post-Islamist pluralist, political/civil rights-based discourse.

5.1.1 Arab Spring Effect on Turkish Foreign Policy: Back to Pan-Islamism

It is widely stressed that Turkey entered an “overly confident, pan-Islamist and expansionist” foreign policy period (Balta 2021, 3) a foreign policy more oriented towards the Middle East after the deterioration of the relations with the EU, and a reduced commitment to the EU membership in 2008/2009. As Abdullah Gül, the AKP’s second man, an important balance against Erdoğan, the deputy prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs between 2003 and 2007, had ascended to the Presidency in 2007, the pan-Islamist foreign policy was administered by Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo, the latter of whom served till 2009 as the chief foreign policy advisor to Erdoğan, and afterwards, as the minister of foreign affairs, and happened to be the key ideologue of the AKP’s foreign policy framework. As KK⁴⁸, a cabinet colleague of the period also noted in our interview, “their foreign policy attitude was, without doubt, very much in harmony.” As Balta (2021, 3), who identifies three distinct phases⁴⁹ in AKP’s foreign policy, also stressed, after the economic growth of Turkey in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, 2010/2011 Arab Spring which led the AKP to see opportunities for itself in the region, also increased the confidence of the AKP leadership, and led it to implement a more assertive/active foreign policy.

⁴⁸Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁴⁹Balta (2021, 1) called the first phase, “the phase of liberal internationalism, characterized by a commitment to the EU and multilateralism (2002-2007); then came between 2008 and 2014, ‘the phase of civilizational expansionism characterized by an overly confident, pan-Islamist and expansionist foreign policy;’ and finally she called the final and the current phase, “the phase of nationalist expansionism, anti-Westernism and the reprioritization of containment regarding the Kurdish issue (2014-)”

Undoubtedly, apart from the Arab Spring 2010/2011 and the following civil war in Syria, there were also other significant developments of the period, which increased the consensus that the Turkish foreign policy was becoming more Middle East-oriented, and away from the EU/Europe/the West. Among such developments were the Israel-Gaza war in 2008/2009; one minute” scolding of Erdoğan in 2009 and his leaving the World Economic Forum in Davos in protest, which to DD⁵⁰ was the key incident that changed the image of the AKP negatively in the international arena and caused the negativities that came afterward; Israeli attack on the “Mavi Marmara” Gaza aid flotilla in 2010, killing 10 Turkish nationals on board; Israel’s attacks on Gaza in 2014, killing more than 2 thousand Palestinians; the nuclear swap deal Turkey and Brazil signed with Iran in 2010 at a time when both Brazil and Turkey were U.N. Security Council members and the Council was discussing new sanctions against Iran for its refusal to comply with the Council’s demand to halt uranium enrichment. And yet, there is almost a consensus that the Arab Spring and the Syrian policy of Turkey took place at the core of Turkey’s switch to a more assertive foreign policy, which came to an end with the prolongation of the civil war in Syria, and Erdoğan’s shelving the “Resolution process” with increasing security concerns in the region, as well as with decreasing AKP votes, as the AKP for the first time in 12 years, in 2015, lost its majority in the parliament.

In fact, from the very beginning, the foreign policy framework of the AKP was designed by Davutoğlu, in his book, *the Strategic Depth*. The essence of this book was that in the previous decades, Turkey had failed to benefit from its (imperial) history and its special/unique/ “optimal” geographical location “in the midst of Afro-Eurasia landmass” (Davutoğlu 2008), and that, in order to be a global actor, Turkey was supposed to benefit from both of them by developing “strategic depth,” i.e., by diversifying its international ties and intensifying its (pro-active) engagement abroad. Then, Davutoğlu (2008, 79-82) explained the AKP’s foreign policy vision as “one of providing security and stability not only for itself but also for its neighboring regions.” In this regard, he identified five foreign policy principles the AKP implemented since 2002 in line with the new foreign policy vision. The first principle, he stressed, was that Turkey’s ability to influence its environment primarily would come from its ability to establish “a balance between democracy and security” at home. In other words, “[Turkey’s] most important soft-power [happened to be] its democracy”. Other principles he stressed were “zero problems policy toward Turkey’s neighbors,” “to develop relations with the neighboring regions and beyond,” “adherence to a multi-dimensional foreign policy,” according to which principle, relations with other global actors complemented each other, not conflict with

⁵⁰Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

each other, and finally “rhythmic diplomacy,” which stressed the importance of increasing diplomatic activities, particularly in regional/international platforms. The political, economic, and cultural engagement with the Middle East held special significance, since, as he stressed, because of both the PKK factor and the prejudices of both parties to each other, Turkey did not/or could not extend its influence to the Middle East before the AKP. In this regard, as Davutoğlu (2008, 80-91) noted, Turkey not only increased diplomatic activities (such as the ministerial level visit to Lebanon in 2004 first time after 25 years), but obtained key roles in regional bodies such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), increased mediatory initiatives (such as in the conflict between Shia-Sunni groups in Iraq in 2007) and engaged in bilateral and multilateral free-trade, and visa-free travel agreements, but also presented itself as an energy hub, “facilitating the transit of energy across its territory...[as a country] central to the East-West energy corridor”, and responded to Middle Eastern energy resources need by undertaking such initiatives as the South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP), which brought about dam building to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Turkey; and hence initiated joint river water management (Handy 2011, 64).

Davutoğlu (2008, 85) identified the principles on the basis of which Turkey would further establish its position in the Middle East as follows:

“First of all, security for everyone, not only for this group or that group, this country or that country but common security for the entire region. Second, priority must be given to dialogue as a means of solving crises...[And,] Turkey...[acts as the] facilitator [and] positive promoter...Third principle is economic interdependence. Order in the Middle East cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of isolated economies...The fourth principle is cultural coexistence and plurality”.

Clearly, Davutoğlu perceived the EU as a model that Turkey would apply to the Middle East. And to him, Turkey, as the only country, “leaders [of which] can contact all Middle Eastern leaders,” had to undertake the important role of intervening in crises/disputes in the region, and initiate means of dialogue to maintain order in the region (Davutoğlu 2008, 84-85). He said,

“Would it be possible to establish order in Europe if France and Britain did not have any relations? In such a case, a country like Germany or another third actor would have to intervene and set up channels for dialogue, just as Turkey has done and continues to do in the Middle East”

As Davutoğlu (2008, 86-87) stressed, in line with these principles, for instance,

since 2003 through its “Neighboring Countries” initiative, Turkey put an effort to build a “constructive dialogue” between Iraq and its neighbors in order to maintain an undivided Iraq with a multi-cultural Iraqi government. Furthermore, in 2007, Turkey employed diplomacy, soft power, and hard/military power in coherence to combat with the PKK and to take the support of all regional leaders, including the Iraqi government, in this regard. As Davutoğlu said, unlike the 1990s in which Turkey’s operations against the PKK were met with heavy international criticism, Turkey’s operation was not confronted by any state or international organization in 2007. Also in line with the third principle, as Handy (2011, 65) said, from July 2010 till the worsening of the political situation in Syria, Davutoğlu proactively engaged in developing a regional free-trade area which includes Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon with the establishment of a “High Level Cooperation Council focusing on trade, cross-border investment and visa exemptions”.

The unstable character of relations with Syria, with the switch from “high-level hostility” throughout the 1990s, because of the support given by Syria to the PKK terrorism against Turkey and Syria’s attempt to gain an advantage over Turkey’s management of Euphrates River water distribution at the expense of Syria, with the enmity dated back to Syria’s rejection of it after Turkey’s annexation of Hatay, to “high-level cooperation” in 2000s until the Arab Spring, and then, back to “high-level hostility” after the Arab Spring, undoubtedly, distinguished relations with Syria from others (Hinnebusch 2015, 14).

The emergence of the relations with Syria as the mainstay of “zero-problems” policy occurred under the AKP, in the aftermath of the assassination of Hariri in 2004, as the AKP sided by Syria despite the isolation imposed on Syria by the international community, although the relations with Syria started to improve economically after the Adana Agreement in 1997, and politically with the attendance of President Ahmet Necdet Sezer at the funeral of Hafız Esad, and with the efforts of Minister of Foreign Affairs İsmail Cem to improve relations with neighboring countries (Akcan 2016). After 2004, the relations reached the level of High Level Strategic Cooperation, which almost meant the removal of economic and political borders; the foreign trade volume reached the level of 2 billion dollars. Hence, the Syrian case turned into a “a real foreign policy success,” and emerged as a motive in Turkey’s increasing activism in the region, with the appointment of Davutoğlu as the foreign minister, with also the support given by Syria in this respect.

Then, TESEV survey, conducted in 2010, provided important insight into how Turkey’s engagement efforts with the region was perceived by the Middle Eastern societies, and how Davutoğlu-Erdoğan duo saw wider opportunities for Turkey in the

region when the Arab Spring uprising spread across the region, and started to implement a more assertive/active foreign policy, a policy which led to neo-Ottomanism accusations to the AKP foreign policy particularly in the period after Davutoğlu has become most active in directing foreign policy in 2009. In this regard, one key finding was that 80% of the respondents had a favorable opinion of Turkey. Not only the regional average in 2010 was 5% higher in 2010 than in 2009, but also in 2010 in all countries apart from Iraq, Turkey's popularity increased. Another important finding was that Turkey's increasing role/influence in the Middle East was both welcomed and a further increase was supported. For instance, Turkey's mediatory role in 2010 in the Iranian nuclear issue was welcomed by 61% of respondents. Also, 75% of respondents said Turkey had "great" impact on peace in the region; 73% "agreed" that Turkey has become more influential in regional politics; 78% "agreed" that Turkey should play a mediatory role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and 66% "agreed" that Turkey could be a model for Middle Eastern countries; and 66% "agreed" that Turkey's blend of Islam-democracy was successful. As it is stated in the report, in 2009 the rate of respondents who said Turkey would be a model for the countries in the region was 5% less than the rate in 2010. Why respondents saw/or did not see Turkey as a model for their respective countries was further explored through a separate question as well. According to the answers, Turkey's Muslim background, economy, democratic regime, and stand-up for Palestinians and for Muslims in general, came to the fore as the most popular answers. And yet, similar reasons were also cited for other respondents to account for why Turkey cannot be a model for their respective countries as well. In this regard, for instance, 12% of the respondents told Turkey was not suitable for being a model because of its secular system; 11% thought Turkey was not Muslim enough. Also for 10% of the respondents, Turkey's relations with the West ruled it out as a possible model. On the other hand, support for Turkey's EU membership decreased from 57% in 2009 to 54% in 2010. In parallel, the rate of respondents who thought EU membership would have a positive effect on Turkey's role in the Middle East also dropped from 64% in 2009 to 57% in 2010. As it is stated in the report, this finding was particularly noteworthy for suggesting that the region was aware of the slowing down of Turkey's accession process. Furthermore, TESEV report also shows Turkey's cultural engagement efforts paid off since with the removal of visas requirements with Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, in both directions and for Saudi citizens, resulted in a large increase in the rate of tourists coming from those countries from 2009 to 2010. 133% increase in the number of tourists coming from Syria was particularly striking; Turkish TV series were also responsible for Turkey's popularity since 78% of the respondents confirmed that they had watched them. Finally, one important finding was that the region also had a very positive view of the Turkish economy as

14% of respondents thought Turkey was the region's strongest economy (only Saudi Arabia had a higher rate with 22%), and 27% of respondents thought Turkey would be the strongest economy in the region in 10 years (while the rate of Saudi Arabia was 16%). Turkey also emerged as the most preferred country by respondents (32%) to invest in their respective countries. In addition, when respondents were asked whether they would support investment from Turkey, 86% of respondents affirmed that they would. As the report rightfully stressed, these rates affirmed that the economic engagement efforts of Turkey were also recognized and paid off.

As Handy (2011, 62), rightfully, argued, certain remarks of Davutoğlu after his appointment to the ministerial post also played a role in neo-Ottomanism accusations against him. Examples of these remarks are his reference to an Ottoman edict, issued in 1463 to protect religious freedoms in the Empire, in his visit to Sarajevo in 2009, and his words, "in the geopolitics of the current era [of interdependence and global governance], geography has lost some of its importance, yet traditional geographical regions are re-emerging in a cultural, political and economic sense," in Oxford University in 2010. Handy (2011, 63), in this regard, defined Davutoğlu's foreign policy vision in the region as "a re-consideration of the collective Ottoman past in a more positive light."

When the Arab Spring protests began, Turkey's policy change to side with the people rather than the administrations was so obvious that Davutoğlu was asked in an interview after the resignation of Mubarak in Egypt, "Where was Turkey, the defender of the oppressed, the defender of the people of Gaza. . . when Husnu Mubarak was oppressing his own people? Why was your voice not heard then?" Davutoğlu explained Turkey's foreign policy change at a moment of "historic opportunity" for the region as follows:

"As state to state relation, we have full respect, we do not intervene in any domestic affair of any country. But in the last case, there was a clear will of the people. And that will of people was demonstrated in a very peaceful manner. And we see this as a historic opportunity, and before this opportunity was missed in 1990s when Eastern European countries transformed into democracy. This time we thought that this opportunity should not be missed. And there was a clear will of the people in using peaceful methods. And there of course we showed solidarity with the Egyptian people, with Egypt as a country, and we tried to give the correct messages to the Egyptian administration and to President Mubarak through the most appropriate means. It was a call from PM Erdoğan and from Turkey that now it is time of transformation, now it is time of change. Because it is the will of the Egyptian people" (Talk to Jazeera Feb. 11, 2011).

In this interview, Davutoğlu talked about the likelihood of a “positive domino effect” in the region, and his expectation of a “transformation without destroying the stability, [a transformation characterized by both] change and stability, [and] based on an integrity of security and freedom.” In expectation of expansion of the Turkish influence in the region, he not only said that the coexistence of stability/security and freedom was the political philosophy of the AKP rule, but also he said, “advice sometimes is by word, sometimes a good example; and Turkish democracy, stability and economic growth itself is the best advice for everybody.” (Talk to Jazeera Feb. 11, 2011). As Handy (2011, 66) stressed, Turkey also intended to expand in the region its model of political application of Islam, which has been successful in Turkey, and in this respect, challenged Iran not only by offering a completely different model of political Islam to the region than the one offered by Iran but also “on the question of who speaks for Muslims.” As she stressed, an example of this is that Turkey has increasingly acted as if it was the spokesperson for the Palestinian cause and that both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu have expressed their dissatisfaction with Israel.

Davutoğlu’s speech in Al-Jazeera Forum (Mar. 13, 2011) also sets forth his foreign policy perspective in the Arab Spring period. He explains how colonialism and the Cold War periods as “two abnormalities” that interrupted the “the natural flow of history” in the last century in the region, “divided the societies, the countries, ... [by cutting off] the natural, [historical] links between tribes and communities.” Then, he explained, he saw the democratization movements in the region as the “naturaliz[ation] of the flow of history,” the realization of a “delayed process” that should have been lived in the 1990s, like the Eastern European region. Then, for history to flow “naturally” again, there was a “need to reconnect” these societies/sects/communities in the region; and the future lied in the revival of this “sense of common history,” and “common destiny.” To him, what lied behind PM Erdoğan’s reaction to Peres in 2009 due to Israeli attacks against Gaza also was this “sense of common history” on the part of Turkey. Then, he explained the compatibility of democratic values with Islamic values as follows:

“Transparency, accountability, rule of law, representation... We should not think that these values are alien to Muslim societies... Whenever we read Omar *Radıyallâhüanh*’s life, we always say he is the man who established Islamic law, rule of law, transparency, accountability, all are there. These are human values. These are our values, as well. So democratization in Muslim societies or making reference to these values is not an alienation. It is the human values. We have to respect all” (Al-Jazeera Forum Mar. 13, 2011).

In September 2011, Erdoğan made a 5-day visit to the three transition countries of

the Arab Spring, i.e., Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, and each time he was accorded an almost hero's welcome by large crowds. As Tol (2011), rightfully, stressed, although the region was long doubtful about Turkey as the heir of the Ottoman Empire, under which they were ruled for almost 600 years, Erdoğan's vocal support to the Palestinians and the AKP's being perceived as a model for the democratic transition of their countries by Arab publics was behind this enthusiastic welcome from thousands of cheering people. As it was reported then, the central theme of the talks in all countries happened to be secularism as Erdoğan praised secularism in these countries, rejecting the claim that it was anti-religion and explaining that secularism was an important principle of the state and a guarantor of religious freedom/pluralism. Reading between the lines, he also revealed that he was against the imposition of it as an ideology for individuals or as the ideology of the social space. In his own words, Erdoğan put the AKP's perspective on secularism as follows:

"I believe these regions will be in a negotiation or discussion at the moment for understanding secularism. I do not acknowledge that secularism is irreligiousness or anti-religion. . . The definition of secularism in my party's program is as follows: Secularism is a state's attribute, not a person's. As a Muslim, when ruling a secular state, the state is at an equal distance to all faith groups, including Muslims, Christians, Jews, and atheists. The belief of all belief groups is under the guarantee of that state" (Dünya Sept 16, 2011).

Tol (2011) also argued that this perspective set forth by Erdoğan in the visit was the presentation to both Iran and the West an alternative religion/state model, in which unlike the one presented by Iran, "Islam is not the institution of the state, but rather a social compass." Then, in this visit, which took place immediately after Turkey expelled the Israeli ambassador over Israel's refusal to apologize for the Mavi Marmara flotilla incident, and just before a vote in the UN over Palestine, the AKP set forth its new assertive policy in the region and presented its model of democracy to the Arab world.

5.1.1.1 The New Foreign Policy Framework: A *Dava* Perspective and an Identity-Building Initiative

We have seen that Turkish foreign policy shaped by the neo-Ottoman perspective after the Arab Spring involved a desire to create a system of conservative democratic regimes in the Arab world. And yet, this perspective also saw Turkey as the order-setter country, the guardian of the former Ottoman territories and the Muslim world, and the role model as a secular/Muslim/democratic country. Thus, the neo-Ottoman

perspective envisaged the creation of conservative-democratic regimes in the region, based on the Turkish model, and the restoration of Turkey's leadership in the region.

Thus, while Akcan (2016) identified the differences of the new policy from the foreign policy implemented by Davutoğlu's predecessors Abdullah Gül and Ali Babacan as deviation from an "economic-based," "win-win" foreign policy strategy, and replacement of such foreign policy principles as "preservation of the status quo" by principles of undertaking an "order-setter" and "against the regional status-quo" roles, the new religious undertones/motives, actually, pointed to a bigger change than that, with also domestic implications. As Hinnebusch (2015, 15) stressed, this neo-Ottoman ambition envisaged the revival of Turkey's leadership in the region "in a new multi-national regional order grouping of Turks, Arabs, and Kurds under an Islamic banner."

Arslan (2018) summarized the Islamic undertones in the Arab Spring period foreign policy, implemented by Davutoğlu, as a *dava* perspective based on "Middle East-Islam-Ottoman peace." Thus, to him, "the Great Ottoman Project" was the reason why Turkey failed in Syria, and the AKP failed in Turkey. To him, the main components of this "Great Ottoman Project," which was also the reason for Turkey's failure in Syria and AKP's failure in Turkey, were the sense of belonging to the Ottoman Empire and (Sunni) tradition and hostility to modernity. In other words, this project, an identity-building initiative, excluded both Western modernity and part of the histories/identities of the country/region. Also arguing that what resurrected these components was particularly the straining of the relations with the West, and the AKP's feeling compelled to take sides among the communities in the region during the Arab Spring, he explained that this project, which provided the AKP "community/cemaat" with a "geopolitical" perspective, main parameters of which were explained in the *Strategic Depth*, and implemented with almost complete consensus, until the Arab Spring went into crisis in Syria as follows:

"This project is not a single project. At issue is a past and a future, and a Middle East vision shared by the community. [It] is not simply a book. It is rather an expression of 'the AKP community's collective mentality; a geostrategic expression of the holistic view of the realm, which gives meaning to/makes sense of Islam, the West, the Ottomans, democracy, tradition, Shiism, Kurdishness, women, authority,..., etc. [It] is a... "shallow geopolitical" manifestation of the future vision and of the holistic understanding of politics of this world view (alem tasavvuru)."

He also explained how the "geography" and "history" perspective in the *Strategic Depth* affected the identification of the Kemalist period in Turkey as follows:

“Davutoğlu... applies Laing’s idea of schizophrène’s alienation from his body to Turkish politics. To him, Turkish politics has become schizophrenic by alienating from its history and geography. What he means by ‘history’ is the Ottoman history, and what he means by ‘geography’ is the Ottoman geography. For him, Kemalism is not [part of] the history of this country. Kemalism is only an elite and artificial system product. To resolve this problem, it is necessary...for the people and the politics to make peace with the Ottoman legacy.”

Thus, he argues, just as this project, this Middle East vision, led Davutoğlu to define colonial and cold war periods in the region as “abnormalities” and deviations from the natural flow of history, it also led the Kemalist period in Turkey’s history to be defined as a deviation from history since in both cases historical continuity could be enabled by developing a sense of belonging in the Ottoman civilization. This perspective, which envisaged the revival of the Ottoman identity (i.e. belonging to the Ottoman Empire) without making any criticism of it, closed the door to a “rational negotiation” as to the future of not only Turkey but also the (Middle Eastern) region from the very beginning by drawing a bold line between the segments that can be included in the “Ottoman peace” and the segments that are alienated from the “Middle East-Islam-Ottoman” peace, since “neither Kemalists, nor Alevis, nor Nusayris (in Syria), nor Shiites, nor seculars in Egypt has no real place in this peace,” and since the AKP did not offer any perspective as to on what common ground politics may be made with people with no attachment to the Ottomans or to the tradition. As he stressed, this “identity-building initiative” that embraces rulers like Yavuz, with whom the Alevi population cannot make peace, saying that it is our history and without subjecting them to any criticism, hinders from the very beginning any negotiation about the future of the country with those who do not identify with the Ottoman identity and who are not likely to be subject to this identity in the near future (Arslan 2018).

In practice, the foreign policy implication of this *dava* perspective and identity-building initiative with an emphasis on “Middle East-Islam-Ottoman peace” has been openly supporting the Sunni opposition elements in Egypt and Syria, and distancing from the zero-problems foreign policy. And the main domestic implication has been a deviation from the rights-based, pluralist notion of democracy, which were the primary indicator of the post-Islamist transformation the core cadres of the AKP had once gone through. Furthermore, the experienced AKP cadres who objected to deviation from the pluralist notion of democracy and from zero-problems foreign policy, are eliminated one-by-one by the AKP leadership.

5.2 The Syrian Policy of Turkey after the Arab Spring and the Rift It Created between Gül and Erdoğan-Davutoğlu Duo

As mentioned above, Davutoğlu has been widely blamed for “claiming rights in the region around a neo-ottomanist perspective,” for intervening in the internal affairs of its close neighbors, such as Syria, by openly supporting the regime opponents in the country, and for Turkey’s transition from “zero-problem” policy to “precious loneliness” policy, particularly after the resistance and the failure experienced in Syria (Akcan 2016).

The change in the foreign policy perspective over the region, and, particularly, over Syria, i.e. the foreign policy agenda to change the regional status quo by supporting the opposition, became visible when Erdoğan’s addresses at electoral campaign rallies prior to 2007 and 2011 elections are compared with each other. While prior to the 2007 elections, AKP leader Erdoğan focused on improving the relations with Syria, at the rallies before the 2011 elections, at first, he started to warn the Syrian regime, and then, continued with a threatening rhetoric against Assad. Thus, it was not surprising to find that after the June 12, 2011 elections, Turkey started to re-build its relations with Syria on the rhetoric it used during the electoral campaign, and positioned itself as the representative of democracy and against the Syrian regime (Akcan 2016).

As part of the new foreign policy toward Syria, in line with the neo-ottoman perspective, Erdoğan toughened his language towards Syria in the aftermath of the 2011 elections. Then, after the UN’s call on the Syrian regime to end the atrocities and to establish a dialogue with the regime opponents, Erdoğan stressed that they perceived Syria “as a domestic policy issue,” with reference to “ties of kinship, history, and culture” with Syria, and said that they would act accordingly (Euronews August 07, 2011). Then, we find that in his visit to the Arab Spring countries in September 2011, Erdoğan toughened his language against Assad even more, and said, “Those who torment their people in Syria will not be able to survive... The autocracy periods are now over. Totalitarian regimes are ending. Now is the time for the rule of the people” (Dünya Sept 16, 2011). Then, in November 2011, he said, “no regime that kills and jails its opponents can stand,” also adding, “the future cannot be built on the blood of the oppressed, otherwise history will call them blood-fed leaders. You, too, Assad, are now heading towards turning that page” (BBC News November 16, 2011). Also, in January 2012, he, again, addressed Assad, blaming him for dragging Syria into a “religious, sectarian and racist civil war;” and told that Turkey had to undertake a leading role given that a civil war in Syria would

pose a threat to Turkey as well (Euronews Feb. 9, 2012).

Hinnebusch (2015, 14-15) explained Turkey's foreign policy in Syria, and how "amity [between Ankara and Damascus] turned into enmity" after the Arab Spring protests spread to Syria, more specifically, as follows:

"Prime Minister Erdoğan called on his 'friend' in Syria to implement far-reaching political reforms rather than repressing protestors and urged Asad to share power with the Muslim Brothers. When this advice was not taken, he took umbrage; the tone from Ankara became more hectoring and the reaction from Damascus more resentful. As the level of Syrian government violence against protestors increased and refugees from the fighting flooded into southern Turkey, the Turkish government increased the pressure on Asad: even as it was urging reforms on him, the AKP sought leverage over him by hosting opposition leaders, notably the Muslim Brotherhood, eventually sponsoring a potential alternative government, the Syrian National Council (SNC). In June 2011, Turkey gave sanctuary to Syrian army defectors and helped them constitute themselves as the Free Syrian Army (FSA), an anti-Damascus armed force. The Syrian Ambassador in Ankara warned that Damascus could retaliate by resuming support for the PKK; indeed, Syria soon allowed the PKK-affiliated Syrian Kurdish party, the PYD, to take over much of the Kurdish-inhabited Syrian border zone with Turkey. In a key meeting between Asad and then-Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu in August 2011, the latter's warnings of Western intervention if Asad did not abandon his 'security solution' to the uprising was met by counter-threats that Syria could, in reaction, unleash Hizbollah and a regional war".

Assad's success in mobilizing his sectarian constituency by portraying the Syrian opposition as Islamic terrorists and Erdoğan as the "Turkish-Ottoman-Wahhabi Sectarian enemy" played a role in his survival (Hinnebusch 2015, 15-16). Besides "the military involvement of Russia, Iran and, Lebanese Hezbollah militia, and the reluctance of Western powers to intervene in full force curtailed the ability of Turkey to stand up to Russia and Iran on its own" (Kösebalaban 2013, 337-341). Furthermore, as Kösebalaban (2013, 341) noted, Turkey's options were limited given "its energy dependency on the very countries with which it had regional rivalries, namely Russia and Iran," and also given "its dependence on its NATO allies for its military technology."

Thus, due to the miscalculations Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo made with regard to the democratization prospects in Syria and Egypt, Turkey could not maintain its good relations in the region. In this regard, the AKP rule, left its supra-sectarian stance it had maintained as part of its zero-problem policy since coming to power, strongly condemned the coup in Egypt in 2013 against the Muslim Brotherhood rule and

led to the break-up of the relations with Egypt, and called Asad, the leader of the Baath regime in Syria, “a dictator,” whom Erdoğan had been calling “my brother” before the Arab spring since he could not be convinced to a peaceful resolution by Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo. Then, Turkey, which was considered when the Arab Spring protests began a model country by the countries of the region as well as by Europe with its secular-democratic-Muslim NATO member qualities, began to be accused by both Europe and the USA of “supporting Sunni jihadist elements” since Ankara, who was unable to convince Assad to make political reforms and share his power with the Muslim Brotherhood, later, got involved in the armed conflict to overthrow the Assad regime (DW Aug. 14, 2021). As we will see later, the implication of its involvement of Ankara in the Syrian conflict was the emergence of a security problem in the south of Turkey with the rise of the ISIS and strengthening of the Kurdish PYD, the latter of which also was regarded as an ally by the U.S. in its combat against the ISIS. Yaşar Yakış, the first foreign affairs minister of the AKP rule as well as one of the founders of the party also explained why Turkey’s particularly Syrian policy was wrong as follows:

“Turkey did wrong in Syria since it put all the eggs in the same basket based on the assumption that Bashar Asad would fall. Assad did not go, he still stands. Turkey made a mistake by supporting fundamentalists. It also made a mistake by sending its troops to Syria” (DW Aug. 14, 2021).

GG⁵¹, critical of this foreign policy, also told in our interview that when Erdoğan-Duo was conducting this policy, the ministry of foreign affairs was sidelined, leading to the emergence of another feature of National Outlook Parties emerged in the AKP, which is, “having multiple faces.” In his own words,

“Now Turkey is like an intelligence state, in which ministry of foreign affairs is sidelined. . . A state with a rule of law has only one face. . . Now we have several faces. . . That’s what intelligence state means. . . ”

Furthermore, the Middle East vision, i.e., new foreign policy, implemented by Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo, became another source of conflict between Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo and President Abdullah Gül since, as an interview with Ahmet Sever (Hürriyet Jun. 16, 2015) showed, Gül did not approve the foreign policy implemented by the former. As Sever argued, Gül thought that particularly, Egyptian and Syrian policies of the government were wrong, that Erdoğan/Davutoğlu behaved like the PM/foreign affairs minister of those countries, and that it was

⁵¹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

against the interests of Turkey. Former minister DD⁵² also confirmed in our interview that the policy implemented in Syria after the Arab Spring protests began was severely criticized by the then President Abdullah Gül, although it did not become publicly-known then. As he stressed, Abdullah Gül was not only an important balance against Erdoğan, but also favored a more balanced approach in foreign policy. And to him, it was this severe criticism of Abdullah Gül against Davutoğlu's foreign policy that caused a rift between Minister Davutoğlu and President Gül. Taştekin, a columnist, also stressed in an interview that after the Syria briefing he gave to President Abdullah Gül, Gül told to him that he had warned both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu many times, but his words were not listened to (Cumhuriyet Apr. 9, 2016). Gül made his views on the issue clear in a TV interview (NTV Sep. 18, 2015). In this program, he also revealed that he did not find Turkey's foreign policy in the region after the Arab Spring "realistic" and "inspiring for the Arab countries;" that what led Turkey to fail in its foreign policy was its distancing from its "soft-power" strategy, the intervention into internal affairs in other countries and the claim of the government that the regime in Syria would fail in a short while; that when it became clear that international actors in the West (i.e. the U.S. and the EU) only engaged in hostile rhetorical practices against Syria without engaging in any military confrontation, it was very obvious that the war in Syria would go on for a long time in the absence of any balancing-power against Russia and Iran, unless a political solution was pushed by neighboring countries, which also included Turkey. He also stated in an interview he gave to Foreign Affairs (Jan./Feb. 2013) magazine that "both Russia and Iran should be invited to engage with the transition in Syria" as well. Finally, reading between the lines of the interview he gave to NTV (Sep. 18, 2015), to Gül, the policy of the government was responsible for the prolonged war in Syria, and the resulting void, which led to the emergence of the Kurds as a separate entity in Syria, and exported instability to Turkey as well. Then, as a result of the emergence of the rift between Gül and Davutoğlu, as Sever (Hürriyet Jun. 16, 2015) stated in an interview, Davutoğlu avoided making any reference to Gül while widely praising Erdoğan, in his address to the audience after being unanimously elected as the new chairman in the AKP congress, although it was Gül who assigned Davutoğlu as his advisor after becoming the PM, introduced him into politics in the first place and played an active role in his appointment as foreign minister.

⁵²Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

5.3 Domestic Implications of the “Neo-Ottomanist” Perspective of Erdoğan-Davutoğlu Duo: The Competition of Two Conceptions of Democracy in the AKP Government

As mentioned above, post-Islamist transformation meant a change of discourse, convictions, and ideals on the part of former Islamist actors; and in the case of the AKP, an important element of this transformation was the adoption of a pluralist notion of democracy, rejecting any exclusionary attitude/practice, and adoption of a West/modernity-referential discourse, after criticizing the RP’s majoritarian understanding of democracy and its denigration of the West and its values. And yet, the “neo-Ottomanist” perspective adopted by Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo, above all, meant coming to the fore of the majoritarian democracy perspective, as well as the denigration of Western modernity. Then, with the implementation of this policy we have seen that two notions of democracy, the pluralist and the majoritarian, competed against each other in the party. In this respect, while the “civilization” perspective, i.e., the neo-Ottomanist perspective introduced by Davutoğlu to the party involved a majoritarian understanding of democracy by its nature, there were many ministers in the government who tried to preserve the pluralist line and the human-rights focus that rejects exclusionary discourses and practices.

As mentioned above, in Arslan’s (2018) words, one important implication of the neo-Ottomanist perspective was that “the nation” referred only to the sociological groups who defined themselves with the Ottoman Empire and “Islamic tradition.” This majoritarian democracy perspective also showed itself in the book entitled “15 years of the AKP/AKP’nin 15 Yılı,” published by SETA, a pro-AKP/Erdoğan think tank, in an article by Aslan (2017), himself being one of the coordinators of SETA. Aslan (2017, 79-84,95-97), called the neo-Ottomanist perspective of Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo, “civilization politics,” and argued that it was an an identity-building initiative around a Sunni Muslim and Ottoman identity, and a means for the AKP’s “hegemonic” walk. In his account, consensual democracy would only be possible in a “post-political democratic order;” and yet, since “the political” is neither “eliminable” nor “irreducible,” a post-political democratic order is very unrealistic in life. Then, to him, both the individual and the society are in need of identity, and the “individual” only gain identity and “subject” status in society by integrating itself into “the collective.” And to him, the fight of “collective subjects” and their passions and hence, the “friend-foe dichotomy,” activated by these passions, are what define politics. Finally, to him, since “existential and ideological differences” characterize the political environment, democratic politics rely not on “consensual democracy,”

characterized by a search for common ground between the parties, but on majoritarian democracy, in which the majoritarian party makes decisions on behalf of the other parties, and “dictates its will” to them.

Then, from 2009 till 2015, the perspective the AKP under Davutoğlu-Erdoğan duo adopted, was a “a civilization politics⁵³” perspective, which was a “a hegemonic move/attempt⁵⁴,” with the aim of expanding the AKP’s sphere of influence/governance in the society, in Aslan’s (2017, 94-95) account. In this respect, to him, “Turkishness/Türkiyelilik” was employed as an overarching identity in this period, as an alternative to the Kemalist secular nationalist identity, to express a desire for a “unity” that encompasses all differences, as part of a civilization discourse,” which involved frequent references to “the Islam, Ottoman and the Seljuks past⁵⁵”. In this respect, to him, even the “democratic opening process,” initiated by the AKP government in 2009 “to make the social segments, that the Kemalist state ignored for a long time, part of the political community and to expand the boundaries of the society,” was also part of the AKP’s “civilization politics,” and a means for the AKP’s “hegemonic” walk with the goal of “building a conservative-democratic society” (Aslan 2017, 95).

On the other hand, to many interviewees, close witnesses of this process and who parted ways with the AKP, “the democratic opening” process was a move undertaken by the AKP in the name of democratic consolidation, not in the name of identity-building. In fact, we see that Erdoğan also adhered to the former perspective in his messages on the democratic initiative process until 2011 when the process was erupted. To BB⁵⁶, it was “the most important initiative undertaken by the AKP in the name of democratic consolidation.” In his words, “it meant crossing many psychological thresholds as well as many borders drawn by the official ideology.” Atalay, then the minister charged with the task of coordinating the process, said in a press conference, on July 30, 2009, that this project was compatible with the “human-focused” policies the AKP undertook till that day. In the press conference, he mainly conveyed the message that they would solve all these problems “with more

⁵³Similarly, the head coordinator of SETA, Burhanettin Duran (Duran 2014), acknowledging the role of Davutoğlu in bringing a “civilization perspective” to the AKP, also argued as to the main features of this perspective that it took civilization as a historical institution, and that it had an “inclusive and integrative” character.

⁵⁴To Aslan, from 2009 till 2015, “a civilization politics” perspective, and afterward “a local and national politics” perspective guided this process.

⁵⁵One such instance was Erdoğan’s speech at the opening ceremony of the new academic year in 2009 of Ahi Evran University, a university named after a Bektashi preacher, known also to be the founder of a trade union, called Ahi Teşkilatı, in the 13th century. In his speech, Erdoğan made multiple references to institutions such as Ahilik Teşkilatı and vaqf, as sources of the AKP’s “civilization perspective,” which he stressed was key to generating a “strong Turkey” (Haber7 Oct. 17, 2009, 96).

⁵⁶Interview with a former AKP deputy.

democracy;” and that a human rights perspective and a justice perspective would guide them in this process. He said,

“We believe that the issue called ‘the Kurdish question’ would also be resolved by expanding/reinforcing democratic rights, and by ensuring that every citizen, wherever they live, feels as an equal and free member of the state” (HaberTürk Jul. 30, 2009).

DD⁵⁷, an interviewee, who said that this process started with a human rights perspective said that Abdullah Gül, the then Foreign Minister, played a major role in taking the first steps of this process in 2005, and that the intellectuals in the country at that time also gave them great support. According to his account, before Erdoğan’s speech in Diyarbakır on August 12, 2005, a meeting was held at the Prime Ministry building with the participation of intellectuals, who together decided on the content of Erdoğan’s speech in Diyarbakır. Looking at Erdoğan’s Diyarbakır speech that day, we see that he said “The Kurdish problem is my problem” and promised “democratic deepening.” In this speech, he made an emphasis on “the citizenship bond of the Republic of Turkey,” which binds all “sub-identities” together. Then, he identified ethnic nationalism, regional nationalism, and religious nationalism as “3 red lines” that cannot be crossed; and first time used the slogan, “one state, one nation, one homeland, one flag” (Hurriyet Aug. 12, 2005). The process, which had been interrupted at the time due to Erdoğan’s suspicions about it, resumed in 2009 also with democratic concerns following 5-6 ministers’ insistence on starting the process, in DD⁵⁸’s account. He said that at that meeting he emphasized that as the AKP, they had the will and ability to solve Turkey’s problems one by one, that in this context, solving the Kurdish problem through democratic means was necessary for the country to become stronger, that security policies were not enough to solve this problem, that many injustices had been done to these people by the state in the region where they lived, and that solving their problems from a human rights perspective would create a “normalized” society and strengthen their ties with the state. Following this meeting, on July 23, Erdoğan announced at the airport on the eve of a foreign visit that they had launched the “Kurdish opening process” and that Minister of Interior Atalay would be responsible for the coordination of this process, marking the beginning of the process as a unilateral initiative of the government. On May 9, 2009, then-President Abdullah Gül also supported the initiation of this process, describing the Kurdish issue as “Turkey’s primary problem awaiting a solution.” (Milliyet May. 9, 2009).

⁵⁷Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁵⁸Interview with a former AKP deputy.

Afterwards, Atalay's attempts to ensure the participation of different segments of society in this process draw attention. In this regard, reportedly, the first thing Atalay did was to knock on the doors of non-governmental organizations and political parties to seek an answer to the question, "how should the Kurdish problem be resolved?" (Al-Jazeera Turk Aug. 29, 2014). Moreover, the steps taken in this process were harshly criticized by opposition parties, the nationalist MHP and the center-left CHP, who argued that the AKP was collaborating with the terrorist PKK. In this context, one of the most controversial meetings in this period was the workshop held on August 3, 2009, at the Police Academy in Ankara under the chairmanship of then Police Academy Chairman Zühtü Arslan, where 12 democrat columnists, including Hasan Cemal, Cengiz Çandar, Taha Akyol, Fehmi Kuru, İhsan Dağı and others came together to propose steps for the process. This workshop, which was entitled "the Resolution of the Kurdish Question: Towards the Turkish Model," and which was held in two sessions with the headings, "what should be done within the scope of the process and how should the problem be resolved," later became known with the harsh criticisms of opposition parties, the CHP and the MHP. Bahçeli, today the chair of coalition partner MHP, called the journalists who, then, attended the workshop, "12 bad men," reminiscent of "12 giant men" (Hürriyet Aug. 3, 2009).

Just two days later, on August 5, 2009, the AKP delegation met with a delegation from the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), but the leaders of the opposition parties CHP and MHP harshly criticized the meeting, saying that "the PKK was the interlocutor of this meeting" and that the AKP was being pragmatic (BBC News Aug 5, 2009). Similarly, on November 13, 2009, when the parliament convened to discuss the government's democratic opening initiative, the CHP left the session during Prime Minister Erdoğan's speech, and MHP leader Bahçeli accused the government of negotiating with terrorism instead of fighting it, saying that the democratic initiative process was "the government's quest for division" (Cumhuriyet Nov. 3, 2009). Then, on March 27, 2010, in a speech to the public in a province where Kurds live in large numbers, he described the process as a "trap" and asked the people not to fall into it (Milliyet Mar. 27, 2010).

Although there have been developments that arose from the abuse of the process the government continued the process. In this regard, one critical moment, criticized by the opposition parties, was the entry into Turkey from Habur border gate in October 2009 and the surrender to security forces of 34 PKK members, upon the call of Öcalan, despite all the advance warning Atalay gave to the DTP deputies in meetings with them (Al-Jazeera Turk Aug. 29, 2014). Reportedly,

“While the entry of 34 people from the Kandil and Mahmur camps to Turkey was being planned, Atalay was in intense contact with the representatives of the Kurdish political movement, who were members of the Democratic Society Party (DTP) at that time, at every step of the process. He hosted a meeting about Habur, which was kept secret in those days and was considered the most important step. He discussed what could happen in Habur for hours with DTP members Ahmet Türk and Sırrı Sakık at AOÇ in Ankara, and asked them to ‘prevent the making of a show.’ He kept in touch with Ahmet Türk at all stages from statement-taking from the PKK members to their release. Afterwards, what happened in Habur disrupted the process that started in 2009, but Atalay continued to work as the person responsible for the resolution and coordination of the problem” (Al-Jazeera Turk Aug. 29, 2014).

The continuation of the human rights-oriented approach to the process showed itself with the introduction, only a few months later, of a “human rights package,” which consisted of 4 different short-term and mid-term steps/mechanisms for the “normalization” of daily life. And yet, this package was also followed by a motion of censure, tabled by the CHP against the then Interior Minister Atalay “for holding secret meetings that address a terrorist organization and contain illegal commitments” (Milliyet Feb. 18, 2010). Short-term steps included paving the way for the use of different dialects and languages, such as Kurdish, during prison visits, and for private channels to broadcast in different languages 24 hours a day, for High Education Board (YÖK) to establish institutes and research centers in different languages, and for road controls and plateau bans to be reduced. Mid-term goals included the establishment of a National Prevention Mechanism to place Turkey under international control for the prevention of torture, the establishment of a Human Rights Institute to examine complaints of individuals and take preventive measures, the establishment of an independent Law Enforcement Oversight Authority, and an Anti-Discrimination and Equality Board to monitor the implementation of the constitutional article prohibiting discrimination by state institutions (Article 10). However, these steps did not fully satisfy civil society organizations in Diyarbakır, a predominantly Kurdish province, who argued that the issue is still addressed from a security perspective.

The democratic opening process also witnessed such critical developments as the use of Kurdish “Norşin,” the Kurdish name of Bitlis Güroymak, by President Abdullah Gül in his visit to Bitlis, a Kurdish-populated province in the southeast of Turkey (CNN Turk Aug 11, 2009); and Erdoğan’s repetition of the goal of “National Unity project” despite all the criticisms after Habur; the government’s holding workshops and meetings with various social segments, such as Alevites (Hurriyet Mar. 31,

2011) and Romans (Hurriyet Mar. 14, 2010), and preparation of reports analyzing how to resolve their problems; Erdoğan's apology on behalf of the state for the "Dersim" incidents that had taken place during the single-party period (Milliyet Nov. 23, 2011); his coming together with the artists of the country to ask them to assume responsibility in this process, saying, "I believe that Neşet Ertaş and Şivan Perver understands each other well, even though they do not know each other, and may be they have never met," (Milliyet Feb. 21, 2010). Moreover, the shutdown of the pro-Kurdish DTP by the Constitutional Court and the banning of 37 MPs, including co-chairs Ahmet Türk and Aysel Tuğluk, from politics for five years on the grounds that their activities were against "the independence of the state, its indivisible integrity within its territory and nation" (Amnesty International Dec. 14, 2009), the government remained determined to continue the process.

This process, which stumbled with such crises as Habur in 2009, and Oslo crisis in September 2011 caused by the release on the internet of an audio recording, allegedly belonging to a meeting between MIT officials and PKK members, and in which Hakan Fidan, who was, then, the deputy undersecretary in the Prime Ministry, stated that he had met with Öcalan and PKK members at the instruction of PM Erdoğan and as his "special representative" (NTV Sep. 14, 2011), came to a halt in the aftermath of the PKK attacks, first of which occurred in Silvan in July 2011, killing 13 Turkish soldiers, and the second one being in Hakkari Çukurca in October 2011, killing 24 Turkish soldiers. And the following process was explained in an online news portal as follows:

"... Öcalan's living conditions would be further aggravated and the doors closed on him would not be opened for 1.5 years. The hunger strikes, which started on September 12, 2012, with the demand that [the state] 'meets' with Öcalan, would spread to all prisons where Kurdish political prisoners were held. On November 17, 2012, the government would send Mehmet Öcalan to İmralı, and the hunger strikes would end with Öcalan's call" (Can 2019).

5.4 Increasing Interventionist Rhetoric of Erdoğan in his "Mastership" Period

The democratic opening process held an important place in the electoral campaign prior to the 2011 elections. In this regard, to convey unity/solidarity messages, the party employed a folk song, which used the "road" metaphor, "refer[ring] to the

Kurdish opening process and to brotherhood [relations]” (SETA 2015, 22-37). And yet, as the 2011 elections marked the highest vote rate reached by the AKP, with almost 50 percent of the votes, and given that two important background conditions, the deterioration of the relations with the EU and the onset of the Arab Spring, which was thought by particularly Davutoğlu to create significant opportunities for Turkey in the region at the time, as well as the ascendance of Abdullah Gül, the most important balance against Erdoğan in the party, to Presidency, and the resulting increasing harmony/collaboration between Davutoğlu and Erdoğan, the influence of the “civilization” perspective increased over Erdoğan after the elections.

Undoubtedly, Erdoğan’s balcony speeches, which became traditional after Erdoğan delivered speeches after the 2007 elections, told a lot about the then concerns and orientation of the party. AKP leader Erdoğan, in the balcony speech after the 2011 elections, introduced the party as “the hope of the oppressed and the victimized in the world;” and also addressed the societies that can be included in the “Middle East-Islam-Ottoman peace,” saying that, “believe me, today, Sarajevo has won as much as Istanbul. Beirut has won as much as İzmir. Damascus has won as much as Ankara. Ramallah, West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza won as much as Diyarbakır.” (Hürriyet Jun. 13, 2011).

Erdoğan called this period his “mastership period,” an important indicator of his growing self-confidence. Furthermore, significant figures who parted ways with the AKP in the post-2011 period argued in our interviews that in this period the AKP step by step started to away from its founding principles, such as “common mind.” For instance, HH⁵⁹ called this period, “a period without consultation,” arguing that specializations lost their importance.

In this period, important background conditions that emerged and contributed to the democratic backsliding, accelerating Erdoğan’s slide into the majoritarian notion of democracy and increasing adoption of friends-foe dichotomy in his statements, were the war with the FETÖ, which started in 2012 with the FETÖ conspiracy against the MIT, the Gezi park events which increased the rifts in the party, primary one being between Gül and Erdoğan, and the prolonged civil war in Syria, which disrupted the Resolution process. All these developments, accompanied by increasing interventionist⁶⁰ rhetoric of Erdoğan led to the rise of disagreements be-

⁵⁹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁶⁰DD a former AKP deputy/minister, rejected, in our interview, the claim that Erdoğan had intervened in the peoples’ lifestyles, also acknowledging that Erdoğan increased the numbers of imam hatip schools, to a large extent. To him, during the AKP governments religious orders/sects had the opportunity to act more freely as civil society organizations, in line with an Anglo-Saxon type of secularism which provided some public space for the activities/social engagement of religious groups. In his words, “in the past the gendarme and the police were disturbing them a lot; but now they do not.”

tween Erdoğan and experienced cadres of the AKP, the primary one being Abdullah Gül. Furthermore, in this period, for the first time, the introduction of the presidential system was brought to the agenda by the AKP, leading to the shelving of the new constitution initiative, promised in the 2011 election manifesto.

While democratization reforms, the primary ones being the democratic opening process, which later continued as the Kurdish opening process, and the new constitution initiative, were undertaken on one hand, it was also possible to find more interventionist expressions in Erdoğan's speeches after the 2011 elections in line with the increasing influence of the majoritarian notion of democracy. Since the rejection of radical transformation exceeding the natural pace of life that took place in the AKP program was interpreted as the critique of the RP/FP's tradition of conservatism, these remarks were definitely a deviation from the AKP's notion of conservative democracy, that defined in this thesis as a post-Islamist line. As mentioned before, Akdoğan (2004, 13-17) explained in his book on party's ideology that the party's notion of conservative democratic ideology was based on the acknowledgment of "societal change [as] the primary and permanent change" and of the importance of practicing politics on the basis of "compromise, integration, and tolerance instead of conflict, division, and polarization."

For instance, we find that Erdoğan proposed "raising pious generations" as one of the goals of the party, reminiscent of the Islamist statements of the National Outlook parties; and in response to the criticisms of the leader of the center-left CHP, Kılıçdaroğlu, who accused Erdoğan of making a distinction among the citizens as the pious and the irreligious, and who called Erdoğan "religion merchant," Erdoğan asked, "as a political party who defines itself as a conservative democrat, do you expect us to raise atheist generations? We will raise conservative and democrat generations who preserve the values, principles, and traditions (principles derived from the past, in correct wording) of its nation and its homeland" (Bianet Feb. 1, 2012).

The issue of unmarried male and female students' sharing the same house emerged as another area of intervention in late 2013. It was alleged that in the closed section of the AKP camp on November 4, 2013, in Kızılcahamam, Erdoğan, after complaining about the problems caused by insufficient numbers of dormitories, said that in Denizli province they witnessed unmarried female and male students staying together; that it went against their conservative democratic identity, and that the governor was instructed to control this situation (T24 Nov. 5, 2013). And then, this statement of Erdoğan caused a dispute between Arınç and Erdoğan in front of the public. While Arınç called the news over Erdoğan's this statement, "rubbish,"

Erdoğan, in his party's group meeting, contradicted Arınç, saying, "I don't have the sense of denying what I spoke of," also adding that they wouldn't let boys and girls stay together; and that the governorships were intervening in such houses (T24 Nov. 5, 2013). As Kadri Gürsel (2013) argued in his column in *Al-Monitor*, in a joint conference in Helsinki on November 6, with his Finnish counterpart, upon a question on this issue, Erdoğan, first said, "the private lives of our people are under our guarantees," and then, made a distinction between lifestyles of citizens along "legitimate" and "illegitimate" categories, arguing that they would take measures as defined by law regarding these categories. As a columnist (Gürsel 2013) stated, Erdoğan's response implied that the private lives of people were "under the guarantees of the prime minister, not law," that legal protection was to be provided only those he deemed "legitimate," that male and female students' sharing the house was "illegitimate" to him, that he was in preparation of preventing "this so-called illegitimacy through legal means;" and finally, revealed his "mindset that place[d] his will above the law." Then, the media outlets reported the statement of the governor of Adana, Huseyin Avni Cos, that Erdoğan's statement about the male and female students' sharing the same house was "an instruction for them;" and that "the necessary action would be taken" (Hurriyet Nov. 11, 2013). Then, the first news of fines to unmarried female and male students, sharing a house, came from Manisa province (Radikal Nov. 10, 2013).

The "democratization package" announced by the AKP government on September 30, 2013, in which Erdoğan praised the concept of "respect for lifestyle," was in stark contrast to Erdoğan's anti-democratic statements on male and female students sharing the same house. Thus, on one hand, Erdoğan had already started to employ interventionist remarks, on the other hand, as DD⁶¹ noted in our interview, the removal of the headscarf ban in public institutions, which took place at the top of the democratization package in 2013, was realized within the framework of the structural-functional change, used in sociology, as opposed to a radical/revolutionary change. He elaborated on the issue as follows:

"It was our policy to be late for the headscarf issue. It is a sociological thing, not an ideological thing. First of all, you believe that clothing, language, etc., are the elements of freedom. But all of them take a certain process in social life. As I said, one type of change is a revolutionary one, that is, you make a sudden decision and implement it. The other type is the structural-functional change, in which you take into account both the structure and the functions. Thus, the removal of this ban was made without conflict, in a way accepted by society. In 2013, we put the

⁶¹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

removal of headscarf ban at the top of the package, and we said, ‘from now on in public institutions headscarf is free’ because there was no reaction, no objections, to the headscarf in the society anymore. Even the CHP did not object because it was accepted as the reality of the society. In other words, we followed a more sociologically appropriate strategy there. Thus, many things like that were spread over time.”

Thus, Erdoğan’s interventionist remarks happened to be an important departure from the AKP’s decisiveness in keeping its distance from identity politics, which the AKP believed to have radicalized the politics as exemplified by the National Outlook parties. Hence, we can safely argue that two different notions of change, two different notions of conservativeness, and two different notions of democracy, the pluralist/consensual versus majoritarian competed against each other in the party, as became clear in the interventionist remarks of Erdoğan and “structural-functional change” notion, explained by DD.

Then, the PM’s anti-democratic attitude also led secularists to question the final democratization package and to claim that it was intended to provide safeguards only for those lifestyles that fall into the “legitimate” category of Erdoğan, i.e. for the AKP constituency. Gürsel’s following words is a good example in this context:

“When Erdoğan announced the good news that ‘disrespect for lifestyle’ would be incorporated into the Turkish penal code as a criminal offense punishable by one to three years in prison, he referred to ‘religious beliefs.’ He added that interfering with the practice of religious beliefs will also be punished. When saying that the scope and punishment of ‘hate crimes’ will be expanded, he declared, ‘Preventing a person from practicing beliefs will be considered a hate crime and duly punished.’ Actually, the main and concrete benefit of the democratization package was the annulment of the headscarf ban in public. This is no doubt a positive step that appeased Erdoğan’s constituency. In short, this is what the situation is: The prime minister divides the lifestyles of his citizens into ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ categories. For those he considers legitimate, he provides legal protections, while preparing the ground for police intervention with those he sees as illegitimate” (Gürsel 2013).

5.5 Gezi Park Protests and the Growing Rift in the AKP

In the third term of the AKP rule, the event which caused the biggest disagreement in the party in the face of Erdoğan’s harsh reaction was the Gezi Park protests, which began on May 28, 2013, over the urban development plan for Istanbul’s Gezi

Park and, later, not only escalated to include other cities but also turned into anti-government protests against the imposition of conservative-Islamic values that would infringe on personal freedoms.

In the Gezi Park events, police intervention drew harsh public reaction, and led the protests to grow from nothing to massive protests in just a few days. From the very beginning, Erdoğan took a tough stance against the protesters, resorted to conspiracy theories, blaming the Gezi Park protesters for “becoming the soldiers of the interest rate lobby” (NTV Jun. 22, 2013), and defining the protests as a “coup” attempt and “foreign-induced operation against Turkish economy.” On January 3, 2013, arguing main opposition CHP was also involved in the protests, he said, “those who could not defeat the AKP at the ballot box, are trying to topple it through protests.” Also in response to the question of the Reuters reporter that there were allegations of large-scale participation in these protests in the country he said, “right now, there is at least 50% of this country that we hardly keep in their homes” (BBC News Jun. 3, 2013). Furthermore, in line with his majoritarian understanding of democracy, he pointed to the local elections to be held seven months later, and said, “... wait for seven months... We’ll see you in seven months at the ballot box,” also calling the protestors, “looters” (DW Jun. 9, 2013). On the other hand, unlike Erdoğan who burned the bridges with the secular segments of society in the course of these protests, on January 3, 2013, in his first statement regarding the protests, President Gül said, “messages given in goodwill, have been received;” and in reference to the importance of the freedom of assembly in democracies, he said, “democracy cannot be defined solely with reference to elections.” Hence, Gezi Park protests have happened to be an issue, over which the clearest difference of opinion between Gül and Erdoğan, before the public, emerged, causing the deepening of the distrust between them (Girasun 2021).

In the words of an analyst, Gül’s attitude against the Gezi Park protestors exemplified his overall attempt to contribute to the emergence of a democratic society, as opposed to a polarized one (Girasun 2021). Ahmet Sever, the chief advisor to Gül for 12 years, also stressed in an interview that the divergence between Erdoğan and Gül which surfaced during the Gezi Park protests had further implications as they represented different directions the country would take (Bozan 2018). Sever (2015) also explained how Gül’s reaction to Gezi Park protests differed from that of Erdoğan in his book entitled, “12 years with Abdullah Gül.” As he wrote, unlike Erdoğan, who viewed the protests as a coup attempt, Gül thought the protests were motivated by a sensitivity to the environment, and got very concerned when the tents of the protestors were burned by the police. And in an interview he gave, Sever told, when protestors began their march to Taksim, the governor banned their

entry into the square by getting barriers set up. And as Sever said, Gül, who got very concerned about the escalation of the events, called the governor to ask for the removal of the barriers; and only after Gül convinced the Prime Minister for the removal of the barricades did their removal become possible. Then, Sever also confirmed that Gül had persuasion power over Erdoğan particularly when both were serving in the government, and his power decreased gradually as the divergence between them increased (T24 Jun. 14, 2015).

It is possible to argue that the approach of Ali Aslan (2017), one of the coordinators of SETA, to the Gezi Park protests also reveals Erdoğan's perspective over the issue. Aslan (2017, 97), who called the Gezi Park protests as "Gezi Park Acts of Violence", defined these protests as "a counter-hegemonic move" of the secular social segment/circle in society to protect its own space against the AKP's [hegemonic] move "to expand and deepen its power" and "to unite the society on the basis of civilizational discourse." More specifically, he defined these protests as "a class resentment against the conservative religious social circle's becoming a political subject on which a hegemonic society was built." Then, in his account, the secular segment of society attempted to draw a line against the AKP's hegemonic move by fueling the secular-religious polarization in the society. This perspective was also expressed by an academic, Ögün (Al-Jazeera Turk May 29, 2014), who explained the Gezi Park protests as "a cultural fight," "an expression of discontent by the petty bourgeois," i.e. the established middle classes, against the articulation of a new middle class, culturally alien to the established ones, but wanting to be articulated. More specifically, in his account, the established middle classes were reacting in order to "keep certain life patterns as a privilege."

On the other hand, our interviews, particularly with deputies and ministers who parted ways with the AKP, confirm that different opinions regarding how to respond to the protests were not managed well in the party, and that these protests created a rift in the party. In other words, these interviews confirm that these protests witnessed the disagreement of other AKP deputies/ministers who favored a more tolerated approach to the protestors rather than the brutal suppression of them, although these disagreements never became publicly visible/known then. Then, majority⁶² of former deputies/ministers of the AKP whom I interviewed with,

⁶²Only one of the interviewees who parted ways with the AKP said that "Gezi Park protests represented the fears and concerns of secular segments of society stemming from the loss of power." However, he also agreed with the rest of the interviewees that "a good management of the events would only occur by taking security measures and letting these people express themselves as they wish." He added the following:

The PM gave an exaggerated reaction to the Gezi park events since the society resolved the problem on its own by giving a big support to the AKP in 'the respect for the national will' meeting, held on June 13, 2013, in response to the Gezi park events" (BB, interview).

stressed that at first the young population protesting in the Gezi park was solely motivated by environmental considerations; that it was not until much later that terrorist groups got involved in the protests; and that they favored a more tolerated approach to protestors in this respect. For instance, an interviewee, DD⁶³, stated that they, as a group of leading people of the AKP, went to Istanbul in those days to sideline the police, although it was not known publicly known at the time as well. As he stressed,

“At the beginning of the protests, even the Beyoglu municipality alone, or Istanbul Metropolitan municipality, or Istanbul governorate would solve the problem with a humanitarian and good strategy. In this regard, burning the tents of the protestors was a huge mistake, and only then did provocative actors join the protests.”

Likewise, Yeneroğlu (2019) said in an interview that the involvement of terrorist groups could have been prevented if the government had established a dialogue with the protesters, adding that at the time Abdullah Gül made efforts to establish a dialogue with the protesters and tried to convince Prime Minister Erdoğan to do so.

As JJ noted in the interview, the rift that emerged in the party in the course of Gezi Park protests was bigger than the one that emerged during the March 1 bill. As he said, “although almost 100 AKP deputies voted against the March 1 bill, which was a government bill, the AKP did not make a big deal out of it, managed that process well, and people could unite again afterward.” He added, “if the AKP had not tolerated those deputies who voted against the bill, a major division within the party could have occurred that day.”

To Sadullah Ergin (Jul. 18, 2020), then the Minister of Justice, too, divergences in the party particularly surfaced in the course of Gezi Park events of 2013. In his account, when the Gezi Park protests started, he (and some other people) expressed in the party’s administrative bodies, such as the Central Decision and Executive Committee (MKYK), the need to communicate with the protestors by giving examples from how they treated the protestors during the 2007 republican meetings. He said in an interview,

“In 2007, we provided those protestors with health services, security services. We distributed water. We allocated public transportation vehicles for the elderly to go to Amlakbiri. Some of the protestors carried banners calling “army on duty,” but we kept serving them. We did not recourse to any suppression. But those who engaged in those protests lost in

⁶³Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

the election, while the AKP increased its vote rate. That was the right thing to do. Then, if we had been able to establish a dialogue with the protestors that convened in Taksim to listen to their demands, and respond to their rightful demands this might have turned out better. It is also true that some marginal groups then leaked into the protests. But if we had been able to do the right things as the public authority, the state's reflexes in the face of the vandalism of those groups would have been justified. As the public authority, first you should take the steps that would lead to the withdrawal of reasonable people" (Ergin Jul. 18, 2020).

Apart from President Abdullah Gül, another minister who publicly disputed PM Erdoğan about how to react to Gezi Park protesters was Bülent Arınç, who, then, acted as the official substitute of PM Erdoğan, who was then in a foreign visit. In this regard, in an effort to calm the protests, Arınç adopted a conciliatory approach, and apologized to the protesters, saying, the initial protests were "just and legitimate," and "the use of excessive force" against those who started the protests was "wrong and unfair." Only then, did he call for the end of the demonstrations, saying "terrorist elements" took them over (BBC News Jun. 4, 2013). Arınç also announced that the urban development project in Gezi Park was cancelled. After his return to Turkey, Erdoğan's denial of Arınç by announcing that the project would continue brought Arınç to the brink of resignation, as one columnist emphasized, and it was Abdullah Gül who prevented the resignation (Küçükşahin 2016).

What becomes apparent is that while Gezi Park protests caused a big rift in the party with the conflict between two competing notions of democracy, the majoritarian versus the pluralist, this conflict was not publicly visible at the time. As to why such a major rift within the party did not become publicly visible at the time, interviewees widely pointed out that the AKP leadership at the time was moving away from the principle of common reason (collective wisdom) and increasingly suppressing different voices within the party, even though the AKP program had placed special emphasis on the issues of preventing leader oligarchy and preserving internal democracy after their criticism of the National Outlook tradition on this issue.

JJ⁶⁴ pointed out that two things prevented him (and others) from making criticisms out loud at the time. First, he said, in Turkish culture there is an understanding of "don't let it out of this room." But more importantly, he said, "the conjuncture was never suitable for making out-loud criticisms." In his words, "international pressures, domestic problems in the country, including terror, manipulations they (as civilian

⁶⁴Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

politics) faced, extraordinary conditions... , all created an environment which impeded their out-loud criticism of mistakes in the media, or publicly in general.” Then, he said, in line with this understanding, when he and his friends saw major mistakes, they either made their objections or criticisms “in the council of ministers, or administrative bodies of the party, or by meeting with/inviting the related person.” In this regard, DD⁶⁵ stated that in the first two terms of the AKP rule, all Council of Ministers or other administrative bodies’ meetings witnessed harsh debates with Erdoğan, unlike the post-2011, particularly post-2013 period. HH⁶⁶ stated, by 2013 the number of people who could raise their voices in the administrative bodies of the party was only three or four since “who raised their voices were directly or indirectly impeded; they were either forced to take a back seat or had to leave.” In addition, FF⁶⁷ noted that as of 2013 in parallel with the move away from the principle of collective mind, the style of doing politics also underwent a very important change. To him, till 2012/2013, the AKP governments’ style of doing politics was based on “politics of progress,” which involved giving positive messages and promises to the electorate. He called the latter style of politics, “politics of fear,” a style of politics which aimed to gain support by pumping fear and anxiety in the society, in which a polarizing language, threats, enemies and security risks are produced, and as a result, concerns such as democracy, human rights and freedoms take a back seat.

The relations with the EU and the US were also further strained during Gezi Park protests with their warnings against the brutal suppression of the protests. To go into the details of the Western reaction at that time, prior to the European Parliament resolution, adopted on June 13, 2013, to criticize the police brutality (Aslan 2016), the EU Commission started its warnings against the government on the first day of the protests “for the excessive and disproportionate use of force during the demonstrations that started with a democratic reflex,” condemned the government’s reaction 6 hours after its first warning and continued its statements on the issue (BBC News Jun. 4, 2013). The U.S. State Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki, also expressed their “concern for the number of people injured during the police dispersal of the protesters,” who, she said, were only acting in accordance with the basic freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, found in every healthy democracy (T24 Jun. 1, 2013). Only two days later, the U.S. White House spokesperson as well as the Secretary of State continued to express their concerns “about the reports of excessive use of force by the police” (Hurriyet Jun.

⁶⁵Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁶⁶Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁶⁷Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

3, 2013). Furthermore, the protests attracted too much media attention, as also stressed above, and CNN International broadcasted the protests live for hours.

Thus, relations with the West further deteriorated in the course of the Gezi Park protests, and Erdoğan started to employ more and more conspirational/blame-attribution rhetoric, i.e., stressing that external actors, particularly Western powers, have ulterior motives in Turkey (Balta 2021), in the face of Western reactions to his harsh suppression of the protests. Furthermore, combined with the already evident self-confidence-boosting effects of the Arab Spring environment on Turkish foreign policy, we saw Erdoğan employing the motto “the world is bigger than five” to criticize the composition of the UN Security Council in “an aspiration to elevate the status of the country in the international arena by focusing on an unequal distribution of power at the global level” (Balta 2021). The increasing loneliness of Turkey in the international community was responded by the introduction of the concept of “precious loneliness” as early as August 2013 by Ibrahim Kalın, PM Erdoğan’s foreign policy advisor then.

5.6 Attempts to Politically Exclude Abdullah Gül, a Balancing Figure against Erdoğan and Its Emergence as a Source of Disagreement within the AKP

As a former AKP deputy, Yeneroğlu (2019) noted, there have been signs of an authoritarian turn in the AKP since 2011, and this turn has primarily occurred through the sidelining of people who “should be taken seriously”. The most important figure who was politically sidelined by Erdoğan was Abdullah Gül, who ascended to presidency in 2007, and the idea of whose return to the party as the next prime minister found support in the party⁶⁸, as “the second man” of the party, whose opinion was always sought in important issues, and known with calm “balancing role” (Girasun 2021), as Erdoğan was preparing to hand over the chairmanship and prime ministership to Davutoğlu.

To many analysts, Gül was the force behind the improved relations with the EU. For instance, Girasun (2021), an analyst, argued that although the AKP has been almost always read through the genius of Erdoğan, if we were to attribute the success of the AKP to someone after the rise of the party to power, it would be Abdullah Gül, who got exposed to European values and established a dialogue with the West, through

⁶⁸ As Ahmet Sever, stressed in an interview, Gül had appeared ahead of all candidates in the intra-party polls and in the polls 76% of the electorate wanted to see Gül as the next AKP chairman (Bozan 2018).

his study in the U.K. and membership at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) from 1991 to 2001, and during the years who served first as PM and the foreign minister (2003-2007) relations with the EU peaked (Girasun 2021). Similarly, Zaman, a columnist, criticizing the Syrian policy, being implemented in line with the *Strategic Depth* book of Davutoğlu, and Erdoğan's intention to leave his (PM) seat to Davutoğlu instead of Gül, argued, "It was Abdullah Gül, the foreign affairs minister between 2003 and 2007, who was the true architect of the shining years in foreign policy. He is also the person who has contributed at least as much as Erdoğan in making the current AKP. After his ascendance to the presidency, a transformation started in the country and in the party" (Zaman Aug. 15, 2014). Furthermore, as a columnist, Çandar (2014) also said, "a Putin-Medvedev-type of swap" between Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, i.e. Erdoğan's ascendance to the presidential seat and Gul's stepping down to take over the prime minister's seat, was also desired by the Westerners who thought that "a sober Gul would serve as a formidable check and balance to a maverick Erdoğan," and hence would prevent Turkey from drifting into Erdoğan's one-man rule. And yet, since Erdoğan wanted to designate a new AKP chairman/PM who would not object to Erdoğan's reluctance to share power, Gül was not a name that would meet that criterion (Çandar 2014).

Another argument used by the analysts who supported Gul's return to the party after Erdoğan was that Gul was the pioneer of the democratization movement in the National Outlook tradition, and he did not refrain from taking risks to this end. In this respect, an analyst (Girasun 2021) noted that Gul emerged in the Welfare Party (RP) as one of the names who brought up the idea of opening the party to other segments in society and played a role in the RP's incorporating into its cadres significant names from the center-right tradition, and also in the increasing vote rates of the RP in 1994 local elections. Abdullah Gül not only introduced a new political model to the RP, he said, but also pioneered the Reformist movement in the Virtue Party (FP) by running for party chairman in 2000 against the serving leader Recai Kutan, while Erdoğan who has always been described as a "risk-taker," did not attend the Congress in 2000. Similarly, Gültekin (2014), a columnist, also stressed that while, in 2000, Abdullah Gül assumed the leadership of the moderates in the FP against Recai Kutan in an atmosphere in which any vocal criticism was not tolerated by Erbakan. In his account, it was not Erdoğan, but Gül, who initiated the renovationist movement in FP and introduced it to the grassroots of the party and to the society, although interest in this movement increased particularly after Erdoğan's joining their ranks. Then, he said, although Gül became the first prime minister after the AKP's rise to power, he did not refrain from giving the post to Erdoğan after his political ban was removed, and he was elected member of

parliament. He also added, it was Gül's more tolerant/embracing attitude, peace-promoting policies during his prime ministership that appeased the fears of the secular sectors of society.

Furthermore, to Gültekin (2014), Gül never hesitated to take risks to preserve/consolidate democracy during the AKP rule as well. In this respect, Gül adopted a risk-taking attitude during the 2007 presidential election crisis, since running for president was a risky business then, as revealed by the following words of Erkan Mumcu: "if we had gone to the parliament to support Gül, the parliament would have been bombed." Gül did not refrain from running for presidential election neither before the April 27 e-memorandum/ the 367 decision nor after the snap elections of July 2007 while Erdoğan was afraid of the reaction he would get, and was in search for a candidate not coming from the National Outlook tradition. And when the military issued an e-memorandum on April 27, again, it was Gül who encouraged Erdoğan, by saying "we need to stand firm." Then, he noted, it was Gül's risk-taking, firm stance that brought 47% of the votes to the AKP in the 2007 elections. And during his presidency, Gül's moderate, embracing attitude contributed to the "normalization" of relations in the country.

Despite his important function in the party, in the post-2011 period, Erdoğan engaged in an effort to politically sideline Gül. To this end, first, he tried to make an amendment in the law on presidential elections in January 2012 to prevent Abdullah Gül's reelection. In the words of Sever, Erdoğan's this attempt further deepened the distrust between Gül and Erdoğan which started to surface in 2007 since "this law was designed solely against Gül" (Bozan 2018). And then, in 2014, when former President Abdullah Gül's term as president was coming to an end, this time the AKP hastily decided to hold the party congress one day before Gül's presidential term ended, to close the door to his candidacy for the chairmanship of the party although, as the first foreign minister of the AKP rule also confirmed later, there was an expectation in the party that Erdoğan would become the President and Gül would first become the chairman of the AKP, and later, a member of parliament and the prime minister (Yakış 2020).

Moreover, Gül himself also said, on August 11, 2014, in a farewell reception (for his presidency), which was held only a day after the first round of the presidential elections which was won by Erdoğan, that he would return to the AKP after his presidential term expired. That is, Gül had also started to voice the idea that Erdoğan would become President and he would first become the chairman of the AKP, and later, a member of parliament and the prime minister (Yakış 2020). And yet, only a few minutes after Gül's remarks did the AKP executive committee (MYK)

announce its decision to hold the party congress to elect the new party chairman on August 27, one day before the presidential term of Gül expired. Erdoğan also immediately reacted at Gül's announcement, on August 14, 2014, in the AKP extended provincial heads meeting, by stating as to the new AKP chairman/PM designation process that "[the party] was not established to provide anyone with the chairmanship or the prime ministry seat" (Al-Jazeera Turk Aug. 14, 2014). Furthermore, although presidential elections were held on August 10, the publication of the result in the Official Gazette was delayed; and Erdoğan resigned from his posts as PM and AKP chairman, just one day before he was sworn in as president in the parliament on August 28.

The above-mentioned remarks of Erdoğan were followed by a smear campaign against Gül in the pro-AKP media. For instance, while Selvi, then a columnist in daily *Yeni Şafak* wrote, Gül would return to the party only "as a party member," Akdoğan, then, a senior advisor to Erdoğan and an AKP deputy wrote in his column in daily *Yeni Şafak*, "this movement does not owe any debt to anyone," also arguing, "the chairmans may change over time, but the only leader of this movement is Erdoğan... All the positions obtained by the people in the party must be considered his achievements only... And it is at the discretion of Erdoğan (and the executive bodies) to decide for future of the party..." (Akdoğan 2014). Then, to Akdoğan, all the achievements of AKP belonged to Erdoğan only, and that it was only at his discretion to decide on the next chairman.

As Sever noted, if Gül had decided to step down at the end of his term to assume the chairmanship of the AKP, it would have required him to get in a serious fight. And yet, he added, Gül did not want to get in that fight, thinking, "two acrobats don't play on a tightrope," although he was very concerned that a country which "had blown the winds of reform changed its shell, and a country that would be a model, a way out to other Muslim geographies has turned to security policies." (Hürriyet Jun. 16, 2015). Gül was, apparently, very critical, particularly of the then foreign policy implemented by Davutoğlu-Erdoğan duo, and as early as June 2014, Akdoğan, then the chief advisor to PM Erdoğan stressed that after Erdoğan's ascendance to the Presidency, the new Prime Minister should have been someone "working in harmony [with the President]. In response to the question, whether the PM's ascendance to the Presidency would be the insurance of President Gül's assuming the prime ministership, Akdoğan said, "Being in harmony with Tayyip Erdoğan is always the most important point here. President-prime minister harmony is a situation that should not be underestimated." Then, he said, the name Davutoğlu naturally came to the fore, as it was a name with no "third-term problem" (Al-Jazeera Turk Jun. 7, 2014).

As it was reported in daily Cumhuriyet (Aug. 13, 2014), Gül's decision to return to the party when his presidency came to an end emerged as a major issue of contention as the party's senior names supported Gül's taking over the post of the PM/Chairman, and the younger generation who got elected for the first time in 2007 or 2011 elections, sided with Erdoğan. For instance, Arınc, was one of the founders of the AKP, who got furious with the remarks of Akdoğan, and told, "the adolescents may disrupt our brotherhood relations" (Cumhuriyet Aug. 13, 2014). And in Sever's account, when Gül announced at one of the farewell ceremonies towards the end of his term that he would return to the party, Ergin told in one of the executive body meetings of the party (MKYK) that it would be better to postpone the congress to a later date. And when a number of people in support of Gül started to increase, Erdoğan interrupted to close the topic in the MKYK meeting (Hürriyet Jun. 16, 2015).

Face-to-face interviews with former figures of the party reveal individual efforts to prevent Erdoğan's sidelining Gul. Accordingly, DD⁶⁹ stressed that when Davutoğlu's name started to be mentioned in the party and in the media as the next prime minister, he made a conversation with Davutoğlu and stressed that they aspired for the return of Abdullah Gül to the party as the next prime minister since Gül would be the only person who would balance Erdoğan, that if Abdullah Gül left the party the balance in the party against Erdoğan would be impaired. As he told, when he made this conversation with Davutoğlu, a team was already set up in SETA, upon Erdoğan's assignment, to promote Davutoğlu's candidacy in the media. He also noted that particularly the harmony in Syrian policy between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu brought them closer, and distanced them from Gül, since Gül was very critical of the Syrian policy of the government, and harshly criticized this policy to their face.

HH⁷⁰ also explained in our interview how he tried to prevent the law from being adopted when Erdoğan attempted to amend the Law on Presidential Election in 2012. In this regard, he stressed that they prepared the law, and that after the adoption of the law by the Council of Ministers it was sent to the parliament. And yet, he argued, in the sub-commission on the Constitution in the parliament, a sentence was added to the law, prohibiting the Presidents, elected before the entry into force of the 2007 constitutional amendment, from being elected again. He said, upon this amendment, he blocked the working of the commission and went to Erdoğan to oppose it, and told Erdoğan that, this was against the Constitution,

⁶⁹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁷⁰Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

against the brotherhood relations, and that they wouldn't defend this law neither in the commission nor in the general assembly. And in his account, Erdoğan offered to establish a consultation team and to abide by the decision the team reached on the issue. And yet, he stressed, although this team, composed of 8-10 people, finally decided on withdrawing the proposal, it was re-added to the law behind his back. And he said, it was passed by the parliament, and yet, cancelled by the Constitutional Court upon the appeal of the CHP in the end. Then, he added, he also objected in the MKYK to the decision on the congress date in 2014.

Hence, as Girasun (2021) rightfully put it, Abdullah Gül, who turned into an “out-of-practical politics and detached-from-society figure” after he ascended to Presidency, was excluded from the party/politics in 2014. Since Gül both insisted on not making any statement to announce his return to the party towards the end of his presidential term, and refrained from publicly criticizing/challenging both such attempts to politically “kill” him and the smear campaign, run against him by Erdoğan-led clique in the party, and spread among the electorate, Erdoğan could easily sideline him.

5.7 The FETÖ-Initiated Crises in 2012/2013, and the 2014 Local Elections with Allegations of Misconduct

In the post-2011 period, attempts by the Gülen organization to sabotage the peace process, which had started in 2009 under the coordinatorship of the then interior minister and the resulting war, emerged as another factor that contributed to the authoritarian turn of the AKP. Thus, not only did the alliance with what was then called the Gülen movement that had begun in 2007 come to end in this period, but also the government launched a war against the movement.

As for the details of how the alliance with the Gülen movement ended, the movement, which did not support the peace process, attempted to sabotage it by calling National Intelligence Agency (MIT) Undersecretary Hakan Fidan to provide testimony on charges related to Oslo talks, i.e. the intelligence agency's secret negotiations with the PKK, on February 7, 2012. And Ergin (Jul. 18, 2020) then the Minister of Justice, explained that only after “the February 7 conspiracy against MIT,” which was considered to have marked the peak of the self-confidence of FETÖ, did the government realize that the Gülenists infiltrated the judiciary. Thus, only after 2012, February 7 MIT Crisis did the government find out that Gülenists had obtained the majority in the final HSYK elections. Then, after a Gülen movement-linked prose-

cutor, Sarıkaya, called Fidan to testify in an investigation, he was removed from the investigation, and the MIT law was amended to bring Prime Ministry permission requirement for the MIT members to testify within the scope of their duties; and thus, February 7, 2012, marked the date fight with the FETÖ started.

Many analysts called this war between the AKP and the Gülen movement a power struggle in state structures between two Islamist groups coming from different Islamist traditions although their paths crossed for a while to push the military out of politics Arango (2013). As Tol (2014), a Turkey expert, wrote, in February 2012 the Gülen movement-linked prosecutors' calling on Fidan, the Chief of the MIT, for testimony also derived from Gülen's favoring "a hard-line nationalist approach to Kurds," just like the ultra-nationalist MHP and the main opposition CHP. And she argued that although the two movements, the AKP and the Gülen movement, engaged in an alliance to curb the military's power in politics, there were already multiple domestic and foreign policy areas, in which views of Gülen and Erdoğan-led AKP differed, such as the 2010 Mavi Marmara crisis, caused by the raid of Israeli troops on the Turkish vessel Mavi Marmara, carrying humanitarian aid to Palestinians in international waters, killing nine Turkish citizens. While Erdoğan reacted to this attack demanding both apology and compensation for the victims' families, and pulling the ambassador out of Tel Aviv in protest, as Tol (2014) explained, Gülen described the initiative as "an unlawful challenge to Israel's sovereignty" to the surprise of his own followers as well. As she explained, Gülenist media outlets also criticized then Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's policy of improving ties with Iran.

Although after the February 7, 2012 conflict between the AKP and the Gülen movement, Çelik, the AKP Chairman, made a press release, rejecting the allegations that the Gülen organization infiltrated the state institutions to take over the state (NTV Feb. 20, 2012), not long after came Erdoğan's announcement that they were considering to prepare a draft bill to close down (or transforms into private high schools) the centers of private courses known as "dershane," which helped students prepare for the centralized university entrance examination, and a quarter of which were operated by the Gülen organization (HaberTürk Mar. 25, 2012). A few months later, then Education Minister Avcı also announced that this regulation would take effect only in the next academic year (2014-2015) (Cumhuriyet Aug. 14, 2013). Finally, Erdoğan announced that he was determined to shut down these preparatory courses first in his party's traditional Kızılcahamam camp on November 4, and then in a TV program on November 20 (Cumhuriyet Nov. 20, 2013). Then started to come counter-attacks from Gülen community-controlled media outlets, the primary one being daily *Zaman*, which kept defending these courses via its headlines, and whose editor-in-chief Ekrem Dumanlı wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister on

November 25, 2013, to convince him not to adopt the bill closing down/transforming these courses, which were not only an important source of income for the Gülen community but also a source of recruitment (Medyatava Nov. 25, 2013). The Gülen community perceived Erdoğan's insistence on closing down the "*dersane(s)*" as part of a plan to wipe their movement out. This perception also became evident on November 28, 2013, in daily *Taraf*'s headline, which argued that the August 2004 National Security Council decision had advised the government to prepare an action plan against the Gülen community, and that this decision had been also signed by the then PM Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül (CNN Türk Nov. 28, 2013). Although Akdoğan, then the Chief Advisor to Erdoğan, responded to this headline by arguing that the decision in question was considered null and void and no council of ministers decision or regulation was made on the basis of it (CNN Türk Nov. 28, 2013), apparently, the Gülen organization was not satisfied with this explanation since, it was believed that the prosecutors who initiated, on December 17, a corruption and bribery investigation which also involved four AKP ministers, were members of the Gülen organization. In police raids dozens of people were detained, including the sons of three ministers who resigned then, an AKP mayor, a state bank chief, as well as businessmen close to the government.

In this crisis, too, Erdoğan continued his stance of resorting to conspirational rhetoric, i.e., explaining the crisis with "ulterior motives of external forces" (Balta 2021), an attitude he had maintained since Gezi Park protests. Then, Erdoğan called the investigation a "foreign plot," a "conspiracy" to harm the government before the coming local elections in March 2014, blamed the Gülen movement for setting up a "state within state," a "parallel state" in state structures, primarily in the police and the judiciary, and dismissed the Istanbul police chief as well as many other officials in the police and judiciary in response (The Guardian Dec. 19, 2013). Furthermore, as it was reported then in the local media, on December 25, the initiation of another investigation that also involved the PM's closer circle was also prevented by the newly installed police officials. More dramatically, the closest minister to Erdoğan among the three who resigned, Bayraktar, told in a TV interview that PM Erdoğan's resignation was also required since he was the one who had approved the real estate deals at the heart of the investigation (Arango 2013).

Hence, Erdoğan found himself in a fight for survival at a very difficult time, when Turkey was seeking to be a "force of stability" in the region with a war raging in Syria after the Arab Spring, and when Erdoğan had just faced domestic challenges with massive anti-government protests. As the Arango (2013) also reported then, the corruption investigation portrayed a contrasting image than the democracy-promoter, the welfare-provider image portrayed by the AKP in the first years after

coming to power, and since it was this image in the former years that led the AKP to be considered as a model in the region, Erdoğan's preoccupation with his political survival made this role in the region questionable as well. As Tol (2014), rightfully, argued then, Erdoğan's position would only be strengthened by winning a landslide victory in the 2014 March local elections, a victory which would also mark Erdoğan's launch of an "all-out war" against the Gülenists. It was also reported in Al-Jazeera (Mar 30, 2014) that March 30, 2014 elections, held amid corruption allegations against the AKP, were viewed as a "referendum" on both Erdoğan, the PM then, and the AKP; and for Erdoğan to strengthen his position, he was supposed to win at least the same vote percentage (which was 38.8%) as it won in the 2009 local elections.

The Kurdish Opening process also started a few months after the crisis with the FETÖ occurred in 2012. Can (2019) argued that Öcalan sided with Erdoğan in this crisis and proposed the "Resolution Process" to the government in this environment. Thus, he wrote, "we know that Öcalan, who gained the right to 'meet' after the prison resistances which ended on November 17, declared the investigation against Fidan a 'coup' attempt, took a stand, and warned the government in general, and Fidan, in particular, about this issue." In other words, the Resolution Process started at a time when Erdoğan became aware of the FETÖ threat, and Öcalan warned Erdoğan through Fidan against a coup threat of FETÖ. Then, as he noted, it was Öcalan, who directed this conjuncture in the post-hunger strike period to "the Resolution Process" through Fidan. On the other hand, to him, what convinced Erdoğan to this proposal was his desire not to fight at the same time with the FETÖ and the PKK, the latter of whom prepared itself to wage a comprehensive war throughout 2012.

Tol (2014) also noted that when FETÖ-initiated December 17/25 corruption allegations were made, the imprisoned PKK leader, Öcalan, sided with the government, adopting the narrative of the government and calling the investigations a "coup attempt," and the then pro-Kurdish party Peace and Democracy Party's (BDP) leader Selahattin Demirtaş, made a statement on his Twitter account, stressing that they would not let corruption allegations harm the ongoing peace process since the government had emerged as the "Kurds' best bet for the resolution of the Kurdish question." Then, the "peace process" initiative of the government, which was re-initiated in 2013 would be the first victim of Erdoğan-Gülen fallout if the clash between them further weakened Erdoğan; hence, 2014 local election results were of crucial importance for the fate of the peace process, to Tol.

Turkey went to the critical local elections in 2014 not only amid corruption allega-

tions targeting the government and businessmen with links to the government but also in an environment in which the government blocked Twitter and Youtube a few days before elections since the leakings of illegally recorded conversations that allegedly documented the corrupted actions of Erdoğan as well as of a high-level security meeting in which a possible armed intervention in Syria was discussed, had been shared on these two social media platforms (Al-Jazeera Apr. 1, 2014). The election was also marred by electoral fraud allegations, the significant cases of the allegations being in Ankara and Yalova, the two places against the results of which the CHP appealed to the Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) for renewal. Other allegations of misconduct included unusual power blackouts in multiple places during vote counts, intimidation by a minister during the vote count in a critical district (Antalya), and playing with voter registration lists as this election marked the highest invalid vote rate in the elections with 4.30% (for instance, this rate was 2.21% in 2011, and 2.30% in 2009 elections) (T24 May 19, 2015). What further decreased trust in election results were state-run Anatolian news agency's and privately-owned Cihan news agency's publishing different figures, and the AKP and CHP candidates' in both Ankara and Istanbul, two key battlegrounds, claiming victory and slamming the opposition for manipulating the results (The Guardian Mar. 30, 2014).

Regardless, the AKP declared victory late in the evening of March 30 by getting almost 43% of the votes whereas the main opposition CHP held almost 28% and the MHP got 15% of the vote. In recognition of the fact that the election meant a vote of confidence for him, Erdoğan, in his address to the electorate in a balcony speech said, "The people have spoken: They said we are here. The montage politics have lost." He thanked to the people who supported the AKP, saying, "You have protected the independence struggle of the new Turkey." (Hurriyet Daily News Mar. 30, 2014). Again, he sent greetings to Palestine, Syria, and Egypt and stated, "Today, ...national unity and solidarity process, the resolution process has won. He also said, "today, Turkey, which defends peace and holds the hands of the oppressed, has won." He thanked God, for "giv[ing them] the grace to be the flag bearer of this cause." In this address, he once again emphasized "one nation, one flag, one homeland, and one state" as the formula of unity in the society (Al-Jazeera Turk Mar. 31, 2014). As Erdoğan would start an all-out-war against the Gülen movement in the aftermath of the elections, Deputy Prime Minister Arınç explained after the AKP's victory that Gülenists had "visited every house; [and] even begged," to convince people not to vote for the AKP (Hurriyet Daily News Mar. 30, 2014).

As Karaca, a columnist, rightfully argued then, since the public saw that the power of a democratically elected government was trying to be undermined through illegal recordings of an organization, they perceived the Gülen organization as "a more

serious threat” than the corruption allegations, and responded by taking the side of the PM (Al-Jazeera Apr. 1, 2014).

And yet, we may also safely argue that the issue of the trial of four former AKP ministers, which came to the fore after the corruption/bribery investigation, believed to have been initiated by Gülenist prosecutors, turned out to be another issue where there was a difference of opinion between Gul and Erdoğan. As Sever (Hürriyet Jun. 16, 2015) noted, while the government immediately reacted, calling these investigations a “coup attempt” and “montage,” Gül did not reach a definite conclusion, and yet, thought that the issue had to be explored and the ministers in question had to be acquitted by the Constitutional Court.

Moreover, after Davutoğlu was assigned as the next PM following Erdoğan’s ascendance to the Presidency, the same issue also caused a conflict between Davutoğlu and Erdoğan as early as October 2014 and became one of the issues that paved the way for the overthrow of the PM Davutoğlu with an intra-party coup. Thus, these crises played a big role in Erdoğan’s sidelining Davutoğlu, to whom he left the AKP chairmanship and the prime ministership, politically sidelining Gul. And finally, we can also argue that these FETÖ-initiated crises put Erdoğan in a constant mood of struggle for survival, and, also led Erdoğan to take a determined stance to switch to the presidential system. In the words of GG⁷¹, an interviewee, these crises led Erdoğan to take more confident steps to seize full control of the party.

5.8 The Resolution Process the Process from 2013 till June 7, 2015 elections

As already mentioned, the demand to re-initiate the Kurdish Opening process came from Öcalan, who sided with Erdoğan in the course of the FETÖ-initiated 2012 crisis. Furthermore, on September 24, 2012, KCK Executive Council Member Zübeyir Aydar also demanded the restart of the peace process, blaming the Gülen organization for leaking the Oslo talks, although he also put the blame on the government side for the end of Oslo talks, arguing that it was the government, not the PKK, who started military operations in the pre-2011 election period (BBC Sep. 24, 2012). Only two days later, on September 26, 2012, Erdoğan acknowledged that Oslo talks were held as part of ‘the resolution process,’ and that “they ended these talks because of insincerity and the information being served by the terrorist organization.” (DHA

⁷¹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

Sep. 26, 2012). And then, “the Resolution Process,” a very important democratization initiative in the post-2011 elections period, *de facto* started in January 2013 with the meetings of Öcalan and BDP deputies, Ahmet Türk and Ayla Akat Ata, and became official with the declaration of Abdullah Öcalan, read in Diyarbakır on the Newroz of March 21, 2013.

The main importance of Öcalan’s “Newroz letter” read out by two parliamentarians of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in Diyarbakır, on March 21, 2013, was that he announced the start of a democratic politics process and the end of the armed resistance process. Çandar (2013), a columnist, defined this letter as “a paradigm shift” on the basis of the following points Öcalan pointed out in the letter:

“[Öcalan] emphasized that the Kurds have acquired their identities and true selves as a result of the PKK struggle, and as such there is no more need to pursue an armed struggle against Turkey and it is time to move the struggle to democratic politics. . . One of the points he underlined was that the solution would be achieved by preserving Turkey’s territorial integrity, within the country but without a nation-state model. This was his way of saying that there will not be an “independent Kurdish state” through secession or dismemberment of the existing country or by partition. By saying that, he also rejected any country or state based on a “single nation,” including that of Turkey. He described the current borders of the Middle East as superficial borders that at one point in history splintered the Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Persians, and other peoples. He talked about “unity” and “partnership” and defined the Turks and the Kurds as “two strategic powers” in the Middle East.”

Next, on April 3, the AKP took a critical step to include the parliament in the Resolution Process; and proposed to establish a parliamentary commission that would “assess ‘the Process.’” On the same day, the party established a body called “Eminent/Wise Peoples Group,” made up of prominent individuals in the society, to explain “the Resolution Process” to the public and to increase public support for this process. While the Eminent Peoples Group held various seminars and symposiums in various regions of the country to this end, both of the opposition parties in the parliament, the center-left CHP, and the far-right MHP announced that they would not assign any member to the parliamentary commission. And the Official Gazette (May. 14, 2013) announced that the parliamentary research commission on “the investigation of pathways for peace and the evaluation of the resolution process” was composed of nine AKP deputies and one BDP deputy. Whatever Erdoğan’s motivation to re-start this process was, it was a very risky business to undertake it in an environment where other opposition parties were heavily opposed to the process,

and where the war against FETÖ had already begun. As already mentioned, it would not occur if it was not for the wind of democratization which blew in the country with the 2010 referendum, and the following electoral victory in the 2011 elections.

The Resolution Process involved frequent visits of the BDP deputies to Kandil (KCK), and to Imrali (Öcalan), and the start of the withdrawal of the PKK from Turkey in May 2013. And yet, before long, particularly the KCK side started to express its concerns about the process, arguing that the government and the state did not take the necessary steps that would pave the way for a “resolution.” In this regard, first in June 2013, KCK Executive Committee Chair Karayılan, blamed the state for “sabotaging the process,” criticizing “the construction of new police stations in the Southeast, the military explorations in the region, the failure to take a step towards the abolition of the village guard system, the failure to release KCK detainees, and the court decisions regarding Uludere (Roboski) incident” (BBC News Jun. 19, 2013). And then in September 2013, co-chair Cemil Bayık threatened the government against termination of the process, complaining that “talks with Imrali remained at the “dialogue” state, and could not move to the “negotiation” stage (HaberTürk Sep. 25, 2013).

Next in the process was Erdoğan’s announcement of the democratization package, on September 30, 2013, which involved important reforms concerning the Kurdish question. As DD⁷² stated in our interview, even when the first stage of the democratic opening process came to an end, they used every opportunity to rectify the injustices done to the Kurdish population by the state. In this context, he said that almost half of the final “democratization package,” involved democratization reforms related to the Kurdish question, to be carried out through legal amendments or administrative steps. This was also the time that Erdoğan initiated a war against the Gülenists through an attempt to close down the *dersanes*.

We find that while announcing the democratization package in a press conference, Erdoğan stressed that “[it was] not a result of any bargaining or negotiation; [but]... a result of the people’s demands.” Another important point he made was that their “references” were “international human rights, the European Union acquis and the works of the Wise/Eminent People [during the peace process]” (Hurriyet Daily News Sep. 30, 2013). As Cengiz (2013) stressed, his speech, in which he stressed that new reforms would follow as long as the Kurdish side used politics as the only means to resolve their problems, was a message to the PKK and the Kurdish political actors.

⁷²Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

As for the content of the package, it included reforms regarding the democratization of the electoral process, aimed specifically at the benefit of the Kurdish political actors. For instance, the package offered to discuss in the parliament two other alternatives to the existing electoral threshold. Accordingly, the electoral threshold would either remain the way it was, be reduced to 5%, or be completely eliminated through the introduction of a majoritarian (winner-takes-all) election system. And pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) would most gain from the complete removal of the threshold with their then level of electoral support in the Kurdish-populated southeast. Moreover, the package lowered the 7 percent threshold for the political parties to receive state subsidies to 3 percent. Also, according to the package, the political parties would have two co-chairs, which is a practice widely adopted by pro-Kurdish political parties, including the BDP; and also, the parties would use other languages/dialects, including Kurdish in political propaganda. In addition, the package also opened the door to instruction in different languages/dialects at private schools.

The package also involved other reforms pertaining to other minorities. In this regard, it promised to establish a Roma language and cultural institution, and the removal of restrictions before collecting charitable donations; it included the imposition of legal measures against hate-crimes, although which hate-crimes the package referred to was not specified.

As to whether these promises satisfied opinion leaders, for example, when asked about his views on the Kurdish-related parts of the package, the then President of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, lawyer Tahir Elçi, said that the package was “a modest step towards democratization,” and that it lacked amnesty, which he thought was necessary for the total disarmament of the PKK and also lacked any effort to narrow the vague and broad definition of “terror organization” and “terror organization membership” in the Anti-Terror Law since to him broad definition of these concepts had caused the detention of many Kurdish politicians/activists. He also found the limitation of instruction in the mother tongue only to private schools as a mistake. As Koptas, the managing director of Turkish-Armenian newspaper *Agos* stated, the package also had serious defects since, for instance, it still did not grant official status to the Alevis’ places of worship (cem evleri), or did not make any reference to the reopening of the Greek Orthodox seminary in Halki (Heybeliada) (Cengiz 2013).

After the announcement of the package, Executive Council of the KCK (the political arm of the PKK) also harshly criticized it, claiming that it was adopted to divert the society and gain time before the presidential elections, and that it beared no

real intention to solve the Kurdish question through democratic means, the latter of which was claimed to have been proved by the undemocratic method the package was designed. In the statement, the Executive Council even called on the Kurdish people to increase their struggle since this package meant the end of the Resolution process (BBC News Oct. 1, 2013).

In July 2014, in the pre-presidential election process, we find harsher explanations as to “the Resolution Process” on the part of the pro-Kurdish HDP, the BDP’s “sister party,” established in 2013 to fight local elections in the west of Turkey, where Kurds make up the minority, as the co-chair of the party, Selahattin Demirtaş announced his candidacy in June 2014. And finally, on August 5, 2014, this time Abdullah Öcalan accused the government of using “the Resolution Process” as propaganda material in the pre-presidential election period and expressed his discontent that the government did not move into a “negotiations” stage (HaberTürk Aug. 5, 2014).

In this pre-election environment, in which the main opposition CHP and the MHP named Ekmeleddin İhsanoglu as their candidate, in an attempt to join forces of the opposition against Erdoğan, the HDP, named Demirtaş as the presidential candidate, and both candidates of the opposition asked for the support of the latter if any of them made the second round (Reuters Jun. 26, 2014), came to the parliament the bill on “Ending Terrorism and Strengthening Social Integration.” While Öcalan, with whom Turkey had been negotiating for over a year, defined this bill “a historic step,” contrary voices were frequently heard from “the Qandil side.” Reportedly, Cemil Bayık, co-chair of the KCK, told that even the title of the bill was problematic since it signalled that the problem was still being perceived from a security perspective on the part of the state (Al-Jazeera Turk Jul. 10, 2014). Then, he also blamed the state for implementing “a distraction tactic” for still not conducting any “negotiations” with Öcalan. Similarly, on July 8, 2014, HDP co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ defined the Resolution process as “a simple restoration,” and demanded “abolition of the Anti-Terror Law, the release of political prisoners, including Öcalan, and education in mother tongue (Al-Jazeera Turk Jul. 8, 2014).

In a few days, on July 16, 2014, the Law on Ending Terror and Strengthening Social Integration, which was enacted to regulate the procedures and principles regarding “the Resolution Process,” was ratified by President Abdullah Gül. As Atalay, then the deputy PM, stressed, this law was passed by the parliament in June with over 80% support of deputies, and it was the first time the main opposition CHP also gave support to the process (Milliyet Aug. 20, 2014). And finally, on August 5, 2014, this time Abdullah Öcalan accused the government of using “the Resolution Process” as propaganda material in the pre-presidential election period and expressed his

discontent that the government did not move into a “negotiations” stage (HaberTürk Aug. 5, 2014).

Erdoğan, immediately after his ascendance to the Presidency by winning 51.79% of the vote on August 10, 2014, expressed his determination to continue the Resolution process. In this regard, in the last Council of Ministers meeting held under his chairmanship, on August 27, 2014, he announced that apart from the fight with “the parallel structure,” the EU, investments, and the developments in the region, especially in Syria and Iraq, the Resolution process also would be among the issues he himself would personally follow. Then, the process continued, with such steps as the visit of MIT undersecretary Hakan Fidan to İmralı to assure Öcalan about Erdoğan’s determination to continue “the Resolution process,” and then deputy prime minister Atalay’s expression of their desire to expand the talks, conducted with İmrali through the MIT, with the involvement of the Undersecretariat of Public Order and Security in the process, and to extent these talks with İmrali to Europe and Qandil as well (Milliyet Aug. 20, 2014). Still KCK co-chairman Cemil Bayık, in an interview he gave to Çakır, complained about the government’s not taking “serious steps towards a solution,” although he said he was pleased with the account of Atalay. In his account, it was only Öcalan’s “one-sided efforts that brought the process to a certain point,” and the government only “tried to strengthen itself by using the ground offered by [them]” (Radikal Aug. 23, 2014). On the other hand, it became apparent in an interview given by Akdoğan, then the chief advisor to the PM, that Öcalan was perceived by the government as a more reasonable representative of the Kurdish side than HDP deputies because of the continuous “provocative messages” given by the latter (Al-Jazeera Turk Jun. 7, 2014).

On August 29, 2014, after Erdoğan’s ascendance to the presidency, Ahmet Davutoğlu established the new government. In this environment, the prolongation of the civil war in Syria, to which Turkey also contributed with its aggressive policies in the region in line with the “civilization perspective,” brought the end of the peace process slowly, both due to electoral considerations of Erdoğan in the pre-June 2015 elections environment, and because the Kurdish side tried to benefit from the authority vacuum in the region in collaboration with the PYD in Syria. Thus, this was a time period, in which prolonged war in Syria generated important security risks for Turkey with the emergence of an authority vacuum in northern Syria, the PKK/KCK benefited from which. Not only did the Assad regime supply arms/ammunition to the PKK/KCK both against Turkey and to prevent the Kurds in the country from joining the opposition, but also the PKK/KCK gained the opportunity to act together with the PYD and recruit militants from these Syrian Kurds, and tried to establish an autonomous administration in the North/northeastern Syria in the first place, as

the first step of the four-part confederal independent Kurdistan in the Middle East. Besides, the ISIS emerged as another terror organization in the region as a result of the power vacuum that emerged in Syria and posed greater threats for Turkey (Altundeger and Yilmaz 2016, 293).

An interview, published, on August 29, 2014, with HDP deputy Baluken put forth criticisms of the Kurdish side on the post-Arab Spring policy of Davutoğlu in the region, which he defined as both anti-Esad and anti-Kurdish. He argued that Davutoğlu's mistake was that his Kurdish policy at the time was not a global one, but was shaped on the basis of concerns over "Southern Kurdistan." He also, again, complained that the government still had not made it to the second stage, which he defined as "the in-depth discussion/negotiation stage," in which "both parties decide on the negotiation chapters, and debate on them through specialized delegations;" and that they were not given any details on the roadmap until then (Al-Jazeera Turk Aug. 29, 2014).

Towards the end of the process, we also find that the chief of staff Necdet Özel publicly criticized "the Resolution process," arguing that their opinion on the process was not sought by the government and that they also learned about the roadmap from the press (Al-Jazeera Türk Aug. 31, 2014).

In this environment, on October 2, 2014, the bill authorizing the Turkish Armed Forces for cross-border operations and interventions in Syria and Iraq was passed by the parliament with the affirmative votes of the AKP and the MHP deputies, and the rejection votes of the CHP and HDP deputies. As a MHP deputy, Mehmet Sandır, stressed, their party mainly supported this bill since the bill documented the realization on the part of the government that the Resolution Process was a Dissolution Process (BBC Oct. 2, 2014). On the other hand, during the parliamentary debates over the bill, both the HDP and the CHP deputies voiced the claim that it was the AKP government, that supported the ISIS in the region against the PKK/KCK and against the Syrian regime, and that the real motive behind the bill was to overthrow the Syrian regime. In this regard, for instance, CHP deputy Faruk Loğoğlu drew attention to the fact that the bill involved only one reference to ISIS while it involved multiple references to the Syrian regime. Another CHP deputy, Korutürk, also voiced the claim that it was Davutoğlu's "wrong and illusionary policies" that was responsible for the "swamp" in Syria. The HDP central executive committee also, in a written statement, criticized that the bill equated the PYD with the ISIS (BBC Oct. 2, 2014). A few days later, on October 7, HDP central executive committee made a written statement to argue that if Kobane, a Kurdish-populated city in Syria occupied by the ISIS, fell, the resolution process

would be finalized. And this statement was reinforced by the statement of Öcalan who argued that Kobane and the Resolution Process were inseparable parts of each other.

In 2015, the government's demanded from Öcalan to make a call to the PKK for a ceasefire, and, in response, Öcalan's 10-point democratization demands, which involved such items from women's rights and environmental issues to a new constitution, as the conditions of this call marked the resolution process. HDP leader Demirtaş announced the content of the 10-item list, which he called "homework of the government," to the public in a TV program (Dünya Feb. 26, 2015).

What followed it, on February 28, 2015, was the meeting of a HDP delegation with a government delegation in the Dolmabahçe Prime Ministry office, where Öcalan's call to the PKK to convene a ceasefire congress was read out by a HDP deputy in a joint press appearance with government officials, and where the HDP team announced a 10-point roadmap for the peace process. On the other hand, as Fehim Taştekin (2015) wrote, Öcalan's message read out by HDP deputy Sırrı Süreyya Önder was as follows:

"I invite the PKK to convene an extraordinary congress in the spring to make a strategic and historical decision on the basis of principles on which a basic common understanding is reached [with a view to] renouncing the armed struggle."

And yet, to Taştekin (2015), the government sought to sell this statement to the public only as the announcement of the PKK's laying down arms, always ignoring Öcalan's condition for "an agreement on the principles." As he stressed, to the Kurdish side, laying the arms was an end goal to be achieved in parallel with other steps the government was supposed to take in line with the 10-point roadmap, and yet, the government kept pressuring the PKK for the lay-down of the arms.

The same day of the Dolmabahçe Agreement, PM Davutoğlu described this meeting as "the beginning of a new stage in the Resolution process," a stage which marked the beginning of "a democratic life" and the end of "the language of arms." On March 1, the KCK Co-Presidency also described this initiative as "a historic step," and stated that they would fulfill their responsibilities if the government did its part. And finally, President Tayyip Erdoğan also stressed that Öcalan's call was important "for the establishment of trust, peace and stability" (Bianet Feb. 28, 2021). And yet, despite all those positive messages, there were already strong signals that "the Resolution Process" was coming to an end. On one hand, Qandil, PKK, HDP and finally Öcalan kept making statements that put a crimp in the Resolution Process.

First of all, on the day of the Dolmabahce Agreement, HDP leader Demirtaş, with reference to the government's domestic security bill of the government that was at the time being debated in the parliament, argued that the government would not make progress in democratization when insisting on this package. Also, the same day, a PKK leader, Karasu, stressed that the arms would not be laid down before 10 titles were completed by the government. And on March 11, KCK Co-Chairs Bayık and Oran said that the statements on the part of the government that the PKK would lay down arms were election propaganda and that the call for bringing an end to the armed struggle against Turkey could only be made in a congress attended by Öcalan himself. This meant that the PKK would not announce this decision before the release of Öcalan. Finally, although in the message of Ocalan, read out in Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır on March 21, 2015, Ocalan stressed that "a new era" in which peace prevailed was starting, and although he called the PKK "to hold a congress in order to an end the armed struggle that has been waged for nearly 40 years against the Turkish Republic and to determine the political and social strategies in line with the spirit of the new era," he also introduced new conditions, as it was reported in Turkish media then (Karar Aug 17, 2015). To Fehim Taştekin, although the government refrained from taking any steps on the 10-points since the Dolmabahçe Agreement, Öcalan had presented reaching "a common understanding" on "the principles" as the condition of laying down the arms. Then, Öcalan's call on March 21 was as follows:

"I deem it necessary for the PKK to hold a congress to end the armed struggle and adopt a strategy concordant with the spirit of the new era, in conjunction with an agreement to be reached on the principles in the declaration" (Taştekin 2015).

The government, apparently, attributed too much importance to Öcalan's message to be read out in Newroz in 2015. For instance, the deputy PM, Akdoğan, who defined the joint statement by HDP deputies and government members as a "turning point," also called the expected call for the congress by Öcalan in Newroz, "an opportunity to accelerate the Resolution Process" (Hurriyet Mar. 18, 2015). With this expectation, in his address at a public rally, Erdoğan expressed his belief/will that the Newroz that year would lead to a brand-new era by saying, "may the Newroz mark a milestone for peace and solidarity" (TCCB Mar. 21, 2015).

However, almost at the same time, Erdoğan began to give messages that contradicted his previous statements and those of the government regarding the Resolution process. First, on March 20, he argued that he did not know about the Monitoring Committee and that he was not in favor of it, arguing that in all countries only

intelligence agencies would carry out these talks (Al-Jazeera Turk Mar. 20, 2015); and on March 22, he criticized the point reached on the Resolution process at the time, saying, “Imrali, Qandil, the co-chairman of the party, and the speakers in Dolmabahçe, all are giving different messages.” He also said that he was not informed about the meeting, did not find it right for the government members to have met with HDP deputies in Dolmabahçe office, and that he did not have a favorable opinion of the 10-point declaration read in the meeting, arguing that the 10-point demand list of the HDP side had nothing to do with democracy (Al-Jazeera Turk Mar. 22, 2015). In addition to that, after stressing that it was the AKP governments since 2005 that abolished the denial/assimilation/and rejection policies of the state, he said, “after all, is it possible to argue that there is still a Kurdish problem in this country? My Kurdish citizens may have problems, my Turkish citizens may have problems” (Cumhuriyet Mar. 22, 2015).

Many analysts, then, interpreted Erdoğan’s sudden step back from the peace process as an election maneuver to win nationalist votes (Küçükşahin 2016) since pre-election surveys pointed to the rise in the votes of both the pro-Kurdish HDP and the nationalist MHP, which meant that Erdoğan’s dreams to reach supermajority in the parliament and to pass super-presidency would fade away, even if Davutoğlu would continue as the PM (M. Akyol 2015a). A journalist, Cevdet Aşkın also argued that Erdoğan, with statements contradicting the government regarding the resolution process, wanted to disrupt the peace process, and put a spoke in the HDP’s wheel since the HDP had very high potential to exceed the threshold and needed to continue its peace discourse to achieve that (BBC News Mar. 20, 2015). Similarly, Taştekin (2015) argued that, Erdoğan who wanted to install a presidential system after the elections, and who was frustrated with the HDP’s plan to contest the elections as a party, a move which would decrease the votes of the AKP if the HDP exceeded the 10% threshold, wanted to exploit the peace process to reach a supermajority in the elections to rewrite the constitution. As he explained, Erdoğan saw in the opinion polls that the resolution process on the basis of the 10-point roadmap did not increase the vote rate of the AKP as he expected, and led him to make a 180-degree turn in his strategy. In Taştekin’s (2015) words,

“Opinion polls showed that a settlement process based on the 10 points would not boost the AKP vote as expected, leading Erdoğan to kick the negotiating table. Erdoğan, as a leader who, a few years ago, boasted of recognizing the Kurdish problem, was now denouncing the Dolmabahçe deal, the plan for a monitoring committee, and full-fledged peace negotiations. He went even further, saying, ‘There is no Kurdish problem. Arguing the opposite is discrimination and separatism.’”

On the other hand, as Burhanettin Duran, the general coordinator of the SETA, wrote in his column then, the aim of Erdoğan's new rhetoric was "to show that the critical threshold was crossed in the Kurdish issue," and "to underline the normalization provided by the reforms made on this path throughout Turkey." Then, in his account, the demands of the Kurds have been met to a large extent through reforms "on the basis of an individual rights" perspective, and yet, the Kurdish nationalist actors maintained their goal of obtaining "community rights such as autonomy and ensuring the PKK's de facto hegemony in the Southeast." Then, he argued, "the HDP-PKK line [kept] establish[ing] a close connection between community rights and terrorism, ... between gun and the 'Kurdish problem'" (Duran 2015). Thus, the Resolution Process can be said to have practically come to an end when, on May 5, KCK co-chair Oran also announced that holding a congress was not on their agenda anymore.

Furthermore, the controversy caused by Erdoğan's above-mentioned sudden turn, which led the Kurdish side to accuse him of kicking the table and call off their plan to hold a disarmament put Arıncı, as the government spokesperson, at odds with Erdoğan (Küçükşahin 2016). Arıncı, as the government spokesperson, made a press statement, in which he argued that it was the government's responsibility to undertake the tasks/ steps, determined in the roadmap of the resolution process; that the government was committed to implement the decision on the establishment of a monitoring committee; that it was not possible for the President to be uninformed about the steps taken, or to be taken, regarding process; and that Erdoğan's statements that he did not look favorably on something were only emotional expressions (HaberTürk Mar. 21, 2015). As M. Akyol (2015a), rightfully, stressed, the main importance of this defense of the government was that it brought to the light the disagreement between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu's cabinet as well as Davutoğlu's struggle to prevent Erdoğan from "exceed[ing] his limits." As Akyol stressed then, "though Erdoğan is undoubtedly, still, the respected leader of the AKP, the cabinet also wants to free itself from Erdoğan's 'tutelage' and stand on its own feet." Although, as he noted, the AKP spokespersons and propagandists kept calling any news claiming that there is tension between the government and the President, a "fitna, an Islamic term for internal strife that roughly corresponds to sedition," Arıncı's statements suggested that the long-rumored tensions were real.

Then, it is possible to argue that re-inclusion of "the Resolution Process" into the election manifesto, published by the AKP for the June 7 elections, as an additional section, in which it was defined as "an initiative with a human rights and democracy focus, ... the welfare project of the nation; ... the roadmap for the normalization of Turkey; ... and the guarantee that the old-democratic practices of the old Turkey

will not be repeated” (Bianet Apr. 21, 2015), was PM Davutoğlu’s initiative. In this regard, then PM Davutoğlu, in a TV program, on May 31, complained about “zigzags between the HDP, Imrali, and Qandil,” and stressed that they would review their interlocutors (SETA 2015, 81).

In the run-up to the June 7 elections, tensions between the parties escalated though, strengthening Erdoğan’s position against Davutoğlu on the Resolution process. One incident that raised the tension was the allegations that the HDP-KCK violated election security, with reference to billboards in the southeast with images of blood flowing from taps and messages such as “take your precautions,” and “are you aware?” In the southeastern Kurdish-populated city of Van, the metropolitan mayoralty of which was run by the HDP, it was argued that the billboards intended to give the message to the public that “if you do not vote for the HDP, blood will shed,” in the words of the then AKP provincial head (Sabah May. 1, 2015). Then the official allegation was that the KCK was making election propaganda in the southeastern cities to put pressure on people who did not want to vote for the HDP (SETA 2015, 80). Another important incident was the outbreak of a clash, on April 11, during the ceasefire period, between the PKK and the gendarmerie before a tree planting event that was going to be held as part of the spring festival in a village in Ağrı, an eastern province. According to the official statement made by the military, the gendarmerie was dispatched to the region upon the instruction of the Governor’s office, upon the information that the PKK members were planning to make propaganda in the region to put pressure on the citizens to vote for the candidates they supported. To the military, it was the PKK that opened fire on the gendarmerie (SETA 2015). As Taştekin reported in *Al-Monitor* (2015), Erdoğan, who was at the time attending a ceremony in Sakarya, “gave out real-time information as the clash was in progress,” saying, “25 terrorists are now clashing with our soldiers;” and “the government quickly blamed the HDP... [to] exploit the incident for its campaign.” Demirtaş gave a different account of the incident, saying, “there was no clash there but a pre-planned, staged operation [of the government].” He even argued that the wounded soldiers were left in the clash field since “the goal was to come out with as many coffins as possible... [to help] the AKP increase its votes” (Taştekin 2015). And then, the tension escalated on June 5, 2015, two days before the elections, with the bomb attack of ISIS in Diyarbakır in the course of an electoral rally of the pro-Kurdish HDP, killing 5 people and wounding almost 400 people, an attack HDP leader Demirtaş called an attempt to stop their walk to power.

5.8.1 The Resolution Process Between June 7 and November 1, 2015

However, the Resolution process completely collapsed in the aftermath of the June 7 elections with the harsh statements of the KCK leaders targeting the AKP and President Erdoğan targeting the HDP, the call of the KCK leaders for a “revolutionary people’s war,” the bloody terror attacks of ISIS and PKK, and the security operations of the army. And the increasing terror particularly after the elections brought Erdoğan even more closer to the nationalist/securitist MHP line.

If we take a closer look at the process, first of all, election results, which ended the 13-year single-party rule of the AKP not only dictated the formation of a coalition government but also posed uncertainty for the future of the Resolution process. On one hand, on July 14, a day before Selahattin Demirtaş, the co-chair of the HDP (the People’s Democratic Party) met with the AKP leader Davutoğlu to discuss coalition partnership prospects, Demirtaş called the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (the PKK) to disarm and cease the armed conflict against Turkey. And yet, in the same speech, he stressed that his call would not suffice for the PKK to drop its arms. And he added that only Öcalan’s call would work and that Öcalan had already explained the conditions under which he would make that call. He said, “this was what the Dolmabahçe Agreement was for” (Sözcü Jul. 14, 2015). And yet, the KCK announced at the time that neither Öcalan nor Demirtaş was entitled to make such a decision on behalf of the KCK/PKK; and once again laid down the release of Öcalan as a condition for them to continue the Resolution Process (DW Jun. 18, 2021). Undoubtedly, this statement meant rendering the status of Öcalan in the PKK dysfunctional. Then, with regard to the PYD’s attempt to establish a state in the North of Syria and Turkey’s military intervention prospects, Erdoğan said, “we will never allow the establishment of a state in northern Syria. Whatever the cost is, we will prevent it. We will do our part to ensure peace in Syria and Iraq as soon as possible” (Cumhuriyet Jun. 26, 2015). Then came the KCK leader Karayılan’s threat, with the following words: “let me be clear: if they intervene in Rojava, we will interfere with them. Then all of Turkey will turn into a battlefield” (Vatan Jun. 29, 2015). What followed was the KCK’s announcement that they ended the ceasefire, the initiation of which had been announced in Newroz in 2013, after blaming the AKP was taking steps that meant waging war against the Kurdish people; among such steps were constant arrests, and construction of dams and headquarters for military purposes (T24 Jul. 11, 2015). A few days later, Karayılan gave an interview, in which he accused Erdoğan of abolishing the peace process, arguing that Erdoğan’s explanations such as “there is no such thing as a Kurdish problem,” “I do not agree with the monitoring committee,” “the declaration

in Dolmabahçe palace is also not correct. There is no table or anything,” all meant ignoring everything done, and brought an end to the resolution process. On the other hand, while just a few days ago Karayılan announced they had decided to end the ceasefire because of the AKP’s war against the Kurds, in this interview, he said that they would determine their position “according to the color of the government to be formed” because, according to him, Erdoğan wanted a “hard-line election government.” And he added, “there is a process going on in the Middle East, there are developments in Kurdistan. We cannot have a thing to wait.” (Sputnik Türkiye Jul. 14, 2015). As noted in a SETA (2015) report, in response to this attitude of the KCK leader, PM Davutoğlu declared that “formations that threaten the assembly and the political will to be formed will not be respected.”

Only one day after Karayılan, KCK co-chair Bese Hozat wrote an article in which she called the new stage, “revolutionary people’s war,” blaming the AKP for “waging an all-out war, against which a serious opposition from democratic politics has not developed.” In this article, she also criticized the HDP for wasting time in the aftermath of elections, not making strong democratic moves right after the elections (Özgür Gündem Jul. 15, 2015). Apparently, they found the attitude of the HDP very passive, considering that the party won 13,1% of the vote, which translated into the 80 seats in the parliament, and blocked the AKP from establishing an outright government. Only two days later, on July 17, Erdoğan blamed the HDP for having an organic relationship with the PKK and for being “the [PKK’s] extension in parliament.” Erdoğan also said, he did not recognize anymore the “Dolmabahçe Agreement,” adding, “there cannot be an agreement with a political party that is being supported by a terrorist organization” (Hurriyet Daily News Jul. 19, 2015). Thus, “the Resolution Process” collapsed.

Then, KCK’s decision to end the ceasefire reached an irreversible point, after a suicide attack, which took place while the Socialist Youth Associations Federation (SGDF), which was planning to move to Kobani, was making a press statement, on July 20, in Suruç. For the attack ISIS claimed responsibility, and 33 people died. After the attack, in response to Davutoğlu’s call for a joint declaration against terrorism by the four parties, Demirtaş said, “do not make us partners in your crimes,” reminding the Dolmabahçe Agreement, which was shelved after President Erdoğan’s objection. Demirtaş said, “there is no point in making a call for a new declaration when you have not been able to stand up for the Dolmabahçe declaration” (Diken Jul. 21, 2015).

What further escalated the events was the killing of two police officers in their sleep in Şanlıurfa Cenylanpınar, on July 22, by the PKK, which claimed responsibility

for the attack, claiming that these police officers were collaborating with the ISIS, and that their attack was a retaliation to the Suruç massacre (Cumhuriyet Jul. 22, 2015). That was followed by the attacks of the PKK over military and police targets in the region, and the Turkish military re-started security operations and airstrikes against the PKK forces first time after a 3-year break as well. According to the SETA (2015, 83) report, the tension further escalated as the KCK Executive Council member Duran Kalkan called for the declaration of autonomy on July 27, and the HDP did not hesitate to use its own political organization in service of the KCK; in this regard, in two provincial centers, Şırnak and Hakkari, and 13 districts, autonomy was declared. As it is stressed in the SETA (2015, 84) report, in the regions where local self-governance declarations were made, trenches were dugged to prevent state security forces from entering these regions, and the HDP defended these self-governance declarations in its party programs. It was followed by the remarks of President Erdoğan that they would never let the formation of another state within Turkey's borders, a statement Erdoğan had also made on Twitter as early as June 27, 2015, as well, with remarks, "I am addressing the whole world. At any cost, we will not let the establishment of a state in the north of Syria, in the south of Turkey" (DW Jun. 18, 2015).

The increasing tension in politics, accompanied by PKK attacks and military operations, then also turned into a democracy crisis. First, MHP leader Bahçeli, in a written statement, called the chief public prosecutor's office of the Supreme Court of Appeal "to run the law," and shut down the HDP, calling the HDP deputies, "the Qandil politicians" (Cumhuriyet Jul. 26, 2015). Then, on July 27, one week after the Suruç attack, the Prime Ministry Coordination Center declared that a total of 1050 people deemed to be related to terrorist organizations were detained in the operations carried out, and that the judicial process was continuing for them (Sözcü Jul. 27, 2015). And as AA (Aug. 8, 2015) reported, between July 7 and August 8, number of detainees from ISIS, DHKPC, and most of the detainees being members of the PKK, reached 1600; and 314 of them were arrested. And number of martyrs already reached 24. And two days after Bahçeli, Erdoğan declared that he was against the shutdown of the party, but he was not against the lifting of the parliamentary immunity, adding, "are you acting/working together with a terrorist organization, you will pay for it, and it should be paid for." He also added that it was not possible to continue the Resolution Process with those who plotted against national unity and brotherhood in the country (TCCB Jul. 28, 2015). Unlike Erdoğan, Atalay, who was then an AKP deputy chairman, and who has taken an active role in the peace process, said, "the Resolution process cannot be said to be over, but the process has stopped," also arguing that "the HDP could not distance itself

from violence and terrorism.” Atalay, again, stressed that the Resolution Process would continue only if the terrorist elements left the country and laid down their arms (Diken Jul. 28, 2015).

As for the HDP side, Demirtaş kept dumping on the AKP and President Erdoğan, arguing that the AKP was aiming to rise to power alone by pumping the fear “if we fall from power, Turkey will experience great chaos.” And he claimed, cross-border operations and “the so-called operations against ISIS,” were all part of the plan for the government to save itself. “These are not government policies. It is a palace policy,” he said, implying that the President was guiding this process (Cumhuriyet Jul. 27, 2015). He told that all the state institutions as well as the government “employees” were in service of Erdoğan, with the following words:

“The palace has now established a separate state for itself. There is an intelligence agency, affiliated with it. It has its own finances, it has law enforcement. It has a judicial, media and social media power attached to it. While taking and implementing all these decisions, the temporary PM and the government are the only officials within the state who are responsible for implementing these decisions taken by the state” (Cumhuriyet Jul. 27, 2015).

On July 30, in an interview with *Reuters*, Demirtaş argued that the current situation should not be interpreted as the end of the Resolution process, saying that both sides must take their hands off the triggers for negotiations to resume. He said in this interview, “our only crime is to pass the threshold by winning 13% of the votes;” and that Erdoğan was preparing to lead the country to a re-election. He said that the AKP was not actually fighting against ISIS, their main aim was to prevent the Kurdish formation in Syria, and that the police operations only targeted the left and the Kurdish opposition (Diken Jul. 30, 2015). Demirtaş, on August 2, again rejecting making a one-sided call to the PKK, called both the state and the PKK to take their hands off the trigger (BBC Türkçe Aug. 2, 2015).

On August 4, after the CHP and HDP delegations met, in his press statement CHP deputy Engin Altay praised the efforts of HDP leader Demirtaş, saying, “there is no one who did not hear his cry in Turkey.” On the other hand, he also argued that “the PKK must definitely lay down its weapons as soon as possible; [and that] peace is not desired with weapons in hand” (Cumhuriyet Aug. 4, 2015). And yet, also the CHP deputies, including Deputy Chairman Sezgin Tanrıku and Veli Ağbaba, who conducted investigations in the region in the aftermath of Suroç, published an evaluation report, and cited “weakness in intelligence,” and weak border security, as the main factors that led to the attack. In the report it was stressed that:

“...MIT was not able to fulfill its duty effectively in the Suruç explosion, as in other recent attacks... It has [also] been observed that border security is still neglected to the extent that it is almost non-existent, and the length of the border is cited as the reason. This is not an acceptable situation. This weakness in border security both facilitates the crossing of ISIS on the border and threatens national security to a great extent” (TGRT Haber Jul. 26, 2015).

In this tense environment, some of the names of the *Wise People Committee* also came together in İstanbul, and in the aftermath of the meeting, Ali Bayramoğlu read the joint statement, which demanded that the guns be silenced immediately and that a non-conflict atmosphere should be returned, that the discriminatory and accusatory language, as well as any proposal that will narrow down the democratic and political space, should be avoided, and that a dialogue environment should be created to return to the Resolution efforts (Haberler.com Aug. 1, 2015).

Then, on October 10 came suicide bomb attacks, which killed 102 civilians in Ankara outside the railway station during a peace rally, which demanded the end of the violence between the PKK militants and the Turkish government, and which was also attended by the pro-Kurdish HDP. While PM Davutoğlu called the attack, “cocktail terror,” arguing that it was carried out by ISIS and PKK collaboration (DW Jun. 18, 2021), HDP leader Demirtaş blamed the state for the attack, calling the government, murderers. According to Demirtaş, following the June 7, 2015 elections, Erdoğan adopted a strategy of “attacking the Kurdish movement” to reverse HDP’s success in an early election, and also “did not effectively close the border” to let ISIS militants cross the border (Ignatius 2015).

In addition, in 2016, the PKK, and ISIS attacks continued with the Ataturk Airport attack on June 28, 2016, killing 45 people, a suicide bombing at a wedding in Gaziantep, killing 30 people on August 21, 2016, and twin bombings outside a football stadium in Istanbul, on December 11, 2016, killing 38 people as well.

In summary, as to the June 7-November 1 period in 2015, on one hand, on the part of the HDP and the KCK, there was a claim that Erdoğan was escalating the conflict against the PKK in a bid to gain the electoral support of the nationalists and to discredit the pro-Kurdish HDP, which for the first time was able to broaden its appeal to attract not only Kurdish but also leftist and liberal votes from across the country, and that he chose to harden the rhetoric, sacrificed the peace process to this end. On the other hand, the official AKP rhetoric claimed that the HDP and the KCK/PKK were in an organic relationship, and saw an opportunity for themselves in the region after a political vacuum emerged in Syria. In this regard, as DD noted in our interview, the most important factor that played a role in the

ending of the Resolution Process was the outbreak and the prolongation of the Syrian civil war, which created a political vacuum that led the Kurds in the region to become armed and organized. That is why, he said, “the HDP showed too much interest in the developments in the Syrian border.” He said, the Syrian civil war meant the emergence of new “opportunities” for the Kurdish side who thought that a separate Kurdish state was about to be established in the region, and who never gave up their goal of establishing a separate Kurdish state whatever rights they were given. Then, he added, following the collapse of a two-year ceasefire, they brought too many arms into the country through Cizre, Nusaybin, and engaged in too many terrorist activities in Turkey in the aftermath of the June 7, 2015 elections. In his words, “then, too much terror came to Turkey from Syria.”

As to the June 7-November 1 period in 2015, it is possible to infer from the developments mentioned above that despite the HDP’s winning 13% of the vote and 80 seats in the parliament, the PKK’s resort to violence and the HDP’s resistance to keeping a clear distance against the PKK’s violent attacks, strengthened Erdoğan’s hand in pushing for early elections. And yet, one of the members of the Wise People Committee, which was formed by the government to explain the resolution process to the public, Dogu Ergil, stated in an interview that it was not easy for the HDP to distance itself from the PKK, underlining that the HDP and the pro-Kurdish politics it represented, emerged as a result of the PKK’s armed struggle. Then, in Ergil’s words, “the HDP did not give birth to the PKK. The PKK gave birth to the HDP.” So, in Ergil’s account, Demirtaş put an effort to keep the distance, and he condemned acts of violence, in this respect. Then, he noted, it was necessary to give him an opportunity under the roof of the parliament (DW Jul. 29, 2015).

To DD⁷³, the MHP’s big support to the AKP’s security-based perspective and to the harsh responses given to the terror acts in this period, played a major role in the coalition with the Turkish nationalist-MHP although the coalition was carried out after the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016. As he stated, the coalition with the MHP, which officially started in 2018, meant “a seal on the door” of the Resolution Process. Then, as the state developed its security⁷⁴ reflexes one more time in this

⁷³Interview with a former AKP deputy.

⁷⁴In fact, even before the June 7 elections, Turkey witnessed first signals of the move into a securitist perspective with the approval of the Law on the Amendment of the Police Duties and Decrees, known as the Domestic Security Package, by President Erdoğan on April 4, 2015. A lawyer explained to the Amnesty International that this law meant a transition into “a new/authoritarian order, in which any opinion that the governments do not approve of cannot be easily expressed, and those who take to the streets to protest democratically and peacefully against the decisions of the rulers will face the risk of being detained, tortured and ill-treated, killed, disappeared, and punished with heavy penalties if they survive” (Bianet Apr. 4, 2015). In this respect, she explains some of the articles of this law as follows:

“This law grants the police a search power that goes beyond the limits of the constitution... The police is empowered to take statements from complainants, victims and witnesses in their homes and workplaces. With this regulation, judicial authority is transferred

period, democratization ideals automatically took a back seat.

5.9 Issues of Conflict between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu before the June 7 Elections

There were two well-known facts in the pre-election environment. First, as the decision of the HDP to enter the election as a party also suggested, Demirtaş was confident that it would pass the ten percent threshold, as he also stated on March 30, 2015, (HaberTürk TV Mar. 30, 2015). Secondly, Erdoğan was determined to increase the AKP votes to reach a supermajority in the parliament to install the presidential system. After the FETÖ-initiated crises, the prolongation of the Syrian war and the resulting growing authority vacuum in the south of Turkey, and decreasing vote rate of the AKP, as set forth by pre-election surveys, as well as the fact that the problems deriving from dual-headedness began to arise very quickly between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, led Erdoğan both to prioritize switch to a Presidential system and to slide to a securitist/nationalist line. On the other hand, one of the most memorable things about this pre-election period was, HDP co-chair Demirtaş's statement, "we will not make you President," at the parliamentary group meeting of his party on 2015, March 17.

Erdoğan had already started to voice his desire to become "president" in election rallies held under the name of collective opening ceremonies. Then, although in 2014, he had renounced his AKP chairmanship to ascend to the presidency, which required its holder to display neutrality, Erdoğan continued to address the crowds at rallies across Turkey under severe criticisms that he was not maintaining his impartiality and demanded 400 seats in the parliament to switch to a presidential

to law enforcement. During the investigation and trial processes, the guarantees (such as torture, ill-treatment, . . . the right to benefit from the assistance of a lawyer) regarding taking statements by the Criminal Procedure Code (CMK) are abolished and the person is left unprotected. . . [In another article,] the police and the gendarmerie are given the opportunity to wiretap up to 48 hours without a judicial decision by the order of the Chief of Police or the head of the intelligence department. Only at the end of this period, after the wiretapping has already been done, the privacy of the person has been interfered with, and the right to privacy of the communication has been violated, will this wiretapping decision be submitted to the judge's approval. The judge's approval will only ensure the legalization of the wiretaps, rather than carrying a real judicial guarantee. . . [With this bill, also] the scope of weapons is extended to include such flammable materials as slingshots, molotov cocktails and fireworks, and the police are authorized to use weapons against them. One goal here is, to ensure impunity in the ongoing cases regarding children and youth killed by the police in social events. . . With this bill, the concept of 'preventive detention' is introduced, and the duty of the prosecutor is completely transferred to the law enforcement. . . [Besides,] the authority to investigate crime, which is a judicial power, and hence, belongs to the prosecutors, is transferred to governors and district governors. [Then, she asks,] can you imagine a country where the governors and district governors appointed by the government and the law enforcement officers appointed by them are both accusing and investigating?" (Bianet Apr. 4, 2015)"

system, for him to carry out the presidency and the AKP chairmanship at the same time. As he stressed back then, Turkey needed “a presidential system, strengthened by [Turkish] culture.” He claimed a presidential system with a strong parliament would prevent the system from reaching a gridlock (TCCB Mar. 21, 2015).

Only two weeks before the June 7 elections, SETA organized a panel on presidential systems, to which Erdoğan attended as the keynote speaker and gave a detailed account of why he insisted on a presidential system for Turkey. In this regard, he stressed that the main reason for his insistence was that the presidential system was conducive to “a climate of stability and trust,” adding, “because if it is to ease the work, this system eases the work.” He also stressed that this system would pave the way neither to “the coalition days of the 1970s and 1990s,” nor “the national chief practices of the 1940s.” And yet, he also argued that the presidential system to be instituted in Turkey should be developed on the basis of Turkey’s own customs and traditions, describing the one-to-one adaptation or copy-paste Westernization practices adopted since the late Ottoman as well as in the single-party period as “a deviation from the historical line,” which goes back to the Seljukis and the Ottomans. Then, in his account, the Seljukis and the Ottomans were not only “pioneers of change and transformational/reformist steps,” but also were able to “borrow all the civilizational values in their geographies and present them to the service of the their people in a new synthesis.” He said, “unfortunately, we could not develop our own methods, as we were always looking for solutions in other addresses in the face of the problems we encountered” (TCCB May 25, 2015). Thus, Erdoğan continued to employ a “civilization politics” rhetoric, based on the Seljuki and Ottoman past, in the context of presidential system debates. On the other hand, Davutoğlu, who was the pioneer of the civilization perspective, employed more and more a pluralist democracy and human-rights discourse, as we have already seen in the election manifesto where the importance of the Resolution process was explained. Differentiation of their rhetoric and the emergence issues of conflict both before and after the elections show that the political goals and priorities of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu started to differ before the elections.

As Kalkan (2020) stressed, although switch to a presidential system was the primary focus of Erdoğan at rallies, “then the AKP chairman and the PM, Davutoğlu, hardly touched on this issue in his election rallies; and in the programs he attended, he dismissed the questions about the presidential system in a hesitant manner and with ambiguous expressions.” For instance, in a TV program, Davutoğlu stressed that the current system brought with it a conflict of authority, and there was a need to switch either to a pure parliamentary or a presidential system. Then, he added that considering that election of the President by the people had taken place, it

would be correct to change the system towards the presidential system (HaberTürk Mar 27, 2015). On the other hand, the presidential system issue was covered only in 3 pages of the election manifesto, which consisted of 356 pages. In other words, not only was the issue almost overlooked by the AKP chairman and the PM, Davutoğlu, it was almost ignored in the election manifesto published by the AKP for the June 7 elections as well. This perspective of Davutoğlu became apparent in the aftermath of the elections since Davutoğlu declared in a TV program, on June 10, that people did not authorize them through their votes to institute a presidential system, and that now it was their responsibility to operate the existing system (TRT Haber Jun. 10, 2015).

We can, easily, argue that towards the June 7 elections, Turkish public witnessed many conflicts/differences of opinion between the President and the PM/government, apart from the conflict about the Resolution process, arising from dual-headedness and differentiation of their priorities. From January 2015 till the end of March 2015, Erdoğan's public intervention in the government had taken place so repeatedly that in the press problems, Erdoğanization and personalization of rule analyses had already begun to be made by the end of March. Bayramoğlu (2015) used the expression, "the President's politics against his own party," to explain the frequently witnessed tensions that derived from dual-headedness, which surfaced with reciprocal statements, although these kinds of crises were dealt with in the meetings between PM Davutoğlu and President Erdoğan before. Bayramoğlu wrote,

"This situation is a result of the relocations within the dominant political party and the differentiation of the scope of execution. As a matter of fact, the popular election of Erdoğan, who announced that he will stay in the political scene regardless of the conditions, and the emergence of the existence of "dual rulership-execution field, one of which is de facto and the other constitutional," is a novel and difficult situation to administer. More importantly, Erdoğan's patriarchal, political style, his understanding of a "leader" who represents this, and the fact that in the existing scale leadership greatly outweighs institutionalism, all play an important role within this framework" (2015).

Thus, the disagreement between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, Erdoğan's interventions in the government emerged not only in the Resolution process but also in other areas before the elections. As mentioned above, as early as October 2014, there was a disagreement between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu over the trial of four former ministers, accused of corruption in the Supreme Court; and the disagreement culminated towards the end of the year with the news that Davutoğlu had spoken to four ministers, and asked them to return to politics after being tried and cleared by the

Supreme Court (Görmüş 2021). As Zeyrek (2015), a columnist in daily *Hürriyet*, reported then, according to the information revealed after the decision vote of the “investigation commission” established in the parliament following the allegations of corruption and bribery regarding four AKP ministers after the 17/25 December 2013 operations, the AKP members of the commission wanted to send four ministers to the constitutional court; and yet, the members changed their mind after Erdoğan stepped in upon the demand of these ministers. Then, in the vote held in the parliament on January 20, 2015, the sending of the ministers to the Supreme Council was also rejected by the votes of the AKP members. As Görmüş (2021) stated, until the headline “chaos is aimed with the trap of the Supreme Court” appeared in daily Sabah (Jan. 3, 2015), the pro-government media mistook Davutoğlu’s demand from the four ministers as Erdoğan’s demand; and they followed the news with the hope that this would lift the stigma on the party. Then, only after the Sabah newspaper made this headline, Erdoğan’s views and the disagreement between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu became publicly known, as Erdoğan was clearly the owner of the opinion in the headline. Under the headline, the news continued as follows:

“Chaos is aimed with the trap of the Supreme Court/ The parallel state structure and its collaborators are now trying to achieve their goal of dragging Turkey into chaos, which they failed to achieve with the 17-25 December coups, through the trap of the Supreme Court. It turned out that a dirty move was behind the seemingly innocent demand for the four former ministers to be tried in the Supreme Court. The parallel state structure is trying to put into effect a new conspiracy plan through the Supreme Court” (Sabah Jan. 3, 2015).

In fact, to Görmüş (2021), Erdoğan, from the very beginning of the premiership period of Davutoğlu, tried to manage Davutoğlu in a series of political traps. Then, to Görmüş, in every major issue, Erdoğan first let Davutoğlu take a certain path, and then, led him to step back from his move, just each time to give him the lesson that “he should consult with Erdoğan before taking any important steps.” Another such initiative of Davutoğlu, also blocked by Erdoğan, was the draft “Package for Transparency in Public Administration.” As Görmüş (2021) stated, this package was intended to balance the negativity caused by the Supreme Court issue in the minds; and that is why, it was brought to the public attention on February 6, 2015, with a special presentation, during which Davutoğlu promised that it would be adopted before the elections. One of the most remarkable items in the package was that asset declaration to the parliament speaker’s office was made mandatory for “deputy parliamentary group chairs, executives at the headquarters of political parties, provincial and district-level political party executives and executives of radio and television channels that broadcast to national, regional or local areas; the

president and the members of the top courts, as well as the heads of chambers of these courts” (Hurriyet Daily News Feb. 6, 2015). Besides, this declaration was required to be renewed every 2 years. Furthermore, the package stipulated that the rent that would arise from value increases in the development plans would be transferred to the municipalities and ministries for use in urban transformation. And also, the package stipulated that the public servants who made a notification about their superiors would be temporarily assigned to other units; and the superior of the public official who made the report would not be able to make an assessment about him (Hurriyet Jan. 14, 2015). Only two weeks after the package was disclosed by Davutoğlu, it was reported that the passage of the package was postponed until after the June elections after the intervention of President Erdoğan. Although then trade minister Canikli explained in a TV interview that its implementation was postponed on the grounds that there was no sufficient time for the passage of the package before the parliament went on recess prior to the elections, it was reported in media outlets that only one day after Davutoğlu’s press conference, Erdoğan held a private meeting in the absence of PM Davutoğlu, and that, in this meeting, he harshly criticized the package, reportedly saying he did not find “the timing and the content correct” (Hurriyet Daily News Feb. 6, 2015).

In addition, a conflict occurred between Davutoğlu and Erdoğan regarding Hakan Fidan’s candidacy in the June 7 elections. When answering a question regarding MİT Undersecretary Hakan Fidan’s resignation to stand in as a deputy in the June 7 elections, Erdoğan stated that he did not have a favorable opinion of Fidan’s candidacy. And Fidan had to give up his candidacy and return to his post (BBC News Türkçe Feb. 8, 2015).

5.9.1 The Main Issue of Disagreement between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu after the June 7 Elections: Should a Coalition Be Formed or Not?

And then, after the June 7 elections, coalition-building has emerged as the most important issue of conflict between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu as the election results dictated the formation of a coalition-government since the AKP’s support dropped from 50% to 41% and the party lost its parliamentary majority, while the nationalist MHP increased its vote share from 13% to 16%, the main opposition center-left CHP won 25% of the vote, and the pro-Kurdish HDP entered the parliament by broadening its appeal and winning 13% of the vote through a Kurdish-leftist-liberal alliance. As Çağaptay (2015) also noted, this picture, in which no party obtained the majority, pointed either to a minority government or to a coalition government,

the establishment of which required the AKP to find only one partner while other parties required to find at least two partners to make up the majority. As he put it, although it was possible to identify many coalition alternatives in theory, since both the pro-Kurdish HDP and the Turkish-nationalist MHP ruled out a coalition with the AKP, and the MHP also ruled out a coalition with the HDP, the options, in practice, quickly narrowed down.

As it was stated in post-election analyses, HDP leaders not only declared since the beginning of their electoral campaign that they would not cooperate with the AKP but also in the aftermath of the elections they confirmed their attitude, arguing, “there is no change in our decision because of [the AKP’s] rhetoric and attitude towards our party and our voters.” On the other hand, MHP leader Bahçeli declared the day after the elections that its party would not join a coalition with the AKP, adding, “the MHP is ready to undertake the main opposition position.” Besides, analysts wrote that Bahçeli’s conditions such as the reopening of the 17/25 December investigation files, the assurance that the president would not interfere in the government, and the resolution process happened to be other obstacles to the AKP-MHP coalition then. And finally, the prospect of a broad-based coalition between the AKP and the CHP seemed particularly attractive to business circles, but the CHP’s demands for the AKP to be free of Erdoğan’s influence, the government’s commitment to fighting corruption, and the strengthening of the parliamentary system proved to be obstacles to this coalition as well (BBC News Türkçe Jun. 8, 2015).

In this atmosphere, only 3 days after the elections, in a TV program, Davutoğlu opened the door to coalitions with the following words:

“We said the coalition is not good, we conveyed it to the public. But the people said, ‘Okay, you say that, but my preference is a coalition.’ Now, we will not initiate a discussion again saying ‘Your choice is wrong.’ . . . We will act on the basis of the preferences of the people first. As for the coalition . . . we will try to do the best for our nation, and we will not close the door to anyone” (TRT Haber Jun. 10, 2015).

Unlike Davutoğlu, Erdoğan did not look favorably upon coalition-building, and only two weeks after the elections, even before AKP leader Davutoğlu was assigned the task of establishing the government Erdoğan reminded that the renewal of the elections was an option, saying, “If egos take the lead then this process will be prolonged. At that time, our duty as the President is that if politicians cannot solve this problem, the nation is the only authority to solve it, and we have to do it.” (NTV Jun. 21, 2015). Thus, Erdoğan reminded that the Turkish Constitution authorized the

President to call new elections if no government was established and received a vote of confidence within 45 days after the elections. Thus, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu's different approaches to the coalition issue showed that their political priorities continued to diverge in the aftermath of the elections as well.

On July 9, 2015, Erdoğan assigned Davutoğlu the task of establishing the government. Hence, in the post-election period, characterized by a sharp increase in violence and the revival of security concerns, AKP leader Davutoğlu engaged in coalition-building efforts between July 9 and August 18, the latter date referring to the deadline he was set to formally give up trying to form the next government. After Davutoğlu failed to find a junior coalition partner and handed the mandate back to the President on August 18, President Erdoğan could, theoretically, hand the mandate to form a coalition government to the second party with the most votes in the elections, the CHP, which was supposed to form a working government till the August 23 deadline, under the terms of the constitution. However, on August 21, Erdoğan announced that he would not hand the task to form a new government to another party, called for a snap election, suggesting November 1 as the election date, and called on an interim power-sharing government to lead Turkey to the next election. And then, the date November 1 was confirmed by the head of the Supreme Electoral Council on August 25 as well.

While the MHP and CHP took party decisions to not accept any ministerial position offer, MHP deputy Tugrul Turkes broke ranks with the MHP and accepted the offer. In the interim government, Turkes was made a deputy prime minister, along with three other AKP members. Although the HDP made a party decision to accept any ministerial position offer, 2 deputies, Muslum Dogan and Ali Haydar Konca attended the interim cabinet, while another HDP deputy, Levent Tüzeli, who was offered a ministerial seat in the government declined the offer. Then, on August 27, the new interim government was established.

And yet, the question is, why did Davutoğlu fail in finding a junior coalition partner after the June 7 elections?

As it was reported in *Hurriyet* (Jul. 15, 2015), when Davutoğlu completed the first round of coalition negotiations with all parties represented in the parliament, the CHP emerged as the most likely coalition partner since during the talks with the AKP, both the MHP and the HDP pointed the CHP as the junior coalition partner. Besides, in the talks, the MHP once again confirmed that it did not intend to be part of the coalition. And after the coalition talks with the HDP, in which Davutoğlu called on the HDP to take a stand for the PKK to lay down arms, Davutoğlu made the following announcement:

“Selahattin Demirtaş, in his statement right after the elections, said that they would give neither inside nor outside support to a government that includes the AKP. In the consultations held within the AKP, no support was given to the coalition with the HDP from the grassroots or the party organization” (Hurriyet Jul. 15, 2015).

Furthermore, AKP and CHP forming a contact delegation and Davutoğlu’s comment that the CHP’s 14-item list put on the table, one of the 14-articles of which concerned the President’s retreat to his constitutional limits, were “almost the same as” the AKP’s 10-point coalition principles, also led to such comments that the coalition talks between the AKP and the CHP were “positive.” (Hurriyet Jul. 15, 2015).

And yet, both before and after the first round of coalition talks, different voices from the AKP wing continued to remind the public of the early election option and even its preference by them, following the footsteps of Erdoğan. For instance, even before the start of coalition talks, then Deputy PM Arınç told, “Being in power is worthy of the AKP, not being a coalition partner.” Also assessing Turkey with reference to the financial crisis in Greece, he also added that “we need the AKP rule not to turn to Greece” (Hurriyet Jul. 12, 2015). One day later, then the health minister, Müezzinoğlu, told that after the elections the people saw the inconveniences displayed by other parties (other than the AKP), and that now people reached the conclusion that an early election would be a better option (Posta Jul. 13, 2015). Only a few days later, on July 16, then the finance minister Zeybekci also said, “it would be insulting and unfair to Turkey to think that economy would not hold another election” (Haberler.com Jul. 16, 2015). Besides, when the option of coalition with the CHP was still on the table, on July 17, Davutoğlu also said in his address to the party members, “if the government is not formed, the AKP is ready to recourse to the national will” (Diken Jul. 17, 2015). And finally, on July 31, came once more a reminder from Erdoğan that the election option was on the table with the following statement: “A minority government is quite possible, provided that it leads to elections” (Diken Jul. 31, 2015).

CHP and AKP delegations came together a second time on August 10, and a third time on August 13. And yet, after the meeting, Davutoğlu declared, “the recourse to national will has become the only possibility,” arguing, “there has been a conviction that there is no ground to realize a coalition partnership” (Sabah Aug. 14, 2015). Davutoğlu also met with MHP leader Bahçeli, on August 17, for coalition talks, and yet, he declared after the meeting that the MHP leader, directly, gave a negative response in line with the four conditions they laid down. These conditions of the MHP involved complete abandonment of the Resolution Process, protection of the first four articles of the Constitution, addressing December 17/25 corruption

allegations, and retreating the President to his constitutional limits (DW Aug. 17, 2015).

On the other hand, even before the MHP and AKP delegations came together to assess the coalition prospects, President Erdoğan started to address the public in election rallies, starting from his hometown Rize on August 15. In this rally, not only did he sharpen his criticisms of the HDP a few tones compared to before the June 7 elections, accusing the HDP of deriving its from the PKK, and asking the public to teach them a lesson, but also he asked for support in his combat with the “parallel structure.” Also, he responded to the peoples’ chants of “we want an election,” saying, “whatever you say will happen” (Cnntürk Aug. 15, 2015). As mentioned above, Davutoğlu returned the mandate to form a government to President Erdoğan. And Turkey once again found itself in an election environment, since Erdoğan did not give the task to CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu despite the fact that the 45-day period for the formation of a government had not expired yet.

As FF⁷⁵ noted in our interview, Davutoğlu was criticized a lot in the party for his willingness to enter into a coalition although he was also aware of Erdoğan’s intention, and that these coalition talks were held just to give the impression that they worked hard to make a coalition and that they had to hold snap elections compulsorily. He explained the reaction to Davutoğlu from within the party as follows:

“The coalition talks were conducted just to create legitimacy for holding snap elections, i.e. just to show the electorate that there was no way out but to hold snap elections. Ahmet Bey (Davutoğlu) started to face attacks from within the party for wanting a coalition. He also knew that the talks process was being carried out to show that it would produce no result. But there were those who couldn’t even stand these talks with the concern, what if the coalition accidentally takes hold? But I personally supported him at that time because at least the country would stay in a reasonable place.”

Account of BB⁷⁶, a close witness of the coalition talks, confirm this claim that coalition talks were not held with the intention of forming a coalition. In this respect, he explained that when they saw that the election results pointed to a coalition, they started to conduct field research and in-depth interviews in more than 20 cities to see if they would win if they called early elections. He argued that in one week after the elections, they saw that if they called snap elections they

⁷⁵Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁷⁶Interview with a former AKP deputy.

would come to power in a single-party government. In his own words,

“On Sunday it became clear that a coalition would be needed, and on Monday the first thing we did was to start field research, [and conduct] in-depth interviews in 24 cities with at least 1000-1100 people in each city and 5.000-10.000 people in large cities. So at the end of the first week, we had some pretty solid information. So we took our job seriously. On the 8th or the 9th, we had a photograph of where this thing would go. We extended the [coalition] talks to 5 weeks. But we could finish everything in 2 weeks. So a power game was being played there. We didn’t do anything immoral there. We played by the rules. We saw where things would go. We saw that we could come to power. And what we saw came to life.”

JJ also noted that “if the talks had been sincere, negotiated well, and beared real intention to form a coalition, such a coalition would have, most likely, taken place.” To him, if it was achieved, some deep-rooted problems could be solved more easily. And he said, “such an expectation was born in the society, but it did not materialize.” To him, on the part of the AKP the problem was that as a party that ruled the country as a single-party government for a long time, its understanding of “stability” solely comprised “single-handed rule of a political party.” Then, as he⁷⁷ noted, the AKP forgot that “stability,” by definition, also included “the preservation of some basic principles and values.” He said, “we failed to realize that sometimes the greatest instability occurs through the destruction of certain principles and values during (or by) the single-handed rule of a political party.”

Furthermore, as Sever (Hürriyet Jun. 16, 2015) said in an interview, the issue of whether to form a coalition or not was also an area of disagreement between former President Gül and then President Erdoğan. As Sever noted, Abdullah Gül called both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu to encourage them to be part of a coalition. This statement of Sever is also confirmed by an interviewee, GG⁷⁸.

There is almost a consensus among the former AKP deputies/ministers I interviewed that coalition-making was an opportunity that should not be missed to prevent Turkey from moving away from democracy. For instance, FF⁷⁹ noted that he was in favor of a coalition after June 7, 2015 elections since a coalition would be a much more balanced, reasonable, to-the-benefit-of-all-segments-of-society solution. GG⁸⁰

⁷⁷To this former minister, the CHP, as a party whose past was characterized by intense opposition to the AKP, was also not ready for such a coalition, though.

⁷⁸Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁷⁹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁸⁰Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

also told the following would occur if the AKP-CHP coalition was formed:

“Turkey would, first, get rid of this polarization environment. The opposition would have to respect the president. The President would also have to embrace everyone. And they would be together on Turkey’s national agenda. And those accusations against each other, and polarization wouldn’t emerge. The government could deal with Turkey’s issues.”

5.10 The AKP Congress on September 12, 2015: Erdoğan’s Increasing His Power in the Party

Although newspapers reported on October 3, 2015, that “the AKP gave its electoral [campaign] start [for the November 1 elections] in Germany” (DW Oct. 3, 2015), Erdoğan had already started to give electoral messages at martyrs’ funerals, which was interpreted by some media outlets as Erdoğan’s holding electoral rallies at martyrs’ funerals (Cumhuriyet Aug. 17, 2015). In one of those martyr funerals, Erdoğan, first, praised the rank of martyrdom, and then, repeated his slogan, “one nation, one state, one homeland, and one flag,” promising, “we will never let those who would like to divide our nation and homeland.” (TCCB Aug. 16, 2015). Thus, the slogan of the resolution process was now employed by Erdoğan with promises “to fight till the end” (Cumhuriyet Aug. 23, 2015). Thus, Erdoğan’s slide towards a nationalist/securist line, with some Islamist elements in it, was reflected in electoral messages.

The shift to a nationalist line manifested itself in the symbols used at election rallies as well. Erdoğan had given rally speeches with the Kurdish Qur’an in his hand in Kurdish-populated cities, Batman, Diyarbakır, Siirt, and Mardin, in order to gain the sympathy of the Kurdish electorate prior to the June 7 elections, and this attitude was severely criticized by the opposition parties, CHP and HDP. While CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu had called it “an abuse,” HDP leader Demirtaş appealed to the High Election Board (YSK) on the grounds that the President violated the principle of impartiality, also adding in the petition, “The Quran, which is one of the religious symbols, is used as a propaganda tool by being shown it to the masses” (BBC News Türkçe May 6, 2015). As for the rallies held before the November 1 elections, the Turkish flag turned out to be the only symbol employed by the AKP (DW Oct. 4, 2015). It was reported that in the AKP congress, on September 12, in which Davutoğlu was re-elected as the chairman of the party, there were

more Turkish flags than the party banners (T24 Sep. 12, 2015). With the AKP's shift towards nationalism, the slogan of "domestic and national" also entered the AKP discourse, and started to be used in rallies along with the "one nation, one flag, one homeland, one state," and "fight till the end" slogans. In this respect, on September 20, 2015, at the "One Voice Against Terrorism" rally, Erdoğan told the crowd, "I want you to send 550 local and national deputies who will work for the country with their bodies and hearts, regardless of their party." At the same rally, Davutoğlu asked the crowd to vote "the PKK" out of the parliament in the elections and give the power single-handedly to the AKP, which he defined as "the symbol of brotherhood" between the Turks and the Kurds (Al-Jazeera Turk Sep. 20, 2015).

To FF⁸¹, another difference of the campaign period of the November elections from the June elections was that although Erdoğan had campaigned for the AKP in the June elections, in violation of the President's non-partisan status under the law, he stepped back a little in the campaign period of the November elections, since one of the most important reasons for the AKP's failure in the June elections was that Erdoğan was at the forefront of the campaign period despite being the President of the Republic. However, while Erdoğan stepped a little back in the campaign period prior to the November 1 elections, he further increased his power within the party in this period by leaving his mark on the AKP congress on September 12, 2015. Thus, the differences of opinion with Davutoğlu, the divergence of priorities between the two, led Erdoğan to move on by eroding Davutoğlu's power. Moreover, the AKP's experienced figures with a pluralist democratic approach, who had served as a counterweight to Erdoğan, who was already prone to an interventionist and majoritarian democratic approach, were completely excluded from the party's governing bodies at this congress. In M. Akyol's (2015b) words, the party's top figures, who "at times risked clashing with Erdoğan and were seen as 'moderate' by outside observers," were excluded from the MKYK, the party's central decision-making and executive body, and replaced by Erdoğan's "ardent supporters," whom Akyol calls the "hawks wing." As he argued, "although Erdoğan did not attend the congress personally, his traces were all over it, and he even left his mark on the party more powerfully than ever before." Hence, while such senior/moderate names as Abdulkadir Aksu, Bülent Arınç, Beşir Atalay, Mehmet Şimşek, Ali Babacan, Sadullah Ergin, Osman Can, and Hüseyin Çelik were not given a seat in the MKYK, they were replaced by Erdoğan loyalists, overlooking the preferences of Davutoğlu, such as Berat Albayrak, Binali Yıldırım, Burhan Kuzu, Nurettin Canikli, Yalçın Akdoğan, Ravza Kavakçı Kan, Fatma Sayan Kaya, etc. On the other hand, Süleyman Soylu, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Numan Kurtulmuş, Mustafa Şentop, some of the important names in

⁸¹Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

the AKP in the next period, kept their seats in the AKP leadership (T24 Sep. 12, 2015).

While moderate figures were being excluded from the party one by one, those who stayed, were promoted or joined the party prior to November 2015 elections could be defined by only one criterion: “loyalty to Erdoğan and hostility to his foes” (M. Akyol 2015b). In that case, it is not surprising to find that Abdurrahim Boynukalın, the AKP’s then youth branch chief and Istanbul deputy, was unanimously elected to the council tasked with conducting procedures of the congress by the delegates, with the nomination of the party officials, including the PM and Chairman Ahmet Davutoğlu in the AKP congress on September 12. Boynukalın was one of the actors of an attack on daily *Hürriyet* with stones and sticks one week before the congress; and in the speech he delivered in front of the newspaper after the attack, Boynukalın vowed to “make [Erdoğan] president [with extended powers] irrespective of the outcome of the election,” and targeted Erdoğan’s critics, accusing them of supporting the outlawed PKK, also threatening to force them to leave Turkey after the election (Hurriyet Daily News Sep. 12, 2015). Furthermore, in the congress, the following words of Bekir Bozdag, who was elected as the chairman of the Council (Divan), addressing Erdoğan, also told a lot about the following course of the AKP: “your way is our way, your cause is our cause; . . . and our strength lies in our commitment to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.” Also, one important change in this congress was the removal of the rule that imposed a three-term limit on the deputyship with a by-law amendment (T24 Sep. 12, 2015).

As M. Akyol (2015b) also stressed, the presence of a tension between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, was reported in the media outlets a few days before the congress. It was alleged in these media outlets that because Davutoğlu insisted on going to the congress with his own MKYK list, but that Erdoğan opposed to this list; and the disagreement went as far as the possibility of Binali Yıldırım, a close associate of Erdoğan, to run for the presidency at the congress. In this regard, “Erdoğan’s men” collected signatures of 900 delegates on a blank sheet, to ensure that, the delegates in the congress support the chairmanship of Binali Yıldırım, at a signal from Erdoğan, if Davutoğlu continued to resist. And according to media reports, a likely crisis was averted by Davutoğlu’s last-minute step-back and his full acceptance of the MKYK list of Erdoğan. Thus, after former President Abdullah Gül, other moderate figures who “miss the AKP line of the first years of its rule, who do not support Erdoğan’s obsession with a new constitution centered on the presidential system, and who are known to be close to former President Abdullah Gül, who was pushed aside by Erdoğan due to his different and liberal stance” were also pushed aside by Erdoğan (T. Akyol 2015) were also pushed aside by Erdoğan.

With reference to a former minister, T. Akyol (2015) also wrote that “not one of the names that Davutoğlu insisted upon could be included in the list. Certain names that he absolutely declined were all on the list.” Saying that the “new AKP” got much more under Erdoğan’s control than the old AKP, he made the following comparison between the names entered and left the MKYK with the September 12, 2015 congress:

“Out of the ‘outgoings,’ Ali Babacan and Mehmet Şimşek were the names who defended the independence of the Central Bank, economic rationalism, and European norms. While the Central Bank was accused of ‘treason,’ they confronted these attacks and gave the following message to the world of the economy: ‘trust our institutions.’ But the new-comers are the names who ignored the foreign exchange-interest relationship and defended the reduce-the-interest-rate populism. . . [Also], Sadullah Ergin and Osman Can in the field of law [were replaced by] Bekir Bozdağ and Burhan Kuzu. Sadullah Ergin was the architect of the reforms in the field of law that Turkey could take pride in. This was also expressed by Gianni Boquiccio, Chairman of the Venice Commission. Professor Osman Can, on the other hand, was the rapporteur of the Constitutional Court, a lawyer who supported liberal views throughout his career and who defended the EU law. Of the ‘newcomers,’ Bekir Bozdağ is known as the Minister of Justice of the post-December 17 regulations. Burhan Kuzu is a committed supporter of the presidential system. But in Kuzu’s understanding, the president should be ‘strong,’ unlike ‘poor Obama.’”

Until they were excluded from the party decision-making bodies, the outgoing names conflicted with, went against Erdoğan, and fell out of favor with Erdoğan in multiple instances.

As already mentioned above, the reason for the fall out of favour of Babacan and Şimşek was their insistence on the independence of the Central Bank in the face of Erdoğan’s relentless demands for sharper interest-rate cuts on the basis of his theory, “interest is the cause, and inflation is the effect.” As they continued to resist Erdoğan, Erdoğan did not hesitate to harshly criticize both Turkish Central Bank Governor Erdem Başçı and Deputy PM Ali Babacan because of their interest rate policies. For example, on February 25, Erdoğan targeted Başçı, implying he was under foreign influence, with the words, “you are fighting for independence against us, but do you have dependency on other places?” Erdoğan, who has been resorting more and more to conspiracy theories since Gezi Park events, publicly accused Erdem Başçı of “acting upon the instructions of the interest rate lobby” (Duran 2015). And in a few days, according to the media reports, this time Erdoğan targeted Başçı by equating higher interest rates with treason, with the following words: “Selling the land becomes possible by wasting all the efforts through high-

interest rates and bad management.” Erdoğan also targeted Babacan with the words, “I see that they are in the same situation. Now they need to tidy themselves up a little bit.” (Cumhuriyet Mar. 11, 2015). On March 9, 2015, *Reuters* also wrote how Central Bank Governor Başçı had to walk on a tightrope because of the political pressure, and had to try to please both Erdoğan and the markets at the same time. Then, as Mehmet Şimşek and Ali Babacan were excluded from administrative bodies of the party, Yiğit Bulut, one of the advisors of Erdoğan in charge of the economy, happily declared two days after the AKP congress in his column (Bulut 2015), “the 200-year-financial captivity” and “the neo-liberal submissive process” which submitted Turkey to the West (through Western economic institutions apparently), was finally ending by putting into force a new economic paradigm.

As already mentioned, KK⁸² noted in our interview that it was particularly Erdoğan’s fear of the market that kept him from intervening in the management of the economy, and the more his fear diminished, the more he got stronger, the more his interventions increased. To him, once Erdoğan took full control of the party, especially after 2015/2016, he wanted to be the sole decision-maker in all matters. He noted that, Erdoğan showed too much interest in the issue of “interest” from the very beginning probably because he did not understand the concept well. He elaborated on the issue as follows:

“Even in the first years of the AKP rule, he was obsessed with interest. Maybe there would not be so much obsession if he understood the concept of interest... We told him over and over... If interest is *haram*, ... inflation is even more *haram*. Because creation of inflation destroys the wealth, income and contracts of the nation... How can you speak of justice and fairness after printing money and creating inflation? Of course, you may get poorer with exogenous shocks, but not with domestically-engineered policies.”

FF⁸³ referred to Erdoğan’s perception of “tutelage” to explain why he eliminated the experienced/founding cadres of the AKP and increased his interventions over time as his power increased. To him, although over time all state institutions, including the ones against which the AKP once waged a just struggle, became heavily composed of members appointed by the AKP rule, Erdoğan kept perceiving any institutional check on government as a tutelary mechanism on the pretext that the “elected” were superior to the “appointed.” Thus, to him, as Erdoğan increased his power in the party, he started to perceive the founding cadres as tutelage, as impediments before

⁸²Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁸³Interview with a former AKP deputy.

the things he want to do, as well.

5.10.1 Issues Differentiating Arınç and Erdoğan and Leading to the Exclusion of Arınç at the September 12 AKP Congress

Bülent Arınç, has been one of those moderate names, not only excluded from the party, but also, often, warned by the loyalists, widely called “trolls,” of the party not to clash with Erdoğan on any issue. More importantly, since Arınç was one of the three founders of the AKP, along with Erdoğan and Gül, and was regarded as the “second man” in the party after Gül’s ascendance to the presidency, it is important to see the issues he reacted/criticized by the time of AKP Congress on September 12.

To M. Akyol (2016), Arınç’s disagreement with Erdoğan, and, in his words, with “Erdoğanism,” has been a long-awaited development for Turkish politics, since Arınç was already speaking out against the injustices, undemocratic practices during the second term of the AKP rule, a period when there was no internal disagreement within the party; in this regard, when Erdoğan gave full support to the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases, which he later called plot against the army, Arınç even made vocal criticism of the allegations of injustices in these cases, such as long imprisonment decisions for journalists, while not imprisoning the people with strong backing (Vatan Aug. 19, 2010).

As already mentioned above, Gezi Park protests, emerged as another instance in which Arınç publicly disputed Erdoğan, while he was acting as the official substitute of PM Erdoğan, who was then in a foreign visit. We also saw that Erdoğan contradicted Arınç once again over the issue of unmarried male and female students’ sharing the same house, when he called the allegation that Erdoğan instructed the governors to control this situation, “a rubbish” (T24 Nov. 5, 2013). When Arınç was contradicted by Erdoğan over this issue, his words in an interview he gave that “his duty [was] to follow the Prime Minister and reflect his views positively,” and that “the source of the contradiction was not himself,” were important. Küçükşahin (2016) stressed that despite being “one of the AKP’s top three heavyweights” since the establishment of the AKP, each time Arınç was contradicted by Erdoğan upon disputing him on an occasion, or publicly voicing a criticism against an undemocratic practice, he tolerated it, without showing any public reaction. In this context, Arınç’s words, in an interview, “I am not just a minister; I have my own specific weight and this specific weight is different from others,” (BBC News Nov. 8, 2013) emerged as the most significant reaction till that date. Then, on February 2015

came Arınc's statement, "if half of the society likes us, the other half hates us," and his blaming the AKP for the polarization in society. These statements were then responded by a pro-AKP journalist who accused Arınc of disappearing in every crisis, and of whining after the storm subsides (Esayan 2015).

And yet we see that Arınc's reactions have become gradually harsher, as in his reaction to Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Mayor, Melih Gökçek, an Erdoğan loyalist, after Erdoğan claimed that he was not aware of the Dolmabahçe meeting between the AKP and the HDP and that he did not look favorably on it. After Arınc's statement that the resolution process fell under the purview of his government, Erdoğan loyalists initiated a smear campaign against him; and Melih Gökçek, not only called on Arınc to resign, but also claimed that he acted on the instructions of the "parallel state structure" (NTV Mar. 23, 2015). In response, Arınc not only accused Gökçek, in front of cameras, of seeking the votes of the parallel state structure in the local elections, but also accused him of immense corruption saying, Gökçek "sold Ankara parcel by parcel to them" (Al-Jazeera Turk Mar. 23, 2015).

Next, we have seen that prior to the June 7 elections, in an atmosphere Erdoğan and Davutoğlu-government confronted in multiple instances, Arınc criticized Erdoğan for acting like a "strong president, almost like an undeclared presidency," drawing attention to the fact that at the time there was no change in his powers although the presidential election model/process changed. Arınc made two important points in this respect: First, he stressed that even if it could be called a contradiction, that contradiction derived from the constitution, since Erdoğan tried to use the powers that already existed in the Constitution as presidential powers. And the second point he made was that, it was necessary to change the constitution to fix the contradiction. And yet, he also stressed that the presidential system "should not be *Alaturka* (Turkish/Ottoman) style but *Alafranga* (European/Western) style." He added, "in whichever countries these systems are working successfully, we should not disintegrate the system" (Vatan Mar. 27, 2015). These words were important, and could be interpreted as a response to Erdoğan's words, only a few days ago, that Turkey needed "a presidential system, strengthened by Turkish culture" (TCCB Mar. 21, 2015). Thus, Arınc's this West-referential discourse was compatible with the line adopted by the AKP in its program, and in the first years of its rule, as a departure from the West/modernity-rejecting discourse of the National Outlook tradition.

And then, before the AKP congress on September 12, 2015, Arınc, in an interview, cited Erdoğan's tendency to become one-man in the party as the reason behind his reluctance to take place in the administrative bodies in this congress, saying "'we'

spirit is now replaced by ‘me’” (Milliyet Sep. 11, 2015). Thus, Arınç was expressing his longing for the founding values of the AKP, at the core of which took place the common reason principle, and criticizing the one-man rule in the party, which they as the founding cadres had criticized harshly in the National Outlook parties, and into which Arınç thought the AKP under Erdoğan have evolved. This is how Erdoğan excluded him from executive bodies of the party at the time.

5.11 The November 1 Elections, Overthrow of Davutoğlu by Intra-Party Coup, and the End of Representation of Alternative Discourses in the AKP

We have seen that prior to the November 1 elections, although Erdoğan stepped a little back in the campaign period, he further increased his power within the party by filling the governing bodies of the party with his loyalists at the AKP congress on September 12.

Although Davutoğlu was the PM and chairman of the AKP in the early elections, held on November 1, 2015, in which the AKP gained 49.5% of the vote, increased the number of its seats in the parliament to 317 and rose to power single-handedly again, as the political priorities/goals of Davutoğlu and Erdoğan continued to diverge Davutoğlu was ousted from the party chairmanship in May 2016, only few months after the elections, after the collection of signatures of the MKYK members to restrain some of his executive powers in the party. The issues on which they disagreed showed that the main difference in their style of politics in this period was that while Erdoğan was doing politics based on the friend-foe dichotomy, Davutoğlu tried to do politics based on the rule of law principle and with a human-rights focus, i.e., style of politics adopted in the AKP program. In this process, Erdoğan established his dominance in the party.

5.12 Increasing Open Criticisms of the AKP’s Course by Senior Party Figures and the Lynching Campaign Against Them after the November 1 Elections

Parallel to this process, we have also seen that Arınç’s increasing criticisms against domestic and foreign policy of the AKP and the course the AKP has taken, also

put Arınç in the spotlight and exposed him to troll attacks. Furthermore, open support of some of the former AKP ministers to Arınç, exposed the “silent opposition,” presence of which was speculated for a long time within the party. These criticisms, and reactions to them are important to fully understand the AKP’s notion of democracy at the time. In this context, former minister Huseyin Celik’s criticism against the course the AKP has taken was also important. As we will see, as pluralist notion of democracy and intra-party democracy took completely back seat, friends-foe dichotomy and conspirational rhetoric against any criticism became the dominant discourse in the party.

In the post-election process an incident that exposed Arınç to loyalist attacks was a number of concerns he expressed about the domestic and foreign policy issues in a TV program, on January 29, 2016, saying, “many truths remain in the shadows” (Küçükşahin 2016). The points he touched upon involved his statement that to the best of his belief, Dolmabahçe Agreement had taken place within the knowledge of Erdoğan; his criticism of the fight with “the parallel state,” which turned into a witch hunt, with the words, “I want to put on my robe again;” his criticism of smear campaigns organized by social media trolls; his criticism of the lawsuits against Cumhuriyet newspaper Editor-in-Chief Can Dündar and its Ankara representative Erdem Gül, who have been charged with aiding a terror group without being a member, for their news report on MIT trucks; and also his criticism of Erdoğan’s use of foreign policy issues as objects of hostility at public rallies; and finally, his statement that the judges received instructions “from certain places” (CNN Türk Jan. 29, 2016). Immediately after these statements, the social media trolls and pro-AKP media outlets took action this time against him, and accused him of treason. For instance, Hilal Kaplan, a pro-AKP journalist immediately called Arınç, “Lawrence of Manisa” and “political dead” (“siyasi cenaze”) on her Twitter account (Cumhuriyet Jan. 29, 2016).

The next morning after the program, all pro-AKP/pro-Erdoğan media outlets carried Arınç to their headlines, as the target of a lynching operation. In this regard, the newspaper *Güneş* used the headline “Bülo in Robes” (“Cübbeli Bülo”), *Star* claimed “Arınç’s coalition with Dogan media was exposed,” the following day (February 1, 2016) *Star* used the headline “guardian of the FETÖ,” *Akşam* used the headline “talked with the words of the parallel state” (“paralel yapının ağzıyla konuştu”). Furthermore, AKP deputies also joined the lynch operation: Deputy PM Akdoğan called Arınç, “guardian of the FETÖ,” Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports Boynukalın accused Arınç of “turning his back on his companion/mate, to whom he owes all his titles, when his benefit is over,” and AKP deputy Aydın Ünal resembled Arınç to “a candle that goes out when diverts from the path” (T24 Feb.

1, 2016). And finally, Erdoğan, when asked about these statements of Arınc, blamed Arınc for “being dishonest,” without uttering his name, and calling him “that man” (Sözcü Feb. 2, 2016).

And yet, Arınc responded to Erdoğan in a tweet series to stand his ground. Moreover, former ministers Hüseyin Çelik, Suat Kılıç and Sadullah Ergin shared Arınc’s statements on their Twitter accounts in support of him (T24 Feb. 2, 2016), although PM Davutoğlu as well as the rest of the government members kept silent, despite rumors that their silence was due to the fact that they could not afford to join the “traitors” camp overnight against Erdoğan, who had gained an immense power “with a mass of admirers, a huge media empire, and countless followers in all institutions” (M. Akyol 2016). And then, Fahrettin Altun, then the Deputy General Coordinator of SETA, and a columnist in Sabah, targeted Arınc (as well as those ministers) by accusing them of serving “Erdoğan’s enemies” and of taking part in a “political operation” against Erdoğan, with the following words:

“Arınc has made a choice. He took a step with political consequences. Erdoğan’s enemies are collecting materials from many of Arınc’s recent speeches... But the issue is far beyond the possibility of giving hope to Erdoğan’s enemies, particularly to the members of the parallel state structure... The criticisms of Arınc and some of the former resentful ministers who supported him are connected to a broader political operation... They either became tools or intentionally became a part of that operation” (Altun 2016).

Then, this incident also set forth the role played by many young deputies in the party as “bouncers” of Erdoğan, along with social media trolls, in discrediting and dismissing senior names of the party one by one, and hence, in the transformation process of the party from a collective mind/ reason to what Çakır Çakır (2018), a researcher/journalist, called “Erdoğan movement and defined as “[the movement/party] in which, producing politics, developing opinions and policies became monopolized by Erdoğan.” As Çakır argued, since intra-party democracy was the most important ambition of the renovationists who broke away from the National Outlook tradition, when Ömer Çelik, one of the political advisors of Erdoğan in the newly established AKP, had defined the AKP as “Erdoğan movement,” it had drawn too much reaction from within the party. But, he argued, time proved Ömer Çelik right, and the AKP, first turned into “Erdoğan movement,” and then, with the adoption of Turkish-type presidential system, the whole country turned into an “Erdoğan country.” In his words, what generated the AKP was the rebellion against “the tyranny of Erbakan” in the party, and yet, Erdoğan’s domination/tyranny within the movement far exceeded that of Erbakan.

On February 09, 2016, Hüseyin Çelik brought even harsher criticisms to the course the AKP has taken, likening the party to “a sinking ship.” He complained that 10 out of 11 who took part in writing the AKP program in the establishment stage of the party, were excluded from decision-making mechanisms of the party just because of their “objections/criticisms.” Most of them “either left, or were forced to leave the party,” he said. Furthermore, he stressed that according to a foreign journalist, who came up with a list of “top 50 names that come to mind when asked to name within the AKP,” 98% of those names did not take part in the party anymore. “They have been systematically excluded, pushed aside... [Then, he added,] are you going to treat all these people as “traitors,” “as people who betrayed the cause?” Or will we look for trouble somewhere else?” He implied that even a criticism in one issue was sufficient for being subject to such an exclusion, with the following words: “You defend the party and the leader in 100 issues, but in one issue you say, ‘wouldn’t it be better like this?’ and when you say this, someone tries to lynch you... The worst thing is that it is not interfered with.” To him, that sort of lynch occurred to Abdullah Gül, Bülent Arınç, Ali Babacan, as well as other names (Hakan 2016).

Particularly after statements of Arınç and Çelik, in the media, it was speculated that a dissidents’ movement was about to be born out of the AKP. As Küçükşahin (2016) reported then, Gül, who was viewed by many AKP members “as the man who can stop the downturn,” met with Erdoğan upon Erdoğan’s invitation in those days. And in the aftermath of the meeting, Gül came together with Arınç and four former ministers, to whom he “stressed the need to protect the party’s interests and discuss problems internally,” although Gül also shared the concerns of former ministers. And yet, as Küçükşahin (2016) also stressed, although the unrest in the AKP was eased with Gül’s mediation, pro-Erdoğan media outlets maintained their attitude of attacking these former ministers. For instance, they claimed that Arınç and Çelik could be summoned for questioning on the grounds that they were linked to the Gülen community (Akşam Feb. 11, 2016).

5.13 Post-November 1 Elections, Points of Divergence between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu

As we already mentioned, in parallel to this process of increasing open criticisms on the part of senior names of the party to the course the AKP had taken, Davutoğlu and Erdoğan also faced each other on many issues, which culminated in the expulsion of Davutoğlu from the chairmanship of the party.

The first issue of disagreement after the elections arose over the imprisonment of Can Dündar and Erdem Gül on charges of espionage for covering the issue of MIT trucks, since Davutoğlu stated, on November 28, 2015, that he thought that trial without imprisonment would be more correct, considering that detention was an exceptional measure in such cases (T24 Nov. 28, 2015). On the other hand, Erdoğan made very harsh statements on this issue every time. For instance, in a live broadcast on TRT1 on May 31, 2015, he accused these journalists and their newspaper (Cumhuriyet) of being involved in an espionage activity, and intervened in the lawsuit process, saying “[they] will pay a heavy price for it; I won’t leave it like that” (Cumhuriyet May 31, 2015).

Then, in April 2016, another issue of disagreement between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu was over the resolution process. In this regard, on April 3, 2016, Davutoğlu gave the green light to the re-start of the resolution process on the condition that all armed elements of the PKK left the country, after stating that it was the other side, who had tried to use what they considered a “gain” in Syria to destabilize Turkey, with an illusion that they could control the districts close to the Syrian border permanently, who ended the Resolution process (Al-Jazeera Turk Apr. 3, 2016). However, the next day, Erdoğan said, “there is no issue to be resolved or discussed; let this be known,” after stating that they had tried ways other than holding operations, but the PKK had deceived them (Bianet Apr. 4, 2016). Some media outlets called Erdoğan’s reaction to Davutoğlu a “scold” (Cumhuriyet Apr. 6, 2016). To daily *Cumhuriyet*, even before this scold fell off the agenda, another “slap” came from Erdoğan to Davutoğlu after PM Davutoğlu’s words opposing the imprisonment pending trial of academics who signed in January 2016, the “peace declaration” calling for peace talks with Kurdish militants and who were dismissed from their positions and faced criminal investigations, since Erdoğan made a statement saying, “what does it mean that they should be released pending trial? if he is guilty, he will be tried in pre-trial detention” (Cumhuriyet Apr. 6, 2016).

And finally, the incident that broke the ties between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu took place at the MKYK meeting on May 3, 2016, with the AKP MKYK members’ opening to signature of a proposal, depriving Davutoğlu of his authority to appoint local party heads. As it was then reported, the proposal was signed by 47 members, including Davutoğlu and İzmir deputy Binali Yıldırım, Erdoğan’s close associate, who returned to the cabinet after November 1 elections as the Transport Minister, and who had intended to challenge Davutoğlu to become party leader before the September 12 congress (Hurriyet Daily News Apr. 30, 2016). As it was also reported then, the rumor was that Erdoğan made this move on the grounds that Davutoğlu had not taken his recommendations into account when making appointments to

party organizations (Hurriyet Daily News Apr. 30, 2016). Then, on May 4, 2016, Erdoğan's words, "whether you are a headman (muhtar), mayor, minister, prime minister or president, your heart and mind must work to serve the nation," was interpreted as a message to Davutoğlu (Haberler.com Sep. 2, 2019). And only one day later, on May 5, Davutoğlu resigned from the chairmanship of the party, also announcing that he would not run for party-chairman in the extraordinary congress to be convened on May 22 (Haberler.com Sep. 2, 2019).

But one thing was for sure: Davutoğlu was forced to resign. His forceful resignation after what can be called an intra-party coup was considered a turning point in the AKP's authoritarian-turn, by some analysts, and some of the former AKP deputies/ministers I interviewed. For instance, a researcher Kalkan (2020) argued that after this move of Erdoğan "the AKP *de facto* lost its qualification as a political party and turned into an office attached to the presidency." Hatem Ete (2020) also argued that Davutoğlu period represented the last period in which alternative discourses and policies could be negotiated both in the decision-making bodies in the AKP and in the state administration. BB⁸⁴ also noted that after the premiership period of Davutoğlu, state institutions also started to lose their control over their institutional spheres, although the 2017 constitutional amendment happened to be the legal foundation for this interference. He said, up to his resignation, "for instance, the Central Bank was more or less preparing its own program; and the ministries were working with their own agenda."

On the other hand, to some interviewees⁸⁵, Davutoğlu's ascension to the post of prime minister was another factor contributing to the democratic reversal. They argue that it was the "harmony" and "close collaboration" between Davutoğlu and Erdoğan particularly in the foreign policy after the Arab Spring that led Erdoğan to support the rise of Davutoğlu to the premiership. For instance, JJ⁸⁶ noted in our interview that "when the chairman of the party became the president of the country, the party could not undergo a healthy leadership turnover due to his reluctance to give up the leadership." He added that the consideration at the time was that the new leadership of the party would be of a "contractual" kind. Then, he said, since the intention was not to undergo a real transformation but design a contractual leadership system, the party could not materialize a healthy change; and the new

⁸⁴Interview with a former AKP deputy.

⁸⁵On this issue, FF, a former AKP deputy/minister blamed primarily the decision to have the president elected by the people in 2007 and stated that this decision, which was taken with a "narrow perspective", i.e. the election of both the president and the prime minister by the people, created problems that they could not have foreseen at the time.

⁸⁶Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

leadership could stand this system only for two years. To JJ, “the failure in realizing a healthy leadership transfer was a crossroad after which problems in the party started to grow at an increasing rate.” Then, he explained why he called Davutoğlu’s rise to the prime ministership an “unhealthy leadership transfer,” as follows in our face-to-face interview:

“The party came up with new criteria for the election of a new chairman to eliminate all the potential leaders and to narrow down the options as much as possible. According to newly established rules, the chairman shall not be elected from among deputies who were elected for the third time nor from among former deputies, but only from among the newly elected deputies. The newly set criteria narrowed down the options to such a large extent that there was almost only one person left who met the criteria, and that person became the new chairman.

KK⁸⁷ also noted in our interview that it was the “harmony” between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu in the Arab Spring environment that made Erdoğan think that he would easily manage Davutoğlu. And yet, he argued, he later found out that “ambitious” personality of Davutoğlu was not apt for that kind of “micro-management.” Davutoğlu himself, too, in the press conference he held to announce his resignation decision to the public, defined his premiership period as a period of “a strong president and a strong prime minister.” (Sözcü May 5, 2016). As Sever (Hürriyet Jun. 16, 2015) also pointed out in an interview, although Davutoğlu was unanimously elected as the new leader at the AKP congress, Gül was the one who came out ahead of all the other candidates in the internal party polls. However, Gül’s harsh criticism of the Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo’s foreign policy after the Arab Spring, especially the Egypt and Syria policies, led to a rift between Gül and Davutoğlu.

However, it is safe to say that the period in which Erdoğan actually started to put into practice his idea that “I decide everything and anything”, as KK⁸⁸, an interviewee, put it, was the period after Davutoğlu’s resignation. Thus, Davutoğlu’s resignation marked the date when the principle of “collective mind/reason”, which was adopted in the AKP program based on the lessons learned from the experiences of the National Vision parties in order to prevent an evolution towards one-man rule, was completely shelved.

It was, also, particularly after the resignation of Davutoğlu, that the “domestic and national” discourse, with some Islamist elements, emerged as the AKP’s only discourse, without any alternative/rival discourse, although Erdoğan had already

⁸⁷Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁸⁸Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

started to employ a discourse of “domestic and national politics”⁸⁹,” leaving aside the “civilization politics” discourse, with increasing security concerns and/or electoral concerns prior to the November 1 elections.

In summary, we have seen that although “civilization discourse” was the dominant discourse of Davutoğlu-Erdoğan for a while, in this period the AKP also undertook very significant initiatives to promote human rights and consolidate democracy, primary ones being the Democratic Opening/Resolution process and the 2013 democratization package. Thus, although particularly in the post-2011 period Erdoğan frequently resorted to interventionist remarks and remarks that revealed a majoritarian democracy perspective, in accordance with the inherently exclusionist character of the civilization discourse, the presence of highly important above-mentioned initiatives to promote human rights and pluralist democracy suggests that two notions of democracy coexisted and competed in the party in this period. We have also seen two different interpretations of the same initiative in parallel with two different notions of democracy in this period. For instance, although, Aslan (2015), a SETA coordinator, claimed that the democratic opening process, which later continued under the name of the Resolution process, was employed as a means for the AKP’s “hegemonic” walk, interviewees, majority of whom served in the AKP in this period, underlined in our face-to-face interviews that this initiative was guided by a human-rights perspective, and blew the winds of democracy in the country. In this period, along with Gul, who had ascended to the Presidency in 2007, there were multiple experienced names in the party who, represented the human rights perspective and pluralist notion of democracy in the party, and played a balancing role against Erdoğan, and objected to Erdoğan when they deemed necessary.

And then, we have seen that after Erdoğan’s rise to the presidency and Davutoğlu taking the prime minister’s seat after Erdoğan, Davutoğlu more and more put emphasis on the rule of law, the will of the nation and human rights, and tried to undertake initiatives to reinforce these values. Among these initiatives were the trial of four former ministers charged with corruption/bribery allegations and the Package of Transparency in Public Administration, both of which were aborted by Erdoğan, and the coalition-making initiative after the June 7 elections, at a time when Erdoğan insisted on holding snap elections and switching presidential system,

⁸⁹To Ali Aslan (2017, 99-100), a coordinator of SETA, the common feature of the “civilization politics” and “domestic and national politics” discourse is that both aim to transform the society into a whole around a common identity, by putting “conservative and pious social segments” in the center. And he explained the distinguishing feature of the two as follows:

“While the politics of civilization is a move of the AKP to transcend the nation-state structures with globalization and regional developments, domestic and national politics is a move to protect and strengthen the nation-state [as well as to repel attacks against it from inside and outside].”

particularly with increasing security concerns, deriving from, first, FETÖ-initiated crises and then, the prolongation of the war in Syria, creating security problems for Turkey. In this period, Erdoğan who slid more towards a nationalist/security-oriented line, took full control of the party, sidelining all the moderate founding cadres, who were representing the human rights perspective and pluralist notion of democracy in the AKP through first the September 12 AKP congress and then with forceful resignation of Davutoğlu from the AKP chairmanship. Hence, both the collective mind/reason principle, the most important founding principle of the AKP, was shelved and the pluralist notion of democracy ceased to exist even as an alternative/rival notion of democracy in the party. Furthermore, alongside the “domestic and national” discourse, Islamic and conspirational and friends-foe-dichotomy-based rhetoric has taken the front row.

5.14 The July 15 Coup Attempt, AKP-MHP Rapprochement, and Democratic Backsliding in an Emergency Rule Environment

While in the new period, Erdoğan’s AKP shifted to an Islamist/nationalist line, and security-prioritizing reflexes that characterized the state throughout the 1990s one more time took the stage, it is also worth stressing that in the same period, MHP leader Bahçeli also took complete control of his party, eliminating the intra-party opposition, that emerged around such names as Meral Akşener, Koray Aydın, etc., after the June 7 elections as a reaction to Bahçeli’s stance against being a coalition partner then. As Ataklı (2017) noted in his column, the intra-party opposition was disturbed that “Bahçeli took the whole party under his control through “expulsions, dismissals, and threats; and left no room for the opposition to even breathe.” Although these names were able to convene the extraordinary congress on June 19, 2016, after the vote rate of MHP remarkably decreased, and pass the by-law amendment, which paved the way for the removal of Bahçeli from the chairmanship of the party, Bahçeli brought this amendment to the court. And the court decided on the annulment of extraordinary congress held by the MHP as well as all the decisions made in the Congress. In this process, while the MHP entered the process of disintegration, Bahçeli proved his dominance within his party, and gained the power to design common policies with the AKP by proposing to undertake a constitutional amendment in the country to switch to the presidential system (Ataklı 2017).

Thus, while the intra-party opposition in the MHP awaited the court decision for a year, MHP leader Bahçeli re-initiated the presidential system debate in the country

and became the engine of the transition to presidentialism with the constitutional amendment proposal he made at the group meeting of his party, on October 11, 2016. Thus, at a time the security concerns of the AKP, and hence of Erdoğan, peaked due to the FETÖ-initiated coup-attempt that took place on July 15, 2016, Bahçeli argued in this group meeting that it was dangerous for the future of the country in a period characterized by “the Turkish Republic’s fight for survival” that the President was contradicting the law, and that “[he] either should give up the *de facto* presidential system and retreat to the limits set by the laws and the constitution or should explore ways for his *de facto* status [or powers] to acquire a legal status;” and that MHP would support the AKP in this process (NTV Oct. 11, 2016). It was interesting considering that after March 30, 2014, local elections he was the one who had argued in the group meeting of his party, “each citizen can become President, but Recep Tayyip Erdoğan cannot,” attacking Erdoğan with reference to the corruption allegations against him (Cumhuriyet Apr. 8, 2014). As DD⁹⁰ noted in our interview, if the July 15 coup attempt had not occurred, many things would have unfolded differently. He argued that before MHP leader Bahçeli opened the door to the introduction of a presidential system in the country without any prior discussion of it, this issue was being delayed in the AKP. Thus, on July 15, 2016, failed coup-attempt of the FETÖ paved the way to the adoption of a Turkish-type presidential system with the proposal of MHP leader Bahçeli.

FETÖ’s failed coup attempt led to the declaration of a state of emergency, which was declared on July 21, 2016, and extended seven times for three months until its expiry on July 17, 2018, violations of the rule of law through successive decrees, and heightened concerns about accountability, civil liberties, transparency, rule of law and checks on state power. Article 121 of the Constitution allowed during state of emergency, the Council of Ministers, which convened under the chairmanship of the President, to issue decrees having the force of law on matters necessitated by the state of emergency. By decrees, the government was able to suspend civil liberties. As it is stated in the Council of Europe report (Oct. 7, 2016), the government’s interference in human rights in the post-coup period through decrees adopted under state of emergency, resulted from “the exercise of discretionary power,” “unlimited discretionary powers for administrative authorities and the executive in many areas, by derogation from general principles of rule of law and human rights.” Furthermore, as Babacan, then an AKP deputy noted in an interview, even then, all authority over the decree laws belonged to Erdoğan, as ministers were asked at cabinet meetings to sign blank papers, which were later filled in by President Erdoğan. In other words, the signatories had no idea what they were signing. That is, even before the

⁹⁰Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

transition to the presidential system Erdoğan was the only decision-maker in the decrees (Diken Oct. 10, 2021).

As it is stated in a report (BBC News Jul. 17, 2018), in the two years after the July 15 coup attempt, 36 decrees were issued, some of which led to the dismissal of tens of thousands of public workers. And after the constitutional amendment referendum on April 16, 2017, decrees also involved harmonization regulations to make the laws regulating the parliamentary system compatible with the presidential system. Since Article 121 of the Constitution stipulated that decrees be made only “on matters necessitated by the state of emergency,” the main opposition party CHP applied to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of decrees that do not fulfill this condition. However, the AKP argued that the Constitutional Court was not authorized to review the decrees prepared during the state of emergency, as it was written in Article 148 of the Constitution. And in 2016, the Constitutional Court also declared that it did not have the authority to examine the decree laws. Thus, while the government was given the opportunity to issue decrees that contradict the Constitution, it was also decided that the substantive review of the decrees issued during the state of emergency would not be possible for a period of ten years. And yet, upon the reactions both from within the country and from Europe to the fact that decrees were left out of judicial review, the government decided, with a decree-law, to establish a State of Emergency Commission, which was authorized to assess the applications of dismissed public employees or of closed institutions (BBC News Jul. 17, 2018).

Widespread detentions, arrests, and trustee practices as a tool of oppression against the opposition constituted another dimension of the anti-democratic practices of this period. Tens of thousands of people were arrested, and more than 50 thousand people were detained in cases related to the coup attempt (BBC News Jul. 17, 2018). Against 169 thousand people legal action was taken. However, among the arrested in this process took place journalists, politicians, and academics who had nothing to do with the coup attempt or with the FETÖ organization. To Yeneroğlu, a former AKP deputy, expulsion of people from public institutions through decree laws (KHK) has emerged as the most important indicator of “unlawfulness” in Turkey. Acknowledging that expulsion of people with suspicious links to FETÖ was a necessary measure immediately after the 2016 coup attempt for the state to defend itself, he noted that it was necessary to prevent any unjust victimization after the public order was enhanced. In his words, “the problem of [expulsions through] decree law turned into a lasting cruelty.” Then, he argued, between 2016 and 2018, almost 1 million and 1 hundred thousand people were charged with terror organization membership, and became subject to investigations. And these people were

left to “social death,” in the words of Yeneroğlu. “These people were deprived from social assistance; they could not get banks credits; they could not sell their houses to make a living because of the commentaries put on the real estate deeds” Yeneroğlu (2020).

Yeneroğlu (2020) defined Erdoğan’s attitude against dissidents in society as “law of the adversary,” with the goal of tightening the ranks among the electorate; and gave the examples of the cases of Semih Özakca and Nuriye Gülmen, a former teacher and an academic, respectively, who were expelled from their jobs in the aftermath of 2016 coup attempt through a decree-law (KHK) in a state of emergency environment, and started hunger strikes to get their jobs back in this context. He stated that he examined the files of Ozakca and Gülmen, and only found that after the expels started at universities, that they joined protests in support of these people, and that they were expelled from their institutions over the charges of being members of the FETÖ. And to him, in line with “law of the adversary” being implemented, the Ministry of Interior Affairs even started to make up propaganda material to steer the public opinion and convince the society that these people were related to terrorist organizations. In his words, “Is there any investigation going on about these people? No. Is there any judicial process going on? No. Any judicial process in their past? No. This is what we call hostilitization. . . . When you do it, and convince your electorate to what you say, anything you do about those people becomes legitimate/allowable. This is the current situation of our society.” He stressed that suppression/generating a climate of fear, and criminalization/exclusion of people with different world views became the main pillars of the current regime. To Yeneroğlu, in such a climate of fear, everyone became accustomed to having every problem solved by brutal police force and criminal law (Yeneroğlu 2020).

In this regard, the largest group among those arrested was pro-Kurdish HDP deputies and mayors. Relying on anti-terrorism laws, Kurdish organizations were banned, and mayors of the pro-Kurdish HDP were removed by the government. Furthermore, a constitutional amendment to lift lawmakers’ parliamentary immunity, adopted in the parliament on May 20, 2016, and ratified by President Erdoğan on June 8, 2016, facilitated the prosecution of numerous deputies from the pro-Kurdish HDP and the main opposition CHP. In this regard, after the removal of their parliamentary immunities, in November 2016, 15 HDP deputies, including co-leaders Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ were arrested on allegations of supporting terrorism. According to the report by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV) and the Human Rights Association (IHD) published two days before the elections in 2018, between April 28 and June 21, 362 HDP members were detained. Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Interior’s data, as of January

2018, trustees have been appointed to 94 of the 102 HDP municipalities, although no legal action has been taken against them. And finally, according to the data of the Independent Journalism Platform (P24), by 2018, number of journalists and press workers in prison reached 150, which put Turkey to the first place in the rankings based on number of journalists in prison (BBC News Jul. 17, 2018).

5.15 Pre-2017 Referendum Process: Anti-Western/Nationalist and Islamist Rhetoric Synthesis

The post-July 15 period, in which democracy indexes recorded a sharp decline in Turkey's ratings and ranking, and alongside the "domestic and national" discourse with also Islamist elements in it, and conspirational and friends-foe-dichotomy-based rhetoric, this period is also characterized by Turkey's further distancing from Europe and the West in general. Thus, in the referendum process held in the emergency rule environment, we identify anti-Western, populist friend-foe-dichotomy-based, nationalist, and Islamist rhetoric in the AKP campaign, and widespread accusations of increasing pressures and unequal playing field against the "no" camp.

Regarding the course of relations with the EU at that time, Sinan Ülgen, the Chief of the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), stated that in an environment in which the process of full membership to the EU fell off the agenda, the new axis of EU-Turkey relations between Turkey and the EU was making "cooperation in the fields of interest," as exemplified by the refugee agreement in March 2016 which stipulated that Turkey would prevent a refugee influx to the EU in exchange for more financial aid (DW Jun. 23, 2021).

We have seen that Turkey's relations with the West further deteriorated with the Syrian crisis after the Arab Spring. Then, as Balta (2021, 1) rightfully argued, anti-Westernism has been an important component of this period of the AKP foreign policy; and foreign policy populism, which she defined as the foreign policy's turn into "a site for the continuation of domestic politics by other means," became most evident in this phase. Then, although Binali Yıldırım, who was elected as the chairman of the AKP in the extraordinary congress held in May 2016 after the resignation of Davutoğlu and tasked by Erdoğan to establish the government, promised in his first group meeting after becoming the PM to put an end to the overly ambitious foreign policy of Davutoğlu era, promising that Turkey would try to "increase the number of its friends, and reduce the number of enemies," Turkey's relations with the West further deteriorated particularly after the coup attempt since Turkey's pri-

ority in foreign policy was Gülen's extradition from the U.S. and the fight against the activities of the Gülen community abroad, and there was a strong belief on the part of the government that FETÖ members who fled from Turkey were protected in/supported by those countries.

Nedim Şener (2020) presented the following data in *Hürriyet*, justifying the government's belief:

"Hundreds of extradition files have been sent to the countries to which FETÖ/PDY members fled. Seven extradition requests against FETÖ leader Fetullah Gülen have been sent to the US Department of Justice. In the seven extradition requests sent against the FETÖ leader, charges were made on 27 subjects. . . To date, 596 Red Notice requests have been conveyed to the Ministry of Interior Interpol Department. However, Interpol has not accepted a single Red Notice request so far. . . The extradition of 257 FETÖ members was demanded from EU member states. Among EU member states, the highest demand was made to Germany about 77 people, to Greece about 64 people, and to Belgium about 36 people. To date, no one has delivered FETÖ members to Turkey, except for two extradition requests, to which only Romania has responded positively."

Furthermore, there was a strong belief on the part of the government that the coup attempt was supported by the U.S. administration although PM Erdoğan for a long time refrained from directly accusing the U.S. of this support. The claim that the U.S. was behind the coup attempt, was first put forward by the then Minister of Labor and Social Security, Soylu, who on July 16, 2016, argued that for months they had been sending messages to the U.S. about Gülen, and that a few magazines published from there had been operating for a few months before the coup (BBC News Feb. 5, 2021). And yet, till the end of 2018, Erdoğan described the case in which Iranian businessman Zarrab and former Halkbank Deputy General Manager Atilla were on trial in the U.S., "as an extension of the failed coup attempt," accused the US of "setting a snare for Turkey," and frequently voiced the demand for Gülen's extradition (BBC News Feb. 5, 2021). However, the claim that the U.S. was behind the coup in this process was frequently voiced by the media outlets close to the government (BBC News Feb. 5, 2021). For instance, *Yeni Şafak* published news reports with the following headlines⁹¹: "The U.S. is behind the coup attempt," "The role of the CIA in FETÖ's coup attempt was revealed," "Foreign Policy: Erdoğan should have been killed," "The USA tried to kill Erdoğan," "Data showing the USA supported the FETÖ coup".

⁹¹Yeni Şafak used these headlines between July 16-20, 2016.

In this tense environment, crises with some European countries and the EU also deepened due to the fact that Deniz Yücel, Turkey correspondent of the German *Die Welt* got arrested in Turkey on charges of “terrorist propaganda and inciting people to hatred and provocation” due to his news about the hacked emails of Energy Minister Berat Albayrak (BBC News Feb. 27, 2017); that Turkish government officials were not allowed to hold referendum rallies in some European countries; and that there have been multiple reactions from Europe to increasing pressures against the opposition as well as to the referendum package.

In this regard, as mentioned above, the arrest of a dual-citizen reporter of the German newspaper “Die Welt” in Turkey on February 27, 2017, was strongly reacted by both German officials and the EU, as Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for Enlargement of the EU Commission, criticized Turkey for not abiding by “the principle of rule of law,” and expressed his concern about “the detention of many journalists and the discrimination in the implementation of the anti-terror law” (DW Mar. 1, 2017).

This crisis was deepened by the cancellation of referendum campaign events of some Turkish ministers in such countries as Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands as to-be-voted Turkish-type presidential system was found anti-democratic by them, and Erdoğan’s reaction following the cancellations in Germany, saying, “your current practices are not different from the Nazi practices in the past; and then, the affirmation of this criticism also by Minister of Foreign Affairs Çavuşoğlu who also argued that such practices were similar to the one in the pre-WWII era (DW Mar. 8, 2017). He made the same Nazi analogy one more time, on March 19, 2017, despite reactions from Europe, saying, “if they don’t be ashamed, they will bring to the agenda gas chambers and concentration camps again, but for now they do not dare to do so.” He then stressed that some European countries which had prevented Turkey’s ministers from meeting with Turkish citizens, allowed representatives of the terrorist organizations, the PKK and the FETÖ, to hold meetings (TTCB Mar. 19, 2017).

Furthermore, in the case of the Netherlands, the crisis further escalated with the deportation of Fatma Betül Kaya, Minister of Family and Social Policies, who was trying to cross from Germany to the Netherlands by land (DW Mar. 12, 2017). In this tense environment, Erdoğan, borrowing the Islamist National Outlook parties’ the EU-Crusader Alliance analogy, started to call the European Union a “crusader alliance,” and demanded support from the electorate to “stop the rising wave of racism and hostility towards Islam and Turks in European countries” (Milliyet Apr. 3, 2017). He even opened the door to holding another referendum to decide on

whether or not to continue the EU membership negotiations in a referendum rally (BBC News Mar. 25, 2017). Another issue to which Erdoğan opened the door in referendum rallies was the return of the death penalty, as Erdoğan told, the results of the referendum would also pave the way for that (DW Apr. 15, 2017). Thus, Erdoğan fully revealed his new anti-Western/Islamist/nationalist line during his referendum rallies.

Furthermore, in this atmosphere, as it was also acknowledged by Recep Özel, YSK representative of the AKP, it came to the fore that holding propaganda abroad got prohibited through an electoral law amendment, undertaken by the AKP rule in 2008, although the AKP held 3 elections without this amendment being discussed. Thus, the 2008 electoral law amendment, while allowed voters living abroad to vote in the countries that they lived, also introduced a restriction, prohibiting Turkish politicians from making election propaganda in all kinds of indoor and outdoor spaces abroad. More specifically, the law stated that “election propaganda cannot be made abroad, at Turkish Representations in foreign countries, and at customs gates” (Diken Mar. 12, 2017).

The AKP’s shifting to a more nationalist line, and the gradual convergence of the AKP and the MHP also manifested itself during the referendum campaign period in both the slogans and the symbols employed in the referendum process, as for instance, in the referendum rally held in Ankara, the posters of Erbakan, Türkeş, and Yazıcıoğlu were hung together. While “one flag, one nation, one state” phrase was employed again, “Yes, Strong Turkey,” was employed as the main slogan. The primary message conveyed to the electorate was that the Turkish-type presidential system was “the guarantee of [Turkey’s] national unity,” (TTCB Mar. 19, 2017), and that with the constitutional amendment, the legislature and the executive would work in harmony with each other (while the judiciary would be independent), and that the stability would be strengthened. Accordingly, an end to “tutelages, crises, and impositions” was cited as one of the promises of the constitutional amendment (DW Feb. 25, 2017).

The leader of the main opposition CHP, Kılıçdaroğlu, defined the referendum package as “the hand-over of the state of the Republic of Turkey to a single person” throughout the campaign process, and called voting in favor of this package a heavy “fault/sin to bear” (DW Apr. 15, 2017). As for the nationalist MHP, the referendum campaign, and Bahçeli’s support for the presidential system, apparently, deepened the rift in the party, as Bahçeli’s support for such a system without any oversights was found puzzling by the opposition within the party as well. As Ulvi Batu, former chairman of Ülkü Ocakları (Idealistic Hearths) then stressed, “those who say

yes today cannot explain why they are pro-yes. Bahçeli could not explain why he said yes” (DW Mar. 18, 2017).

Increasing pressures against the “no” camp was widely emphasized throughout the referendum campaign process. In this regard, according to the data provided by the CHP Deputy Chairman Zeynep Altıok Akath, who reported the pressures on the “no” camp since the day the constitutional amendment package started to be discussed in the parliament, the pressures by figures were as follows:

“... At least 123 threats, oppression, and attacks took place against those who said ‘No’ in the period from the beginning of January to March 15. In addition, more than 120 people who carried out a ‘No’ campaign were detained, 4 MHP deputies were expelled, many conference halls cancelled the meetings, and ‘No’ camp’s events in universities were blocked [by university administrations]”

Sinan Oğan, one of the dissidents expelled from the MHP, also told in an interview that throughout their referendum campaign process, in which they used the slogan “No for my ideal (ülkü), no for my country,” they faced difficulties such as the cancellation of their hall meetings due to the pressure of the government, private halls’ not giving them a place in order not to get in trouble with the government, taking down their posters from the billboards, and not finding a place on TV channels (DW Mar. 22, 2017). Furthermore, Ümit Özdağ, who resigned from the party administration after falling apart with the MHP administration,” argued on television that their campaign faced multiple attacks, which were guided by Devlet Bahçeli himself (DW Mar. 18, 2017).

And HDP Group Deputy Chair Filiz Kerestecioğlu explained that the playing field in the campaign period in the emergency rule environment was so uneven that they were not even allowed to hold rallies due to emergency rules restrictions. In her words, the state of emergency which was declared against the July 15 coup attempt turned into something to hurt those who would say “No” in the referendum. According to the data she provided in the DW interview, only between February 1 and March 20, 293 HDP members and executives were detained, and 18 of them were arrested (DW Mar. 22, 2017).

5.16 The 2017 Referendum: Adoption of the “Turkish-type” Presidential System

The 18-item constitutional amendment package, which was brought forward by the AKP-MHP alliance, and which passed the parliament with 339 votes, exceeding the required three-fifths votes on January 20, 2017, was adopted with 51.4% voting “yes,” and 48.6% voting “no” in the referendum held on April 16, 2017, amid debates over the YSK’s decision to consider unsealed votes valid “unless it is proven that they were brought from outside” (BBC News Apr. 17, 2017). As it was noted in the *Freedom House* report on Turkey, in June 2016, a judicial reform bill was passed by the parliament, which allowed “AKP-dominated judicial bodies to replace most YSK judges in September” (Freedom House 2017). Three of the YSK judges were arrested after the coup attempt on charges of involvement in the coup, as announced by the then YSK head Sadi Güven (Cumhuriyet Dec. 30, 2016).

In this referendum, the voters in Turkey were asked about the change of the system of government for the first time. This constitutional amendment package involved the official switch from a parliamentary system to a “Turkish type” presidential system, in which, to an interviewee, AB “elections remained to be Turkey’s only link to democracy.” This package abolished the post of PM, gave President Erdoğan new sweeping powers (consolidated the power in the president’s office), and deprived the parliament of its powers. The president would maintain his/her ties with his/her political party, declare a state of emergency, appoint ministers by issuing decrees without the requirement of parliamentary approval, and draft a budget. In the new system, in addition to the laws enacted by the parliament, the President would also make legal arrangements by issuing decrees. And as BBC News (Jun. 28, 2019) reported with reference to the data derived from *Official Gazette*, since 2016 the number of laws passed by the parliament decreased from year to year. According to this data, between June 2016 and June 2017, 314 laws and 25 decree laws were published in the Official Gazette; between June 2017 and June 2018, 6 decree laws and 120 laws were published; between June 2018 and June 2019, the number of laws, presidential decrees and decree laws (KHK) published were 34, 39, and 6 respectively. As this data suggested, in only 2 years the number of laws enacted dropped by 89%; and in only one year after Turkey officially switched to the Turkish-type presidential system, the number of presidential decrees exceeded the laws. Furthermore, BBC News (Jun. 28, 2019) also reported that between June 2018 and June 2019, the number of articles in the laws enacted and presidential decrees issued were about 600 and 1900 respectively.

Also noteworthy was the fact that, in the words of Kaboğlu, Professor of Constitutional Law and CHP MP Kaboğlu, “the scope of presidential decrees has expanded considerably and no oversight mechanism has been established in the Parliament against them.” As he also rightfully argued, the fact that the President is also the party leader also made the implementation of the Constitution difficult. In this regard, he stressed that the President issued decrees outside the areas determined by the constitutional amendment as well, giving two examples: Establishment of the Justice Academy via Decree No 34, and Decree No 1, subordinating local administrations to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization. He made the explanation as follows:

“According to Article 141 of the Constitution, the training of judges and prosecutors should be regulated by law; but that regulation was made through a presidential decree, which is unconstitutional. According to Article 127 of the Constitution, the establishment, duties, and powers of local administrations are determined by law in accordance with the principle of decentralization; it is unconstitutional to amend it via a decree” (BBC News Jun. 28, 2019).

Moreover, the impartiality of the judiciary suffered a lot due to the increased weight of the President in the appointments regarding the high judiciary, primarily the Constitutional Court, although it was stressed in the constitutional amendment package that the judicial power in the system would be exercised by “impartial and independent” courts. The debate on judicial independence is mainly based on the criticism that although the parliament appoints 3 of the constitutional court members and the remaining 12 members are appointed by the president – 8 members from among the candidates determined by the Council of State, the Court of Appeal, and the YÖK, and 4 members directly appointed by the president – he actually makes all the appointments. To constitutional law professors, since Erdoğan is both the president and the AKP chairman, and also appoints the YÖK members, who also determine candidates for the Constitutional Court, also since the People’s Alliance holds the power in the parliament, it would not be possible to expect neither the parliament nor the Constitutional Court members appointed by YÖK members to be independent. (DW Jul. 10, 2020)

Another source of the debate over judicial independence in the new system is the increasing authority of the President over the High Council of Prosecutors (HSK), “a body in which the most critical decisions are made in the high judiciary, from the personnel rights of the judges to appointment and promotion,” in the words of Ergun Özbudun, a constitutional law professor. In the new system, the number of the HSK members was reduced to 13 with the constitutional amendment, and the

President retained the authority to appoint six of its members, including the board's natural members, the Minister of Justice, and the Ministry of Undersecretary, while the parliament was authorized to appoint the remaining seven members. On the other hand, the Council of State, the Court of Appeal, and judges and prosecutors are given no authority to appoint any member to the HSK. To Özbudun, "these changes in the structure of the HSK have turned the judiciary into a bureaucratic body, subordinate to the executive" (DW Jul. 10, 2020).

Then, the new system paved the way for the concentration of power in the hands of the president, eliminating the separation of powers/weakening the checks and balances as Erdoğan had the opportunity to control both the parliament and the judiciary. Besides, as also mentioned above, the 2017 constitutional amendment has been the legal basis for intervening in all state institutions, which had been able to develop/secure their institutional presence over the years and develop the capability to repel intruders, in the words of BB⁹². He said, "an institution's attempt to protect its own sphere brought about a quality to that institution. But now it is not possible to protect these institutional spheres."

The constitution amendment package also gave Erdoğan the chance to return to the party helm by removing the article that required the president-elect to sever party ties. Then, three years later giving up the post, President Erdoğan got re-elected the chairman of the ruling AKP at an extraordinary congress held on May 21, 2017. This overlap of titles (the President and the AKP Chairman), undoubtedly, played a significant role in Erdoğan's increasingly synonymous perception of the state and the party. As FF told in our interview, Erdoğan in multiple instances between 2002 and 2007 criticized the brief period in which provincial heads of the CHP were also the governors of those provinces. He added, "today the AKP does not have any governor who does not support the AKP." Moreover, to him, particularly governors in the eastern and southeastern provinces conduct serious campaigns on behalf of the AKP since these governors are told that the means of protecting the state (for instance in a district) was supporting the AKP campaign there. As the state overlapped with the party, in FF⁹³'s account, even the distribution of social benefits changed to the advantage of the provinces which voted for the AKP at higher rates. He explained the difference between how they distributed the social benefits at the beginning, and how they are distributed recently, as follows:

"At the beginning, we aspired for democracy-for-all and freedoms-for-all.

⁹²Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁹³Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

And we thought that when we did good things for the whole society, “the pious” in the society would also benefit from those. For long years, we undertook social policies and were very fair in their implementation. For instance, we gave incentive payments not only to the provinces whose vote rate cast for the AKP was the highest. We generated a socio-economic development index and ranked the provinces according to this index, and gave incentive payments to the provinces below a certain threshold in this index. And yet, now it changed; and the AKP currently mostly financially supports the provinces which voted for the party at the highest rates.”

Furthermore, since the AKP circles’ only concern, both in the referendum process and in the 2018 election period, was to get Erdoğan elected president, what the new system and the coalition with the nationalist MHP would take away from the party was not opened to discussion⁹⁴, although in the 2017 referendum in both Ankara and Istanbul, to which the AKP attached great importance, “no” votes has come out ahead with a margin of 2.4%. The referendum results pointed to a decrease in public support for the AKP in 15 other provinces as well. Furthermore, considering that the total vote share of the AKP and the MHP in November 1, 2015 elections was 61.4%, the referendum results revealed that the total vote share of these two parties actually dropped by 10% in the referendum. As it was reported then in *Hürriyet*, it was claimed that only 3% of the MHP voter voted in favor of the system change, while only 2% of the AKP voter did not support the new system. In other words, it was claimed back then that the majority of the loss derived from the MHP constituency (Hurriyet Apr. 17, 2017). Since the AKP’s only concern at that time was to get Erdoğan elected president, it refrained from any self-critique of either the party or the coalition.

Besides, as a researcher, Kalkan (2019) stated, since the AKP started to bear meaning only as part of an alliance/structure whose sole concern was to elected Erdoğan President since the 2017 referendum, the AKP also failed to realize that the AKP-MHP coalition only produced results in favor of the MHP, and that the AKP could not go beyond being a “state institution,” reminiscent of the CHP in the single-party period, also losing many of the essential functions⁹⁵ as a political party, such as pol-

⁹⁴This discussion only started with the loss of Ankara and Istanbul, the two most critical provinces, in the 2019 local elections.

⁹⁵Here are the manifestations, in Kalkan’s (2019) account, of the AKP’s losing its function as a political party:

“Except for a vague 2023 vision and an abstract concern for survival, the AKP cannot offer any alternative policies/goals to the electorate. . . The incompetence of the AKP in policy determination manifested itself in the slogan of country work heart work, employed by the AKP in the March 31 local elections. . . Training/recruiting individuals for different positions in the political system is perhaps the place where the AKP stumbled the most since the names that have specific weight in the party were given their dues, with the concern that they could form alternative power centers. Erdoğan’s transition from *primus inter pares* position, that is, from the first among the equals to the sole decision-maker in the party,

icy determination, raising/recruiting individuals for various positions in the political system, political mobilization, articulation of social interests, representation, etc.

5.17 Further Deepening of the Crisis with the West and Rapprochement with Russia after the 2017 Referendum

The adoption of the referendum package also further deepened the crack in relations with the West. Immediately after referendum results came out, the EU Commission made a statement, calling on Turkish authorities “to reach the widest possible consensus, given the results obtained in the referendum at similar rates and comprehensive effects of the constitutional amendments” (DW Apr. 16, 2017). However, after the unofficial results were announced, Erdoğan said, “Don’t worry (it’s too late), the horse has already crossed Üsküdar.” Erdoğan’s statement on the death penalty immediately afterward also drew a reaction from the EU:

“I will discuss [the death penalty] immediately with the Prime Minister and Bahçeli. I will say that I have always encountered this in the rallies. If it comes before me, I will approve it. If Kılıçdaroğlu does not support, we will hold a referendum for it if necessary” (BBC News Apr. 16, 2017).

Then European politicians reacted harshly to the possibility of the return of the death penalty by opening Turkey’s membership process to discussion and calling on the EU to terminate Turkey’s EU membership process. In this regard heads of different groups in the European Parliament made statements one after another calling the referendum result “a departure from rule of law and democracy,” “Erdoğan’s closing the EU door,” and “the beginning of Erdoğan’s dictatorship” (DW Apr. 17, 2017). Then at the end of 2017, the European Parliament decided to cut off 105 million Euro financial aid to Turkey from the EU budget. Furthermore, in the budget negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union in November 2017, 70 million Euro-aid to Turkey was frozen, and

condemned them to a veteran status. And Erdoğan had to continue with low-profile names who stand out for their loyalty rather than their merits for every critical position. The nomination of Binali Yıldırım for every position like a joker, or the occupation of critical positions in the political system by individuals whose names have never been heard before are manifestations of this situation. . . Expressing and combining interests is among the most basic functions of political parties in democracies. By fulfilling this function, parties act as a bridge between the state and society. Expressing interests is the introduction of the political, economic, and social demands of different social groups based on religious, ethnic, or other origins to the whole society through political parties. Combining interests is the production of policies that will be approved by the overwhelming majority of society for these demands. The recent situation of the AK Party gives the impression that the party is not a bridge that connects the state and society, but a front that separates the state and society” (Kalkan 2019).

tied to the condition of “improvement in human rights, democracy and the rule of law.” And after it was noted in the 2018 report of the European Commission that there was no progress in these areas, a 70 million Euro fund, allocated to Turkey as part of IPA, the fund for the candidate countries in the accession process to improve their capacity to adapt to the EU acquis, was cancelled in October 2018 on the grounds that “fundamental rights and freedoms deteriorated,” and “Turkey continued to move away from the European values” (DW Oct. 2, 2018).

Moreover, although after the referendum Erdoğan made his first official visit to Germany, hoping to review Turkey’s relations with the EU and expand the Customs Union, the former EU Ambassador to Ankara, Marc Pierini, stated then that membership of Turkey was no longer on the table. “Turkey is so far from the EU’s rule of law standards that it is no longer realistic to bring the full membership offer to the agenda again,” he said. To him, this position was shared by the coalition governments in Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands and by President Macron in France. Upon Erdoğan’s visit to Germany, Janning, then the ECFR Director in Berlin, also stated that “because Turkey no longer defines itself with the principles and values of an EU candidate country but has preferred to define itself as a geopolitical actor in its region and leave the EU candidacy axis,” Germany has started to evaluate bilateral relations with Turkey only in terms of benefit/harm to Germany’s interests. Then, adding that modernization of the Customs Union would also be possible only with Erdoğan’s turn to the right economic policies, he said, “For example, all of the very large public procurements in Turkey are given to Erdoğan’s circle. Why should Germany support a government which is not open to competition, not transparent and foreign investors do not trust?” (DW Sep. 27, 2018).

Furthermore, PACE, the Council of Europe’s executive arm, which was established to “promote human rights, democracy and rule of law,” decided by 113 to 45 votes to reinstate Turkey in the inspection process, from which Turkey had been removed in 2004. In its report, which was discussed in the session on “the functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey,” the decisions/practices under the state of emergency (OHAL), which was declared after the coup attempt, and yet, extended three times by then, was criticized (BBC News Apr. 25, 2017). This resolution was harshly criticized by then PM Yıldırım, who accused the PACE of being under the influence of the rising racism and islamophobia and anti-Turkey sentiments in Europe, and by the President’s Office Spokesperson Kalın, who called the decision “a political operation.” Furthermore, Markar Esayan, then one of the members of the AKP in the PACE called the people who prepared the Turkey report, “terror organization sympathizers” (BBC News Apr. 25, 2017).

In 2017, after Trump's ascendance to power in the U.S., many mutual steps caused the relations between Turkey and the U.S. to further deteriorate as well. Such steps were the U.S. President's rejection of Turkey's demand to take part in Raqqa operation together and their starting the operation with the YPG, which is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, arms support of the U.S. to the YPG both before and after the Raqqa operation against ISIS, Turkey's purchase of S-400 air defense system for Russia, the U.S. administration's non-extradition of the FETÖ leader to Turkey and Turkey's detention of some officials working in the U.S. embassy on the grounds that they took part in the Gülen organization, the U.S. response by stopping its visa activities in Turkey, and also the U.S. administrations's demand for the release of the U.S. cleric Brunson, who was imprisoned in Turkey, and Erdoğan's response, "You also have one priest. Give the priest, take the priest," then the start in New York in November of the Reza Zarrab case, which was called by the AKP Spokesperson and the PM "an attempt to take Turkey hostage," and "an attempt to squeeze Turkey" respectively, the U.S. National Security Advisor's words, "Turkey and Qatar are new sponsors of radical ideologies," and finally, the U.S. decision to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (BBC News Dec. 25, 2017).

Unlike relations with the West, Russia-Turkey relations started to improve in 2016, particularly, because Turkey switched its foreign policy goal to the prevention of creation of a Kurdish state in its southern border since the PKK/PYD had obtained a strong foothold in the south of Turkey with the prolonged war in Syria, and enjoyed the support of Turkey's traditional ally (in the Western alliance system), the U.S. (Kösebalaban 2020, 342). Then, Turkey, who lost its key ally to the PKK/PYD in the region had to strategically side with Russia to create room for maneuver for itself in Syria (Kösebalaban 2020, 342). In 2016, one important background condition was that Assad gained the control in Aleppo, and caused Turkey's hopes for the fall of Assad to be completely lost. Then in the recent/current foreign policy period, which Balta (2021) called "the phase of nationalist expansionism, anti-Westernism and the re-prioritization of containment regarding the Kurdish issue," Turkey allied with Russia.

In this regard, first, Kremlin reported in June 2016 that Erdoğan, in a letter, "apologized" for Turkey's downing a Russian warplane in 2015, after which bilateral relations between the countries hit rock bottom. Then, on July 25, 2017, Erdoğan announced the signing of the S-400 missile defense system agreement in his speech at the AKP parliamentary group meeting, although the clauses over joint production and technology transfer, stipulated by Turkey, kept secret on the grounds of "country security" (BBC News Aug. 8, 2019). The positive course of the relations showed

itself with 30% increase in trade volume between the countries in 2017 compared to the previous year, 500% increase in the number of tourists from Russia compared to 2016, and with the start of Astana talks, held in January 2017, in which Syrian government and the opposition were brought together to seek a solution in Syria, and which brought to life non-conflict zones in Syria. And according to the agreement reached on September 15, Russia, Iran and Turkey as guarantor countries decided to deploy 500 soldiers each to Idlib to maintain the ceasefire. However, Turkey's desire to end the presence of the PKK-linked PYD/YPG in its southern border, and hence, to restrain the gains of the separatist Kurdish groups, has not been met, and the YPG captured almost all lands in the north of Syria's Euphrates river (BBC News Dec. 25, 2017).

5.18 The 2018 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections

On June 24, 2018, presidential elections were held alongside parliamentary elections on the same day upon calls from MHP leader Bahçeli for a snap election, although the elections were originally scheduled for November 2019. Erdoğan, who announced on April 18, 2018, that the elections would take place on June 24, declared his election manifesto at his party's Istanbul provincial congress on May 6, 2018, as the joint presidential candidate of the People's Alliance, which contested against the Nation's Alliance, composed of the CHP, the Good Party (İYİ), the Felicity Party (SP), and the Democratic Party (DP). As Duran (2018), the coordinator of SETA and a columnist in pro-AKP daily *Sabah*, also stressed, in the election manifesto, shaped around the recent discourse on "domestic and national," with Islamist elements in it, the history employed for the creation of a sense of common identity was based on such critical dates of Turkish history as 1071 Manzikert (Malazgirt), the independence war period, and the July 15 coup attempt (Duran 2018). Then, unlike the "civilization" discourse adopted by Davutoğlu and Erdoğan for a while, this time, common identity was not sought in the imperial/Ottoman and Seljuki past.

In these elections, in Çakır's (2018) account, Erdoğan transformed the party's strategy from a "globalist, urban, liberal line, which prioritized freedoms without giving up its conservative identity" to a "domestic and national provincial strategy, . . . stuck in awareness of the azan and the flag," and which appealed to the countryside in the Central and Eastern Anatolia and the Black sea. And yet, while Erdoğan switched to the latter strategy for pragmatic purposes, the fact that in June 24 elections there was a serious shift from the AKP to the MHP in voter preferences in Cen-

tral/Eastern Anatolia and Black Sea regions showed that Erdoğan was unable to draw a long-term future for himself either. We can also argue that Erdoğan's shift to a nationalist line/discourse after shelving the Resolution process, followed by the electoral coalition with the MHP during the referendum, locked him into this conservative/nationalist line. Thus, although Erdoğan's coalition with the MHP was, in the words of HH⁹⁶, "conjunctural, and guided by pragmatism [for Erdoğan] to perpetuate his power," the AKP got locked in to "a new blend of conservatism and nationalism" after the coalition with the MHP (Kösebalaban 2020, 342). Furthermore, as DD⁹⁷ noted, this new conservative/nationalist line, was "a radical break with the democratic path the AKP had followed before." HH⁹⁸ also that the policies implemented in this period of the AKP rule, looked like the single-party rule in the first years of the Republic, and were once considered unthinkable for the AKP.

And yet, just as the AKP focused only on the adoption of the package in the 2017 referendum and failed to correctly assess the negative implications of the referendum results for itself, the same was true for the June 24 elections in 2018 as well. That is, since the victory of Erdoğan in the first round of the 2018 elections was seen by the AKP circles as the most concrete proof of success, the AKP concluded that the June 24 elections did not have any negative implication for the AKP despite the fact that in these elections the AKP lost nearly 2.5 million votes, i.e., 7% of its votes, compared to the previous general elections (Kalkan 2019). He summarized the thinking of the ruling circles at that time as follows:

"With 53.66 percent of the vote, the People's Alliance succeeded in obtaining the majority in the Assembly; it had provided more than the 50 percent plus 1, ... the only formula of legitimacy. Moreover, the new system, which was accepted by the referendum on April 16, 2017, freed the executive from the obligation of coalition."

Thus, the AKP circles overlooked the fact that the party lost its majority in the parliament, i.e., its 16-year uninterrupted stand-alone rule, excluding the brief period between June 7 and November 1, 2015, and now was compelled to form a coalition in the parliament. Thus, the AKP failed to realize the importance of the fact that it became dependent on the support of the MHP, a far-right political party that adheres to Turkish nationalism, for every law to pass through the parliamentary process. The AKP circles also failed to realize that the party and the election results produced results more in favor of the MHP than the AKP. Although the

⁹⁶Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁹⁷Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

⁹⁸Interview with a former AKP deputy/minister.

MHP gained the opportunity to design common policies with the AKP with these elections, the MHP leader said in his post-election speech that the people assigned to the MHP the task of checking on/balancing the AKP (Sözcü Jun. 25, 2018), thus placing all political responsibility arising from the policies to be implemented on the AKP. To FF, what the MHP presented as the task of checking/balancing the AKP, although the MHP ran for election as part of the People's Alliance, and was expected to name ministers as the coalition partner, was that the MHP refused to share the burden as part of the ruling coalition and yet, enjoyed the blessings of the coalition.

The shallow evaluation of the elections results in terms of the AKP also manifested itself in SETA's post-election analysis (2018), and SETA coordinator Duran's (2018) column in Sabah newspaper. Although both of these analyses drew attention to the 7-point decrease in the AKP votes, compared to the previous general elections, they assessed the big shift in voter preferences from the AKP to the MHP as the conservative voters' "rewarding" the MHP (Duran 2018) and an indication of the AKP voters' approval of the coalition with the MHP (Kanat 2018, 15-16) without discussing any negative implications for the party, and its founding values. Here are a few sentences from the SETA report reflecting this perspective:

"The most important indicator which shows that the June 24 elections have consolidated President Erdoğan's leadership is his re-election to this office by getting the votes of more than 26 million voters... First of all, it is remarkable that President Erdoğan received approximately 1 percent less votes than the People's Alliance, and approximately 10 percent more votes than the AKP. This situation reveals that the People's Alliance, which was established together with the AKP and the MHP, received support from the bases of both parties... On the other hand, it was observed that the AKP lost approximately 7 points of votes in these elections compared to the 1 November 2015 elections... One of the reasons that come to the fore in this regard is the move of votes from the AKP to MHP, another partner of the People's Alliance. However, considering that the five parties exceeded the 10 percent threshold and won seats in the Assembly, it can be said that the 295 seats AKP won in the Parliament with its 42.6 percent vote share is satisfactory".

Moreover, to Duran (2018), Erdoğan "got the message," as he stressed in the post-election balcony speech, and would address the decreasing-votes problem before the 2019 March elections "by continuing the renewal process in the AKP."

Moreover, in this election, electoral fraud perceptions in the society has further increased due to the changes to the electoral regulations passed by the parliament three months before the elections. The enacted legislation allowed unstamped ballots

that are sent by the authorized electoral boards to be admissible. This, undoubtedly, meant the official endorsement of YSK's contested practice in the 2017 referendum, where it had reinterpreted the electoral regulation and approved unstamped ballot papers, which aroused concern among voters. And yet, as the Council of Europe Venice Commission (2018) argued, this amendment to the Law on the Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers was misinterpreted by the Supreme Electoral Board, and left room for arbitrariness. As it is stated in the report,

“The new paragraph added in March to Article 101, if interpreted literally, states that ballot papers sent by the authorised electoral boards and having watermarks of the YSK but that are not stamped on their back due to the neglect of the Ballot Box Committees are to be considered invalid; however, the practice seems to interpret it as allowing the counting of these ballots. Moreover, the legal framework does not include any provisions establishing a procedure and clear and objective criteria for the determination of whether an unstamped ballot was unstamped due to negligence or some other reason such as fraud, leaving room for arbitrary application” (Council of Europe Venice Commission 2018)

Furthermore, another feature of the 2018 election law amendment package, also known as the “coalition package” by the public as it paved the way for political parties to form electoral coalitions, was that it gave the YSK the authority to relocate the polling stations and merge the electoral districts (Hurriyet Feb. 22, 2018). Although officials argued that the law was changed to prevent the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) from intimidating the voters in the primarily Kurdish southeastern provinces, after the announcement of this measure by the Supreme Electoral Board in May 2018 the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) outcried against it, arguing that the real intention behind this maneuver was to move ballot boxes from the villages which strongly backed the HDP to nearby villages that mainly supported the AKP, and hence to prevent the HDP from entering into the parliament in June elections (Reuters May. 28, 2018).

Besides, another international authority, PACE, reached the conclusion with regard to the June 24, 2018 elections that they were not fair, were contested on a deeply uneven playing field (Euronews Sep. 7, 2018). Accordingly, the PACE which monitored the 2018 elections published an assessment report in which it was argued that the elections were held in an emergency rule environment, which was extended seventh times despite the warnings of various international actors and institutions; and that although electoral laws were based on equality and fairness on paper, the restrictions set by the laws were not implemented for the President and his party. Moreover, it was emphasized in the report that the candidates “did not have equal

campaign opportunities;” and that the ruling AKP abused state opportunities during the campaign period and in between the elections. In this regard, according to the report, the overall media (including not only the main state-run TV station TRT and its affiliated channels but also private broadcasters) gave far more air time to Erdoğan than this rivals; the state channels did not broadcast even the largest opposition party meetings; the broadcast opportunities for Erdoğan’s competitors, particularly of Selahattin Demirtaş, the imprisoned former leader of the HDP and the presidential candidate, were extremely low; also the state’s means of transportation were used for the AKP’s and Erdoğan’s electoral campaign. And also, although it was against the rules, state employees made statements in support of the ruling party and its candidate.

Similarly Reuters (Jun. 20, 2018) explained that the amount of coverage of the President Erdoğan and the AKP in TRT, state-owned TV channel, which was 67 hours in total, was 60 hours more than his main presidential rival Muharrem İnce. Moreover, as stated in the Human Rights Watch report, published in June 2018, voters had “limited access to information, independent news coverage, and non-government-controlled commentary about all the candidates and parties contesting the elections.” Similarly, Reporters Without Borders estimated that the rate of newspaper coverage in support of the government was 90 percent.

Furthermore, to many critics, near-monopoly of Erdoğan on the media has emerged as the most important obstacle to the free and fair conduct of elections in 2018. In the emergence of the AKP monopoly in the media, undoubtedly, the sale of the top-selling *Hurriyet* daily and several other broadcasters, including CNN Turk, by Doğan Holding, a long-time pillar of the secular establishment in Turkey to Demirören Holding, who had already owned two pro-government dailies, played a major role. Then, by 2018, only a handful of newspapers that are not pro-AKP remained in Turkey. Furthermore, particularly after the coup attempt in 2016, Erdoğan frequently scolded the independent media for their criticisms against the crackdown initiated in the aftermath of the abortive coup attempt. Even before the coup, on March 5, 2016, as part of the fight with the FETÖ, the government had taken over *Zaman*, a daily newspaper with close links to Gülen organization. By mid-2018, 120 journalists were detained, over 180 media outlets were closed down for allegedly being connected to the FETÖ, the organizer and conductor of the failed coup attempt. In April 2018, 14 staff of *Cumhuriyet* daily, an opposition newspaper, “one of the few remaining voices critical of the government,” were sentenced to various prison terms on assisting terrorism charges. And hence, in 2018 Turkey ranked 157th out of 180 countries in the global press freedom index (Reuters Jun. 20, 2018). After Turkey’s official switch to the presidential system in 2018, in *Freedom*

House democracy index, which rate and rank countries on the basis of political and civil rights, Turkey took place as a “not-free” country.

5.19 Concluding Remarks

In this section, I explored how Turkey’s AKP, first elevated the country to the status of a model country for other Muslim geographies with its democracy-promoter and welfare-provider image, and then caused democratic backsliding that lowered its status at *Freedom House* to “not-free” in 2018.

I called the AKP “post-Islamist” since its founders, who enabled the AKP to start its political life as a liberal/democratic/conservative party, came to this line following a self-assessment/self-critique process, i.e., criticizing the Islamist line and democracy notion of the National Outlook parties they had belonged to. Thus, post-Islamist transformation meant a change of discourse, convictions, as well as ideals on the part of these actors, and manifested itself in the values adopted in the AKP program, and discourse of the AKP elite. We have shown that post-Islamist transformation particularly meant the adoption of a pluralist perspective in the approach to secularism/religion/Islam, democracy and intra-party relations. Thus, a West/modernity-referential discourse; rejection of the majoritarian notion of democracy; the use of the language of political/civil rights; the perception of the Western institutions such as the EU as partners in democratization; the adoption of a notion of secularism that allows for the public visibility of religion, provides some public space for the activities of religious groups, and state neutrality toward various religions; and an emphasis on keeping distance from identity politics that radicalize politics as exemplified by the National Outlook parties, that is, the rejection/critique of Islamist ideology which has the claim of Islamizing the society through the exercise of state power; and the rejection of radical transformation exceeding the pace of life as a critique of the RP/FP tradition’s notions of democracy and conservativeness, emerged as the main features of the conservative-democratic/post-Islamist identity of the AKP. Furthermore, as a critique of RP/FP tradition, in support of the pluralist notion of democracy, leader oligarchy, intra-party democracy, and collective reason/mind were also addressed in the AKP program.

My research showed a few things about the democracy experience of Turkey under the AKP rule. First of all, the research showed that democratic backsliding basically took place by moving away from a pluralistic understanding of democracy and conservativeness. Thus, having undergone a post-Islamist transformation after

a self-critique process was necessary but not sufficient to stay in that line and move democracy forward.

Secondly, the research also showed that the fact that the EU, which the AKP had seen as an ally in its struggle against assertive secularist institutions, ceased to be a motivating and/or constraining structural factor on the AKP, contributed to the democratic backsliding in Turkey.

Third, although there were other important background conditions, crises such as the war with the FETÖ and the FETÖ-initiated crises, Gezi Park protests, the prolonged civil war in Syria after the Arab Spring, all of which were perceived as a struggle for survival (politically) by Erdoğan and to which he reacted by shifting more towards the majoritarian notion of democracy, the presence of important figures who promoted a pluralist understanding of democracy and conservatism, and created a balance against Erdoğan, prevented a major shift from the post-Islamist line of the party, until they were all sidelined by Erdoğan.

Thus, I argue that first Abdullah Gül in August 2014, then other moderate names of the party in the AKP congress on September 12, 2015, and finally through an intra-party coup in May 2016 Davutoğlu was politically sidelined. Therefore, after the political sidelining of Davutoğlu, whose emphases on the rule of law and human rights were remarkable in all of the issues he clashed with Erdoğan after Erdoğan ascended to the Presidency and he became the PM, there was no one left in the party to balance Erdoğan. Then, the AKP brought a democratic backsliding to the country along its new nationalist/Islamist line.

It is also worth stressing that Davutoğlu was the name who brought to the AKP the “civilization politics” perspective, and acted in great harmony with Erdoğan with this perspective in the foreign policy after the Arab Spring started. And yet, with the prolongation of the war in Syria, while Erdoğan slid into a nationalist line, Davutoğlu increased his emphasis on the rule of law, human rights, and the pluralist notion of democracy, and his initiatives to promote these values, as we have seen in the issues he clashed with Erdoğan after he became the PM.

6. ENNAHDA PARTY UNTIL THE 2019 ELECTIONS, MARKED BY THE RISE OF POPULIST PARTIES/FIGURES

The self-immolation of Bouzizi, a Tunisian street vendor born into economic hardship, in front of the office of the governor of the province of Sidi Bouzid, on December 17, 2010, is considered the beginning of the Arab Spring. And Tunisia was the only country that survived the Arab Spring until July 25, 2021, when Saied, the President of Tunisia, seized power, effectively ending Tunisian democracy. While other Arab Spring countries, such as Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt collapsed into either civil war/chaos, or dictatorship, Tunisia⁹⁹ transitioned into democracy, albeit a fragile one, and managed to preserve it until President Kaies, who had ascended to power via free and fair elections, suspended the parliament, began ruling by decree on July 25, 2021, and then, in a constitutional referendum, on July 25, 2022, the first anniversary of his power grab, with just 30.5% of registered voters participating, put in place an authoritarian rule based on presidential supremacy that would help him further consolidate his one-man rule. In between, Tunisia went through six free and fair elections, including the 2011 elections to generate a constituent assembly responsible for drawing up the new Constitution, the 2014 presidential and parliamentary

⁹⁹While not the subject of this thesis, it is worth mentioning that there are structural factors from which Tunisian democracy benefited. One very frequently cited reason for the success of Tunisian transition to democracy is the presence of a homogenous, 98% Sunni-Muslim population in Tunisia, which prevented the sectarian, tribal divisions that caused civil wars in Arab Spring countries Libya, Yemen and Syria from occurring in Tunisia (Grewal 2019). The weakness of Tunisian military both before and after its independence from France came to the fore as another structural factor that helped a democratic transition in Tunisia. Thus, the military did not only have only a minor role in the nationalist movement, but also after independence President Bourguiba created only a small and politically powerless military to deprive it of the capacity to carry out a coup. The military was rendered politically, economically and militarily powerless in the police-state of President Ben Ali as well. Grewal (2016), a researcher on Middle Eastern politics, wrote about the nature of the military during the reigns of Bourguiba and Ben Ali as follows:

“The Tunisian armed forces are the smallest in the Arab world, numbering only 40.500 active duty personnel in a population of nearly 11 million. They have fought no major wars, largely remaining ‘imprisoned’ in the barracks. Underfunded, underequipped, and sidelined from political and economic power, . . . the military as an institution never developed deep corporate interests that would tie it to the fate of Tunisia’s autocratic rulers. These lack of vested interests allowed it to quickly move beyond Ben Ali following his ouster in January 2011 and then stand much more removed from domestic political developments than other militaries in the region.”

The third structural factor that helps to explain why Tunisia was able to transition to democracy, and maintain it until Tunisia’s president Kais Saied suspended the parliament, is the presence of a strong and vibrant civil society in Tunisia.

elections, 2018 municipal elections, and the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections. Furthermore, in 2014, it has adopted a constitution¹⁰⁰, that protects freedom of conscience along with freedom of religion, and assigns duties to the state to ensure gender equality, that is, a constitution, “progressive even by Western standards” (Grewal 2019). The 2014 constitution’s declaration of the “civil¹⁰¹” character of the state set out Tunisia as a real exception in its region, “where the place of religion in the legal system varies from strong impregnation to complete takeover” (Mekki 2018). Thus, the 2014 Constitution stated that Tunisia was a “civil state based on citizenship, the will of the people, and the supremacy of law (Article 2)” in reference to the secular character of the state; Article 1 stated that the religion of the state was Islam; and Article 6 stated that the state had an obligation to protect religion, and listed the means by which it would do so. The constitution was followed by the adoption of very progressive legislation by the parliament, such as the adoption of the new electoral law requiring “horizontal and vertical¹⁰²” gender equality in local elections (UN Women Jun. 28, 2016), the one outlawing psychological abuse and economic discrimination along with physical violence against women (The New York Times Aug. 1, 2017), and a law against/penalizing racial discrimination (Euroscom Oct. 10, 2018). With these democratization steps, Tunisia, which had been ranked 144th in the Economist Intelligence Unit’s democracy index in 2010 with the status of “authoritarian regime,” rose to the status of hybrid regime in 2011, and then a “flawed democracy” in 2014. Although it has never been classified as a “full democracy,” it maintained its status as a flawed democracy between 2014 and 2021, ranking 53rd and 54th out of 167 countries in 2019/2020; however, it was reclassified as a “hybrid regime” in 2021 again.

Despite its rise in the rankings in democracy indexes till 2021, the gains always remained fragile, and a relapse into authoritarianism always remained a possibility given Tunisia’s being a very small country, caught between two much larger un-

¹⁰⁰The 2014 Constitution marks, in its preamble, the willingness to generate “a democratic and participatory system,” on the basis of “a civil state,” in which sovereignty belonged to the people, power alternated through free elections, and powers of the state are separate but balance each other, and the state guaranteed the rule of law, respect for freedoms and human rights and the equality of rights and duties between all citizens, male and female and across regions (Tunisia’s Constitution 2014).

¹⁰¹It is also worth stressing that while in Article 2, it says, Tunisia is a “civil state based on citizenship, the will of the people, and the supremacy of law;” in Article 1, it says, “Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign state; its religion is Islam.” In Article 6, it says, “The state is the guardian of religion.” And in the same article, it elaborates on how the state protects religion as follows:

“It guarantees freedom of conscience and belief, the free exercise of religious practices and the neutrality of mosques and places of worship from all partisan instrumentalization. The state undertakes to disseminate the values of moderation and tolerance and the protection of the sacred, and the prohibition of all violations thereof. It undertakes equally to prohibit and fight against calls for Takfir and the incitement of violence and hatred.”

¹⁰²Horizontal parity required equal numbers of women and men on municipal electoral lists across Tunisia, while vertical parity required women and men to rotate in each list (UN Women Jun. 28, 2016).

democratic neighbors, Algeria to the west and Libya to the east, the ever-worsening economic crisis, with sinking wages and growing unemployment, which rose to 18% during the pandemic, constantly changing governments, these governments' having different priorities, and the adoption of the policies at odds with democracy and rule of law, and the failure in establishing a constitutional court, which would be an important institution to lock in democratic progress. Thus, since the ruling coalitions of the country's largest parties have failed to ensure economic prosperity, and advance the democratic transition, i.e., establish all the democratic institutions ("rules of the game") as stipulated by the 2014 constitution, Tunisians have become increasingly disillusioned with political parties, ruling coalitions and also democracy, which they perceived as playing a role in the government's shortcomings. Thus, as revealed by Afrobarometer surveys since 2013, those who think that the country was moving in the wrong direction rose from 61% in 2015 to 79% in 2018, and stayed at 72% in 2020 and 2022. Those who find the economic situation fairly/very bad always remained above 70% since 2013, and was 73% in 2020¹⁰³. Furthermore, since 2013 Tunisian society expressed their dissatisfaction with the governments' performance in the fight against corruption; dissatisfaction rate always remained above 60%, the highest rate recorded since 2013 being 69% in 2020¹⁰⁴, and the lowest being 59% in 2022. Finally, Tunisians also expressed dissatisfaction with the government's action to curb smuggling in 2020¹⁰⁵ (51%). Then, while support for democracy¹⁰⁶ kept decreasing from 70% in 2013 till 46% in 2018, support for alternatives¹⁰⁷ to democracy kept increasing. For instance, support for one-man, who abolishes the elections and the parliament, kept growing from almost 10% in 2013 to almost 35% in 2018 and to 57% in 2020 (Afrobarometer Mar. 4, 2023,O). Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that Saied, who was not affiliated with any political-party, won a landslide victory in the second round of the 2019 presidential elections by campaigning on a populist platform in which he vowed to clean up corruption and protect the will of the people against the corrupt established political parties. He, then, seized power in July 2021 in what his opponents called a "constitutional coup," systematically dismantled the institutions of the parliamentary system established by the 2014 constitution, and finally, monopolized all the power and national decision-making in his

¹⁰³The rate rose to 84% in 2022, the highest rate since 2013.

¹⁰⁴Likewise, the International Republican Institute (IRI)'s public opinion survey, conducted in late 2020, few months before Kais Saied's takeover, found that 85% of the people believed that the government did "little or nothing" to address their needs. Likewise, 81% of people said the ministries, and 88 percent said members of the parliament did "little or nothing" to address their needs. Besides, 87% believed that the country headed "in the wrong direction (IRI Sep. 24-Oct. 11, 2020)."

¹⁰⁵It was again 51% in 2022.

¹⁰⁶The rate of support for democracy reached 58% in 2020 after 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections.

¹⁰⁷Other alternatives in the Afrobarometer surveys included, military rule and one-party rule.

hands through a constitution adopted in a highly contested referendum.

Even though it was Saied who steered the country's course toward authoritarianism, the Ennahda party, which has dominated the legislature in the post-revolution era and whose vote share fell from 37% in the 2011 Constituent Assembly elections, to 28% in the 2014 and 20% in the 2019 legislative elections, respectively, and its leader Ghannouchi, whose over-reliance on the politics of reconciliation till 2019 is said to have led to economic and political gridlock, and as a reaction, to popular backlash (Lang 2022), were largely blamed for the failure of the 10-year democratic experiment. According to the IRI's public opinion survey results, Ghannouchi's unfavorability rating, which was 20% in 2011, reached to 65-70% in mid-2013, and remained constant then till mid- 2017. On the other hand, Essebsi, leader of Nidaa Tounes, which, like Ennahda, was part of the ruling coalition between 2014 and 2019, did not suffer from public disillusionment to the same extent as Ghannouchi. Essebsi's unfavorability rating¹⁰⁸, which was 10-20% in 2011, reached above 40% in mid-2012, and remained constant for a while; then, started to increase after mid-2015 again, reached to 50% in mid-2017.

Our aim is to examine Ennahda's conception of democracy as a post-Islamist actor, its role in Tunisia's democratization and return to one-man rule. Hence, the thesis focuses not only on the period up to 2019, when Ennahda ruled Tunisia in grand coalitions and contributed to President Saied's rise to power with a populist, anti-establishment rhetoric but also on the period after Saied ascended to the presidency and seized power through a constitutional coup since in this latter period Ennahda under Ghannouchi was still considered the "only force" (Guesmi 2022) in Tunisia with the power to challenge Saied's autocratic regime despite internal conflicts and ruptures within Ennahda given that the other important actor with a high organizational capacity, Tunisia's powerful trade union (the UGTT), was unable to maintain a stable position against Saied.

In the first period leading up to Saied's election as president in 2019 we will see that Ghannouchi-led Ennahda tried to create a space for itself in politics by relying on the discourse of compatibility between islam and democracy and on a policy of consensus-building with secularists and former regime loyalists, having been challenged by both hardline islamists in the party/constituency¹⁰⁹, who accused them

¹⁰⁸This information is derived from the graph, prepared by Grewal and Hamid (2020), based on the IRI's Tunisia public opinion surveys. The last survey that measured the favorability of these two leaders was in late 2017, and gave the same values as mid-2017.

¹⁰⁹And Reform Front was established in 2012 by these ultra-conservative Salafi Islamists who follow a strict interpretation of Islam, and was granted a license by the Islamist-led government as Ghannouchi thought that these parties had to be provided a stake in the new system rather than being banned from politics as Ben Ali had done (Reuters May. 11, 2012).

of surrendering to the secularists and pushed for a greater role for religion in public life and even for the creation of an islamist state, and secularist figures/institutions, such as the bureaucracy, parties, media and the syndicates, who accused them of disguising their islamist intentions. Although the role of compromise/consensus has fallen disproportionately on Ennahda as it tried to carve out a political space for itself, the fact that Ennahda has made consensus-building a value in its own right has undermined democracy by blocking progress on the issues that had led to the revolution, particularly economic progress and transitional justice, by hampering the process of building democratic institutions, and by leading to people's disillusionment with democracy (and its institutions) in the end.

In the period after the 2019 elections, when President Saied came to power, and especially after he seized power in a constitutional coup in 2021, we'll see that while he, as a populist President/figure, steadily moved towards consolidating his one-man rule by undermining/marginalizing every institution created after 2011, Ennahda, weakened by internal divisions and resignations, unable to form an alliance against Saied for a long time and unable to offer any ideas on the economy, the main concern of the people, and the opposition bloc to which it belonged (NSF), became marginalized as Tunisia once again fell into the clutches of authoritarianism.

6.1 Tunisia's Ennahda: A Post-Islamist Party?

It is no secret that until President Kais Saied sacked the government and suspended the parliament on July 25, 2021, the moderate stance of Ennahda, which was established as an Islamist movement in 1981 under the name of Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), labeled Ennahda in 1989, and legalized in 2011, played a very important role in the success of Tunisian democracy in the post-revolutionary process. If one indicator of Ennahda's post-Islamist line was Ennahda's commitment to pursue consensus since the revolution, the other was the movement's leader Ghannouchi's statements on the compatibility of Islam, democracy and secularism as Ghannouchi was not only the chairman, but also the intellectual leader of the movement/party, who had written extensively on the compatibility between Islam and democracy/secularism in the 1980s.

In fact, the birth of the movement under the name *Jamaat-al-Islamiyya* - the Islamic Group - dates back to the 1970s. The movement, which remained clandestine throughout the 70s, first spread slowly in universities and among the youth. The main objection of the founders of the group Ghannouchi, Abdelfattah Mourou,

and Hmida Ennaifer¹¹⁰, early on, was to the secularization and Westernization of Tunisia; and their main aim was to restore the Islamic notions of “piety and morality” (Boehm 2022). They were also influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria, as Ghannouchi later revealed saying, “At first, we were influenced by thinkers associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria, such as Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the movement in Egypt, and Mustafa al-Sibai, the leader of the Syrian branch” (Ghannouchi 2016). However, in our interview, Riadh Bettaieb¹¹¹, a senior Ennahda MP, spoke of a wide range of factors that influenced Ennahda’s identity. First, he said, they were influenced by the books of the Muslim Brotherhood, but he also said that the Iranian revolution, their contacts and discussions with leftist student movements and the syndicate in the 1970s/1980s, their work with leftist parties when they were in exile, all played a role in the construction of the movement’s identity. He also added that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they started to talk about democracy, gender equality and participation in elections, at which point the Muslim Brotherhood labeled them “an Islamically improper/unfit movement,” and saw their path as “inhiraf” - a deviation from the right path.

As mentioned above, Ennahda’s first official establishment took place in 1981 under the name of the Movement of Islamic Tendency (MTI). The MTI’s founding manifesto announced by Ghannouchi in a press conference in 1981 involved its commitment to democracy. In our interview, Ghannouchi¹¹² stated that a journalist, then, asked him whether he would accept the election results if the Communist party won, and he replied that he would respect that, and would try to change the public opinion for the next election. Immediately after its formation in 1981, the movement called on the government to recognize the MTI as a political party, but Bourguiba and then Interior Minister Ben Ali rejected this call; and 60 leading members, including Ghannouchi, were immediately arrested on charges of forming an illegal organization.

In 1981, Ghannouchi was prisoned for four years¹¹³, during which time he further developed his democracy thinking and wrote three books which are *The Rights*

¹¹⁰Ennaifer left Jamaat al-Islamiyya after the Muslim Brotherhood’s growing influence over the group (Boehm 2022).

¹¹¹Riadh Bettaieb, interview by author, Tunis, April 15, 2018.

¹¹²Rachid Ghannouchi, interview by author, Tunis, April 14, 2018.

¹¹³In fact, as Ghannouchi stated in an interview, he was imprisoned in 1981 with an 11-year sentence but was released after 4 years. In 1987, he was arrested again and sentenced to life imprisonment. Although Bourguiba pushed for a death penalty, Ghannouchi was released from prison when Ben Ali ousted Bourguiba, and pledged democratic reforms and reconciliation with Islamist movements. In 1989, when Ennahda won a majority in Tunisia’s closest to a free election (in which Ennahda ran independent candidates since it was not officially recognized as a party) before the revolution, Ben Ali both tried to falsify the results and arrest Ghannouchi; but Ghannouchi fled abroad, and returned after the revolution (Weymouth 2013).

of Non-Muslims in a Muslim State, Womens' Rights, and Public Freedoms in the Islamic State, in which he further elaborated on the notions of democracy in Islamic culture and the Muslim democrat, and on the reconciliation between Islamic values, democracy and freedom as he “fully believe[d] that freedom is a core value of Islam,” as he told in our interview.

Accordingly, an AKP deputy, AA¹¹⁴, stated in our interview that long before the 2011 revolution, Ghannouchi had presented secularism as an understanding, a formula for internal peace in a country, as opposed to an understanding of secularism that dictates a move away from religion in people's lives, and explained the importance of democracy in building a society where everyone could live together with reference to the concept of citizenship. Thus, he said, in this understanding, secularism “means freedom of religion and conscience, . . . [and] is a set of rules that binds that state, . . . protects the individual vis-a-vis the state.” CC, a researcher/journalist¹¹⁵ with an interest in the Middle Eastern politics, stated in our face-to-face interview that when Ghannouchi expressed his views on Islam and democracy/secularism in the foundations and associations of the pious segment in Turkey (in 80s/90s) long before the revolution many people in these institutions found these views odd.

Ghannouchi's frequent resort to compromise, concessions and negotiations to avoid any confrontation with secularists and supporters of the old regime during the transition period was in line with the literature on transitional democracy. In fact, the importance of consensus/negotiations¹¹⁶ between the old regime elite and the democratic forces, that is, the balance of power between incumbents and oppositionists (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Huntington 1991-1992, Linz and Stepan 1996), and later “the balance of power¹¹⁷ within the oppositionist camp once the incumbents have been toppled” (Brownlee et al. 2015) to prevent the emergence of elements that would disrupt the transition process, was stressed in the literature on democratic transitions. In addition to that, new democracies require all sides to reach an agreement on the “rules of the game,” i.e., constitutional and electoral rules of democracy (Diamond 1999). In the words of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 43-44),

¹¹⁴Interview with an AKP deputy, Ankara, January 18, 2020.

¹¹⁵Interview with a researcher/journalist, Ankara, March 19, 2019.

¹¹⁶Besides, political science literature has shown that polarization leads to a breakdown in democratic norms and has detrimental consequences for democracies by causing “the normal multiplicity of differences in a society [to be] aligned along a single dimension,” “the people [to], increasingly, perceive and describe politics and society in terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them,’” and the rival parties to try to defeat each other by whatever means it takes (McCoy et al. 2018, 16).

¹¹⁷As Brownlee et al. (2015, 195-196) stated, it was the balance of power between Islamist and secular actors, and a belief on the part of both that they enjoyed a relatively equal playing field, and equal chance of winning the elections and pursuing their interests under a democratic system, that played an important role in the maintenance of democracy in Tunisia and its failure in Egypt.

“[democracy emerges when] no social or political group is sufficiently dominant to impose its ‘ideal project,’ [and yet, consents to] a second-best solution which none of the actors wanted or identified with completely but which all of them can agree to and share in”.

And yet, one important point was that from the beginning the disadvantaged position of Ennahda, deriving from the lack of financial, media support¹¹⁸¹¹⁹ and international support, caused the burden of “not polarizing the society ... to fall disproportionately on [Ennahda]” (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 3). The factors, in more detail, that disadvantaged Ennahda in Tunisian politics after the revolution were as follows: the positioning of the Gulf countries and France against Ennahda, seeing it as an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, compounded by the fact after the emergence of ISIS¹²⁰ a significant portion of ISIS recruits came from Tunisia, the example of the Freedom and Justice Party rule in Egypt, which was toppled with a military coup in July 2013 after not allying with neither the secularists nor the liberals in the country, the maintenance of the old regime loyalists and assertive secularists¹²¹ their strong position in the bureaucracy and syndicates very influential in politics, and Ennahda cadres’ lack of experience in politics, etc.

Ghannouchi-led Ennahda’s reconciliation with secularism and secularists was met with backlash by the Islamists within the party, who criticized this stance of the party, and was also challenged by security threats posed by Islamists. As a former

¹¹⁸Wolf (2014a) noted that most secular Tunisians agreed that Ben Ali’s downfall brought them at least one positive thing, “a free press which they continue[d] to dominate.” She said that although after its rise to power, Ennahda attempted to change the secular media landscape through the appointment of media personnel and to create an alternative Islamist media which was banned in Ben Ali, these attempts were largely unsuccessful due to fierce resistance from journalists, who saw their task as opposing the domination of the Ennahda government, particularly given weak political opposition. She argued, to this end, many media heads either joined secular parties or established their own (Wolf 2014a).

¹¹⁹Riadh Bettaieb (April 15, 2018), a senior Ennahda figure, also told us in a face-to-face interview that there was a “big media machine” in Tunisia that had the capacity to manipulate public opinion, especially in times of social and political crisis, that was anti-Ennahda, and that sought to create polarization, while Ennahda had no equivalent media support.

¹²⁰As a Turkish researcher/journalist, CC (March 19, 2019), who stated in our face-to-face interview that he conducted field research in eight districts in Tunisia on joining the ISIS, said, they found that the most important two reasons for joining the ISIS was the belief that Islam practiced by ISIS was true Islam, and the longing for an increase in the living standards of those who had joined the ISIS, which they saw in the Facebook posts of ISIS members. Saying that in Tunisia there was a traditional Salafi vein, dating back to Zaytouna, CC also argued that the reason for its being ignited in Tunisia after the revolution, was to revive/reactivate the police state in the country. In his words, ‘as soon as violence emerges as a means of intervention in politics, the police force and the idea of the police state starts to come into play again, and politics get blocked.’

¹²¹Ghannouchi (April 14, 2018) stated in our face-to-face interview that apart from the fact that Tunisian state was built on the French legacy of *laïcité*, the 20 years before the revolution, when Ennahda members were in exile or in prison, gave “secular fundamentalists” the opportunity to dominate all sectors of society, such as universities, education, culture, etc. He added, after returning from exile, they were now trying the “neutralize” the situation.

AKP deputy, BB¹²², who was in the AKP team who held training seminars¹²³ for Ennahda members after the revolution and who twice attended Ennahda electoral campaign, stated in our interview, although Ennahda marched to power immediately after it was legalized, there was a section of Ennahda cadres/constituency who found Ennahda's way of dealing with/confronting secularism and secularist figures/institutions, such as the bureaucracy and the syndicates, which are the institutions formed in collaboration with Ben Ali and France and maintained their power in the post-revolution era, inadequate from the very beginning. To AKP deputies, and researchers I interviewed, who had encounters with Ghannouchi, since the revolution the party (and leadership cadres) was characterized by a split between hardliners, who were particularly composed of "prison-exits,¹²⁴" imprisoned for long years by the Ben Ali regime, and those who went into exile, supporters of democracy and compromise, which I call post-Islamists. BB¹²⁵ (November 18, 2019) who said that he was in the AKP team who held training seminars for Ennahda members and attended the electoral campaigns of Ennahda twice, stated that in his each encounter with Ennahda members he had felt the tension between the members, deriving from this duality. Then, it was the approach of the latter, that moved Ennahda and Tunisian democracy forward. Thus, although there was a split between the Islamist and post-Islamist Ennahda leadership cadres since the revolution, the democracy-promoting stance of Ghannouchi-led post-Islamist cadres prevailed over the others, and the party was able to take steps in that direction. On the other hand, Ennahda MP Riadh Bettaieb¹²⁶ said in our interview that although, at first, particularly in

¹²²Interview with a former AKP deputy, Ankara, November 18, 2019.

¹²³Face-to-face interviews with Ennahda and AKP deputies also suggest that both AKP delegations went to Tunisia to advise Ennahda in their electoral campaigns and delegations from Tunisia (as well as other Arab Spring countries, such as Egypt, Syria, Libya) came to Turkey to learn from the AKP experience in power.

¹²⁴As BB (November 18, 2019) put it, the assertive French secularism which was implemented after independence, first, by Bourguiba, and then, by Ben Ali, and which suppressed the Ennahda movement, jailed and exiled thousands of its members, led to the differentiation of morals, political cultures, perspectives on democracy and secularism between those who stayed in Tunisia and those who were exiled, and even between the diaspora who went to England and those who went to France. He argued that although Ennahda members maintained their contacts/ties with each other after the dispersal of the movement, the structure of the countries they lived in during this 20-year period, different relationships they established in their respective countries differentiated the morals, political cultures/perspectives from each other. Thus he stressed that although all these actors reunited in Tunisia, and Ennahda was legalized as a political party in the post-revolution period, there was not a common ideology or consensus on important issues in the party.

¹²⁵Interview with a former AKP deputy.

¹²⁶Bettaieb, interview. He said:

"When we came to the country in 2011, we came from different backgrounds/experiences, from Paris, London or prisons. There were also those who stayed in Tunisia and had ties with radical Salafists. So we were homogeneous in 2011. It was very difficult to build a common platform with all these differences. There were those in the Shura Council who wanted to put Sharia in the constitution. Some big names kept asking why we were having these negotiations, why we were having these coalitions. Some young people were telling Mr. Ghannouchi, in the Shura Council, to leave our party. And Mr. Ghannouchi stayed in the Shura for a long time, listening to different criticisms. But over time we managed to

the first 2-3 years after the revolution, there was a big rift between those who stayed in Tunisia/mostly prison exits and were associated with radical Salafists and those who came from exile due to their different backgrounds/experiences, over time the former group also experienced a change in their convictions and thus, they managed to form a homogenous party platform.

After the toppling of the Ben Ali regime in 2011, and the caretaker government¹²⁷ that took office on January 17, Ennahda, in multiple instances, conveyed the message that it had adopted a moderate agenda, starting from its publishing its election platform on September 14. Ghannouchi, who described Ennahda after the revolution as “a national party dedicated to reform,” pointed to Turkey’s AKP, from whom it also sought advice, as a positive reference point starting from early 2011. As early as February 2011, he made the following explanation in an interview:

“The Turkish experience remains the closest to the Tunisian situation, culturally, politically and socially. Turkey is the closest case to Tunisia. So al-Nahda, if you were to compare it [with another movement], cannot be compared to the Taliban or Iran, the closest comparison would be to the AKP” (Al-Jazeera Feb. 7, 2011).

As Matthews (2011), a columnist in *Newsweek* stressed, Ghannouchi believed that Erdoğan’s AKP set a model for “how to reconcile Islam with modernity, pointing a path from the political wilderness to the mainstream.” As the TESEV survey, conducted in 2010 in Middle Eastern societies, suggested, at the time the AKP’s blend of Islam and democracy was widely approved by these societies as 66% “agreed” that this model was successful, and that Turkey could be a model for Middle Eastern countries. Thus, it was also quite natural that in 2011, like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Ennahda in Tunisia also took the AKP as a model.

create a homogeneous platform.”

¹²⁷In 2011 after an interim government was established, on January 17, under the premiership of Mohammed Ghannouchi in the aftermath of the fled of Ben Ali, people protested for the dismissal of ministers who were members of Ben Ali’s RCD party. The minister of the interim government, first, ordered the RCD to cease its activities and then, on March 9, the party was officially disbanded. On February 27, PM Ghannouchi, also a name affiliated with the RCD, also resigned after setting July 15 as the election date. The interim President Fouad Mebazaa assigned Beji Caid Essebsi as the PM instead; and a new government took office. And on April 26, PM Essebsi banned former RCD members from running in elections.

6.2 2011 Constituent Assembly Elections, Ennahda's Coalition with Two Secular Parties, and the Delicate Balance Ghannouchi Sought to Establish between the Salafist Ennahda Base and the Secularists

In constituent assembly elections held on October 23, 2011, Ennahda won 37% of the vote, beating the runner-up by almost 30 points, 41% of the seats (89 of 217 seats), and 32 out of 33 constituencies across Tunisia, based on the electoral formula known as the Hare Quta with Largest Remainders¹²⁸, as it was the most organized party in the country and as the only major religious party standing while liberal and leftist vote was split among a large number of small secular parties. However, it chose to establish a coalition-government with two secular parties, Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol, a party that is further left on the ideological scale. Although a coalition with the center-left CPR was enough to reach a simple majority, which required controlling 50% plus one seats in the 217-seat assembly, with Ennahda's 89 seats and the CPR's won 29 seats, Ennahda invited Ettakatol, which had 20 seats in the parliament, to the coalition in search for a grand coalition. Ghannouchi¹²⁹ explained this decision by saying that it was not easy to govern a transition to democracy with 50%+1 like a stable democracy, especially given that Tunisian society was divided into Islamists and secularists, pro-revolutionaries and anti-revolutionaries after the revolution. DD¹³⁰, a former AKP deputy, who stated that in 2011 Erdoğan assigned him the task of meeting with the delegations from Arab Spring countries, suggested that entering a coalition and uniting three political tendencies/groups in power, was also advised by AKP delegation to Ennahda. As DD said, "Our advice in these meetings had always been the same: 'You should look broadly, and not distinguish yourself from the others. The society made the revolution together.' On the other hand, Riadh Bettaieb¹³¹ said that even during the years in exile, they maintained their contact with the leftist parties in the country, but after the revolution, many leftist parties/figures refused to cooperate with Ennahda since they thought that the revolution would benefit Ennahda, and many prominent figures of the left, such as Kemal Jendoubi, Hama Hammami, Nejib

¹²⁸On the other hand, as Carey (2013) noted, although every electoral formula rewarded large parties to some degree with seat bonuses, "usually the large the party, the larger the bonus," this electoral formula was not one of the formula that rewarded the large parties to the largest extent. As he stated, if Tunisia had chosen the d'Hondt Divisor (D'HD) method for the conversion of votes to the seats, Ennahda would have had 69% of the seats in the assembly; and hence, Ennahda would prepare a constitution on its own (Carey 2013, 1).

¹²⁹Ghannouchi, interview.

¹³⁰Interview with a former AKP deputy, Ankara, December 12, 2018.

¹³¹Bettaieb, interview.

Chebby refused to take part in the government, despite being offered to do so. “We tried to include all the opposition parties,” he said.

From the beginning, it was a very delicate balance that Ghannouchi-led Ennahda tried to establish, caught between the Salafist base of the party, which multiple times declared Ghannouchi (and the post-Islamist line he represented) an infidel because of the Islam-democracy discourse, and old regime loyalists and secularists, i.e. the secular bureaucracy, the syndicates and the media, who were against Ennahda, and wanted to rule it out by using the Salafist base of the party. As Mehrezia Labidi¹³² put the groups that Ennahda got stuck between, especially in 2011, 2012 and 2013, were the extremely religious groups that completely rejected modernity and the extremely secularist groups that completely rejected religion. And from the outset, Ennahda immersed itself in a struggle to meet conflicting demands, which put the party in a very tough position. For instance, during the government formation process, the leading cadres’ certain statements contradicted the post-Islamist line adopted by Ghannouchi. One such statement was that Ennahda Secretary General Hamadi Jebali, who became the PM in the new troika government¹³³, referred to the new government as the sixth Muslim caliph, causing the Ettakatol to suspend its coalition partnership until he returned to the government with the promise of more important ministries. Besides, Salafists increasingly attacked artworks they deemed “blasphemous.” Among these attacks were an attack to film director Nouri Bouzid for the open support he gave to a secular constitution, and his announcement that he would criticize religious fundamentalism in his next movie, in June 2011, an attack on a cinema in Tunis for screening a documentary called *Laicite Inshallah* (Secularism, if God wills), an attack on a theatre group in Tunis in March 2011, Nessma TV for showing the movie *Persepolis*, with scenes representing God speaking to a girl, in the aftermath of which the TV station owner Karoui was tried and fined, and his house was also put in the fire. As stressed by a Tunisian journalist, although the troika government kept expressing condemnation of violence and its commitment to free speech, its commitment was constantly questioned as early as May 2011 as journalists/bloggers/artists were attacked, and the government officials always blamed the victims as opposed to the perpetrators (Jayasekera 2013). For instance, after the *Spring of Arts* exhibition, which sparked riots in Tunis and several other cities for allegedly attacking Islam, officials of the Ennahda-led coalition government also condemned the artists for their intention to insult and provoke and vowed to take legal action against the organizers of the exhibition, although they also said

¹³²Mehrezia Labidi, interview by the author, Tunis, April 17, 2018.

¹³³Moncef Marzouki of the CPR was named the President, and Mustafa Ben Jaafar of the Ettakatol was named the speaker of the parliament.

there would be no excuse for resorting to violence (Reuters Jun. 12, 2012) and many exhibitors, bloggers were jailed under Article 121.3 of the Penal Code which made it an offense to “distribute, offer for sale, publicly display, or possess, with the intent to distribute, sell, display for the purpose of propaganda, tracts, bulletins, and fliers, whether of foreign origin or not, that are liable to cause harm to the public order or public morals” (Jayasekera 2013). In 2012, hardline Islamists undertook violent attacks on mausoleums, political party offices, police stations, alcohol stores, a beach resort, a courthouse, art exhibitions, media institutions, and finally the U.S. Embassy, after which both Ennahda leader Ghannouchi and the then President Marzouki vowed to crack down on the Islamists (Alarabiya News Sep. 21, 2012, Khaleej Times Sep. 29, 2012). For 50 days an offshoot of Ennahda, staged a sit-in outside the state television channel, al-Wataniya, protesting against the presence of loyalists of the former regime in the institution and Ben Ali propaganda they make, demanding that the institution be purged of the old regime figures. And in April 2022, Ghannouchi’s raising the possibility of “taking radical measures in the news media domain including, possibly, privatising the public media,” was seen by many observers as sympathizing with the violent anti-media protests (Wolf 2014a). While there were protests alleging that the country’s political and media institutions, in particular, were still controlled by the old regime, the then President Marzouki criticized Ennahda, in a speech he delivered, claiming that Ennahda was trying to gain control of political and administrative institutions of the country by placing its supporters in these institutions, as the old regime did. And Ennahda responded to this to claim, saying they were placing their supporters only to remove old regime figures (Daily News Egypt Sep. 8, 2012). And in October 2012, upon the call of the journalists’ union, Tunisian journalists, also involving those in state-run media institutions, demonstrated to demand an end to the restrictions on the media, and to protest Ennahda’s appointment at the helm of these institutions its allies to control them (Reuters Oct. 18, 2012).

Ghannouchi’s in-between situation also showed itself in the constitution-drafting process, which officially started in February 2012. Although before the elections Ghannouchi had promised to retain the existing first clause of the constitution, which identifies Islam as the religion of the state and not codify sharia law in the constitution, in February 2012, he said that their party was debating the idea of referring to sharia in the constitution. In 2012, Tunisian society was already deeply divided over the role of Islam in the constitution, government and society. Streets of Tunis witnessed massive protests of both secular Tunisians, marching to show their rejection of growing calls by Salafi Islamists to create an Islamic state, and to call

for a “civil state” (Reuters Mar. 20, 2012) and hardline¹³⁴ Islamists, marching in demand for the inclusion of Islamic law in the constitution (Reuters Mar. 25, 2012). Mehrezia Labidi¹³⁵, who was, then, in charge of receiving delegations representing different Tunisian groups and listening to their demands on the content of the constitution, said that the groups she had received came with two types of demands, those who came for the demand for “religion” only, and those who came with the demand for “human rights” and were absolutely against the inclusion of religion in the constitution. While Salafi Islamists blamed Ennahda for “betray[ing] religion,” secularists blamed Ennahda for giving license to the violence, i.e., for being “too lenient with Salafis” (Reuters Jun. 12, 2012). And finally, on March 26, 2012, a senior party official, Larayedh, announced that they were opposed to the incorporation of sharia law into the new constitution to ensure unity of people and prevent divisions, disillusioning the Islamists¹³⁶ (Reuters Mar. 26, 2012). And the following day, on March 27, Ghannouchi also said, in a press conference, that “we are not going to use the law to impose religion,” adding that it was enough to keep the first article of the 1959 Constitution, which stipulated that “Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state, its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic and it is a republic.” Although this statement put Ennahda at odds with hardliners, as Mehrezia Labidi¹³⁷ noted, it also “introduced a new dynamic, a dynamic widening the middle ground [between the two poles].” First, she said, because Ghannouchi spoke like this, he differentiated not only himself but all the party, from those wanting Islam. Referring to an earlier statement by Ghannouchi, Labidi said that in the 1980s when a journalist asked him what Ennahda’s priority was, he replied, “freedom,” saying “what Tunisians lack is not Islam; Islam has been here for centuries; and Tunisians were Muslims before us and will be Muslims after us; what Tunisians lack is freedom.” Thus, she said, this statement¹³⁸ of Ghannouchi differentiated Ennahda from people who saw the lack as Islam. And secondly, she said, it also allowed those who wanted to distinguish themselves from extreme secularists to express themselves. Following

¹³⁴Between end of November 2011 and end of January 2012, Islamist students also held protests/strikes at state universities, demanding that male and female student be separated, and female students be allowed to wear face veils at schools.

¹³⁵Labidi, interview.

¹³⁶*Reuters* had reported that some of the Salafi Islamists in the country were sympathetic to al Qaeda; and that the leader of al Qaeda, in a video recording, blamed the Ennahda government for “betraying religion,” and called on Tunisians, upon Ennahda’s compromise with a civil constitution, to “defend Islamic law from Ennahda” (Reuters Jun. 12, 2012).

¹³⁷Labidi, interview.

¹³⁸As Labidi (April 17, 2018) noted, Ghannouchi, then, in May 2012, brought the proposal before the Shura council in Nahda, and the majority in the council voted in favor of Ghannouchi’s proposal. Labidi said that when he asked Habib Ellouz, a member of the Shura Council who voted against the proposal, how he felt, Ellouz said he would respect the vote. Thus, she said, she concluded that everyone in the party who voted against it would respect the vote/democracy.

Ghannouchi's statement, Mohammad Fadl, one of the leaders of the secularist faction in the constituent assembly, announced that they, too, would not insist on the *inclusion of laïcité* in the constitution, but would instead settle for the word "civil" – until then, secularists insisted on the phrase "Tunisia is a republic, independent and laic." Then, according to Labidi's account, on the initiative of Mustafa bin Jaafar, then parliament speaker, the second article was added in the constitution, stating that "Tunisia is a civil state, and is based on three main pillars, which are citizenship, the rule of law, and popular sovereignty." As Labidi noted, these two articles pointed to "a new vision" [which] reconciled citizenship and Islam, democracy, modernity and Muslim heritage."

Another controversy in the constitution-drafting process began when Ennahda announced at the party congress in July 2012 that it planned to introduce a legislation that would punish offenses against "sacred values," and then filed in the parliament such legislation (proposed an amendment to the Penal Code), which the Human Rights Watch warned, if passed, would pose a threat to freedom of expression and become a new form of censorship in the country," particularly given the broad interpretation and possible abuse of the clause (MWN Aug. 3, 2012). Thus, even when Ben Ali era laws to silence dissident voices were still in place, Ennahda's bill to criminalize blasphemy was met with concern. And finally, after its negotiations with the two coalition partners in the Troika government, Ennahda agreed to drop the anti-blasphemy cause from the draft constitution¹³⁹.

Another draft article, which drew public outcry and was protested by thousands of Tunisians on August 14, was the one that considered women as "complementary to men," rather than equal, and was seen by the protesters as an erosion of the status of women in a country that rose to prominence in the Arab world in 1956 by granting women full equality with men (Reuters Aug. 14, 2012). However, to Mehrezia Labidi¹⁴⁰, this was not the position of the party but of 3 or 4 colleagues¹⁴¹, despite

¹³⁹The constituent assembly released two draft constitutions, the first one in August 2012, and the second one in December 2012, with extensive revisions to the first one.

¹⁴⁰Labidi, interview.

¹⁴¹In our face-to-face interview, Labidi (April 17, 2018) explained how this statement was propagated as Ennahda's position as follows:

"We were discussing the status of women and the family in the Rights and Freedoms Commission, and the article on the status of the family was included in the first draft of the constitution as Article 21. It was voted after long discussions in the absence of MPs representing Nahda and of many other [conservative] MPs. This article stated that the family is the basic unit of society and is based on the equal partnership of husband and wife. A week later, a meeting was convened to vote on Article 28 on women... Nahda MPs, who were absent from the previous vote, asked for Article 21 to be reconsidered. But this was not possible because it had already been voted. Then some of them, I think with the support of 3 other MPs from different political groups, proposed to add, to Article 28, a phrase about the complementarity of the roles of men and women in the family. So we had the first version of Article 28, ... which said that the status of women will be protected and their advancement will be ensured, that women and men are equal partners in building the

the fact that those who wanted to damage Ennahda's image propagated the idea that Ennahda supported the inclusion in the Constitution of the phrase "complementarity of women." And later on, the constituent assembly adopted Article 46, which stipulated that the state "commits to protect women's established rights and works to strengthen and develop those rights," and "guarantees equality of opportunities between women and men to have access to all levels of responsibility and in all domains" and "works to attain parity between men and women in all elected assemblies," which Labidi led the drafting of. And as Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported, the second draft of the constitution involved important improvements in freedom of expression and women's rights. In the former area, the main improvement was the drop of the articles that criminalized any "normalization [with] Zionism and the Zionist state" and offenses against sacred values (Human Rights Watch Jan. 22, 2013).

While Ennahda was caught between conflicting demands of secularists and Islamists, it should be noted that the people, who felt no improvement in the economy, also organized protests¹⁴² against the Troika government; and upon the emergence of protests in Siliana, one of the under-developed interior cities, with the potential to spread to other long marginalized interior cities, in November 2012, President Marzouki, in a televised national address, called for the establishment of a technocratic government that is "not based on political factions," saying that the current government was unable to "fulfill the promises of the country's revolution" (Al-Jazeera Dec. 1, 2012). Moreover, 2013 was marked by a worsening economy¹⁴³ and mounting tensions caused by the assassination of, first, a leftist politician, Chokri Belaid in February, and then, another opposition politician Mohamed Brahmi, on July 25, after which widespread calls were made for the dissolution of Ennahda, allegedly responsible¹⁴⁴ for these murders. In mass demonstrations, people expressed their

country and that their roles in the family are complementary... Of course, another group of MPs, secularists, objected. In the end it was decided that there should not be one version of Article 28, but two versions [in the draft], with and without this statement about the complementarity of roles."

¹⁴²Every Sunday people held nationwide protests between May 2011 and July 2011 in demand for democratic and economic reforms. On August 10, 2012, in the Sidi Bouzid, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, crowds expressed their frustration with the Troika coalition's inability to create jobs and redistribute wealth (France 24 Aug. 10, 2012).

¹⁴³In 2013, the growth rate decreased to 3.2% from 3.6% in 2012. In addition, while the official unemployment rate was 16%, it was almost twice that in the under-30 population. In other words, although the revolution was partly triggered by youth unemployment, a few years after the revolution, the situation did not improve at all (BBC News Dec. 11, 2013).

¹⁴⁴Even today, secular parties make similar calls. The Democratic Patriots and the Popular Front have been leading the claim to this day that Ennahda had a secret apparatus that was behind the killings of leftist politicians Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, and that is why it has to be dismissed. Similarly, Abir Moussi, the head of the Free Constitutional/Destourian Party (PDL) and a ruling party official in the Ben Ali dictatorship has called for the dissolution of Ennahda, based on the accusation that Ennahda has a secret apparatus, responsible for the killing of two leftist politicians, and the sending of jihadists to the

anger at Ennahda for failing to confront hard-line Islamists. As reported in the *The New York Times* (Feb. 19, 2013), people expressed their anger at “a government seen as more adept at squabbling than at solving pressing issues like crippling economic crisis or the reform of security institutions.”

Amid this chaos and political turmoil, then PM Jebali, also the secretary-general of Ennahda, defied his party and proposed the establishment of a neutral government, “free from political fights,” and composed of technocrat ministers. Although fellow leaders of Ennahda tried to reach a common ground, Abdullah Fettah Mourou, one of the founders of Ennahda, criticized this effort of the leaders. Then, as the party debated whether to retain key ministries, Jebali resigned, saying that political leaders in the country, including those of Ennahda, had “let Tunisians down with their bickering” that had caused political turmoil in the country (*The New York Times* Feb. 19, 2013). Furthermore, while the new cabinet established by Ali Layaredh, another senior figure of Ennahda, retained two junior secular coalition partners, in the new cabinet critical ministries, including the Interior and Justice Ministries, were given by Ennahda to independent figures to avoid any criticism (*Reuters* Mar. 14, 2013). The majoritarian approach of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was seen by Ennahda as an example to be avoided by Larayedh too, as he said with reference to the mass protests in Egypt against the government of Mursi that the situation unfolding in Egypt would not occur in Tunisia since the approach of Ennahda was “characterized by consensus and partnership” (*Reuters* Jul. 2, 2013).

On the other hand, secular opposition parties such as the Popular Front, a coalition led by Hamma Al-Hammami, established in 2012 to bring together twelve left-wing parties, and Nidaa Tounes¹⁴⁵, a secular party established by Beji Caid Essebsi, transitional prime minister, overseeing Tunisia’s first democratic multi-party elections, and foreign minister under Ben-Ali, in mid-2012 to counter-balance Ennahda in an environment in which debates over the role of Islam intensified in the country,

ISIS. The current President Saied (*Meshkal_TN* Jan. 31, 2020), also, in an interview with national TV also pointed to the investigations conducted about the alleged secret apparatus of Ennahda.

¹⁴⁵Nidaa Tounes brought together a wide variety of ideological currents, including businessmen, independents, trade unionists (represented primarily by Baccouche, a former head of the UGTT and chairman of the Arab Institute of Human Rights, and current members of the UGTT such as Ons Hattab) and leftists (represented on the leadership level by such people as journalist Akremi and businessman Marzouk (Wolf 2014a)) as well as former members of Ben Ali’s Constitutional Democratic Rally-RCD (who constituted the strongest members, both numerically and economically, such as Faouzi Loumi, a former member of the RCD and head of one of the top companies of Tunisia, and Mohamed Ghariani, last secretary general of the RCD (Wolf 2014a)) as well as independent women (who feared that Ennahda would diminish their rights), all of whom were united by their opposition to the Islamists (*Euronews* Dec. 31, 2014). Until the establishment of Nidaa Tounes in 2012, as mentioned above, secular and liberal votes had been shared by a large number of small-sized secular parties; and some of these parties had merged with each other in 2012 to build a stronger platform. In this regard, “secular centrist group,” formed by the merger of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), Afek Tunis and the Republican Party, the merger of the secular left Ettajdid and Labor Party, and also the splinter group formed by the breakaways from Ettakatol and the Congress for the Republic (CPR), which were secular coalition partners of Ennahda, come the fore as important examples of splinter groups and mergers, although none of them could offer an alternative to Ennahda (*Al-Arabiya News* Jun. 16, 2012).

also including former members of Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD), continued to position themselves against the Ennahda-led government. Shortly after Larayedh's taking over the prime ministership, on March 16, Al-Hammami, called on the society to overthrow the government as they had overthrown the Ben Ali regime. Then, the interim President Marzouki called these secular parties, "secular extremists, ... [who] do not know the art of compromise." In response, not only did the secretary general of the Nidaa Tounes accuse Marzouki of "encourag[ing] sedition," but also signatories from various secular parties submitted a motion for Marzouki's dismissal (Mahjar-Barducci 2013).

After the assassination of another opposition politician, Mohamed Brahmi, who was known to be "a loud critic of Ennahda," on July 25, anti-government protests quickly followed, and protestors burned down the Ennahda headquarters in Sidi Bouzid although this time the government quickly identified the culprits as radical extremists, some of whom were linked to Ansar al-Sharia. The UGTT¹⁴⁶, the country's biggest labour organization, which had congratulated the Egyptian army after its intervention, called for a general strike to protest the killing. On August 7, tens of thousands of people took to the streets, demanding the resignation of the government, blaming it for being too lenient with hardline Islamists (The Guardian Jul. 26, 2013). To force the government to step down, the National Salvation Front (NSF), which was established in July 2013 after Brahmi's assassination as an alliance of secular opposition forces¹⁴⁷, also including the Nidaa Tounes and the Popular Front¹⁴⁸ Parties, and which united around a strong anti-Islamist rhetoric, published an official statement on July 26, 2013, blaming the Troika government and particularly Ennahda for "the increase in violence and organized political crime," demanding both the resignation of the government and the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, and calling for the establishment of a government of "national salvation," that would be tasked with completing the constitution, launching the required economic and

¹⁴⁶The UGTT, with its 150 offices across the country, close to 700.000 members and, a long history of political activism, including its siding with the rebels during the 1984 bread riots, and acting as a catalyst for the disobedience in the 2008 Mining Basin of Gafsa, and its local offices' serving as headquarters during the revolt against Ben Ali in 2010, is undoubtedly Tunisia's most powerful civil society organization (Omri 2013). Omri (2013) described the power of the UGTT as follows: "[It] has enjoyed a continuity in history and presence across the country which is paralleled only by the ruling party at its height under Bourguiba and Ben Ali." And as he stated, "due to the historical factors which saw leftists channel their energies into trade unionism when their political activities were curtailed, the UGTT has remained on the left side of politics and, in the face of rising Islamist power, become a place where the left, despite its many newly-formed parties [particularly the Nidaa Tounes and Popular Front], has kept its ties and even strengthened them."

¹⁴⁷As Wolf (2014a) noted, the National Salvation Front coalition, which was dominated by the Nidaa Tounes and the Popular Front parties, also involved other secular voices such as the Tunisian Anti-Torture Organization (the reformist wing of the Ettakatol), and the Tunisian Union of Unemployed Graduates.

¹⁴⁸Tunisia's far left, which had suffered severe repression under Ben Ali, formed the Popular Front in October 2012 under the leadership of Hama Hammami, bringing together twelve communist/nationalist political parties.

security measures, and organizing the next elections (Wolf 2014a); and initiated a week-long rally, opening of which was attended by thousands of protestors (Wilson Center Jan. 10, 2014). As Wolf (2014a) noted, Tunisia's secular parties, which failed to cooperate with each other after the revolution due to their ideological rivalries, strategic differences and leadership divisions and were, therefore, largely politically excluded from politics after the revolution, were now seeking to come to the fore more in politics; and they are blaming Ennahda for the assassinations of two Popular Front leaders fueled the fire of anti-Islamism in the country. To the analysts, the secular opposition wanted to replicate in Tunisia "the Egypt scenario, in which the secular opposition toppled an Islamist-led government," demanding the step down of the government and dissolution of the National Constituent Assembly, and holding daily mass protests to this end (Amara and Solomon 2013). "The echoes of Egypt were hard to miss" in this political deadlock occurred in Tunisia in less than three months after the Islamist Morsi government was ousted by a military-backed uprising in Egypt, as the opposition groups even called themselves the same names as their Egyptian counterparts, in the words of an analyst (Grewal 2016, 260). In this regard, in early September, Tunisia's *Tamarrod* (Rebellion), modelled on the organization in Egypt that helped the overthrow of Mursi, called for "the dissolution of the assembly, preservation of an amended version of the 1959 constitution and early presidential elections; [also called on people for mass demonstrations]." Similarly, the National Salvation Front, also inspired by Egypt's National Salvation Front, launched a campaign to dismiss local and national officials appointed by Ennahda (Grewal 2016, 260). Furthermore, as Grewal (2016) said, based on the interviews he conducted with the retired military officers, in the summer of 2013, the events in Egypt, the mass protests, and as well as opposition politicians' "look at Egypt" warnings to Ennahda leaders, were all perceived by the military as calls to intervene as well. In the meantime, the secular opposition withdrew from the Assembly, which was writing the constitution, to compel its shelving (The New York Times Dec. 16, 2013). And the final blow to Ennahda came from one of the junior coalition partner Ettakatol as Mustafa Ben Jaafar, also the Constituent Assembly Speaker, froze the work of the legislature. Although he justified this step with the aim of "guarantee[ing] the transition to democracy," it was interpreted as an "internal coup" by an Ennahda leader (Amara and Solomon 2013). As early as August 26, a senior Ennahda official signalled that the government would resign if the parties reached an agreement on the constitution, the electoral law, and the date of the elections. And yet, as it was also reported by the The New York Times (Sep. 28, 2013), despite the fact that Ennahda leadership had repeatedly signalled their readiness to resign, the secular opposition, and the union increased their pressure on Ennahda, as they were encouraged by the ouster of the Morsi government in

Egypt. Then, as the political transition of Tunisia appeared to be on the verge of collapse, and anxious about suffering the same fate as President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood members, the former of whom was ousted from power, and the latter were cracked down on afterwards, Ghannouchi-led Ennahda decided to relinquish control of government to a non-partisan caretaker government to complete the country's transition to democracy. As Ghannouchi¹⁴⁹ stated, this joint effort to topple the government demonstrated the importance of preventing polarization and confrontation in divided societies like Tunisia. He said that although they had a coalition with two parties after the revolution, they realized after this joint effort to topple the government that they had ignored two forces in this coalition, namely "the forces of the old regime and the far-left." He added that these two forces became a real obstacle to the government after the *coup d'état* in Egypt emerged as a "spiritual force" for them. It seems that 2013 turned out to be a new milestone for Ghannouchi in avoiding any confrontation and polarization.

Although Ennahda had to agree to step down from power it had won at the ballot box at the end of this process, the Egyptian scenario that the opposition tried to replicate in Tunisia did not materialize either. To the analysts, since both the media and the public were allied with the NSF, Ennahda did not have much of a chance other than resigning. As Wolf (2014a) noted, since media outlets, dominated by secularists, saw their task as influencing politics and opposing Ennahda in the absence of a strong political opposition, they also sided by the NSF; and since the NSF was backed by major media outlets and civil society organizations, it also gained popular support in this environment. In the words of a Tunisian professor, "There was a social rejection of Ennahda... There was a rejection of the Islamist agenda" (The New York Times Dec. 16, 2013). An Ettakatol deputy also said in an interview that "as long as the media was on the side of the NSF, the public could not be favorable toward the Troika" (Wolf 2014a).

And yet, the opposition had to negotiate and reach an agreement with Ennahda before it stepped down from power. Thus, on September 28, Ennahda agreed to resign for the formation of "a government of independents" after the adoption a new constitution, electoral laws and a timetable for fresh elections, which were key milestones in the democratic transition, which had been effectively blocked between the Ennahda-led government and the opposition. The deal came as a result of negotiations with the main opposition Nidaa Tounes and its allies, with the mediation of labor union leaders, who initiated the National Dialogue, which referred to the three-week negotiation period during which both sides had to fulfill their promises. Then,

¹⁴⁹Ghannouchi, interview.

PM Ali Larayedh made a written pledge to dissolve the government in three weeks and appoint a neutral government that would rule the country until the elections, although the assembly, the largest number of seats of which belonged to Ennahda, would remain in place to check on the newly-formed government. The UGTT, the main mediator, supported NSF's demand for a new government since, to them, the government "had no popular support," and yet, opposed the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, which at that time was only weeks away from the completion of the constitution (Wolf 2014a). A senior UGTT member told, in an interview, that the UGTT thought that the government was dominated by Ennahda which was "first of all accountable to Muslim Brotherhood, not to Tunisians," and that they could "never trust [such] an Islamist movement." Then, the UGTT leadership called on its base to join the NSF protests against the Troika government in front of the assembly. On October 24, 2013, just hours before the start of a national dialogue between Ennahda and the opposition, thousands of opposition supporters, again, took to the streets upon the killing of seven policemen by Islamist extremists. The protestors chanted such slogans as: "The people want the fall of the regime," "Government of traitors, resign!" (Al-Jazeera Oct. 24, 2013). Even when the National Dialogue was underway and despite Ennahda's stepdown decision, Nidaa Tounes leader Essebsi, in an interview that he gave to the Weymouth (2013), drew parallels between Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood, stating that Ennahda was aimed at establishing a religious state, changing the structure of society¹⁵⁰ in the constitution and creating an Islamic society; and he encouraged an investigation into Ennahda, saying, "we can not give them any guarantees of immunity." At the end of three weeks, Ali Larayedh resigned; and the next day Mehdi Jomaa, Tunisia's former industry minister, took office as the interim PM to guide the country to new elections as part of a democratic transition agreement. And when Ali Larayedh resigned at the end of three weeks, leaving his seat to Mehdi Jomaa, who had the support of almost half of the opposition parties to lead the country to new elections as part of a democratic transition deal, the Popular Front and Nidaa Tounes opposed, arguing that Ennahda chose him to preserve its political clout despite the fact that Mohamed Ennaceur, one of the candidates of the secular wing, was recently appointed vice-president of the Nidaa Tounes (The New York Times Dec. 16, 2013, Wolf 2014a).

Despite the fact that Essebsi has been the political figure to have led the movement to oust the increasingly unpopular Ennahda-led government after the assassinations,

¹⁵⁰Beji Caid Essebsi made these accusations with reference to Ennahda's insistence on the introduction of sharia as the source of law, on the inclusion of the statement that Islam was the "religion of the state," and on changing the status of women and making them "complementary," rather than "equal."

it is possible to give credit to Essebsi¹⁵¹, too, for the negotiated transfer of power as he held a series of private meetings with Ghannouchi to alleviate the political crisis when the country came to the brink of civil war after two political assassinations. And yet, reportedly, after the assassination of two leftist politicians, Essebsi and Ghannouchi met five times one-on-one to find a political solution, during which Essebsi won concessions from Ghannouchi to waive age limits and the exclusion of members of Ben Ali's government from political office in the new constitution (Gall 2015). Thus, it is still possible to argue that reducing the polarization in the country and avoiding an authoritarian reversal was primarily Ennahda's incentive. In fact, it was after the stepdown that the world started talking about an "Ennahda model," a model that combined Islam and democracy. As Ennahda leadership made the step-down decision despite resistance from some of its members, and their accusing the party leaders of making too many concessions (The New York Times Sep. 28, 2013), the decision created a radical break with the Islamists, and led to the emergence of "the Ennahda model" by showing Ghannouchi's preference for democracy over power in the face of increasing disturbances in the society, as CC, stated. As reported in The New York Times (Dec. 16, 2013), in an interview after the stepdown decision, Ghannouchi said, "we still believe that Tunisia will succeed in establishing the first democratic model that brings together Islam and modernity in the region. This small country can provide this large benefit to the world." Former Foreign Minister Rafik Abdessalam also stated that Ennahda voluntarily agreed to step down from power "to secure [Tunisia's] democratic experience so that Tunisia can reach a safe shore" (Wilson Center Jan. 10, 2014).

In the constitutional negotiations in the parliament to finalize a new constitution, Ennahda dropped all of its outstanding constitutional demands, including an article stating that Islam¹⁵²¹⁵³ was the religion of the state, the age limit of 75 for political office holders, which cleared the way for Essebsi to run for president. Furthermore, Ennahda withdrew a draft law¹⁵⁴ that would prevent former members of Ben Ali's

¹⁵¹To Gall (2015), a columnist in *the New York Times*, it was "[Essebsi's] readiness to recognize the Islamists' place in politics and engage with them," drawing lessons from the Libyan case, where warring factions tore the country apart, and extremist groups, arms smugglers and human traffickers exploited the resulting chaos, that made the negotiated transfer of power possible.

¹⁵²The constitution guaranteed freedom of worship, and forbid "attacks on the sacred," an expression which was open to interpretation, to analysts (BBC News Jan. 27, 2014).

¹⁵³It is a fact that Ennahda's push for Article 141, which involved multiple unchangeable clauses, one of which stated that Islam was the "religion of the state," was an important source of division although the article was, subsequently, removed in a compromise by Ennahda. As noted by ?, given that the popularity of the party in the society was a reflection of the importance of religion in the society, Ennahda tried to give Islam both a permanent role and a special protection in the constitution, making a case for it with reference to the suppressive administrations of Bourguiba and Ben Ali.

¹⁵⁴This draft law that would "disqualify all members of the successive Ben Ali governments, from 1987 to 2011, as well as senior members of the former ruling party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD), from holding certain elected or appointed positions, and from forming or joining the governing bodies of

party from running for elections, a concession which was strongly reacted by many inside the party who were afraid that “the old guard,” who had suppressed them in the past, would come to power (The New York Times Dec. 16, 2013). Ghannouchi (April 14, 2018) explained his effort to prevent the passage of this law after 2013 emerged as a new milestone in avoiding any form of confrontation/polarization in our interview as follows:

“We avoided any sort of polarization, confrontation even with people of the previous regime. We avoided any sort of exclusion. There was a bill given to the parliament to exclude people of the previous regime from politics. But I gave my word that this bill would not be passed by the parliament. [In the end, these people] joined the coalition and participated in the elections.”

Despite criticisms from within the party, as Wolf (2014b), an expert on Tunisian politics, said, Ennahda was able to maintain the unity in the party to a large extent. And finally, the constitution, which shared the executive power between the President and the PM, passed almost unanimously in January 2014. Then-President Marzouki¹⁵⁵ explained why they considered power-sharing in the constitution to be important as follows: “We are afraid of dictatorships... We do not want a strong president anymore.” While the division of executive power between the President and the PM was seen as a way to prevent a return to the old regime, as Nawfel Jamali¹⁵⁶, an Ennahda MP and former Minister of Vocational Training, the problem with the constitution was that it made the day-to-day functioning of the state difficult by “too ambiguous and too much power-sharing.” This idea is supported by the fact that Ghannouchi, on the one hand, and Kais Saied, on the other, later came to speak about the need to change the system. After the adoption of the constitution, a new electoral law, introducing an electoral system that favors a fragmented parliament, was also adopted in April 2014, allowing authorities to set a date for elections.

It is possible to argue that after the political agreements, stepdown of Ennahda-led government, adoption of the constitution, and caretaker government’s taking office, there was a normalization in the country, as also suggested by President Marzouki’s removal of the decree that imposed the state of emergency, which had

any political parties,” was introduced on November 30, 2012 by five parties, including two members of the governing coalition, Ennahda and the CPR, “to protect Tunisia’s nascent democracy from the old guard;” and yet, was criticized for violating the international criteria set to limit political rights of certain people, associated with the former regime at the beginning of democratic transition, as stated in a Human Rights Watch (Jun. 15, 2013).

¹⁵⁵Moncef Marzouki, interview by the author, Sousse, April 16, 2018.

¹⁵⁶Nawfel Jamali, interview by the author, Tunis, April 17, 2018.

been ordered by Ben Ali before his fled from the country, and had given the army and the police outstanding powers such as the power to impose curfews and prohibit gatherings of more than three people although the governments did not implement these restrictions after the overthrow of the regime, albeit keeping in place the state of emergency (Gall 2014). On the other hand, in the new period security forces kept clashing with Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militants, based mainly in the area around Mountain Chaambi near the Algerian border. Upon an attack on a military checkpoint, killing 14 Tunisian soldiers, the government launched a crackdown on mosques and radio stations associated with Islamist extremists¹⁵⁷, out of concern that hardliners would be spreading their jihadist messages through these channels not under the control of the state (Reuters Jul. 20, 2014). Few days into the elections in 2014, the interior ministry announced that an assassination plot was prevented, and plotters were arrested. Ennahda, which had been accused by the opposition of tolerating the extremist Islamists had been more careful in the new period. After al-Baghdadi, the leader of an offshoot of al-Qaeda, which had seized territories in Iraq and Syria, proclaimed himself “caliph” of a new caliphate and called on factions across the world to declare their allegiance (Reuters Jun. 30, 2014), Ennahda, without wasting time, rejected his declaration of an Islamic caliphate, calling it, a “reckless act, which gave a deceptive message” (Al-Jazeera Jul. 7, 2014).

6.3 The 2014 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections

With the adoption of the 2014 constitution, Tunisia entered the electoral process. In the campaign process, the main goal of Ennahda, as the representer of the more conservative/Islamist, more pro-revolution electorate, living in the less affluent interior¹⁵⁸ parts of the country, was to portray the party as a moderate actor who sought/valued consensus, to differentiate itself from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Islamic State in the eyes of both its domestic opponents and inter-

¹⁵⁷Tunisia has been the largest source from which Islamic State (IS) group in Iraq and Syria, also known as ISIS, recruited fighters as Tunisia’s a new freedom of speech in the post-revolution country, provided the group with the opportunity to captivate young Tunisians, suffering under a regressing economy and “an abusive police force” inherited from the authoritarian era, by their promises of justice and opportunity (The New York Times Mar. 18, 2015). Besides, the political chaos and security vacuum in Libya provided the ISIS militants with the opportunity to increase their presence in Libya, and stage attacks at Tunisia, crossing over from Libya.

¹⁵⁸While there were studies that suggested the important role of regional divisions between coast and interior on the voting behavior of Tunisians (Berman and Nugent 2015), in that Nidaa Tounes and secular parties appealed to the coastal areas, also privileged by the authoritarian regime, and Ennahda appealed more to the (pro-revolution constituencies in) the interior and rural areas, Ozen (2020) found in his study that not living in coastal areas but living in bigger cities accounted for the vote on secular parties. And Omri (2013) argued, while Nidaa Tounes appealed to “a base along socioeconomic lines,” Ennahda appealed to “a religious or political affiliation” that transcends the class divide.

national observers. As some scholars put it, Ennahda aimed to settle in the center, de-emphasizing its Islamist credentials (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 59) despite the fact that it still had to present itself as “the sole guarantor of Islamic values in the country” as well (Tavana and Russell 2014, 7). In this regard, to reinforce the image of a party that values democracy and power-sharing, first of all, the party pre-selected parliamentary candidates who were more sympathetic to a coalition with Nidaa Tounes (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 18). Besides, in the campaign period, the party employed an American public relations firm; and Ghannouchi delivered speeches in multiple institutions in the U.S., in which he emphasized the importance of consensus and coalition-making to maintain democracy (Tavana and Russell 2014, 7-8). For instance, in a speech Ghannouchi delivered in an institution called “U.S. Institute of Peace” in September 2014, he noted that Tunisian democracy was successful since it prioritized power-sharing in the transition process, refusing the domination of a political party or faction over others as well as the exclusion of any political party/faction from politics. In this regard, he said, Ennahda contributed to this process by seeking to form a coalition of secular and Islamist parties (POMED Sep. 29, 2014). Furthermore, Ennahda even decided not to run a presidential candidate in the 2014 elections not to dominate the elections, and to “help maintain the equilibrium necessary for the healthy development of democracy,” in the words of Ghannouchi (France 24 Jan. 5, 2015). An Ennahda deputy, and the vice-president of the constituent assembly, Mehrezia Labidi, also said, in an interview, “is it good for Tunisia to have a party with the majority in the assembly and the presidency? No. For Tunisians to build a good democracy, a democracy that works, we shall learn how to share” (Dreisbach 2014). As stressed by an expert on Tunisian politics, the party was more concerned with retaining the prime ministry and the parliament in the 2014 elections to complete the reforms that concerned “the internal workings of the country” (Dreisbach 2014). However, even when Ennahda decided not to nominate a candidate the issue of who the party would support in the presidential election caused division in the party. As Radwan Masmoudi, an expert on Tunisian politics, noted, while the majority of Ennahda members were in favor of supporting Marzouki, the majority of the Ennahda leadership was in favor of supporting Essebsi in the presidential race not “to lose any opportunity to join a government with Essebsi’s Nidaa Tounes party, [then] the largest party in the parliament.” It can be said that the support of Essebsi in the presidential race created a split also within the Ennahda leadership, as the party’s secretary-general and former prime minister, Hamad Jebali, who supported Marzouki, resigned from the party 10 days before the presidential election, announcing on Twitter that he was leaving the party to devote himself to “the defense of freedoms and the values for which the revolution took place” (MacDonald 2015). As he noted on his Facebook page, he did not find this

goal attainable within the framework of Ennahda anymore because of the choices the party made, saying, “I have great difficulty in remaining faithful to this position given the state of Ennahda today. I find myself no longer agreeing with its choices.” (MacDonald 2015).

On the other hand, unlike Ennahda, Nidaa Tounes, the representer of the more secular, pro-old regime electorate, living mostly in the more affluent coastal regions, run a very polarizing anti-Nahda election campaign, making references to certain aspects of the former regime, such as secularism, strong state, peace and order in the former regime. As (Wolf 2014a) stated, the leaders of Nidaa Tounes also tried to increase the legitimacy of the party in the eyes of the people by making frequent references to the Destourian roots of the party “associated with the fight for Tunisian independence,” that is, to the Destour¹⁵⁹ (the Constitutional Liberal Party), which was established in 1920 to liberate Tunisia from the French Protectorate, and which after a split in 1934 under the leadership of Bourguiba, turned into a popular movement that ultimately brought an end to the French Protectorate over Tunisia. As Wolf (2014a) noted, to strengthen Nidaa Tounes’ Destourian roots, after a consultation with Essebsi, Omar Shabou, one of the founders of the Nidaa Tounes, temporarily, left the party to establish the Free Destourian Movement, with the idea of “bring[ing] together Destourians who had not yet joined Nidaa Tounes to eventually integrate them into the party.” Ozen (2020), a scholar, who statistically analyzed the alternative explanations that influenced the party choices of Tunisians in the 2014 elections, also stated that Nidaa Tounes’ electoral campaign which involved a “cynical discourse” towards Ennahda and “positive” remembrance of the former regime, in an environment in which Ennahda-led government remained ineffective in handling the increasing Islamist terror, had a significant impact on the voting behavior of the Tunisians. His overall finding was that Tunisians voted primarily on the basis of the secular-religious cleavage in this election. As Haugbolle and Cavatorta (2011) rightfully, put it, “the divisions of the past [in Tunisian society were] still haunting the... transition” (Haugbolle and Cavatorta 2011, 339).

Then, in 2014, Tunisia held parliamentary and presidential elections, in both of which Nidaa Tounes, the main rival of Ennahda, won the elections despite the fact that Nidaa Tounes had a “rather weak party organization,” and lacked “a clear ideological stance” except for its “anti-Islamist rhetoric;” and was seen “as the continuation of the old regime, having inherited not only a significant portion of the organizational structure of Ben Ali’s RCD, but also leading figures from the old

¹⁵⁹While Habib Bourguiba changed the name of the party to the Socialist Destourian Party in 1964 “to reflect the change in socio-economic policies,” in 1988 Ben Ali re-named the party as the Constitutional Democratic Rally (Wolf 2014a).

guard¹⁶⁰” (? , 796). In the parliamentary elections, held on October 15, 2014, the Nidaa Tounes secured 86 out of 217 seats against the 69 seats won by Ennahda; and hence, it won the right to form a new government. And yet, since it did not have an absolute majority it was obliged to form a coalition government. And in the presidential run-off, held on December 21, Essebsi secured 55.7 percent of the vote, beating his rival Marzouki, after winning 39 percent of the vote in the first round and, campaigning primarily on the promise of re-building a strong state, and a very strong anti-Islamist platform. As noted by an expert, despite the fact that Essebsi was the only person that was holding Nidaa Tounes together, what prompted Tunisians to vote for Nidaa Tounes was Essebsi’s promise to unite all secular parties under himself. That is, its supporters saw Nidaa Tounes as the only party that would unite the secularists to counterbalance the Islamists, who had dominated Tunisian politics after the ouster of Ben Ali, given that all other secular parties in the parliament had failed to do it, and that the party had close ties to the business community (Wolf 2014a). Mahmoud Ben Romdhane, one of the founders of Nidaa Tounes, also stated that Nidaa Tounes was “not [even] a democratic party” since Essebsi¹⁶¹ himself was the party, and that it was the strong fear of Tunisian secularists against Ennahda that made them accept Essebsi’s “undemocratic ways” (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019). And yet, as we will see later, the fragile character of party unity, provided only by strong leadership, was soon revealed by the division within the party, caused by Essebsi’s helping his son, Hafedh Caid Essebsi, take over the party leadership, leading to a fight between then PM Chahed and Hafedh Caid Essebsi as well as a series of resignations. With the political infighting between Chahed and Caid Essebsi, not only has Nidaa Tounes has been divided into four¹⁶² different political parties and lost its parliamentary majority, dropping to the third place as a result of resignations, but also it lost two-thirds of its electorate in the

¹⁶⁰In 2014, more than half of Nidaa Tounes’ eighty-six deputies were people who had held senior positions in Ben Ali’s party, and it drew criticism from both the public as well as other parties. Towards the 2019 elections, the criticism increased even more as the number of former senior RCD members in the cabinet further increased in the last two cabinet reshuffles (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019).

¹⁶¹As Wolf (2014b) noted, Essebsi was, in fact, receiving a lot of criticism from within the party before the elections: Accordingly, one issue that created tension within the party before the elections, in July 2014, was Essebsi’s attempts to hold the party congress where the party’s executive cadres would be determined, before the elections, which was perceived by the main figureheads in the party as his attempt to consolidate the power of the Ben Ali party members in the party, who already held the majority. Furthermore, in June 2014, the decision of Nidaa Tounes to run in the parliamentary elections on its own, instead of as part of the joint list of the Union for Tunisia (UPT) coalition, a coalition of center-left and leftist parties, posed the threat of fragmentation by creating the possibility of the departure of Baccouche as well as other trade unionists and leftists from the party. Finally, another criticism was that Essebsi focused on his own presidential election campaign rather than keeping the party together (Wolf 2014b).

¹⁶²First, in 2016, Mohsen Marzouk, who became Nidaa Tounes’ secretary general in 2015 and who opposed one-man rule in the party, established Machrou Tounes. More recently, Chahed and his supporters split from Nidaa Tounes, formed a new parliamentary bloc, the National Coalition, and a political party, Tahya Tounes, to compete in 2019 elections. The party which set its goal as countering not only Nidaa Tounes, accusing it of “nepotism” and “hereditary transfer of power,” but also Ennahda, accusing it of “Islamism” (Al-Jazeera Jan. 28, 2019) quickly drew forty-four deputies, and made his bloc the second-largest after Ennahda.

2018 elections (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019).

Following Essebsi's election as president and the appointment of Habib Essid, a minister under Ben Ali and interior minister after the 2011 revolution, as prime minister to form the new government after an agreement was reached between the parties in the newly formed parliament, Essid initially intended to exclude Ennahda from his government, but later abandoned this initiative and formed a four-party unity government with ministers from four parties, including Ennahda (Al-Jazeera Feb. 6, 2015).

Researchers on Tunisian politics, unanimously, claimed that the initiative to include Ennahda in the coalition belonged to President Essebsi. In this regard, Grewal and Hamid (2020) revealed that Nidaa Tounes, even without the inclusion of Ennahda, would have easily reached the 109-seat threshold required for an absolute majority. Accordingly, with close allies like the Free Patriotic Union (UPL), which won 16 seats, and Afek Tounes, which won 8 seats, the coalition would have already exceeded the 109-seat threshold. It could have even strengthened the coalition further by including other small secular, pro-regime parties such as the National Destourian Initiative (Moubadara), which won 3 seats, and the secular leftist Popular Front, which won 15 seats. Besides, Wolf (2014b) noted, this initiative of Essebsi was a risky one, bearing the potential to destabilize/fragment the party, which was composed of people from many different ideological spectrums, who were only united by their opposition to the Islamists, as Nidaa Tounes primarily defined itself "as a modern alternative" to Ennahda, and called for a strong state and a secular society, as opposed to the first years after the revolution, under the rule of Ennahda. Based on interviews with Nidaa Tounes members, Wolf (2014b) said that there were allegations that the leaders of Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes were negotiating a "secret deal," which was met with backlash from some members of the party, also adding that a coalition with Ennahda would bring about resignation of some of the members. Leila Chettaoui, a co-founder of Nidaa Tounes, in an interview, told that after running a fierce electoral campaign and winning the elections, as party members, they expected Ennahda to be in the opposition and themselves in power, and that they told Essebsi, who neither consulted them nor explained the reasons behind the reconciliation decision, that such a decision would tear the party apart, in a way supporting the allegation of secret meetings (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 17). Besides, just days into the establishment of the coalition, on January 13, 2015, Belhadj Ali, a deputy and an executive board member, called the possibility of a coalition with Ennahda "improbable," on the grounds that people voted in these elections to remove from power the government coalition, dominated by Ennahda, and that Ennahda's inclusion in the government would deprive the

election of its meaning; and that 70 out of 86 Nidaa Tounes deputies were against Ennahda's inclusion in the next government (Kapitalis Jan. 13, 2015). Therefore, it was not surprising to find that the first resignations¹⁶³ from Nidaa Tounes came amid allegations of a lack of consultation during the process of Nahda's inclusion in the coalition and the party's move away from its initial goal, a goal that Mohsen Marzouk, one of the figures who left Nidaa Tounes to form Machrou Tounes¹⁶⁴ in early 2016, defined as "build[ing] a democratic, modern, and secular state" (Gall and Samti 2016).

What made Essebsi's initiative¹⁶⁵ all the more important was that almost all the party's key ministers and parliamentary leaders opposed Ennahda's participation in the government, including "Taieb Baccouche, Mohamed Ennaceur, Boujemâa Remili and Fadhel Ben Omrane, the president of the parliamentary group of the party" (Tunisie Numerique Jan. 31, 2015). Reportedly, they issued a press release to express their absolute refusal to make a coalition with Ennahda, calling for the establishment of a government that "respect[s] the will of the voters of Nidaa Tounes, reflects the political program of the party and its project of modernist society." They expressed that as the election results manifested, the majority of Tunisians "refused to bring back to the fore the figures of Ennahda that [they had held] responsible for the [then] disastrous situation in the country" (Tunisie Numerique Jan. 31, 2015).

Undoubtedly, by insisting on including Ennahda in the coalition, Essebsi showed that he recognized Ennahda's place in politics. Then, with the initiative of Nidaa Tounes leader Essebsi, who said after his electoral victory that he wanted to "... turn the page on the past and look to the future" (Euronews Dec. 31, 2014), a grand coalition¹⁶⁶, which "claimed 82% of the parliament (179 seats), leaving the opposition with a mere 18%," was established (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 5-6). And Ghannouchi-led Ennahda, which saw consensus politics as a remedy to deal with

¹⁶³Mass resignations continued, in January 2016, to protest President Essebsi's son taking over leadership of the party in a hereditary transfer of power; and decreased Nidaa Tounes's seats in the parliament from 86 to 58, making Ennahda the dominant faction in the parliament again with 69 seats (Gall and Samti 2016).

¹⁶⁴Machrou Tounes was established in 2016 by Mohsen Marzouk, a former member of Nidaa Tounes in 2016 with the goal of fighting terrorism and carrying out the necessary economic and social reforms.

¹⁶⁵Not only did Essebsi say in an interview that Ennahda "had put the Islamist parts of its agenda aside," but also as the proof that he recognized the place of Islamists in politics he noted that "In reality, Ennahda is a party for the political scene that we are in now... For now, we cohabit together, we accept them, and they accept us;" and that "Ennahda, bit by bit, is becoming Tunisified... It must continue like that" (Gall 2015).

¹⁶⁶From 2015 till 2019 elections, Tunisia was ruled in grand coalitions, which consisted of largest secular parties and Ennahda. First, the four-party grand coalition, Nidaa Tounes established with UPL, Afek Tounes and Ennahda, ruled Tunisia until 2018, first under Habib Essid (2015-2016), and then under Youssef Chahed. After the disintegration of Nidaa Tounes, it was replaced by another coalition between Ennahda, Afek Tounes, Moubadara, and the two largest splinters from Nidaa Tounes, which are Tahya Tounes and Machrou Tounes. The second coalition was codified in the cabinet reshuffle, carried out in November 2018, and then further increased its parliamentary support (the coalition grew from 60% to 64% of the parliament) with the further fracturing of Nidaa Tounes (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 6).

the country's most pressing socio-economic and security problems, agreed to take part in the coalition although Ennahda was given only one ministry¹⁶⁷ (the ministry of employment) of 27 ministries, and three deputy ministries, despite holding 32% of the parliamentary seats, second only to Nidaa Tounes, which commanded 40% of the seats (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 7). As stated by a scholar, Boukhars (2017b), Ghannouchi was determined to maintain Nahda's presence in the government-state apparatus because in a country where the democratic functioning of institutions was still fragile, the risk of the majority abusing its power was real (Boukhars 2017b, 259). As he added, the goal of Ghannouchi was "to neutralize the power of uncompromising leftists within Nidaa Tounes and tame the politics of ideological confrontation" (Boukhars 2017b, 262). Ghannouchi¹⁶⁸ also told us that although a large number within Nahda were not pleased with the participation in the government, this participation avoided ideological clashes/confrontations. Undoubtedly, this elite consensus also had the advantage of making it easier to convince the public against the austerity policies to be implemented, breaking the resistance of the powerful UGTT, and increasing the international aid/investment in the country (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 7). As Grewal and Hamid (2020, 7) pointed out, citing an Ennahda deputy¹⁶⁹, while Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes had vastly different perspectives on religion and revolution, their approach to economic and security issues was very similar, as both were economically liberal parties. Then, the joint incentive to increase the attractiveness of the country to international investors/organizations prompted both Essebsi and Ghannouchi to write op-eds in the international media (Ghannouchi 2014, Essebsi 2014). As interviews with two Nahda deputies¹⁷⁰ revealed, Nahda also considered its presence in the ruling coalition important in order to control/contain Nidaa Tounes' anti-democratic tendencies from within (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 7-8).

¹⁶⁷On the other hand, junior coalition partners, Afek Tounes and UPL, were given 3 ministerial positions each, of 27 ministries.

¹⁶⁸Ghannouchi, interview.

¹⁶⁹Here are the words of an anonymous Ennahda deputy: "If you check the programs our party and Nidaa Tounes before the elections you will be shocked that there is no big difference between the parties. Because we are two parties on the right and we are [economically] liberal and share the same principles, ideas, and ways of thinking about the economy" (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 7).

¹⁷⁰In interviews, two deputies said the following:

"If we are in the opposition, what will we have? We will have Nidaa Tounes – a huge part of the old regime – alone, as the main part of government: 'We think that this is not good for the transitional process and for a real process of building a strong democracy. ... We must oblige them to [respect] the principles of the constitution especially on human rights and freedom'" (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 8).
 "[If] Ennahda is in the opposition, talking to the public, pushing the government, making peaceful demonstrations – there are people who would not accept that kind of opposition. ... Someone may advise the president to dissolve the parliament, to push the government to resign, etc. ... This is the past we're afraid of. Some of these people don't believe in democracy..." (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 7-8).

Then, on October 30, 2014, few days after the parliamentary elections, in a press conference, Ghannouchi called on Nidaa Tounes for the establishment of a national unity government, and warned that, under the conditions of the time, “no political party in the country should seek to monopolize¹⁷¹” (Asharq Al-Awsat Oct. 31, 2014). In an interview Ghannouchi gave in the same days, he drew attention to the fact that Tunisian democracy was still in a transitional phase, in which an authoritarian reversal was still possible; warned against the repeat of the Egyptian experience, in which Morsi was ousted from power through a *coup d'état* and Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed due to the political “polarization” atmosphere in the country; and emphasized the necessity of resolving economic and security challenges the country faced since the revolution in a broad-based government. Thus, he said, such a government was crucial to eliminate all these potential threats to political stability:

“...Tunisia has not completely turned the page on tyranny...Our goal is to ensure democracy triumphs over chaos and dreams of coup d'état...Tunisia does not need protest parties, but rather it needs compromise parties that are capable of rule, as well as a mature and responsible [political] elite that rejects all forms of exclusion. After the elections, voters do not expect to see political conflict, but rather a strong state that achieves security, stability and economic development.... Democracy in Tunisia...cannot handle a return to the conflict between the state and an opposition force. This is why we believe that the majority [of political parties] are incapable of leading the next stage and that the solution is consensus based on mutual trust between Tunisia's various [political] actors...” (Asharq Al-Awsat Oct. 31, 2014).

And yet, although this coalition, which was approved by the parliament in early February 2015, was seen as the beginning of “a new phase” in the transition process, “[a phase] that would tame political polarization and put ideological differences aside to focus on Tunisia's urgent socioeconomic needs” (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019), time was to show that elite consensus, reached by Essebsi and Ghannouchi at the time, was not enough to tackle the country's most pressing problems and did not contribute to the building of some of the basic institutions of democracy, such as the constitutional court, let alone to the consolidation of democracy. Besides, as we will see later, after Essebsi's announcement of the end of the alliance with Ennahda in September 2018, the elite polarization immediately will re-emerge, with renewed calls to investigate Ennahda for its alleged involvement in the killings of Brahmi and Belaid.

¹⁷¹ Apart from Ghannouchi himself, his daughter also wrote an op-ed in the international media, detailing how Ennahda differed from its counterpart in Egypt, in that while the latter adopted “a winner-takes-all approach after gaining a majority of votes in the elections,” Ennahda has not sought a monopoly of power and instead, “sought to form wide political coalitions with other secular parties” (Ghannouchi 2014).

6.4 2015-2018 Grand Coalition Period

A peaceful transfer of power¹⁷² through elections and the establishment of a government in which over 80 percent of the parliament took place in the ruling coalition have been the first important developments of 2015. In this consensus environment, calls within Ennahda for the prosecution of former regime member figures as part of the transitional justice and calls within Nidaa Tounes for an investigation into Ennahda for its alleged involvement in fighter recruitment to the jihadist groups in Syria, Iraq and Libya, and in the killings of Brahmi and Belaid through its secret apparatus were silenced, probably by the intervention of leaders of both parties (Grewal and Hamid 2020). And yet, in this period, in the absence of a strong opposition party in the parliament and with Ennahda's over-pursuit of consensus, Essebsi was able to pass many problematic laws through parliament. And yet, as Nidaa Tounes did not pursue the consensus policy as much as Ennahda during the coalition-government, the constitutional court, which would be an important institution to oversee the government, could not be established; and economic reforms could not be undertaken.

6.4.1 The New Counterterrorism Law

A new open-to-abuses counter-terrorism law, passed by parliament, after two terrorist attacks in 2015 was one of these anti-democratic laws. Tunisia suffered three terror attacks in 2015, making security the most urgent¹⁷³ problem to be solved. First, on March 18, 2015, one of the worst terrorist attacks in Tunisia's history took place, killing 21 people, the majority of whom were tourists. Militants¹⁷⁴, including ISIS, have claimed responsibility for this attack on the National Bardo Museum in Tunisia (The New York Times Mar. 19, 2015). Ennahda, who had been, while in power, widely blamed for being too tolerant to Islamist militants, called for "a public rally against terrorism, and a national conference to set a comprehensive

¹⁷²Tunisia's 2014 election was particularly significant as it was the second time that power changed hands since the 2011 revolution, passing the "two-turnover test," Huntington argued, was necessary for a country to be called a consolidated democracy.

¹⁷³The survey conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in 2015 in Tunisia also found that 47% of the respondents ranked terrorism as the single biggest problem facing Tunisia (International Republican Institute Nov. 16-25, 2015, 16-17).

¹⁷⁴Interior minister Gharsalli laid the blame for the attack on an Al-Qaeda-linked Islamist group, Okba Ibn Nafaaa, based in Chaambi Mountains next to the Algerian border. And the government, before long, announced that they had killed the leader of the group responsible for the attack (The New York Times Mar. 29, 2015).

counter-terrorism strategy.” (The New York Times Mar. 18, 2015). Then, only three months later came another deadly extremist attack, also claimed responsibility by the ISIS, on a Mediterranean resort in Sousse, killing almost 40 people. And President Essebsi, who said the aim of the attack was to “damage the economy, and derail Tunisia’s democratic transition” (The New York Times Jun. 26, 2015), responded to this attack by declaring the country at war (Reuters Jul. 4, 2015). In this regard, he declared “a state of emergency, which provided wider-ranging authority to security forces, in a week after the massacre (BBC News Jul. 5, 2015); many directors and commanders of the Ministry of Interior, who were dismissed after the revolution, returned to duty (Herbert 2018); and also Essebsi signed into law a new counter-terrorism bill to replace the one that had been in force since 2003, with almost unanimous support of the parliament, with 174 in favor and 10 abstentions, which drew reaction of leading human rights organizations in the world, eight of which issued a joint declaration to warn that the new law “lack[ed] the necessary safeguards against abuse;...grant[ed] security forces broad and vague monitoring and surveillance powers; extend[ed] pre-charged detention from 6 up to 15 days for terrorism suspects, and permit[ed] courts to close hearings to the public; and allow[ed] witnesses to remain anonymous to the defendants” (Foreign Policy Aug. 18, 2015). Thus, since there was no strong opposition in the parliament a very undemocratic law was adopted. And amid the criticisms against the law came the third major attack, on November 24, in one year, this time on a bus carrying presidential guards, and killing 12 of them.

While the application of the old law, which was employed by the Ben Ali regime to suppress the political opponents, primary ones being the Islamists, and which led the regime to charge them without “any credible evidence linking them to terrorism, with convictions based on confessions extracted under torture,” was stopped by interim authorities after Ben Ali’s ouster, and then resumed in May 2013 after a series of armed attacks against the security forces in the mountains close to the Algerian border (Human Rights Watch Jul. 31, 2015), the new law was also criticized for being open to such abuses, infringing on civil liberties, and the broadness and vagueness of what qualifies as an act¹⁷⁵ of terrorism as well (Foreign Policy Aug.

¹⁷⁵In the report signed by eight international human rights organizations, the criticisms against the definition of terrorism in the law were detailed as follows:

“The law includes as terrorist offenses the act of ‘causing harm to private and public property, vital resources, infrastructures, means of transport and communication, IT systems or public services’ when they are part of an individual or collective enterprise aiming at intentionally spreading terror among the population or forcing the government or an international organization to accomplish an act or abstain from so doing. Such a definition could allow the repression of certain acts that are not of a terrorist nature as defined by international law. Simple demonstrations accompanied by a certain amount of disorder could be qualified as acts of terrorism... The law prohibits ‘praising terrorism’ in broad terms that fail to meet the requirements set by international law for restricting the right to freedom of expression. According to the law, any person who is found to have ‘publicly and clearly

18, 2015).

Security has been largely restored¹⁷⁶ in the country, but at the cost of a resurgence of torture and other abuses of power by security officials, a key feature of the Ben Ali era, even though dismantling and reforming the security sector was one of the main demands of Tunisia's 2011 revolution. As Boukhars (2017a) noted, because of the old authoritarian discourse of stability and order, and the return of old repressive habits of the police and security forces, the country remained in the "grey zone."

As Grewal (2018b) stated, purging and reforming the security sector could not be undertaken after the revolution also because multiple police unions, which were created in the post-revolution process to represent their interests, eventually consolidated their power by merging under umbrella organizations. And as these unions blackmailed politicians, pressured judges to try to free fellow officers on trial because of misconduct, sieged/stormed courthouses, a law regulating these unions could not be adopted. Although both the amended Internal Security Forces (ISF) statute (May 2011) and the 2014 constitution permitted members to unionize and prohibited strikes, as Grewal (2018b) said, in the absence of clear definitions of the roles of police unions, and of clear boundaries about which actions constituted political activities and which were not, these unions not only "exploit[ed] this ambiguity in law, but also flout[ed] even its clear restriction on strikes."

In fact from the outset, post-revolution governments failed to establish civilian control over the security forces. In the course of Tunisia's first democratically-elected government (2011-2014), which was led by Ennahda, the attempt of Ali Larayedh, the interior minister, who had been imprisoned and tortured under Ben Ali's rule, along with thousands of other opposition figures, to replace the Ben Ali-era senior security officials resulted in intense protests and illegal strikes of the police unions, prompting Larayedh to back off. As Grewal (2018b) noted, the protests that began with the announcement of the dismissal of Laajimi, a senior security official, culminated in his appointment by Larayedh to an advisory position¹⁷⁷ in the ministry.

praised' a terrorist crime, the perpetrator of a terrorist crime, an organization or an alliance connected with terrorist crimes, their members or their activities, could be sentenced to up to five years in prison. This article could be used to unjustifiably restrict the freedom of expression of individuals and groups that legitimately exercise their right to freedom of expression" (Human Rights Watch Jul. 31, 2015).

¹⁷⁶The public opinion survey conducted by IRI in Tunisia in 2019 also found that only 1% of the respondents ranked terrorism as the biggest problem facing Tunisia (International Republican Institute Jan. 25-Feb. 11, 2019, 8).

¹⁷⁷Grewal (2018b) explained this process as follows:

"Larayedh announced the firing of Colonel Moncef Laajimi, the General Director of the Intervention Units who was on trial for killing protesters during the revolution. In response, thousands of officers from the Syndicate of Officers of the General Directorate of the Intervention Units (SFDGUI) went on strike, leaving key installations unsecured, and surrounded

Then, the unchecked power of police unions remained a threat to democracy. Police unions not only continued their attempts to defend police officers facing prosecution but also after terrorist attacks in 2015 to Bardo Museum and Sousse, pushed for the adoption of a counter-terrorism law, which was severely criticized by human rights organizations.

Furthermore, after the adoption of the 2015 counter-terrorism law, this time police unions campaigned for the adoption of another bill, known as the “Repression of attacks against armed forces bill,” and criticized by Amnesty International (Jul. 13, 2017) for “exempt[ing] members of the security forces from criminal liability for ‘injuring or killing anyone,’ even when they ‘respond with lethal force to an attack on property that does not threaten lives.’” The bill also “criminalized the ‘denigration’ of police and other security forces”; and provided for prison terms and fines “for those disclos[ing] or publish[ing] ‘national security secrets,’” which was defined too broadly to include any information revealing human rights violations, and contained no protection for informants and journalists (Amnesty International Jul. 13, 2017). Pressure by police unions on parliament to pass the bill increased, especially after a police officer was stabbed to death in November 2017. Three largest security unions issued a joint statement, threatening to halt security to the deputies of parliament and stage protests if the parliament failed to pass the bill within two weeks (Reuters Nov. 2, 2017). Although the law has been, repeatedly, withdrawn, and has yet to be adopted, human rights violations¹⁷⁸ committed in the name of security, such as home raids, arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture have been increasingly used by the security personnel particularly in the state of the emergency atmosphere, reinstated in November 2015 after the deadly attack which targeted presidential guards; and “in some cases these measures are imposed in a discriminatory manner based on appearance, religious beliefs, or previous criminal convictions and with disregard to the due process of law,” as reported by Amnesty International (Jul. 13, 2017). At the beginning of 2017, after his visit to Tunisia, the UNHR Rapporteur expressed his concern about slow and open-to-abuse judicial processes, such as “prolonged pe-

Laajimi in Tunis’s Bouchoucha barracks, blocking access to him. A lurid video allegedly of Laarayedh was subsequently leaked, as if in retaliation for his attempt to fire Laajimi. Forced to compromise, Laarayedh instead transferred Laajimi to a consultant position elsewhere in the ministry”

¹⁷⁸ According to the figures provided by the Ministry of Interior, only in 2015, 85 cases of torture were reported; and yet, no conviction was pronounced (Jeune Afrique Mar. 27, 2018). Despite the Tunisian authorities’ voicing their commitment to investigate all allegations of abuse, the Ministry of Interior stated that it “investigated only one allegation of torture in 2015 and 2016 and found it to be false” (?). Furthermore, reportedly, the Organization against Torture in Tunisia (OCTT) counted 631 cases of torture between 2013 and 2016; and In Sanad centers, established by the OMCT for giving psychological and legal support to victims of torture, between 2013 till 2018, 224 victims were given support. Furthermore, these were despite the fact that Tunisia has been the first Arab Country to ratify the provisions of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Torture, and the 2014 Constitution mentioned the “imprescriptibility” of the crime of torture, and the Code of Criminal Procedure was amended in February 2016 to require the presence of a lawyer from the start of the custody (Jeune Afrique Mar. 27, 2018).

riods and conditions of detention, the use of executive orders to restrict freedom of movement and impose house arrest without proper judicial review, and allegations of ill-treatment and torture,” against people accused of terrorist acts, saying, of 1500 people against whom investigations/prosecutions continued, only about 10% were sentenced, and the rest were held in provisional detention without any conviction (UNHR Feb. 9, 2017). Although, in February 2018, police unions stormed the courthouse, surrounding it with police cars, during the trial of five police officers accused of torture and secured the release of the suspects, pitting the security forces against the higher judiciary¹⁷⁹ and civil society¹⁸⁰, and prompting the police unions to back¹⁸¹ down (Mosaique FM Mar. 2, 2018), in 2021, the security forces’ abuses were further exacerbated with President Saïed’s seizure of power, who has extensively relied on police force to suppress the opposition.

6.4.2 2016 May: 10th Ennahda Congress: How Important for Post-Islamist Transformation?

In 2016, during the reign of both PM Essid, and then PM Chahed, Tunisia continued to grapple with terror, high unemployment, inflation and social unrest. Tunisian security forces’ clashes with militants crossing over from Libya, and on the mountains at the Algerian border, continued during the reign of Chahed who took office in mid-June. As economic reforms and development have failed to keep pace with political changes in the country, young people particularly in the most marginalized segments, continued to join the ISIS. Reportedly, by early 2016, more than 3000 people left Tunisia to fight for the ISIS (Reuters Mar. 18, 2016).

In such an environment, in which clashes with extremists continued one after another near both Algerian and Libyan borders, Ennahda, accused of authorizing violence during its rule, took a bold step in an effort to draw a thick line between his party and extremist groups; and Ghannouchi, the leader of the party, in May 2016, at

¹⁷⁹In this regard, the Supreme Judicial Council, denounced the attitude of the police, defining it as a violation of public order and a “banditry;” and urged judges and lawyers to join the sit-in, in protest. Thus, judges and lawyers staged “day of rage” protests to demand protection of courts against police intervention (BBC News [Fr] Mar. 1, 2018)

¹⁸⁰15 international and local human rights organizations issued a joint letter, on March 13, 2018, addressing the Tunisian government, to ask the government to ensure that “it puts an end to the impunity that prevails for human rights violations by the Tunisian security forces;... [and]... that members of the security forces suspected of committing or participating in crimes or torture or ill-treatment are not allowed to escape judicial proceedings opened against them” (Human Rights Watch Mar. 13, 2018)

¹⁸¹And finally, a military prosecutor initiated an investigation against the police officers who gathered in front of the court in official uniform to demand the release of their colleagues, “for undermining the internal security of the state” (Mosaique FM Mar. 16, 2018).

Ennahda's second post-revolutionary party congress¹⁸², to which Essebsi was also invited, announced their decision to separate the religious and political work, i.e., the decision to "leave political Islam and enter democratic Islam," calling the new party identity "Muslim democrat" and "political, democratic and civil" (Middle East Eye May. 23, 2016). In his address at the congress, he, officially, vowed "to keep religion far from political struggles," arguing that "a modern state is not run through ideologies, big slogans and political wrangling, but rather through practical programmes" (Al-Jazeera May. 21, 2016). Reportedly, this project of re-branding in Ennahda was led by a "progressive" faction-led by Ferjani and Ghannouchi himself; and the changes were endorsed by 1200 delegates in the congress (Ibish 2016). In an interview given only a few days after the congress, Ghannouchi explained this decision as a stage in the development of both the party and the country. He elaborated more on this phase of development as follows:

"... This is one of the stages of development, which our movement has been ready to, and the country has been ready to. The constitution that governs the country is a revolutionary constitution; and it requires a certain type of specialization. People have to be specialized in every field that they engage in. Religious affairs need to be exercised by religious people, and politics need to be exercised by politicians... So that politicians will not be accused of using religion as a tool. And so that neither religion nor the political field will be exploited... We are not talking about abandoning religion. We are talking about a modern society in which any field is exercised by people who have a specialty in that field... Our country has reached a point that requires such separation" (CNN May. 23, 2016).

Some analyses claim that Ennahda's break with political Islam and switch to post-Islamism dates back to this speech by Ghannouchi at the 10th party congress. For instance, an analyst stated in that this decision to "drop the party's commitment to 'dawa', proselytizing Islamic values," which came after Ennahda saw the downfalls of its Egyptian counterpart, made the party "a purely political organization, with no overt religious mission," as well as "the first post-Islamist party in the Arab world," although secularists, and critics of Islamism remained skeptical of this re-branding (Ibish 2016). And yet, we have already seen that the party's trajectory since the revolution was already a compromise-based, post-Islamist approach/line of moderates who "wanted to make the revolution and democracy lasting," in the words of CC (March 19, 2019), a researcher/journalist, albeit one that included steps to appease Islamists within the party/constituency. Besides, while Ghannouchi's an-

¹⁸²The party congress in May 2016 witnessed not only a rebranding of the party but also a restructuring in which the party leader was given the power to appoint members of the executive committee and the shura council was given the power of verification/veto.

nouncement that he was separating the party from the movement, and banning party members from religious activities such as preaching, represented a significant break with Islamists within the party/constituency, we have seen that as a movement with no political experience, the consolidation of post-Islamist line in Ennahda as a party line took place in the post-revolutionary period as the Ghannouchi-led faction also experienced other breaks with the Islamists within the party and at the grassroots. Ghannouchi's 2012 statement "we are not going to use the law to impose religion" was one break, and Ennahda's decision to step down from elected power after the 2013 assassinations and its motivation to further expand the coalition to reduce the polarization in society was another. This thesis, therefore, takes Ghannouchi's statement at the 2016 party congress as another break with the Islamists in the party/at the grassroots and a further consolidation (even formalization) of the already existing post-Islamist line. "Not an expression of ideological transformation but a re-expression of what already existed," AA (January 18, 2020), an AKP deputy, similarly said of this statement. Therefore, this thesis treats Ennahda as a post-Islamist party since the revolution, a characteristic most evident in Ghannouchi's statements over the conciliation with Islam and democracy/modernity and the party's dialogue/consensus-first stance, that does not hesitate to compromise/make concessions for democracy.

6.4.3 2016-2018: The Carthage Agreements Further Broadening the Consensus Rule to Undertake Economic Reforms

2016 began with a political crisis within the ruling Nidaa Tounes as many deputies of the party resigned to protest both Essebsi's son's appointment as "national secretary in charge of the executive administration and legal representative of the party" at the party's first national congress, creating a dynastic transfer of power, and the coalition with Ennahda, with the claim that "the party had lost its vision to build a democratic, modern and secular state," in the words of a resigned deputy who was "credited with masterminding the electoral success of Nidaa Tounes." With these resignations, Nidaa Tounes' number of deputies decreased to 58, while Ennahda had 69 deputies. Thus, Nidaa Tounes lost its majority in the parliament, allowing their main rival to become the largest party (The New York Times Jan. 11, 2016). Reportedly, Nidaa Tounes split into two after resignations, one led by Caid Essebsi, who attempted to seize the control of the party through a party restructuring, and the other by Marzouk, secretary-general of the party, who opposed to hereditary transfer of power, and formed Machrou Tounes (Reuters Nov. 9, 2015).

While there was a crisis in Nidaa Tounes, Tunisia was also grappling with terror, high unemployment, inflation and social unrest. In July 2016, amid a series of militant attacks and intense fight of the Tunisian soldiers and police with militants near both borders, further hampering Tunisia's tourism and economy, emerged a process, under President Essebsi's supervision, to form a national unity government (NUG), which was seen as a cure for Tunisia's problems. Reportedly, Essebsi had been pushing for a new unity government to overcome the political infighting in the government coalition to tackle economic reforms¹⁸³ demanded by the lenders, and even proposed the inclusion in the government of the UGTT president, one of the main opponents of the austerity programs (Reuters Jun. 2, 2016). As part of this process, nine political parties¹⁸⁴ and three major unions signed on to the "Carthage Agreement"¹⁸⁵, an agreement setting out priorities¹⁸⁶ of a national unity government. Although the development of the agreement took place in a "highly personalized decision-making process" through informal meetings between Essebsi and Ghannouchi and "outside the established channels of democratic process," it expanded the "consensus" rule – the "political tent" (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019) – to the unions, including the UGTT and five opposition parties (Machrou Tounes, al-Moubadara, al-Joumhour, al-Massar and the Peoples' Movement) to increase their role in the country's achieving the priorities, such as fighting terrorism and corruption, addressing regional disparities, encouraging growth, etc., as outlined in the Carthage (Dihstelhoff and Sold 2016).

Then, as the next step, PM Habib Essid, who was pressured to resign from office for his lack of progress in undertaking economic reforms to create growth and employment, and because of his handling the threat of Islamist militants, asked parliament for a vote of confidence, which failed and led to his dismissal (Reuters Jun. 2, 2016). Essebsi, then, named Youssef Chahed, a senior member in the Nidaa Tounes party as prime minister (Reuters Jun. 2, 2016). Then, on August 27, 2016, Chahed's new "national unity government (NUG)," involving 26 ministers and 14 secretaries of

¹⁸³To the World Bank, "anemic" growth rates, with a rate of 1.0 percent in 2016 following a 1.1. percent growth rate in 2015, a sharp increase in public spending including wages, and failure in carrying out economic reforms, caused high fiscal and current account deficits (The World Bank Oct. 11, 2017).

¹⁸⁴The NUG was composed of four parties in the coalition government (Nidaa Tounes, Ennahda, Afek Tounes, and the Free Patriotic Union) and five opposition parties (Machrou Tounes, al-Moubadara, al-Joumhour, al-Massar, and the People's Movement) and three civil society groups—the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Union for Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts (UTICA), and the Tunisian Union of Agriculture and Fishery (UTAP).

¹⁸⁵To Dihstelhoff and Sold (2016) one problem with the agreement was that it beared the risk of marginalizing the opposition as the nine parties that took place in the coalition represented only 32 percent of Tunisia's voters although signatories to the Agreement represented majority of the seats won in the 2014 elections.

¹⁸⁶Six broad priorities determined by the Agreement were as follows: "combatting terrorism; encouraging development, growth and work; fighting corruption; ordering public finances; decentralization; and increasing government efficiency" (Dihstelhoff and Sold 2016).

state, won a parliamentary vote of confidence by 167 votes to 22 one month after the dismissal of the former cabinet (Aliriza 2017). Before the Tunisian parliament gave a vote of confidence to Chahed's government, Chahed addressed the parliament, detailing his three-year plan to fight terrorism, corruption¹⁸⁷ and boost economic growth¹⁸⁸. Although the NUG, designed to reduce polarization¹⁸⁹/political tensions and improve government performance by increasing policy coherence on key policy issues, temporarily reduced the political tension and allowed parliament to resume parliamentary activities, pass a series of reforms¹⁹⁰ to improve the economy, improve the investment climate, and attract aid to the country, including the approval of a four-year \$3 billion loan by the IMF in exchange for reforms, the protests¹⁹¹ and strong opposition from the UGTT continued to force Chahed's hand (Aliriza 2017).

In fact, even ahead of the vote on the 2017 budget, Chahed got stuck between two different demands, trying to appease both. On the one hand, there were international lenders, who regularly pushed to cut spending and raise avenues; and on the other hand, there were Tunisian socio-economic movements, who kept protesting against austerity measures, and demanding the state to create jobs, investment, and redistribution. Pressure from the UGTT, in particular, led to austerity measures in the 2017 budget being limited to a "freeze in public hiring and spreading out of wage increases." Fewer austerity measures led the IMF to delay its second tranche

¹⁸⁷ According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2016, the country fell from 59 out of 178 countries in 2010 to 75 in 2016.

¹⁸⁸ Reportedly, between 2010 and 2016 the number of civil service employees increased from 600.000 to 900.000 in a population of 11 million, wage share of the national economy grew rapidly, and the government spending far exceeded the revenues. In the face of the big budget gap and the deepening public debt, which rose from 25 billion dinars in 2010 to 56 billion in 2016, accounting for 60% of the GDP, the government had to borrow a big loan from the IMF (Mohsen-Finan 2017). In 2016, the International Monetary Fund approved a four-year, \$3 billion loan for Tunisia in exchange for reforms, but due to delays, the country only received 1.6 billion dollars of the loan.

¹⁸⁹ As Kubinec and Grewal (2018, 19) noted, even after the establishment of the NUG, parliamentary debates/votes were again divided by religious and revolutionary issues: a failed amendment to regulate Islamic financial institutions, the counter-terrorism law, particularly concerning definitions, two electoral-law amendment attempts to give military/security forces the right to vote were divisive issues along secularist-Islamic lines. And the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD)'s budget and whether to investigate the president was the main divisive revolutionary issue.

¹⁹⁰ In this regard, in 2016, the parliament approved a law to strengthen the central bank autonomy to prevent political interference/pressure as the government attempts to intervene in monetary policy after the revolution was reacted by the central bank governor, who was then sacked by the government in 2012 (Reuters Apr. 13, 2016). It was followed, in June 2016, by the parliament's approval of a new central bank law, which not only made amendments to generate a solid banking sector, but also laid out frameworks for Islamic finance services that can be offered by the banks (Reuters May. 12, 2016). Then, in September 2016, a foreign investment law was enacted to boost foreign investment in the country. The law gave flexibility to foreign investors in transferring funds abroad, including profits, and removed the taxes on the profits of major projects for a ten-year period; established an investment fund to provide funding to fund infrastructure projects, and to encourage investors to start major projects in disadvantaged areas of the country; and created a high Investment Authority to deal with foreign investors and reduce administrative procedures for them (Reuters Sep. 17, 2016). Finally, in November 2016, "Tunisia 2020" international conference produced a series of loan and aid pledges from Qatar, the European Investment Bank, etc. to financially support Tunisia (Amara 2016).

¹⁹¹ Since 2016, Tunisians has taken to the streets multiple times to protest unemployment (Al-Jazeera Jan. 22, 2016).

of the loan on the grounds that Tunisia lacked “progress in reforms, including public sector wage bill, the public finances, and state banks,” a delay that lasted till the government pledged in spring 2017 to “cut 10.000 public sector jobs and sell its stakes in three state-owned banks,” as “Tunisia’s economic transition require[d] a shift from public sector towards a competitive private sector,” as highlighted in IMF loan program review (Aliriza 2017).

In the meantime, strong opposition from the UGTT resulted in a cabinet reshuffle, that included the dismissal of the Civil Service Minister, Briki, who came from the ranks of the UGTT, as Briki, unlike Chahed, wanted to proceed gradually in civil servant cuts, first relying on “voluntary layoffs.” Furthermore, before the cabinet reshuffle, the UGTT, which feared a privatization wave and mass layoffs by the government under the pressure from the IMF, both threatened a general strike and withdrawal from the cabinet. While Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda sided by the PM, other parties complained that there was no prior consultation with them as suggested by the Carthage Pact (Mohsen-Finan 2017). It was followed by a wide cabinet reshuffle in September 2017, in which many old regime figures were included in the new cabinet, with 13 names replaced and 11 new names (Reuters Dec. 19, 2017). Reportedly, while the Nidaa Tounes pushed for more cabinet representation in return for its 2014 election victory, Ennahda opposed, saying that the cabinet reshuffle should only be aimed at filling vacant ministries (Al-Jazeera Sep. 6, 2017). In the new cabinet, which Chahed called a “war government [to] fight against terrorism, corruption, unemployment and regional inequality,” three of the names had served as ministers under Ben Ali regime¹⁹²; and yet, Chahed also named an Ennahda member Taoufik Rajhi, an economic adviser to him, as economic reforms minister (Al-Jazeera Sep. 6, 2017). However, the new government¹⁹³ failed to meet the austerity measures, demanded by international lenders, particularly overhauling the subsidy-heavy economy, and cutting public spending. With remaining high unemployment particularly for youth and in the interior regions, and rising inflation, the year 2017 was also a challenging one for the economy (The World Bank Oct. 11, 2017).

And then, in 2018, the governing coalition made a second attempt, called “Carthage 2” to adopt economic reforms. And as Grewal and Hamid (2020) stressed, the gov-

¹⁹² Among these names were Ridha Chaloum, Ben Ali’s former finance minister, an ally of the Nidaa Tounes party, and reinstated into the finance ministry again, and Lotfi Braham, also a name close to Nidaa Tounes, assigned as interior minister.

¹⁹³ As Diwan (2019) noted, apart from the fact that especially young democracies often have incentives to pursue expansionary policies, another reason why both Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda failed to carry out economic reforms was that they felt themselves to be in a “weak position” – Nidaa Tounes because of constant divisions within the party, and Ennahda because of the general deteriorating situation of the region after the 2013 Egyptian coup.

erning coalition this time agreed on 63 reform items. However, throughout 2018, the country was rocked by protests against rising costs of living since the government, facing few economic options, allowed price increases on a host of products, including basic goods such as bread and fuel, and also increased retirement plan contributions and taxes, pushing many middle and lower-class families to the economic edge, to reduce the country's deficit over austerity measures imposed by the lenders. Almost 800 people were arrested after protestors took to the streets and clashed with the police in at least 20 cities and towns for five days in a row, between January 8-12 (NPR Jan. 11, 2018). Although the government pledged to increase financial aid to needy families, review the retirement disbursements of underpaid people, and extend healthcare to everyone (The New York Times Jan. 14, 2018), protests restarted only two days later against austerity measures (Reuters Jan. 14, 2018). Thus, protests, which erupted dramatically in January 2018, continued intermittently across the country. According to the report of Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES), more than 9 thousand protests occurred in 2018, with almost 25 protests a day (December 2018).

And finally, in 2018, the intra-party fight between PM Chahed and the President's son over the leadership of Nidaa Tounes escalated, leading to the suspension of Chahed's party membership in September, and the end of the alliance between Ghannouchi and Essebsi after Essebsi accused Ennahda of giving support to Chahed in the intra-party fight.

What initiated the political crisis in the first place was Chahed's blaming President Essebsi's son, Hamed Caid Essebsi, for causing an internal crisis in the party, which spilled over into state institutions. Then President Essebsi called for the dismissal of Chahed, in July, blaming him for the political and economic crisis in the country. However, while the coalition member Ennahda rejected the calls for the dismissal of Chahed out of fear that the economy would collapse, saying the PM's departure would harm stability when the country was in need of economic reforms, in the absence of broad consensus and compromise on the reforms, the UGTT¹⁹⁴, who kept opposing the economic reforms and privatization plans proposed by the Chahed government, supported the call of the President, and called a public sector strike on October 22 and 24 to protest Chahed's privatization plans. However, with Ennahda's 68 seats in the parliament, and 42 seats of the National Coalition/Tahya Tounes, a pro-Chahed bloc, founded on August 27, 2018, by former Nidaa Tounes deputy Mustapha Ben Ahmed, composed mostly of former Nidaa Tounes deputies, which became the third largest bloc in the parliament, Chahed had enough support

¹⁹⁴The UGTT is estimated to represent five percent of Tunisia's population.

in parliament to withstand a possible vote of no confidence. Then came Chahed's announcement that he would continue with an aggressive economic reform program, which included "the reform of subsidies and social funds," and which was also backed by the IMF to reduce the budget deficit. It is also worth stressing here that although Ghannouchi tried to avoid ideological polarization/confrontation in the coalition governments, he¹⁹⁵ was not, in principle, against a confrontation on socio-economic issues. "For example, there is now confrontation about the public sector," he said in 2018, elaborating on it as follows:

"50% of our economy is based on public sector. And public sector is in bankruptcy. The leftists insist that they have to keep this sector regardless of the income. But [we] insist that the economic decisions have to be based on rational grounds; and companies not benefiting has to be reformed or sold. So, there is polarization [on socio-economic issues], but not ideological."

In September, Essebsi, the leader of Nidaa Tounes, suspended Chahed's membership, and called for his resignation, for his alleged failure in reviving the economy and generating a new bloc in the party, which rendered Nidaa Tounes powerless (Middle East Eye Sep. 15, 2018). As deputies close to Chahed also left the party, Nidaa Tounes' number of seats dropped to third place in the parliament. However, the crisis culminated, on September 24, with President Essebsi's announcement during a television interview that the consensus with him and Ennahda came to an end with Ennahda's "choosing to form another relationship with Youssef Chahed" (Middle East Eye Sep. 15, 2018). Hence, Ennahda's refusal to cooperate with Nidaa Tounes to marginalize Chahed and his bloc costed the consensus.

To some analysts, the President made the announcement out of anger at Chahed's anti-corruption policies, which have touched both officials from the Ben Ali era and prominent businessmen who supported Nidaa Tounes (Al-Jazeera Jan. 28, 2019). To some other analysts, with this announcement, Essebsi intended to differentiate itself from Ennahda who supported Chahed, by capitalizing on anti-Chahed sentiments in Tunisian society following an unpopular economic reform program, which included cutting public wages and divestment of loss-making state companies (Al-Jazeera Jan. 28, 2019). In particular, as we will see in more detail below, given that the results of the local elections in May 2018 showed that the declining popular support for political parties was most pronounced for Nidaa Tounes, which lost 800.000 votes compared to the 2014 elections, while Ennahda lost 450.000 votes compared to the 2014 elections but maintained its hegemony in the south of the

¹⁹⁵Ghannouchi, interview.

country, strongly penetrating the regions won by Nidaa Tounes in 2014, it is safe to say that Essebsi, ahead of the 2019 elections, wanted to differentiate himself from Ennahda, which supported Chahed's economic reform policies. In accordance with this claim, a political analyst, Yerkes and Ben Yahmed (2019) stated that Essebsi's announcement of the end of the four-year coalition with Ennahda may have had something to do with his desire to base his election campaign once again on anti-Islamism to differentiate itself from Ennahda given that Nidaa Tounes-led coalition government failed to deliver the most important goals of the 2011 revolution and that Essebsi had no success story to tell ahead of the 2019 elections. This claim is supported by the fact that, soon, in a speech to the Tunisian National Security Council, President Essebsi, indirectly, accused Ennahda of being involved in the 2013 assassination of two secular opposition leaders through its secret apparatus (Arab News Nov. 29, 2018).

In fact, to re-activate the secularist-islamist divide and to re-elevate the "culture war issues" (Al-Jazeera Aug. 13, 2018), in August 2018, Essebsi pledged to introduce a bill to the parliament to amend the personal status law to grant women and men equal inheritance rights, in line with a report¹⁹⁶ by the Committee on Personal Freedoms and Equality (COLIBE), which had been set up by the President in August 2017, and tasked with bringing the country's laws in line with the 2014 constitution and international conventions. And, reportedly, the committee's report which called for, among other issues, inheritance equality, decriminalization of homosexuality, abolition of death penalty, the right to take the mother's last name and the right of Tunisian women to pass on their citizenship to their foreign husbands, drew the ire of Islamists as thousands of protesters, gathered outside the parliament to denounce the proposals, labelling them as "anti-Muslim" and carrying placards which call these proposals "an affront to God's word." (Al-Jazeera Aug. 13, 2018). In response, Ennahda Shura Council, the party's highest authority, which met on August 25-26, 2018, issued a statement rejecting these proposals and expressing its adherence to the inheritance system as stated in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and expressed by the Personal Status Code, which, on inheritance, followed the Islamic guidelines that gave women half the share of men. One significance of this statement was that it was the first time that the Ennahda Shura Council rejected a policy, proposed by Essebsi after Ennahda's getting into coalition with Nidaa Tounes. Thus, the conflict between Ennahda and President Essebsi turned into the major conflict between the parties before the 2019 elections.

¹⁹⁶The report prepared by the committee included provisions on "equality in nationality law, equality in family relations and inheritance code. ... [as well as] a draft law on the Code of Individual Rights and Freedoms and another draft law on the elimination of discrimination against women and children" (Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation Jul. 15, 2018).

Re-activating the “cultural war” issues would certainly work to re-unite the secular forces prior to the 2019 elections, as also it would distract the attention of the voters away from the failure in reviving the economy (Al-Jazeera Aug. 13, 2018). Although it was Essebsi who threw the bait to make Ennahda “choose between pleasing its conservative base and cultivating its progressive image” (Grewal 2018a), it was Ennahda who took the bait by rejecting the proposals without delay, at the expense of undermining its “moderate, even progressive” international reputation (Al-Jazeera Aug. 13, 2018). To a scholar, (Grewal 2018a), while Ennahda was able to justify its previous compromises, such as not mentioning sharia, and inclusion of gender equality in the constitution, on religious grounds, Qur’an’s clarity on inheritance, combined with the resistance¹⁹⁷ of Ennahda’s base, prevented it from making this compromise despite the fact that Essebsi had offered to allow individuals to continue to abide by Islamic rules on inheritance. Then, although Ennahda approved most of the other recommendations of the COLIBE, it rejected the proposal of gender equality in inheritance. On the other hand, some Ennahda figures, such as the then head of the Ennahda party list in Tunis for the municipal elections, who then got elected, expressed her support for the President’s proposals, in general, although she did not express a clear position on equal inheritance, saying, “I align myself with the proposal of the President, who recommends increasing the threshold of freedoms,” and stating that she was in favor of individual freedoms (Business News May. 9, 2018). And the cabinet approved equal inheritance law in November 26, 2018.

After Ennahda’s refusal to sack PM Chahed, who had been competing with Hamed Essebsi for the leadership of Nidaa Tounes, undoubtedly, the Shura Council’s rejection of the proposal of gender equality in inheritance further strained the alliance. And then followed the announcement by President Essebsi that the alliance with Ennahda ended. Undoubtedly, Tunisian democracy would benefit from this development as Ennahda, which gained its freedom after having condemned itself to what came out of Essebsi’s lips for a long time, would now propose alternative political/economic policies (Grewal and Shadi 2018). Although following Essebsi’s announcement Ennahda pledged its commitment to “the path of consensus, as the foundation of Tunisia’s stability” (Middle East Eye Sep. 15, 2018), and Ennahda deputy Lotfi Zitoun said that Ennahda was seeking “stability and dialogue that includes all partners to get out of the crisis,” (Qantara.de Sep. 27, 2018) the new power bloc, i.e., the power realignment in the parliament, further crystalized, and the division in Nidaa Tounes deepened with the government reshuffle, undertaken

¹⁹⁷International Republican Institute’s (IRI) public opinion survey, conducted between November 23-December 3, in Tunisia, after Essebsi’s call for amending the inheritance law to provide equal inheritance to sons and daughters, also found that 63% of the respondents (75% of men, and 52% of women) “strongly oppose[d]” Essebsi’s proposal.

by PM Chahed on November 5.

Chahed engaged in a cabinet reshuffle¹⁹⁸, naming 10 new ministers, without notifying the President in advance, saying, the aim of the reshuffle was to bring an “end to the political and economic crisis” (The Arab Weekly Nov. 6, 2018). Furthermore, in the new cabinet, Chahed increased Ennahda’s portfolios from five to nine, while he completely excluded Hamed Caid Essebsi-led wing of the party from ministry positions. Thus, Ennahda, which had become the party with the largest number of deputies in the parliament in 2015 with the resignations following an in-fighting in the Nidaa Tounes, now gained the ability to support or derail the Chahed government with its growing number of ministry portfolios as a result of political in-fighting. Thus, ranks tightened and a new power bloc crystallized with the cabinet reshuffle: While a senior political adviser to the president accused Ennahda of being behind the reshuffle, saying “this government is Ennahda’s government,” Taboubi, the leader of the Tunisian General Trade Union (UGTT), allied with the President, saying “[Tunisia] deserves better than this reshuffle” (The Arab Weekly Nov. 6, 2018).

The cabinet reshuffle, which was also approved by the parliament with the support of Ennahda and the parliamentary group of the National Coalition was, reportedly, seen as a victory for Chahed, who faced pressure from his party’s leader, Hamed Caid Essebsi, to step down from power due to his failures to revive Tunisia’s economy. Although President Essebsi, originally, rejected the cabinet re-shuffle, saying he was not priorly consulted about it, he did not block its passage from the parliament since he did not have enough support in the parliament (Middle East Eye Nov. 13, 2018); and he had to swear in the new cabinet on November 14. And yet, although the 2014 constitution had given the PM the power “to create, amend and dissolve ministries [except for ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs which required the president’s approval] and secretariats of state, as well as to determine their mandates and prerogatives, after consulting the Council of Ministers,” Essebsi’s opposition to the cabinet reshuffle on the grounds that he was not consulted in advance, showed that President Essebsi “was inserting himself into the PM’s duties¹⁹⁹ in a manner inconsistent with the constitution” (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019). And yet, the

¹⁹⁸Chahed named 10 new ministers and eight new junior ministers from three political groups in a broad reach of support in the parliament to ensure that the parliament endorses the new government. Reportedly, he kept the key ministers, such as foreign affairs, interior, finance and education ministers, the latter two of whom had ministry positions under Ben Ali rule, the same since their replacement prerequired a consultation with the President. Among the new ministers were also another name, who served as a minister under Ben Ali, a Nobel prize winner, and a Tunisian Jewish businessman.

¹⁹⁹It is important to stress that the 2014 Constitution limits the President’s powers compared to the powers he had under the 1959 Constitution. The 2014 Constitution entrusted the PM with almost all the executive power, setting the overall government policy, and chairing the council of ministers. The President, elected by universal suffrage in two rounds, charges the head of government proposed by parliament to form the government. He also signs bills into laws and has veto power.

presence of competing claims in this incident highlighted the necessity of the constitutional court²⁰⁰ which can adjudicate disputes over the powers of the president and the PM, particularly given that after the cabinet reshuffle two executives, President Essebsi and PM Chahed, represented different power bases (Grewal 2018c). Although Tunisia created an interim body to review the constitutionality of draft laws, this body did not have the authority to settle disputes over the powers of the president and the PM.

Post-revolution coalition governments, including the ones led by Chahed, remained ineffective in reviving the economy, despite the two IMF programmes, in 2013 and 2016; and the economic situation in Tunisia after the revolution has been worse than it was before the revolution. Accordingly, according to the World Bank data, annual GDP growth rate²⁰¹, which was 4-5% annually prior to the revolution, hardly passed 2% after the revolution; and in 2015, 2016 and 2019 could barely go above 1%. Unemployment, which was 10-12% before the revolution, has reached 16% by 2022. And inflation, which was 3-4% before the revolution has increased to 8 percent by 2022 (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 9-10). As coalition governments have fallen short in their efforts to revive the economy, people have become increasingly disillusioned with political parties, as revealed by 2018 Afrobarometer survey which found that 81 percent of Tunisians do “not feel close to any political party,” and that almost 50 percent did not know whom to vote for and 30% would not vote if elections were held the next day (Afrobarometer Oct. 1, 2018, 60,66).

6.4.4 Combat with Corruption: From Asset Recovery Commission (2012) to Transitional Justice Law (2013) to Economic Reconciliation Act (2017)

After the revolution and the fled of Ben Ali, his wife Leila Trabelsi and their extended families from the country, one of the priorities of the new government was to recover the stolen assets, owned by the so-called “Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan,” and their close associates, and hold them accountable for corruption. As it was reported by the World Bank in 2014, the companies that belonged to this clan comprised 21% of private sector profits, and yet, only 3% of the production and 1% of the employment

²⁰⁰ Article 148 of the 2014 Constitution stipulated that “the establishment of the Supreme Judicial Council shall take place within a maximum period of six months from the date of the legislative elections. From the same date and within a maximum period of one year, the establishment of the Constitutional Court shall take place.” While the Supreme Judicial Council was set up in 2016, the Constitutional Court could not be established due to Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda parliamentary groups’ inability to reach a consensus on the members.

²⁰¹ As an exception, in 2012, immediately after the revolution, the GDP growth rate was the same as the pre-revolution period, which was 4.2%; and in 2021, it was 3.3%.

(New Lines Magazine May. 7, 2021). In this context, on March 14, 2011, interim President Fuad Mebazaa issued a decree to automatically confiscate “movable and immovable property” belonging to the Ali-Trabelsi community, which included Ben Ali, Leila Trabelsi and 112 members of their inner circle, acquired after Ben Ali came to power in 1987. To investigate and retrieve these assets in Tunisia and abroad, the first task force established was the semi-independent National Asset Recovery Commission, composed of officials from six bodies, such as the Central Bank, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Justice, etc. As this commission reported in 2012, Ben Ali’s family and friends used state institutions such as state banks, the police and the justice system to appropriate public funds and land, and to punish who opposed them. In 2014, another significant step was the establishment of the “Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD)” the constitutional commission tasked with exposing decades of human rights abuses²⁰² from 1955, the last year of the French rule, till the end of the dictatorship, with a four-year mandate, to conduct its own investigations as part of the transitional justice process. Then President Marzouki²⁰³ said that the transitional justice process was a process agreed with Ennahda to bring justice, “step by step,” for the crimes of corruption and torture during the dictatorship so not to jeopardize the revolution. He explained the purpose of this process, as follows:

“We adopted what we called transitional justice since two main problems of Tunisia during the dictatorship was corruption and torture. . . The idea [in transitional justice] was, look, you have been in torture in Tunisia. Come and ask for forgiveness. . . Just come and say, ‘I was obliged to torture. I am sorry, I ask for forgiveness.’ That will be ok, we will accept. And the second point was, look, we know that you have taken a lot of money from the banks without any reason, now you have to give this money back.”

Thus, the IVD was more of an “independent tribunal” to “encourage corrupt individuals to come forward and make amends” (New Lines Magazine May. 7, 2021). Although the Transitional Justice Law was adopted in 2013, and formally launched at the beginning of 2014 by the then President Marzouki, the first hearing was held 3 years later, in November 2016, after investigating more than 60000 submitted cases of human rights abuses, and holding 17000 audition sessions. As the first hearing, held for cases of corruption and police abuses such as torture, arbitrary arrests,

²⁰²Bensedrine, the head of the commission, also revealed with the following words, the commission’s work also covered indictments of high-profile figures: “It is about violations committed by people who are still on board in the administration, around the presidency, inside the parliament and so on. . . We have managed to get the whole chain, including the former president Ben Ali. We have evidence for all these crimes. . . It is more about revealing the truth than accountability” (The Guardian Mar. 4, 2019).

²⁰³Marzouki, interview.

deaths in detention, etc., had the symbolic meaning of “acknowledging the atrocities of the past,” it was streamlined live on national television. However, Essebsi, who had held high public offices in both Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes, and his party Nidaa Tounes opposed this process, and denigrated this commission from the outset. First of all, while Ennahda’s political platform expressed support for the IVD in its 2014 election campaign, partly, because Ennahda’s main opponent Nidaa Tounes had multiple old regime elites (Tavana and Russell 2014, 8), Essebsi, in his election campaign, made the call to end “digging in the wounds of the past and move on” (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy Dec. 14, 2018). They also accused the IVD of aiding Ennahda as many of the victims, allegedly, had Islamist connections (The Guardian Mar. 4, 2019).

However, post-revolutionary anti-corruption efforts have been undermined first by the expiration of the Asset Recovery Commission’s mandate in 2015, and then by the September 2017 parliamentary adoption of the Administrative Reconciliation bill, allowing officials involved in corruption under Ben Ali to return to positions of power with impunity. The bill, proposed by then President Beji Caid Essebsi, not only sought “reconciliation without truth” but also weakened the authority of the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD), effectively removing its jurisdiction over corruption, as noted by Grewal and Hamid (2020, 11).

Chahed, who has made the fight against corruption one of his main goals from the very beginning, expanded the 2017 budget for the National Anti-Corruption Unit (INLUCC), an independent body, whose mandate was to “prevent, detect and investigate” cases of corruption, involving the public and private sectors to this end. Along with Chawki Tabib, the chairman of this body, he pioneered the Law on Reporting Corruption Cases and Protection of Whistleblowers, which was unanimously adopted by the parliament in February 2017. Reportedly, after the adoption of the law, which aimed to prevent corruption by protecting informants, “Operation Clean Hands” was launched, targeting businessmen and high-profile figures involved in corruption, and aiming to disclose smuggling routes and the expanding informal sector. However, in stark contradiction to this process, and at the same time, there was a parallel process undermining this fight against corruption, which was the process of the proposal and adoption, in September 2017 of the Administrative Reconciliation Law, a law that “pardon[ed] all the corrupt people,” in the words of former President Marzouki²⁰⁴.

Essebsi’s original 2015 draft was an “economic” reconciliation law, that granted amnesty to civil servants/state officials accused of stealing public funds, and about

²⁰⁴Marzouki, interview.

400 Ben Ali-era businessmen, also accused of corruption under the former authoritarian regime and were under investigation/on trial since the revolution, and whose assets/capital were frozen, in exchange for their return of the money they had extracted. It also allowed the civil servants to return to positions of power (The Guardian Mar. 4, 2019). Not only Nidaa Tounes deputies but also Ennahda deputies, the two parliamentary blocs that occupied most of the seats in the parliament, supported the bill, later dubbed the Administrative Reconciliation Bill (2017), after it was negotiated between the President and parties in secret negotiations, reportedly, on the grounds that it would pump money into the struggling economy (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy Dec. 14, 2018). Ennahda deputies also justified their support for the bill not only by stating that their vote for the law was crucial to maintain the consensus, but also by claiming that it was their efforts that changed the focus of the bill from businessmen to bureaucrats, latter of whom they claimed were mere pawns of corruption schemes (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 11). However, Grewal and Shadi (2018) noted that, in fact, neither law could be significantly amended since there was neither a strong parliamentary opposition to put pressure on the government nor a constitutional court to check the constitutionality of laws (Grewal and Shadi 2018).

The bill was protested by the opposition and some human rights groups for its “normalization of corruption” and being against the values of revolution (Reuters Apr. 26, 2017). This bill, which ended the trials/investigations of former officials who were involved in corruption under the Ben Ali regime, was severely criticized by Mohamed Abbou, the former minister in charge of Administrative Reforms, who called it “an unconstitutional promise of impunity for those who financed the 2014 presidential campaign” (El-Malki 2017). Maneesh M’sameh (I Will Not Forgive) movement, which was established after the government approved bill and other civil society organizations resisted the bill on the grounds that it was “an obliteration of the revolution” (The New Arab May. 31, 2016). In addition, *the Transparency International* issued a press release²⁰⁵ to call the government to “stop” the bill, saying that it was against the “accountability and transparency” principles stated in the Constitution, and that it “allow[ed] the most corrupt in Tunisia to escape justice;” and “encourage[d] further theft.” Furthermore, *International Republican*

²⁰⁵ Here is an important section from the press release:

“The bill would stop prosecutions and halt trials for corrupt former officials, crooked businessmen and their cronies if they reveal their stolen wealth to a new Arbitration and Reconciliation Committee. However, the law does not have a clear way to reveal the full amount stolen, nor ways to prevent fraud, leaving open the opportunity for the corrupt to hide their wealth... There is nothing in the proposed law to make the corrupt name the cronies or high officials in the Tunisian government who helped them steal” (Transparency International Aug. 31, 2015)

Institute (IRI)’s public opinion survey (2017) set forth that 77% of the population was “somewhat/very unfamiliar” with the Administrative Reconciliation Law, and when the content of the law was explained, 51% “somewhat/strongly opposed” the law (IRI (Apr. 19-26, 2017, 77-79). In other words, despite the society’s lack of support for the law, Ennahda, “the only party large and organized enough to put pressure on the government,” did not oppose the law. To the contrary, as part of the government coalition, Ghannouchi-led Ennahda worked for the government’s success, reining in the hardliners in the party, who were in favor of the prosecution of former regime figures as part of the transitional justice process, bowing to Essebsi and Nidaa Tounes. Hence, Ennahda’s over-pursuit of consensus contributed to the realization of “counter-revolutionary” interests of Nidaa Tounes and old regime remnants (Grewal and Shadi 2018).

Reportedly, the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) extended its own mandate until mid-December 2018 although the parliament voted, unanimously, to oppose the self-proclaimed extension. And yet, since the Speaker’s office did not issue a decision over the issue, the commission carried on its work (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy Dec. 14, 2018). In the meantime, in October 2018, Nidaa Tounes even walked out of parliament, and announced its decision to suspend its legislative activities until the IVD was dissolved. Besides, President Essebsi, once more, voiced the criticism that he was “against settling scores of the past” (The Guardian Mar. 27, 2019). And yet, the commission released its final report on March 26, 2019, despite the government’s efforts to impede²⁰⁶ the work of the commission. Besides, although the report was ignored, since December 2018 the commission referred cases to the courts, which “processed them at a crawl” (The Guardian Mar. 4, 2019).

The IVD report not only accused President Essebsi of being complicit in torture during his ministry under Bourguiba, but also then exiled former President Ben Ali, his extended family and their wider network, of corruption and human rights violations, such as torture and enforced disappearances under his rule. Since 2011, in multiple cases, the last one being in 2017, Ben Ali and his family members have been convicted in absentia several times, and issued prison sentences for corruption (The Guardian Mar. 26, 2019).

Ghannouchi, who positioned himself alongside Essebsi and his Nidaa Tounes party, supporting the reconciliation law, and against the transitional justice, including the IVD, when asked, in an interview, why he took such a stance, demonstrated once

²⁰⁶Reportedly, interior and defense ministries impeded the commission’s access to archives, the judges failed to enact travel bans to prevent the defendants from leaving the country, the security forces repulsed the attempts to prosecute its members for torture, and the pro-government media portrayed Bensedrine as a spy or prostitute (The Guardian Mar. 4, 2019).

again his conciliatory, non-polarizing approach, saying, although the transitional justice process started in a supportive climate, over time the public's view of the process changed due to the vindictive path, followed by the Commission. He said:

“Before [the commission's] mandate ended, the public mood changed, so it became divorced from its context and seemed to be attempting to put the rulers on trial. For example, democratically elected president Essebsi came to be accused in this process. This raised the question, “Who is trying whom?” Had we not withdrawn from the government in 2013, perhaps we would be the ones now on trial. These trials are excessive and unproductive as they haven't uncovered the truth or provided redress for the victims. . . Vindictiveness and revenge don't appeal to me. . . Regarding my feelings, I simply felt that we are passing down grudges, which does not benefit societies” (The Legal Agenda Jun. 30, 2021).

On the other hand, to a political analyst, Ennahda first condemned the reconciliation act, calling for the “cleansing” of the interior and defense ministries, and yet, later, it sided by the bill, voicing support for a general amnesty, mainly because Ennahda tried to use it as a “bargaining chip” in its political rivalry in the Nidaa Tounes, just like Nidaa Tounes used the IVD as leverage in its coalition with Ennahda, particularly prior to the 2019 parliamentary elections. And reportedly, Ghannouchi's later positioning himself against the transitional justice process created a crisis in his party as well. Accordingly, in the crisis over the extension of the IVD's mandate in 2018, while Ennahda deputies refused to vote to end the process, Ghannouchi demanded the opposite at this party congress (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy Dec. 14, 2018).

Hence, despite being the largest and most organized party in parliament, Ennahda refrained from taking action on controversial issues, such as transitional justice and supported the adoption of the laws contrary to the spirit of the revolution. This, naturally, raised the question of whether there can be such a thing as “too much consensus” that could be a threat to democracy (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 1).

6.4.5 Failure to Establish the Constitutional Court

As noted above, President Kais Saied, who came to power in 2019 presidential elections, suspended the parliament in 2021, before all the institutions of democracy had been established as envisaged by the 2014 constitution. And the Constitutional

Court is at the forefront of the institutions²⁰⁷ that have not been completed although Article 148 of the Tunisian Constitution stipulated that “the establishment of the Supreme Judicial Council shall take place within a maximum period of six months from the date of the legislative elections. From the same date and within a maximum period of one year, the establishment of the Constitutional Court shall take place.” Although the Supreme Judicial Council²⁰⁸ was set up in 2016, the lawmakers were unable to elect four of the twelve members of the Constitutional Court²⁰⁹ since Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda parliamentary groups could not reach a consensus on the members of the Court. Despite the fact that the Constitutional Court was granted important powers by the Tunisian Constitution (Articles 118-124), such as constitutional review of constitutional amendments, international treaties, draft laws, laws, and parliament’s internal procedures; ending the term of the President of the Republic, declaring a vacancy in the office of the President of the Republic; assessing the legality of maintaining the state of emergency; deciding on conflicts related to the jurisdiction of the president and prime minister, and although the Organic Law of the Constitutional Court was adopted on December 3, 2015, the court²¹⁰ was never established as the Tunisian parliament which under Article 118 of the Constitution is supposed to elect four members of the court, failed to do so.

The parliament convened several times in a row to elect members of the Court, but only one of the candidates proposed by the parliamentary blocs, the candidate nominated by Nidaa Tounes, received the required number of votes (145 out of 217) to be elected. Despite the fact that parliamentary groups had agreed, in March 2018, on four names after more than two-month-long consultations and that a document,

²⁰⁷ There are also five other independent constitutional bodies, which are an official human rights authority, an official electoral commission, an anti-corruption commission, a sustainable development commission, and a communications authority, whose establishment processes could not be completed due to parliament’s delay in drafting their laws although constitutional provisions regarding these bodies came into effect after the first legislative elections. While two of these institutions, the Higher Independent Elections Commission and the Independent Authority for Audio-Visual Communications, kept operating under the legal texts that existed before the adoption of the constitution (Mekki 2018), basic Laws establishing the Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Authority and the Human Rights Commission was adopted on July 19, 2017, and 2018, respectively.

²⁰⁸ Although the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), was created by the parliament, on May 15, 2015, within the six-month mandate, to replace the High Judicial Council (HJC), which was discredited under former President Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali for compromising the independence of the judiciary and making the courts subordinate to the government and which was suspended in December 2012, the law which created the SJC was also criticized by the Human Rights Watch, primarily, on the grounds that the executive would still appoint members of the council and hence, have a significant influence on the judiciary; and that it included the chief military judge as an ex officio member, and hence, gave a senior military official influence over the civil justice system, too (Human Rights Watch Jun. 2, 2015). Then, in October 2015 elections were held for 33 of 45 seats of the SJC.

²⁰⁹ According to the constitution, the rest of the members were to be elected by the President of the Republic and the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), a constitutional body entrusted with ensuring the independence of the judiciary by overseeing judicial appointments, disciplinary measures, and career advancement of judges.

²¹⁰ As mentioned before, in the absence of a permanent Constitutional Court, the Provisional Instance (article 148(7)), established in 2014, was mandated to assess the constitutionality of the laws only before enactment, that is, to be in charge of constitutional review until the permanent court was established.

which involved these names, had been given to the speaker of the parliament before the voting after being signed by heads of the parliamentary blocs, Ennahda nominee Abdellatif Bouazizi got only 116 votes, and remained below the 145-vote threshold since Nidaa Tounes deputies dispersed their votes whereas Nidaa Tounes nominee got 150 votes with the support of Ennahda. In other words, since Nidaa Tounes did/could not keep its word, only Nidaa Tounes candidate was elected, and the court could not be established to date.

The media reported after the voting that other deputies accused the leaders of Nidaa Tounes of having called on their deputies to vote only for their candidate Radhia Ouersghini, and to split their votes for the other candidates (Jeune Afrique Mar. 16, 2018). On the other hand, the fact that Ennahda deputy Mehrezia Laabidi said in an interview that even when the leaders of Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes and the PM agreed in advance on the passage of a law, half of the Nidaa deputies often voted against it or did not vote at all, suggests that, the lack of party discipline in Nidaa Tounes would be one reason for Nidaa Tounes' failure to kept its promises: a part from being "a loose secularist coalition," united only by their opposition to Ennahda, since 2016 Nidaa Tounes has constantly been in a fragmentation²¹¹ process –with its seats in the parliament decreasing from 86 after the 2014 elections to just 25 before the 2019 elections (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 17). Grewal (2018c) also noted that while electing a judge is a polarizing issue, just like in the U.S., it may also have derived from the governing coalition's avoidance of polarizing issues for the sake of consensus. Another scholar, Boubekour (2016), also noted that the elite consensus, which consolidated power-sharing agreements in the post-revolutionary era, while ensuring that the transition process was a peaceful one, also caused both Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes camps to avoid "politically costly and potentially explosive issues, such as structural economic reform and transitional justice," that would destroy the consensus, and impeded the "institutionalization of rules that would have made it possible. . . to resolve such conflicts in a transparent way" (Boubekour 2016, 109). In this regard, Yerkes and Ben Yahmed (2019) also noted that it took seven months for the parliament to elect the new head of the Independent High Electoral Commission (ISIE), Nabil Baffoun, on January 31, 2019, while the elections were scheduled for October 6 and November 12.

In the absence of the constitutional court, which would act as a safeguard for democratic transition by overseeing the constitutionality of the laws and arbitrating dis-

²¹¹ While constant splits from Nidaa Tounes reduced the members of the party in the parliament to only 25 in 2019, Ennahda managed to maintain its integrity and party discipline in this process. Undoubtedly, the Islamist background, and a strong sense of solidarity and cohesion, inherited from long years of repression under the authoritarian regime, played a role in its maintaining the integrity (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 8). As widely stressed in our face-to-face interviews, Ennahda had a much more democratic internal decision-making structure; and issues were widely debated in these structures before making a decision.

agreements among different branches of power, a democratic reversal took place when the conditions became ripe. Besides, the country has been governed under a permanent state of emergency under the pretext of the fight against terrorism, as Article 80 of the Constitution gave the Constitutional Court the power to end the state of emergency as well (Grewal 2018c).

6.4.6 Decentralization: First Local Elections in 2018

In Tunisia, which declared its independence in 1956 with a highly centralized system, the local elections on May 6, 2018, were the first local elections, as strong Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali had also preserved, even expanded, the centralized system, “centralizing all decision-making in Tunis, and furthering regional divisions” (Waszkewitz 2018). As Baccouche (2016) noted, while the 1959 constitution introduced some local governance, “in a unique and deliberately incomplete article,” with the introduction of municipal and regional councils, to him, in practice, the decentralization in this period was “pure fiction,” since both Bourguiba and Ben Ali, deliberately, opted for more a centralized system, in which local administrators were appointed by the center to “rebuild a united state which was able to fight against an ancient tribal system” (Baccouche 2016, 185). He stated that, unlike the 1959 constitution, the 2014 constitution was very “generous in terms of decentralization” (Baccouche 2016, 185). As MMekki (2018) stated, Chapter 7 of the 2014 Constitution (on decentralization) was “like other chapters, revolutionary,” and the wording “local power” in the constitution was meaningful, in terms of showing the distancing from the “timid vision of decentralization” in the 1959 Constitution. Thus, the constitution clearly stated that local authorities “manage local matters in accordance with the principle of administrative autonomy.” However, the implementation of decentralization has been problematic as local elections for the establishment of local authority councils could not be held until May 2018 although Article 14 of the 2014 constitution stipulated that direct elections be held for local representatives.

One reason for the delay was that the holding of these elections required determining the powers of municipal and regional governments as well as their budgetary autonomy, but the former local governance law of 1975 had deprived local governments of any form of financial and administrative autonomy. And the law regulating the decentralization process, which replaced the 1975 law, was passed by parliament on April 26, 2018, just ten days before local elections. Another reason was the prolonged failure to enact the draft law submitted on October 26, 2015, to oversee these elections and the amendments to the electoral law announced by the government

in November to unify the electoral law regulating all types of elections. As a result, there were parties that were undecided about the date of the local elections on the grounds that there were obstacles to overcome prior to the local elections and that the local and regional governments were not ready as well as parties that were completely against local elections, as Nouredin Bhiri (April 17, 2018), head of the Ennahda parliamentary group and former justice minister, said in our face-to-face meeting. For instance, Wafa Makhlouf said that²¹² local elections should be held but that it was being pushed too fast, and that local and regional administrations were not equipped with the necessary “human resources, financial resources, good practices training” to deliver good results. She said, “my frustration is that we expect a good result with bad tools.” The fact that local elections, scheduled for October 2015, were postponed four times further fueled fears among pro-democracy supporters that figures from the old regime were trying to block the empowerment of local administrations, particularly given that, in September 2017, the parliament passed the controversial economic reconciliation law and also PM Chahed went through a major cabinet reshuffle, including many of the old regime figures in the new cabinet after consultations with political parties and the UGTT (Reuters Dec. 19, 2017). And yet, finally, in December 2018, the Presidency announced that the elections would be held in 2018.

In the 2018 local elections²¹³, political parties, independent candidates, and coalitions competed with approximately 57,000 candidates from a total of 2,074 electoral lists (Waszkewitz 2018). However, the election turnout rate of only 35%, which is much lower than the 2014 turnout rate, and the results of the elections, in which independent lists won a landslide victory, winning 32.7% of the vote (and almost 2,300 seats) thanks to their locally organized campaigns, compared to 29% vote for Ennahda and 21% vote for Nidaa Tounes who won fewer votes²¹⁴ compared to the 2014 elections, signalled population’s disillusionment with democracy and with country’s stagnation since 2011 (Waszkewitz 2018). Both lower voter turnout compared to the 2014 elections (68%), and the overwhelming victory of independent

²¹²Wafa Makhlouf, interview by the author, Tunis, April 17, 2018.

²¹³Looking at the glass half-full, the 2018 elections were elections in which more than half of the candidates were under 35 years old and 49% of the candidates were women, that is, women and youth were heavily nominated, partly due to the local elections law’s youth quota, which required party lists to include at least one person under 35 every four spots, and both vertical and horizontal gender parity requirements. The quota helped youth secure 37% of the municipal council seats, and women secure 48% of the municipal council seats (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Aug. 15, 2018). Furthermore, as Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Aug. 15, 2018) report noted, the decentralization process, ahead of the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections, raised the hopes for the empowerment of local actors, increasing service delivery and building of trust between citizens and the governments.

²¹⁴While Nidaa Tounes came in third with 20.85% of the votes, Ennahda surpassed Nidaa Tounes with 28.64%, although it also received 500 thousand fewer votes compared to the 2014 elections (Waszkewitz 2018).

lists over political parties pointed to growing public disillusionment with political parties (not only with democracy). As mentioned above, this is also revealed by the 2018 Afrobarometer survey, which found that 81 percent of Tunisians do “not feel close to any political party,” and that almost 50 percent did not know whom to vote for and 30% would not vote if elections were held the next day (Afrobarometer Oct. 1, 2018, 60,66).

6.4.7 Towards the 2019 Elections: Public Disillusionment with Democracy and Re-emergence of Elite Polarization

We have seen that Ghannouchi-led Ennahda has established coalition governments with secular forces in the country since 2011 to preserve democracy, and has maintained these coalitions despite opposition from hardliners within the party/constituency, adhering to the principles of prioritizing consensus and cooperation and avoiding polarization. However, while Ghannouchi prioritized consensus to keep democracy alive and pushed the limits of his capacity to reach consensus until its termination by Essebsi in September 2018, public contestation of policies/plans/ideas remained out of question, despite Ennahda being the largest and most organized political party in the parliament. Thus, albeit in the name of consensus, Ghannouchi-led Ennahda has contributed to undermining democratic representation and progress by failing to act on solving the problems of Tunisia, the problems that had caused the revolution in the first place, and by giving support to anti-democratic laws in 2015 and 2017, proposed by Nidaa Tounes, creating the impression that it sacrificed its differences to fit in with the other party and made peace with the old regime – even collaborated to resurrect in the new era the police brutality, from which it had suffered a lot under the old regime (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 1-2). ? also noted that while international community praised the consensus rule in Tunisia’s transition process as “being on the road to consolidation,” Tunisians saw the consensus between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes as “politics as usual: the old regime keeping its privileged position but this time sharing it with Islamists without any genuine pluralism” (?, 798).

Furthermore, as mentioned before, since there has been no strong opposition party to represent frustrated Tunisians, support for democracy (and political parties) decreased overtime –from 70% in 2013 till 46% in 2018 – and support for alternative forms of government, such as one-man rule, reached high levels – rose from almost 10% in 2013 to almost 35% in 2018 and to 57% in 2020 (Afrobarometer Mar. 4, 2023,O). And yet, according to IRI’s public opinion survey results, while Ghan-

nouchi's unfavorability rating started to rise from 20% in 2011 and reached 65-70%, the unfavorability ratings of Essebsi, the leader of Nidaa Tounes, has not risen as much as Ghannouchi's, reaching at most 50%, although Nidaa Tounes was also part of the ruling coalition after 2014. Moreover, while Ennahda was largely blamed for the political and economic gridlock in the country due to its over-reliance on consensual politics, Kais Saied's seizure of power and, in the words of Mondher Thaber, a Tunisian political analyst, his "build[ing] his moves on Ennahda's mistakes and the gaps it created" also revealed a rift within the party over Ghannouchi's leadership that had existed for some time, as we will see in the next section (The Arab Weekly Aug. 25, 2021). Thus, even though it was quite unheard of before Saied's rise to power, apart from the criticism of the hardliners within the party against the post-revolutionary political approach that prioritized compromise, which Ghannouchi represented, there has also been a criticism of intra-party democracy that has existed for some time among the faction aligned with Ghannouchi. As Samir Dilou²¹⁵, an Ennahda MP and former human rights minister, stated, when Ghannouchi traveled to Turkey in 2016, he was impressed by Erdoğan's "strong leadership" and returned home with "new leadership ideas". So, according to Dilou, the existence of the Shura Council was no longer enough for intra-party democracy to take place. "Democracy is not only about saying what you want to say, but also about influencing the decision-making process," he said.

Moreover, after Essebsi announced the end of the consensus with Ennahda in September 2018, the elite polarization immediately re-emerged, suggesting that the elite consensus, created by mutual efforts after the 2014 elections, only delayed the conflicts/cleavages but did not resolve them (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 1). Thus, after announcing the end of the consensus with Ennahda, in a National Security Council meeting, in November 2018, President Essebsi mandated the council, which deliberated on issues that concerns the Tunisian national security, and which was linked to the presidency, to investigate Ennahda's involvement in the assassinations of secular opposition leaders Brahmi and Belaid. Reportedly, prior to that, in November 2018, Essebsi had met with a few members of a group, calling itself the Committee for the Defense of Martyrs Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi (two leaders of the Popular Front party), which was dissatisfied with the initial investigation into Belaid and Brahmi murders and was pursuing its own investigation, and which demanded that the judiciary reopened the case. And at the meeting, this committee which had earlier accused Ennahda not only of involvement in the assassinations, but also of forming a secret apparatus that infiltrated state institutions to steal related documents from the interior ministry, presented new data to

²¹⁵Samir Dilou, interview by the author, Tunis, April 16, 2018.

Essebsi, alleging that the secret apparatus had also planned to assassinate Essebsi in 2013 (Ltifi 2018b). Al-Sabah newspaper, also, published on October 3, 2018, some of the documents, detailing Ennahda's link to assassinations through a parallel security apparatus in the Ministry of Interior (Ltifi 2018a). And yet, Ennahda, still maintaining its conciliatory attitude, released a statement with the signature of Ghannouchi on its website, in which it warned against the dangers of involving the presidency in the judicial affairs with the intention of undermining the independence of the judiciary and in political squabbles, saying its involvement served narrow political agendas and contradicted the impartiality and the constitutional role of the presidency, which represented a symbol of national unity. At the end of the statement, Ennahda also expressed its keenness on partnership and consensus with the political and social forces in the country, foremost of which was the President in order to overcome all challenges that Tunisia was facing (Ennahda Nov. 26, 2018). In a press statement, announced the same day by Ennahda, after stating that Ennahda was a "Tunisian Muslim democrat political party representing reform, democracy, progress, and opportunity for all Tunisians," the party refuted all the claims by "the Popular Front's Defence Committee," calling the claims, "pure fabrications by a politicized self-appointed extra-judicial body that is undermining the legal process by continuously seeking to interfere, pressurize and question the integrity of the judiciary, in order to tarnish and demonize a political rival." It was also added that these "undemocratic means, [which are] used to exclude political rivals," "undermined the democratization process, the transparency as well as the independence of the judiciary."

However, encouraged by Essebsi's initiative, in a few days, a Tunisian lawyer, also a member of the defense team of assassinated left-wing political leaders, Belaid and Brahmi, announced that he would file a legal case to dissolve Ennahda on the grounds of having "links to terrorism" (Al-Arabiya News Dec. 2, 2018), based on the 7th chapter of Tunisian anti-terror law, which provided for the dissolution of a political party/organization linked to terrorism. About the same time, political opponents of Ennahda, that is, parliamentarians from Nidaa Tounes as well as Popular Front, also called for the dissolution of it (Ltifi 2018b).

7. STEP-BY-STEP AUTHORITARIANIZATION IN TUNISIA AFTER POPULAR DISILLUSIONMENT WITH DEMOCRACY

7.1 2019 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections: The Rise of Populist Figures/Parties in Tunisia and the First Surfacing of Disagreements within Ennahda

As of 2019 elections, the major political parties of Tunisia were Ennahda, Nidaa Tounes²¹⁶ and Tahya Tounes/National Coalition, the final one of which was established in 2019 under the leadership of Youssef Chahed as a coalition of former members of Nidaa Tounes, Machrou Tounes²¹⁷ and the Free Patriotic Union and which became the second parliamentary bloc with the most seats in parliament after Ennahda. However, as successive coalition governments failed to deliver “economic opportunity” (Grewal 2019) which was the most urgent demand of the revolution, given that by almost every economic indicator, the economic situation was worse than it had been before the revolution, it was not surprising to find that support for all parties involved in the consensus rule, as well as for the 2014-2018 era small opposition parties, decreased in the 2019 elections, and that support for populist newcomers increased. Nidaa Tounes, which had won the 2014 elections, securing 86 seats in the parliament, had only 25 deputies on the day of the 2019 elections; and it won only 3 seats in the 2019 elections. Splinters of Nidaa Tounes, that is, Tahya Tounes and Machrou Tounes, which had 43 and 15 seats in the parliament on the day of the 2019 elections, won 14 and 4 seats, respectively, in the elections. The number of seats of the junior coalition partners,²¹⁸ Free Patriotic Union and

²¹⁶Nidaa Tounes, the party with the most seats in the parliament in 2014, dropped to third place as a result of a series of resignations in 2018.

²¹⁷Machrou Tounes was established in 2016 by Mohsen Marzouk, a former member of Nidaa Tounes in 2016 with the goal of fighting terrorism and carrying out the necessary economic and social reforms.

²¹⁸Another junior coalition partner, Moubadara, having merged into Tahya Tounes, did not participate in the 2019 elections.

Afek Tounes also fell from 16 and 8, respectively, to 0 and 2 in the 2019 elections. Like the secular parties, Ennahda also saw a decrease in its number of seats in the parliament, though to a lesser extent. Thus, while it had won 69 seats in the 2014 elections, it could secure only 52 seats in the 2019 elections. Finally, the Popular Front and the Congress for the Republic (CPR), the two largest opposition parties of the 2014-2019 period, also lost votes in the 2019 elections, dropping from 15 and 4, respectively, in the 2014 elections to 1 and 0, respectively, in the 2019 elections.

As populist outsiders/ anti-system political parties could easily capitalize on anti-elite, anti-establishment, and anti-system sentiments under the worsening economic conditions, ideologically extreme secular and Islamist parties, such as the Islamist Karama coalition and the assertive secularist PDL (Free Destourian Party) rose, making it more difficult to form any government, let alone a “consensus government” (Grewal 2019). In this regard, “right-wing religious populism of the Karama coalition” (Lorch and Chakroun 2020), which built its campaign on the disillusionment created by Ennahda with its concessions on religion and revolution, came 4th in the election and won 5.94% of the vote and 21 seats in the parliament. Besides, Karama’s leader and presidential candidate, Seifeddine Makhoul, reportedly, also, a notorious advocate of high-profile terrorism suspects (Jeune Afrique Dec. 20, 2019), won 4.4% of the vote in the first round of the presidential elections. Although Karama²¹⁹ coalition defined itself as “non-ideological” and consisted of a wide range of political figures, including figures from the secular Congress for the Republic (CPR) party, statements by leading figures of the Karama coalition manifested a discourse that combined religious rhetoric of salafism with populist rhetoric (Lorch and Chakroun 2020), which considered the society composed of two homogenous and antagonistic groups, “[morally] pure people” against “[morally] corrupt elite,” and which identified itself with the former against the latter (Mudde 2021). While Makhoul told in an interview that they were conservative in the sense of upholding traditions, that they respected the rule of law and freedom of all faiths, and yet, were opposed to all-out liberalism, such as same-sex marriage (Lafrance 2019), since the coalition involved Salafist political actors, among others, the employed religious tone sometimes went too far. For instance, a Karama coalition deputy, called the new PM from Ettakatol during the plenary session on the vote of confidence over the government, an “ultra-secular” for opposing laws criminalizing homosexuality and drug use, drinking alcohol, letting cafes be open during Ramadan, and advocating equality between the sexes (Kapitalis Feb. 27, 2020).

²¹⁹ Besides, the party also used an anti-imperialist tone by promising to end the permanent French domination in the Tunisian economy and politics by terminating all French colonial contracts and demanding an apology from the French state, and by claiming to be more revolutionary than Ennahda, which chose to ally with Nidaa Tounes instead of realizing the goals of the revolution (Lafrance 2019).

Just like the Karama coalition which rose in the 2019 elections by criticising Ennahda and championing its original demands, Nabil Karoui's Qalb Tounes and Abir Moussi's Free Destourian Party also rose by criticizing Nidaa Tounes for deviating from its original goal, which was the revival of the strong secular state of the Bourguiba era, and by championing that goal; and came second and fifth in the 2019 elections, respectively. Similarly, Karoui and Kais Saied, the two presidential candidates who led the pre-election polls, also capitalized on the public's disillusionment with the political elite and parties, albeit in different ways (Grewal 2019).

Kais Saied, a law professor, was also a populist figure, who won the 2019 Presidential elections, claiming that the revolution was hijacked by corrupt political parties. He was an independent candidate; and the fact he had never been affiliated with a political party, undoubtedly, appealed to the public who was disillusioned with the political establishment. He even claimed to have never voted in his life (Lafrance 2019). In Grewal (2019)'s words, "he is a political outsider *par excellence*, giving him the integrity to mount a populist challenge." Thus, he could capitalize on this public frustration by introducing himself as "the man of the people" (POMED 2019, 13). In this regard, he also proposed to decentralize decision-making, and return power back to the Tunisian people through such measures as creating local assemblies in each region, abolition of parliamentary elections in favor of the election of deputies by local and regional assemblies, and allowing the people to recall elected officials (Lafrance 2019) (POMED 2019, 14). Furthermore, he reinforced his image of an honest man, that power cannot corrupt, by using public transportation and by promising that if elected, he would not live in the presidential palace but continue to live in his own home (Grewal 2019).

As some analysts noted, Tunisians' heading to the polls "to choose between two political outsiders," in an election contested by 26 candidates, as an indication of voter dissatisfaction with the political establishment, "once again showcased [Tunisia's] unique position in the Arab world" (Raghawan 2019). On one hand, as populist figures, both Saied and Karoui portrayed themselves as the voice of the poor and those neglected by the populist establishment, and in their campaigns pledged to eradicate poverty, fight corruption and provide basic services such as health and education. On the other hand, they had "diametrically opposite" characteristics in that while Karoui was a media tycoon, who was arrested the day before the start of electoral campaign "on three-year-old allegations of tax fraud and money laundering," and thus, who had to campaign from a prison cell, Saied was a conservative law professor who "hardly campaigned," and "had to borrow money to register as a candidate," and conducted his campaign largely by talking to voters on their doorsteps rather than addressing crowds at rallies (Raghawan 2019).

While some read Saied's rise to power in line with global political trends in which established political parties were overthrown by populist movements (Raghawan 2019), it is also worth emphasizing that, Tunisians would easily pick the "quick fix" of Karoui, a "fiery populist who takes his cue from tough-talking strongmen such as the Philippines' Duterte, Turkey's Erdoğan and Trump;" and yet, they opted for "a no-drama candidate,... [who] represented a dramatic departure from business as usual,...and who won by promising a fresh start" (Caryl 2019). Thus, Tunisians, who succeeded in continuing their democratic experiment by always "returning to the ballot box – or taking to the streets to express dissent" (Caryl 2019), once more, demonstrated their desire to continue their democratic experiment.

And yet, also, the 2019 parliamentary elections, in which the voter turnout was only 42% and which created a highly fragmented²²⁰ parliament, delivering no clear mandate to any single party, made it potentially difficult to form a government. That is, although Ennahda²²¹ won 52 seats, securing the highest share of the vote, it fell far short of the 109 seats, needed to command a majority within the parliament, forcing the party to seek compromise so that its preferred candidates for parliamentary speaker and prime minister would have the support of a parliamentary majority. But things were further complicated by Ennahda's announcement that it refused to meet with its two closest rivals, the Free Destourian Party led by Abir Moussi, an outspoken defender of the country's crumbling dictatorship, and Qalb Tounes led by Karoui (Middle East Eye Nov. 10, 2019), leaving Ennahda with the option of trying to form a coalition of other secularists, leftists and Islamists. And yet, of all the other parties only Karama coalition had agreed to enter into a coalition with Ennahda. The rest of them, including Chahed's Tahya Tounes, avoided holding talks with Ennahda. And if Ennahda failed to form a government within two months of nominating the prime minister, the president had the power to give another party a try (Middle East Eye Nov. 10, 2019).

Furthermore, unlike in previous periods, Ennahda both insisted that one of its leaders be prime minister, on the grounds that Tunisians had empowered them in the elections to implement their own program, and Shura Council speaker al-Harouni announced that the party had decided to nominate Ennahda's senior leader Ghanouchi to run for parliamentary speaker. Despite the animosity between Ennahda and Qalb Tounes since the campaign period, when Ennahda pointed to numerous

²²⁰In the elections, Qalb Tounes led by Karoui, a media mogul and populist, came second, winning 38 seats, while Abir Moussi's Free Constitutional Party won 17 seats. Nidaa Tounes was able to win only 3 seats in the 2019 elections, down from 86 in the 2014 elections. Islamist Karama coalition won 21 seats.

²²¹Although Ennahda had the most seats in the parliament after the 2019 elections, in fact, it was steadily losing power in each election, with its seats dwindling in the parliament – from 89 seats in 2011, to 69 seats in 2014, to 52 seats in 2019.

corruption allegations against Karoui and Karoui blamed Ennahda for his detention and long-term economic difficulties that continue to plague Tunisia (Cordall 2019), and both parties presented themselves as ideological rivals of each other, Qalb Tounes' backing²²² Ghannouchi for the post of speaker of parliament, paved the way for a coalition between the two parties. As stated by Charfeddine, a Qalb Tounes deputy, the party decided to vote for Ghannouchi for the post of speaker of parliament after an agreement with Ennahda. Thus, Ghannouchi was elected as the speaker of parliament on November 13, 2019, with the support of Qalb Tounes (Al-Jazeera Nov. 13, 2019). With the addition of the radical Islamist Al-Karama coalition to the alliance, the three-party coalition came to control the parliament, and it started to make and unmake governments, withdrawing its support at its will, in open conflict with President Saïed.

The 2019 election period also saw conflicts within Ennahda, which surfaced with Ennahda Executive Office's announcement, on July 21, on Facebook, that Ghannouchi would head the candidate list in the Tunis 1 district in legislative elections. Ennahda spokesperson Imad Khamiri said that the Executive Office approved the lists after an assessment of "national and party interests," and in this context, the Executive Office decided to nominate party leader Ghannouchi as a candidate for the Tunisia 1 district to compete in the legislative elections (Hakaek Jul. 20, 2019). However, this decision drew the reaction of some Ennahda members, who claimed that the Executive Office, an office which was in charge of approving the lists, in violation of the party rules, at an extraordinary ordinary meeting, made alterations to the electoral lists, drafted by the Shura Council, removing the names who were critical of Ghannouchi, one day before the announcement of the decision (Jebli 2019). For instance, Lutfi Zitoun, one of those names removed from the candidate lists by the Executive Bureau, also an adviser to Ghannouchi, issued a statement on his Facebook page, claiming that he was removed from the list for his "dissenting opinion and criticism of institutions," and that revisions to the lists was made, on the basis of "political exclusion and loyalty to Ghannouchi" (Zitoun 2019). Ben Salem, one of the leaders of Ennahda, who stressed that the Executive Office deliberately excluded "free voices" within Ennahda from legislative process, stated that 78 of 147-member Shura Council signed a petition to hold an extraordinary session of the Shura Council to look into the Executive Office's move (Mosaique FM Jul. 22, 2019). To a political science professor in Tunis, Mtimet, this last-minute decision of Ghannouchi to run in the legislative elections stemmed from his sense of danger from recently formed alliances to compete against and politically isolate Ennahda.

²²²The Attayar (Democratic Current), which came third in the parliamentary elections, and Achaab (People's Movement), which came sixth, also backed Ghannouchi in the speaker of parliament elections.

Thus, to him, it was this sense of danger that prompted him to employ every weapon to wage a political war, including running himself (Jebli 2019). It is particularly, noteworthy, that the Executive Office's announcement came after retired military officers formed a party in early July to run in parliamentary elections, in an attempt to end the tradition of the military's abstention from politics that has been in place since Tunisia's independence (Al-Hilali 2019). Furthermore, in a move that would represent another first for him, Ghannouchi announced in a TV program on June 30, 2019, that he was considering to run for the presidency with the following words: "I am the only candidate from Ennahda in the presidential elections."

7.2 Ennahda Candidate Jemli's Efforts to Form a Government and the Growing Rift within Ennahda

Criticism of Ghannouchi and his political choices from within the party has also become visible during the government formation process after President Saied, on November 15, 2019, tasked Habib Jemli with establishing the new government based on the proposal of Ennahda, the party with the most seats in the parliament. Jemli had to propose a government that would win majority support in the highly fragmented parliament, where Ennahda, the largest party, controlled only a quarter of the seats. However, reportedly, Ennahda's choice of Jemli to form the next government came as a surprise even to those within Ennahda as those who were named potential prime ministers since the announcement of election results were senior Ennahda names, such as Abdellatif Mekki, Abdelkarim Harouni, and senior political figures such as the speaker of the assembly and founder of Ettakatol, Mustapha Ben Jafar (Doha Institute 2020a). And yet, the Shura Council, which convened on November 14, 2019, decided to propose Jemli, a decision which was endorsed by the Executive Office, in a statement praising Jemli's independent personality, competence, experience in economy and finance in general, and in agriculture in particular, openness to communication with all political and social forces, and willingness to work with women and youth (??). Although Ennahda justified Jemli's candidacy on the basis of his personality and competence, in fact, "intra-party balances and the general political context in the country" played a role in his candidacy (Doha Institute 2020a). First of all, Ennahda's number of seats in the parliament was not enough for one of Ennahda's own leaders to create a government that can secure a vote of confidence. And secondly, some of the Ennahda leaders who insisted on Jemli's candidacy feared that a new disagreement would arise within the party over the nomination of one of the party's own leaders at a time when there were already

strong internal conflicts in the ranks and among the leadership of the party, and when the party sought to restore its internal ranks until the 11th congress, which was scheduled for May 2020 (Doha Institute 2020a). But, Jemli was nevertheless challenged both from within the party and by other parties.

Ziyad Al-Athari, Ennahda's then secretary-general and member of its executive office, issued a statement, on November 28, 2019, on his Facebook page, saying that he was not comfortable with the path the country had taken for a while, especially with a number of major decisions taken by the party in the recent period, and that he was not convinced of the party's choices (the last of which concerned the formation of the next government), which did not live up to the expectations of Tunisians (Radio Express FM Nov. 28, 2019). He criticized Ennahda's nomination of Habib Jemli as the head of the next government, saying he would not vote "yes" to the government proposed by Jemli (Hakaek Jan. 1, 2020).

Besides, Jemli had a hard time building a team that could win the support of the majority of lawmakers from the beginning. Immediately after his appointment by President Saïed, he began consultations with representatives of "the Democratic Current/Attayar (22 deputies), the People's Movement/Achaab (16 deputies), the Dignity Coalition (21 deputies), along with Ennahda (52 deputies)" (Doha Institute 2020a, 2). In various statements, he stressed that the government would serve the expectations of the Tunisian people, noting that "the criterion in selecting its members is competence, and integrity, regardless of political affiliations" (AA Nov. 19, 2019). He also expressed his intention to form a government "totally different" from the former governments, a "harmonious" government with no "inclination towards any political party, including Ennahda" (AA Dec. 5, 2019). However, the government formation process stalled as parties, which showed no sign of urgency²²³, could not agree on the sharing of ministerial posts. Jemli did not want to give to the Democratic Current the interior ministry it demanded, and suggested that an "independent" figure be agreed upon by both parties; he also left the demands of other parties unanswered (Doha Institute 2020a). And after his deadline to form a government expired in mid-December and all parties one by one announced their withdrawal from the talks, Jemli dismissed the coalition initiative, this time, announcing a month before the second and final deadline that he would form a non-partisan technocratic government instead (Doha Institute 2020a). However, the

²²³It was despite the fact that the Tunisian representative of the World Bank (WB), which had made Tunisia 4.6 billion dollars available since 2011, "an amount well beyond what the World Bank provided for a country of the economic size of Tunisia," in the words of the WB representative, urged the political leaders to form "a functional government to break deadlocked reform projects" (Business News Nov. 28, 2019). The existence of urgency was beyond doubt with public expenditure of 30 percent of GDP, and external debt of 85 percent of GDP in 2019, almost twice as much as the rate of 44.5% in 2011, and a public debt of 73.3% in 2019, also almost twice as much as the rate of 40.4% in 2011, according to the IMF data.

process of forming a non-partisan technocratic government was not easy either; and the names Jemli proposed for the ministry were accused of either incompetence, involvement in corruption, or covert loyalty to Ennahda (Doha Institute 2020a, 3). However, as Yerkes (2020)), noted, Ghannouchi's attempt to "sell" Jemli, who had previously served as deputy prime minister for agriculture in the Ennahda government, and his proposed government of Ennahda-affiliated ministers to parliament as independents and technocrats to avoid political polarization and parliamentary objections did not work. And Jemli's proposed government, composed of 43 technocratic ministers, was rejected by 140 votes out of 217, on January 10, 2020, after more than 12 hours of debate in the parliament. This result was, apparently, a big setback for Ennahda, which had been holding power since the revolution.

After its failure to form a government, Ennahda saw a series of resignations, mostly through announcements the resignees' Facebook pages, and without specifying the reasons for their resignation, as a result of a split, said to be between junior and senior members of the party (Ltifi 2020). Baoud, also a political analyst, described this series of resignations among the youth as a "rebellion" movement that emerged as a result of Ghannouchi's "wrong political choices and monopoly of decision." According to him, there was a conflict in Ennahda between the youth camp of the party which wanted a change in leadership and administration, and the group that won the congress in 2016, formed its official institutions, and has led the movement since then (Ltifi 2020). Political analyst Riad al-Shuabi emphasized that the youth movement, which included a group of youth leaders demanding a change of leadership/management, did not aim to take the party outside the official Ennahda line. Ali Laarayedh, whose own son was among those who resigned, also said in an interview that the increasing resignations of the younger generation were a message to Ennahda's top leaders, whom they criticized their "weak choices and inclinations," that a change and re-assessment was necessary. Ennahda Shura Council leader Harouni stated in an interview, on January 15, that the movement would engage in dialogue with its youth to preserve the unity of the movement, and that Ennahda formed a committee that includes all opinions to prepare the content of the party's 11th congress, to be held on a date to be determined, to preserve the unity of the movement (Mosaique FM Jan. 15, 2020).

7.3 Fakhfakh's Attempt to Form a Government and Ennahda's Use of Its Parliamentary Majority as a Leverage to Influence the Government Formation Process

After the failure of Jemli, President Saied took action to implement Chapter 89 of the 2014 constitution, which stipulated that the “President of the Republic shall consult with political parties, coalitions, and parliamentary groups, with the objective of asking the person judged most capable to form a government within a period of no more than one month to do so.” That is, Chapter 89 of the constitution mandated the President to choose a name he deemed most suited to establish a government. In this regard, it was reported that the President met with Speaker of Parliament and Ennahda leader Ghannouchi, on January 11, 2020, and expressed “the need to respect the constitution” as well.

Then, on January 20, the President chose an outsider, Fakhfakh, the leader of Ettakatol, a social-democratic party that failed to win a single seat in both 2014 and 2019 and was part of the Troika government, in which Fakhfakh served first as minister of Tourism and then as minister of Finance. After he was tasked with establishing the government, Fakhfakh held a press conference in which he pledged to work to build the broadest possible coalition government, “sticking to the majority opinion, avoiding any form exclusion or party-political favoritism.” However, he also added that he would exclude Qalb Tounes and old-regime-supporter Free Destourian Party from the coalition talks since he did not see these two parties “on the path of the revolution and meeting the people’s expectations the regarding the way ahead,” and these parties, in the second round²²⁴ of the presidential elections, did not vote for Saied, who “embodie[d] values and principles of the people” although these two parties were the largest second and fifth parties, respectively, in the parliament (Ghanmi 2020). In other words, Fakhfakh based his choice of the parties on their support for values of the revolution and the extent of their support for Saied in the second round of the presidential elections. Thus, as the leader of party which has won no votes in the last two elections he attached himself to Saied.

Just as he announced, Fakhfakh met with leaders of the main four parties, including that of Ennahda, who had voted for Saied in the presidential election and whose electoral campaign had been built on the refusal to negotiate with Qalb Tounes. Ennahda, the largest party in the parliament whose joining the government coalition was crucial to pass the 109-vote threshold, required to secure a majority in

²²⁴While he leader of Qalb Tounes competed against Saied in the second round of the presidential elections, the Free Destourian Party was considered affiliated with the previous regime.

the vote of confidence, abruptly changed course; and Fakhfakh's decision to exclude Qalb Tounes emerged as the first source of disagreement with Ennahda. As Ghanmi (2020), a columnist, stressed, the image of Fakhfakh overshadowed by Saied, created concern on the part of Ennahda about the transfer of power to Saied and weakening of the influence of the legislature in the decision-making process, which would disadvantage Ennahda which, thanks to its vote rate, has always had a say in post-revolution governments. Besides, it was the existing balance of power in the parliament, and the support by Qalb Tounes deputies that allowed Ghannouchi to secure the speakership position. Moreover, some analysts argued that Ennahda was using the Qalb Tounes card as leverage to thwart the appointment of figures it was not comfortable with to ministry positions and to increase its own number of ministries (Doha Institute 2020b).

Then, after Fakhfakh's announcement, Ennahda shura council issued a statement, on January 23, calling on Fakhfakh to expand his consultations to include all parties without exclusion, apart from those "who excludes themselves," and to form a "national unity government, ... having the widest party and parliamentary base." The executive office also recommended preparing for all possibilities, including snap elections, which, to Al-Hilali (2020), a Tunisia-based correspondent, was a position that many saw as a pressure attempt and a veiled threat to Fakhfakh. She noted with reference to Rafik Abdel Salam, a leader of Ennahda, that Ennahda's rejection of exclusion was not only related to Qalb Tounes, but went beyond it, and was driven by the need to form a national unity government that reflected the parliamentary balances produced by the last legislative elections in order to push through the institutional transition and the enactment of policies to revive the economy. Rafik Abdel Salam stated that the Prime Minister-Designate was charged with forming the government in light of the results of the parliamentary elections and not on revolutionary considerations, and that Ennahda would not vote "yes" in a vote of confidence if Fakhfakh clung to his position of rejecting to form a national unity government that excluded no one. Thus, Ennahda's call for Fakhfakh to respect the election results suggested that the party was keen to continue the consensus/national unity approach it has adopted since 2011 in the troika government and in 2014 with Nidaa Tounes although economists warned that another "shallow consensus" for 2020-24 posed the risk of completely collapsing the economy and the already faltering institutions (Al-Hilali 2020, Ghanmi 2020).

Fakhfakh's positioning himself and his future government under Saied's shadow was, undoubtedly, a different position than adopted by the former prime minister-designate Jebli, who had moved away from the image of "the government of the President." Thus, Fakhfakh received criticism, especially from Nahda and Qalb

Tounes, that he thought his legitimacy derived from the President (Al-Hilali 2020). Qalb Tounes condemned its exclusion from coalition talks, describing it as “an exclusionary practice that has nothing to do with democratic practice or the amended parliamentary system on which the country’s political system is based” (Al-Hilali 2020).

On the other hand, positions of political leaders varied regarding the exclusionary position of Fakhfakh. The People’s Movement called on Fakhfakh to form an expanded political belt, also noting that the PM was free to form a government according to his vision, and drawing attention to the controversy in Ennahda’s position since Ennahda’s electoral campaign was built on the refusal to negotiate with Qalb Tounes, and accusation of it with corruption. Democratic Current leader al-Hamidi called Ennahda’s position “nothing but a political maneuver” to improve the terms of negotiation with Fakhfakh, and the parties supporting him, to increase his ministerial portfolios in the government, also pointing out that his party “fully support[ed]” the position of Fakhfakh in excluding two parties from negotiations (Al-Hilali 2020). Besides, Ghannouchi’s insistence on the inclusion of Qalb Tounes in a coalition government, backed by a large parliamentary base, was also opposed by a group in Ennahda, who considered Qalb Tounes “a throwback to Tunisia’s ‘corrupt past’” as well.

Saied’s meeting with Qalb Tounes leader Nabil Karoui, on February 6, 2020, and including him in the government coalitions the next day at Ennahda’s urging, transformed the images of both Fakhfakh and Ghannouchi in the eyes of the analysts though (Ghanmi 2020). While Ennahda, which had become an “isolated party” with the failure of the prime minister, designated by it, in securing a vote of confidence in the parliament, started to be seen as a conciliator and a “power broker,” Fakhfakh who had been seen as a head of government under the shadow of the president started to be seen as a “hostage” of and submissive to Ghannouchi and Ennahda under the pressure to form a government by February 21. Besides, this conciliator position of Ghannouchi provided him with an upper-hand against his intra-party rivals who had praised Fakhfakh’s nomination by Saied, calling him a “friend of Ennahda.” (Ghanmi 2020). Although the meeting of Fakhfakh with Qalb Tounes delegation did not result in representatives of the party being added to the coalition government, analysts reported that Ennahda’s pressure on Fakhfakh not only forced him to change the names he would appoint to some ministries, but also allowed Ennahda to gain several other ministerial portfolios²²⁵ (Hafsa 2020, Doha

²²⁵For instance, upon Ennahda’s opposition to the assignment of Lubna Al-Jribi, a senior name within Ettakatol, to the Ministry of Communication Technology, questioning her impartiality, this ministry was given to Ennahda (Doha Institute 2020b).

Institute 2020b).

In the negotiations held hours to the end of the deadline, Fakhfakh presented Ghannouchi with his amended list, and Ghannouchi presented it to the Shura Council to make the final decision, that is, either to adhere to his previous position which involved withdrawal from the government without voting for it, or to approve the amendments and give confidence to the Fakhfakh government (Hafsa 2020). Thus, as soon as Ennahda decided to support Fakhfakh's government, it was clear that the government would receive a vote of confidence. Then, the new 32-member government, which was approved by the parliament with 129 votes to 77, half consisted of independents²²⁶ although the degree to which certain political figures can be called "independent" has been a central issue of dispute between the negotiating parties; and the other half consisted of five participatory parties, where the number of ministries varied according to the size²²⁷ of the group in the parliament.

However, within a few months, after an independent deputy released documents showing that the PM did not hand over control of shares in private companies that have won public contracts worth 44 million dinars (15 million dollars) from the state, a turbulence started to shake the already fragile coalition. After the National Anti-Corruption Authority, an independent constitutional body, referred documents regarding the allegations to the judiciary and the speaker of parliament, Ennahda Shura Council announced that it withdrew its support from the government, a move, which was followed by 105 deputies from Ennahda, Qalb Tounes and Al-Karama coalition, and independents submitting a petition to the parliament²²⁸, demanding the withdrawal of confidence from Fakhfakh's government (Salmi 2020). In the dire state of the economy, which was made more dire by the pandemic's fallout as Tunisia's economy was "expected to contract by 4.3% in 2020, ...the deepest recession since its independence in 1956," according to the International Monetary Fund (Apr. 10, 2020), and in which the government announced that it was asking foreign lenders to delay their debt payments, Fakhfakh responded to this Ennahda-led initiative by stating that he would announce a cabinet reshuffle in the coming days, a move that analysts saw as a sign that Ennahda's seven ministers would be sacked (Al-Jazeera Jul. 15, 2020).

²²⁶Independent figures without any party affiliation were given 15 ministries and two non-portfolio positions. For instance, neutral figures were assigned to such key ministries as interior, foreign affairs and defense ministries at the demand of the Democratic Current and the People's Movement (Doha Institute 2020b).

²²⁷In line with the size of their groups in the parliament, Ennahda was given 7 ministries for its 52 deputies, Democratic Current was given 3 for its 22 deputies, and the People's Movement, Tahya Tounes and the National Reform Bloc two ministers each, while Qalb Tounes (38 deputies), the Dignity Coalition (19 deputies), and the Free Destourian Party (17 deputies) formed the opposition.

²²⁸73 signatures were required for the petition to be passed to the parliamentary office, followed by an absolute majority (109 out of 217) vote at the plenary, according to the 2014 constitution.

PM Fakhfakh resigned from his post the next day, at the request of Saied, who wanted to designate a new PM and limit Ennahda's room for maneuver, according to some analysts (The Arab Weekly Jul. 15, 2020). As a result, although Fakhfakh positioned himself under Saied's shadow, his actions were conditioned by the will of the parliament, where Ennahda, Qalb Tounes and Al-Karama coalition, which had drawn confidence from him due to suspicions of corruption, formed the majority. After resignation, Fakhfakh, heading the caretaker government which would serve until the President designated a new PM, announced that he dismissed the ministers belonging to Ennahda (Al-Jazeera Jul. 16, 2020). In response, Ennahda issued a statement, describing Fakhfakh's dismissal of Ennahda ministers as a move "with the intention of settling political scores," drawing attention to the importance of the "democratic experience" of the country, and calling for dialogue, negotiation, and the establishment of a national unity government as a way out of the political crisis with the following words: "This new stage requires maintaining dialogue and consultations between the various political and social parties to form a government of national unity that is capable of facing the ongoing crisis" (Middle East Monitor Jul. 17, 2020).

7.4 The President's Attempt to Politically Marginalize Political Parties, in general, and Ennahda, in particular, and Ennahda's Battle

Following the resignation of Fakhfakh, President Saied asked parliamentary blocs and parties to offer their proposals in writing regarding the most competent person to take up the task of running the new government, breaking the precedent of direct consultations, which was practiced by former presidents Essebsi and Marzouki. And apart from the Dignity Coalition/Al-Karama who refused to offer a name, and called for direct consultations, all other parties presented their written proposals (Doha Institute 2020c). On July 26, 2020, Saied named Hichem Mechichi, who had served on the National Commission to Investigate Corruption and Embezzlement and National Anti-Corruption Authority after the 2011 revolution, and who served as Saied's legal advisor after February 2020 and the interior minister in Fakhfakh's cabinet, as the next PM, against all expectations, as his name was not among the 21 names suggested by political parties for the prime ministership. The fact that Saied exploited a loophole²²⁹ in the constitution to appoint a name of his choosing, other

²²⁹ Article 89 of the 2014 constitution required the president to "consult" with the parties in the parliament, but did not specify that he must choose from among the candidates proposed by them (Grewal and Hammami 2020).

than those names proposed by the political parties, was widely interpreted as an attempt to consolidate his power to marginalize the role of political parties, including that of Ennahda, with the highest number of seats in the parliament, and as establishing a *de facto* presidential system that would hold sway over the government, as Saied advocated to switch from the parliamentary system, in which parliamentary majorities played a leading role in government formation, to a presidential system (The Arab Weekly Jul. 26, 2020, Grewal and Hammami 2020, Doha Institute 2020c). For instance, Saied, in the announcement of Mechichi's appointment, identified "responding to the legitimate demands of people and the disadvantaged groups" among the priorities that the new government should address, and expressed his desire to change the political system with the following words: "We respect the legitimacy [of the parliament], but the time has come to revise it so that it, in turn, would be an honest and complete expression of the will of the majority" (Carthage Jul. 25, 2020). To Grewal and Hammami (2020), Saied, with these words, referred to the unpopularity of the parliament which, he felt, did not represent the aspirations of Tunisians anymore.

Mechichi, an independent and technocratic figure, who also came from outside the developed coastal areas where most of Tunisia's political elite hail from, was a very fitting name for Saied's outsider preference (Grewal and Hammami 2020). Just like Saied, he had "no political party affiliation and no political experience" (Ben Salah 2021b). While many centrist and secular parties welcomed the appointment of Mechichi, describing him as an "independent" personality, Ennahda saw his appointment as Saied's consolidation of power and an infringement on "the power of parliament and its speaker, Ennahda leader Ghannouchi" (The Arab Weekly Jul. 26, 2020). Similarly, the ultra-conservative Dignity Coalition/Al-Karama reacted to his appointment, describing the President who picked Mechichi as "a real burden on the democratic transition," accusing him of acting "without the consideration for the constitution, the parliament or the revolution" (The Arab Weekly Jul. 26, 2020).

On August 10, 2020, PM-designate Mechichi, who had 30 days to form the cabinet and submit it for parliamentary approval, announced his intent to form a non-partisan cabinet of technical competencies, members of which, he said, "have to be efficient, with integrity and willing to assume their functions," implying that political tensions between parties that have marked the political scene since 2011 were responsible for the economic crisis. While it was clear that the decision to form a technocratic government, without any political party representative, was taken at the request of the president, Mechicji justified the need for a technocratic government by explaining the economic forecasts, saying, "a minus 6.5% negative GNP growth

rate, 86% indebtedness rate, and an unemployment level that may exceed 19% [are expected] by the end of the year” (The Arab Weekly Aug. 11, 2020).

While Tahya Tounes and Free Destourian²³⁰ party immediately backed Mechichi’s decision to form a technocratic government, marginalizing the role of political parties, the Peoples’ Movement, at first rejected the proposal, and yet, decided to support it after meeting with Mechichi. Although the Democratic Current also called for the PM-designate to reappraise his options for technocratic government, saying it was “too early” to form a purely technocratic government that leaves political parties out of the cabinet (Guesmi and Hidri 2020), analysts argued that both Peoples’ Movement (16 seats in parliament), and the Democratic Current (22 seats in parliament) would eventually support an initiative that would marginalize Ennahda, since both of these parties called for the formation of a government that excluded Ennahda after Fakfaakh’s resignation, attributing the country’s hardships to Ennahda’s dominance for more than 8 years (Zayat 2020b). A number of major national organizations such as the influential trade union UGTT and the business federation UTICA welcomed the proposal, the head of the latter of which, pointed out the importance of forming a government “independent of politics,” stating that “political governments have proven their failure” (Guesmi and Hidri 2020).

Thus, it was primarily Ennahda, Qalb Tounes and Dignity Coalition that opposed a technocratic government and demanded a political government, which reflected the election results. And undoubtedly, Mechichi’s proposal put the PM-designate at odds the most with Ennahda, the largest party in the parliament. Political analysts “unanimously” agreed that this proposal, which came just hours after Ennahda’s emergency shura council meeting to discuss the government’s path, would take control of the political scene from Ennahda, and corner it, giving it two, equally bitter options, which were, either give consent to a government of independents or, reject it and suffer the consequences, including the possible dissolution of parliament and an early election, the latter of which would be a “gamble” for Ennahda, considering that if early elections were called, it would result in Ennahda’s emerging weaker and its rivals gaining ground (Guesmi and Hidri 2020). A poll conducted, in August 2020, by Sigma Conseil showed that Ennahda fell to second place in public support, behind the Free Destourian Party, whose vote share rose to 35.8% with a 14-point increase. Moreover, the same poll showed that confidence in Ennahda leader Ghannouchi was also on the decline, as he was found to be the least trusted political leader in Tunisia, ahead of former PM Youssef Chahed (Arab Observer Aug. 25,

²³⁰Free Destourian party leader Abeer Moussa stated in a press statement that her party was not interested in joining the next government, and would support it as long as it did not include any Ennahda representative (Arab Observer Jul. 30, 2020).

2020).

This effort to politically marginalize Ennahda came just after the no-confidence vote at the end of July to withdraw support from Ghannouchi as parliament speaker on the grounds that he violated the constitution that exclusively charged the President with overseeing the foreign policy of the state, by taking sides in the Libyan conflict by supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, as part of a brotherhood plan, led by Turkish President Erdoğan and financially supported by Qatar, with also the support of terrorist militias. These accusations were directed against Ghannouchi after his frequent contacts with Turkish president Erdoğan and his congratulating²³¹ Fayez al-Sarraj, the PM of the Turkish and Qatari-backed government of national Accord (GNA) on his recapturing al-Watiya airbase, near the Tunisian border, after the withdrawal of Libyan National Army (LNA) from there (Zayat 2020a). Before the vote at the end of July, a plenary session known as “accountability of Ghannouchi,” was held on June 3, in which Free Destourian party leader Abeer Mousa and some other deputies called for withdrawing confidence from Parliament Speaker Ghannouchi, accusing him of belonging to the international organization of Muslim Brotherhood, paying a secret visit to Turkey and meeting with Erdoğan in a closed session to support the Turkish plan in Libya which they saw as an attempt to drag Tunisia into the conflict in Libya against the Tunisian national security interests, and holding talks and suspicious relations with armed groups in Libya. In the session, Al-Munji Rahwi, a deputy, described Ghannouchi’s presence as head of parliament as a “threat to Tunisia’s national security” (Arab Observer Jun. 5, 2020).

Besides, at the time when more than 80 deputies submitted a motion at the initiative of the Free Destourian Party to the parliament to withdraw confidence from the speaker of parliament, Ennahda was also being challenged by defense committee concerning the assassination of two leftist politicians in 2013 through a secret apparatus. A defense committee member, Qazazeh, stated in a press conference that al-Badawia, the person in charge of supervising the staff of the apparatus, was very close to Ghannouchi, and that it was found that many phone calls had been made between the two the day before the assassination of al-Brahmi. The committee also claimed that Ennahda had diverted the investigation through its influence in the state security and judicial bodies (Arab Observer Aug. 2, 2020).

Although Abeer Moussa had stated before the session in a radio program that 109 votes were available to withdraw Ghannouchi’s confidence, describing the day of the vote as “the day of joy/beginning of a new phase” (Arab Observer Jul. 30, 2020),

²³¹ A statement published by the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya stated that Sarraj received a phone call from Ghannouchi, who congratulated Sarraj on his “recapture of the strategic al-Watiya airbase” (Zayat 2020a).

Ghannouchi was able to survive the confidence vote held, on July 31, 2020, two weeks after the resignation of Fakhfakh, as 97 lawmakers voted against Ghannouchi, falling short of the 109 votes needed to topple him. However, given that Ghannouchi's margin of victory was very slim in this vote with only 16 of the deputies having voted in favor of him (where Ennahda and the Islamist Karama party boycotted it to show their opposition to the motion), analysts predicted that in the upcoming days, Ennahda would face a tougher opposition in the parliament, and that political divisions would further deepen, making the establishment of a government even harder (Al-Arabiya News Jul. 31, 2020).

Then, while other parties were trying to politically marginalize Ennahda, which had won Tunisia's first free elections in 2011 and since then, has held power almost continuously, Ennahda, as expected, immediately, expressed its clear opposition to the proposal, pushing for a party representation-based government instead. In fact, as stated above, Ennahda had called for the formation of a government based on the results of parliamentary elections during the government formation process led by Fakhfakh as well; thus, it actually maintained its earlier position. Shortly after Mechichi's speech, Ennahda Vice-President Ali Laarayedh described the proposal on state television as "the marginalization of the victorious parties in the elections and an attack on democracy" (Guesmi and Hidri 2020). Then came following statements from Ali Laarayedh, on state television, that made the early election seem like a less bad option and that looked like a veiled threat:

"As we are faced with Mechichi's determination to form a government of independent technocrats, we think that the political and social cost of holding early elections will be less steep than additional months and months of failure" (Zayat 2020b).

"Return to people's will through early elections is part of the rules and foundations of democracy" (Zayat 2020b).

"[The approval of the prospective government by the parliament] is not guaranteed and, . . . Ennahda Movement is fully convinced that a government not supported by political parties will clash with the bitter reality and will not be able to remain standing" (Guesmi and Hidri 2020).

After Laarayedh, Abdelkarim Harouni, head of Ennahda's Shura Council (the advisory board), also expressed, at the press conference, clear opposition of the party to the proposal, saying, "minority parties should not determine the fate of the government." (Zayat 2020b). Youssef Cherif, head of the *Columbia Global Centre* in Tunis, stated that the new government would rely on the support of the President

and the public sector, including the strong trade union UGTT, however, without the support of political parties, the most strong of which was Ennahda, it would “face tremendous challenges in parliament.” He also added that Ennahda could turn into a strong opposition force “if it feels alienated and attacked” (Arab Observer Aug. 25, 2020). That is why Laarayedh, as well as some other leaders of Ennahda, were able to threaten to block the passage of laws introduced by the next government on the grounds that it “lack[ed] a broad parliamentary belt” (Zayat 2020b).

However, Ennahda also announced that it was “open to various parties and democratic blocs to accelerate the formation of the government.” Besides, in a speech he made during the inauguration of a hall at the parliament headquarters, parliament speaker and Ennahda leader Ghannouchi also called for the adoption of “policy of compromise” to resolve differences, and called on to follow the lead of former President Beji Caid Essebsi, who, he said, “saved Tunisia from conflicts with his forgiveness and broad perspective” (AA Jul. 25, 2020).

However, 72 hours before the end of the constitutionally-mandated deadline for Mechichi to form a government, news broke that Mechichi presented his proposed government to President Saied and that the president would withdraw his support from Mechichi due to the escalating disagreements between the two. Disagreements between the two became obvious when Saied invited representatives from Ennahda, Tahya Tounes, the Democratic Current and the Peoples’ Movement parties to Carthage Palace to discuss various scenarios regarding the government formation process. According to the leaked news, Saied demanded that the participants voted “no” in the Mechichi government’s vote of confidence and suggested that the caretaker government continue under the leadership of Fakhfakh or someone else. It was also reported that Saied pledged, at this unexpected meeting, to extradite the dismissed Ennahda ministers and not to dissolve the parliament in the event of the government being rejected (Al-Talili Aug. 31, 2020). In the statement made on the presidency’s Facebook page regarding this meeting, it was said that the presidency emphasized in the meeting that “Tunisian people have a new political thinking that should be in line with a new understanding of political action,” and that “there is no room for the formation of a government only to make changes in it in a short time” (Presidency of Tunisia Aug. 31, 2020).

Of course, Mechichi’s “betrayal” (Zayat 2020c) of Saied caused the ball to pass into Ennahda’s court whose shura council gained the power to decide the fate of the government, also leaving the party in a very vulnerable position as its ally, Qalb Tounes, was determined to end the caretaker government as soon as possible (Al-Talili, Walid). Mechichi, who formed a 25-member government, composed of non-partisan

competencies such as academics, judges, civil servants, and private-sector executives, in the speech he delivered in the parliament as the pre-vote parliamentary debate began, pledged to cooperate with “all parties, parliamentary blocs and national organizations” to improve the citizens’ socio-economic conditions (Arab Observer Sep. 2, 2020), hinting at the possibility of a ministerial reshuffle and amendment in his government, contrary to what Saied announced (Al-Talili, Walid).

According to some analysts, Mechichi made a deal with Ennahda and its allies to reshuffle the cabinet after the formation of the government (Zayat 2020c). Statements from different names of Ennahda also revealed that they agreed to “vote” for Mechichi (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020), and that they hoped to negotiate with Mechichi to make adjustments in the cabinet lineup to build a political cabinet. For instance, in his announcement that Ennahda would vote in favor of the government, Ennahda Shura Council leader, Haronui, stated that the decision to support the government was taken as an appreciation of “the difficult situation the country,” and that they would later seek to “develop and reform this government” (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020). To some commentators, Ghannouchi’s words that the government formation process required “a high spirit of responsibility, uphold[ing] the values of cooperation and collaboration,” and that they would “work on calm to overcome all the differences,” was also a statement that later work would be done to bring the government to a political structure (Arab Observer Sep. 2, 2020).

While Qalb Tounes (as well as Tahya Tounes) also announced that they would vote in favor of confidence in the government, the Democratic Current, the People’s Movement and the Dignity Coalition decided to vote against it. And yet, the fact that the new government passed with a comfortable majority, receiving 134 votes in favor and 67 against, with no abstentions, revealed that deputies from other parties also voted in favor of the government, which was seen, by analysts, as motivated by the desire to avoid a snap election that would further deepen the instability in the midst of a severe socio-economic crisis (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020). Besides, in this political climate, in which Ennahda once more got the upper hand in the political battle with the President, the resignation of Mohamed Abbou, secretary-general of the Democratic Current, one of the key supporters of the President in the parliament, immediately after the vote of confidence, further weakened the President in the face of Ennahda (Doha Institute 2020c).

7.5 The Widening Rift between President Saied and the Parliamentary Majority Amid Worsening Economy and Ghannouchi's Taking Politics of Consensus Further

On September 2, Saied's speech at swearing-in ceremony of the new government showed that the divide between the president and the parliamentary majority had widened. Saied took the stage very angrily since many deputies used the pre-vote parliamentary debate to criticize Saied for having invited representatives of four parties to the palace to ask them to vote against Mechichi, and having tried to control the government formation process beyond his limited constitutional prerogatives, which only included the power to "consult" with the PM on the appointment of only defense and foreign ministers (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020). In his short address to deputies, Saied denied the allegations against him, accusing the deputies for trying to turn public opinion against him "with insidious campaigns," and swearing that he respected the constitution he had sworn to respect, and that he also would not hesitate in the future to fulfill his commitments to the people (Zayat 2020c). In his short address to deputies, President Saied also vowed to disclose the facts about the government-formation process later, claiming that the previous day's parliamentary debate contained many "fabrications," calling those involved in it "traitors" and "lackeys of colonialism," without giving any names (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020). He, then, targeted Ennahda, describing its leaders as "crooked politicians, plotters," and accusing them of "spending the last few days trying to find ways to gain control over the government" (Zayat 2020c). But Qalb Tounes, the second-largest parliamentary bloc, leaders of which accused the president of embezzling funds, and the Dignity Coalition, which accused the president of unilaterally interpreting the constitution and being a burden to democratic transition, also became the target of the president's anger in this address.

Although President Kais Saied denied allegations made against him of attempting to interfere with the government-formation process beyond his constitutional powers, as some analysts, also, said, it was Saied's overstep and wrong management of government-formation process that brought Mechichi closer to parliamentary blocs like Ennahda and Qalb Tounes, who hoped to negotiate with him to switch to a political government (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020). Thus, while post-revolution Tunisia had been, previously, divided over issues such as the role of religion in the constitution and politics, and the attitude toward the economic reforms that must be undertaken, the new period was marked by the struggle between the president and the parliamentary majority, that is, between President Saied and Ennahda (and

its allies) over prerogatives (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020). Then, shortly after the President's harsh criticisms against them, Dignity Coalition leader Makhoulf said, in a radio broadcast, that Saied's speech was "unacceptable and reprehensible," and proved that Saied had "nothing to do with democracy." Besides, he accused Saied of interpreting the constitution unilaterally and using the means of state to threaten and spy on his political opponents and members of parliament (Zayat 2020c).

The deepening divide between the president and the parliamentary majority further complicated the task of Mechichi government by putting it under pressure from both sides (Zayat 2020c). In fact, even Mechichi himself stated after the vote that progress on economic issues²³², that he had promised, was conditional on his government not getting bogged down in political infighting (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020). Having warned of "dangerous [economic] indicators²³³" and debt of 7.5 billion dinars (2.74 billion dollars) due in 2020, Mechichi needed to restart talks with the IMF, which had approved, in 2016, a four-year, 3 billion dollar-loan for Tunisia in return for major reforms, and whose four-year program expired in April 2020 with the country having received only about 1.6 billion dollar till that time as Tunisia struggled to complete its budget. And yet, analysts also doubted the Mechichi government's prospects for success in reviving the economy given the deteriorating economic condition, with the impact of the coronavirus, which has damaged the tourism sector, among other sectors, and the impact of increased protests in recent months in the south, which have paralyzed vital phosphate and oil production as well as given that political instability deepened after the 2019 elections due to the inability of political parties to form a stable government dedicated to implementing much-needed economic reforms as a result of President Saeed's efforts to form a government close to him and parties competing for cabinet seats, and the rift between the President and parliamentary majority (Zayat 2020c, The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020).

Not surprisingly, the government mismanaged the deteriorating socio-economic condition, which was followed by protests, particularly in marginalized districts. The IMF announced that the country's already moribund economy before the coronavirus contracted by an "unprecedented" 8.2% in 2020 (Cordall 2021b). While this shrinkage was felt throughout Tunisia, it was most felt in working-class neighborhoods on the outskirts of Tunis, and in the interior and southern regions of the country, which had unemployment rates up to 30% before even before the pandemic, compared to

²³² Mechichi had listed the new government's priorities, during the pre-vote debate in parliament, as "addressing the socio-economic situation, . . . stopping the bleeding in public finances, starting talks with lenders, and embarking on reform programs, including for public companies and subsidies" (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020).

²³³ According to the data released by the National Institute of Statistics, the unemployment rate rose from 15% to 18% in the first half of 2020, and the GDP shrank by 21% year-on-year in the second quarter (The Arab Weekly Sep. 4, 2020).

the Tunisian average of 15%, as the pandemic damaged the extensive network of ancillary industries that provided products and services to tourism centers, and day-to-day type of work that had sustained many families in these areas. Thus, economic shrinkage and unemployment, compounded by the pandemic, has been a driver of social unrest. According to the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, more than 1.000 protests were held in November alone (Al-Jazeera Jan. 18, 2021).

And in January, on the 10th anniversary of the revolution, social unrest and calls for the fall of the regime, night-time riots, once more marked life in Tunisia in a movement sometimes portrayed as a “second revolution” (Ben Salah 2021a). In at least 15 marginalized locations across Tunisia, people took to the streets not only to protest government neglect, unemployment and poverty, exacerbated by the pandemic which damaged the works that supported families in these areas, but also to protest the security forces’ violent crackdown on protestors and mass arrests, including of minors (Cordall 2021a). Thus, as post-revolution governments had left the police force entirely unreformed (Grewal 2018b), arbitrary arrests of about 1.000 young Tunisians, and police abuse targeting young people or even entire families barging into houses marked this process (Cordall 2021b). Even the army was deployed to protect public-buildings from the protesters (Al-Jazeera Jan. 18, 2021).

When it comes to the official responses²³⁴ at a time when violent protests underlined the urgent tasks of the government as anger escalated over economic hardships and police viciousness to protesters, Mechichi, who was then also acting as the interim interior minister after sacking the former minister Charfeddine on January 5, in his address to protesters on the state television, on January 19, 2020, shockingly, not only did not address the problem of the excessive use of force by the police, but also praised them for their “professionalism,” saying, “I can make a clear distinction between this [socio-economic demands] and the accompanying acts of violence and theft, which our security forces have countered with all their professionalism.” And his statement, “we understand your anger and frustration... your voice was heard and your demands were legitimate,” was likened on social media to Ben Ali’s last speech, on January 13, before he fled the country (Mbarek 2021). Just like Mechichi, Ben Ali had, also, had said in his address²³⁵ “I have understood you,” and, appar-

²³⁴When it comes to President Saïed’s reaction, during his visit to one of the poor neighborhoods at the outskirts of Tunis, he called on young people “to refrain from targeting people and property, and warned them against political instrumentalization and exploitation of their misery,” while also emphasizing that people had right to work, freedom and dignity (TAP News Agency Jan. 18, 2021).

²³⁵In his speech, Ben Ali, also, employed sentences such as, “please forgive me, I made mistakes,” “there is no better virtue than forgiveness” (Fitouri 2021).

ently, thought that his offering the protesters understanding would suffice to quell the protests.

Like Mechichi, Ghannouchi also said in an interview he gave in those days, “we understand [the protesters’] frustration,” empathizing with the protesters. Then, after saying that people were right to protest as their expectations were high and economic progress fell short of their expectations, he also added that still, one should not deny the change brought about by the revolution, particularly considering that Tunisia has adopted the most progressive constitution in the Arab world, especially in terms of freedoms, although still more than ten years were needed to remove the damages caused by years-long dictatorship. He said, “dignity is much more difficult to achieve as it aims to right the wrongs of 60 years of dictatorship” (Ben Salah 2021a). And unsurprisingly, Ghannouchi, again, emphasized the importance of “consensus-based politics” approach in the functioning of transitional democracies, saying that Tunisia has overcome many obstacles thanks to “the willingness of various actors to work with each other” and “put the country first.” “We have made consensus-based politics our motto and we believe transitional democracies need such consensus to protect themselves from division and conflict,” he said (Ben Salah 2021a). Apparently, Ghannouchi was still determined to pursue the policy of consensus, believing that it would be a cure to the problems Tunisia was facing, although Ennahda’s over-pursuit of this policy after the revolution had also done a lot of damage to Tunisian democracy. To this end, Ghannouchi began to prioritize comprehensive national reconciliation with the rulers of the old regime, provided they pledged to abide by the constitution. And in this context, in late October 2020, he appointed Mohammed Ghariani, a prominent member of the former regime, who was general-secretary of Ben Ali’s RCD, which has been dissolved after the revolution, as his advisor in charge of national reconciliation and the completion of the transitional justice file. He, reportedly, justified this move with the following sentences:

“We have lived in exclusion, and we do not want that experience to be repeated with any of the forces in the country, whatever the topic of discussion. . . The ultimate aim for transitional justice should be to reach national reconciliation so that we can move to the future, unburdened by the problems of the past” (Ben Salah 2021a).

Ghariani himself also speculated, in a radio broadcast, that his disagreement with PDL leader Abir Moussi, whom he accused of promoting extremist ideas such as pursuing a policy of exclusion, spreading hatred and sowing discord among the people, was probably one of the factors that prompted Ghannouchi to choose him as a parliamentary advisor. He added that his political role was “to counter any

extremist ideology or approach that divides Tunisians” (Tunisie Numerique Jan 15, 2021). However, Ghannouchi drew reaction of human rights groups and some Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) members, when, on top of his appointment of Ghariani as his advisor, he stated, in a TV program, on November 8, that he was planning to close the transitional justice file (Belhassine 2020). More specifically, in this program, after talking at length on such themes as “political consensus,” that has made Tunisia an exception of the Arab Spring, “national comprehensive reconciliation,” and “the rejection of exclusion,” he spoke of “the need to close the issue of transitional justice once and for all with the implementation of a new law” on the issue. And he said, the assignment of Ghariani for this task had a symbolic value, as an expression of his “anticipation of reconciliation” (Belhassine 2020). And although the mandate of the IVD, tasked with investigating human rights abuses and financial embezzlement, had expired on December 31, 2018, five members of the commission issued an open letter, on November 17, 2020, addressed to Ghannouchi, in response to his statements, in which they said that “failure to give justice to the victims of despotism can only fuel the cycle of violence” (Belhassine 2020). To Nessrine Jelalia, director of the pro-transitional justice NGO *Bawssala*, and some other analysts, Ennahda has “sold out” transitional justice for political calculations. According to these analysts, by initiating a comprehensive consensus through Ghariani, Ghannouchi aimed to weaken Abir Moussa, leader of the Free Destourian Party, who sought to revive the old regime and continued to rise in the polls, and to strip of part of its base. In other words, he was trying convince part of Moussa’s base that he was continuing Essebsi’s policy of “turning the page of the past” (Belhassine 2020).

What is even more interesting is that while Ennahda had a post-revolutionary reputation as the party representing more pro-revolutionary voters, as opposed to Nidaa Tounes, which, mostly, represented the old regime supporters, and while it was itself a party that had been banned under the old regime, and whose members had been imprisoned or exiled, Ghannouchi not only accused the commission of doing a poor job, but also used dictatorial language and referred to it disparagingly as the “Bensedrine Commission” on the TV interview. Then, in their open letter, five former commission members reacted with the following sentences:

“You consider as an indication of ‘failure’ our decision to charge 923 people accused of murder, 428 accused of rape and torture, 9 accused of violations of individual freedom and 66 accused of embezzling Tunisian public funds – crimes that remained unpunished prior to the Revolution... What shocked us most is that you attack the Truth and Dignity Commission for having brought 1,426 defendants before the specialized

chambers to bring justice for 29,950 victims based on evidence obtained in investigations, hearings of victims, defendants and witnesses who responded to the IVD summons in accordance with the provisions of the law” (Belhassine 2020).

What is also noteworthy is that Ghannouchi’s attempt to close the transitional justice file came in the midst of a “reconciliation race” (Belhassine 2020) in which many parties participated one after the other, right after the Mechichi government received a vote of confidence in September. Thus, the political parties that have failed to form a stable government and have had many disagreements since the 2019 elections, apparently, united in closing the issue of transitional justice once and for all. First, in September Abir Moussa, a supporter of the old regime, and then in October, President Saied²³⁶, known for his anti-party and anti-system stance, drafted a bill that would allow for financial settlements with businessmen of the old regime who were under investigation for embezzlement charges. And thus, Ennahda joined this camp on reconciliation. Reportedly, even Al-Karama coalition prepared a bill over reconciliation even though it was not made public by the time. It was also reported that PM Mechichi, who had promised victims’ associations to activate the Dignity Fund and set up a commission to implement the IVD’s recommendations, broke his promise due to the influence of Qalb Tounes and Ennahda, both of which were not favorable to the IVD’s work (Belhassine 2020).

7.6 How a Cabinet Reshuffle Turned into a Constitutional Crisis as Part of a Power Struggle between the PM&Ghannouchi and the President

Then, amid the protests motivated by a deep socio-economic crisis, compounded by the pandemic, the PM and the President started to fight over a wide-ranging cabinet reshuffle, that Mechichi, backed by Ennahda and Qalb Tounes, announced on January 16, and which quickly turned into a constitutional crisis. While Mechichi

²³⁶The draft prepared by the President, and made public, targeted the businessmen, whose embezzlement allegations were being investigated by the judiciary or specialized agencies. Through financial reconciliation, it aimed to turn embezzled money into investment by distributing it to development projects in marginalized areas whose situation has not improved since the revolution. "Each convicted person must undertake to carry out the projects requested by the inhabitants under the supervision of a regional commission for monitoring and coordination. The final reconciliation is completed only when the person concerned submits the necessary evidence of the projects realized," stipulated the draft law. Nessrine Jelalia, director of the NGO Bawssala criticized the initiative as "an administrative and extrajudicial procedure that prevents us from learning the truth about mafia practices," although it fit well with the president’s slogan "the people demand." Another legal expert said that the initiative did not serve transitional justice since there were no guarantees that financial corruption would not recur, that institutions would be reformed, or that confidence in the justice system would be reformed, with symbolic trials if the president so desired (Belhassine 2020).

said in the press conference that the aim of the reshuffle was “to achieve greater efficiency in the work of the government” and “to make sure the country makes progress on economic recovery and social development goals,” analysts stressed that the common feature of key ministers sacked in this cabinet revision, such as health, justice and interior, was their loyalty to President Saied (The Arab Weekly Jan. 17, 2021). The remarks of Oussama Khelifi, Qalb Tounes’ parliamentary bloc head, that “With this change, Mechichi has become the undisputed and true leader of his team,” (The Arab Weekly Jan. 17, 2021) also revealed that the elimination of names close to Saied was an important goal of the reshuffle. Ennahda Shura council president Harouni also stated in an interview that Saied had not only appointed a name (Mechichi) other than those suggested by political parties, but also had placed, in Mechichi’s cabinet, his “confidants,” such as Charfeddine and Boussetta, interior and justice ministers, respectively, both of whom were sacked in January 2020 by Mechichi. Also, the fact that he said, “For us, a cabinet of independents imposed by Kais Saied was a step back... It was as if we didn’t have a choice,” also indicates that the cabinet reshuffle was also intended to give “some political color” to a largely technocratic government (Ben Salah 2021b). Thus, Ennahda and Qalb Tounes backed PM Mechichi in his standoff with President Saied over a cabinet reshuffle.

The cabinet reshuffle announcement, quickly, broke the threadbare truce in Mechichi’s relationship with Saied, who complained days before the announcement that he was not consulted about the names as he was required, and issued a statement hours before the announcement, in which he insisted that the “honesty” of the proposed ministers should “arouse no suspicion” and said that there was “no room for persons subject to legal proceedings [within the government]” as well as “to doubts about their background or behavior that could undermine the credibility of the state and its institutions and the legitimacy of its decisions” (The Arab Weekly Jan. 17, 2021).

While the parliament approved the reshuffle at the end of January, Ghannouchi as the Speaker of the Parliament sent letters to Saied asking him to invite the new 11 ministers to be sworn in. And yet, the president rejected the request for a swearing-in ceremony at the palace, charging that one of the ministers was involved in corruption and three of them were suspected of conflict of interest, without giving any evidence. He also accused the PM of violating the vote-of-confidence procedures stipulated by the constitution, saying, “The government’s confidence-granting procedures have been marched by a breach of the constitution” and that the swearing-in was “not just a formality” (The Arab Weekly Jan. 30, 2021).

The phrase, “The PM and his members take an oath before the President,” in Article 89 of the Tunisian constitution was, apparently, interpreted differently by the PM and the President. While the President claimed that he was not consulted regarding the cabinet reshuffle and therefore he opposed it, Mechichi argued that the reshuffle was in line with Article 89 of the constitution, claiming the article required the President to give his approval for the government to take office but not in case of a reshuffle. Besides, pointing to Article 88 of the Constitution, Qalb Tounes MP Ayyad Al-Lomi also hinted that the parliament, with the approval of two-thirds of MPs, would remove the president from office if he did not change his mind on the ratification of the cabinet reshuffle. And back then such a move was not impossible, given that the reshuffle was approved by 144 out of 217 deputies in the parliament (Middle East Monitor Feb. 2, 2021). The cabinet reshuffle process, and the accompanying power struggle between the prime minister and the president, thus, turned into a constitutional crisis²³⁷ between PM Mechichi and President Saied as the constitutional court, authorized by the 2014 constitution to adjudicate constitutional disputes, could not be still formed due to political divisions. And as the president refused to swear in new ministers, the cabinet had to continue working with a severely reduced number of ministers. In this process, President Saied even asked PM Mechichi to resign (Al-Arabiya News Mar. 7, 2021).

As the government continued to rule amid the country’s deep financial crisis and rising debt burden, another move that threatened to further escalate the crisis between the country’s president, prime minister and parliament speaker came from Ghannouchi, who called for constitutional changes that would change the role of President Kais Saied and make it “purely symbolic” (Guesmi 2021). Ghannouchi’s statements during a live virtual dialogue session with a group of Facebook activists showed that he was furious at Saied’s refusal to allow the four newly-appointed members of the government to take the oath of office, accusing them of corruption and conflict of interest. Saying, “corruption charges are the verdict of the judiciary,” he described Saied’s rejection of a cabinet reshuffle after making accusations against cabinet members as “intrigues” to stop a cabinet reshuffle (Guesmi 2021). Then, claiming that the role of the President in distributing power, as stipulated by the constitution, was “symbolic rather than constitutive,” he said that it was the stalling of the Constitutional Court that “opened the door for the interpretation of the con-

²³⁷This constitutional crisis also sparked a debate among constitutional law professors. In this respect, issues such as, whether the president’s power to approve the government members is limited, whether the relevant constitutional article applies to a cabinet reshuffle, whether the parliament can table a motion of censure against Saied for violating the constitution if he objects to the new ministers being sworn in, whether the motion of censure would suffice to dismiss Saied since the main body charged with determining the violation is the constitutional court, whether the newly appointed ministers can take office and carry-out their duties without being sworn in, were discussed at length by constitutional law experts (The Arab Weekly Jan. 30, 2021).

stitution by the president” (Guesmi 2021). Then, emphasizing that the other reason that produced the current impasse was the failure of the country’s political system, which he defined as an “uneasy mix of presidential and parliamentary systems,” he also proposed to transform the political system into a fully parliamentary one, in which “the three branches of power are separated and all executive power remains with the party that stands out in the elections and elects a prime minister” (Guesmi 2021).

Ghannouchi made repeated calls for a system change. For instance, in another interview, he, again, complained that the President was acting like a supreme court by overriding what parliament has approved. Besides, citing former President Essebsi as an example, he said that although Essebsi had disagreed with PM Chahed years ago, he followed the provisions of the constitution and accepted the cabinet reshuffle. He also called for stability, stating that continuous change of governments since the revolution served no good at all. He also said that “the essence of the Tunisian revolution is to separate powers, not to converge them” (Middle East Monitor Mar. 12, 2021). In another instance, he also said that the electoral system should be reformed for Tunisian democracy not to collapse, adding that, the electoral system adopted after the revolution was responsible for the disintegration of the political system as it led to a fragmented parliament, preventing the emergence of strong majorities that could assume governing responsibilities and be held accountable in return (Ben Salah 2021a). The constitutional crisis and the President’s call for the resignation of Mechichi, backed by Ennahda gave the party the opportunity to position itself on the side of democracy. Besides, given that demonstrators in January protests focused most of their anger against Mechichi and Ennahda, Ennahda, on February 27, 2021, “in a show of strength,” rallied tens of thousands of supporters in Tunis in the “biggest demonstration²³⁸ in Tunisia for years.” Party supporters, bused in from across the country, marched in the capital chanting “the people want to protect the institutions” and “the people want national unity.” While Ennahda marketed this march as a march for democracy, as reported by a news outlet, it was seen as an effort to mobilize popular support against Saied (Middle East Monitor Feb. 28, 2021). While some analysts and civil society leaders criticized Ghannouchi for blaming only the political system, electoral system and the president for the crisis in the country while denying his own share of responsibility, some others accused him of tacitly calling for a coup, or voicing the Ikhwan’s unending aspirations for a

²³⁸Ennahda movement announced, on February 12, 2021, in a statement issued by Fathi Ayadi, the movement’s spokesperson, on a radio broadcast that, they, as Ennahda, “invite[d] supporters to demonstrate on a specific day to support the democratic track in the country.” Ayadi also stated that Ennahda did “not accept the option of government resignation,” since that scenario “threaten[ed] the Tunisian democratic experience and the general situation in the country” (Middle East Monitor Feb. 13, 2021).

parliamentary system using the crisis as an excuse (Guesmi 2021)²³⁹.

While Ghannouchi expressed his desire to get rid of the inherent design flaws of the current political system by switching to the parliamentary system, Saied, in mid-February, in a handwritten and publicly released letter to Mechichi, made statements discrediting the parliament, with the following words:

“We are facing heavy burdens and harsh impacts where some would want us to believe that we are still in a transitional phase that they wrongly describe as democratic... This is only so on the surface. In truth, it is a transition from a single party to a single group of corrupt people” (Ben Salah 2021b).

While Ennahda Shura Council head Harouni defined these statements as “a fairy tale of a battle between the good and clean president and the thoroughly corrupt parliament, [created as] part of a plan to sabotage the legitimacy of parliament” (Ben Salah 2021b) it was no secret that Saied had long aspired for a system change. In fact, it was his anti-establishment, and anti-political party stance, which found its expression in the slogan “I was, I am and I will always be independent,” that won him 73% of the votes in the second ballot. As Harouni, rightfully, put it, the model of democracy Saied desired was “a kind of bottom-up democracy,” and based on a self-designed “from the local to centre” concept, in which directly elected local assemblies had more weight than parliament, and the president, rather than political parties, composed the government (Ben Salah 2021b). In the words of Khalil Abbess, a figure from Saied’s inner circle, Saied was in favor of “cooperat[ing] with the parliament as an institution, but with a parliament “entirely devoid of party politics” (Ben Salah 2021b). On the other hand, albeit in conflict with his anti-establishment stance, figures from Tunisia’s strong trade unions that support a system change, also made their way into Saied’s inner circle.

²³⁹For instance, Abid, a Tunisian researcher stated that transition to the parliamentary system was an issue that Ennahda had insisted on when the constitution was first being prepared, and that Ennahda, who could not achieve it at that time, was now enthusiastic again on the occasion of this crisis. Mohsen al-Nabti, the official spokesman of the Pan-Arab Tunisian People’s Current, described Ghannouchi’s remarks as “adding fuel to the fire, to reveal his coup-like intentions through a one-sided interpretation of the constitution.” Mohsen Marzouk, then head of “the centrist Project of Tunisia movement,” posted on Facebook that Ghannouchi’s words were “a sincere expression of his coup-prone thinking,” and “a more accurate expression of the Brotherhood’s desire for such a system that is tearing the nation-state apart.” Likewise, Briki, the leader of the left-leaning Tunisia Forward Movement, described Ghannouchi’s words as a “call for a coup” against the president (Guesmi 2021).

7.7 Saied's Different Approach to National Dialogue and Prolonging the Constitutional/Political Crisis

The constitutional impasse over the prerogatives of President Saied and PM Mechichi, on top of a very deep economic, social and health crisis and accompanying wave of protests in the south then, lasted for weeks despite offer by trade unions to mediate the process by initiating a national dialogue²⁴⁰ as they did in the 2013 political crisis (The Arab Weekly Mar. 7, 2021). While seeking a national dialogue seemed to be the only way out, in 2021 there were also deep divisions over how to approach a national dialogue. President Saied, on December 30, 2020, came up with another dialogue formula, saying that he was prepared to start a national dialogue, involving some of the political parties and youth from all regions “to correct the process of the revolution, which has deviated from its true path [that is, goals] that the people set 10 years ago, which [was] employment, freedom and dignity,” although he refrained from giving further details or a precise date (Amara 2020b). To Saied, the aim of broad participation of the youth in such a dialogue was “to formulate proposals and demands at the local level, which [would] then be examined by experts in all fields to reach concrete solutions [applicable on a national scale].” He repeated, on March 21, 2021, that they would organize a national dialogue with the broad participation of the youth through modern communication channels to overcome the political and social crisis (López 2022). Undoubtedly, this formula of national dialogue based on the preferences of the youth was in line with “the people want” slogan, which Saied had adopted during his election campaign, presenting him as “the champion of the youth and spokesperson of the people” (López 2022). And, without doubt, despite the limited powers granted to him by the 2014 Constitution, Saied, from day one, believed that he could bring about a system change with the legitimacy provided to him by the public support that came with this slogan. As Riyadh Jrad, a Tunisian political analyst, stated, Saied was not against dialogue in principle but he was against a dialogue that did nothing but divide power among political parties. In Jrad's words, Saied was in favor of a dialogue with a “new formula” and a “real content,” that “included changing the constitution, the electoral law and the political system” (Al-Estiklal Newspaper May. 23, 2021).

²⁴⁰Mustapha Ben Jaafar, who had served as president of the constituent assembly between 2011 and 2014, also called for national reconciliation with the following statement he posted on his facebook page:

“The national dialogue in 2013 brought us together to achieve the common goal for which we were elected, which was to ratify the constitution drafted by everyone without exception. . . Let us make the goal of dialogue in the coming days, not only to overcome the current crisis, but to initiate a comprehensive national reconciliation to get rid of the deep causes that are like ticking bombs that threaten to erupt into next crises” (The Arab Weekly Mar. 7, 2021).

The idea of hosting a dialogue with the youth, excluding the political establishment, has drawn the ire of both Ennahda and the UGTT, which had presented a detailed proposal for national dialogue²⁴¹ months ago (Asharq Al-Awsat Mar. 27, 2021). In this respect, one of the leading Ennahda members, also a former foreign minister, Rafik Abdel-Salam, drawing a parallel between Saied and Qaddafi, the latter of whom had “claim[ed] that the real authority lied in the hands of the people, through its popular and national committees,” said that Saied “wants to move along the same path [as Qaddafi] and claims that the youth have the ultimate say, whereas the president is no more than the executor of their popular agendas.” And yet, he said that in reality both leaders exploited the people/youth to achieve their goals (Asharq Al-Awsat Mar. 27, 2021). UGTT Spokesperson Sami Tahri, also, criticized the president’s dialogue call, saying, “the president has disrespected the authority of the state” (Asharq Al-Awsat Mar. 27, 2021). Besides, as he rightfully stated, such a dialogue would take years (López 2022).

Furthermore, Saied’s insistence, in his speeches, on the exclusion, from the national dialogue that he proposed to launch to put in place a social and economic plan, of such political groups as the Free Destourian Party (PDL), Qalb Tounes and Al Karama, which have been accused of either supporting the old regime, or corruption or having links with Islamist terrorism, was also an obstacle in itself to the launch of the national dialogue (López 2022).

Another attempt at dialogue rejected by Saied was a letter sent by the Speaker of Parliament Ghannouchi to the President of the Republic, on February 20, 2021, calling for a tripartite meeting between the President, PM and himself “as soon as possible” to bring an end to the conflict between the President and the government. In the letter, Ghannouchi said that the purpose of the meeting was to convey “positive messages to the Tunisian people and to the whole world,” and thus, prove that “Tunisia is a state of law and institutions, despite differences and growing rhetoric of division” (Agence Tunis Afrique Presse Feb. 20, 2021). Besides, in early April 2021, Ennahda issued a statement, expressing an “urgent need of a national dialogue that brings together all parties without exclusion [to] determine the major policies and economic and social priorities, . . . ease political and social tensions, and unify Tunisians by reassuring them about the future of their country” (Middle East Monitor Apr. 3, 2021).

²⁴¹ While national dialogue was one of the particular traits of the country, many analysts concluded that at the time conditions were not ripe for a genuine national dialogue as the gap between positions were too wide (political actors were even divided on whether Mechichi should resign or not), and as political actors even started to see “national reconciliation” as a concept employed by their rivals to pursue their hidden agendas (The Arab Weekly Mar. 7, 2021). For instance, Mohsen Nabti, the spokesperson of Popular Current, said, referring to Ennahda, “some political parties continue their political existence by trying to save Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) through such concepts as national reconciliation” (The Arab Weekly Mar. 7, 2021).

As for Mechichi, while reiterating calls for Saied to swear in ministers, he also recognized the urgency of negotiating with international donors for loans, avoiding political fights for the sake of the survival of Tunisia's economy and enacting an economic reform as Tunisia grappled with unprecedented financial problems, exacerbated by 8.2% contraction in the real GDP of Tunisia in 2020, and unemployment rising to 16.2% by the end of September 2020, reflecting the adverse effects of the coronavirus outbreak on the economy (Republic of Tunisia: Presidency of the Government Apr. 2, 2021). Given that debt repayments due in 2021 increased to 16 billion dinars (\$5.75 billion) from 11 billion dinars in 2020, Tunisia's 2021 budget forecasted a borrowing requirement of \$7.2 billion, of which around \$5 billion was external loans (The Arab Weekly Apr. 1, 2021). Then, on March 31, 2021, to pave the way for a deal with the IMF, a package of economic reforms, covering such controversial areas as subsidies, taxes and state-owned enterprises suffering from heavy debts, that is, a package of reforms the IMF has long called on Tunisia to enact, was signed between the Mechichi government and the powerful labor union UGTT. Cutting the wage bill (from 17.4% in 2021 to %15 in 2022) through the reduction of workforce in key seven state companies to improve the efficiency of these companies, eliminating state subsidies (gradually till 2024) to reduce the fiscal deficit in exchange for a new system that supports the living standards of poorer sections of society, a change in tax system to increase financial resources of the state and to improve public services, were issues that were negotiated (The Arab Weekly Apr. 1, 2021). This agreement was important given that the UGTT had been objecting these reforms mainly to protect public sector pay, and that cutting government spending was a sensitive issue in a young democracy like Tunisia where people have been protesting since the revolution in frustration over poor public services, and the economy in general. Mechichi stated in an interview that the government was "a stable" one that owned "the confidence of the [parliament]," and that the government was able to "engage in a positive partnership" with national organizations to find a solution to the socio-economic crisis, and that he hoped that "the rest of the stakeholders would have the same awareness to [be able to] work together in the same direction" (Republic of Tunisia: Presidency of the Government Apr. 8, 2021). Then, in May 2021, the IMF talks in Washington D.C. started with a Tunisian delegation led by finance minister Ali Kooli to seek \$4 billion in loans (Al-Arabiya News May. 4, 2021).

President Saied not only prolonged the constitutional and political crisis by taking advantage of the absence of a mediating institution such as the Constitutional Court, he also contributed to the delay in the election of members to the court by refusing, on April 4, to ratify the amendments to the Statute of the Constitutional Court,

approved by the parliament, on March 25, 2021, reducing the majority required for the election of court members from 145 (two-thirds) to 131 (60%) deputies. Reportedly, the proposal to complete the election process of Constitutional Court members had come from Ennahda, parliamentary bloc of which issued a statement, calling for “further efforts to reach consensus with the rest of the [political] blocs” (Middle East Monitor Apr. 7, 2021). However, President Saied refused to ratify the amendments to the law on the pretext that the deadline for the establishment of the Constitutional Court had expired years ago and that he would not take responsibility for such a “violation of the constitution,” turning the establishment of the court into a new issue of conflict with the parliament (The Arab Weekly Apr. 8, 2021). To political analysts, though, Saied’s refusal of the draft bill was also politically-motivated, rather than stemming from a constitutional reading. To them, Saied rejected the amendments out of the fear that they would be used to limit his powers and oust him from office. And some observers stated that Saied was not wrong to be afraid as Ennahda, which already had two allies in the parliament, could get some of its candidates elected after the amendment, and use the court to target its opponents. An independent deputy Meliki, also, stated, in an interview, that there were statements from the ruling coalition parties that the president would be removed by the court (Hedoui 2021). And in response, Saied sent a letter to Parliament Speaker Ghannouchi, rejecting the amendments and calling for respect for all provisions of the constitution (Hedoui 2021). Although Saied had the constitutional right to reject an amendment, the result for Tunisian democracy was that the establishment of the constitutional court was further delayed by the president as part of his own political struggle.

At the time, President Saied continued to make harsh statements, sometimes in coded messages, against his political opponents, particularly PM Mechichi and Mechichi’s ally, Ennahda. For instance, in Zitouna Mosque, the day before Ramadan, he prayed to God to protect Tunisians against coronavirus as well as “political epidemics,” and defined Ramadan as a month to “hide devil political interests”. An Ennahda leader, Rafik Abdul Salam, commented on this statement on his Facebook page, accusing President Saied of “spreading hate” (Al-Estiklal Newspaper May. 23, 2021). Likewise, speaking at a ceremony, held on the 21st anniversary of the passing of Habib Bourguiba, Saied made statements, casting doubt on the democratic credentials of his political rivals. In this regard, he said that the political stage was taken over by corrupt individuals and “thieves;” and warned against the use of laws “to protect the interests of a single person or a particular party” (The Arab Weekly Apr. 8, 2021). Another significance of this speech was that, for the first time, Saied made statements defending the legacy of the two authoritar-

ian presidents who had ruled Tunisia after independence, referring to the presence of a “conspiracy to undermine public services that have been established since the 1960s, including education, health and transportation, and a conspiracy targeting our Islamic values.” Then, after complaining that the country’s rule shifted from “one-party rule to one-lobby rule,” the latter of which, he said, was a great danger to political pluralism, he said that the people had every right to participate in the establishment of “a new political system that meets their aspirations” (The Arab Weekly Apr. 8, 2021).

Saied’s blocking of parliamentary efforts to create a Constitutional Court which would strengthen Tunisian democracy, was followed by his visit to Egypt, on April 9-12, 2021. The future implication of his three-day visit to Egypt, and of the joint press conference by Saied and Egyptian President Sisi, on April 10, in which they made statements against political Islam in the framework of their fight against terrorist organizations and extremist ideologies, was predicted, by the analysts, to be further deepening of the gap between Saied and Ennahda, as Ennahda was seen by some analysts as the Tunisian extension of the Muslim Brotherhood, which Egypt has classified as a terrorist organization since December 2013, although Ennahda, itself, has denied any links with the Muslim Brotherhood or any other international organization. Thus, a time when the Tunisian president was at odds with Ennahda, Egyptian president Sisi’s words, stressing the importance of “boosting cooperation in the field of combating terrorism in all its forms and aspects . . . as well as . . . of confronting extremist ideology that poses a threat to the region and its people,” was, naturally, understood to mean the Muslim Brotherhood and its various branches, including Ennahda (Nadhif 2021).

Only few days after his return from Egypt, Kais Saied, during a speech, where both Mechichi and Ghannouchi were in the audience, stated that his powers as the commander of the armed forces included not only the army but also the internal security forces²⁴² although until then the 2014 Constitution had been widely interpreted as placing the internal security forces and the Ministry of Interior under the control of the PM. This statement, hence, further escalated the dispute with PM Mechichi, who also held the position of acting interior minister since Saied refused to approve the cabinet reshuffle proposed by Mechichi. His specific mention of the president’s power over the internal security forces was interpreted as an attempt to divide the security establishment and as laying the groundwork for a “soft coup” (Middle East

²⁴²More specifically, he said, “the President is the supreme commander of the military and civilian armed forces. Let this matter be clear to all Tunisians . . . I do not intend to monopolize these forces, but the constitution must be respected. . . There is no distinction. The law, the world’s texts and the code of contracts and obligations all mention it. The armed forces are the military and the security forces.” (Middle East Eye Apr. 18, 2021).

Eye Apr. 18, 2021).

7.8 Kais Saied's Power Grab – “constitutional coup” – on July 25, 2021

On May 13, 2021, a pro-Qatari British news website, *Middle East Eye*, published a document, which it claimed to have leaked from the office of Saied's chief-of-staff Nadia Akacha and revealed that a “coup” was being planned at the Tunisian presidential palace, based on Article 80 of the Constitution, which granted the president extraordinary powers for a limited time under certain conditions. Since the plan was not reported in the local media but appeared in a pro-Qatari website, one of the claims about the source of the leak was that Ennahda, known to have good relations with Qatar, leaked the plan to increase its pressure on the President. According to the leaked plan, Saied was to call an urgent meeting of the National Security Council at his palace in Carthage under the pretext of discussing the pandemic, the security situation and mounting levels of debt; ambush those attending the meeting, including PM Mechichi and Parliament Speaker Ghannouchi; and announce that he would invoke Article 80 of the Constitution which allowed him to concentrate all powers in his hands in a national emergency²⁴³; and deliver a televised speech announcing the coup in the presence of Mechichi and Ghannouchi as well. The leaked plan also stated that a general named Khaled al-Yahyawī, director of the President's personal security unit, would be appointed acting interior minister; the armed forces would be deployed at the entrances to cities and key institutions. The leaked plan also envisaged a cabinet reshuffle in which the President would keep only the prime minister and replace all other ministers. A senior political figure, reportedly, said that this plan had been discussed since April 2021 in circles close to the President albeit not having been communicated to the President directly, and that not dismissing the PM was a way to neutralize him, as dismissal was a complex procedure requiring a parliamentary vote (Al-Estiklal Newspaper May. 23, 2021).

At the time, after days of speculation, President Saied confirmed the authenticity of the document but denied that he was planning a coup in the country. Reportedly, on May 26, responding to the alleged coup plot against the government, in a meeting with PM Mechichi and Defense Minister, he said that the document was sent to him and that he could not be held responsible for its content (Al-Estiklal Newspaper

²⁴³ Describing the situation as a “national emergency,” the document states: “In such a situation, the President's role is to concentrate all powers in his grip so as for him to become the center of authority that will enable him to exclusively retain... all the powers that empower him” (Al-Estiklal Newspaper May. 23, 2021).

May. 23, 2021). As reported by another political analyst, in this meeting, Saied also fueled these rumors by stating that it was the President's constitutional authority to apply Article 80 in a situation that required the adoption of exceptional measures (López 2022).

However, on July 25, Republic Day, Saied carried out the scenario described in the document published in the *Middle East Eye*. In a televised speech following an emergency meeting²⁴⁴ at the Carthage Palace, Saied announced that he would assume the executive authority with the help of a new prime minister, freeze the parliament's activities, remove the immunity of deputies, paving the way for their prosecution, put himself in charge of supervising public prosecution, and rule by decree for 30 days to address Tunisia's months-long political crisis (Tunisie Numérique Jul. 24, 2021). His announcement came after the protests that swept Tunisia from Sidi Bouzid in the south, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, to the north of Tunisia, on July 25, in which protesters called for the overthrow of the government and the dissolution of the parliament controlled by Ennahda and stormed and burned Ennahda headquarters in several cities, blaming Ennahda for the political and economic crisis in the country (Reuters July 25, 2021). Besides, although Ennahda maintained a strong core base of support, Saied acted with the comfort of having 87%²⁴⁵ support of Tunisians, according to a survey carried out in the three days after Saied's power grab. As Amara and McDowall (2021) stated, to the large majority, Saied's intervention was necessary to "oust a corrupt, sclerotic political elite after years of stagnation and relaunch Tunisia's revolution".

The society was fed up with the political instability, stemming from the animosity between President Saied, PM Hichem Mechichi, and the speaker of parliament and Ennahda leader Ghanouchi, and the ever-changing health ministers amid the pandemic, which was spinning out of control, with the WHO declaring Tunisia the most infected country with the highest death rate in Africa, and which further aggravated the prolonged economic crisis. The society was "fed up with the failures of the government and parliament," compounded by Ennahda's compensation demand, on July 7, for the torture and imprisonment they were subject to under Ben Ali, at a time when Tunisia's economy was collapsing. And then, on July 20, the final straw came with PM Mechichi's first initiating an investigation and then firing the health minister over his "random opening" of vaccination stations on Eid Adha, leading

²⁴⁴In the emergency meeting at the Carthage Palace, Saied pointed to the deterioration of the health situation in many regions amid covid, and expressed dissatisfaction with the poor management of the health crisis by the Mechichi government, who, he said, tried to take advantage of the health crisis for their purely political objectives.

²⁴⁵In the survey carried out between July 26 and 28, 2021, 87% of Tunisians said they approved the decisions of the President. Of these 87%, while 76% totally approved the decisions, 11% somewhat supported (La Presse Jul. 28, 2021).

to stampedes (Volkmann 2021b, Tunisie Numerique Jul. 21, 2021). For the same reasons, Kais Saied also received the support of key civil society groups, such as the UGTT and Les Femmes Democraties, to whom he assured that their rights would be protected (Volkmann 2021b). Besides, after Saied's seizure of power, influential local media also supported him by making justifications for his power grab. For instance, as it was reported in *the Guardian*, the editor-in-chief of Nawaat, an influential local media outlet, stated that to decide whether Kais Saied's intervention was a coup or not it was necessary to take into account "the dire situation in the parliament" at the time (Cordall 2021c).

When it comes to the reactions of the parliamentary groups to the president's decisions, they differed. While Saied's opponents, including Ennahda, accused him of conducting a "constitutional coup," Saied refused to describe it as a coup, and said that his actions were in line with article 80 of the Constitution, except for the provision on informing the Constitutional Court²⁴⁶, which stipulated that the head of state had the right to take "any exceptional measures" in case of "imminent threat jeopardizing the nation, and the country's security and independence." He also noted that Article 80 prohibited the dissolution of the parliament, implying that freezing its activities was not prohibited, despite the fact that Article 80 stipulated that the parliament must be in "permanent session" when the article is invoked (Human Rights Watch Jul. 27, 2021).

Ennahda leader Ghannouchi, in a first reaction, only few hours after Saied's power grab, called on the people to take to the streets "to defend [the] democracy," "like on January 14, 2011, when Tunisians rose up in the revolution (Reuters Jul. 25, 2021). In an interview with the Turkish state television TRT, Ghannouchi described Saied's move as a "full-fledged coup," and said, "since the moment we heard of the coup, we have taken to the streets and we are trying to observe the Turkish lesson," in reference to the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Turkey (Daily Sabah Jul. 26, 2021). Ghannouchi also made his way to the parliament with two deputies, and their access was denied by the military armored vehicles. It was followed by a sit-in outside the parliament, staged by Ghannouchi and deputies from various parliamentary groups, who denounced Saied's freezing of the parliament's activities (Ltifi 2021). The next day saw skirmishes between supporters of him and Saied outside the parliament, the latter of whom went out for celebration (Reuters Jul. 25, 2021). Besides, despite calls by Ennahda and Qalb Tounes for Mechichi to

²⁴⁶The Tunisian Constitution states that "the measures required by this exceptional situation" can be used, but only after consulting the speaker of parliament and informing the constitutional court, which, as noted above, has not yet been created in Tunisia, despite being one of promises of the 2011 revolution. Hence, in the absence of the court, there was no mechanism to assess whether the conditions were born to invoke Article 80.

continue his post (Ltifi 2021) and although Ennahda announced in a statement, on July 26, that PM Mechichi confirmed to them that he would continue to exercise his duties and continue to call the council of ministers to meet, the same day Mechichi, on his Facebook page, declared that he “will not adhere to any position or any responsibility in the state, . . . will hand over the responsibility to the person who will be entrusted by the President,” also saying, “[he] cannot in any way be a disruptive element or part of a problem that complicates Tunisia’s situation” (Mechichi 2021). On July 27, after a meeting of the executive office, Ennahda reversed his stance, and called for a national dialogue to get the country out of crisis. In an interview with the French press, Ghannouchi made a call for national dialogue one more time, saying, “we are trying to use all peaceful means – dialogue, street pressure, pressure from organizations . . . internal and external pressure – to bring back democracy,” also stating that he and his party were ready “to make all concessions so that democracy can return to Tunisia” and that democratic gains would be preserved (Daily Sabah Jul. 30, 2021). Likewise, another Ennahda leader and former finance minister Basbas said, in an interview, that Ennahda would confront the coup only “with peaceful mechanisms” (Ltifi 2021). However, these calls of Ennahda, one of the key targets of Saied’s move, were quickly dismissed by the President.

Qalb Tounes, the second-largest party in the parliament with 29 seats, also denounced Saied’s move by issuing a statement, in which they described the decisions announced by Saied as a “blatant violation of the constitution” that plunge Tunisia back into autocracy. Al-Karama/the Dignity Coalition with 18 seats also denounced Saied’s decisions. On the other hand, the People’s Movement, issued a statement on Facebook in which it held Ennahda fully responsible for the assassinations and terrorist operations that the country witnessed as well as for the deterioration of the political and economic conditions in the country and for the spread of the political and economic corruption phenomena, and in which it gave support to the President’s move on the grounds that it would put the revolution back on track.

Although Saied’s opponents and critics have sounded alarm bells, warning that Saied aimed to do away with democracy and bring a one-man rule to the country, international reaction has been a “soft” one (Mathews 2021). Immediate reaction of many international institutions focused more on the protection of civil rights. For instance, in the press release issued by the Biden administration after the coup, the reaction was mainly to the closure of media offices, since the police closed down the office of the Qatari TV Channel Al-Jazeera, in Tunis, on July 26, after evicting all the journalists that were present. Then, the U.S. administration issued a statement, “urg[ing] scrupulous respect for freedom of expression and other civil rights” (The U.S. Department of State Jul. 26, 2021), although Secretary of State Blinken’s

words, on July 29, that he “urged [Saied] to make sure that Tunisia returns to the democratic path as quickly as possible” was assessed by some as a harsher response to Saied’s move (Mathews 2021). Human Rights Watch (HRW) also called Saied’s intervention “dangerous” since it threatened civilian rights, and urged the President to limit any drastic limitations on fundamental rights (Human Rights Watch Jul. 27, 2021). Likewise, in its press release, Amnesty International (Jul. 26, 2021) urged the President to uphold human rights following suspension of the parliament. Whereas two senators on the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, issued a statement, expressing concern about “growing tension and instability in Tunisia” and calling on President Saied to “recommit to the democratic principles” and the military to “observe its role in a constitutional democracy,” (U.S. Senate. Foreign Relations Committee Aug. 5, 2021), the Biden Administration continued to sidestep questions about whether the President’s actions constituted a coup²⁴⁷.

Like the US, the EU, which had made Tunisia a privileged partner with the ouster of Ben Ali, giving the country “the highest per capita EU support in the world,” also showed reluctance in calling Saied’s seizure of power a coup and gave initially only “mild and slow reactions²⁴⁸” to Saied (Cherif 2021). It took until October 15 for the EU Commission to react more forcefully, calling on Saied to present a “clearly-defined timetable” for Tunisia’s return to democracy (European Union External Action Oct. 15, 2021). Likewise, it took until October 21 for the EU Parliament to vote in favor of a resolution, expressing concern about “the powers concentrated in the hands of the President” and “a foreign interference undermining Tunisian democracy,” and calling on Saied to return to a “full-fledged democracy” through “an inclusive national dialogue” and to provide for a “clear roadmap for returning to normality” (European Parliament Oct. 21, 2021). The emphasis on “foreign interference,” undoubtedly, implied Egypt and the Gulf countries, in particular the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which have openly expressed their support for and confidence in Saied after his power grab.

Ghannouchi, in an interview with *Times*, also blamed the UAE for the coup saying in an interview that the UAE was determined to “finish off” the Arab Spring since it regarded the Muslim democracy propounded by Ennahda as a threat to its own

²⁴⁷For instance, in a press briefing, U.S. State Department Spokesman Ned Price said that “more important than the label issue is the critical job of supporting Tunisia’s return to the democratic path” (U.S. Department of State Aug. 3, 2021).

²⁴⁸To Cherif (2021), a political analyst, the EU’s soft response to Saied’s power grab, mainly, derived from Tunisia’s not being a priority country for democracy support, unlike regions like the Balkans and the Caucasus. Then, not even the European Parliament or national parliaments of the EU member states gave an immediate and unified reaction against Saied to safeguard Tunisian democracy. As Cherif (2021) stated, the first recorded call between Saied and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was in early December, and the first adoption of a document by the European Parliament warning Saied against an authoritarian turn was on October 18.

power (The Times Jul. 31, 2021). A *Middle East Eye* report even claimed that UAE and Egypt assisted Saied in the execution of the coup, and that Egyptian security officials physically assaulted Mechichi before the coup, forcing him to resign, a claim later denied by Mechichi (Hearst and Edroos). Saudi and Emirati media, which are known to be tightly controlled by the government and reflected the government's narrative in their reporting, celebrated Saied's move, calling it an uprising, a victory against the Muslim Brotherhood, which they claimed Ennahda represented (The New Arab Jul. 27, 2021). Saied's frequent references in his post-coup speeches to "brotherly and friendly countries" (The Arab Weekly Aug. 2, 2021) that, he said, would help Tunisia reduce its budget deficits and fulfill its loan commitments were interpreted by analysts as a declaration of Saied's intention to cement partnerships with Arab dictators at the forefront of anti-democracy in the region (Brumberg 2021a).

Saied's moves were followed by more steps triggering the fears of a return to an authoritarian regime and erasing the gains of the revolution although Saied had promised, on July 30, that he would "not turn into a dictator" (Al-Jazeera Jul. 30, 2021). In this regard, he sacked the defense minister and the interim justice minister, on July 26; and assigned an "ally," Khaled Yahyaoui, the Director General of the Presidential Security Unit to run the Interior Ministry, on July 29 (Reuters Jul. 26, 2021). In the following days, he also dismissed several top officials, including the military chief prosecutor as well as the head of the national TV channel Wataniya. As stressed in a Goldstein (2022), from then on, Wataniya's debate programs excluded almost anyone who called his actions a coup, openly doubted the president's vision/path (Goldstein 2022). Simultaneously, in a further sign of contraction of press freedom, journalists increasingly practiced self-censorship as Saied, frequently, attacked the news media in his speeches, as noted by Fahem Boukadous, head of the Journalists' Union (Yee 2022a). On the other hand, as a step that helped Saied gain popularity among Tunisians who, in the words of Monica Marks, a professor of Middle Eastern politics, "are now more populist in their expectations than even before"²⁴⁹, he proposed to force wealthy businessmen accused of corruption to finance development projects in poorer regions, while he suspended bailout negotiations with the IMF without revealing his economic plans (The New York Times Sep. 29, 2021). More specifically, on July 28, in a meeting with the President of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, Saied called on wholesalers and retailers, and distributors to lower prices under the difficult conditions the country was going through, brought criticisms to "bad economic choices" implemented in recent years,

²⁴⁹ Monica Marks said: "The wall that Kais is hurtling toward and might splatter against is economy. . . Inevitably, there is going to be a huge chasm between populist expectations, that are higher than ever now, and the reality of what Kais can actually deliver" (The New York Times Sep. 29, 2021).

and proposed that those involved in looting public money must finance development projects in the disadvantaged regions, accusing 460 businessmen of embezzlement (Daily Sabah Jul. 29, 2021, Ltifi 2021). Just days after seizing power, Saied ordered an investigation into Ennahda supporters who were involved in a fight outside parliament during protests against Saied, over charges of “attempting to commit acts of violence,” while no investigations were announced into supporters of Saied although supporters of Ennahda and Saied confronted each other (Al-Jazeera Jul. 30, 2021). He ordered an investigation into three largest parties in parliament, who called his move a coup, claiming that these parties received foreign funds ahead of the 2019 elections. And Mohsen Al-Dali, the spokesman for the Court of First Instance in Tunis, announced the opening of an investigation into the allegations that Ennahda, Qalb Tounes and Aich Tounsi association obtained foreign funds from unknown sources to finance their electoral campaigns. Dali also informed about the opening of another investigation into “the mismanagement of funds belonging to the Tunisian Anti-Corruption Authority.” Saied administration has issued arrest warrants for all members of the Dignity Coalition in parliament (Middle East Eye Aug. 2, 2021).

In fact, Tunisian authorities have, increasingly, begun to use travel bans, investigations and arrests against the political opposition, lawmakers, journalists and civil society after Saied’s seizure of power. The has documented the imposition of travel bans on at least 50 people, including judges, state officials, businessmen and a parliamentarian, only within the first month of Saied’s seizure of power, without any trial or judicial investigation and with only verbal notification by airport authorities, and thus, in violation of the rights to liberty and freedom of movement. Military courts have increasingly investigated and prosecuted civilians, including many members of parliament, in some cases only for publicly criticising the President, calling his seizure of power a “coup²⁵⁰,” and judges who protested the prosecution of civilians in military judiciary; and issued house arrests/detentions (Middle East Eye Aug. 2, 2021, Amnesty International Nov. 10, 2021). Amnesty International (Nov. 10, 2021) reported that in the three months after Saied’s power grab, at least ten civilians, six of whom were members of parliament, were investigated or tried by military courts for various offenses, compared to six documented military trials between 2011 and 2018. On December 31, 2021, the Vice President of Ennahda, a Member of Parliament and former Justice Minister Nouredine Bhiri and a former Interior Ministry employee Fathi Beldi have been arrested without being formally

²⁵⁰Lifting of parliamentary immunity has also led to the execution of previous resolutions on several deputies, such as the one on Yassine Ayari, an independent deputy, who had been convicted him of “demoralizing the army,” due to a Facebook post in 2018. The verdict against him was executed in September 2021 after he called Saied’s power grab “a coup against the whole constitution,” on Facebook (The National News Sep. 28, 2021).

charged, without having access to a lawyer or having been granted the opportunity to challenge their detention before a court (Amnesty International Jan. 14, 2022). Likewise, Tunisia's former president Marzouki was also tried and sentenced in absentia for criticizing President Kais Saied, saying he staged a coup, and for calling on France to end its support for the current administration (France 24 Dec. 22, 2021). Saied's politically-motivated investigations and arrests, later, targeted Ennahda leader Ghannouchi, former PM and senior Ennahda member Hamadi Jebali²⁵¹, Youssef Chahed, Elyes Fakhfakh, Nabil Kharoui, as well as many former ministers and politicians who had run in the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections. The charges against the candidates included "political advertising, illegal advertising on social media, and violating electoral silence." Reportedly, the accused would face fines, if found guilty; and yet, Saied pushed for more serious penalties, such as banning them from running in the future elections or holding public office (Brown 2022).

7.8.1 Saied's Further Tightening His Grip on Power and Growing Opposition against Him

Meanwhile, President Saied, who had promised to name a new PM and said, in July 2021, that his actions were provisional responses to Tunisia's pressing economic and health problems, has tightened his grip on power since then. First, he extended the suspension of parliament and lifting of the parliamentary immunity of deputies "until further notice," through a presidential decree, on August 24, 2021, (France 24 Aug. 24, 2021). He also continued to escalate the tone of his attack on Ennahda: While Ennahda denied allegations in local media that it had paid a lobbying firm in the US to boost Ennahda's reputation during the 2019 elections and after Saied's takeover, Saied, responded to Ennahda's calls for national dialogue, on September 15, in a video posted online by the presidency, saying, in a clear reference to Ennahda, that he wouldn't make deals with "traitors... who pay to offend their country." He also called the government that ruled Tunisia "mafia," saying, "this is a state with two regimes; the apparent regime, the regime of the institutions, and the real regime, the regime of the mafia that rules Tunisia" (The Arab Weekly Sep. 15, 2021).

Then, on September 22, 2021, Saied, without setting a time limit on his hold on power, announced (Decree Law No. 117) that he would "rule by decree and ignore parts of the constitution as he prepare[d] to change the political system" (Amara

²⁵¹Hamadi Jebali was arrested, on January 24, 2022, on charges of money laundering, "raising opposition concerns about [Saied's] human rights record;" and Jebali went on hunger strike, claiming that his arrest was politically-motivated and had nothing to do with money laundering (Reuters Jun. 24, 2022).

and McDowall 2021). The new measures, published in the official gazette, allowed him to appoint the cabinet, set its policy²⁵² direction and key decisions (Article 9 of Decree Law No. 117), although the 2014 Constitution had tasked the parliament with lawmaking and authorized the PM to appoint a cabinet. Besides, Article 5(2) of Decree 117 gave the president full legislative authority over “the organization of justice and the courts,” which meant that “all institutions which were supposed to protect judicial independence could now be changed at will by the president” (Al-Ali 2021). The President also said that he would appoint a committee to formulate constitutional amendments to the 2014 Constitution for the establishment of “a true democracy in which the people truly are sovereign,” and that during this period only the preamble of the 2014 constitution, and Articles 1 and 2 of the 2014 Constitution which held that the state was “republican” and that the system was based on the “will of the people, and the supremacy of the law,” and the articles that did not contradict the legislative and executive powers he had seized, would remain in effect (Amara and McDowall 2021). Thus, Saied suspended most articles of the constitution, gave himself all legislative²⁵³ and executive powers, and exempted²⁵⁴ his decisions from any appeal through a decree – Presidential Decree 117 (Doha Institute 2021). In the *Human Rights Watch* report, which was issued in collaboration with 12 Tunisian civil society institutions and other international human rights institutions, it was stated that Decree Law No. 117 placing the presidential decree laws above the constitution meant removing the constitution from being the source of laws and reversing the universal rule of constitutional supremacy (Human Rights Watch Sep. 27, 2021). As one analyst put it, the decree “effectively establish[ed] a new constitutional order in which the president has granted himself extraordinary power far in excess of anything Tunisia has experienced in its modern history” (Al-Ali 2021).

After announcing his seizure of additional powers, Saied has begun to face growing opposition, even from those who, initially, had supported his power grab. In this regard, three center-left parties (the Democratic Current, Ettakatol and the Republican Party) and one liberal/center-right party (Afek Tounes), in a press conference,

²⁵²As an analyst, rightfully, put it, while the new regulation required the president to “consult” the cabinet when setting policy, this requirement was unlikely to have any practical impact given the president’s sole authority over the composition of the cabinet (Al-Ali 2021).

²⁵³The President was given the power to legislate in all areas, such as “the organization of justice and judiciary, the organization of information, the press, the organization of political parties, unions, associations, organizations, and professional orders as well as their financing, the organization of internal security forces and customs, the electoral law, freedoms and human rights, personal status, or local power, and the organic budget law” (Human Rights Watch Sep. 27, 2021).

²⁵⁴In this regard, Article 7 of Decree 117 provided that presidential decrees were not subject to appeal, which meant that the president’s decisions would not be subject to any judicial review. Article 21 of Decree 117 dissolved the interim constitutional court, which meant that there could be no recourse to any law that could be enacted in the interim period.

announced the formation of a coalition “to express the refusal of the monopolization of power” (Al-Jazeera Aug. 28, 2021); and issued a statement saying, “the President has lost legitimacy by violating the constitution. . . and he will be responsible for all the possible repercussions of this dangerous step” (Al-Jazeera Sep. 23, 2021). In the press conference announcing the formation of the coalition, Ghazi Chawashi, the secretary-general of the Democratic Current party, the party known for its closeness to Saied, described Saied’s move to seize governing powers as “a dangerous period that could lead to the collapse of the state and the end of democratic transitions” (Al-Jazeera Aug. 28, 2021).

The fact that some parties, such as the Democratic Current, which were known to have supported Saied on July 25, switched to the opposition position in the two months following the coup is, undoubtedly, important in terms of signaling significant changes in the political scene, but the contradictions inherent in this change of position should not be ignored. The main contradiction is that these parties which took position on the side of democracy after September 22 continued to avoid aligning themselves with Ennahda, the party which had reacted most strongly to the coup from the beginning, issuing statements accusing Ennahda of creating the political/economic conditions that made Saied’s coup possible. For instance, Chawashi, the leader of the Republican party, who accused, in his speech, Saied of “exploiting” Tunisia’s several crises to “seize power,” and who called on him to amend the constitution “within a quiet dialogue, away from any crisis, with the participation of all parties,” stated during the announcement of the coalition that there would be “no return” to the previous status quo (Al-Jourhouri Sep. 28, 2021). What he meant by “the previous status quo” became clearer the next day when Republican party leaders claimed that largely Ennahda was responsible for the crises Tunisia was facing (Al-Jourhouri Sep. 28, 2021). Moreover, few days later, Workers’ Party leader Hama Hammami, made a similar statement, accusing Ennahda of creating the conditions that made Saied’s coup possible, at a rally on October 9, 2021, saying that the Ennahda Movement, which was in power with its allies, “turned its back on the revolution and aspirations of the people, destroyed state institutions, and contributed significantly to the collapse of all societal values, leading to popular anger against this political formation,” and adding that, his party would accept neither returning to Ennahda’s “rotten” system that has devastated the country for years, nor “the populist and authoritarian system of President Kais Saied” (Agence Tunis Afrique Presse Oct. 9, 2021). Thus, at that time many parties did not even consider alliance with Ennahda as an option.

A contradiction became evident in the UGTT’s change of position as well. Article 22 of Decree 117 which stated that the president himself would be responsible for

“preparing draft amendments related to political reforms” and that he would be assisted in this by a committee to be set up by him, has even raised the ire of the UGTT, which was part of a quartet in 2013 that brokered the national dialogue that helped the country’s fledgling democracy survive. Then, on September 23, the UGTT issued a statement, saying “The UGTT rejects the president’s monopoly on amendments and considers this a danger to democracy” (Al-Jazeera Sep. 23, 2021). The union, then, called on the President to engage in a dialogue to amend the Constitution, saying “The amendment of the Constitution and the electoral law is a matter that concerns all components of society... There is no solution to the current crisis other than consultation, partnership and dialogue on the basis of national principles, Tunisia’s sovereignty and service” (The New York Times Sep. 29, 2021). Given that on July 25, when the president announced the suspension of parliament and the dismissal of the PM, the UGTT²⁵⁵ issued a cautious statement that, far from condemning the measures taken, only emphasized “the need to adhere to constitutional legitimacy at every step” (Middle East Eye Jul. 26, 2021), it is safe to say that the real reason for its much harsher reaction to the September 22 decisions was not the love of democracy, but the possibility that Saied, who was seeking to change the constitution and the political system, would not cooperate with the UGTT in doing so.

And as for Ghannouchi, while he described Saied’s recent move as “a step back towards absolute one-man rule” and continued to call on the public to “take part in peaceful actions to resist dictatorship” (Al-Jazeera Sep. 23, 2021), his failure to join the latest coalition to resist Saied’s monopolization of power has led to the growth of intra-party opposition against him, which had previously arisen from criticism of his leadership style and the alliances he had forged over the years, leading to splits within Ennahda (Al-Jazeera Aug. 28, 2021). As seen above, the fact that Ennahda, the country’s largest party, has been the most important force in parliament since the 2011 revolution has made it easier for it to be blamed for Tunisia’s problems, not only by the rival political parties but also by the public, making it difficult for other parties opposed to Saied’s expansion of powers to cooperate with Ennahda.

²⁵⁵It can even be argued that the UGTT positioned itself on Saied’s side after his July 25 power grab, given that the union’s deputy secretary-general told a local news outlet that he believed that “most of the president’s decisions are in line with the constitution,” while a senior union official, Sami al-Tahiri, said that the union “had consulted some constitutional law professors” and that there was “not much to criticize” in Saied’s measures (Middle East Eye Jul. 26, 2021).

7.8.2 Ennahda Defections on the Rise after Saied Consolidates His Power

Saied's power grab, and subsequently, his seizure of additional power, undoubtedly, confronted Ennahda with an existential crisis – the biggest since 1989, when former dictator President Ben Ali banned Ennahda and forced many of its members to flee into exile or face imprisonment or torture, (Volkmann 2021a) bringing with it increasing criticism of Ghannouchi's leadership and policies, and then, splits. Therefore, while July 25 and Saied's subsequent consolidation of power was external blows to Ennahda, Ennahda was also shaken from within by growing criticism and splits.

As a manifestation of internal disagreements within Ennahda, on July 31, a group from the Ennahda Youth Movement, which also included deputies, issued a statement, entitled "Correcting the Course," calling on the Ennahda leadership "to take responsibility for the failure to achieve the demands of the Tunisian people," noting that "the leadership should understand the state of congestion and ferment as the party's political, economic, and social choices, and the way it managed alliances and political crises, were not effective in meeting the needs of the citizens" (El-Sheikh 2021). Then, Ghannouchi, who had been facing criticisms from within Ennahda over his handling of the political crisis after Saied's power grab, decided to dissolve the party's executive committee, and formed a new committee. He announced this decision on Facebook, on Aug. 23, justifying it on the grounds that it was "in accordance with the requirements of the phase," and was necessary "to achieve greater effectiveness" (AA Aug. 24, 2021). After this move, he also suspended the membership of one of the senior members, Imad Al-Hamami, and referred him to the internal system committee "over [his] repeated transgressions on the movement's policies," "in accordance with the provisions of the party's basic law," as stated on the party's Facebook page (Middle East Monitor Sep. 2, 2021). And finally, on September 25, 113 prominent members of the party, including senior members, shura council members, deputies, and former ministers resigned in a petition announcing that their resignation was in protest against the performance of Ennahda's leadership. In the petition, resigners blamed Ghannouchi for "Ennahda's isolation" and for "prevent[ing] the party from actively engaging in any common front to resist the imminent tyrannical danger represented by the Sept. 22 decisions" (Jebli 2021). They also attributed their decision to "the disruption of the movement's internal democracy and the unilateral decision-making by a group loyal to its leaders," which they said led to "bad political choices" and "inappropriate alliances"²⁵⁶ that "under-

²⁵⁶In the words of a political analyst, Ennahda's alliance with parties accused of corruption, primary one being Nidaa Tounes, resulted in Ennahda's losing its legitimacy, credibility and popular base (Jebli 2021). After the resignation of 113 prominent members of the party, Ennahda leader Ghannouchi, the leader of

mined Ennahda's credibility" (Arab News Sep. 25, 2021). As stated by Madouri, a political analyst, the heavyweights of the movement decided to resign as they chose not to clash with Ghannouchi who continued to adopt a single-handed rule approach. One of those names who resigned, former minister of health Abdellatif Mekki, stated in an interview that resignations came after all attempts at internal reform failed (Jebli 2021). For some, these resignations marked "the end of political Islam in the Arab world due to the failure of its political choices and its lack of any political or economic program" (Jebli 2021).

7.8.3 Saied's Appointment of Najla Bouden, a Political Outsider like himself, as PM on September 29, 2021, albeit with No Sign that Saied was Relinquishing Control

Although domestic pressure on Saied increased after he announced, on September 22, that he would increase his governing powers and rule by decree, Saied did not seem to care much about this pressure and calls for dialogue wherever they came from, and continued to suppress the opposition. For instance, on October 3, the police arrested Amer Ayad, a talk show host for Zaytouna TV, a privately-owned channel, allegedly with close links to Ennahda, on charges of "undermining the security of the state" on orders of the military judiciary after Ayad read an anti-dictatorship poem in the program. Reportedly, on October 6, the police also raided the network's studios, and confiscated its equipment after Tunisia's once independent, now under Saied's control, Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HAICA²⁵⁷) claimed that the network, which has been broadcasting since 2012, had been broadcasting illegally for years (BBC News Oct. 6, 2021). Tunisia's ranking on Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Index dropped 21 places in 2022, from 94 in 2021 to 73 in 2022, as press freedoms declined due to Saied's power grab in July 2021 and subsequent measures. Another name, whose house was raided by the police, on October 3, and who was arrested, on charges of insulting the police, for trial by a

the largest bloc in the parliament and the speaker of the parliament by the time of Saied's power grab, also acknowledged Ennahda's responsibility in Saied's seizure of power saying, "Ennahdha is not in power but it backed the government, despite some criticism we had" (Gulf Times Sep. 25, 2021).

²⁵⁷Tunisia's independent media regulator HAICA, whose role was to oversee media time and access for all candidates in accordance with the electoral law during elections, came under Saied's control. First, on October 2011, it announced that it had shut down three broadcasters critical of the president, claiming that they had been operating illegally without licenses for years despite numerous calls to comply with broadcast licensing laws. According to HAICA board member Hichem Senoussi, the channels' management had long ignored the licencing law, claiming political patronage from the ruling Ennahda and Qalb Tounes parties (Bouazza 2021). Then, on December 10, 2021, PM Bouden issued Circular No.19 on government communication rules. According to the circular, which instructed ministers and secretaries of state to coordinate with the Office of the Head of the Government in their dealings with the media, whether these officials would appear on television and radio would depend on HAICA's approval of a particular media outlet (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor May. 17, 2022).

special military court was a Dignity Coalition deputy, Abellatif Alaoui. Moreover, on the day of these two arrests, thousands of people²⁵⁸ demonstrated in the capital and other cities to show their support for Saied's suspension of parliament and increased governing powers on September 22. Thus, it became clear that the President was still riding a wave of popular support. The demonstrators carried anti-Nahda banners; and one of the slogans called Ghannouchi, who had, two days earlier, challenged Saied's suspension of parliament by declaring parliament in session and calling on deputies to resume their work, a move likely to deepen the dispute over Saied's legitimacy, an "assassin" (Amara 2021, Reuters Oct. 2, 2021). As Brumberg (2021b) argued, while these two arrests pointed to the growing political clout of the security apparatus, the demonstrations organized on the same day as the arrests showed that the President believed that the public would support such drastic and legally questionable measures.

And yet, faced with increasing international²⁵⁹ calls to form a government, the latest from the German chancellor Merkel, who called for "a return to parliamentary democracy in dialogue with all other political actors," Saied appointed Najla Bouden, an academic and political outsider, like himself, as PM on September 29, 2021, more than two months after the coup; and said that Bouden's task was to "put an end to the corruption and chaos that has spread to many state institutions" (Agence France-Presse Sep. 29, 2021). On the other hand, on September 22, Saied had significantly reduced the powers of her office and was, technically, in charge of the administration himself. According to decisions announced in September, the new cabinet would, ultimately, answer to him rather than the new PM. Then, on November 11, a new government, with close associates of Saied, including Taoufik Charfeddine, former Minister of the Interior, who had been dismissed from office by then PM Mechichi and Sihem Boughdiri, who had been installed by Saied as interim finance minister in August, took office. In his speech at the swearing-in ceremony of the new government, Saied, again, claimed that his steps were "constitutional" in light of the "imminent danger" facing Tunisia; and continuing his populist rhetoric, he said that he acted to "free the Tunisian state from the clutches of those lurking at home and abroad and those who see the office as a tool for looting or plundering public funds," and that he would also "cleanse the judiciary" (The Guardian Oct. 11, 2021). Furthermore, while the 2018 municipal elections and the resulting municipal councils were a step towards dismantling the highly centralized state power that had developed during Tunisia's years of rule by Bourguiba and Ben Ali, and marked

²⁵⁸The protest was also a response to the nearly 2000 protesters who took to the streets to oppose the president four days after Saied's September 22 decree (Al-Jazeera Sep. 26, 2021).

²⁵⁹The head of Amnesty International, Callamard, also, in a speech, warned of a concentration of power that would "very quickly lead to more authoritarianism" (The New Arab Sep. 24, 2021).

a real advance in Tunisia's democratic transition, with Presidential Decree No.2021-187, on November 23, 2021, Saied abolished the Ministry of Local Affairs, which served as a bridge between central and local governments, transferring its powers to the Ministry of Interior, and bringing municipal councils under the control of the latter. As Yerkes and Alhomoud (2022) put it, the abolition of the Ministry of Local Affairs was "a rollback of the democratic transition's efforts to devolve power to local actors." A new government was, thus, formed, but Saied gave no sign that he was planning to relinquish control.

Despite the step Saied took by appointing a PM, calls for laying out a dialogic roadmap to get the country back on track started to be made more forcefully by the U.S.²⁶⁰ and the EU²⁶¹ and finally by the G7²⁶² countries, which Saied not only expressed his "dissatisfaction" with (Middle East Monitor Oct. 15, 2021) but also described as foreign interference (Al-Arabiya News Oct. 21, 2021). Finally, on October 21, he promised to launch a "sincere" and "loyal" dialogue with the participation of youth from all regions of Tunisia, to lead to "consensual proposals" on the political and the electoral system, in a speech streamed on the presidential Facebook page (Agence Tunis Afrique Presse Oct. 21, 2021). And yet, the President has also announced his intention to exclude from dialogue "those stole the people's money and traitors" (Al-Arabiya News Oct. 21, 2021), which would become "a pretext to exclude some political and civilian forces" in the country, and hence, which casted doubt on "the inclusiveness and legitimacy of the dialogue" (Mekki 2021). In fact, the President had also said previously that he would not make deals with those he considered "traitors," in an apparent reference to the Ennahda party, which the local media has accused of paying a foreign lobbying firm (Reuters Sep. 15, 2021). Moreover, the President's remarks had also been voiced, on October 4, by the leader of the Peoples Party, one of the president's ardent supporters, who said that Ennahda would be excluded from the dialogue as it was "part of the problem and respon-

²⁶⁰On October 15, 2021, the U.S. Congressional Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa and Global Counter-Terrorism held a hearing, titled "Tunisia: Examining the State of Democracy and Next Steps for US Policy," in which it was stated that democracy in Tunisia was "in danger," despite the recent positive steps taken by Saied. Reportedly, at the hearing, Democratic Congressman Malinowski described Saied's seizure of power as a "coup," a Republican Congressman Mast called Saied "a dictator," and another Republican lawmaker Steube declared that "Tunisia's president is not our friend" (Mathews 2021). Around the same time, State Department spokesman Ned Price also issued a statement, calling on Saied to "create... an inclusive path for a rapid return to constitutional order" (Middle East Monitor Oct. 15, 2021).

²⁶¹As mentioned above, on October 21, the European Parliament adopted a resolution, expressing deep concern that "the powers are too greatly concentrated in the hands of the President," and calling for the rule of law (European Parliament Oct. 21, 2021).

²⁶²The ambassadors of G7 countries in Tunisia issued a statement, on December 11, 2021, calling on Tunisia to "swiftly" return to functioning democratic institutions and to set a "clear deadline" for this return; and also expressed the readiness of their respective countries and the EU "to encourage and support the rapid implementation of the necessary steps to strengthen the economic and financial position of Tunisia," referring to "the importance of social and economic stability in order to meet the needs of the Tunisian people" (France 24 Dec. 11, 2021).

sible for the damage done to the country.” As Brumberg (2021b) said, while this assessment of Nahda’s role was controversial, it signalled the direction in which the president was taking Tunisia, namely the exclusion of Ennahda and other Islamist parties from both the national dialogue and the new order to be established.

7.8.4 Saied’s Announcement of the Roadmap in the Face of Increasing International and Domestic Pressure and Worsening Economic Crisis on December 13, 2021

Amidst increasing international and domestic pressures, Saied, finally, announced the roadmap, titled “Activating Chapter 80,” on December 13, 2021, five months after the July 25-presidential coup against the constitution, in a speech, posted on his official Facebook page. In fact, it can be argued that the roadmap was announced mainly due to the worsening economic crisis, the inability to mobilize the necessary financial resources to cover the 2021 budget deficit, and the desire to secure a new loan from donors, especially the IMF, despite Saied’s mocking and downplaying the importance of ratings issued by credit rating agencies, in a populist rhetoric, in the presidency’s Facebook page (Maghreb Voices Oct. 10, 2021). Tunisia had raised the budget deficit forecast projected in the supplementary Finance Law (according to Legislative Decree No. 2021-3), published in the Official Gazette, on November 15, 2021, to \$3.42 billion, from the \$2.48 billion projected in the original Finance Law for 2021, which meant an increase by 38% in the budget deficit, which the government planned to finance through external and domestic borrowing (AA Nov. 16, 2021).

The announced roadmap, that is, the set of political measures, that ultimately aimed to change the political system, included suspending the parliament until the new elections that would be held on December 17, 2022; holding a series of “virtual popular consultations” in early 2022 by asking yes/no questions via an electronic platform to gather ideas for revising the Constitution, which would then go to a commission tasked with the formulation of constitution proposals based on the results of the online consultation; holding a referendum on the new Constitution, on July 25, 2022; and a criminal reconciliation²⁶³ for businessmen accused of financial crimes. And given Saied’s desire to reshape the political system into one with a strong presidency, and decentralized, local government, it was, even then, possible to say that

²⁶³Saied, on the facebook page of the Presidency, announced the imminent issuance of a financial reconciliation decree based on the detention of those involved in corruption cases according to the degree of their involvement and the prosecution of “those who have committed crimes against the state and the people” (Doha Institute 2021)(The Presidency of Tunisia 17.12.2021.).

the adoption of these measures would put in place “a new system with authoritarian features under the guise of non-representative direct democracy, empowering the president to rule the country almost unilaterally” (Doha Institute 2021). An earlier decree that the commission to formulate constitutional amendments would be appointed entirely by him, had already given him unchecked control over the final draft of the constitution (Yee 2021). Moreover, Saied’s announcement of these measures on the eleventh anniversary of the outbreak of the Tunisian revolution also signalled, as some analysts stressed, that he wanted to present these decisions as a “resumption of the revolutionary trajectory” after what he described as a “black decade,” characterized by widespread corruption and the failure to meet the social and political demands that had given birth to the revolution (Doha Institute 2021).

Surprisingly, key international actors, including Biden administration, have given tacit approval to these decisions, as they responded to the roadmap by saying that they “welcome” Saied’s announcement of a roadmap for political reform and parliamentary elections (U.S. Department of State Dec. 14, 2021), a reaction that stands in stark contrast to Biden’s Democracy Summit speech a few days earlier, in which he emphasized that democracy did not occur by chance and renewal of it required “constant effort;” complained that democracy data²⁶⁴ pointed at a move across the globe in the opposite direction. He also stated that autocrats tried to justify their “repressive policies and practices [by presenting them] as a more efficient way to address today’s challenges” (U.S. Department of State Dec. 14, 2021), as if referring to Saied.

Although a bunch of political parties, from various political affiliations, outright rejected Saied’s recent announcements, it was not possible to speak of an opposition united around a common strategy to steer the country back towards democracy. For instance, Ghannouchi issued a statement in his capacity as parliament speaker, calling the suspension of the parliament for another year “unconstitutional and illegal,” calling on Saied to “engage in a comprehensive dialogue to jointly determine the future of the country,” and emphasizing that “any amendment to the constitution must be done through constitutional procedures” (Presidency of Parliament Dec. 16, 2021). Ennahda also issued a statement, describing Saied’s, recently, announced political measures/roadmap as an indication of his willingness “to commit himself to absolute unilateralism in determining the fate of the country, using the camouflage of electronic consultation and referendum in the style of populist autocratic regimes

²⁶⁴He noted, for example, that Freedom House reported that 2020 was the 15th year of global freedom retreat; that the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance similarly reported that more than half of all democracies were in decline, and that democracies, including the United States, were all experiencing a decline in at least one dimension of their democracy in the last 10 years (The White House Dec. 9, 2021).

to change the constitution and reshape the political, constitutional and electoral scene according to his whim in a complete break with political forces” (Ghannouchi 2021). Likewise, the four-party coalition including the Democratic Current, on December 16, issued a joint statement, on their Facebook pages, referring to Saied as “the head of existing authority;” calling on Saied to “adhere to a national dialogue that establishes a just state that creates wealth, achieves equality, integrates all groups, ends years of corruption and its symbols, and immunizes the country against autocratic rule and abandoning its sovereignty;” and expressing “rejection of any violation of the constitution outside the framework legitimacy and before holding legislative and presidential elections that effectively restore power back to the people.” Ghazi Al-Shawashi, secretary-general of the Democratic Current party, which supported Saied’s seizure of power on July 25 power grab but reversed course in September, in a radio interview, accused Saied of “playing with the people and the state” after his July 25 power grab, and stated that Saied was “no longer capable of saving the country” and “went too far” after he froze the parliament (Middle East Eye Dec. 13, 2021).

As for the UGTT, albeit in a low tone and far from giving the appearance of unity with the parties that openly objected to Saied’s decisions, it continued to bring criticism to Saied. Thus, on December 14, in a Union’s conference, Nouredine Taboubi, the Secretary General of the Tunisian General Workers’ Union, said that “the country is going through dangerous times and delicate periods,” and that “the organization of workers is not in favor of anything other than national options and a civil, democratic and social state” (Echaab News Dec. 14, 2021). This low tone came despite the fact that before Saied’s announcement of the roadmap that completely excluded dialogue with political parties and national organizations, Nouredine Taboubi, the Secretary General of the Tunisian General Workers’ Union, speaking at a rally, on December 4, had called on the president to initiate a dialogue, involving political parties and national organizations, in order to “review the electoral law and agree on early and transparent elections;” and had clearly expressed his dissatisfaction with the direction of the process, saying, “we supported July 25 because it was an opportunity to save the country and implement reforms... but the extreme reluctance to announce a roadmap has made us fear for Tunisians’ democratic gains” (The Arab Weekly Dec. 5, 2021). To some analysts, with the announcement of the roadmap, the UGTT has positioned itself on a more “conservative” line (Doha Institute 2021). However, it will not be possible to say that the UGTT has taken a clear and consistent position against Saied’s power grab, and expansion of his powers, even after Taboubi was re-elected²⁶⁵ as the head of the union

²⁶⁵Marks (2022), an expert on Tunisian politics, predicted that the UGTT’s lack of a clear position on

on February 19. As will become clearer later on, the UGTT has frustrated the expectations of those who expected it to assume the mediating role it had assumed in the 2013-2014 crisis by seeking to exclude Ennahda from dialogue by blaming it for destruction of the economy through corruption and mismanagement. We will also see that the UGTT justifies the criticism that it only decided to challenge Saied's project when it was excluded from negotiations with the IMF, that is, when it failed to exert its traditional influence on Saied's socio-economic decisions (Guesmi 2022).

Key constitutional institutions, such as the Independent High Authority for Elections (IHAIE) and the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), have also issued statements objecting to Saied's decisions, and mainly explaining why the process was marred by anomalies from the start. In this regard, Al-Birinsi, a member of Tunisia's IHAIE, told local media that President Saied "did not consult the authority regarding the referendum on constitutional amendments or the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for December 17," and that "the electronic consultations announced by Saied as a referendum method has no legal basis," also stressing "the need for a national consensus on the organization of this election, with the need to create a general atmosphere of confidence in the ballot box and its results." Finally, he pointed out that the Electoral Commission was constitutionally authorized to set the date of the elections after agreement with the parties or the executive authority. In a harsh statement, posted on its Facebook page, on December 10, the SJC also criticized Saied's view of the judiciary as a mere "profession," stressing that the judiciary was one of "the authorities of the state," and that it was crucial to "keep it free from all pressures, regardless of their source" (The Supreme Judicial Council Dec. 10, 2021). We will see that Saied will take action against both institutions which took positions against Saied's seizure of power.

Furthermore, despite Saied's efforts to portray his roadmap as a revolutionary path, public support for Saied was also rapidly declining, as, according to a poll by a local pollster, Insights TN, the rate of those who supported Saied's line, which was 49% in August 2021, declined to 22.1% in February 2022 (Insights TN Apr. 11, 2022), although Marks (2022), an expert on Tunisian politics, has stated that polls in Tunisia were often methodologically unreliable. Another indicator of decreasing public support for Saied was the growing protests against him in the capital and other cities, including clashes between police and protesters in some working-class neighborhoods in the 11th anniversary of the revolution (Al-Araby Dec. 18, 2021).

The largest group of protests against Saied was organized by the civil society group

Saied was partly due to Taboubi's desire to avoid alienating the union's pro-Saied members ahead of the leadership election at the February congress.

“Citizens Against the Coup,” an alliance of “democrats” from all political affiliations, as part of a continuing series of protests they initiated after Saied’s extension of his exceptional powers and suspension of parts of the constitution on September 22 (Ghaya 2021). Although the 11-member Executive Committee of the civil society organization did not include any members of Ennahda, they, nevertheless, did not close themselves off to cooperation with Ennahda and its supporters, unlike other opposition parties/figures who blamed Ennahda for all the political, economic, and terror problems Tunisia has faced in the decade following the revolution, and hence, who directed their dual criticisms against both Saied and Ennahda. Then, the sit-in against the “coup against the constitution” initiated by the Citizens Against the Coup initiative after Saied’s December 13 announcement was also joined by some high Ennahda officials. Recognizing the importance of uniting the opposition across ideological²⁶⁶ divides, the group declared that the hunger strike, which they initiated on December 23 after Saied announced his roadmap and lasted into January, was aimed at “leading the creation of a national political front that offers Tunisians a political alternative” (Tunis Afrique Presse Dec. 30, 2021). Thus, they welcomed Ghannouchi’s support for the hunger strike and his visit to the center (Tunisie Numerique Dec. 31, 2021).

The post-September 22 coalition of four smaller parties, including the Democratic Current, which had few or no representation in the parliament dissolved by Saied, and which while criticizing Saied avoided an alliance with Ennahda, who they accused of making parliament dysfunctional throughout the decade after the revolution, have staged their own protests, refusing to collaborate with Citizens Against the Coup because of its alleged links with Ennahda. The Democratic Current leader Ghazi Chaouachi set forth in an interview his dual opposition to Saied and Ennahda as follows: “Citizens Against the Coup is a front for Ennahda. We know this. We are against Saied’s personal dictatorship, but we are also against Ennahda and the disastrous decade of rule that came before July 25” (Marks 2022). According to Marks, an expert on Tunisian politics, his statement that “Tunisians want an alternative” signalled the desire of these small parties for a parliamentary system in which the power of large parties was reduced (Marks 2022). Thus, on the day Saied announced the roadmap, they organized their own demonstrations and called on people for active resistance against Saied on December 17²⁶⁷ (Middle East Eye Dec.

²⁶⁶The group’s de facto leader, Jaouhar Ben Mbarek, said in an interview, “We have never agreed with Ennahda’s policy goals. But we are democrats, and we understand that the chief goal right now – the goal that has to unite the opposition at this historical moment – is ending Saied’s coup regime” (Marks 2022).

²⁶⁷Reportedly, on December 17, in Sidi Bouzid, where the revolution broke out in 2010, the unemployed youth also protested against Saied’s decision to cancel Law No. 38, which was issued on August 13, 2020, and which prioritized university graduates who have been unemployed for 10 years in public sector recruitment (Ghaya 2021).

13, 2021). Similarly, on January 14, the 11th anniversary of the revolution and the day before the start of the online consultation, instead of joining the protests, organized by the Citizens Against the Coup initiative and attended by more than 1.000 thousand people, where the police attacked protesters, including a French reporter who was filming the police violence (Amara 2022a), the social democratic parties' alliance, again, organized their own demonstration, only agreeing to march at the same time of the day as the Citizens Against the Coup (Marks 2022), in addition to Afek Tounes' publishing a hard-hitting²⁶⁸ letter against Saied on its Facebook page. On the other hand, Ennahda urged its supporters to join the protests organized by the Citizens Against the Coup, which was organized to call the citizens to boycott the online consultation the next day (Ansamed Jan. 11, 2022). Then, although the quadruple alliance did not join, again, on March 20, the day the online consultation ended, thousands of people, including supporters of the Ennahda movement, marched near the parliament in the capital Tunis, chanting slogans against Saied's measures and his monopolization of power, such as "the people want to overthrow the coup," "the people want to remove the President," and "no to consultations." Police, again, blocked nearby Bardo square and its entrances to try to prevent protesters from gathering (Al-Jazeera Mar. 20, 2022). Thus, although Saied frequently used the slogan "people demand" to justify his orders, his orders have frequently violated the civil society's right to organize by bringing a ban on public gatherings and using brutal police force to suppress the protesters and right to information by blocking the activities of media outlets.

According to some scholars, although Saied's popular support decreased to some extent, Saied continued to enjoy quite a large rhetorical public support (even though the economy significantly further deteriorated under Saied) (Hammami and Grewal 2022). For instance, according to Emrhod Consulting's poll, approval of Saied and his actions rose suddenly from 38% to 82%²⁶⁹ with Saied's power grab on July 25, 2021, (since Tunisians were fed up with the crisis-ridden political system); and although his public approval rate declined slowly and steadily since then, he still had 57% of popular support by the end of May 2022, the lowest rate since his power grab (Ansamed Jan. 3, 2022). And to these scholars, this perception that Saied had maintained popular support was what prevented Tunisian political parties, labor

²⁶⁸In the letter, Afek Tounes expressed concern about the state of democracy and freedoms despite the broad welcome for the will, announced on July 25, 2021, to correct the course of democratic transition and establish the institutions of rule of law; they also stressed that the reform of the executive, legislative and judicial institutions had to be completed with a broad participatory and representative understanding, far from the logic of exclusion in the decision (Tounes 2022).

²⁶⁹Analysts Hammami and Grewal (2022) argued that even though active support for Saied after his power grab remained limited, the perception that he had popular support prevented Tunisia's political parties, the UGTT as well as international policymakers like the U.S. or the E.U. from strongly opposing his seizure of power in July 2021.

union UGTT, and even external actors from strongly opposing him (Hammami and Grewal 2022). Youssef Cherif, a political analyst, also stressed that although it was clear that Saied's roadmap did not cause a decline in the political/societal opposition, Saied did not see the growing protests against him as a threat since those who voiced their discontent about the backsliding of democracy were still "a minority." According to Cherif, this was because people were still "looking elsewhere," meaning that the vast majority of people, at the time, had not yet given up on Saied a chance with the economy, although Saied had yet to put forward an economic plan, and had prioritized rewriting the constitution at a time when negotiations with international donors for a fourth bailout in a decade were stalled and concerns were growing that the country would default on its foreign debt (Al-Jazeera Dec. 17, 2021).

To these scholars, Saied's main problem was translating this rhetorical support into action, that is, he struggled to mobilize his supporters (Hammami and Grewal 2022). For instance, when Saied moved the official commemoration of the Arab Spring to December 17, the day Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire, from January 14, the day Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ali was ousted, to convey his view that the revolution was usurped by political parties that day, Saied supporters hardly showed up for the celebrations on the new day (Hammami and Grewal 2022). The same was true for the online consultation process Saied launched on January 15 and ended on March 20 as part of his roadmap, and which was attended by less than 7 percent of the electorate.

Thus, although Saied has widely used the phrase "people demand" to justify his actions, the online consultation process, hardly, affected the citizens as the public showed little interest in answering online questions, which were posed for national consultation on "economic issues, development and digital transformation, education, and cultural affairs, quality of life, social issues and political and electoral affairs." The consultation, which had a target of 3 million participants, reportedly, reached about 535 thousand people, despite government efforts, which also included the use of state means, including the provision of free internet through about 250 "youth houses." That Saied supporters have given him rhetorical support and yet avoided their active support, led some analysts to refer to Saied's supporters as the "silent majority" (Hammami and Grewal 2022). Then, Saied did not hesitate to turn the consultation process "from a tool for debate and reflection, into one that justifies predetermined decisions," in the words of an analyst who noted that, questions in the online consultation, particularly the ones related to the political and electoral affairs, were specific/targeted and were framed in a way that directly pointed to Saied's political agenda and priorities, although the participation rate was very low (Bouhlef 2022). This criticism was proven right by the fact that the President did

not hesitate to refer to the results of the consultation when he dissolved the Supreme Judicial Council – almost a month before the consultation was due to end.

7.8.5 Saied’s Dissolution of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) – the Last Institutional Check on His Power – and the Establishment of a New Council Subservient to Him

On February 6, Kais Saied announced his intention to dissolve the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), an independent constitutional body, tasked with appointing, disciplining and promoting judges, and aimed at preserving the independence of the judiciary in the country, accusing²⁷⁰ the body of corruption, blocking politically sensitive investigations, such as the one into the killing of two left-wing politicians in 2013, and political bias (i.e., being influenced by his nemesis Ennahda) even though Saied won the 2019 presidential elections under the supervision of this body. Although he had not yet issued a decree to dissolve the body at the time, the move was still interpreted as the President taking full control of the judiciary, the “last line of defense to his one-man rule,” the last institutional check on his power, after taking control of the legislature and the executive (Fayyad 2022). As an academic, Monica Marks, rightfully put it, the SJC was considered one of Tunisia’s “key post-revolutionary achievements on the road toward the democratic institution-building” (Fayyad 2022). Thus, while practices bypassing judicial procedures, such as arbitrary travel bans, house arrests, detentions had already started to be imposed on Tunisians after Saied’s seizure of power, the dissolution of the SJC was still a turning point in Saied’s power grab as it marked “the [official] death knell for judicial independence in the country,” according to analysts (Amnesty International Feb. 8, 2022). And although Saied promised in a post-announcement speech that he would not interfere in the judiciary and would not intervene in any cases or appointments, for some analysts, Saied’s disbanding of the SJM had already marked the end of hopes for democracy in Tunisia. After Saied’s move, for instance, Marks, said, “The question today is not whether Tunisia is a dictatorship, but whether Saied can consolidate his dictatorship” (Fayyad 2022). Although Saied justified his seizure of power by arguing that the 2011 revolution was hijacked by politicians he branded as corrupt (France 24 Dec. 17, 2021), as Ghannouchi put it, the one-man control of all the state institutions that Saied attempted was what the 2011 revolution against

²⁷⁰In his speech announcing the dissolution of the SJC he said: “In this council, positions and appointments are sold and made according to affiliations. . . You cannot imagine the money that certain judges have been able to receive, billions and billions.” He also added, “Unfortunately in this country, some judges in the courts have manipulated the Chokri Belaid case. This is not the first trial where they have tried to hide the truth for years” (Fayyad 2022).

in the first place (Middle East Monitor May. 12, 2022).

In fact, given that the SJC has drawn the ire of Saied after the SJC delegation, which had met with him after his power grab, positioned itself on the side of democracy, underlining the independence of the judiciary and the judges and “the need to distance them from all political disputes,” and rejecting the self-proclaimed title of chief prosecutor, saying, “public prosecution is part of the judicial branch, and performs its duties within the scope required by the legal texts in force,” (Zoom Tunisia Jul. 26, 2021), Saied’s move was hardly a surprise. Saied, who had been emphasizing since his meeting with the SJC that he would not allow judges to act “like the state” instead of acting as “a function of the state” (Al-Arabiya News Feb. 6, 2022), pledged to “purify” the judiciary, on October 11, 2021, saying, “the judiciary will be purified because the purification of the country can only be achieved by purifying the judiciary” and accusing Ennahda of controlling the judiciary (Husnaa, Samir Oct. 11, 2021). Then, after the establishment of the government, on February 5, in video-taped remarks to the Minister of Interior, Saied had already called the SJC “a part of the past as of this moment” (Amnesty International Feb. 8, 2022). Moreover, when 14 political parties and organizations, including the UGTT, announced that they would gather, on the 9th anniversary of Belaid’s assassination, to push the judiciary to expedite the case and hold those involved accountable, Saied, despite having banned all demonstrations after his seizure of power, in approval of this demonstration, said, “I tell Tunisians to demonstrate freely. It is your right to dissolve the SJC” (Middle East Eye Feb. 6, 2022). And yet, as mentioned above, only around 300-400 of Saied supporters took part in the protests; and his supporters, again, withheld their active support for Saied (Hammami 2022).

As International Court of Justice (ICJ) MENA director Benarbia put it, in the absence of an official decree dissolving the SJM, it was unclear on what legal basis Saied disbanded it. As Benarbia said, Saied’s decisions were based on “no constitutional or legal basis whatsoever,” but on the army and police, who exerted “de facto force” by implementing his decisions (Fayyad 2022). The closure of the SJC’s headquarters in Tunis by security forces after Saied’s announcement, and the prevention of employees from entering the building justify this assessment (Fayyad 2022). In the absence of strong political parties to form a united front against Saied, international community/institutions could be the only source of pressure for a turnaround. Benarbia also called on the international community to react saying, “it is a matter of utmost urgency right now for the international community to react with a unified voice and urge a return to the constitutional order” (Fayyad 2022). And ambassadors of Canada, France, Italy, Japan, the UK, the US, and the EU issued a joint statement, in response, stating that they were “deeply concerned about the

announcement of the intention to unilaterally dissolve the SJC,” and underlining the importance of a “transparent, independent and efficient judiciary and the separation of powers” for a functioning democracy (U.S. Embassy Tunis Feb. 8, 2022).

While Tunisia’s Judges Association launched a two-day strike in front of the council, doors of which was locked, to protest Saied’s decision to disband the SJC, Saied took another step forward, and with a decree (Decree 11) issued, on February 13, he established a new 21-member Supreme Judiciary Council, members of which was chosen by him, contrary to international law, and which was “obedient to the executive power,” in the words of Anas Hamadi, the president of the Association of Tunisian Judges (Al-Jazeera Feb. 13, 2022). The decree which replaced the council abolished by Saied, gave the council the right to appoint, transfer, promote and dismiss judges. The decree also gave Saied the power to overturn or veto any decision taken by the council. It also banned strikes or any organized collective action by judges to prevent their dissent (France 24 Feb. 13, 2023). Thus, Saied, who had set the fight against corruption as the main goal of his program since his rise to power and who had presented the abolishment of the SJC and the establishment of a new one as part of this program, overtook the judicial power through this decree after overtaking the legislative and executive powers of the state through a decree issued on September 22.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) reacted to the decree on Twitter, stating that it “consolidates power in the hands of the President and effectively ends any semblance of judicial independence in the country,” also adding that it “brings back Tunisia to its darkest days, when judges were transferred and dismissed on the basis of executive whim” (ICJ MENA Feb. 13, 2022). Media also reported that Ennahda organized a march in protest against the decree and thousands of protesters, who attended the demonstrations, chanted slogans in support of an independent judiciary such as “stop the coup... hands off the judiciary,” “Freedom! Freedom! The police state is finished” (Al-Jazeera Feb. 13, 2022).

7.8.6 Further Steps to Consolidate Saied’s Powers: Changing the Composition of the IHAE, Decree Granting Him Absolute Power to Dismiss Judges

After appointing the members of the SJC, Saied took another step to reinforce democratic backsliding and entrench his one-man rule, on April 22, 2022, issuing a presidential decree granting himself the power to assign members of Tunisia’s elec-

toral commission, the Independent High Authority for Elections²⁷¹ (IHAE), which had been created to ensure the legitimacy of elections, and which was supposed to supervise a referendum on a new constitution to be held on July 25, and legislative elections that would follow on December 2022. As Monica Marks, rightfully, pointed out, this step to give Saied control of the electoral commission would “accelerate his dictatorship,” and cast doubt on the integrity of the elections to be organized by the IHAE (DW Apr. 27, 2022). Analysts argued that although Saied, who had been expected to dissolve the IHAE and replace it with a new structure and who was unable to do so in the face of opposition from the international community and the threat of the breakdown of the IMF talks, completely changed the composition of the IHAE, creating a body, composed of members hostile to the Ennahda movement, including Sami Ben Slama, known to be a fierce critic of the Ennahda movement (Amara 2022c, Middle East Monitor May. 13, 2022). Thus, Saied has taken another step towards establishing an autocratic regime by seizing control of one of the last independent bodies²⁷². As Yerkes and Alhomoud (2022) rightfully stated, Saied has either manipulated or shut down all five independent bodies enshrined in the 2014 Constitution and has excluded them (except for the IHAE) from his draft constitution. And thousands of Tunisians gathered, on May 15, 2022, to demand “a return to normal order” in the face of Saied’s change in the composition of the IHAE, reportedly, the largest demonstration in months (Yerkes and Alhomoud 2022).

Saied continued to consolidate his one-man rule by issuing another decree on June 1, 2022, granting himself absolute power to suspend judges. He then dismissed 57 judges on charges of corruption and obstructing terrorism-related investigations, which the Tunisian Judges Association said were politically motivated (Al-Jazeera Jun. 10, 2022). In protest of Saied’s “interference” in the judiciary, Tunisian judges carried a four-week-long strike (Reuters Jun. 26, 2022). And human rights groups – including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and International Alert – issued a joint statement, describing Saied’s expansion of his powers, to the point of dismissing judges, as “an assault on the rule of law” (Al-Jazeera Jun. 10, 2022).

According to Insights TN’s poll, as Saied took steps to consolidate his one-man rule, concerns increased among voters about the future of democracy and human rights in the country. According to the poll, while 42% of registered voters who participated in the survey on August 3, 2021, responded positively to the question

²⁷¹Previously, the IHAE, made up of nine members, were elected by a special commission, composed by applying proportional representation, created within the parliament.

²⁷²Although Saied has repeatedly cited corruption as justification for his exceptional measures since July 2021, one of the independent bodies shut down by the security forces, in August 2021, has been the Tunisian Institution for Combating Corruption, which had been in charge of monitoring corruption in state institutions and referring violations to the judiciary (Middle East Monitor Aug. 21, 2021).

of whether they were concerned about the future of human rights and democracy in the country, this rate increased to 65.1% on November 23, 2021, and to 68% on December 17, 2021. The rate kept rising, and rose to 70.6% on January 13, 2022, and to 77.9% on February 16, 2022, (Insights TN Apr. 11, 2022).

7.8.7 Saied's Unilateral Dissolution of Parliament after Ghannouchi's Initiative for Online Meeting and The UGTT's Backdown from Challenging Saied's Project

The Tunisian President's next step to consolidate his power by dismantling the institutions created since 2011 was to unilaterally dissolve parliament, on March 30, 2022, after facing the most serious challenge since his power grab. Radwan Masmoudi, a political analyst and a member of Ennahda, said the reason Saied had not dissolved parliament in July 2021 was because he knew he had no constitutional right to do so. What gave Saied the chance to formally end the parliament at the end of March 2022, as Masmoudi also said, was that just hours earlier, some 116 out of 216 lawmakers held an online plenary session and voted in favor of a law abolishing all decisions and decrees issued by Saied since July 25 (Bajec 2022). Moreover, the law to cancel Saied's exceptional measures was passed with the votes of deputies representing a broad spectrum of political views, far beyond members of Enndah party, Saied's main rival (Dworkin 2022). MPs who attended the meeting, accused the government of disabling Zoom and Teams applications, leading to the disruption and postponement of the session, an accusation denied by the minister of communication Technologies (Reuters in Tunis Mar. 31, 2022).

Undoubtedly, the online meeting, which was proposed by Ghannouchi, who was leading a battle against Saied, reflected the parliament's growing confidence, along with the widening opposition to Saied, who was trying to rewrite the constitution at the time. As, rightfully, noted in an analysis, while the parliament remained deeply divided, there were more people who were openly confronting Saied and demanding that he adopt an inclusive approach to restructure Tunisian politics (Reuters in Tunis Mar. 31, 2022). As an opposition lawmaker, Issam Bargougi, convicted in absentia by a military court for opposing Saied's seizure of power, put it, the parliamentary vote was "historic" as it "remove[d] the legal legitimacy of [Saied's] coup and...defend[ed] state institutions and claim[ed] to be the primary legislative body and to have authority over the president who has rebelled against the constitution" (Hamdi 2022). Speaking to *the Washington Post*, Ghannouchi also said the purpose of the meeting was to prove that legislature was still "alive and

able to play its role after seven or eight months of obstruction,” and that “Tunisian democracy has not failed.” He also added that the majority of deputies rejected Saied’s seizure of power and remained committed to the separation of powers, which he called “the fundamental principle of democracy” (Parker 2022).

And yet in another sudden move, during a speech he delivered at a National Security Council meeting at the Carthage Palace, attended by senior security/army officials, and which was posted by his office on Facebook, Saied intervened, emboldened by a series of presidential decrees that he had used to consolidate his power saying, he was dissolving the parliament “to protect the government, the institution, and the Tunisian people” (The New York Times Mar. 30, 2022). The president also stated that the virtual meeting was “illegal” as the parliament was “frozen,” thus revealing the existence of two sides claiming authority, and “two competing legitimacies” (The Arab Weekly Mar. 30, 2022).

In announcing the dissolution of the parliament, Saied cited Article 72 of the Constitution, which gave the President the task of “guaranteeing the independence and continuity of the state and ensuring respect of the constitution.” While some analysts argued that in the absence of a constitutional court this article gave the president the power to interpret the constitution and that the article said nothing about the renewal of elections (The Arab Weekly Mar. 30, 2022), other analysts, including Masmoudi, argued that this article did not give the president the power to dissolve parliament either. According to the latter group, parliament could only be dissolved if a majority of MPs passed two motions of no confidence against the government, and it could be dissolved in 90 days, as stipulated in Article 89; thus, it should have remained in session until a new vote was held within a 90-day period (Bajec 2022). On the other hand, despite dissolving parliament, Saied said in a statement that parliamentary elections would not be held in the following three months, and that instead, he would proceed to rewrite the constitution, which would be voted in a referendum on July 25, and that elections would be held on December 17 in line with the political roadmap announced last December. Thus, according to this latter group of analysts, including Masmoudi, the president’s latest move was another violation of the constitution (Bajec 2022). As Oussama Khlifi, head of parliamentary bloc for the Qalb Tounes said, “With this action, Saied confirmed a constitutional coup and the return to an anti-democratic regime of omnipotence” (Parker 2022).

Besides, likening the online session of lawmakers to a “failed coup attempt” with “absolutely no legitimacy” and aimed at “dividing the country and sowing chaos,” the president also signalled a major escalation in targeting his opponents, promising that MPs who participated in the online session and opposed presidential decrees

would be prosecuted on serious charges such as “conspiracy against domestic and external state security” (The Arab Weekly Mar. 30, 2022). Immediately afterwards, the justice minister launched a criminal investigation against more than half of these members, including Ghannouchi, who was then summoned for questioning by the anti-terrorism unit. Saied even argued that “conspirators,” which referred to opposition politicians, would not be allowed to run in future elections (Bajec 2022). As some analysts have emphasized, in such an environment of intimidation and persecution of the main opposition figures at the time, the sequence of elections was also critical, and it was unlikely that Tunisians would have free and fair elections if a referendum took place without a functioning parliament in place. As Monica Marks, then, said, only if everyone rallied around the demand for new elections within 90 days would it be possible to get off the highway to a consolidated dictatorship (Bajec 2022). On the other hand, some analysts predicted that even renewal of elections would not necessarily lead to an outcome more favorable to democracy as opinion polls predicted that pro-Ben Ali Free Constitution (Destourian) Party would win the highest number of seats in parliament if elections were renewed at the time (Parker 2022). It was, therefore, also no surprise that party leader Abir Moussa, who welcomed Saied’s dissolution of parliament by saying “Ghannouchi’s parliament has been dissolved; The Muslim Brotherhood parliament has been dissolved,” and called on Saied to suppress the opposition, also called for early elections, saying her party would reject Saied’s plans for a referendum in July 2022 (Hamdi 2022).

However, Ghannouchi’s proposal to convene the parliament has also received criticism. Some analysts described this initiative a “provocative move, aimed at showing that Saied was obstructing the country’s “democratic process” (The Arab Weekly Mar. 30, 2022). Sami Tahri, spokesman of Tunisia’s powerful trade union the UGTT, also defined Ghannouchi’s initiative as an attempt “to drag the country into conflict,” and suggested dissolving parliament and calling early elections as a way out of the crisis (The Arab Weekly Mar. 30, 2022). However, given that the on-line parliamentary meeting came at a time when Tunisia was facing an increasingly urgent economic crisis and coincided with the IMF²⁷³’s launch of a visit to Tunisia for talks on a possible IMF-supported financing program and calls for reforms to reduce spending on state-owned enterprises, subsidies and public wages, which were strongly objected by the UGTT leader Taboubi, who said, “public companies are not for sale and the public sector is red line, . . . painful reforms, forget about it,” called for wage increase in 2022 and 2023, and threatened the government by “shutting down the economy with strikes” (Al-Jazeera Mar. 18, 2022), it could also be

²⁷³Tunisia had formally renewed its loan request from the IMF in November 2021, and “preliminary talks” started with the organization in mid-February 2022 (Al-Jazeera Feb. 18, 2022).

argued that the UGTT used this online meeting as an opportunity to intervene in Saied's plans to reform the political system in order to increase its influence over the government.

Because of Saied's refusal to allow other social and political actors, including the union, to exert pressure on the government, the UGTT could neither exert its former traditional influence on Saied administration's socio-economic decisions nor convince Saied to hold a national dialogue on Tunisia's political direction, which it could supervise. Most recently, when Saied announced, on March 20, on the occasion of the conclusion of the national consultation that everyone would be given the right to express their views/ positions on the new system of governance ahead of the referendum while, then an unnamed committee drew up the amendments, UGTT leader Taboubi, in the face of President Saied's failure to make explicit reference to the direct participation of parties and organizations in his speech, expressed his discontent with the exclusion of the UGTT from decisions, stating that "the parties in the country are not 'soldiers of Kardouna,' which means that they will not be content to play the role of spectators" (Middle East Monitor Mar. 22, 2022). Thus, in Tunisia, which was struggling with high unemployment and public debt of more than 100% of GDP while the war in Ukraine further exacerbated economic woes by driving up oil and grain prices, Saied faced "a difficult balancing act"²⁷⁴, in the words of Tunisian politics expert Monica Marks (Al-Jazeera Feb. 18, 2022). In this environment, the importance of the vote in the parliament was seen as a matter for the union and the military²⁷⁵ to decide, increasing the likelihood of their intervention (Hamdi 2022). And yet, despite its increasing criticism of Saied, the UGTT came out in support of Saied's decision to dissolve the parliament saying, "the decision to dissolve the parliament came late but it was necessary. . . The parliament was already suspended and *de facto* dead. We honor our dead by burying them" (Hamdi 2022). And then, on June 16, three months after the UGTT's strike threat, while the consultative committee was drafting the constitution, the UGTT, taking advantage of the IMF's condition that a new IMF bailout package be conditioned on the UGTT coming on board with the government, organized a 24-hour strike, demanding a wage increase; and potentially complicating the bailout talks, he threatened the government's reforms submitted to the IMF, including a public sector wage increase,

²⁷⁴In the words of a Tunisian politics expert, Monica Marks, on one hand, Saied had to cooperate with the IMF in order to get loans not to face a financial collapse as he would face more pressure to ameliorate the deepening economic crisis, having concentrated almost all powers in his hands. "The only factor that could threaten popular support for Saied is the social and economic situation of Tunisians," Kharrat, a political analyst, said (Parker 2022). But, on the other hand, Saied also had to appease the UGTT by distancing himself from IMF-backed austerity policies, such as public sector wage freeze and subsidy cuts (Al-Jazeera Feb. 18, 2022).

²⁷⁵It was because Article 18 of the Constitution stipulated that the military could intervene in cases where there was a clear threat to the state. The military, thus, had the power to reopen the parliament-building and restore access to its members, thus, ending Saied's emergency rule (Hamdi 2022).

the phasing out of some subsidies and the restructuring of state-owned companies (France 24 Jun. 16, 2022).

The UGTT, thus, has justified the criticism of some analysts that the union has struggled to adopt a clear vision and direction since Saied came to power, and that only when it was excluded from talks with the IMF and could not exert its traditional influence over Saied's socio-economic decisions did union leaders decide to challenge Saied's project (Guesmi 2022). Moreover, the UGTT has also proved wrong some other analyses that pointed out that the political deadlock would be broken by the UGTT, which had broken the political deadlock during the 2013-2014 political crisis. As the UGTT chief economist Sami Aouadi noted, although the UGTT tried to push Saied into talks to resolve the political crisis, the dialogue the union had in mind was also far from the inclusive dialogue of 2013/2014 because the union²⁷⁶ wanted to exclude Ennahda from dialogue, repeating a common refrain that held Ennahda largely responsible for the destruction of the economy through corruption and mismanagement (Yee 2022b). Thus, the UGTT remained out of the picture as a force capable of meaningful resistance to Saied.

In response to the question of who can challenge Saied's clear dictatorial consolidation and how, many analysts/political scientists²⁷⁷ emphasized the need for the creation of a strong/united opposition that would formulate a plan before Saied fully consolidated his dictatorship, taking advantage of Saied's lack of an economic plan to convince the public that he could overcome economic difficulties (Yee 2022a, DW Apr. 27, 2022). After all, as evidenced by the low public participation in Saied's online consultation process, i.e., the lack of interest in the process of drafting a new constitution, Tunisian's main concern was survival in the midst of a worsening economic crisis.

Finally, ten months after Saied's seizure of power, five opposition parties, such as Ennahda (albeit weakened by internal conflicts and splits), Qalb Tounes, and the Dignity Coalition, along with some independent political figures and five civil society organizations, notably the "Citizens Against the Coup" initiative, formed an umbrella opposition group called the National Salvation Front (NSF) under the leader-

²⁷⁶ Despite that Ennahda announced its support for the 24-hour public sector strike organized by the UGTT, on June 16, to demand wage increases and to oppose the government's reform plan, which included a wage-freeze in the public sector, the phasing out of some subsidies and the restructuring of state-owned companies, and which was prepared to please the IMF (France 24 Jun. 16, 2022). Although the UGTT, then, insisted that the strike was non-political, it was held at a time when Saied was already facing intense criticism for excluding opposition forces from the national dialogue process, part of his efforts to consolidate his power, and after the IMF conditioned its new bailout on the labor union support, potentially complicating the bailout talks.

²⁷⁷ Huntington's (1991-1992) guidance to democratizers in authoritarian settings also included taking every opportunity to express opposition to the regime, as well as promoting unity among opposition groups and seeking to establish comprehensive umbrella organizations to facilitate cooperation among them.

ship of Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, a left-wing politician, with the goal of fighting against Saied's "coup" and "populist program aimed at destroying state institutions," as the Front announced (Middle East Monitor Jun. 1, 2022). However, as we will see, Saied's opponents still remained too fragmented to mount a real challenge to Saied's project.

7.8.8 Saied's Announcement of the Establishment of the Consultative Commission in Charge of Drafting the New Constitution

As Saied's moves to dissolve the country's institutions or bring them under his control have intensified, the Western outcry, including that of the U.S., has grown, reaching its strongest point with the dissolution of the parliament, raising the question of whether external pressure would return Tunisia to democracy. Tunisian political analysts Ferjani (2022) stated in an article that the U.S. had long avoided calling Saied's constitutional coup a coup due to the fact that doing so would "legally trigger the suspension of U.S. financial aid to Tunisia." Accordingly, the growing U.S. reaction could be interpreted as meaning that the option of cutting aid to Tunisia or opposing the IMF deal was on the table. For instance, on March 25, 2022, a group of House Democrats had also sent a letter to Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, urging the Biden administration to "consider Tunisia's significant democratic regression" when considering financial assistance to Tunisia, and reviewing "any assistance to the country's internal security force, which has historically played a significant role in the repression of Tunisian citizens." After stating that what they witnessed in Tunisia over the last eight months was "a clear and tangible erosion of the democratic institutions that the Tunisian people have spent over a decade building," they also expressed their concern that "Saied's proposed timeline for constitutional reforms and legislative elections" did not involve "an inclusive dialogue" with various social and political actors, and reinforced "his intention to maintain the suspension of parliament until at least December 2022;" and that Saied's characterization of "critics as traitors" also casted doubts on "his commitment to democratic checks and balances" in the Tunisias's future political system. Besides, in the U.S. Department of State (Mar. 27, 2022)'s media note regarding Under Secretary's visit to Tunisia on March 23-27, it was stated that the undersecretary conveyed his concern about "Tunisia's democratic trajectory and the importance of an inclusive political and economic reform process," although it was also noted that she was "heartened by the government's assurances of inclusiveness implementing the political roadmap." After Saied's dissolution of the parliament, in a press briefing, on March 31, 2022, Ned Price, spokesperson for the U.S. State Department, made the strongest state-

ment yet made by the U.S. after Saied's seizure of power. "The U.S. is deeply concerned by the President's decision to unilaterally dissolve parliament and reports that authorities are considering legal measures against members of parliament," the statement said. The statement went on to emphasize that "any political reform process [had to be] transparent and inclusive and be carried out in coordination with various political parties, trade unions and civil society," and that "a swift return to constitutional governance, including an elected parliament" was vital (U.S. Embassy Tunis Apr. 1, 2022). Despite the fact that the European Commission announced, on March 30, 2022, that it would provide Tunisia with €450 million budget support (Amara 2022b), signaling that EU officials were reluctant to condition assistance on a return to democratic path, Dworkin (2022), a senior policy fellow at ECFR, also wrote that Europe would also face the choice of cutting aid, if Saied continued to refuse to transition to an inclusive political process.

Amid growing international pressure to adopt a more inclusive approach, on May 21, Saied announced the establishment of the "Consultative Commission," tasked with drafting the new constitution. Since elite consensus was never part of Saied's vision, Saied who excluded political parties and civil society from any dialogue, excluded them from the consultative committee as well. Saying, "participation is open to anyone who supports the July 25, 2021 process," in a meeting with Sadok Belaid, the handpicked head of the commission, Saied hinted at the very beginning of the process that participation would not be inclusive (Agence Tunis Afrique Presse May. 4, 2022). Then, Presidential Decree 30, issued by Saied on May 19 established that the committee would have a "consultative" role and would rely on the results of the online consultation²⁷⁸, in which only 7 percent of registered voters participated, to formulate its recommendations, suggesting from the outset that the committee would not have a decision-making role. Moreover, he designed a complicated structure of sub-committees²⁷⁹ and set an extremely compressed timetable, saying that the work would be completed "within a few days" (Agence Tunis Afrique Presse May. 4, 2022). While Saied stated that four national organizations, one of which was the UGTT, would participate in the "national dialogue," the union turned down the invitation, on the grounds that the proposed process excluded the key political actors and was aimed at imposing "conclusions decided unilaterally in advance" (France 24 Jun. 16, 2022). Besides, Decree Law 2022-30 stated that "the results

²⁷⁸After all, to legitimize his moves, Saied said, his "vision to overhaul Tunisia's political structure and establish a 'new republic responded to the will of the people" (Bessalah 2022).

²⁷⁹He stated that one sub-committee would be dedicated to political and constitutional reforms and the other to economic and social reforms. He also added that one sub-committee would conduct the "national dialogue" with four national organizations, which were the UGTT, the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LDH), the Confederation of Industry, Commerce and Handcrafts (UTICA) and the Bar Association (Agence Tunis Afrique Presse May. 4, 2022).

of the Commission's work shall be published with the President's authorization," which meant that the first draft of the constitution would only be public if Saied chose to publish it, and that Saied, alone, would determine the final text, thus, indicating a lack of transparency (Bessalah 2022).

The committee produced a draft constitution in two weeks, submitting it on June 20, unlike the 2014 Constitution which had taken more than two years to draft as it took a lot of discussion, civil society collaboration, and compromises on the part of political actors to create a consensus-based constitution. Former President Marzouki²⁸⁰ also emphasized that one of the features that made the 2014 constitution "one of the best" in the Arab/Muslim world was that it was drafted over two years with the participation of all institutions and NGOs and with a lot of debate. Saied published the draft constitution in the Official Gazette, on June 30, weeks before the national referendum set for July 25, and also publishing additional amendments to the draft on July 8. But the draft published by Saied, which gave Saied almost absolute powers, reducing the role of the parliament and the judiciary, came as a surprise even to the head of the commission, Belaid, known as a Saied loyalist. Belaid said in a public statement that Saied's version of the draft was not similar to the first draft proposed by the committee, and that it contained sections that would pave the way for a "disgraceful dictatorial regime" (Amara 2022e). Freedom House (Feb. 22, 2022) issued a press release on the draft constitution, describing it as an "undemocratic document" that "[would] accelerate Tunisia's slide toward authoritarianism".

7.8.9 A Closer Look at the Draft Constitution Giving Saied Almost Absolute Powers

To examine the provisions more closely, whereas the 2014 constitution divided the executive power between the President and the government, stating that "Executive power is exercised by the President of the Republic and by a government presided over by the head of government," the new draft constitution (a provision adopted on July 8) stated that "The president exercises executive power with the assistance of a government presided over by the head of government," thus making the government subordinate the President (Yerkes and Alhomoud 2022). Then, while the 2014 Constitution gave the PM, who was named by the party that won the legislative elections, the power to appoint and dismiss the cabinet, the new draft constitution gave the president the power to appoint and dismiss the PM and ministers. Further-

²⁸⁰Marzouki, interview.

more, Article 90 stated that the president would serve two-terms of five years each; and yet, in case of “imminent danger” the president was allowed to extend his term of office and dissolve parliament as the article specified that “if elections cannot take place in a timely manner because of war or imminent danger, the presidential term shall be extended by law until the reasons for its extension cease to exist.” This provision not only gave the President the right to extend his term indefinitely by using the adaptable concept of “imminent danger,” but also constitutionalized the President’s actions since July 25, 2021²⁸¹, as Yerkes and Alhomoud (2022) noted. Moreover, Article 96 of the draft constitution, which set out the conditions for the government to exercise emergency powers, eliminated the possibility to challenge exceptional measures before the Constitutional Court and the 2014 Constitution’s requirement that “the measures should ensure the return of state institutions and services to normal functioning as soon as possible.” Thus, by relying on a very flexible “imminent danger” concept, the President can proclaim a state of emergency, and he can extend it as much as he wants since no institution is given by the constitution the power to challenge him. That is why, a political analyst, Gobe (2022)), rightfully, employed the Carl Schmitt’s “sovereign dictatorship” concept to define the political system proposed by the draft constitution, “that is, [a system] outside the law and unconstrained by time limits”.

Furthermore, the new draft constitution did not include a provision on how the president could be removed from office, even in cases of grave breach of the constitution, contrary to the 2014 Constitution (Article 88), which had established that on the initiative of the majority of the parliament, a motion could be made to terminate the President’s term of office for gross violation of the Constitution. Thus, the draft constitution removed the Constitutional Court’s power to rule on motions calling for the impeachment of the President in cases where he/she has grossly violated the Constitution. As for the legislative power, the draft constitution (Article 56 published in July 8) envisaged a bicameral parliament, although its powers were significantly reduced. Thus, the draft constitution proposed the establishment of a chamber for “regions and districts²⁸²,” as Saied had long desired to “to build democracy from bottom-up” (Gobe 2022), although neither how the members would be elected nor the powers of the body was specified in detail in the provision. As Gobe (2022) detailed, Saied has also included in the draft constitution two other mechanisms, alongside bicameral legislature, for the bottom-up building process to

²⁸¹The phrase “imminent danger,” had also appeared in the 2014 constitution and been used by Saied, in July 2021, to dismiss the government and control executive powers.

²⁸²It is stated in the draft constitution (Article 81) that “members of the National Assembly of Regions are not directly elected but nominated by local/regional assemblies, where three members from each regional assembly are nominated to represent their region at the national level.”

flourish. The first was to give voters the power to withdraw the mandate of lawmakers (Article 61), which Saied supporters saw as a “guarantee of true democracy” for its making representatives accountable to their constituents by Saied supporters, and which Saied opponents saw “as a way for a popular president to get rid of elected members of the opposition.” And the second mechanism was the election of “local assemblies,” the smallest administrative scale, “by a single-member plurality voting with a revocable mandate” (Article 75) Gobe (2022). The second mechanism was aimed at sidelining/weakening established political parties which had gained influence after the revolution in favor of local figures. And yet, Saied’s references to building bottom-up democracy have not gone beyond “the de-centralization of legislative power” in the draft constitution. Not only have local/regional assemblies been deprived of executive bodies to implement their programs, but Saied has also negated the bottom-up institutionalization plan that was supposed to pave the way for a real democracy to flourish by giving himself broad powers and diluting the powers of parliament (Gobe 2022). The draft constitution stipulated that the President had the right to introduce draft laws, which would take precedence over other legislative proposals. It also stipulated that only the president had the sole power to introduce draft laws agreeing to treaties, and financial draft laws (Article 68).

Besides, as Benarbia (2022), rightfully, put it, the draft constitution also eliminated guarantees for the independence and impartiality of constitutional bodies such as the SJC, IHAE, etc. In this regard, although the draft article 134 stipulated that the IHAE would be composed of nine independent and impartial members, it did not elaborate on how these members would be appointed, according to what criteria and by whom (Benarbia 2022). In violation of the independence of the judiciary, the draft constitution also envisaged that members of the Constitutional Court would be composed entirely of judges appointed by the President, unlike the 2014 Constitution, which stipulated that the president, parliament, and the supreme judicial council each would appoint four members of the court (Amara 2022e). The draft also took away judges’ right to protest in response to the judges’ strike that had taken place recently in protest against Saied’s decision to disband the SJC.

The draft constitution also removed reference to Islam as the state religion, as provided for in Article 19 of the 2014 Constitution. And as Article 5 of the draft, published on July 8, also removed the reference to Tunisia as a “civil state,” stating instead that Tunisia is part of the Islamic ummah/nation and that within a democratic system, the state alone should work to achieve “the goals of pure Islam in protecting life, dignity, money, religion and freedom” (Yerkes and Alhomoud 2022). Some analysts have noted that while it was clear from the proposed provisions that the draft constitution attached great importance to Islam, they also found these pro-

visions “confusing,” noting that they would be used to discriminate against members of minority religions or beliefs (Article 19 Jun. 22, 2022).

Besides, the draft constitution removed two important provisions of the 2014 constitution regarding the military: first, that the military is “required to remain completely impartial (article 18 of the 2014 Constitution),” and second, that the jurisdiction of military courts is limited to military offenses – a provision aimed to protect civilians from being tried by military courts (Yerkes and Alhomoud 2022). As issued in an Amnesty International (Jul. 5, 2022) report, civilians have already been tried in military courts since 2014, as lawmakers failed to amend the relevant laws accordingly. On top of that, it was added, the complete removal of this safeguard from the constitution would exacerbate the situation, especially given the alarming increase in the number of civilians tried in military courts since Saied’s seizure of power (Amnesty International Jul. 5, 2022).

And finally, draft constitution (Article 139) stated that the constitution would enter into force after the IHAIE announced the final results of the referendum and the president signed and published the constitution in the Official Gazette. As Yerkes and Alhomoud (2022) pointed out, the absence of any reference to minimum participation or acceptance threshold requirements implied that “the constitution can be changed with or without a simple majority voting yes.” Finally, draft article 140 extended the validity of Saied’s September 2021 presidential decree, which allowed him to rule by decree, until the next parliamentary elections.

7.8.10 Opposition Divided into Boycotters and “No” Voters

Although most political parties and civil society organizations opposed the draft constitution on the grounds that it would produce an authoritarian, hyper-presidential system that would solidify Saied’s one-man rule, the opposition still failed to develop a unified response before the vote, and has been divided into those in favor of boycotting the referendum and those in favor of voting “no.” Certainly, it has, historically, been a dilemma for opposition parties across the globe whether or not to participate in the elections/referendum organized by a disputed administration since participation lends a degree of legitimacy to the government’s electoral process. Scholars have conducted qualitative and quantitative studies to explore which response (boycott or a no vote) would be more effective. Some analyses based on large datasets show that electoral boycotts can accelerate the electoral defeat of hybrid regimes (Smith 2014); and that the likelihood of democratization is higher particularly when boycotting parties receive international support, and lower when

support is predominantly domestic (Beaulieu 2014). But some other analyses show that except in very high-profile cases, electoral boycotts receive very little international support; thus except in such cases where boycotts can be effective, boycotts almost always fail (Weeks 2013), resulting in the marginalization of the boycotting party and/or further strengthening of the incumbent regime and/or negative changes of electoral dynamics and/or (Frankel 2010).

In Tunisia, largest parties in the parliament, including the National Salvation Front (NSF) parties Ennahda, Qalb Tounes and the Dignity Coalition, as well as the Democratic Current and the Free Destourian Party (PDL)²⁸³, which maintained its first place in the polls, called on Tunisians to boycott the referendum in order to show the domestic and international community that they considered not only the draft constitution but all of Saied's steps to consolidate his power, including his seizure of power on July 25, to be illegitimate (Grewal, DeHaven and Satouri 2022). Indeed, this view is in line with the views of the Venice Commission, a Council of Europe advisory body, which in its report of August 26, 2021, expressed concern about Saied's concentration of powers in his hands, and in its report of May 27, 2022, expressed reservations about the conformity with international standards of the presidential decrees/decrees-laws adopted by Saied since July 25, 2021, as well as of the referendum preparation process. For instance, in the latter report, it has been stated that the subordination of the electoral commission to the executive jeopardized the independence and impartiality of this body; that given the preparation process of the referendum, including the process the constitution was drafted, it was unrealistic to hold a "credible and legitimate" referendum; and that it was necessary to hold legislative elections and restore the parliamentary power prior to any constitutional referendum (Venice Commission May. 27, 2022).

On the other hand, several smaller parties, under Afek Tounes' leadership, urged the public to vote "no," arguing that the only way to defeat Saied was to get higher number of votes as there was no set minimum turnout requirement for the referendum to pass. For example, Fadhel Abdelkefi, the head of Afek Tounes, based on the aforementioned argument that Saied's supporters did not respond to his calls to mobilize despite his retaining the rhetorical support of a significant part of the population – given that Saied still had 57% of public support as of end of May 2022 despite the deterioration of the economy (Ansamed Jan. 3, 2022) – claimed that Saied's supporters would not go to the polls to vote in favor of the referendum, and

²⁸³ According to Emrhod Consulting's May 2022 poll, Abir Moussi's PDL was predicted to rank first with 33% vote rate (35% in the previous poll), followed by the hypothetical "Saied's party," which was predicted to receive 20% of the vote if formed (19% in the previous survey); and in the third place was Ennahda, which was predicted to receive 16% of the vote, up one percentage point from the previous poll (Ansamed Jan. 3, 2022).

that the opposition could block the constitution if larger parties such as the PDL and Ennahda also voted "no" (Grewal, DeHaven and Satouri 2022).

In response, opposition parties calling for a boycott, such as Ennahda and Qalb Tounes, argued that even if they agreed to vote no, they did not trust the referendum to be free and fair, and therefore, could not prevent the constitution from passing. In this regard, Rached Ghannouchi, head of the Ennahda party and president of the dissolved parliament, said, in an interview, that such steps as unilaterally changing the membership of the electoral commission, - appointing Farouk Bouasker as its head, instead of Nabil Baffoun, a vocal critic of Saied's seizure of power, - amending the electoral law, and banning foreign election observers (Amara 2022d) were all taken by Saied to control the electoral process, and therefore, the outcome of the election was predetermined (Grewal et. al. 2022). Likewise, Samira Chaouachi, leader of the Qalb Tounes and deputy speaker of the dissolved parliament, also, insisted on the decision to boycott the referendum, saying that the electoral process was illegitimate as Saied was trying to silence any voice opposition to the referendum through the (military) judiciary (Grewal et. al. 2022).

And Abdulbeki responded, in an interview, that boycotting the elections would mean handing the referendum victory to Saied without him even having to resort to electoral manipulations. "Going to the polls will expose²⁸⁴ him to the world even if he manipulates the elections. This is the only peaceful and democratic way to fight President Kais Saied," he said, reiterating his call for the polls (Grewal, DeHaven and Satouri 2022). He, also, countered the narrative spread by Saied supporters that if the referendum resulted in a no vote it would mean a return to the Ennahda-controlled parliament, saying that if "no" vote prevailed, Saied would have to resign, leaving his office to PM Bouden for three months to lead Tunisia to elections in accordance with Saied's decree 117, which stipulated that "when the office the presidency becomes vacant due to death, resignation, or total disability, the PM shall immediately assume the duties of the presidency" (Grewal, DeHaven and Satouri 2022).

In the end, however, in an environment where each group was firmly committed to its own position, the opposition parties were unable to unite around a common strategy, which, naturally, limited the effectiveness of each position (Marks 2022), and gave Saied the opportunity to continue to "divide and rule the opposition" (Grewal, DeHaven and Satouri 2022). Moreover, as noted above, the UGTT, which could have been an important lever of pressure on Saied, was already out of the

²⁸⁴For instance, when the Afek Tounes field team was prevented from campaigning for the referendum by security forces in Bardo, Abdelkefi (2022) exposed it on his Twitter page.

picture; and it refused²⁸⁵ to join one of the two opposition camps, even though it issued a comprehensive critique of the draft constitution (Echaab News Jul. 9, 2022).

7.8.11 Entry into Force of the New Constitution by Referendum on July 25, 2022

On July 25, 2022, Saied held a referendum on the adoption of the new constitution, which clearly bore his signature; and the Constitution came into effect with a 95% yes vote amid criticism and accusations of electoral fraud by the opposition after the emergence of inconsistency between the initial results announced by the electoral body and the numbers announced following the withdrawal of the preliminary results, and after the election body described the discrepancies between figures as “material errors²⁸⁶” with no impact on the outcome (Gnet News Jul. 28, 2022), and rejected a call by the I Watch organization for a recount of the votes by an independent committee (Middle East Monitor Jul. 28, 2022). Besides, in this referendum, on the eve of which the IHAE announced, in anticipation of low turnout, that there would be no minimum turnout threshold for the results to be valid, only 30.5% of the registered voters went to the polls. Thus, it was a very low voter turnout, indicating Saied’s failure to mobilize the masses in favor of his project despite his extensive use of public services, like youth centres, and administrative vehicles, and public media to promote his project, considering that the 2019 presidential elections, in which Kais Saied was elected president, had turnout of 49% in the first round, and turnout of 57% in the second round, and that the turnout in the elections²⁸⁷ between 2011 and 2019 was between 50% and 70% (Boussen and Lakhal 2022). And as for the international reaction, although post-referendum statements of the U.S. and the EU drew attention to the low turnout²⁸⁸, neither of them reacted strongly

²⁸⁵ Although not the subject of this thesis, there are studies on the reasons for the UGTT’s position. For instance, Bishara and Grewal (2022), based on in-depth interviews with UGTT leaders and survey data with union members, showed that despite the presence of incentives to participate in the elections, such as organizational strength of the union, the UGTT’s important role in the country’s democratic transition process and the presence of economic incentives for participation, the “internal division threat” emerged as an additional factor shaping electoral behavior, encouraging the opposite.

²⁸⁶ The ISIE, first, published the results and then withdrew them, only to re-publish with some corrections after the electoral body characterized them as “material errors” that had no effect on the result, and after some ISIE officials were dismissed for these errors (Gnet News Jul. 28, 2022).

²⁸⁷ Even in the 2018 local elections in which the stakes were very low, voter turnout was 35%.

²⁸⁸ According to a statement by the U.S. Secretary of State, Blinken, published by the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia on its page on Facebook, Blinken also shared his “concerns” about the low turnout in the referendum, the limited opportunities for genuine debate in the process of drafting the constitution, and that the new constitution could undermine democracy in Tunisia (AA Jul. 28, 2022). Council of the EU also issued a statement after the referendum, drawing attention to the low turnout in the referendum, and stating that for the preservation of democratic gains, “a consensus among the different political forces, including

or questioned the legitimacy of the referendum (AA Jul. 28, 2022, Council of the European Union Jul. 27, 2022).

Ghannouchi, who has been heavily criticized, especially after Saied's takeover, from within and outside the party due to his insistence on consensus-based politics since the 2011 revolution was unable to offer much resistance to Saied, apart from calling for the boycott of the referendum, calling it "deception of the people," and a "planned and fraudulent game," and insisting that "economic and social consensus" was the way out of the economic crisis (Middle East Monitor Jul. 25, 2022). And on July 28, Ennahda issued a statement, on behalf of the movement, calling the new constitution "completely null" for its being adopted with a participation less than 50%, and upholding the 2014 Constitution (Middle East Monitor Jul. 30, 2022). And while Ahmed Nejib Chebbi and Rached Ghannouchi of the National Salvation Front (NSF), who had called for a boycott of the referendum, took credit for the low turnout, calling it a victory for their call for a boycott, a survey conducted by SIGMA, a leading survey organization, suggested that only 21% people "actively boycotted the referendum, ... judging it anti-democratic" (Boussen and Lakhal 2022). Thus, after the July 25 referendum demonstrated the opposition's inability to unite, the sigma poll showed that there was an almost 50% disinterested segment, to whom neither Saied's project nor the NSF's call appealed, and who was mainly concerned with the economic trajectory (Boussen and Lakhal 2022). Undoubtedly, the implementation of reforms, imposed by the IMF, which constituted Saied's only economic agenda and were painful for the middle and lower classes, would jeopardize Saied's popularity as the sole holder of executive, and lead to protests. Saied, who once emphasized the need to bring greater fairness to the tax system, signed the 2022 Finance Law, on December 28, 2021, which adhered to the same tax model in which individuals, including the most disadvantaged segments of the population, contributed much more to tax revenues than businesses, saying that, he signed it "despite its shortcomings and unconvincing preferences," and that "time [was] insufficient to achieve the people's goals for a fair tax system," thus indirectly shifting responsibility to the government (Mahroug 2022). And yet, given that Saied's new constitution brought the government directly under the President, it was debatable whether he would throw more of the blame on a government independent of himself.

In the post-referendum era, whereas political parties have lost power, it is possible to argue that the UGTT's influence was growing as the IMF conditioned a new bailout on the UGTT coming on board with the government, having previously stalled the

political parties and civil society, is essential" (Council of the European Union Jul. 27, 2022).

economy with strikes. This increased influence manifested itself in the signing of an agreement between the Tunisian government and the main labor union in September 2022, not on the reforms required for the IMF bailout, but on the raising of salaries by 5% a year for three years and the minimum wage for 7%. In the same days, Saied issued the new electoral law, further weakening the power of political parties and blocs.

7.8.12 A New Electoral Law Ahead of December 22 Elections

Saied decreed the new electoral law²⁸⁹, which stipulated that candidates for the elections, scheduled to be held on December 17, would be elected by the voters on an individual basis, rather than through a party/bloc list, saying “after the previous sham elections, we are entering a new phase in Tunisia’s history towards popular sovereignty,” pursuing his typical populist rhetoric (Al-Jazeera Sep. 16, 2022). Thus, as Yerkes and Al-Mailam (2022) argued, this law, which stipulated that voters could vote for only one candidate in their constituency (that is, 161 voting districts in total, 161 seats in parliament), would further personalize politics, bringing an end to the party-based electoral system, which would also mean the end of the formation of opposition blocs of parties or power-sharing coalition governments.

The further weakening of political parties, a long-standing target of Saied’s, was not the only aspect of the law that dealt a blow to democracy, and that further entrenched Saied’s personalistic rule under the guise of democratic politics. The law also included provisions that would allow Saied to ban candidacies at will, remove legislators from office and candidacy for life or invalidate the votes of candidates to create a legislature that is “disempowered, atomized, and less representative, [and] . . . intentionally ill-equipped to organize robust opposition to Tunisia’s authoritarian drift” (Yerkes and Al-Mailam 2022). For instance, the law prevents anyone who has ever been charged with legal violation from running for office. Given the Saied government’s harsh crackdown on his political rivals since July 2021 and accusations of electoral crimes against many of them, Saied would easily block any of them from running. Moreover, the decree, issued just before the electoral law, criminalizing the publication of false news or rumors, without providing any definition of “fake news” or “rumour,” “by letting the security forces and prosecutors interpret it as they see it” (Reporters Without Borders Sep. 20, 2022), has paved the way for Saied to prevent anyone critical of him from running for elections. The law also

²⁸⁹The law only set the terms for the December 2022 legislative elections, leaving the elections for the second chamber introduced in the new constitution and the presidential election unaddressed.

authorized the government to ban lawmakers from holding office and running for office for life if found guilty of receiving illegal donations. Given that Saied has accused many of his political rivals of receiving illegal donations, it has also opened the door for him to ban them for life from participating in politics (Yerkes and Al-Mailam 2022). Moreover, the law makes it an electoral crime to intentionally exploit another candidate's honor or familial or geographical ties in order to win votes, and provides that all votes of candidates convicted of these crimes may be invalidated. This provision has also made it possible for Saied to nullify the votes and possible electoral victories of opposition candidates. Finally, the law allows lawmakers to be removed from office if ten voters withdraw their confidence from him, opening the door to corruption (Yerkes and Al-Mailam 2022).

Thus, ahead of the elections, scheduled for December 2022, Tunisia found itself, once again, in the grip of authoritarianism, while the opposition bloc, including Ennahda, which had already been weakened by internal divisions and resignations, was sidelined before it offered any insight into the economy, people's main concern.

7.9 Conclusion

We have seen that Tunisia found itself, once again, in the hands of authoritarianism before completing its democratic transition.

In this chapter, we discussed Ennahda's impact on Tunisian democracy in the period after the 2011 revolution until the adoption of the new constitution by referendum, which concentrated all powers in the hands of Saied. Although since the revolution the party was characterized by a split between the hardliners, who were particularly composed of "prison-exits," imprisoned for long years by the Ben Ali regime, and those who went into exile, supporters of democracy and compromise, which I call post-Islamists, the fact that democracy-promoting stance of Ghannouchi-led post-Islamist cadres prevailed over the others from the beginning and the party was able to take steps in that direction, prompts us to call the party line post-Islamist since the revolution. However, as we have seen Ennahda led by Ghannouchi tried to strike a delicate balance with Salafist party members/constituency, who kept criticizing Ennahda's reconciliation with secularism and secularist figures/institutions, particularly until Ghannouch's well-known official declaration in the 10th Ennahda Congress in May 2016 that Ennahda was leaving political Islam and entering democratic Islam. It can be argued that the most radical step that Ennahda, led by Ghannouchi, took to complete the country's transition to democracy was its deci-

sion to step down from power it had won at the ballot box when political transition of Tunisia appeared to be on the verge of collapse, and anxious about suffering the same fate as President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood members, the former of whom was ousted from power, and the latter were cracked down on afterwards.

Undoubtedly, Ennahda's association with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, i.e., the image of Ennahda as an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia, the substantial number of ISIS recruits from Tunisia after the emergence of ISIS, and Ennahda's disadvantaged position from the beginning due to its lack of support from local and international actors, led the burden of not polarizing the society to fall disproportionately on Ennahda, which sought to differentiate itself from the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic State in the eyes of both its domestic opponents and international observers. However, the fact that Ennahda, which held power almost continuously till Saied's rise to power, failed to push any legislative priority, such as economic reforms and transitional justice, and refrained from expressing any clear opposition to ((and even voted in favor of) anti-democratic bills proposed by Nidaa Tounes, such as the counter-Terrorism Law (2015) and Economic/Administrative Reconciliation Law (September 2017), while contributing to de-polarization through its compromises, leaning on consensual politics in the decade after the revolution, coalition governments could not solve the problems of Tunisia, the problems that had caused the revolution in the first place.

Then, towards 2019 parliamentary presidential elections, polls have shown that people became disappointed with political parties, with democracy, with leaders, and most of all with Ghannouchi. After Saied's "constitutional coup," scholars concluded that in Tunisia democracy collapsed not because there was too much polarization but because there was "too little of it" (Lang 2022), also repeating a common refrain that held Ennahda largely responsible for the economic crisis and failure in fulfilling the goals of revolution, in the decade after the revolution, the decade Kais Saied frequently called "a black decade," as well as for the political deadlock before Saied's power grab.

Although Ennahda was the party with the most seats in the parliament after the 2019 parliamentary elections after winning 20% of the vote share in the elections (much lower compared to 37% in 2011 and 28% in 2014 elections), it did not have a majority in the parliament. And in the period after the 2019 elections, first, it tried the push for a party representation-based government against Saied who tried to designate a loyal PM and a government under his shadow, and limit Ennahda's room for maneuver. It was also important that Ghannouchi tried to close the transitional justice law once and for all, pursuing his non-confrontational attitude during Mechichi's

prime ministership despite the fact that by the time, intra-party criticism against him, as well as resignations from the party, had also intensified, with complaints about wrong political choices and Ghannouchi's monopoly of decision, after Saied tasked Habib Jemli with establishing the new government based on the proposal of Ennahda and particularly after Jemli failed to establish the government.

After Saied's power grab, Ennahda positioned itself against Saied who started an attack on democratic institutions to monopolize the power in his hands. Although opposition against Saied widened with Saied's further expansion of his powers on September 22, a unified reaction could not emerge against him and opponents remained too fragmented to mount a real challenge to his project, partly because some of the opposition parties avoided an alliance with Ennahda, who they accused of making parliament dysfunctional throughout the decade after the revolution and because the opposition was even divided on how to react to Saied's referendum. And with the adoption of the new constitution and the electoral law, political parties, including Ennahda, were sidelined before they could offer any insight into the economy, that people really care about.

8. HOW HAS THE POST-ISLAMIST TRANSFORMATION OF FORMER ISLAMIST ACTORS AFFECTED DEMOCRACY IN TURKEY AND TUNISIA?

We have seen that the transition from Islamism to post-Islamism implies a shift in political actors' understanding of Islam and democracy such that there would be a reconciliation between the two notions. While in Nahda the post-Islamist identification corresponded to a faction within the party, led by Ghannouchi, in the early post-revolutionary years, we have seen this perspective spread across the party through political experience and struggles with Islamists within the party and at the grassroots, and finally came to define the party as a whole when the party's official identity was declared as Muslim democratic at the party congress in 2016. However, when the AKP was founded, there was no Islamist-post-Islamist divide/controversy within its founding cadres; in fact, the post-Islamist transformation had already taken place before the AKP was founded, when a faction within the National Outlook parties (RP, FP), identified themselves as renovationists, criticized these parties' (outdated) understanding of democracy and Islam during their political experience within those parties. Therefore, for the founding AKP cadres who had practiced politics in the National Outlook parties before the AKP, the transition from Islamism to post-Islamism had taken place before the establishment of the AKP; and the establishment of the AKP took place as a consequence of this split. Thus, in the case of Turkey, I employ the term post-Islamist to define the transformation of the formerly Islamist actors who established the AKP and their emergence as a democratizing force, promoting Turkey's membership in the European Union (EU).

In fact, the post-Islamist characterization of the AKP was already coined in the early years of the party by some academics who argued that, from the AKP's perspective, Islam belonged to the social sphere (social and economic networks) and that the party, therefore, replaced Islamist political concepts (of the National Vision parties) with modern, Western-referenced concepts such as democracy, the rule of law and

human rights. Thus, we've seen that the AKP founding cadres, critical of the majoritarian understanding of democracy adopted by the RP and of the Islamist ideal of Islamizing the society through the use of state power, emphasized the importance of pluralist democracy, and such values as freedom for all, diversity, compromise, moderateness, avoidance of polarization, gradual/evolutional change (rejecting radical change), keeping a distance from identity politics (on the grounds that identity politics meant radicalization of politics), and common intellect/reason and intra-party democracy (as a result of the criticism of the leader oligarchy in the national outlook parties) in the party program. We've seen that the understanding of secularism advocated by the AKP, in line with the post-Islamist transformation of its founders and their understanding of pluralist democracy, included providing state guarantees to all kinds of beliefs, allowing the public visibility of religion, but rejecting the abuse of religion for political purposes; and is called Anglo-Saxon type secularism/passive secularism/ post-secularism by academics. Erdoğan's statement in one of his speeches that the party's approach to secularism was not incompatible with Islam confirms that this approach to secularism was the result of a post-Islamist transformation, i.e., a reinterpretation of Islam and democracy in a way compatible with each other. We have seen that the list of values to be preserved for AKP, then, included family, traditions, and societal acquisitions. Therefore, we have seen Akdoğan (2014), who was an advisor to Erdoğan in the early years of the party, describe the party's conservative democratic ideology in his book as a modernity that does not exclude tradition, a universality that does not exclude localism and a change that is not radical.

We've seen that the AKP emerged as a democratizing/liberalizing/transforming force, especially in the first term of its single-party rule (2002-2007), continuing the EU reforms through harmonization packages and constitutional amendments (initiated by the 1999-2002 tripartite coalition) to improve human rights and liberties, and expand the scope of Turkish democracy in general. More specifically, we have seen reforms to normalize/democratize civil-military relations, ensure greater gender equality and freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, prevent torture and ill-treatment, and improve international protection of minority rights as well as general human rights. The AKP itself described this democratic transformation as a "silent revolution;" and it was during this period that references to a Turkish model began to be made in the international arena. Moreover, the same period also saw a rapid improvement in the country's economic indicators, continuing the IMF stabilization program that had begun before the AKP came to power, as GDP per capita continued to rise steadily until 2013, with the exception of the global financial crisis in 2009. Therefore, even though the

EU accession process and the IMF agreement, which facilitated success on both the political and economic fronts, had been initiated under the former three-party government, the AKP held on to both processes without a break, and was able to make a major progress in democratization and advance economic development. Thus, unlike the successive coalition governments formed in Tunisia after the revolution, including the Nahda party, the AKP government in Turkey was able to pursue democratization and economic growth simultaneously. In Tunisia, at no point have we seen the political pillar (i.e. democracy) catch up with the economic pillar (economic development).

We've seen that the founding cadres of the AKP, even before the party took power, made frequent visits to EU countries and the U.S. to prove to them that they were determined to continue the EU accession process and the IMF program to prove that they were different from the National Outlook parties and that they truly embraced the democratic/liberal line in order to gain international support. The reason, according to the interviews, was the fear that had prevailed among AKP cadres even before they came to power that the secularist establishment in the country would not allow them to govern (i.e., the fear of the secular establishment), and the fear that their government would suffer the same fate as the broad-based government (which had the support of 53% of the electorate) that had been in power before them and lost popular support due to a financial crisis (which had the support of 53% of the electorate) (i.e., the fear of the market).

While the EU membership objective was seen by many interviewed former MPs/ministers as an incentive for democratization, they also attributed the ability to take these democratization steps to the intensive assessments they had made of the inconsistencies, contradictions and failures of the National Outlook tradition during the February 28th process in order to lay out the basic principles of the new party. Indeed, as one former minister noted, at the Copenhagen Summit in December 2002, just after the elections that brought the AKP to power in 2002, Turkey was given a two-year deadline to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria, and having come to power prepared, Turkey was able to fulfill these criteria on time, which led to the decision to start accession negotiations on December 17, 2004. Accession negotiations were launched on October 3, 2005, followed by the opening of chapters and amendments to the relevant legislation.

We have seen that the reconciliation between the modern age/concepts and Islam was one of the main characteristics of AKP, which was founded on the criticism of the National Outlook parties, as frequently emphasized in interviews with former MPs/ministers of the party. Therefore, unlike the National Outlook parties, the im-

portance of a political perspective/language based on modern political arguments, political and economic concepts, in line with the modern understanding of democracy and human rights, without using religion as an argument/ideology in politics, away from a “dava” perspective based on the traditional understanding of Islam and a political understanding that lives in the past, was a position that everyone agreed upon. The emergence of the AKP as a model was the epitome of this reconciliation between Islam and the modern age/concepts, as noted by the interviewees.

How did the AKP government move away from democracy, despite (former) AKP MPs/ministers who were in power in the early years of the AKP saying that they came to power very prepared? By analyzing the internal and external constraints that enabled the AKP to take steps towards democratization, as well as the AKP’s policies, discourses, intra-party and inter-party interactions, I argued the following: Although the AKP came to power through a post-Islamist transformation process, which also involved a critique of the National Outlook parties, the AKP case also suggested that post-Islamist transformation is necessary but not sufficient to sustain a democracy. The path away from democracy was paved with the empowerment of a leader, who was able to purge moderating/balancing core AKP cadres one by one in the post-Arab Spring period, even though party cohesion was initially preserved after the removal of internal and external restraining forces on the AKP.

From the day first day AKP, a party with Islamist roots, came to power, we have seen it facing questioning of its true intentions by the military-led state bureaucracy, whose mission is to protect secularism and (Turkish) nationalism, two principles of the homogeneous Kemalist nation-building project dated back to the 1961 Internal Services Law (Article 35). Thus, a new Welfare Party (RP) syndrome had already emerged in the military-led state bureaucracy when the AKP rose to power in the 2002 elections. On the other hand, we have also seen the AKP attempt to curb the military’s power in domestic and foreign policy areas from the beginning; for example, its reluctance to continue the fight against the PKK with military force and the March 1st resolution dealt a serious blow to the relations between the AKP and the military. We have also seen that as early as June 2004, the Gülenist efforts to penetrate the state bureaucracy were a matter of concern for President Sezer and the military at the National Security Council (NSC) meeting. And yet, we’ve also seen that, by 2007, the Gülen group had reached the power to target the ministers and to object to law proposals (e.g. anti-terrorism laws) and have them changed. In the 2005 Şemdinli incident, we have seen the military accusing the government of collaborating with the Gülen group against it because the prosecutor, linked to the Gülen organization, linked the incident to Büyükanıt, the commander of the land forces at the time, and some AKP MPs expressed their support for the indictment at

the time. In this incident, we have also seen that the HSYK dismissed the prosecutor in question and positioned itself on the side of the military, turning the incident into a fight between the AKP and the secularist state bureaucracy.

On the other hand, we have seen that while the military viewed the indictment following the Şemdinli incident as an attempt to sabotage it, as interviews with former prominent figures of the AKP revealed, the AKP administration also viewed this incident as one of the attempts of the old establishment to sabotage democracy as it untied the laces of tutelage on democracy one by one through democratization steps. For it was not only the military, but also the high judiciary and the presidency that the AKP had to confront in the early years of its rule. On the other hand, some argue that the AKP's confrontation with tutelary institutions in the first years of its rule led the party to immediately engage with the EU, which in turn led to rapid but cautious steps towards democratization.

One of the most important crises of the AKP government's first term was, undoubtedly, the one that occurred in April 2007, when President Ahmet Necdet Sezer's seven-year presidential term came to an end. Aside from the fact that the office of the presidency was envisioned by the 1982 Constitution as an institution to counterbalance the popularly elected governments, the president was, for the assertively secularist military-led bureaucracy, an important check/balance on the powers of the AKP, which controlled the Prime Ministry and the parliament, and the last bastion of secularism. Thus, we have seen that the prospect of Prime Minister Erdogan or another figure with an Islamist background (and who they could not dispel the suspicion that they had left Islamism in the past) and whose wife wore a headscarf, becoming president caused concern among the military, the judiciary and main opposition CHP and secular civil society, who saw the loss of the last bastion of secularism to the AKP as one more step towards the Islamization of the state. Just as in the case of Tunisia, where secularist actors and civil society rapidly mobilized in the process that started with the assassination of two leftist leaders and continued until Nahda's stepdown from elected power, taking inspiration from the overthrow of the Morsi administration in Egypt and making veiled calls for a coup, in the case of Turkey, we've witnessed the mobilization of the secularist opposition, the military-led secularist bureaucracy (including the higher judiciary), and civil society with calls for a coup the moment discussions on the credentials of the new president began. According to one study, one reason for this mobilization, even though the AKP program emphasized the notion of pluralist democracy, was Erdoğan's Islamist undertones that saw religion and the nation as one, that saw religion as the new glue of the nation, and that manifested itself at the network level in public institutions and the bureaucracy (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 264).

So, while this mobilization and mass rallies called Republican meetings took place even before the AKP announced its candidate, when Erdoğan announced Abdullah Gül as the AKP candidate, a second mobilization process to thwart it took no time. As we have seen, the secular, center-left CHP boycotted the presidential elections and took the elections to the constitutional court on the grounds that the 367 quorum was not met; before the CHP, Kanadoğlu, the chief prosecutor of the Court of Cassation, had raised this requirement (although it had not been required in previous presidential elections). Immediately after the CHP's application, the military issued a harsh e-memorandum, accusing the AKP of violating the secular character of the state and emphasizing its readiness to intervene if necessary.

In the case of Tunisia, we have seen Ghannouchi voluntarily stepping down from power as a result of mounting pressure, putting forward conditions such as the adoption of a constitution and the setting of an election date. In Turkey, instead of trying to tone down the tensions, the AKP government resorted to issuing a statement reminding of the government's commitment to secularism and that the General Staff is an office answerable to the prime minister. At the time, there was no harsh reaction from the EU, as Turkey's EU accession process had effectively stalled in late 2005 when the "Cyprus issue" emerged as an obstacle in the accession negotiations and in late 2006 the EU announced that it had decided to suspend the opening of 8 chapters. Following the Constitutional Court's justification of the CHP's claim and the annulment of the first round of the election, Gül withdrew as a candidate and the AKP decided to hold early elections, also proposing a number of constitutional amendments, most important of which was the election of the president through popular vote.

Just as Ghannouchi excluded names with an Islamist orientation from his candidate lists to facilitate a coalition with the secularist Nidaa Tounes in the 2014 elections, his second election, we have seen Erdoğan make a similar maneuver to move further to the center in the 2007 elections, nominating prominent CHP, Alevi, and center-right figures, while excluding some 150 people close to the Islamist line. In these elections, we have seen that despite the fact that both the state bureaucracy, led by the military, and the center-left CHP ran an intensive campaign in the country against the threat of the AKP government's Islamization of the state and society, the people sided with the AKP. Compared to the 2002 elections, the AKP's vote increased by 12%, while the CHP's fell, showing that only a minority of people thought that the AKP would turn Turkey into a second Iran. As a result, we have seen the AKP administration succeed in framing its conflict with the secular coalition led by the military as the resistance of "the military/status quo" to "democracy/democratic change" and "the election of a religious president", i.e. the inclusion of the religious

in the public sphere (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 257-8). As a result of these elections, the AKP was portrayed in the international press as a new model combining Islam and democracy.

We have also seen the far-right MHP enter parliament with 14% of the vote in the 2007 elections. Moreover, opinion polls conducted at the time revealed that nearly 80% of the society voted for the AKP based on economic considerations. In addition, the fact that pious Kurds also voted for the AKP in these elections also highlighted the growing expectations from the AKP for a solution to the Kurdish problem following Erdogan's words "The Kurdish question is my question," in Diyarbakır on August 12, 2005. As Altan Tan, a politician of Kurdish origin, pointed out, the Gülen organization, which was already in conflict with the military, also campaigned for the AKP in the southeast, as it did throughout the country.

I argue that the 2007 presidential election "trauma" experienced by the AKP led to an increase in the party's vote share in the 2007 elections, but it worked to the detriment of the AKP and Turkish democracy in three ways in the mid-term. First of all, we have seen that after the impositions such as the "367 decision" and the "27 April e-memorandum," a constitutional amendment was made to overcome this impediment, even though the proposal for this amendment, according to former minister Ergin, came from the center-right ANAP at the time. Therefore, as Ergin also said, without these impositions, the path to a Turkish-type presidential system would not have been paved. Some former ministers also said that the decision to amend the constitution was made without adequate discussion, in a psychology of being oppressed, and that their main motivation was the idea that if the president was elected by the people, a candidate who was disconnected from society (particularly referring to the "pious segment" of society) could not be put forward as a candidate. Thus, we have seen that the presence of an elected president and prime minister led to unforeseen conflicts, which led Erdogan to abolish the position of prime minister (as the interviews have shown). For some, the shift towards a more authoritarian line started with this amendment, which enabled the direct election of the President. We have seen these amendments, which then President Sezer refused to approve, go to referendum after the parliament approved them for the second time. Moreover, even though both Sezer and the main opposition CHP appealed to the constitutional court to annul the package due to procedural errors, the constitutional court accepted the validity of the package 6 to 5. And it passed the referendum with ease. After the 2007 parliamentary elections, Abdullah Gül was elected president in the third round as Turkish-nationalist MHP was present in the parliament to secure a quorum.

As we've noted, the second reason why the 2007 presidential election knot was detrimental for Turkish democracy in the longer/mid-term was that this election process witnessed for the first time the emergence of a conflict/mistrust between Erdoğan and Gül. Gül was in an important position as a "second man" within the AKP and as a moderate figure with a balancing role vis-à-vis Erdoğan. As we later learned, Erdoğan did not want to nominate Abdullah Gül as a candidate for the second time not to confront the military, and Gül himself announced his candidacy without Erdoğan's knowledge. We have seen that the mistrust between the two, which first appeared during this presidential election process, then deepened with different issues of divergence, as also reported in the press, until Gül was openly politically sidelined by Erdoğan. Furthermore, Erdoğan's distrust of Gül expanded to include other balancing, moderate figures close to Gül, and resulted in their exclusion from the party as well.

The strengthening of relations with the Gülen group, which campaigned on behalf of the AKP in the 2007 elections and the referendum, and even provided intelligence support (according to an online news platform) was the third reason for the authoritarian turn of Erdoğan-led AKP in Turkey. At the time, reportedly, it was the Gülen group that convinced the government that the Ergenekon organization was preparing a coup plot. On the other hand, we have seen that when this indictment came, an important reason why the AKP was convinced of its veracity and joined the case (Ergenekon/Sledgehammer cases) as a victim was that it created "reasonable doubt" (in the words of former justice minister Ergin) given the previous vetos and threats the government had faced. On the other hand, it should be noted that despite the AKP's involvement in the Ergenekon/Balyoz trials, both Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Gül, repeatedly, criticized the widespread arrests of active and retired military officers, long detention periods, and the arrest of journalists Nedim Şener and Ahmet Şık, the seizure of the unpublished draft of Ahmet Şık's book *İmamın Ordusu* (Imam's Army) and the police raid on *Radikal* newspaper to search for copies of the unpublished book. We have seen that it was the February 7 plot against MİT, which Ergin described as the peak of FETÖ's self-confidence when the government became aware of the FETÖ organization in the judiciary and began to fight it.

We have also seen that the AKP's initiative to craft a new constitution to consolidate democracy, which the AKP had promised its voters before the 2007 elections in return for coming back to power, including measures to limit the excessive powers of the president and consolidate democracy, also brought the secularist bureaucracy and the AKP into confrontation after the elections. According to the justice minister of the time, the chief public prosecutor's office of the Court of Appeals threatened

the AKP leadership that it would file a closure case against the AKP if the constitutional package came to parliament. This was because this package, which AKP presented as an attempt to consolidate democracy, was interpreted by the military-led secularist state bureaucracy as an attempt to “de-Kemalize” the state, to change its core principles, primary ones being Turkishness and (assertive) secularism (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 261). Although the AKP backed down on the new constitution, five months later we have seen that an attempt to amend the constitution to allow the headscarf in universities, encouraged by MHP leader Bahçeli, led to the mobilization of the secularist state bureaucracy, media, opposition parties, and civil society, and the filing of a closure case against the AKP, despite the fact the AKP had presented these changes as a necessity for Turkey’s accession to the European Union and a women’s rights issue. The opposition parties CHP and DSP took the amendment to the constitutional court on the grounds that it violated secularism and the court issued a stay of execution. Immediately afterwards, however, we have seen that a closure case was filed against the AKP by a Court of Appeals chief public prosecutor for violating secularism. Therefore, the same accusation that led to the closure of the Welfare Party was this time leveled against a party in power alone. Although the AKP narrowly escaped a closure verdict, the fact that it came so close to closure was, in the words of the then president of the Constitutional Court at the time, a “serious warning” to the AKP about the issues it should stay away from. Moreover, as Ergin (Jul. 18, 2020), a former Minister of Justice, put it, until the Constitutional Court announced its decision, the AKP had to govern under the risk of being shut down at a time when the mortgage crisis in the U.S. was beginning to affect the markets. Moreover, according to his account, within two months of the ruling, they also heard that another closure case was being prepared for their party at the Court of Appeals.

Therefore, we have seen that the necessity of making “the judiciary act within legal boundaries,” which the interviews revealed, and which arose from the conviction that the secularist state bureaucracy would not allow their government to operate despite the fact that they had come back to power with 47%, led the AKP to undertake the 2010 constitutional amendments. Therefore, while the 2010 constitutional amendment package included many provisions that expanded rights and freedoms, such as the introduction of the right of individual application to the constitutional court, a mechanism inspired by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), it also included provisions to expand the civilian/democratic sphere by removing the military-civilian bureaucratic tutelage over civilian governments. The much-discussed provision of the package was a provision to change the structure of the HSYK to eliminate “judicial activism” (Ergin’s term), which was later widely cited

as a tool for FETÖ's infiltration of the judiciary. However, as Ergin pointed out, even though the package proposed a formula in which each judge and prosecutor would vote for a single person, not a list, in order to create an HSYK with a pluralist structure, i.e. not dominated by any ideological view, and even though this formula was passed by the commission and the parliament, the main opposition CHP applied to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of some constitutional amendments, including this proposal, before the referendum; and the court annulled this amendment. The model that was adopted instead was the majoritarian model, where each group came with its own list. According to his account, the main mistake that led the CHP to become the architect of the new regulation (the majoritarian model) was that it thought that YARSAV, the secularist group, was the only organized group in the judiciary and that its list would be elected in the HSYK elections. However, it was the Gülen organization's list that was elected, not YARSAV's although it was only with the February 7 MIT crisis that the government became aware of the Gülen organization in the judiciary. Moreover, according to Ergin, the Constitutional Court violated the constitution by reviewing constitutional amendments on their substance and thus acting as a legislative body. Therefore, Ergin's statements revealed that the main opposition party CHP's objection to some of the articles in the 2010 referendum package and the Constitutional Court's overstepping of its powers to review the substance and annul them led to Gülenist organization in the judiciary. We have seen that the package, which was also heavily supported by the Gülen organization and liberals, passed the referendum with a 58% yes vote. Even though with this referendum the civilian government was freed from the questions of what the military would say, whether a closure case would be filed against us (as the Constitutional Court was divested of its arbitrary party closure option), and even though, in Oğur's (2021) words, the government was freed from its "chains" and the "distorted Turkish system of separation of powers", the path Turkey took after this process could not be more democratic, because the democracy started to go downhill step by step.

We have seen that after the 2011 elections, thanks to the passage of the 2010 constitutional amendment package, both the preparation of a new constitution was back on the agenda and democratization steps such as the Kurdish resolution process and the lifting of the headscarf ban in state institutions and universities could be taken. On the other hand, in the same period, we have also seen Erdoğan gradually increasing his power through the three pillars, the seeds of which were sown during the 2007 presidential election process, and thus the democratic backsliding began simultaneously. In other words, it was the post-2011 period when the increasing cooperation with the Gülen organization in 2007 turned into a war with FETÖ-

induced crises, starting with the MIT crisis in 2012; when the problem of mistrust between Erdoğan and Gül, which first emerged in 2007, both deepened and widened to include other individuals; and when the process that started with the popular election of the president with the constitutional amendment in 2007 led Erdoğan to abolish the office of prime minister altogether through disagreements between the elected prime minister and the president. As Erdoğan leaned on these three pillars to increase his power within the party, background factors that had an impact on these pillars were the deterioration of relations with the EU and its cessation as a constraining power for democratization, the 2008/2009 financial crisis that tangentially affected Turkey and gave Erdoğan self-confidence, the Arab Spring that started in 2011 that Erdoğan (and his then close collaborator Davutoğlu) saw as an opportunity to increase Turkey's power in the region. We have seen that in this process, as Erdoğan increased his power within the party, the pluralist understanding of democracy receded into the background, while the majoritarian notion of democracy adopted by the Welfare Party (RP) and the traditional conservatism with a (dava) cause perspective and the oligarchy of leaders, which are other characteristics of the National Outlook parties that the AKP had criticized and vowed to stay away from during its establishment, came to the fore once again. It was the Gezi Park protests that signalled the first signs of Erdoğan's transition from pluralist to majoritarian democracy.

We have seen the EU accession process as an external constraint/incentive for democracy that had already lost its impact by 2011. As we have mentioned, the disappointment on the Turkish side (particularly on the part of Erdoğan) towards the EU, caused by the Greek Cypriot side becoming an EU member despite the Turkish side's approval of the Annan Plan, increased at the end of 2006 with the EU's decision to suspend the opening of 8 chapters, alleged to be related to the Customs Union, and the announcement that no chapter would be closed, even temporarily, until the ports/additional protocol issue was resolved. Further reinforcing this disappointment was the fact that in 2007 Sarkozy made opposition to Turkey's EU membership one of the main elements of his election campaign, that after coming to power he announced that he would prevent the opening of discussions on economic and monetary policy, a key area for blocking Turkey's accession negotiations, and that no EU member objected to Sarkozy's initiative. However, we have seen that just after the EU breeze stopped blowing over Turkey, the 2008/2009 global economic crisis, which shaken the EU itself, passed Turkey by a tangent, and international credit rating agencies Fitch and Moody's upgraded Turkey's credit rating at the same time, boosting the confidence of Erdoğan, who had been disappointed with the EU. The fact that the crisis barely touched Turkey apparently also re-

lieved Erdogan of his fear of the market, as anti-EU/Western elements have found their way into Erdogan's jargon, even expressing jealousy as the reason behind conspiracies against Turkey. And after the onset of the Arab Spring in 2010/2011 he was also convinced Turkey could play a leading role as a multi-regional actor in a pan-Islamist, expansionist foreign policy, which turned more towards the Middle East.

Then, in an environment where both the market, secularist state institutions ceased to be constraining factors and the EU ceased to be an incentive in close proximity to each other, Erdoğan, having successfully survived the economic crisis of 2008/2009 and gained self-confidence, after he came to power for the third time in 2011, sought a leadership position in the region with the onset of the Arab Spring after and embarked on a power consolidation process in response to the crises he experienced at home.

After Abdullah Gül, the AKP's second man and an important counterweight to Erdoğan, became president in 2007, we've seen that the main executives of a pan-Islamist (often described as neo-Ottomanist) foreign policy that emphasized Turkey's imperial history were the Erdogan-Davutoglu duo, who saw greater opportunities for Turkey in the region. Davutoğlu, who served as Erdogan's chief foreign policy advisor until 2009 and then as foreign minister, was at the heart of this policy. Considering the possibility of a domino effect of democratization in the region and the expansion of Turkey's influence, the foreign policy after the Arab Spring began was to side with the people rather than the governments in the region, and to present its model of democracy to the Arab world. In this regard, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu also kept emphasizing the compatibility of democratic values with Islamic values and that the principles of secularism, transparency, accountability, rule of law and representation were principles that could also exist in Muslim geographies (with also religious undertones). For example, during Erdoğan's visits to the Arab Spring countries in 2011, we have seen him preaching secularism, rejecting the claim that secularism was anti-religious, and saying that secularism was an important principle of the state and a guarantor of religious freedom/pluralism.

As yet, we have seen, the new foreign policy also claimed to speak on behalf of Muslims in the region, as evidenced by Turkey acting as a spokesperson for the Palestinian cause and harsh reactions against Israel. Thus, it was not possible to say that the new foreign policy approach/discourse adopted by Erdogan/Davutoğlu duo was free from Islamic undertones and a cause (*dava*) perspective as it excluded Western modernity, involved a neo-Ottomanist civilization perspective and aimed to reconstruct the Ottoman identity (Sunni Muslim and Ottoman identity) in the

region. And the Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo tried to put this into practice by supporting Sunni elements in Egypt and Syria, moving away from the policy of zero problems with neighbors, until the new foreign policy was blocked in Syria in 2015.

Moreover, due to the miscalculations of the Erdogan-Davutoglu duo regarding the prospects for democratization in Syria and Egypt, not only did they interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, but the Syrian regime did not fall. When it became clear that the international actors in the West (i.e. the US and the EU) were merely engaging in hostile rhetoric against Syria without engaging in any military confrontation, it became clear that the war in Syria would continue for a long time in the absence of any balancing force against Russia and Iran, unless a political solution was forced by neighboring countries, including Turkey. We have seen that another consequence of Ankara's involvement in the Syrian conflict has been the rise of ISIS and the strengthening of the Kurdish PYD, a U.S. ally in the fight against ISIS, which has created a security problem in southern Turkey. Moreover, the deviation from the zero-problem foreign policy was another point of divergence between the Davutoğlu-Erdoğan duo and President Gül at the time, as Gül had blamed the government for the prolongation of the war in Syria and the emergence of the Kurds as a separate entity in Syria in the vacuum, which exported instability to Turkey (as he indirectly revealed in an interview at the time). This divergence between the Davutoğlu-Erdoğan duo and Gül (among other issues) played a role in Erdoğan's decision to politically sideline Gül and appoint Davutoğlu as prime minister in 2014.

The main domestic implication of neo-Ottomanist foreign policy has been the deviation from a pluralist, rights-based discourse with reference to the West/modernity that was once the hallmark of the post-Islamist transformation of the AKP's core cadres. After all, for former Islamist actors, the post-Islamist transformation amounts to a change in discourse, beliefs and ideals; and in the case of the AKP, an important element of this transformation had been its adoption of a pluralist understanding of democracy after criticizing the RP's majoritarian understanding of democracy and denigration of the West and its values, its rejection of all kinds of exclusionary attitudes/practices, and its adoption of a discourse that referenced the West/modernity. And yet, the civilization perspective that Davutoğlu brought to the party, based on the Ottoman identity (and the exclusion of those who did not identify with it) inherently involved a majoritarian understanding of democracy (and a goal of building a conservative-democratic society). At this point, we have seen two conceptions of democracy, pluralist/consensualist and majoritarian, competing with each other within the party; there were many ministers in the cabinet who tried to preserve the pluralist line and the focus on human rights that

rejected exclusionary discourses and practices.

In its report, SETA, a think-tank close to Erdoğan and one of the most important actors of the period, defined the “democratic opening” process (which started in 2009), the most important democratization initiative of the period, as part of the “civilization politics” of the period, and as an instrument of the AKP’s goal of “building a democratic and conservative society” and its “hegemonic march” (Aslan 2015, 95), whereas other important ministerial figures of the period referred to the democratic opening as the most important part of the AKP’s human-focused policies and democratic consolidation process, revealing the divergence (and two competing democracy notions) in the AKP core cadres at the time. We have seen that for this latter group, it was human rights and justice perspectives and the idea of solving problems through “more democracy” that guided them through this process. Erdoğan, on the other hand, simultaneously utilized the emphasis on democratic deepening and citizenship ties to the Republic of Turkey and the emphasis on historical and geographical consciousness, which is the hallmark of the neo-Ottomanist perspective. As part of this process, the human rights-oriented approach was reflected in the 2010 human rights package, which included short and long-term steps towards the normalization of life in the region. At the time, the AKP’s initiative was harshly criticized by the opposition parties of the time, the center-left CHP and the nationalist MHP, who kept arguing that the AKP was collaborating with terrorists.

Although this process included steps such as a visit to the region by then-President Abdullah Gül, Erdoğan’s apology on behalf of the state for the Dersim incidents of the single-party era, and the government meeting with social segments such as Alevi and Roma and organizing workshops to solve their problems, the process stumbled several times with the Habur (2009) and Oslo (2011) crises, and was ultimately interrupted by repeated PKK attacks 2011, till its restart in 2013, with Öcalan’s, and pro-Kurdish BBP leader Demirtaş’s siding with Erdoğan in the FETO-initiated 2012/2013 crises.

The influence of the civilizational perspective on Erdoğan increased especially after the 2011 elections, when the AKP’s vote share reached almost 50 percent. As we have noted, relations with the EU deteriorated towards the end of 2006; Abdullah Gül, who was the main counterweight to Erdoğan within the party, ascended to the presidency in 2007; Erdoğan’s self-confidence increased (and his fear of the market decreased) as he successfully averted the 2008/2009 crisis; and the 2010 constitutional referendum freed him from military and judicial tutelage (and thus from the fear of whether they would let him rule); the 2011 Arab Spring further enhanced the

harmony/collaboration between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu as Davutoğlu was able to convince Erdoğan that the Arab Spring would create new opportunities for Turkey in the region. Therefore, we have seen that Erdoğan, who was freed from the constraining factors (the EU, the secular establishment, the market) upon him as well as from Abdullah Gül, the leading figure to have balanced him, before the 2011 elections, gained the votes of one out of every two voters in the 2011 elections, which further increased confidence in him. And in this process, the influence of the civilization perspective on Erdoğan increased as, from the post-election balcony speech onwards, Erdoğan not only began to present his party more as the voice of the oppressed around the world, in particular, by giving examples from the former Ottoman territories in the region, but also stepped up interventionist, anti-democratic rhetoric at home. Since the rejection of radical transformation that goes beyond the natural course of life in the AKP program was introduced as a critique of the RP/FP tradition of conservatism, Erdoğan's interventionist remarks during this period (e.g., his reference to the aim of raising pious generations, his pointing to unmarried male and female students sharing the same house as another area of intervention) were certainly a deviation from the AKP's notion of conservative democracy, defined in this thesis as a post-Islamist line; and a significant departure from the AKP's determination to distance itself from identity politics, which it had believed radicalized politics, as exemplified by the National Outlook parties.

In the post-2011 period, we have seen that Erdoğan's increasingly interventionist rhetoric and his main response to the crises and the struggle for survival in which he found himself was to use the friend-foe dichotomy more frequently, to move more towards a majoritarian understanding of democracy and away from the principle of common sense (by suppressing different voices within the party), which led to conflicts with other key figures in the AKP. The crises Erdoğan faced in this period were the Gezi Park protests that turned into mass anti-government protests, FETO's attempt to sabotage the peace process (February 7 plot), and the corruption investigations, which shattered the AKP's image of democracy-promoter and welfare-provider at a time when Erdoğan duo was seeking to present the AKP as a model and force of stability in the region.

The Gezi Park protests were one of the most important events that deepened the mistrust between Erdoğan and Gül that had erupted during the 2007 presidential elections. While Erdoğan called the protesters "looters," and said, "See you at the ballot box in seven months" in a polarizing tone and in line with his majoritarian conception of democracy, we have seen that President Gül avoided polarization and adopted a pluralist democratic approach with statements such as "messages given in good faith have been received" and "democracy cannot be defined only by elections."

During the Gezi protests, Bülent Arınç was another figure who publicly disputed Erdoğan (by apologizing to the protesters), but interviews have shown, that there were those, especially in the party's governing bodies, who suggested Erdoğan to meet with the protesters. Most of the former AKP MPs/ministers I interviewed agreed that the protests in Gezi Park were initially motivated by environmental concerns, but that terrorist groups joined the protests much later. According to many interviewees, if the government had engaged in dialogue with the protesters, the intervention of terrorist groups would have been prevented. What the interviews and the differing positions between Erdoğan, Arınç and Gül in the press revealed was that the Gezi Park protests had caused a major rift within the party, with a clash between two competing conceptions of democracy, the majoritarian versus the pluralist. According to the interviews, the reason why the rift in the party caused by Gezi Park was not heard was that after 2011 (even more so after 2013) Erdoğan moved away from the principle of collective intellect/mind and tried to suppress different voices within the party by forcing them either to take a back seat or to leave, although the issues of leader oligarchy and the intra-party democracy had been attributed special importance in the AKP program as a critique of the National Outlook tradition.

Moreover, we have seen that the successive harsh reactions from the EU and the U.S. to the excessive and disproportionate use of force by the police against the Gezi Park protesters, and CNN's live coverage of the protests for hours, have strained relations between the government and the West. We have seen that not only did Erdoğan use conspiratorial/accusatory rhetoric, making statements about the West's ulterior motives in Turkey, but also the concept of "precious loneliness" was coined (for the first time in August 2013) in reference to Turkey's increasing isolation in the world.

We have seen that sidelining those who, in Yeneroğlu's (2019) words, "need to be taken seriously" within the party was an important step in dragging Turkey into Erdoğan's one-man rule, as the interviews also revealed. Foremost among them was Abdullah Gül, who has clashed with Erdoğan on various occasions since 2007, sometimes publicly and sometimes behind closed doors. After 2011, we have seen him criticize Turkey's policy in the region (particularly in Syria) in the wake of the Arab Spring and warn Davutoğlu about it, and we have seen Erdoğan maneuvering in 2014 to prevent Gül, who had served as a counterbalance to Erdoğan when they worked together in the government, and who, according to many analysts, had been the architect of the AKP's relations with the EU in the early years, from returning to the party after Erdoğan's rise to the presidency, even though Gül's return to the party after Erdoğan's ascension to the presidency was supported by internal party polls. Moreover, as some analysts have noted, Gül had already played a key role in

the democratization of the National Vision tradition during the Welfare Party era, leading the Reformist wing of the Virtue Party and running for the party leadership against Kutan.

As for Erdoğan's maneuvers to exclude Gül from politics, he first tried to prevent Abdullah Gül's re-election in January 2012 by adding a clause to the presidential election law prohibiting the re-election of presidents elected before the 2007 constitutional amendment came into force, an amendment that was approved by parliament but rejected by the constitutional court. Then, in 2014, as President Abdullah Gül's presidential term was coming to an end, the AKP hastily decided to hold its party congress the day before the end of Gül's presidential term, closing the door to Gül's candidacy for the presidency. Moreover, we have seen that Gül's decision to return to the party when his presidency ends has emerged as a major point of contention within the party, with senior party figures supporting Gül taking over as Prime Minister/President, relatively new MPs/younger generation siding with Erdoğan, and several people in the party's governing bodies asking Erdoğan to postpone the congress date. Moreover, at the time, due to the foreign policy alignment between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, a SETA team was formed to promote Davutoğlu's candidacy in the media.

We have seen that other factors contributing to the authoritarian turn of the Erdoğan-led AKP rule in the post-2011 period have been the FETO-initiated crises, the first of which was the attempt in 2012 to sabotage the peace process initiated in 2009 (as the organization had favored "a hardline nationalist approach to Kurds" (Tol 2014), and the counter-war against the Gülen organization launched by the AKP leadership. This marked the end of the tactical alliance with the Gülen organization that had begun in 2007 in the presidential election environment. In the first crisis with the Gülen organization that emerged on February 7, 2012, a Gülen movement-linked prosecutor, which did not support the resolution process, called on Hakan Fidan, the Chief of the Turkish National Intelligence Agency (MIT), to testify on charges related to the Oslo talks, i.e. MIT's secret negotiations with the PKK. As we have seen, in the words of the justice minister of the time, this was the event when the government realized that the Gülen organization had infiltrated the judiciary by gaining a majority in the last HSYK elections. We have seen many analysts refer to this war between the AKP and the Gülen organization as a power struggle in the state structures, between two groups from different Islamist traditions that had crossed paths for a while to push the military (and the secularist state bureaucracy led by the military) out of politics.

As a first step in this war, we have seen Erdoğan announce that he was considering

drafting a bill to close down (or convert into private high schools) the private course centers (known as “dershane”) that prepare students for the central university entrance exam, a quarter of which were run by the Gülen group, and which were not only an important source of income for the Gülen organization, but also a source of recruitment. The Gülen organization also perceived Erdoğan’s insistence on the closure of the dershanes as part of a plan to destroy their movement. The second of the FETO-initiated crises was the corruption and bribery investigation of December 17, 2013, targeting the AKP government and businessmen with links to the government. Erdoğan continued the conspiratorial rhetoric he had started during the Gezi Park protests, describing the investigation as a “conspiracy” with the involvement of “external forces” trying to undermine the government, and accusing the Gülen organization of establishing a “state within the state”, a “parallel state” in state structures, particularly in the police and judiciary. The third crisis was a report in the local press at the time that the launch of another investigation on December 25, involving the Prime Minister’s inner circle, had been blocked by newly appointed police officials. These crises led to the resignation of three ministers and the dismissal of many members of the organization in the public sector, especially in the police and judiciary, including the Istanbul Police Chief.

The March 30, 2014, local elections, which were held in the shadow of corruption allegations against the AKP and amounted almost to a vote of confidence for then Prime Minister Erdoğan and the AKP, were marred by allegations of electoral fraud and misconduct (e.g., a high rate of invalid votes, unusual power outages during vote counting, different figures published by the state-run Anadolu Agency and the private Cihan News Agency). We have seen that even though the Gülen organization tried to undermine the AKP’s electoral success just before the elections with illegal recordings allegedly documenting Erdoğan’s corruption and a high-level security meeting, the AKP won the election with 43% of the vote.

Although Erdoğan was able to avert these FETO-initiated crises with his electoral success, we have seen that the issue of the prosecution of the four former AKP ministers implicated in the corruption/bribery investigation first emerged as a new point of divergence between then President Gül and Erdoğan, as Gül believed that the ministers should be acquitted by the Constitutional Court. Later, as early as October 2014, after Erdoğan’s ascension to the presidency and Davutoğlu’s appointment as the new prime minister, the same issue became a source of conflict between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, paving the way for Davutoğlu’s ouster in an internal party coup. These crises, therefore, played a major role, first in Erdoğan’s political sidelining of Gül, and then in Erdoğan’s sidelining of Davutoğlu, who stepped down as AKP chairman and prime minister, and, as the interviews reveal, in Erdoğan’s more

confident moves to take full control of the party.

We have seen that the resolution process, which officially began on March 21, 2013, with the reading of Öcalan's letter by BDP deputies in Diyarbakır on the occasion of Nevruz, continued until the June 2015 elections, albeit with wobbles, despite opposition from the center-left CHP and the nationalist MHP, and despite the war against FETÖ. In addition to the PKK's cessation of armed struggle, this process included steps such as the establishment of the Wise People's Delegation consisting of respected members of society to explain the importance of this process to the public, visits by BDP MPs to Qandil and Imrali, the establishment of a parliamentary commission of inquiry on ways to peace, and the adoption of the Democratization Package of September 30, 2013, which included democratization reforms (e.g. reforms to democratize the electoral process, especially to the benefit of Kurdish political actors) related to the Kurdish issue to be carried out through legislative amendments or administrative steps (the lifting of the ban on headscarves in public institutions was also realized through this package), and the adoption of the Law on Ending Terrorism and Strengthening Social Integration, which was enacted to regulate the procedures and principles regarding the "Resolution Process." On the other hand, we have seen that the process has always faltered, with Kandil (KCK) in particular criticizing the government's commitment to the process since June 2013, criticizing the Democratization Package as it did not include the abolition of the Anti-Terror Law, and complaining that the talks with Imrali could not move from the dialogue phase to the negotiation phase. Although Erdoğan expressed his determination to continue the Resolution process immediately after his election as President on August 10, 2014, with 51.79% of the votes, we have seen the end of the peace process due to Erdoğan's electoral concerns (prior to the June 2015 elections) and the Kurdish side's attempt to take advantage of the authority vacuum created in the region as a result of the prolongation of the civil war in Syria, to which Turkey contributed with its aggressive policies in the region in line with its "civilization perspective," by cooperating with the PYD in Syria. We have also seen that ISIS has emerged as another terrorist organization in the region as a result of the power vacuum in Syria, posing a greater threat to Turkey.

In the run-up to the June 7, 2015 elections, the main steps leading to the shelving of the resolution process were as follows: On October 2, 2014, the draft law authorizing the Turkish Armed Forces to carry out cross-border operations and interventions in Syria and Iraq was passed by the Parliament with the affirmative votes of AKP and MHP deputies; the HDP made a statement saying that the resolution process would end if Kobani, a Kurdish-populated city in Syria occupied by ISIS, fell; In 2015, the government asked Öcalan to call on the PKK to call for a ceasefire, and in

response Öcalan delivered 10-point democratization demands as conditions for this call; on February 28, 2015, the HDP delegation met with the government delegation at the Dolmabahçe Prime Minister's Office and the 10-point road map for the PKK to lay down its arms was read out; the PKK declared that it would not lay down its arms until the 10 points were completed by the government; The KCK's statement that the PKK would not announce its decision to lay down its arms before Öcalan's release; Öcalan's message read out at the Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır on March 21, 2015, emphasizing the beginning of a "new era" of peace, although he also put forward new conditions; Erdoğan has started to give messages contradicting his earlier statements on the resolution process and the government's statements, which many analysts interpreted as an attempt to win back nationalist votes - for example, he said he did not approve of the meeting of AKP-HDP MPs in the Dolmabahçe office and the 10-point declaration read out at the meeting - and the bomb attack by ISIS on June 5, 2015, two days before the elections, during a pro-Kurdish HDP election rally in Diyarbakır, which killed 5 people and wounded around 400 others.

According to many analysts, the reason for Erdoğan's sudden turnaround on the resolution process in the run-up to the June 7 elections was that opinion polls showed that the resolution process, based on the 10-point road map, was not boosting the AKP's vote share as he had expected, since the AKP's vote share would fall if the HDP crossed the 10% threshold, and Erdoğan wanted to win a super-majority in the elections to rewrite the constitution and install a presidential system after the elections. Moreover, Erdoğan's sudden turnaround pitted him against Arınç, the then government spokesperson and a senior AKP figure, who had reminded Erdoğan in a press conference that the government was in charge of the solution process. The real significance of this defense was that it brought to the surface the disagreement between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu's cabinet over the Resolution Process; analysts even spoke of "Erdoğan's tutelage" over the government. Therefore, the re-inclusion of the Resolution Process in the election manifesto prior to the June 7, 2015 elections was interpreted by analysts as an initiative of Prime Minister Davutoğlu, who had ascended to the prime ministership on August 29, 2014.

Between June 7 and November 1, 2015, with HDP/KCK targeting the AKP (blaming Erdoğan for abolishing the peace process and escalating the conflict with the PKK in order to discredit the HDP) and President Erdoğan targeting the HDP (blaming it for having an organic relationship with the PKK), the KCK leaders' call for a "revolutionary people's war," the bloody terrorist attacks of ISIS and the PKK, and the army's security operations against the PKK forces after a three-year break, The KCK's call for the declaration of autonomy, the declaration of autonomy in two provincial centers, Şırnak and Hakkari, and 13 districts, and the digging of

trenches in these districts to prevent state security forces from entering these areas, not only the resolution process completely collapsed, but Erdoğan also shifted to the nationalist/security-ist MHP line. Thus, by the time of the November 1, 2015 snap elections, the civilizational politics that the Davutoğlu-Erdoğan duo had been conducting hand in hand had come to an end.

At the same time, a crisis of democracy accompanied the escalation of terrorism and military operations. Erdoğan responded to the MHP leader's call for the closure of the HDP by calling for the lifting of parliamentary immunities, although he opposed the closure of the party. Moreover, over a thousand people were detained in connection with terrorism and hundreds were arrested. Moreover, even though the HDP won 13% of the vote and 80 seats in the parliament in the June 7 elections, preventing the AKP from forming a government on its own and forcing it into a coalition, the PKK's resort to violence in the post-June 7 period and the HDP's resistance to keep a clear distance from the PKK's acts of violence (for example, his statement that his call for the PKK to cease armed conflict would not be sufficient and that Öcalan had already explained the conditions to be fulfilled for this in the Dolmabahçe Agreement) strengthened Erdoğan's hand in deciding to call early elections. Moreover, during this period when the state once again enhanced its security reflexes, the ideals of democratization automatically took a back seat as fears of national division were revived. Erdoğan's shift towards the MHP's security-ist/nationalist line played a major role in the AKP's coalition with the MHP after the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016.

As we have seen, Erdoğan's determination to both shift to a security/nationalist line and to build a presidential system predated the June 7 elections. The FETO-initiated crises, the prolongation of the Syrian war and the resulting growing authority vacuum in the south of Turkey, and the decreasing vote rate of the AKP, as set forth by pre-election surveys, as well as the fact that the problems deriving from dual-headedness began to arise very quickly between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, led Erdoğan to prioritize these two issues. Indeed, a sign of a shift to a securityist line was already evident with the approval of the Law on the Amendment of the Law on the Duties and Powers of the Police and Certain Laws and Decree Laws, known as the Internal Security Package, by President Erdoğan on April 4, 2015, which, for example, gave the police the power to search beyond the constitutional limits and completely transferred the duty of the prosecutor to the law enforcement agencies with the introduction of the concept of 'preventive detention'. Erdoğan's commitment to a presidential system "strengthened by Turkish culture" in the run-up to the June 7 elections manifested itself in his demand for 400 seats in parliament at rallies across Turkey, even though he had stepped down as AKP chairman in 2014

and assumed the presidency, which was supposed to be neutral. He also explained why he insisted on a presidential system for Turkey when he was the main speaker at a panel on presidential systems organized by SETA two weeks before the election, where he continued to use a rhetoric of “civilizational politics,” based on the Seljuk and Ottoman past, and talked about the necessity of a system that would be in line Turkey’s own traditions and customs, that would provide stability and confidence, and that would eliminate the necessity of coalitions from Turkish political life.

Before the June 7 elections, when Erdoğan started to shift to a security-oriented line, Davutoğlu and Erdoğan’s political goals and priorities diverged, and Davutoğlu emerged as the representative of the pluralist democratic and human rights discourse, as we can see in his election manifesto, in which the importance of the resolution process was emphasized. Davutoğlu stayed away from the promotion of the presidential system, which Erdoğan insistently emphasized in his election rallies, and almost ignored it in AKP’s election manifesto. After the election, on June 10, Davutoğlu further clarified his position saying the people did not authorize them to introduce a presidential system with their votes. The resolution process was not the only issue on which the government and Erdoğan diverged before the elections. In October 2014, Davutoğlu’s decision to send four former ministers accused of corruption to the Supreme Court, the draft “Transparency in Public Administration Package” introduced by Davutoğlu at a press conference in February 2015, and the resignation of MIT undersecretary Hakan Fidan to run in the June 7 elections were all Davutoğlu initiatives that Erdoğan intervened and prevented in the run-up to the June 7 elections.

After the June 7 elections, the issue of coalition-formation emerged as the most important point of contention between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu as the election results necessitated the formation of a coalition government, with the AKP’s support dropping from 50% to 41% and the party losing its parliamentary majority. We have seen that the prospect of a broad-based coalition between the AKP and the CHP seemed particularly attractive to business circles. Moreover, Davutoğlu opened the door for a coalition immediately after the election, saying that this was what the voters wanted. In fact, after the first round of talks after he received the mandate to form the government on July 9, the CHP emerged as the most likely government partner because both the MHP and the HDP had objected to a coalition with the AKP; and Davutoğlu himself said that the CHP’s 14-point list of conditions was compatible with the AKP’s 10-point coalition principle. However, from the very beginning, the divergence between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu on this issue was striking, because even before Davutoğlu was given the task of forming a government, we’ve seen that Erdoğan had already revealed the difference in their political priorities by

reminding that if a government could not be formed within 45 days, the constitution authorized the president to call elections and that renewal of elections was one of the options. Even as Davutoğlu was conducting coalition talks, some AKP ministers kept reminding of the option of early elections in their statements, casting Erdoğan's shadow over the process. A then member of parliament revealed that immediately after the June 7 elections, the AKP quickly began to conduct large-scale polls and soon it became clear that the AKP would come to power on its own in the event of a new election. Interviews with then ministers/deputies revealed that Davutoğlu was heavily criticized for wanting to enter into a coalition despite Erdoğan's reluctance to do so, as the only purpose of coalition talks should have been to provide legitimacy for early elections. Finally, after two more back-to-back meetings with the CHP on August 10 and 13, Davutoğlu said that a coalition was no longer possible and early elections remained the only option. When Davutoğlu failed to fulfill the task of forming a government and returned it to the President, Erdoğan could have given the task to the CHP, which came second in the elections, but he did not do so and called for early elections.

We have seen that the coalition government, which Ghannouchi has seen as the key to stability in Tunisia following the revolution, was a dividing issue within the AKP in the period after June 7, and was seen as the key to instability, especially for the wing led by Erdoğan. In the words of a then-minister, the definition of stability for the AKP had become the preservation of the AKP's single-party government; the party failed to realize that the greatest instability was to move away from the party's founding values and principles. Besides, we have seen in an interview that Gül, who had been politically sidelined by Erdoğan at the time, called Erdoğan and Davutoğlu on the phone and talked about the necessity of a coalition.

The failure to form a coalition government that would save Turkey from polarization, unite different political parties on Turkey's agenda and prevent the country from drifting away from democracy has put the country on a path where Erdoğan would increase his control first within the party and then in the country's rule. Therefore, in the run-up to the early elections of November 1, 2015, we've seen that Erdoğan first made his mark on the AKP congress on September 12, 2015, more powerfully than even before, in order to erode Davutoğlu's power within the party as the divergence in his political priorities with Davutoğlu had once again become evident with their disagreement over the formation of a coalition after the June 7 elections. In this congress, Erdoğan not only reduced Davutoğlu's influence within the party, but also completely excluded from the party's governing bodies the AKP's experienced and moderate figures who had a pluralist democratic approach, who were willing to oppose him from time to time, and who were a counterweight to Erdoğan, who

was already prone to interventionism and had a majoritarian democratic approach. Therefore, again as the interviews reveal, by 2015/2016, Erdoğan had reached a point where he perceived any obstacle to what he wanted to do, any institutional mechanism, even the founding/senior members of the party, as tutelage, and sought to eliminate them.

It was reported that Davutoğlu wanted to go to the congress with his own MKYK list, and that signatures on blank sheets of paper were obtained from 900 delegates before the congress, so that if Davutoğlu resisted, Binali Yıldırım could be elected as the chairman at the congress. Therefore, with Davutoğlu stepping back senior/moderate names, known to be close to Abdullah Gül and longing for the AKP's line in the first years of its rule (M. Akyol 2015a), such as Bülent Arınç, Beşir Atalay, Mehmet Şimşek, Ali Babacan, Sadullah Ergin, Osman Can were excluded from the new MKYK list, and names loyal to Erdoğan such as Berat Albayrak, Binali Yıldırım, Burhan Kuzu, Nurettin Canikli, Yalçın Akdoğan, etc., were brought in their place, ignoring Davutoğlu's preferences. For example, we have seen that Ali Babacan and Mehmet Şimşek, who were among the excluded names, defending the independence of the Central Bank, economic rationalism and European norms, had insisted on the independence of the Central Bank in the face of Erdoğan's demands for sharper interest rate cuts based on Erdoğan's theory that "interest is the cause, inflation is the effect;" and since the beginning of 2015 they have been, publicly, targeted by Erdoğan for their resistance, accused of acting on the instructions of the interest lobby and of treason. As the interviews reveal, it was primarily fear of the market that had initially kept Erdoğan from intervening in the management of the economy. His intervention increased as the 2008/2009 crisis tangentially affected Turkey, as his fear diminished and he grew stronger. While Mehmet Şimşek and Ali Babacan were excluded from the party governing bodies, we've seen Yiğit Bulut, one of Erdoğan's economic advisors, happily declare in his newspaper column that financial captivity to the West (through Western economic institutions) and the neo-liberal process of surrender had come to an end. In addition, another important change made at this congress was the abolition of the three-term limit for parliamentary seats through a by-law amendment.

We have seen that Arınç, who was one of the three founders of the party together with Erdoğan and Gül, and who was one of the names excluded from the party at the September 12 congress, had confronted Erdoğan many times until the congress (over the issues such as unmarried female and male students sharing the same house, the Gezi Park protests, Erdoğan's statement that he did not know about the Dolmabahçe palace meeting). We have seen that until 2015, Arınç, who did not react for a long time to Erdoğan's contradicting/refuting him in front of

the cameras, hardened his language from early 2015 onwards. In this regard, in February 2015, he blamed the AKP for the polarization in society, saying “If half of the society loves us, the other half hates us;” in March 2015, he accused Ankara Metropolitan Mayor Melih Gökçek, an Erdoğan loyalist who had called on him to resign, of corruption, saying that he had sold Ankara to “parallel structure;” prior to the June 7 elections, when Erdoğan and Davutoğlu’s government confronted each other several times, he criticized Erdoğan for acting like “a strong president, almost like an undeclared presidency,” and emphasized that even if a presidential system was to be adopted through a constitutional amendment, the new system had be “Alafranga (European/Western) style, not Alaturka (Turkish/Ottoman) style,” in line with the AKP’s program and the line the party had adopted in the first years of its rule; finally, in an interview he gave before the AKP congress on September 12, 2015, he stated that he did not want to take part in the governing bodies of the party because “the spirit of ‘we’ was replaced by the spirit of ‘me,’” indicating Erdoğan’s tendency to become one-man within the party and expressing his longing for the founding values of the AKP, an important one of which was the common wisdom/intellect.

Erdoğan’s more hardline tendency was also visible in the election campaign. It was possible to see the influence of his new security-ist/nationalist line (including some Islamist elements) in the new AKP election slogans and symbols at the rallies. The Turkish flag became the only election symbol, while the slogan “local and national” was used at rallies along with the slogans “one nation, one flag, one homeland, one state” and “fight to the end.” Furthermore, since Davutoğlu and Erdoğan’s political priorities/goals continued to diverge after the elections, with Erdoğan pursuing a policy based on the dichotomy of friend and foe, and Davutoğlu pursuing a policy based on the rule of law and human rights, i.e. the political approach outlined in the AKP program, Erdoğan, who at the September 12 congress packed the party’s governing bodies with his own loyalists, ousted Davutoğlu in an internal coup, in May 2016, only few months after the elections, after Erdoğan loyalist MKYK members gathered signatures to restrict some of Davutoğlu’s executive powers in the party, thereby ensuring his complete domination of the party.

We have seen that Davutoğlu and Erdoğan had many confrontations after the November 1 elections that led to Davutoğlu’s dismissal from the party’s chairmanship. On November 28, 2015, Davutoğlu stated that it would be better for Can Dündar and Erdem Gül, who were arrested on charges of espionage for their reporting on the MIT trucks, to be tried without pre-trial detention, while Erdoğan consistently accused both the journalists and their newspaper (Cumhuriyet) of espionage, and intervened in the trial process; On April 3, 2016, Davutoğlu gave the

green light to the resumption of the resolution process on condition that all armed elements of the PKK leave the country, but the next day Erdoğan made a scolding statement saying that there was no issue to be resolved and “let it be known as such;” Following Davutoğlu’s remarks in January 2016 advocating the trial without pre-trial detention of the academics who had signed the “peace declaration” calling for peace talks with Kurdish militants and who had been dismissed from their posts and investigated, Erdoğan objected on April 6, 2016, saying “what does it mean to be tried without detention, if he is guilty, he will be tried in pre-trial detention;” On May 3, 2016, at the AKP’s Central Executive Committee (MKYK) meeting, MKYK members opened for signature a proposal to strip Davutoğlu of his authority to appoint local party leaders, allegedly, on the grounds that Davutoğlu did not take Erdoğan’s recommendations into account when making appointments to party organizations, a proposal also signed by Davutoğlu himself and Binali Yıldırım, who had intended to challenge Davutoğlu to become the party chairman at the September 12 congress.

Davutoğlu’s forced resignation as party leader was carried out despite the fact that Davutoğlu, as AKP chairman and prime minister, had increased the party’s votes and the number of seats in parliament in the November 1, 2015 elections, which saw the AKP win 49.5% of the vote, bringing the AKP’s number of seats in parliament to 317. With Davutoğlu’s removal as party leader, the concepts of pluralist democracy and intra-party democracy were completely pushed to the background; and “domestic and national politics” discourse, with the friend-foe dichotomy and a conspiratorial discourse against any criticism, has become the only discourse in the party, in an environment where Erdoğan gained enormous power with a mass of admirers, a huge media empire and countless followers in all institutions. Therefore, the AKP, which was born as a movement of common mind/intellect, since intra-party democracy was the most important ambition of the renovationists who had broken away from the National Outlook tradition, has officially transformed into an “Erdoğan movement,” in the post-November 1 period, in which the production of politics, ideas and policy development for the party has been completely/exclusively monopolized by Erdoğan (Çakır 2018).

As Davutoğlu and Erdoğan represented competing discourses after Davutoğlu’s ascension to the prime ministership, undoubtedly, Davutoğlu’s forced resignation in what can be called an internal party coup was an important turning point in the AKP’s authoritarian turn. We have seen that, after this move by Erdoğan, in the words of some, the AKP *de facto* ceased to be a party, and turned into an office under the presidency; in the words of some others, the era of negotiating alternative/competing discourses and policies in the AKP’s governing bodies and state

administration came to an end; in the words of others, state institutions also began to lose control over their institutional spaces after this resignation as Erdoğan's idea that "I decide for everything, every single thing," in the words of an interviewee, started to be de facto implemented after Davutoğlu's resignation, even though the legal basis for this intervention had to wait for the 2017 constitution. Thus, to many interviewees and analysts, Davutoğlu's resignation marked the date, the principle of "common reason/intellect," which had been adopted in the AKP program, with lessons learned from their experiences in the National Outlook parties, to prevent an evolution towards one-man rule, was completely shelved. In conclusion, according to all these approaches, Davutoğlu's resignation is an important turning point in the authoritarian turn.

On the other hand, according to another view, even if the harmony between them later disappeared, Davutoğlu's appointment as prime minister as a result of the unity of goals (of promoting Turkey as a leader and model country in the region) and (neo-Ottomanist/civilizationist) discourse between him and Erdoğan, which resulted in Abdullah Gül (the frontrunner in intra-party polls) being sidelined by a political maneuver, was also part of the "anomaly." This was because Davutoğlu did not come to power through healthy leadership succession. On the contrary, it was Erdoğan's reluctance to relinquish the leadership of the party and the government that led him to choose Davutoğlu, on the grounds that they shared a common goal/discourse and that Davutoğlu would not slip into a competing discourse.

After November 1, the emergence of the movement as Erdoğan's movement was manifested in a smear campaign against Arınç after he criticized domestic/foreign policy issues in a program (on January 29, 2016), involving young AKP MPs, social media trolls, pro-AKP media and Erdoğan himself, which amounted to a lynching attempt. We've seen Arınç's remarks in this program that the Dolmabahçe Memorandum had taken place with Erdoğan's knowledge; and his criticism of the fight against the "parallel state," which had turned into a witch hunt, with the words "I want to wear my robe again;" his criticism of the smear campaigns organized by social media trolls (in discrediting and dismissing senior members of the party); his criticism of Erdoğan's use of foreign policy issues as objects of hostility at public rallies; his criticism of the prosecution of Cumhuriyet's Editor-in-Chief Can Dündar and Ankara Representative Erdem Gül on charges of "aiding a terrorist organization without being a member of it" for their news report on MIT trucks; and his statement that the judges received instructions from "certain places," were enough for a major smear campaign to be launched against him. More precisely, we've seen that Arınç was subjected to a lynch attempt in which headlines such as "Cübbeli Bülo," "FETÖ's protector," and accusations of "turning his back on his companion/wife to

whom he owed all his titles when his interests were over,” “being dishonest,” serving “Erdoğan’s enemies” and taking part in a “political operation” against Erdoğan, were thrown at Arınç.

With the AKP characterized by an Islamist/nationalist line and characterized by a conspirational and friends-foe-dichotomy-based rhetoric, and with the security-oriented reflexes that characterized the state in the 1990s once again coming to the fore, we have seen the formation of a coalition with the MHP led by Bahçeli, who had just taken control of the party by purging the opposition within the party, following a thwarted coup attempt by the FETÖ in July. We have seen that what gave the MHP the power to design joint policies with the AKP in the aftermath of the coup attempt by FETÖ on July 15, 2016, was Bahçeli’s suggestion in his group speech on October 11th that the Republic of Turkey was “struggling for its survival,” at a time when the AKP’s, and thus Erdoğan’s, security concerns were at their peak, and thus, became the locomotive of the transition to a presidential system.

Moreover, in the post-coup environment, where security was the primary concern, the country was governed under a state of emergency, which was extended seven times for three months from July 21, 2016, to July 17, 2018; the power granted by Article 121 of the Constitution to the Council of Ministers, convened under the chairmanship of the President during the state of emergency, to issue decrees with the force of law on matters necessitated by the state of emergency was, as we have seen, issued by obtaining blank papers signed by ministers in the council of ministers, with Erdoğan as the sole decision-maker in practice even before the transition to a presidential system. One dimension of this period’s anti-democratic practices has been decrees that have raised concerns about accountability, civil liberties, transparency, the rule of law and checks on state power.

We have seen that in the two years after the July 15 coup attempt, 36 decrees were issued, some of which led to the dismissal of tens of thousands of public employees. The dismissals from public institutions by decrees with the force of law (KHK) were an indication of the “unlawfulness” of this process, as although the dismissal of people suspected of FETÖ links was a necessary measure for the state to defend itself in the immediate aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt, any victimization should have been prevented after public order was restored. However, it was not done; these people were left to “social death,” as Yeneroğlu (2020) put it. We have also seen that the main opposition CHP applied to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of decrees that failed to fulfill the requirement of Article 121 of the Constitution to be “on matters necessitated by the state of emergency,” but the Constitutional Court declared that it was not authorized to review decrees issued during the state of

emergency. Thus, emergency decrees were excluded from judicial review until the government, under increasing internal and external pressure, decided in July 2018 to establish, by decree, a State of Emergency Commission (OHAL) authorized to consider applications from dismissed public employees or shut down institutions.

Widespread detentions, arrests, and trustee practices as a means of repression against the opposition constituted another dimension of the anti-democratic practices of this period. According to reports, tens of thousands of people were arrested, more than 50,000 people were detained, 169,000 people were subjected to legal proceedings, more than 1 million people have undergone terror membership investigation in the two years after the coup. In an environment where creating a “climate of fear” and “criminalization of people with different world views” has been one of the main pillars of the regime (Yeneroğlu 2020), the number of imprisoned journalists and press workers reached 150 in 2018, placing Turkey at the top of the list of imprisoned journalists, according to data from the Platform for Independent Journalism. We have seen the largest group of those arrested were pro-Kurdish HDP (and a large number of CHP MPs) MPs and mayors. Between April 28 and June 21, 362 HDP members were detained. In November 2016, 15 HDP MPs, including co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, were arrested for allegedly supporting terrorism following the constitutional amendment to lift the immunity of MPs, which was passed by the parliament on May 20, 2016, and approved by President Erdoğan on June 8, 2016. As of January 2018, trustees were appointed in 94 of 102 HDP municipalities, with no legal action taken against them.

The AKP’s referendum campaign, which took place in the post-July 15 emergency rule environment, when democracy indices showed a sharp decline in Turkey’s ratings and rankings, was characterized by anti-Western, populist friend-foe-dichotomy-based, nationalist and Islamist rhetoric, as well as accusations of increased repression against the “no” camp and an uneven playing field.

After the deterioration of relations with the West/EU in the aftermath of the Arab Spring with the Syrian crisis, and after “cooperation in areas of interest” was introduced as the new axis of relations with the agreement signed with the EU in March 2016, which stipulated that Turkey would prevent the flow of refugees to the EU in exchange for more financial aid, the post-July 15 period marked the phase in which anti-Westernism was used most as a domestic policy tool (Balta 2021, 1), and relations with the West deteriorated further, mainly due to the fact that there was a strong belief in the government that FETÖ members fleeing Turkey were protected in these countries and that the coup attempt was supported by the U.S. administration. Although Prime Minister Erdoğan had long refrained from directly

accusing the United States, it was Soylu, then Minister of Labor, who first raised the allegation of American support behind the coup the day after the coup. Erdoğan's first accusation against the U.S. came in late 2018, when he characterized the U.S. trial of Iranian businessman Zarrab and former Halkbank Deputy General Manager Atilla as an "extension" of the failed coup attempt. As for the reasons for the deteriorating relations with the EU during the campaign period, Germany and the EU's reaction to the February 2017 arrest in Turkey of Deniz Yücel, Turkey correspondent for the German Die Welt newspaper, on charges of "terrorist propaganda and inciting hatred and hatred among the public" for his reporting on the hacked emails of then Energy Minister Berat Albayrak; the refusal of some European countries to allow Turkish government officials to hold referendum rallies in their countries; the deportation of Fatma Betül Kaya, the then Minister of Family and Social Policies, who tried to circumvent this ban by trying to cross from Germany to the Netherlands by land; numerous reactions from European countries to the increasing crackdown on the opposition and anti-democratic character of the referendum package; Erdoğan's repeated "Nazi" comparisons to European governments that prevented Turkish ministers from meeting Turkish citizens, and his subsequent characterization of the European Union as a "crusader alliance," were the main ones.

During this campaign, Erdoğan's call for voters' support to "stop the rising wave of racism, Islamophobia and Turcophobia in European countries" (Milliyet Apr. 3, 2017) and his opening the door, first, to a referendum to decide whether to continue EU accession negotiations and then to reinstate the death penalty, revealed Erdoğan's new anti-Western/Islamist/nationalist line. The AKP-MHP rapprochement and the AKP's new nationalist line was also reflected in campaign symbols such as the joint hanging of posters of Erbakan, Türkeş and Yazıcıoğlu at the referendum rally in Ankara and slogans such as "one flag, one nation, one state," "Yes, Strong Turkey" and the slogan "the guarantee of Turkey's national unity" for the new Turkish-type presidential system. As for the repression against the "no" camp during the referendum campaign, reportedly, over 100 threats/attacks were made against the "no" camp; over 120 detentions were recorded; 4 MHP MPs were expelled; many conference halls cancelled the events of the "no" camp; and at universities, the university administrations themselves prevented the activities of the "no" camp; their posters were taken down from billboards; private halls did not give them space in the first place to avoid getting in trouble with the government; they did not appear on television channels. As for the criticism of the uneven playing field reported by the HDP, the main issues were their not even being allowed to hold rallies due to State of Emergency restrictions, and the detention of nearly 300 HDP members and executives between February 1 and March 20 alone, 18 of whom were

arrested.

As a result, in this referendum, held on April 16, 2017, in which voters in Turkey were asked for the first time to change the system of government, the 18-article constitutional amendment package, put forward by the AKP-MHP alliance, and passed by parliament on January 20, 2017, with 339 votes, exceeding the required three-fifths of the vote, was approved with 51.4% “yes” and 48.6% “no” votes, amid controversy over the Supreme Electoral Council’s (YSK) decision to recognize unsealed votes as valid unless it is proven that they were brought from outside. As a result of this referendum, which represented the official transition from a parliamentary system to a “Turkish-type” presidential system, Turkey’s only link to democracy remained elections, as a former minister said in a face-to-face meeting. As a matter of fact, this package concentrated all power in the presidential office; and with Erdoğan having the opportunity to control both the parliament and the judiciary, it abolished the separation of powers/weakened checks and balances.

In a nutshell, this package has stripped parliament of its powers. Under the new system, the President would maintain his ties with his party; be able to legislate by decree in addition to the laws passed by parliament; declare a state of emergency; appoint ministers by decree without parliamentary approval; and prepare a budget. We have seen that, in practice (according to data compiled from the Official Gazette), the number of laws, passed by Parliament, has decreased year by year since 2016; the number of laws passed decreased by 89% in just 2 years after Turkey officially switched to the Turkish presidential system; and the number of presidential decrees exceeded the number of laws in just one year. Moreover, reportedly, between June 2018 and June 2019, the number of articles in laws enacted was around 600, while the number of articles in presidential decrees was around 1900. In addition, as one constitutional law professor put it, not only has the scope of presidential decrees vastly expanded, but there has been no parliamentary oversight mechanism in place. Hence, the President has issued decrees in areas that the Constitution has stipulated to be regulated by law (e.g. the establishment of the Justice Academy by Decree No. 34, and Decree No. 1 linking local governments to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization).

As constitutional law professors pointed out, the independence of the judiciary has also been damaged, as the President’s weight in appointments to the higher judiciary, particularly the Constitutional Court, has been increased. As they emphasized, although the constitution provides for 3 members of the Constitutional Court to be appointed by the Parliament and the remaining 12 members by the President - 8 members from among the candidates nominated by the Council of State, the Court

of Cassation and the Council of Higher Education, and 4 members directly by the President - since Erdoğan, who is both president and AKP chairman, also has the authority to appoint members of the Council of Higher Education, and since the People's Alliance holds power in the parliament, it has been impossible to expect the members of the Constitutional Court appointed by either the parliament or the Council of Higher Education to be independent. Another criticism of the independence of the judiciary has been the increased powers of the President over the High Council of Prosecutors (HSK), a body in charge of taking the most critical decisions in the higher judiciary, from the personal rights of judges to their appointments and promotions, since in the new system, the number of members of the HSK is reduced to 13, while the President retains the power to appoint six members, including the minister of justice and the undersecretary of the ministry, who are the natural members of the council, and the parliament is authorized to appoint the remaining seven members. On the other hand, the Council of State, the Supreme Court of Appeals, and judges and prosecutors are not been authorized to appoint members to the HSK. In the words of a former AKP MP in our interview, this referendum has become the legal basis for interfering in all state institutions that over the years had been able to develop/strengthen their institutional existence and develop the ability to repel outside interference.

With the constitutional amendment package removing the clause requiring the elected president to sever ties with the party, Erdoğan's return to the helm of his party three years later, at an extraordinary congress held on May 21, 2017, has created an overlap of titles as President and AKP Chairman, and played an important role in Erdoğan's increasing synonymization of state and party. Yet, as the interviews reveal, during the AKP's first period in power (2002-2007), when the AKP was making a democratic leap forward, Erdoğan would repeatedly criticize the short period when CHP provincial chairmen had also been the governors of those provinces. And in the words of a former minister, "today there is no governor of the AKP who does not support the AKP." Moreover, according to interviewees, governors in the eastern and southeastern provinces, today are indoctrinated that the way to protect the state is to support the AKP campaign there, carry out serious campaigns on behalf of the AKP (as the state has overlapped with the party); even the distribution of social assistance has changed in the new period in favor of the provinces with a higher percentage of votes for the AKP - whereas ranking provinces according to a socio-economic development index and paying incentives to provinces below a certain threshold, i.e. ensuring fairness in the distribution of social assistance, was one of the social policies that marked the early years of the AKP.

Moreover, we have seen that both during the referendum period and the 2018 election

period, the sole aim of getting Erdoğan elected as president has prevented any self-criticism of either the party or the coalition. As a result, in the 2017 referendum, to which the AKP attached great importance, the “no” vote came out ahead by a margin of 2.4% in both Ankara and Istanbul; and the “yes” vote in the referendum was 10 points lower than the combined AKP and MHP vote (61.4%) in the November 1, 2015 elections. Moreover, the AKP failed to realize that its coalition with the MHP only produced results in favor of the MHP.

We have seen that the passage of the referendum package and Erdoğan’s subsequent statement that he would approve the death penalty if it came before him was met with reaction from the EU, with some EU member states even calling on the EU to end Turkey’s EU membership process. Afterwards, €70 million in aid to Turkey was frozen and conditioned on “progress in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law,” only to be cancelled in October 2018, after the European Commission’s 2018 progress report stated that progress had not been made in these areas. We have also seen that the General Assembly of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the executive body of the Council of Europe, established to “promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law,” voted by 113 votes to 45 to reinstate Turkey in the monitoring process from which it was removed in 2004. For this decision, then Prime Minister Yıldırım accused PACE of being under the influence of racism, Islamophobia and anti-Turkey sentiment; Presidential Spokesperson Kalın described the decision as a political operation; and then PACE member Markar Esayan called the experts of the Turkey report terror organization sympathizers, far from stepping back and engaging in a process of introspection.

In 2017, after Trump came to power in the US, Turkey-US relations further deteriorated as a result of many mutual steps taken. The events that contributed to this were as follows: The US President’s rejection of Turkey’s request to join the Raqqa operation against ISIS together; and the U.S. launching the operation with the YPG, which Turkey considers a terrorist organization; and the U.S. arms support to the YPG before and after the Raqqa operation; Turkey’s purchase of the S-400 air defense system from Russia; the U.S. administration’s failure to extradite FETÖ leader to Turkey; and Turkey’s detention of some U.S. embassy officials on the grounds that they were part of the Gülen organization; the U.S. response by suspending visa activities in Turkey; the U.S. administration’s demand for the release of the U.S. cleric Brunson, who had been imprisoned in Turkey; Erdoğan’s response, “You have a priest too. Give the priest, take the priest;” the Reza Zarrab case, which began in New York in November and was characterized by the AKP spokesperson and the Prime Minister as “an attempt to hold Turkey hostage,” and “an attempt

to squeeze Turkey,” respectively; the remarks of the U.S. National Security Advisor that “Turkey and Qatar are the new sponsors of radical ideologies”; and finally, the U.S. decision to move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

We have seen that, in contrast to relations with the West/EU, relations with Russia started to improve from 2016 onwards, as the PYD/PKK, supported by the US, Turkey’s traditional ally (in the Western alliance system), gained a strong foothold on Turkey’s southern border, forcing Turkey to side with Russia in order to create room for maneuver in Syria to prevent the creation of a Kurdish state to its south. In 2016, an important background condition was that Assad had taken control of Aleppo in 2016, causing Turkey’s hopes for Assad’s fall to completely disappear. Hence, Turkey allied with Russia during, what Balta (2021) calls, “a phase of nationalist expansionism, anti-Westernism and the return of containment on the Kurdish issue.”

The improvement in relations with Russia manifested itself in June 2016, when the Kremlin informed Erdogan in a letter that Turkey had “apologized” for shooting down a Russian warplane in 2015; on July 25, 2017, Erdogan announced the signing of the S-400 missile defense system deal in his speech at the AKP parliamentary group meeting; the trade volume between the two countries increased by 30% in 2017 compared to the previous year; the number of tourists coming from Russia increased by 500% compared to 2016; the start of the Astana talks in January 2017, which brought together the Syrian government and the opposition to seek a solution in Syria and implemented de-escalation zones in Syria; and the decision of Russia, Iran and Turkey, as guarantor countries, to send 500 troops each to Idlib to maintain the ceasefire, according to the agreement reached on September 15.

After Turkey moved further away from the West/EU and closer to Russia, and after the AKP introduced the Turkish-type presidential system with the MHP paving the way, the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2019 were held on June 24, 2018, again with the MHP calling for early elections. In these elections, in which the People’s Alliance of the MHP and the AKP competed against the Nation’s Alliance of the CHP, the Good (İYİ) Party, the Felicity Party (SP) and the Democratic Party (DP), Erdoğan ran as the presidential candidate of the People’s Alliance. In line with the party’s line at the time, Erdoğan’s election manifesto, announced on May 6, was shaped around a domestic and national discourse with some Islamist elements; and in line with the same discourse, it emphasized dates such as 1071 Malazgirt, the War of Independence and the July 15 coup attempt in order to create a common sense of identity. Therefore, unlike the “civilization” discourse that Davutoğlu and Erdoğan had once adopted, this time the common

identity was not sought in the imperial/Ottoman and Seljuk past. Looking at the strategy of these elections, the difference with the AKP's globalist, urban, conservative democratic, freedom-oriented line in its early years, was striking. For, as one columnist put it, the new strategy turned into "a local and national provincial strategy ... stuck in the consciousness of the call to prayer and the flag;" and intended for the provinces (Çakır 2018). However, the fact that provincial voters (especially in Central/Eastern Anatolia and the Black Sea regions) shifted their voter preferences from AKP to MHP in the elections also revealed that this strategy had been adopted for pragmatic purposes without much thought. As also highlighted by some analysts, Erdoğan's pragmatic shift to a nationalist line/discourse in order to maintain his power after shelving the Resolution Process, and the electoral coalition with the MHP in the referendum, locked him into this conservative/nationalist line (Kösebalaban 2020, 342).

Just as in 2017, the adoption of the package was the sole objective and the referendum results were not adequately evaluated, we have seen that, in 2018, the sole objective of Erdoğan's election as president has led to an incomplete evaluation of the election results. After all, even though Erdoğan's election as president in the first round was seen as the most tangible proof of success in AKP circles, and even though the People's Alliance managed to secure a majority in the parliament with 53.66% of the vote, the AKP lost around 2.5 million votes, or 7% of its vote, compared to the previous general elections. For example, we have seen that in the post-election analysis of the pro-AKP think tank SETA (İmiş and Duran 2018), although the 7-point drop in the AKP's votes and the shift in voter preferences from AKP to MHP were mentioned, this was presented as a sign of the public's approval of the MHP-AKP coalition and as conservative voters "rewarding" the MHP, without any negative assessment of the party's new line and values. Therefore, AKP circles failed to realize that the election results benefited the MHP more than the AKP.

In fact, in the first elections held under the new system, which had been promoted on the grounds that it relieved the executive from coalition obligations and which had been adopted in a referendum, the AKP lost its parliamentary majority and 16 years of uninterrupted rule - except for a short period between June 7 and November 1, 2015 - and now had to form a coalition in parliament, and was dependent on the support of the MHP, a far-right political party that espoused Turkish nationalism, for every law that would pass through the parliamentary process. Moreover, although the MHP entered the elections as part of the People's Alliance and had the opportunity to design joint policies with the AKP, it showed that it would not share the political responsibility for the policies to be implemented while enjoying

the benefits of power when the MHP leader said in his post-election speech that the people had given the MHP the task of supervising/balancing the AKP.

Moreover, due to the amendments to the electoral regulations adopted by the Parliament three months before the elections, the public perception of electoral fraud had further increased. The enacted legislation allowed for the acceptance of unsealed ballot papers sent by authorized election boards. This was a formal endorsement of the YSK's controversial practice in the 2017 referendum, where it had reinterpreted the electoral regulations and approved unsealed ballot papers, raising concerns among voters. Moreover, we have seen that the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe Venice Commission (2018) also stated in its report that this amendment to the Law on the Basic Provisions on Elections and Voter Registers was misinterpreted by the Supreme Electoral Board (YSK), and left room for arbitrariness.

The 2018 election law amendment package, also known as the “coalition package” because it had paved the way for political parties to form electoral coalitions, also gave the YSK the power to relocate polling stations and merge electoral districts. Although officials argued that the law was amended to prevent the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) from intimidating voters in the predominantly Kurdish southeastern provinces, the pro-Kurdish HDP objected to the measure, after the announcement of it by the YSK in May, saying the real intention behind the maneuver was to move polling stations in villages that strongly support the HDP to nearby villages that predominantly support the AKP, thus preventing the HDP from entering parliament in the June elections.

On the other hand, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) also, in its post-election analysis, announced that the June 24, 2018 elections were unfair and took place on an extremely unequal playing field (Euronews Sep. 7, 2018). In this regard, the report noted that the elections were held under a state of emergency, which was extended for the seventh time despite warnings from various international actors and institutions; and that, although on paper the electoral laws are based on equality and fairness, the restrictions set by law were not applied to the President and his party (e.g. state employees made statements in support of the ruling party and its candidate, even though this was against the rules); that the AKP abused state facilities during the campaign period and in the run-up to the elections (e.g. state transport was used for the AKP's and Erdoğan's election campaign); candidates did not have equal campaign opportunities (e.g. all media - including not only the main state broadcaster TRT and its affiliated channels, but also private broadcasters - gave Erdoğan far more airtime than his rivals; state channels did not even broadcast the largest opposition party rallies; Erdoğan's ri-

vals, especially Selahattin Demirtaş, the imprisoned former leader of the HDP and presidential candidate, had extremely low coverage). Similarly, Reuters (Jun. 20, 2018) reported that President Erdoğan and the AKP were given a total of 67 hours of coverage on state-run TRT, 60 hours more than his rival Muharrem İnce. Human Rights Watch (Jun. 7, 2018) also reported that voters had limited access to information about candidates and parties and to news/commentary not controlled by the government.

After the election, many critics emphasized that Erdoğan's monopoly over the media was the most important obstacle to the free and fair conduct of the 2018 elections. This media monopoly was created when Doğan Holding, long a collaborator of the secularist establishment, sold the best-selling Hürriyet newspaper and several other media outlets, including CNN Türk, to Demirören Holding, which already owned two pro-government newspapers. On March 5, 2016, as part of the fight against FETÖ, the government seized Zaman, a daily newspaper with close links to the Gülen organization. By mid-2018, 120 journalists had been detained and more than 180 media outlets had been shut down for alleged links to FETÖ, the organizers and executors of the failed coup attempt. In April 2018, 14 employees of the opposition Cumhuriyet newspaper, were sentenced to various prison terms on charges of aiding terrorism. As a result, by 2018 Turkey ranked 157th out of 180 countries on the global press freedom index, with only a handful of non-AKP newspapers left in the country. Finally, Turkey officially switched to a presidential system in 2018, the Freedom House democracy index, which ranks countries on the basis of political and civil rights, ranked Turkey as "not free."

In summary, although the AKP came to power in 2002 through a post-Islamist transformation process that included criticism of the National Outlook parties, the AKP case, like the Tunisian Nahda, has shown that post-Islamist transformation is necessary but not sufficient for democratization/democratic consolidation as the Erdoğan-led AKP, in its third term, with the EU incentive and the fear of the market and the secularist establishment gone, and with the support of almost one out of every two voters in the country in the 2011 elections, when it had to choose between democracy or authoritarianism, has gradually turned authoritarian as Erdoğan engaged in a process of consolidation of his power in response to the crises he experienced at home; the crises being the FETÖ-initiated February 7 plot (2012), the Gezi Park protests (2013), the December 17/25 corruption allegations (2013), the emergence of a security vacuum in southern Turkey due to the strengthening of the PYD/PKK (2015) and simultaneously declining support in the polls, and the FETÖ-initiated July 15 coup attempt (2016).

Hence, the main findings concerning the process of the democratic backsliding in Turkey in the thesis are as follows:

The disappearance of the EU membership (2005/2006) as an incentive, the market (2008/2009) and the secularist military-led establishment (2010) as restraining factors for the AKP, and the Arab Spring (2011), with the onset of which the Davutoğlu/Erdogan duo was convinced that Turkey could seek a leadership position in the region, have been important background conditions for the democratic-backsliding.

The path away from democracy was paved in the post-Arab Spring period by the empowerment of a leader who was able to purge the moderate/stabilizing core AKP cadres one by one, even though party cohesion had been, initially, preserved following the removal of internal and external constraints on the AKP.

From the AKP's third term in power onwards, notions of pluralist and majoritarian democracy competed in the party for a while, but with the shelving of the resolution process, pluralist democracy was completely put on the back seat with the elimination of the cadres representing it; and the party shifted to an Islamist/nationalist line and the country's democracy went downhill.

The AKP's responses to the 2007 presidential election crisis have also contributed to Erdoğan's subsequent consolidation of his power:

- The constitutional amendment following the impositions such as the “367 decision” and the “April 27 e-memorandum” paved the way for the presidential system when the president started to be elected by the people; the subsequent conflicts that arose between an elected president and prime minister led Erdoğan to get rid of the prime ministerial position and move to the “Turkish-type” presidential system.
- Erdoğan's distrust of Gül, an important figure within the party with a balancing role against him, which emerged during the 2007 presidential election crisis, has subsequently deepened (with other issues of conflict) and widened to include other people. In 2014-2016 this resulted in the elimination of moderate people who represented the notion of pluralist democracy in the party.
- In the 2007 presidential election crisis, the tactical alliance with the Gülen group allowed the group to grow increasingly self-confident in the following years and to build a secret structure within the state; the government's war against this structure in response to FETÖ-inspired crises, the first being the February 7 plot (2012) against the National Intelligence Agency (MIT) and the last being the July 15 coup attempt (2016), contributed to AKP's

authoritarian turn.

As for Tunisia, the country where the Arab Spring began with the self-immolation of a street vendor, on December 14, 2010, found itself once again in the grip of authoritarianism with the adoption of the new constitution on July 25, 2022, before it could complete its democratic transition. Hence, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's democracy index, Tunisia after the revolution, was upgraded to hybrid regime status in 2011 and to flawed democracy status in 2014, only to fall back to hybrid regime status in 2021. On the other hand, Afrobarometer surveys have also revealed public disillusionment with democracy, governments and parties from 2013 onwards, until Saied seized power and ended Tunisia's experiment with democracy. Accordingly, throughout this process, there has been a steady decline in public support for democracy, a steady increase in support for alternative regimes such as one-man regimes (up to 57% in 2020); and the proportion of people who think the country was heading in a bad direction has consistently remained above 70%.

Undoubtedly, the main reason for this popular disillusionment with governments, parties, and democracy was the failure to address the fundamental problems that had given rise to the revolution - unemployment, poverty, police brutality - during this decade of democratic transition. Indeed, according to another poll conducted by the International Republican Institute at the end of 2020, a few months before President Saied came to power, 85% of the population felt that the government was "doing little or nothing" to meet their needs, while 81% felt that ministries and 88% felt that MPs were "doing little or nothing" to meet their needs. According to this survey, 87% felt that the country was moving in the wrong direction. Thus, these figures show that even though Tunisia was able to preserve democracy for a decade, during this time, the public quickly soured on democracy/government/parties and opened the door to one-man rule again, as the expectations that led to the revolution were not met due to the mistakes/deficiencies of the governments.

In this section, we have discussed Nahda's positive/negative impact on Tunisian democracy both in the first 8 years after the revolution, i.e., after the 2011 revolution until the 2019 elections, in which Saied, a populist figure ascended to the presidency, and after that until the referendum on the new constitution in July 2022, a year after his seizure of power, which concentrated all powers in Saied's hands. It is fair to say that Ennahda, the party with the largest number of seats in parliament for most of the post-revolutionary period and a permanent member of coalition governments, played a big part in both the preservation of democracy for a decade and the public's disenchantment with democracy and its turn towards populist parties/individuals

by carrying consensus-based politics too far, by forgetting that democracy is also a political regime in which alternative policies compete, by not contributing to the solution of the problems created by the revolution, and by carrying the image of having made peace with the old regime too far, and for the continued public tolerance of Saied after his constitutional coup by failing to offer an alternative economic prescription. Thus, our main finding is that post-Islamist transformation is necessary but not sufficient for formerly Islamist actors to contribute to democracy.

This thesis treats Ennahda as a post-Islamist party since the revolution, a characteristic most evident in Ghannouchi's statements on the compatibility of Islam with democracy/modernity and the party's dialogue/consensus-first stance, which does not hesitate to make concessions for democracy. We have seen that especially in the first years after the revolution, Ennahda under Ghannouchi's leadership has tried to forge a political space for itself, caught between, on the one hand, the Islamist elements at the grassroots and in the party, who accused it of surrendering too much to the secular elements in the country, and, on the other hand, the secular actors in the country (i.e. the bureaucracy, parties, media and trade unions), who have always been suspicious of its Islamist tendencies. Thus, we have seen that Ennahda's post-Islamist line was established as an emphasis on the compatibility of Islam with secularism/democracy in the face of divisions with Islamists within the party, and as a simultaneous overly compromising position in the rush/obligation to differentiate itself from Islamists in the eyes of secular actors, so that while the first position contributed to democracy, the over insistence on the second position ultimately undermined democracy.

On the other hand, we have seen that the fraction led by Ghannouchi, which defined the party's course after the revolution, pursued a post-Islamist line of politics from the outset, even if it had some wobbles in the first post-revolutionary years due to pressure/criticisms from Islamists within the party/at the grassroots. Therefore, even though the post-Islamist line as the official party identity was established in 2016, this thesis has taken Ennahda as a post-Islamist party since the revolution. Thus, in interviews with Ghannouchi and others at the core of the movement, we've found that even though the Muslim Brotherhood was the first source of influence of the *Jamaat al-Islamiyya* movement, of which Ghannouchi and his friends was a member in the 1970s, and through this influence, they opposed the westernization and secularization of Tunisia, over time (during the 70s/80s), as their sources of influence diversified, they quickly broke away from the Muslim Brotherhood. Among the diversity of sources that brought about the break with the Muslim Brotherhood, there were the leftist student movements and trade unions in the 70s/80s, the left-

wing parties with which they maintained their contacts during their exile after 1989; and with these influences, concepts such as democracy, elections and gender equality quickly entered the movement's jargon from the 70s onwards, as the interviews revealed.

We have seen that Ghannouchi, who is the intellectual leader of Ennahda, and the main representative in Ennahda of the post-Islamist position mentioned above, namely the idea that Islam and democracy are compatible, had also expressed the movement's commitment to democracy in the founding manifesto of the *Movement of Islamic Tendency* (MTI), which he announced at a press conference in 1981. However, we see in Ghannouchi's account that he fully internalized this idea between 1981 and 1985, when he thought deeply and wrote books on concepts such as the idea of democracy in Islam, the Muslim democrat, and freedom in Islam, and became convinced that "freedom is the main value of Islam." We've seen that Ghannouchi, the intellectual leader of Nahda and the main representative in Nahda of the discourse that Islam and democracy are compatible, expressed the movement's commitment to democracy in the founding manifesto of the Movement of the Islamic Tendency (MTI), which he announced at a press conference in 1981. However, in Ghannouchi's account, we see that he fully internalized this idea and became convinced that "freedom is the fundamental value of Islam" between 1981 and 1985, when he thought deeply and wrote books on the idea of democracy in Islam, the Muslim democrat and freedom in Islam.

We've seen that although the post-1989 movement was divided into exiles who went abroad and those who stayed in Tunisia and spent many years under Ben Ali's oppression and in prisons, and although, as will become clear after the revolution, a cultural divide emerged between these two segments as those who went into exile embraced democracy while those who stayed in Tunisia radicalized, the post-revolutionary line of Ennahda was shaped by the exiles, the so-called post-Islamists, even though it wobbled, especially in the first years after the revolution, as they sought to balance with hardliners; and as of the congress in 2016, the Muslim Democrat identity was officially adopted as the party line, as mentioned above. Therefore, as a party composed of actors with no pre-revolutionary political experience, Ennahda's post-Islamist line has evolved and spread throughout the party as a result of the post-revolutionary political experience, the problems it faced and the lessons it learned, and the ruptures with/confronting the Islamists in the party. Hence, even though the Ghannouchi-led fraction within Ennahda had, as Ghannouchi said at the time, modeled the party's direction after the AKP's harmony between Islam and modernity/democracy, this line has been established as a party identity following increasing Islamist terrorism, the struggles against Salafi Islamist elements within

the party and its base, and the necessity of proving its post-Islamist line to the secularist actors in the country and the old regime loyalists who still maintained their power in the bureaucracy/media.

Until 2016, when the party's identity was officially designated as Muslim Democrat, we have seen a number of watershed moments that have been instrumental in the gradual entrenchment/consolidation of a post-Islamist identity. First, during the drafting of the constitution in 2012, when society was deeply divided over the role of Islam in the constitution, Ghannouchi confronted the hardliners in the party by holding a press conference and saying that there would be no law to impose religion and that it was enough to keep the first article of the 1959 constitution, which stated that Tunisia was a republic, a free and independent state and that its religion was Islam. In 2013, the murder of two leftist politicians marked another turning point when secularist parties/media/unions/segments of society launched a joint campaign to oust Ennahda, which they accused of being responsible for the assassinations by failing to confront hardline Islamists.

As mentioned above, in the period between the secularist campaign against Ennahda and Ennahda's stepping down from power, we have seen that Ennahda has been the one, most committed to reducing polarization in the country and avoiding an authoritarian turn. In this regard, we've seen that in 2013, amid the chaos and political turmoil following the assassination of a leftist leader, Jebali, the then prime minister and secretary general of Ennahda proposed the formation of a neutral government. A government was then formed under the leadership of Ali Larayedh, a senior Ennahda figure, with key ministries given to independents. However, not wanting to stop there, an opposition party leader, Hammami called on society to overthrow the Ennahda government. Furthermore, following the assassination of another leftist leader within a few months, secular parties such as the Popular Front led by Hammami and Nidaa Tounes led by Essebsi wanted to repeat in Tunisia the coup against the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt; and formed an opposition bloc with the same name as the National Salvation Front in Egypt and issued a statement blaming the Troika government and Nahda in particular for atrocities and organized political crime in the country, calling for the resignation of the government and the dissolution of parliament. Moreover, an organization with the same name was formed, modeled on the grassroots movement that organized the protests in Egypt, which also organized anti-government protests. The process reached a political deadlock when protesters burned down the Nahda party headquarters, the UGTT supported the opposition, the secular opposition withdrew from parliament, and the speaker of parliament suspended the functioning of parliament. We have seen that, although statements of readiness to resign continued to come from within

Ennahda, the pressure on the party continued. In the end, in the face of the collapse of the democratic transition and the possibility of a repeat of the Egyptian example in Tunisia, Ennahda agreed to withdraw from the government, this time to form a transitional non-partisan government, on the condition that agreement on a constitution, electoral law, and election dates would be reached before it left power.

We have seen Ghannouchi, in explaining Ennahda's decision to step down from the government in 2013, say that they learned the lesson that the coalition they had built in 2011 was not enough and that in a divided society like Tunisia, it was necessary to include the forces of the old regime and far-left in this consensus rule in order to prevent polarization/confrontation. Whereas in the 2011 elections, a coalition with the Marzouki-led CPR was enough to secure an absolute majority and a vote of confidence in parliament, Ennahda expanded the coalition to include Ettakatol, which had 20 seats in parliament, and formed a coalition with greater support, in line with the recommendations of the literature on transitional democracy and the advice of the AKP, which was their model at the time. And it was mainly after this step down decision in 2013 that the academic and political circles started talking about an Ennahda model that combines Islam and democracy. And as mentioned above, in 2013 political turmoil, the party's decision to step down from power, as well as the party's abandonment of its demands concerning the new constitution, such as age limit and the exclusion of former regime members from holding political office, led to another rift with hardline Islamists within the party, who accused the party leaders of making too many concessions. And as mentioned above, the former members of Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) then constituted the most powerful members of Nidaa Tounes, both numerically and economically.

The constitution, which Ennahda pushed for as a condition for stepping down in the political turmoil of 2013 and which was adopted almost unanimously, also contained too much power-sharing to prevent a return to the old regime, as the then-president noted in our interview. However, the "too much and too vague power-sharing," in the words of an Ennahda MP, between the prime minister and the president in this constitution has complicated the functioning of the state and led to political conflicts, especially given the failure to establish a constitutional court to rule on disputes over the jurisdiction of the president and the prime minister. In a context where this problem has led to political deadlock, we've seen that both Saied, who became president in 2019, and Ghannouchi have made statements expressing the need to change the political system.

As of 2014 elections, Ennahda looked like a party that distanced itself more sharply from radical Islamists, that tried to differentiate itself in the eyes of the electorate

from both the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and ISIS, and that tried to move to the center, even though it still wanted to represent the conservative/Islamist and pro-revolutionary voters. In order to project the image of a party that values power-sharing and democracy, it has put together a list of MPs that would be open to a coalition with Nidaa Tounes. Ghannouchi had come to the conclusion that a coalition with Nidaa Tounes, which included members of the former regime and members of the UGTT, was the only way to neutralize the power of uncompromising secularists in Nidaa Tounes, avoid ideological conflict in the country, and also control their anti-democratic tendencies from within. Interviews with some Ennahda MPs revealed that a place in the government-state apparatus and in parliament was important to maintain control over Nidaa Tounes so that the majority would not abuse its power and the transition process would not deviate from democracy.

During the campaign period, Ghannouchi gave speeches at many institutions in the U.S., emphasizing the importance of consensus and coalition-building to preserve democracy in the transition process, and the importance of maintaining a power balance between parties where no one party dominates over the others, and where no one party is excluded from politics. It also refused to field a candidate in the presidential elections on the grounds that it wanted to maintain this balance, in the words of Ghannouchi. We've seen that in contrast to Ennahda, Nidaa Tounes ran a highly polarizing campaign, with a "cynical discourse" towards Ennahda and a positive remembrance of the ancien regime. Following the parliamentary elections, in which Nidaa Tounes emerged as the first party, we have also seen that Nahda leaders decided to support Essebsi in the presidential elections in order not to miss the opportunity of a coalition with Nidaa Tounes, even though Essebsi's presidential campaign was built on the promise of rebuilding a strong state and a strong anti-Islamist platform, and even though majority of Ennahda members supported Marzouki. We've also seen that while Ennahda managed to maintain party unity despite criticism from within the party in this process, Nidaa Tounes leader Essebsi's decision to include Ennahda in the coalition, showing his recognition of Ennahda's place in politics, and allegations that Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes leaders were negotiating a secret deal led to the first resignations from Nidaa Tounes. Moreover, key figures in the party issued a declaration, making an accusation that we would hear more and more often in the years to come, objecting to a coalition that included Ennahda, saying that the results of the parliamentary election were an objection to including Ennahda, the party responsible for the disastrous situation in the country, in the government. Essebsi's emphasis on "turn[ing] the page on the past and look[ing] to the future" was important in this process, and we will see Ghannouchi referring to it frequently after Kais Saied came to power. In 2015, the elite compro-

mise reached by Essebsi and Ghannouchi created a grand coalition of 80 percent of parliament, bringing together the largest secular parties in parliament and Ennahda, which put aside ideological differences to focus on socio-economic issues.

On the other hand, although in late 2014/ early 2015 Ghannouchi thought that a joint coalition with secularist forces and supporters of the old regime, putting aside ideological differences, could provide solutions to the country's main problems, the following years have shown that far from finding common solutions to the country's problems that had led to the revolution, Ennahda under Ghannouchi's leadership supported Nidaa Tounes' anti-democratic laws in order not to create the polarization. In fact, we've seen that Ennahda took its conciliatory/consensual stance too far, to the detriment of democracy for reasons such as its disadvantageous situation vis-à-vis the secularist forces, lacking financial-media-international support, and the constant need to prove to the secularist actors its non-Islamist (especially Muslim Brotherhood) position at all times, especially with the growing presence of Islamist terrorism and the Salafist party members/base. For example, we've seen Ennahda, who had been accused of turning a blind eye to Islamist extremists while in power after the revolution, approve a new open-to-abuses counter-terrorism law to replace the one that had been in force since 2003, after the terrorist attacks in 2015 following the formation of the new government. Whereas the anti-terrorism law enacted by Ben Ali had been used to suppress political opponents, including members of Ennahda, by linking them to terrorism without any credible evidence, a similar law was now supported by Ennahda to avoid ideological conflict in the government. Moreover, the new law was highly criticized by leading human rights organizations around the world in a joint statement for failing to include the necessary protections against abuse, giving broad and vague monitoring and surveillance powers to security forces, and the broadness and vagueness of what qualifies as an act of terrorism. Thus, while it was not surprising that the police unions, which were formed after the revolution and consolidated into large umbrella organizations and grew in power to pressure judges and besiege courts to save police officers facing prosecution when necessary, took advantage of the 2015 terrorist attacks to push for the 2015 law, it was surprising that Ennahda supported it. Human rights violations, arbitrary arrests, and torture, committed by the security personnel in the name of security, especially in the atmosphere of a state of emergency, which was declared again after the third major terrorist attack of the year on presidential guards in November 2015, increased dramatically. Ennahda, which by its own hand gave way to human rights violations committed in the name of security, reappeared as one of the main victims of these violations after Saied took power and seized power after July 2021, as Ennahda was the main party targeted by Saied, who relied heavily on

the police force to silence the opposition.

In 2016, as a way to no longer be associated with Islamist extremists, Ghannouchi re-branded the party at the party congress, since there was continued heavy recruitment to ISIS, especially from the underdeveloped areas that constituted Ennahda's voting base as a result of economic development failing to keep pace with political developments. Therefore, in an environment where clashes with Islamist extremists were continuing near the borders of Libya and Algeria, Ghannouchi, who wanted to draw a thick line between his party and these groups, announced that the party entered democratic Islam and became a purely political organization (with no overt religious mission); and he defined the new party identity as Muslim Democrat. This development, said to be led by a Ghannouchi-led progressive wing within Ennahda, has been endorsed by 1200 delegates at the congress. As mentioned earlier, although some argue that Ennahda's break with political Islam and switch to post-Islamism dates back to this congress, this thesis claims that it started with the revolution since the party was already on a consensus-based, democracy-prioritizing, post-Islamist trajectory, after the revolution albeit with the initiative of the post-Islamist faction led by Ghannouchi, who wanted to make democracy and revolution last. Although there were slight deviations from the line while trying to appease the Islamists within the party and at the grassroots, we have seen that the party managed to quickly learn from its mistakes in this process. Moreover, while maintaining this line, the integrity of the party was also preserved. Thus, this thesis takes Ghannouchi's statement at the 2016 party congress as formalization and further consolidation of the already existing post-Islamist line.

In 2016, we have seen that when there were resignations from Nidaa Tounes, both in protest against Essebsi's appointment of his own son as head of the party and on the grounds that the party moved away from its initial goal of building a modern, democratic and secular state by forming a coalition with Ennahda, Nidaa Tounes' number of seats in parliament dropped from 86 to 58, falling behind Ennahda's 69 seats. At a time when the country was facing serious economic and terrorism challenges, the Carthage Agreement was signed with the five opposition parties and three major trade unions to improve the performance of the government by setting the priorities of the national unity government (NUG), increasing policy coherence on key policy issues, and enhancing the role of other key stakeholders in achieving the country's priorities. We have seen this agreement being developed in informal meetings between Essebsi and Ghannouchi. At the end of this process, when Prime Minister Habib Essid failed to win a vote of confidence, Essebsi proposed Chahed as PM; and the NUG government, which expanded the consensus rule, was formed in August, led by Chahed, who committed to fighting terrorism and corruption and

boosting economic growth.

Moreover, during the NUG government, Ennahda supported another law to the detriment of the economy, the Economic Reconciliation law (2017), proposed by Essebsi, in order not to create ideological polarization. However, in 2013, on the initiative of then President Marzouki, a transitional justice law was passed to ensure justice for human rights abuses committed during the dictatorship, such as corruption and torture. The Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD), established in 2014, was a kind of “independent tribunal” established to expose and investigate human rights violations of this period and thus, ensure transitional justice. We have also seen that one of the elements of Ennahda’s 2014 electoral campaign was support for the IVD, partly because Ennahda’s main rival, Nidaa Tounes, had a large number of former regime elites. In the 2014 election campaign, Nidaa Tounes called for not opening the wounds of the past, while accusing the IVD of helping Ennahda, claiming that many of its victims had Islamist links. However, in September 2017, President Essebsi proposed the Administrative Reconciliation Law, which would end the prosecution/investigation of former officials implicated in corruption under Ben Ali’s regime and allow them to return to positions of power, and which former President Marzouki described as “pardoning everyone who is corrupt” and human rights groups described as “normalizing corruption” and contrary to the values of the revolution (Reuters Apr. 26, 2017), and which was backed by the two largest groups in parliament, Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda, after it was negotiated in secret negotiations, on the grounds that it would pump money into the struggling economy. We have also seen Ennahda MPs justify their support for the bill, not only by saying that it was crucial for maintaining reconciliation, but also by claiming that their efforts have shifted the focus from businessmen to bureaucrats who they claimed were only pawns in corruption schemes, while the original 2015 version of the bill had included businessmen. Thus, we have seen that Ennahda’s over-pursuit of compromise, which became the party with the largest number of seats in parliament in 2015 after resignations following the clashes in Nidaa Tounes, contributed to the achievement of the counter-revolutionary goals of Nidaa Tounes and the remnants of the old regime. Moreover, we have also seen that, according to IRI’s poll at the time, 77% of the population had little/no opinion about it, and when it was announced, 51% said they were somewhat/strongly opposed to it. However, explaining why he later took a position against transitional justice, Ghannouchi said that the process started in a supportive environment but lost public support due to its vindictive streak. Moreover, Ghannouchi’s change of stance also received a lot of backlash from within the party. Thus, we have seen that a law, proposed by Essebsi which did not have popular support and was contrary to the spirit of the revolution, was

supported by Ennahda on the grounds of preventing polarization, despite the fact that Ennahda was the strongest party in parliament and Ghannouchi's subsequent positioning of himself against the transitional justice process created a crisis within the party. Subsequently, the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) extended its mandate until mid-December 2018, but the parliament unanimously opposed the extension, with Ghannouchi convincing Ennahda MPs. Despite the government's efforts to obstruct the commission's work, the commission published its final report on March 26, 2019, in which the IVD accused President Essebsi of complicity in torture during his ministry under Bourguiba, as well as exiled former President Ben Ali, his extended family and wider network of corruption and human rights violations under his rule, including torture and enforced disappearances.

Although Chahed was able to implement a series of reforms to improve the economy and the investment climate and attract aid to the country, including the approval of a four-year \$3 million loan by the IMF in exchange for reforms, we've seen him caught between the demands of international creditors to implement austerity measures, in particular overhauling the subsidy-heavy economy and cutting public spending, and pressure, particularly from the UGTT, Tunisia's powerful trade union, to create jobs, investment and redistribution. Although Chahed sought a solution in cabinet reshuffles, successive cabinet reshuffles in 2017 failed to deliver the austerity measures demanded by international creditors. Faced with few economic options in 2018, however, Chahed's government was able to implement a number of reforms imposed by creditors, such as allowing price hikes on a range of goods, including staples like bread and fuel, and increasing pension plan contributions and taxes, causing the country to be rocked by protests against the rising cost of living. However, in 2018 we have seen the intra-party fight between Prime Minister Chahed and the President's son over the leadership of Nidaa Tounes escalate and spill over into the alliance between Essebsi and Ghannouchi, with Ghannouchi rejecting Essebsi's demand for Chahed's dismissal, fearing the collapse of the economy. Ghannouchi, who said in our face-to-face interview that he wanted to avoid ideological polarization but that he was not opposed in principle to confrontation on socio-economic issues, in line with this rhetoric, refused to cooperate with Nidaa Tounes to marginalize Chahed. But with the UGTT, which was totally against austerity, siding with Essebsi and calling for a strike in the public sector, and Ennahda siding with Chahed, a polarized environment immediately emerged.

We've seen that seeking to differentiate itself from Ennahda and exempt himself from the anti-Chahed sentiments in Tunisian society following an unpopular economic reform program in the pre-election period, Essebsi sought to build his electoral campaign on anti-Islamism to once again reunite secular forces prior to the

2019 elections, particularly given that the declining popular support for political parties in May 2018 local elections compared to the 2014 elections was most evident in Nidaa Tounes, which lost 800,000 votes. In this regard, first, by following the recommendations of the Committee for Individual Liberties and Equality (COLIBE), established in 2017, Essebsi announced, in August 2018, his support for a law granting equal inheritance rights to men and women, which was opposed by the Shura Council. As we stated earlier, on one hand, given that the 2019 elections were just around the corner and that a poll conducted at the time by the IRI showed that 63 percent of the population was firmly opposed to this proposal, it was a good timing for Essebsi to throw that bait to Ennahda. And yet, on the other hand, although it was Essebsi who threw the bait to make Ennahda choose between its conservative electoral base and improving its progressive international image, it was still Ennahda that took the bait by immediately rejecting the proposal at the risk of damaging its democracy-Islam reconciling, progressive line. Essebsi's second step to re-ignite anti-Islamist sentiments in society and re-unite the secularist actors prior to the 2019 elections was indirectly blamed Nahda for the 2013 assassinations through its secret apparatus. As we said earlier, reactivating the secularist-Islamist divide and raising issues of cultural war seemed to be the only way for Essebsi to increase his electoral vote in a context where he had no success story to present ahead of the 2019 elections. We have seen that Ennahda's refusal to dismiss Prime Minister Chahed, who was competing with Hafidh Essebsi for the leadership of Nidaa Tounes, followed by the Shura Council's rejection of a proposal for gender equality in inheritance, undoubtedly further strained the alliance and was followed by President Essebsi's announcement of the end of the alliance with Ennahda at the time.

On the other hand, in the continuation of this process, we actually saw Ennahda at its strongest in the post-revolutionary period. It had lost 450,000 votes in the May 2018 local elections compared to 2014, which pointed to a loss of fewer votes than Nidaa Tounes. In addition, a new power bloc, Chahed, Tahya Tounes/National Coalition, a pro-reform party/bloc that included Nahda, emerged in parliament at the time. Moreover, after Essebsi suspended Chahed's membership, MPs close to Chahed left the party, further strengthening this bloc, and Nidaa Tunisia's parliamentary seats fell behind Tahya Tounes ahead of the 2019 elections. In addition, in November 2018, Chahed revised the cabinet, increasing Nahda's portfolio from five to nine, while completely excluding the Hafez Caid Essebi-led wing of the party from ministerial positions. Thus, the ranks tightened and a new power bloc crystallized with the cabinet reshuffle. Nahda, which became the party with the largest number of deputies in parliament in 2015 following the resignations in the aftermath of the Nidaa Tounes rivalries, gained the ability to support or derail Chahed's government

with its increased ministerial portfolio as a result of political rivalries. Undoubtedly, Tunisia's democracy could have benefited from this development, as Ennahda, freed after a long period of Essebsi's imprisonment, was now in a position to propose alternative political/economic policies. However, continued poor economic indicators in 2018 and the declining support for political parties, as revealed by the 2018 Afrobarometer, in which 81 percent of respondents said they did not feel close to any party, suggested that all parties would suffer in the upcoming 2019 elections. As mentioned earlier, by all economic indicators, the economic situation in Tunisia after the revolution has been consistently worse than before the revolution. The post-revolution coalition governments, including those led by Chahed, have been ineffective in reviving the economy despite two IMF programs in 2013 and 2016. According to World Bank data, the annual GDP growth rate, which was 4-5% before the revolution, barely exceeded 2% after the revolution, and in some years, including 2019, barely exceeded 1%. Unemployment, which was 10-12% before the revolution, reached 15% in 2019.

We have already witnessed that President Kais Saied, who came to power in the presidential elections in 2019, suspended the parliament in 2021 before all the institutions of democracy had been established as envisaged by the 2014 constitution; and the constitutional court was, undoubtedly, the most important of these incomplete institutions. We have seen that even though parliament convened several times in a row to elect members of the Court, only one of the candidates proposed by the parliamentary blocs, the candidate nominated by Nidaa Tounes, received the necessary votes (145 out of 217) to be elected. Although the parliamentary groups were able to agree on four names, on March 2018, after more than two months of negotiations, Nahda's candidate received only 116 votes, falling short of the 145-vote threshold. In other words, since Nidaa Tounes did/could not keep its word, only Nidaa Tounes' candidate was elected; and the court could not be established. The fact that the Constitutional Court members could not be elected because Nidaa Tounes MPs distributed their votes among the candidates, showed that the burden of compromise was placed entirely on Ennahda's shoulders, and that no progress was made on issues where Ennahda's unilateral efforts were insufficient. However, it is worth noting, as some scholars have argued, that Nidaa Tounes was a loose coalition of secular actors who came together to oppose Ennahda. At the same time, it has been in a constant process of disintegration since 2016. In fact, it had only 25 seats left before the 2019 elections. On the other hand, despite constant criticism of Ghannouchi from within the party, Ennahda was able to maintain party cohesion and discipline thanks to their shared Islamist background and the sense of solidarity they developed under the former repressive authoritarian regime. It is

therefore worth noting that there may be other explanations for its failure to keep its promise (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 17). As a result, in an environment where Nidaa Tounes did/could not cooperate in the election of the members of the constitutional court, the constitutional court, which would have been the guarantor of the democratic transition by reviewing the constitutionality of laws and arbitrating disputes between the different branches of power, could not be established. And, when the conditions were ripe, a democratic reversal took place under President Saïed, who took office in 2019. Moreover, since Article 80 of the 2014 Constitution gave the Constitutional Court the power to end the state of emergency, the country has been governed under a permanent state of emergency, first under the pretext of fighting terrorism and then under other pretexts after Saïed took over.

One of the important features of the 2014 constitution was its determination to move away from the highly centralized system of the previous regime. While implementation of decentralization was problematic for reasons such as the need to define the powers and budgetary autonomy of municipal and regional governments, we have also seen that one of the reasons that made implementation problematic was that some parties, notably Nidaa Tounes, were hesitant about the date of elections on the grounds that there were obstacles to overcome before local elections and that local and regional governments were not ready. In an interview we conducted just before the 2018 local elections, a Nidaa Tounes MP complained that the process was moving too fast, saying that local elections should be held but local and regional governments were not ready yet as they lacked the necessary human, and financial resources and training on good practice. The passage of the economic reconciliation law a few months before the local elections, the increased number of former regime members in the Chahed government in September 2017, and the fact that the local elections were postponed 4 times also raised the question among pro-democracy supporters whether the former regime supporters were trying to prevent the empowerment of local governments. Held a few months before the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections, the most significant feature of these elections was that they revealed the public's growing disillusionment with political parties and democracy, with lower turnout (35%) compared to the 2014 elections (68%) and the overwhelming victory of independent lists over political parties. In these elections, in which independent lists came first, winning 33% of the vote, Ennahda came second with 29% and Nidaa Tounes came third with 21%. As mentioned above, with the influence of these electoral results, we have seen Essebsi once again attempting to create ideological polarization in an attempt to tighten the ranks of the secularist forces/public. As mentioned above, another indicator of growing public disillusionment with political parties/democracy, and with country's stagna-

tion since 2011, was the 2018 Afrobarometer survey, which found that 81 percent of Tunisians did “not feel close to any political party,” and that almost 50 percent did not know whom to vote for and 30% would not vote if elections were held the next day (Afrobarometer Oct. 1, 2018, 60,66).

In the period up to 2019, what was Ennahda’s contribution to the public’s disillusionment with political parties and democracy? Since 2011, we’ve seen Ennahda leader Ghannouchi adhering to the rhetoric of compatibility between democracy and Islam, and to the principles of prioritizing consensus and cooperation and avoiding polarization. We have seen that the discourse of Islam compatible with democracy, which started as the line of a fraction within the party led by Ghannouchi, became the party’s official line in 2016, with confrontations with hardline Islamists within the party and at the grassroots. Again, despite the opposition of hardliners within the party, we have seen him push the limits of his capacity for consensus to the point of supporting the passage of anti-democratic laws, in 2015 and 2017, ironically, in order for democracy to survive, and in a constant rush to prove to the secularist forces that he was different from Morsi in Egypt, until Essebsi broke the elite consensus in 2018. As we mentioned earlier, Ennahda’s support for anti-democratic laws proposed by Nidaa Tounes in 2015 and 2017, that is, its cooperation in reviving in the new era the police brutality, which had suffered so much under the old regime and in ending the transitional justice process, created the impression that it was sacrificing its differences and making peace with the old regime in order to accommodate itself (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 1-2). And while the international community praised the power-sharing agreements/consensus as being on the path to consolidation," what Tunisians perceived was the old regime retaining its privileged position while sharing it with the Islamists without any real pluralism, as some scholars have put it (Yardımcı-Geyikçi and Tür 2018, 798).

The fact that Ennahda, led by Ghannouchi, had almost the sole visible aim of avoiding any ideological confrontation in order not to break the consensus, has led it to never compete on its policies/plans/ideas to address the problems that had caused the revolution in the first place and to undermine democratic representation, despite being a permanent member of post-revolutionary governments and the most powerful group in parliaments. Thus, we have seen that in the following period, not only was Ghannouchi-led Ennahda widely blamed for the political and economic gridlock in the country, but also criticism of Ghannouchi’s leadership, which has been ongoing within the party for some time, intensified. According to an Ennahda MP, the emergence of these criticisms of leadership and lack of internal democracy dated back to 2016, as Ghannouchi returned from a trip to Turkey in 2016, impressed by Erdogan’s strong leadership. Even though party unity was maintained

till the 2019 election period, this became when the first breakaways from the party began. Moreover, the collapse of the elite consensus that emerged during the 2014 election period, in 2018, and Essebsi's revival of the claim that Ennahda was responsible for the assassinations of two-left wing leaders in 2013, revealed that the conflicts/cleavages were just covered up/delayed, not resolved.

It was not surprising to find that all the parties involved in the consensus rule as well as small opposition parties lost votes in the 2019 elections. Nidaa Tounes, whose number of seats in parliament decreased from 86 in 2014 to 3 in the 2019 elections, suffered from the biggest loss of votes. Though to a lesser extent, Ennahda's number of seats also decreased, as it won 52 seats in the 2019 elections compared to 69 seats in 2014. In fact, taking into account that Ennahda had won 89 seats in the 2011 elections, it seems more and more clear that it was losing power in each election. It was also not surprising to see increased support for populist newcomers who, under deteriorating economic conditions, easily capitalized on anti-elite/anti-establishment sentiments in society. One of the populist newcomers was the al-Karama party, which built its campaign on Ennahda's disillusionment with its concessions on religion and revolution and won 21 seats in parliament. Other populist newcomers who rose by criticising that Nidaa Tounes moved away from its original goal, which was the revival of the strong secular state of the Bourguiba era, were Karoui's Qalb Tounes and Abir Moussa's Free Destourian Party, which ranked second and fifth, respectively, in the 2019 elections.

But, undoubtedly, the most remarkable name of the 2019 elections was Kais Saied, who won the 2019 presidential elections by defeating his rival Karoui, a media mogul and another populist name, in the second round. We have seen that having no affiliation with any party and introducing himself as "the man of the people," Saied ran an anti-establishment, anti-political party campaign, claiming that the revolution had been seized by corrupt parties.

Although Ennahda came first in the 2019 elections, its number of seats in the parliament fell short of the 109 seats, needed to command a majority within the parliament. In fact, the 2019 parliamentary elections, in which the voter turnout was only 42%, created a highly fragmented parliament, delivering no clear mandate to any single party, and making it potentially difficult to form a government. And yet, in this process, we have already witnessed many firsts on the Ennahda side. In this regard, Ennahda's announcement that it refused to meet with its closest rivals, the Free Destourian Party and Qalb Tounes, made the government formation process even more complicated. Moreover, unlike in previous periods, not only did Ennahda insist that one of its leaders be the PM on the grounds that the election results

gave them the power to implement their own program, but also the party decided to nominate Ghannouchi to run for parliamentary speaker. In addition, the 2019 election period saw conflicts within Ennahda which surfaced with Ennahda Executive Office's announcement that Ghannouchi would head the candidate list in a district in Tunis to compete in legislative elections. This decision drew the reaction of some Ennahda members, who claimed that the Executive Office, an office which was in charge of approving the lists, in violation of the party rules, at an extraordinary ordinary meeting, made alterations to the electoral lists, drafted by the Shura Council, removing the names who were critical of Ghannouchi, one day before the announcement of the decision.

Criticism of Ghannouchi and his political choices from within the party also emerged after President Saied appointed Habib Jemli to form the new government in November 2019 on Nahda's proposal. Besides, Jemli had a hard time building a team that could win the support of the majority of lawmakers from the beginning. First, he promised to form a government not leaning towards any political party; due to problems in the allocation of ministries, he then promised to form a non-partisan technocratic government; and yet, his government failed to get a vote of confidence, in the end. The failure of its prime ministerial candidate to form a government was, undoubtedly, a major setback for Ennahda. Moreover, following the failure to form a government, Ennahda saw a series of resignations, mostly through announcements on the resignees' Facebook pages, as a result of a conflict in the party, said to be between junior and senior members of the party, the former of whom were highly critical of Ghannouchi's monopoly of decision and wrong political choices. Despite criticizing the monopoly of decision-making within the party, these young people within the party had no problem with the official party line, i.e. the way the party has defined itself since 2016.

Saied's decision, after Jemli's failed attempt, to give the task of forming the government to Fakhfakh, an outsider like himself, and Fakhfakh's announcement that he would not include the Qalb Tounes and Free Destourian parties in the government negotiations, on the grounds that they had not supported Saied in the second round of the presidential elections and were not on the path of the revolution, created fear on the part of Ennahda. As the winning party in the elections, and as a political party that has always had a say in post-revolution governments, Ennahda was insisting on a government that reflected the balance of power in parliament and would not be dominated by Saied. It was, therefore, not surprising that it insisted that Qalb Tounes, which came second in the elections, be included in the government negotiations. As analysts have noted, in Ennahda's perspective, the diminished influence of the parliament in decision-making meant a transfer of power to Saied. So we have

seen the Shura Council of Ennahda issuing a statement calling for the inclusion of all parties in the talks, except those who were unwilling to participate, and for the formation of a government with the widest possible participation. Moreover, we've seen the Ennahda Executive Office advising to be ready for all possibilities, including early elections, which some analysts viewed as an implicit threat. And even though Ennahda promoted this insistence, that is, on the formation of a government of national unity that reflected the parliamentary balances created by the last elections, saying that it was essential for the completion of the institutional transition and the implementation of economic reforms, economists warned that another shallow compromise risked the complete collapse of the economy and the already shaky institutions. Moreover, we have seen that the Ghannouchi-led Ennahda's insistence to include Qalb Tounes in a broad-based government was opposed by a group in Ennahda, that saw Qalb Tounes as a resurgence of Tunisia's corrupt past. However, once Ennahda's insistence led to the inclusion of Qalb Tounes in the government formation process by Saied, Ennahda gained strength as a mediator and power-broker, and Ghannouchi strengthened his hand against his opponents within the party, according to analysts. Moreover, according to some analysts, Ennahda's newfound power over Fakhfakh gave it both the power to change some of the ministerial appointments and an increase in the number of its ministries. Although half of the newly formed government was composed of independents and the other half of five parties, in line with the number of seats in parliament, it was ultimately short-lived. This government was doomed when the Shura Council of Nahda announced that it was withdrawing its support from the government, and then 105 MPs from Nahda, Qalb Tounes and Al-Karama submitted a petition to parliament withdrawing their confidence in Fakhfakh following corruption charges against him. Thus, Fakhfakh resigned on Ennahda's initiative at a time when the International Monetary Fund (Apr. 10, 2020) said that the economy was expected to contract by 4.3% due to the pandemic, in what it described as the deepest recession since independence in 1956.

We have seen Saied's tendency to take the reins into his own hands become even more pronounced after Fakhfakh, as Saied took advantage of a loophole in the constitution to announce that Mechichi, who was not nominated by any party, had been appointed to form the government. Therefore, Saied's appointment of a name of his own choosing, bypassing the political parties, was interpreted as an attempt by Saied to consolidate his power by marginalizing the role of political parties, including (or even more so) Ennahda. Moreover, we've even seen Saied, for the first time after becoming president, signal that he would change the system, when he announced the appointment of Mechichi, saying "we respect the legitimacy of parliament, but it is time to revise it in accordance with the will of the majority."

Following Mechichi's announcement of his intention to form a non-partisan cabinet of technocrats at Saied's request, the camps of the post-2019 elections period have become clear. Because while secular/centrist parties such as Democratic Current, Peoples Movement and leading unions of the country such as UGTT and UTICA welcomed this proposal, Ennahda, Qalb Tounes and Al-Karama/Dignity Coalition positioned themselves against it, demanding a political government, which reflected the election results.

And undoubtedly, Mechichi's proposal put the PM-designate at odds most with Ennahda, the largest parliamentary group in the parliament, who saw the appointment of Mechichi, an outsider like Saied and a technocratic figure, as Saied's consolidation of power and a violation of parliament's power. As we've noted, analysts agreed that Mechichi's proposal to form a cabinet of non-partisan technocrats, put two equally bitter options before Nahda: to approve a government of independents, or to reject it and suffer the consequences, including the possible dissolution of parliament and early elections, the latter of which would have been a "gamble" for Nahda given that early elections would have weakened it and its rivals would have gained ground, especially given that the Free Destourian Party was ahead of Ennahda in the polls at the time (Guesmi and Hidri 2020). Moreover, at the polls, Ghannouchi was also the least trusted political leader in the country. The timing of this proposal, interpreted by analysts as an attempt to take control of the political scene from Ennahda and corner it, was also in Mechichi's favor, since only a month earlier, at the initiative of Abeer Mousa, leader of the Free Destouri Party, a vote of no confidence had been called for Ghannouchi to step down as parliamentary speaker for violating the constitution. They accused Ghannouchi of violating the constitution by taking sides in the Libyan conflict as part of a brotherhood plan led by Turkish President Erdogan and financially supported by Qatar, despite the fact that exclusive control over the state's foreign policy is constitutionally vested in the president. Although Ghannouchi survived a vote of no confidence in late July 2020, two weeks after Fakhfakh's resignation, analysts predicted at the time that Ennahda would face stiffer opposition in parliament and that political divisions would deepen, making it more difficult to form a government. Given that both the People's Movement and the Democratic Current had called for the formation of a government that excluded Ennahda after Fakhfakh's resignation and attributed the country's difficulties to Ennahda's dominance for more than 8 years, this prediction was also starting to come true.

Yet we have seen Ennahda not back down and make clear its opposition to the proposal, pushing instead for a government based on party representation. Moreover, despite having fallen to second place in the polls at the time, we have seen Ali

Larayedh, a leading figure in Ennahda, describe the proposal in a television broadcast as an attack on democracy and an attempt to eliminate the winning parties, saying that elections would be a better option, implying that if a technocratic government was formed, they would become a strong opposition force by preventing the passage of the laws brought by the government (Zayat 2020c). On the other hand, we have seen Speaker Ghannouchi again calling for reconciliation to resolve differences and even calling for following in the footsteps of former President Essebsi, who he said “saved Tunisia from conflict with his forgiveness and broad perspective.”

Even though the ranks had already tightened, a few days before the constitutional deadline for Mechichi to form a government was due to expire, we have seen the tide turn in Ennahda’s favor again with the news that Saied, due to his disagreements with Mechichi, had invited representatives of four parties, including Nahda, to the Carthage Palace and demanded that they vote “no” to Mechichi’s government in a vote of no confidence. On the other hand, according to some analysts, after the formation of the government, Mechichi had made an agreement with Nahda and its allies to make changes in the cabinet. As we have seen, statements from different Nahda figures at the time also indicated their support for the Mechichi government and their expectation to negotiate with him to change the composition of the cabinet in order to form a political cabinet. Indeed, Mechichi’s pledge to cooperate with all parties, parliamentary blocs and national organizations in his speech in parliament before the vote also hinted at the possibility of a ministerial reshuffle and revision in his government. Then, amid accusations that President Qais Saied exceeded his constitutional powers and tried to interfere in the government formation process, but precisely because of Saied’s mismanagement and overreach in the government formation process, we have seen Nahda once again gain the upper hand in the political struggle with the President, and Mechichi move closer to parliamentary blocs such as Nahda and Kalb Tunis, who hoped to negotiate with him to form a political government.

From this period, until the day Saied seized power, we’ve witnessed a deepening of the split between Saied and the parliamentary majority (Ennahda and its allies), with Saied targeting Ennahda, which he accused of seeking ways to control the government and therefore saw as the source of the split. And this growing tension, combined with growing anti-government protests, caused by worsening economic conditions, will create the conditions for Saied to seize power. While the post-revolutionary period up to the 2019 elections was marked by divisions over issues such as the role of religion in the constitution and politics and the attitude towards necessary economic reforms, we’ve seen the post-2019 elections period marked by a power struggle, first between Saied, who wanted to form a government under his con-

trol, and Ennahda, who opposed him and tried to form a political government that reflected the parliamentary balance. After the formation of the Mechichi government, we will see this struggle turn into a struggle for prerogatives between Nahda and its allies and Saied, i.e. between the parliamentary majority and Saied. As a result, political instability deepened after the 2019 elections, first because political parties were unable to form a stable government, and then because of the widening gap between the president and the parliamentary majority.

On the economic front, we have seen that the shrinking economy (which contracted by 8.2% in 2020), unemployment (which had reached 30% in the south even before the pandemic) and poverty, exacerbated by the coronavirus, have been the driving forces of social unrest, particularly in marginalized locations across Tunisia. With also a debt of 7.5 billion dinars (2.74 billion dollars), Mechichi needed to restart negotiations with the IMF to renew the IMF program, which recently expired. We've seen that in early 2021, on the 10th anniversary of the revolution, social unrest, calls for the fall of the regime and night-time riots once again marked life in Tunisia in what some described as a "second revolution." Moreover, it was not only the declining economic situation that people were protesting in the streets, they were also protesting the security forces' violent crackdown on protestors and mass arrests, including of minors as post-revolution governments, with Ennahda's support, had left the police force entirely unreformed.

Moreover, in those days, we've witnessed Ghannouchi taking the image of reconciliation with the old regime a step further after re-emphasizing the importance of consensus-based politics in transitional democracies against the danger of division/conflict despite the fact that Ennahda's over-pursuit of this policy after the revolution had also done a lot of damage to Tunisian democracy. What reinforced Ghannouchi's image of reconciliation with the old regime at the time was that he launched an initiative known as "comprehensive national reconciliation" with the intention of reconciling with the rulers of the old regime on the condition that they promised to abide by the constitution, and closing the transitional justice file, once and for all, with the implementation of a new law; and appointed Mohamed Ghariani, a prominent member of the old regime who was the secretary general of Ben Ali's RCD, which was dissolved after the revolution, as an advisor to this process. Ghannouchi, as we have seen, explained at the time that the aim of this step was "to be able to walk into the future free from the problems of the past" (Ben Salah 2021a). According to political analysts, Ghannouchi's initiative was politically-motivated, as it aimed to weaken Abir Moussa, the leader of the Free Destourian Party, who was trying to revive the ancien regime by initiating a comprehensive reconciliation through Ghariani, and who continued to rise in the polls, and to break off part of

his base. In other words, he was trying to convince part of Moussa's base that he was continuing former Tunisian president Essebsi's policy of "turning the page of the past." Moreover, Ghannouchi's initiative came on the heels of similar initiatives by Abir Moussa, a supporter of the former regime, and President Saied, known for his anti-party and anti-system stance. Both of them had recently drafted a bill to reach a financial settlement with former regime businessmen under investigation for embezzlement. Ennahda has, thus, joined this camp. Ennahda has therefore moved further away from the image of a party of pro-revolutionary voters that it had maintained in the first post-revolutionary years. Moreover, we have seen that Prime Minister Mechichi, who had promised victims' associations to mobilize the Dignity Fund and set up a commission to implement the IVD's recommendations, reneged on this promise due to the influence of Qalb Tounes and Ennahda, both of whom were not sympathetic to the work of the IVD.

We've seen that it was the cabinet reshuffle attempted by Mechichi that started the struggle for prerogatives between Saied and Mechichi/Ghannouchi. Then, in the midst of protests at the beginning of 2021, triggered by a deep socio-economic crisis triggered by the pandemic, Mechichi, backed by Ennahda and Qalb Tounes, carried out a cabinet reshuffle that analysts saw as a purge of names close to Saied, which quickly turned into a constitutional crisis. Moreover, the fact that the head of the Ennahda Shura Council, immediately after this initiative, said that the cabinet of independents imposed by Kais Saied was a step back for them, showed that the purpose of this cabinet revision was also to give a political color to the technocratic government (Ben Salah 2021b). As a result, this cabinet reshuffle soon escalated the already existing tension between Saied and the parliamentary majority to the point of a constitutional conflict, as Saied refused to allow the new cabinet, approved by the parliament, to be sworn in on the grounds both that he had not been consulted on this cabinet overhaul, when he was constitutionally required to be consulted, and that several of the proposed names were involved in corruption or conflict of interest, even though he had provided no evidence. In the process, the failure to establish a constitutional court to adjudicate constitutional disputes in the first post-revolutionary years also took its toll. Saied insisted that he should have been consulted, citing the phrase "The PM and his members take an oath before the President" in Article 89 of the Constitution. According to Mechichi, this clause did not apply in the event of a cabinet reshuffle. Thus, the cabinet reshuffle and the accompanying power struggle between the prime minister and the president turned into a constitutional crisis between Prime Minister Mechichi and President Saied, and the government was forced to continue working with a small number of ministers because the new ministers could not be sworn in.

As Ghannouchi rightly pointed out at the time, it was the lack of a Constitutional Court that opened the door for the president to interpret the constitution as he wished (Guesmi 2021). And yet, as the government continued to operate in the midst of a deep financial crisis and a mounting debt burden, we have seen a further escalation of the constitutional crisis come from Ghannouchi, who proposed a constitutional amendment to make President Saied's powers purely symbolic. Because, as he said, the other reason for the current impasse was the "uneasy mix of presidential and parliamentary systems," created in the 2014 constitution. Therefore, a change of the political system to a parliamentary system, where there was a complete separation of powers and executive power rested entirely with the party with the highest number of electoral votes and the prime minister it elected, could have resolved the impasse. In this process, we witnessed Ghannouchi's repeated calls for a change in the political system, on one occasion expressing his discomfort with the president acting as a constitutional court, on another occasion saying that the aim of the revolution was to separate the forces, not unite them, and on another occasion citing Essebsi as a model for Saied, since Essebsi had accepted, if not approved, Chahed's cabinet revision. On another occasion, we have seen him blame the electoral system adopted after the revolution for the problems of Tunisian democracy, which prevented the emergence of strong majorities capable of assuming governing responsibilities and being accountable in return. Undoubtedly, the crisis that arose when the newly appointed ministers could not be sworn in allowed Ennahda, which had supported Mechichi, to position itself on the side of democracy. Even though Mechichi and Ennahda were targeted by the spreading protests (since January 2021), Ennahda was able to organize a counter-march and market it as a march in support of democracy, in February 2021. In this process, we have seen that while some analysts and civil society leaders have criticized Ghannouchi for blaming only the political system, the electoral system and the president for the crisis in the country and ignoring his own share of responsibility, others have accused him of tacitly calling for a coup d'état or using the crisis as a pretext to express the Muslim Brotherhood's endless desire for a parliamentary system. According to the final group, Ennahda had also pushed for the adoption of a parliamentary system in 2014, but failed to do so.

On the other hand, while Ghannouchi expressed his desire to get rid of the inherent design flaws of the current political system by moving to a parliamentary system, we've seen that Saied, on the same days as Ghannouchi, made disparaging remarks about parliament, saying, "In reality, this is a transition from a single party to a single group of corrupt people," alluding to Ghannouchi's frequent emphasis on the transition process to democracy. It was no secret that Saied had long aspired for

a system change. In fact, it was his anti-establishment, and anti-political party stance, which found its expression in the slogan “I was, I am and I will always be independent,” that won him 73% of the votes in the second ballot. As Ennahda Shura Council head Harouni, rightfully, put it in those days, the model of democracy Saied desired was “a kind of bottom-up democracy,” and based on a self-designed “from the local to centre” concept, in which directly elected local assemblies had more weight than parliament, and the president, rather than political parties, composed the government (Ben Salah 2021b). It seems that the prolonged constitutional impasse marked a turning point for Saied to take action. And from then on, step by step, Saied put into action his plan to seize power.

One of these steps has been to reject all calls for dialogue and mediation. Two of those who called for mediation were Ennahda and the unions who mediated during the 2013 political crisis. Ghannouchi had called for a tripartite meeting in February 2021 involving him (as speaker of parliament), PM Mechichi and President Saied; and in April 2021, Ennahda as a party had called for a national dialogue in which all parties would participate and the people would be given positive messages about the future of the country. But we saw that Saied, who rejected these calls had in his mind a formula for national dialogue that put the youth at the center and excluded political parties. And Saied explained that the aim of this formula was to fix the revolutionary process (by putting in place a social and economic plan), which had deviated from its original purpose, based on the preferences of the youth. As we noted earlier, Saied had used the slogan “the people want” extensively in his election campaign, and he believed, wholeheartedly, that he could bring about a system change by relying on the legitimacy of popular support.

At a time when Tunisia was grappling with unprecedented fiscal problems, exacerbated by an 8.2% contraction in real GDP in 2020 and a rise in unemployment to 16.2% at the end of September 2020, and Tunisia’s 2021 budget envisaged a borrowing requirement of \$7.2 billion, of which around \$5 billion was external loans, there was actually a very positive development in March 2021 to pave the way for the signing of an agreement with the IMF in the urgency to carry out an economic reform: a package of economic reforms, covering such controversial areas as subsidies, taxes and state-owned enterprises suffering from heavy debts, that is, a package of reforms the IMF has long called on Tunisia to enact, was signed between the Mechichi government and the powerful labor union UGTT, on March 31. After this step, negotiations with the IMF started in May 2021 with the Tunisian delegation’s request for a loan of 4 billion dollars.

However, in this positive environment, we’ve also seen the establishment of the

constitutional court become a new point of conflict between the parliament and Saied. At Ennahda's proposal, amendments to the Statute of the Constitutional Court, approved by Parliament on March 25, 2021, reduced the required majority for the election of members of the court from 145 (two-thirds) to 131 (60%). Reportedly, however, Saied saw the move as a step towards limiting his powers and removing him from office. And he may have been right, as some observers have also noted that Ennahda, which had two allies in parliament, could get some of its candidates elected after the amendments and use the court to target its opponents. Saied therefore refused to approve the amendments, on April 4, on the grounds that the deadline for the establishment of the Constitutional Court expired years ago. Thus, Saied not only prolonged the constitutional and political crisis by taking advantage of the absence of a mediating institution such as the Constitutional Court, but he also contributed to the delay in the election of members to the court as part of his own political struggle. We have seen that throughout this process, Saied has continued to use language skeptical of the democratic credentials of his political opponents (for example, by saying that the change in the governance of the country was from one-party rule to one-lobby rule), which some say spread hatred (for example by calling them thieves); and continued to convey the message that a new political system would be established to meet the aspirations of the people.

Saied's visit to Egypt between April 9-12 was critical before his seizure of power. Egyptian President Sisi's remarks, stressing the importance of "increasing cooperation in combating all forms and aspects of terrorism...as well as...confronting extremist ideology that poses a threat to the region and its peoples," in the joint press meeting, was interpreted, by the analysts, to include the Muslim Brotherhood as well as Ennahda, which has constantly faced accusations of being an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood, even though Ennahda has repeatedly reiterated that it had no ties to the Muslim Brotherhood or any other organization. Just a few days after his return from Egypt, he stated that his powers as commander of the armed forces extended not only to the army but also to internal security forces, in violation of the 2014 constitution, leading to speculation that he was already preparing the ground for a "soft coup". Moreover, we have seen that, although Saied denied it at the time, in May, details of the planned coup d'état under Article 80 of the Constitution, which stipulated that the head of state had the right to take "any exceptional measures" in case of "imminent threat jeopardizing the nation, and the country's security and independence," were leaked to the press.

However, on July 25th, we've seen the coup scenario that was reported in the press come true. In a televised speech following an emergency meeting at the Carthage Palace, Saied announced that he would assume the executive authority with the help

of a new prime minister, freeze the parliament's activities, remove the immunity of deputies, paving the way for their prosecution, put himself in charge of supervising public prosecution, and rule by decree for 30 days to address Tunisia's months-long political crisis (Tunisie Numerique Jul. 24, 2021). Moreover, when Saied came to power, we've seen that the conditions were ripe enough for him to seize power as a poll conducted at the time showed that 87% of Tunisians approved of Saied's decisions. Society was fed up with the political instability resulting from the animosity between President Saied, Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and Parliament Speaker and Ennahda leader Ghannouchi, the health crisis that spiraled out of control with covid (given the constant change of health ministers in the midst of the pandemic), and the economic crisis exacerbated by the pandemic. Besides, his announcement came in the wake of the protests that swept Tunisia from south to north, with protesters calling for the overthrow of the government and the dissolution of the Ennahda-controlled parliament, and raiding and burning Ennahda headquarters in many cities, blaming Ennahda for the political and economic crisis in the country.

Although there was no agreement between Saied and the opposition, including Ennahda, on whether the conditions were born to invoke Article 80, the objections of the political parties were irrelevant in the absence of a constitutional court to decide this. Thus, while Saied's opponents, including Ennahda, accused him of staging a "constitutional coup", Saied refused to characterize it as a coup and insisted that his actions were in accordance with Article 80 of the Constitution, except for the provision on informing the Constitutional Court. Moreover, although Article 80 stipulated that parliament must be in "permanent session" if it is to be invoked, Saied justified this by saying that this article prohibited the dissolution of parliament but not the freezing of its activity.

When we look at the reactions to this constitutional coup, we see the continuation of the existing political camps. So it was no surprise that the biggest reaction came from Ennahda, one of the key targets of Saied's move, and its allies Qalb Tounes and the Dignity Coalition. On the other hand, we have seen that secularist/centrist parties such as Democratic Current and People's Movement, which had previously blamed Ennahda for the country's difficulties and wanted to exclude it from the cabinet, supported Saied by blaming Ennahda for the assassinations, the terrorism problem and the deterioration of political and economic conditions in the country. We've seen that Ghannouchi initially tried to follow the example of Turkey on July 15th, calling on people to take to the streets in defense of democracy, but soon changed his stance and went back to employing peaceful mechanisms and calling for calm and dialogue.

We have seen that the initial international response, particularly by the Biden administration and the EU, has been moderate and slow, reluctant to characterize Saïed's seizure of power as a coup d'état, more focused on the protection of civil rights, but occasionally embellished by calls for Saïed to return to the democratic path through a clearly defined timetable and an inclusive national dialogue. Saïed's main international backers were Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as well as the UAE, the final one of which Ghannouchi claimed in an interview was determined to end the Arab Spring because it saw the Muslim democracy advocated by Ennahda as a threat to its power. Then, it was no surprise that Saïed's coup was celebrated in the Saudi and UAE local media as a victory against the Muslim Brotherhood. Saïed's frequent references in his post-coup speeches to "brotherly and friendly countries" that he said would help Tunisia reduce its budget deficits and fulfill its loan commitments were, then, interpreted by analysts as a declaration of Saïed's intention to cement partnerships with these Arab dictators at the forefront of anti-democracy in the region (Brumberg 2021a).

Although Saïed promised after July 25 that he would not "turn into a dictator", we have seen him, in collaboration with a partisan figure named Khaled Yahyaoui, whom he appointed as interior minister on July 26, take steps that reinforce fears of a return to authoritarianism and the erasure of the gains of the revolution. The closure of media offices (e.g. Al-Jazeera); the dismissal of several top officials including the military chief prosecutor as well as the head of the national TV channel Wataniya; his frequent targeting of the news media in his speeches, urging them to practice self-censorship; his ordering investigations against 3 opposition parties, including Ennahda, which called his seizure of power a coup, for allegedly benefiting from foreign funding ahead of the 2019 elections; the widespread use of travel bans, investigations and arrests against the political opposition, MPs, journalists and civil society without any trial or judicial investigation; military courts' investigating and prosecuting civilians, including many MPs, in some cases simply for publicly criticizing the President, calling his seizure of power a coup, and judges protesting against the trial of civilians in military courts, and ordering house arrests and detentions; the lack of access to a lawyer or the opportunity to challenge the decisions in court; and the initiation of investigations against several former ministers and politicians running in the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections for alleged political advertising, illegal advertising on social media and violations of electoral silence, with the demand for severe penalties, such as a ban on running in future elections or holding public office, were among such steps reinforcing the fears of an authoritarian turn.

Moreover, we have seen that Saïed has continued to take steps to tighten his grip

on power. First, on August 24, 2021, he issued a presidential decree extending the suspension of parliament and the lifting of parliamentary immunity “until further notice.” In this process, he continued to target Ennahda. For example, he called Ennahda “traitors,” and the government, including Ennahda, “mafia.” The real step towards consolidating Saied’s power came on September 22, 2021. On this date, Saied announced that he would henceforth “rule by decree and ignore parts of the constitution as he prepared to change the political system” (Decree-Law No. 117), without setting a time limit for his hold on power. Thus, with a decree, Saied suspended many articles of the constitution, gave himself all executive and legislative powers, including the legislative authority over “the organization of justice and the courts,” and exempted his decisions from appeal. He also announced that he would appoint a committee to formulate constitutional amendments to the 2014 Constitution to establish “a true democracy where the people are truly sovereign.” Moreover, we have seen him continue to escalate the tone of his attacks on Ennahda in particular. For example, while Ennahda denied allegations in local media that it paid a US lobbying firm to boost Ennahda’s reputation during the 2019 elections and after Saied took office, Saied responded to Ennahda’s calls for national dialogue in a video posted online by the presidency on September 15, saying he would not deal with “traitors...who pay money to offend their country,” in a clear reference to Ennahda.

After Saied granted himself additional powers on September 22, we have seen a significant number of the actors who initially supported him withdraw their support. One of the actors that switched to the camp against Saied was the UGTT, but analysts have argued that it was not the love of democracy that switched the UGTT to the opposing camp, but the provision in the September 22 decree that the President of the Republic would be responsible for “drafting amendments on political reforms” and that he would be assisted in this by a committee he would set up. It had not reacted in this way on July 25. We have also seen that the center/secularist parties that had initially supported him withdraw their support as well. In this regard, four center-left/right parties, including Saied’s staunch supporter Democratic Current, announced an alliance against Saied. However, moving to the opposite camp of Saied did not mean aligning with Ennahda. As we have seen, they continued to issue statements accusing Ennahda of creating the political/economic conditions that made Saied’s coup possible. Ennahda’s position as the country’s largest party and the most important parliamentary force since the 2011 revolution has made it easier for it to be held responsible for Tunisia’s problems, not only by rival political parties but also by the people. This, in turn, made it difficult for other parties opposed to Saied’s expansion of his powers to cooperate with Nahda. We have even

seen them refrain from participating in protests involving Ennahda.

However, Ennahda's exclusion from the coalition, formed to resist Saied's monopolization of power, led to growing internal opposition and divisions within Ennahda, which had previously been born out of criticism of Ghannouchi's leadership style and the alliances he had forged over the years. So, while July 25 and Saied's seizure of power was an external blow to Ennahda, since then we have also seen Ennahda shaken from the inside with increasing criticism and divisions. Each step Saied took since July 25 to consolidate his power was followed by heavy criticism of Ghannouchi and resignations from within the party. First, immediately after Saied's seizure of power, on July 31st, a group from the Ennahda Youth Movement issued a statement blaming the Ennahda leadership for the political/socio-economic deadlock in the country, and hence, for Saied's seizure of power, and called on the leadership to "take responsibility," in effect calling for their resignation. Then we've seen that Ghannouchi, who was also subjected to internal criticism for the way he handled the political crisis in the post-July 25 period, dissolved the party's executive committee in August and decided to form a new committee. Interestingly, Ghannouchi defended this practice, which was completely outside the understanding of intra-party democracy, as "in line with the requirements of the phase" and "to achieve greater effectiveness" (AA Aug. 24, 2021). Immediately afterwards, we also saw him suspend the membership of Imad Al-Hamami, a senior party figure, for his repeated violations of the movement's policies. And on top of all this, three days after Saied's September 22 move, on September 25, we saw 113 leading members of the party resign in a petition announcing their resignation in protest against the performance of Ennahda's leadership, blaming Ghannouchi for Nahda's isolation and saying that the disruption of intra-party democracy and the decision-making of a group loyal to the leader alone resulted in bad political choices and inappropriate alliances. Thus, according to some analysts, the movement's heavyweights decided to resign because they did not want to clash with Ghannouchi, who continued to embrace a one-man rule.

On the other hand, we have also seen Saied take ostensible steps towards a return to democracy, including the appointment of Najla Bouden, also a political outsider, as PM two months after the coup, in response to growing international calls for him to form a government, and the formation of a cabinet of Saied's cronies. This step was for show, as just a short time before, on September 22nd, the PM's powers had been significantly reduced and Saied had assumed the power to appoint the cabinet and set policy direction and key decisions. Moreover, Saied also took a step to nullify the municipal councils established after the 2018 local elections, one of the most important achievements of the post-2011 period, by placing them under the control

of the interior ministry and abolishing the Ministry of Local Affairs, which served as a bridge between central and local governments.

Despite Saied's step of appointing a Prime Minister, stronger international calls for a dialogic roadmap prompted Saied to take a second token democratization step, announcing on October 21 that he would launch a dialogue to make room for "consensus-based proposals" on the political system. Unsurprisingly, Saied also announced that he would exclude from the dialogue "those who steal the people's money and traitors," which, as some analysts have noted, was likely to become an excuse to exclude some political and civil voices from both the dialogue and the new order.

And we've seen Saied finally announce the roadmap entitled "Activation of Chapter 80" on 13 December 2021, 5 months after 25 July. However, it can be said that the roadmap was announced mainly due to the worsening economic crisis, the inability to mobilize the necessary financial resources to close the 2021 budget deficit, and the desire to obtain a new loan from donors, especially the IMF. A month before, the Saied administration had raised its budget deficit forecast for 2021, which implied a 38% increase in the budget deficit that the government planned to finance through external and domestic borrowing. We've seen that the roadmap included the suspension of parliament until new elections on December 17, 2022, a virtual public consultation on the new constitution with yes/no questions, a commission to formulate constitutional proposals based on the results of this consultation, and a referendum on the new constitution on July 25, 2022. Given Saied's desire to reshape the political system into a strong presidency, and an earlier decree that the commission to draft the constitutional amendments would be appointed entirely by him, it was possible to say that he had unchecked authority over the final draft of the constitution.

Although Ennahda, Ghannouchi in his capacity as parliamentary speaker, and the four-party coalition issued separate statements, explicitly rejecting Saied's recent statements and calling on Saied to engage in a comprehensive dialogue to jointly determine the future of the country, there was no opposition united around a common strategy to return the country to democracy. While the UGTT also continued to criticize Saied, albeit in a lower tone and in a way that did not give the appearance of unity with the parties that openly objected to Saied's decisions, it was not possible to say that it took a clear and consistent position against Saied's power grab and expansion of his powers. Thus, it will be clear later on that even in the days when it offered to mediate, it considered it permissible to exclude Ennahda from the dialogue, accusing it of destroying the economy through corruption and mis-

management, and that it would only object to Saied's project when it was excluded from negotiations with the IMF, i.e. when it could no longer exert its traditional influence on Saied's socio-economic decisions, which has been what many analysts have criticized the UGTT for.

In this process, the largest demonstration of opposition unity was a series of protests launched by the civil society group "Citizens Against the Coup," an alliance of democrats of all political leanings, after Saied expanded his extraordinary powers and suspended parts of the constitution on September 22. We have seen that despite the fact that there was no Nahda member in the 11-member Executive Committee of this NGO, they have not closed themselves to cooperation with Nahda and its supporters, unlike other opposition parties/figures who kept blaming Nahda for all the political, economic and terrorism problems Tunisia has faced in the decade following the revolution and therefore directed their dual criticism at both Saied and Nahda. We have seen that they welcomed both the participation of senior Nahda members in the sit-in against the "coup against the constitution" that the group launched after the announcement of the roadmap on December 13, and Ghannouchi's support for their hunger strike, which lasted from December 23 to January, and whose declared aim was "to lead the creation of a national political front that offers Tunisians a political alternative." We have seen Ennahda encouraging its supporters to join the protests organized by this group the day before the online consultation began to call for a boycott of the consultation, as well as the protests organized on March 20, the day the online consultation ended. On the other hand, we saw that the post-September 22 coalition of the four small parties did not participate in the protests of this civil society group because of its alleged links to Ennahda. They organized their own separate protests, instead.

One of the steps Saied has taken as he moved step by step towards building an authoritarian system was to dissolve the Supreme Judicial Council (SCJ), the last institutional check on his power, and one of the institutions that had taken a position against Saied's seizure of power, and to establish a new council subordinate to him (that is, members of which was chosen by him), since the SCJ had emphasized that the judiciary was one of the "authorities of the state" and that it was crucial to "keep it free from all pressures, regardless of their source." Moreover, despite winning the 2019 presidential elections on its oversight, Saied justified its dissolution by accusing it of corruption, obstruction of politically sensitive investigations such as the investigation into the 2013 murder of two leftist politicians, and political partisanship (i.e. being influenced by his enemy Ennahda). Moreover, we have seen that in the absence of a formal decree dissolving the SJC, i.e. a legal basis, Saied disbanded it by de facto force, i.e. the army and the police, i.e. the security forces

closed the SJC headquarters and prevented the staff from entering the building. The dissolution of the SJC was critical, as it was seen as one of Tunisia's most important post-revolutionary achievements in building democratic institutions. Thus, while arbitrary travel bans, house arrests, detentions and other practices bypassing judicial processes had already been imposed on Tunisians after Saied's seizure of power, the official death of judicial independence in the country came with the abolition of the SJC. Therefore, for some, it marked the end of hopes for democracy in Tunisia. The February 13 decree establishing the new council also gave Saied the power to overturn or veto any decision taken by the council. Thus, Saied, overtook the judicial power through this decree after overtaking the legislative and executive powers of the state through a decree issued on September 22.

After appointing the members of the SJC, Saied's next step to establish an autocratic regime and consolidate his one-man rule was to issue a presidential decree on April 22, 2022, giving him the power to appoint members of the Independent High Authority for Elections (IHAE), Tunisia's electoral commission, created to ensure the legitimacy of the elections. Indeed, the IHAE, in a statement released after the announcement of the roadmap on December 13, had criticized Saied for not consulting them on the planned referendum and elections, that the online consultation had no legal basis, and that a national consensus on the elections was needed. Saied's move to give himself control of the electoral commission was, rightly, interpreted as a step to cast doubt on the integrity of the elections. The Venice Commission, the Council of Europe's advisory body, also noted in its May 2022 report that the subordination of the electoral commission to the executive jeopardized its independence and impartiality of this body. Moreover, in the IHAE that would oversee the July 25 referendum on a new constitution and parliamentary elections in December 2022, Saied appointed members hostile to the Nahda movement, including Sami Ben Slama, who, according to analysts, was known to be a harsh critic of the Nahda movement. Moreover, we have seen Saied continue his moves to control the judiciary, as on June 1, 2022, he again issued a decree giving himself absolute authority to dismiss judges. Immediately afterwards, he dismissed 57 judges on charges of corruption and obstructing terrorism investigations, in a move that the Tunisian Judges' Union said was politically motivated.

Regarding the state of popular support for Saied, opinions differed, as there were polls showing a large drop in popular support and anti-Saied demonstrations, but there were also polls showing that even though Saied's popular support had dropped to some extent, it was still close to 60% as of May 2022. According to analysts who found the second poll more accurate, the backsliding of democracy was something that only a very small minority actually cared about, as the main concern of the

people was still the economy, and the people still had not yet given up on Saied a chance with the economy. According to these analysts, Saied's only problem was that he had difficulty translating this rhetorical support into action, i.e. mobilizing his supporters, as evidenced by the fact that only about 535,000 people (7% of registered voters) participated in his token online consultation, despite government efforts, including the use of state facilities. The fact that the President referred to the results of the consultation when he dissolved the Supreme Judicial Council - almost a month before the consultation was due to end - justified the claim that the consultation was also only for show. We have also seen analysts describe this online consultation process, which the public did hardly participate in, as a means of legitimizing predetermined decisions, pointing in particular to the framing of questions on political and electoral affairs as specific/targeted and directly addressing Saied's political agenda and priorities.

The Tunisian president's next step to consolidate his power, by dismantling one by one the institutions created since 2011, came on the wake of the most serious challenge he faced in the post-July 25 period. And this step was his unilateral dissolution of parliament on March 30, 2022. As one analyst noted, without a legal basis to do so, Saied was unable to dissolve parliament on July 25, but the online convening of parliament on Ghannouchi's initiative, with the participation of 116 MPs out of 216, and their voting in favor of a law annulling all decisions and decrees issued by Saied since July 25, gave Saied the occasion/legal basis to do so. Moreover, the fact that the law canceling Saied's exceptional measures was passed by MPs representing a broad spectrum of political views, far beyond members of Saied's main rival Ennahda party, created the greatest appearance of unity to date. As one opposition MP put it, the vote was historic because it removed the legal legitimacy of Saied's coup by reminding the assembly that it was the primary legislative body. For Ghannouchi, the meeting proved that the parliament was still alive and able to function. Immediately after the meeting, during a speech at the National Security Council meeting, attended by senior security/military officials, we've seen Saied announce his decision to dissolve parliament "in order to protect the government, the institution and the Tunisian people," referring to Article 72 of the Constitution, which tasked the President of the Republic with "guaranteeing the independence and continuity of the state and ensuring respect for the constitution." Although there were analysts who said that the constitution did not give the president the power to dissolve the parliament, and therefore Saied violated the constitution, and that according to the constitution, even in the case of a dissolution decision (which the parliament could take), the parliament was supposed to remain in session until a new vote was taken within the 90-day period, Saied went on to

say that parliamentary elections would not be held in the next three months, but he would instead proceed with the rewriting of the constitution, which would be voted on in a referendum on July 25, and that elections would be held on December 17, in line with the political roadmap announced previous December. Moreover, later in the process, we've seen Saied signal a major escalation in targeting his opponents, promising that MPs who participated in the online session and opposed the presidential decrees would be prosecuted on serious charges such as "conspiracy against internal and external state security;" and soon, the Justice Minister launched criminal investigations against more than half of these members, including Ghannouchi. On the other hand, we've seen Sami Tahri, the spokesperson of the UGTT, Tunisia's powerful trade union, which has not been consistent in its opposition to Saied, describing Ghannouchi's initiative as an attempt to "drag the country into conflict" and suggesting the dissolution of parliament and early elections as a way out of the crisis.

In the process, we have seen that the UGTT has vindicated the criticisms that the union has struggled to adopt a clear vision and direction since Saied came to power, and that it was only when it was excluded from negotiations with the IMF and unable to exert its traditional influence on Saied's socio-economic decisions that union leaders decided to challenge Saied's project. For example, when Saied said, in the wake of the online consultation process, that everyone would be given the right to express their views/ positions on the new system of governance ahead of the referendum while then an unnamed committee drew up the amendments, we've seen the UGTT express its discomfort with the spectator role assigned to it in the absence of explicit reference to the participation of parties and organizations in his announcement. Moreover, we have seen that the UGTT strongly opposed IMF's calls for reforms to reduce spending on state-owned enterprises, subsidies, and public wages, saying that "the public sector is a red line" and threatened the government with "strikes to stop the economy," taking advantage of the fact that Ghannouchi-led online plenary session coincided with the IMF's launch of a visit to Tunisia for talks on a possible IMF-supported financing program. However, despite its growing criticism of Saied, the UGTT still announced its support for Saied's decision to dissolve parliament, saying, "Parliament was already suspended and effectively dead. We honor our dead by burying them" (Hamdi 2022). Moreover, we have seen that even when the UGTT was pushing Saied for talks to resolve the political crisis, the idea of dialogue he had in mind was far from inclusive, as it tried to exclude Nahda from dialogue by repeating a common refrain that held it largely responsible for the destruction of the economy through corruption and mismanagement (Yee 2022b). The UGTT was, thus, out of the picture as a force

capable of meaningful resistance to Saied.

In response to the question of who could challenge Saied's overt dictatorial consolidation and how, many analysts/political scientists have emphasized the need to create a strong/united opposition that can formulate a plan before Saied fully consolidated his dictatorship, taking advantage of Saied's lack of an economic plan to convince the public that he can overcome economic difficulties. The Tunisian public's lack of interest in the new constitutional process, but Saied's continued unpopularity in the polls, showed that Tunisians' main concern was survival in the midst of a worsening economic crisis.

However, we've seen that this united opposition, with the participation of five opposition parties, including Ennahda (albeit weakened by internal conflicts and divisions), Qalb Tounes, and the Dignity Coalition, as well as some independent political figures and five civil society organizations, notably the "Citizens Against the Coup" initiative, was only formed ten months after Saied's seizure of power. This umbrella opposition group, the National Salvation Front (NSF), led by a left-wing politician named Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, has declared its goal to fight Saied's "coup and "populist program to destroy state institutions" (Middle East Monitor Jun. 1, 2022). However, we've later seen that Saied's opponents were still too fragmented to mount a real challenge to Saied's project.

On May 21, we've seen Saied finally announce the creation of the "Consultative Commission" tasked with drafting the new constitution. Saied who excluded political parties and civil society from any dialogue, excluded them from the consultative committee as well, as elite consensus was never part of his vision. Already at the very beginning of the process, in a meeting with Sadok Belaid, the hand-picked president of the commission, he hinted that participation would not be inclusive, saying that "participation is open to anyone who supports the July 25, 2021 process." Moreover, as we have seen, the Presidential Decree issued, on May 19, also established from the outset that the committee would have no decision-making role, stating that it would have an "advisory" role and would rely on the results of an online consultation in which only 7 percent of registered voters participated to formulate its recommendations. Moreover, Saied set an extremely compressed timetable, saying that the committee, which had a complex structure of subcommittees, would complete its work "in a few days" (Agence Tunis Afrique Presse May. 4, 2022). Four unions, including the UGTT, were invited to give their views in one of the subcommittees, but the UGTT declined on the grounds that the results had already been unilaterally agreed upon beforehand. Finally, unlike the 2014 constitution, which was drafted over two years with the participation of all institutions and NGOs and with much

debate, the committee presented Saied with a draft constitution within the allotted two weeks. But we have seen that the draft constitution published by Saied, which gave him almost absolute powers, reduced the role of parliament and the judiciary, which even the head of the commission, known to be close to Saied, said was nothing like the draft he had submitted, and which Freedom House called “an undemocratic document” that would “accelerate Tunisia’s slide towards authoritarianism,” was published on June 30, and then its additional amendments on July 8.

Hence, the result was a draft constitution that would build an authoritarian system and consolidate Saied’s one-man rule. It subordinated the government to the president; gave the president the right to extend his term of office indefinitely using the adaptable concept of “imminent danger;” eliminated the possibility of challenging exceptional measures before the Constitutional Court; contained no provisions on how the president can be removed from office even in cases of grave violations of the constitution; envisaged a bicameral parliament and local/regional assemblies, and yet, also frustrated the bottom-up institutionalization plan that was supposed to pave the way for the development of what Saied called a true democracy, by granting broad powers to the president and reducing the powers of the parliament; provided that all members of the Constitutional Court shall be appointed by the President; and repealed provisions of the 2014 constitution that Tunisia was a civil state and that the jurisdiction of military courts was limited to military offenses.

We’ve also seen that the opposition was unable to develop a unified response even before the vote and was divided into those who wanted to boycott the referendum and those who wanted to vote “no.” For example, we have seen calls to boycott the referendum from the largest parties in parliament, including the National Salvation Front (NSF) parties Ennahda, Qalb Tounes, and the Dignity Coalition, as well as the Democratic Current and the Free Destourian Party (PDL), the final one of which remained in first place in the polls. They’ve seen a boycott as a way to show the national and international community that they considered illegitimate not only the draft constitution but all of Saied’s steps to consolidate his power, including his seizure of power on July 25. Indeed, we have seen that this view was in line with the views of the Venice Commission, which in its May 2022 report expressed reservations about the compliance with international standards of all presidential decrees/decrees-laws adopted by Saied since July 25, 2021, and the referendum preparation process. On the other hand, we’ve seen that several small parties, led by Afek Tounes, were calling on people to vote “no,” arguing that the only way to defeat Saied was to get a higher number of votes, given that there was no minimum turnout requirement for the referendum to pass. They claimed that they could defeat Saied if the parties that called for a boycott also voted no, relying on the argument above that even

those who gave rhetorical support did not respond to Saied's calls for action. In response, we've seen that parties calling for a boycott, such as Ennahda and Qalb Tounes, said that the referendum would not be held in a free and fair environment anyway and that the constitution could not be passed by voting "no." At the time, Ghannouchi said that Saied had already guaranteed control over the electoral process by unilaterally changing the members of the electoral commission, amending the electoral law, banning foreign observers and that the outcome of the referendum was already clear. In response, Afek Tounes leader Abdulbeki said that boycotting the elections would mean handing the referendum victory to Saied without him even having to resort to electoral manipulations. As a result, even though there was a lot of mutual exchange of words through the media, trying to convince the other side by defending their own positions, in the end, when it came to the referendum, neither side was able to convince the other; and the opposition was not able to unite around a common strategy. Moreover, we have also seen that the UGTT, which has not been able to maintain a stable position on Saied's project, did not align itself with any of the opposition camps.

In consequence, Saied organized a referendum on July 25, 2022, on the anniversary of his seizure of power. And even though the electoral commission announced the results twice, citing "material errors," and even though the opposition accused Saied of electoral fraud due to the discrepancy between the first and second results, and even though the referendum had a record low turnout of only 30.5%, we've seen the new constitution come into force with a 95% yes vote. Moreover, Saied rejected I Watch's call for a recount of the votes by an independent committee, as if to justify accusations of electoral fraud.

Even though Ennahda called the new constitution "completely invalid" after the referendum because it was adopted with less than 50% turnout, and even though both Chebbi and Ghannouchi took credit for the low turnout as a victory for their calls for a boycott, at the end we've seen that neither Ennahda nor the NSF was able to mount an effective resistance against Saied. Moreover, a poll by SIGMA, a leading polling organization, showed that only 21% actively boycotted the referendum. Thus, the poll has shown that neither Saied's project nor the NSF's call for a boycott appealed to a disinterested 50% who were only interested in the economic situation. Undoubtedly, the implementation of the reforms imposed by the IMF, which constituted Saied's only economic agenda and were painful for the middle and lower classes, would jeopardize his popularity as the sole holder of executive power and would lead to protests. Indeed, Saied, who once emphasized the need to bring more fairness to the tax system, signed the 2022 Finance Law on December 28, 2021, which adhered to the same tax model in which individuals, including

the most disadvantaged segments of the population, contributed much more to tax revenues than businesses, saying that, he signed it “despite its shortcomings and unconvincing preferences,” and that “time [was] insufficient to achieve the people’s goals for a fair tax system,” implicitly placing the responsibility on the government. However, given that the new constitution placed the government directly under the President of the Republic, it was clear that Saied would no longer place the blame on a government independent of his own.

While the political parties lost power in the post-referendum period, it was possible to argue that the UGTT’s influence increased as the IMF had conditioned a new bailout package on the UGTT, which had previously stalled the economy with strikes, acting in concert with the government. Indeed, this increased influence was manifested in September 2022 when an agreement was signed between the Tunisian government and the main labor union, not on the reforms required for the IMF bailout, but on raising salaries by 5% a year for three years and the minimum wage by 7%. In the same days, we also saw Saied promulgate a new electoral law that further weakened the power of political parties and blocs.

In the run-up to the December 17 elections, Saied continued his populist rhetoric, saying that these elections were different from the previous “sham” elections because they would establish “popular sovereignty.” Therefore, the adoption of a non-party-based electoral law, in which candidates were chosen individually by voters rather than from a party/bloc list, thus making politics even more personalized, and ending the formation of opposition party blocs or power-sharing coalition governments, was an important tool in this process. Moreover, we have seen that the further weakening of political parties, which have long been Saied’s targets, has not been the only aspect of the law that undermined democracy and further entrenched Saied’s personal rule under the guise of democratic politics. The law also contained provisions that allowed Saied to ban candidacies at will, remove legislators from office and candidacy for life, or invalidate candidates’ votes, thereby creating a legislature deliberately ill-equipped to reduce the power to organize opposition. For example, the law’s provision barring people previously charged with legal violations from running for office meant that for every politically-motivated accusation Saied made against his political opponents since July 2021, he could block them from running. Moreover, we have seen that the decree issued just before the election law, which criminalized the publication of false news or rumors without defining “fake news” or “rumor”, paved the way for Saied to prevent anyone who criticized him from running in the elections. Moreover, for example, the law made it an electoral crime to deliberately exploit another candidate’s honor or familial or geographical ties to win votes, and said that all votes of candidates convicted of these crimes could be invalidated, paving

the way for Saied to nullify the votes and possible electoral victories of opposition candidates. It also opened the door to corruption by allowing MPs to be removed from office if they lost the trust of ten voters.

Therefore, we have seen that Ennahda, which had the highest number of seats in parliament after the 2019 elections, but in fact has steadily lost power in every election, from 89 seats in 2011 to 69 in 2014 to 52 in 2019, has failed to put up an effective resistance against Saied in the period after his seizure of power. Weakened by internal divisions and resignations, unable to develop an alliance against Saied for a long time, and unable to offer any ideas on the economy, the main concern of the people, Ennahda and the opposition bloc it belonged to, has been sidelined as Tunisia once again fell into the clutches of authoritarianism.

In conclusion, we have seen that even though Ennahda adopted the post-Islamist line as its official party identity in 2016, the Ghannouchi-led cadre, which until then relied on the discourse that democracy was compatible with each other, was able to steer the party along the same line. And until Saied's constitutional coup in July 2021, it was primarily Ennahda's line that ensured the survival of democracy in Tunisia. We have seen that the post-Islamist line that contributed to the survival of democracy in this process manifested itself in two ways: a commitment to reduce polarization and prioritize reconciliation with secular and old regime actors to prevent the transition process from deviating from democracy, as well as frequent references to the compatibility of democracy and Islam. In the early post-revolutionary years, when Ennahda, led by Ghannouchi, was simultaneously accused by Islamist elements at the grassroots and within the party of surrendering too much to secular elements in the country and betraying religion, and by secularists of giving license to Islamist violence and being too tolerant of Salafis party base, we've seen this post-Islamist stance gradually consolidate as a party line as Ennahda tried to create a political space for itself.

Ennahda's positioning of itself as the representative of the pro-revolutionary electorate since the 2011 elections, its encouraging the building of, and its participation in, inclusive coalitions from the very beginning, in line with the literature on the transition to democracy and the advice of the AKP, which it took as a model at the time, and believing that this was the only way for democracy to survive and for the country to solve the problems that had led to the revolution, certainly helped democracy to survive for 10 years. On the other hand, we have also seen that the consensus-oriented approach Ghannouchi-led Ennahda adopted in order to keep democracy alive and to prevent ideological conflicts from becoming an obstacle to the solution of the country's problems went too far and contributed to the fact

that democracy, although it survived, remained stuck in the transition process for a long time, failed to consolidate, and when the conditions were ripe enough, democracy was thrown off the rails. Thus, not only have grand coalitions that set aside ideological differences, failed to come up with common solutions to the country's fundamental problems, especially economic ones, but Ennahda led by Ghannouchi, in an effort to avoid ideological polarization, has also been involved in a number of controversies by supporting the anti-democratic laws proposed by Essebsi, and hence, by contributing to the achievement of the counter-revolutionary goals of Nidaa Tounes and the remnants of the old regime. As we have seen, these laws, supported by Ennahda, were the 2015 anti-terrorism law, which made it possible to charge people with terrorism without any convincing evidence because of the broadness and vagueness of what qualifies as an act of terrorism, paving the way for human rights violations in the name of security, and the 2017 administrative reconciliation law, which allowed former regime officials accused of corruption to return to positions of power by ending investigations against them. Not only did Ennahda never articulate its own agenda until 2019, but the split with Nidaa Tounes over economic reform in 2018 during the Chahed era, just before the 2019 elections, led to a resurfacing of the ideological polarization that Ghannouchi had studiously avoided. Moreover, because Nidaa Tounes did not or could not show the consensual attitude that Ennahda carried too far, the constitutional court, which could have been the guarantor of the democratic transition by reviewing the constitutionality of laws and arbitrating disputes between different powers, was not established.

Despite the fact that in the 2019 elections, the public punished all the parties, which had failed to offer anything but insolvency in the first 8 years, by increasing the votes of populist, anti-system actors and parties, in the post-2019 period, we have seen that both the unresolved economic problems, the failure to establish a constitutional court, and the police force being left completely unreformed before 2019, played a role in the authoritarian turn after July 2021. We have seen that the unresolved economic problems led the people to turn to Saied, a powerful populist figure and that even when he staged a constitutional coup, the people struggling with economic problems did not easily withdraw their support from Saied. The failure to establish the Constitutional Court before 2019 allowed Saied to interpret the constitution as he wished. We have seen that the absence of a constitutional court played a role both in the cabinet revision attempted by Mechichi that turned into a conflict over prerogatives between Saied and Mechichi, in Saied's decision to dissolve the parliament after the virtual convening of parliament on Ghannouchi's initiative, and in Saied's initiative to stage a constitutional coup on July 25, 2021, on the grounds of imminent threat, opening the door for his unilateral interpretation

of the constitution, and contributing to the authoritarian turn. And we have seen that Saied relied heavily on security forces after his constitutional coup; Ennahda has re-emerged as one of the victims of human rights violations committed by the police forces it helped keep unreformed.

Ennahda managed to secure first place in the 2019 elections, even though its vote has steadily declined in every election since 2011. However, we've seen that, as a member of most governments and the strongest party in parliaments in the 10 years after the revolution, it has been the primary actor targeted both by some centrist/secularist parties, who expressed reservations about partnering with Ennahda, first, in a government coalition (after Fakhfakh's resignation) and then, in an alliance against Saied, and in the protests that spread across the country until Saied seized power in 2021, as the main culprit for the failure to resolve the problems that had paved the way for the revolution. Moreover, in the run-up to the 2019 elections, intense criticism of Ghannouchi's leadership, alliances, and policy choices began to emerge from within the party as well (particularly from the youth); and the party was rocked by splits after July 2021, including the resignations of senior party figures protesting Ghannouchi's single-handed rule.

We've seen that Ennahda, led by Ghannouchi, which fought against Saied's attempt to form a government under his control by appointing political outsiders such as Fakhfakh and Mechichi following the 2019 elections, to form an inclusive and political government that reflected the balance in the parliament, also has been the party that fought the biggest struggle against Saied after his seizure of power. For example, we've seen that Ghannouchi called a virtual parliamentary session, which passed a law nullifying every decision made by Saied after his constitutional coup; that it supported the actions of the most important civil society initiative, the Citizens Against the Coup, and encouraged the participation of its own base in the protests organized by this group; that it used peaceful mechanisms to oppose Saied, one of which calling Saied for dialogue; that it was involved in an umbrella opposition group that included political parties with which it was allied and some civil society organizations to act jointly against Saied's coup.

As a result, although political scientists/analysts have argued that the only way out before Saeed consolidated his one-man rule was the creation of a strong/united opposition and the formulation of a joint plan, taking advantage of the fact that Saied lacked an economic plan to convince the public that he could overcome the economic difficulties, neither the creation of a strong and united opposition nor the formulation of a plan proved possible. Because as we have seen, the opposition remained too fragmented to mount a real challenge to Saied's project even weeks before the

referendum. Indeed, even the question of what position to take in the referendum has been the subject of intense debate, but no consensus has been reached between the “no” camp and the boycotters.

The fact that Tunisian public lacked an interest in the referendum process, with only 7 percent of registered voters participating in the online consultation that was supposedly held to generate recommendations for the committee that would draft the new constitution, and only 30 percent of voters participating in the referendum – despite the fact that Saied still enjoyed close to 60 percent popular support in some polls shortly before the referendum, and the fact that a post-referendum poll showed that the percentage of active boycotters was only 20 percent, meaning that neither Saied’s project nor the NSF’s boycott call appealed to a disinterested 50 percent constituency, showed that unless a strong opposition emerged that could put forward an economic plan, the public would give Saied credit – at least a while longer – rather than the political parties that had already disappointed them.

Weakened by internal divisions and resignations, unable to forge an alliance against Saied for a long time and unable to offer any ideas on the economy, the core issue of public concern, Ennahda, and the opposition bloc (NSF) to which it belonged, were marginalized as Tunisia once again fell into the grips of authoritarianism. Not only did a constitution that would consolidate Saied’s one-man rule, giving him almost absolute powers and rendering parliament and the judiciary dysfunctional, pass in a referendum amid accusations of electoral fraud by the opposition, but immediately afterwards Saied made the parties even more dysfunctional with the adoption of a non-party-based electoral law in which candidates were chosen individually by voters rather than from a party/bloc list, thus further personalizing politics and ending the formation of opposition party blocs or power-sharing coalition governments.

Finally, we have seen in the case of Ennahda that post-Islamist transformation is necessary but not sufficient to sustain and consolidate democracy. The main finding of the Ennahda case is that in addition to prioritizing consensus and avoiding polarization in order to sustain democracy, developing different policy positions and competing with them for the vote of the people, that is, competition is also inherent in the definition of democracy. That is, Ennahda’s persistent over-prioritization of consensus, its constant postponement of a shift to a position where it tried to enforce its own policy positions despite its being the strongest party in the parliament and a permanent member of the governments for most of the post-revolutionary period played a significant role in the irreversible disillusionment of society with political parties/democracy and its turn towards populist anti-establishment actors. So much so that, while the country moved towards the consolidation of a one-man rule with

the firm steps of a populist figure, Saied, by destroying/marginalizing one by one every institution created after 2011, the people, who still do not see any plan/policy position in front of them to improve the bad economic conditions and who still look to Saied for help, and who are already disillusioned with political parties and democracy, have not resisted Saied.

In conclusion, it becomes clear that, in this thesis, I've adopted a comparative approach combined with process-tracing to explore how post-Islamist transformation has affected democratic performances of two political parties, the AKP and Ennahda, as they were in governance. In other words, this thesis locates itself in comparative politics, comparing two case studies through cross-national comparisons, aiming at accumulating our knowledge about the relationship between the parties that are coming from Islamic/conservative backgrounds and their performances as they are in governance. Analyzing to what extent and under what conditions those coming from Islamist backgrounds act within democratic procedures and norms, both by making a cross-national comparison and by examining the change in the democratic perspectives of the parties in question over a period of time, allows us to examine the relationship between Islam and democracy without falling into the orientalist trap.

This study has demonstrated both that the post-Islamist transformation of former Islamist actors is necessary but not sufficient for democratization, and that post-Islamist transformation is also an interactive process, which is affected by the governance of these actors. Thus, post-Islamism is not only an analytical category but also a dynamic one; it is not only transformative, itself also transforms.

As mentioned above, AKP and Ennahda are treated as different but comparable cases. The main similarities of the two cases are their common post-Islamist ideology, the way in which they blend Islam and democracy, which has, at some point in their governance, been cited by analysts as a model for other Muslim-majority countries, the concentration of power in the hands of a single person in both countries through new constitutions or constitutional amendments, and the fact that these post-Islamist parties either contributed to or led this process of democratic reversal. And yet, as mentioned above, this thesis recognizes that these cases have different paths, and specificities. While both countries have experienced democratic reversal, the AKP has directly led this process, while Ennahda has facilitated it through its mistakes during its stay in power. And yet, it is possible to say that democracy in both countries has become vulnerable to coup attempts and regime breakdown as these parties were in governance.

We have seen that post-Islamism refers to a change of belief, normative framework,

and religious/political discourse in which former Islamist actors abandon Islamism as an ideology aiming for an Islamic order and move into a rights-oriented, civil-secular state-aspiring ideology. In this respect, we have seen that the post-Islamist transformation manifested itself in the 2002 AKP program with an emphasis on values such as pluralist democracy, freedom for all, diversity, moderation, avoidance of polarization, gradual/evolutionary change (rejecting radical change), distancing from identity politics (on the grounds that identity politics means radicalization of politics) and common sense/reason, providing state guarantees for all beliefs and rejection of the exploitation of religion for political purposes. As for Ennahda, its post-Islamist line was built from the outset on the adherence to the rhetoric of Islam's compatibility with secularism/democracy and the prioritization of the principles of reconciliation and cooperation, avoidance of polarization, and ideological conflicts.

While the AKP's democratic reversal process has taken place step by step with a move away from these values which constituted the backbone of the AKP program, i.e. a move away from the post-Islamist line, Ennahda has remained faithful to its values from the very beginning. What Ennahda failed to remember has been that in addition to prioritizing consensus and avoiding polarization, the sustaining of democracy required developing different policy positions and competing for the popular vote, i.e. competition, because competition is inherent in the very definition of democracy.

Moreover, the AKP started its political life in much more fortunate circumstances than Ennahda, since when the AKP was founded there was no Islamist-post-Islamist division among its founding cadres. The post-Islamist transformation had already taken place before the AKP was founded, by a group within the National Outlook parties (RP, FP) who identified themselves as reformists and criticized their (outdated) conceptions of democracy and Islam during their political experience in these parties. On the other hand, Ennahda was characterized by a distinction between Islamist and post-Islamist, particularly in the first years after the revolution. At the time, the post-Islamist identity corresponded to a faction within the party, led by Ghannouchi. In the early post-revolutionary years, Ennahda under Ghannouchi's leadership was accused by Islamist elements at the grassroots and within the party of surrendering too much to secular elements in the country and betraying religion, and by secularists of licensing Islamist violence and being too tolerant of the Salafist party base. We have seen this post-Islamist line consolidated as a party line as Nahda tried to carve out a political space for itself and finally became the official party identity at the party congress in 2016.

As mentioned above, Gümüşgü's (2023) recent comparative study is a great con-

tribution to the literature in explaining the different political trajectories of three Islamist parties that came to power. Gümüşçü explains the different political trajectories of the Muslim Brotherhood, which came to power in Egypt after the Arab Spring and was overthrown in a coup, Ennahda, which came to power in Tunisia after the Arab Spring, and the AKP, which has been in power in Turkey since 2002, on the basis of the balance of power between liberals and electoralists within the parties, i.e. which faction has the key organizational resources. It is only when liberals are able to dominate the party vis-à-vis electoralists that the notion of a pluralist democracy can be sustained.

In this thesis, intra-party relations are part of the analysis, but considering that the deeper the analysis of these processes, the more important it is, and given that, as Roy (2016) argues, the constraints to which political actors are subjected have an impact on their policies, the analysis of the democratic reversal processes of Tunisia and Turkey, with the contribution of Ennahda and under the leadership of AKP respectively, includes not only agency-based factors but also domestic and international factors that may have had an impact on their policies.

We have seen that in the case of the AKP, the domestic and international constraining factors were the incentive of EU membership, the market, and a strong military-led secular establishment. As I've mentioned earlier, by 2011, the domestic/international factors that might have constrained the AKP, i.e. the factors that might have forced it towards democracy, were no longer in place. With the deterioration of relations with the EU (and the loss of incentives for EU membership) (2005/2006), the disappearance of the market (2008/2009) and the military-led secular establishment (2010) as constraining factors on the government, by 2011 the AK Party was unshackled and in a position to take the country in a more democratic or more authoritarian direction. In the period 2011-2015, both pluralist and majoritarian conceptions of democracy competed within the party, but after 2015/2016, with Erdoğan's rapid takeover of the party, i.e. the purging of post-Islamist figures within the party who could have been a counterweight, the party rapidly shifted to a nationalist/Islamist line accompanied by authoritarianism.

In the case of Tunisia, the presence of secularists and former regime supporters who have largely retained their power after the authoritarian regime, the lack of international support for Ennahda and Tunisian democracy, and deteriorating economic indicators have been important background factors that have had an impact on the course of democracy. Although Ennahda, led by Ghannouchi, has not been able to rule as a single party like the AKP, it has been the strongest party in parliament since 2011 and a permanent member of governments for most of the post-revolutionary

period. However, with Ennahda's contribution, Tunisian democracy has also become vulnerable to coups and regime breakdown. Ennahda's over-prioritization of consensus, and its continual delay in moving to a position where it promoted its own policy positions and competed for the popular vote, led to the public quickly becoming disillusioned with democracy and political parties, and turning to populist, anti-establishment parties in the 2019 elections. In the post-2019 period, Ennahda put up the strongest fight against Saied, but Saied, as a populist figure, was able to consolidate his one-man regime from that point on by gradually destroying/marginalizing every institution created after 2011. We have seen that the people, already disillusioned with political parties and democracy, who still do not see a plan/policy in place to improve the bad economic conditions and still look to Saied for help, did not resist Saied.

In conclusion, we have seen that in both Turkey and Tunisia, democracy has become fragile in terms of coup attempts and even regime breakdowns due to the leadership or contribution of post-Islamist parties, and thus these parties have willingly or unwillingly contributed to the authoritarianization processes of their countries. Meanwhile, while in Tunisia Ennahda has been completely politically sidelined by President Saied, in Turkey the AKP continues to rule, with a powerful Erdoğan and a weakened AKP. It is because when Erdoğan established his hegemony, he did so at the expense not only of a weakening democracy but also of a weakening AKP.

However, it is possible to say that the transformation of both AKP and post-Islamism continues. After the May 2023 elections, Erdoğan's efforts to strengthen or renew the party became noticeable, notably through increased appointments to ministries and state institutions based on merit rather than shared values and loyalty. How will the concept of post-Islamism, which we've seen to be affected by governance processes, transform in this process? Is it possible to say that a new autocratic regime-based post-Islamism that prioritizes equal citizenship is emerging? Therefore, it is possible to say that the AKP in the process of renewal offers new opportunities for the further study of the relationship between post-Islamist parties and democracy.

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