

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title text.

CHP: A Party on the Road to Social Democracy

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- The CHP did not grow out of a workers' movement. Nor was it founded as a political force rebelling against an unequal system in order to transform it into a more equal one. In contrast, the CHP established a new republican order on the ruins of a collapsing empire and developed reflexes aimed at preserving it. It started to evolve from a state party to a social democratic one in the mid-1960s, within a social context of emerging contestation between employers and workers.
- A radical change occurred within the CHP in May 2010. The former chairman, Mr Baykal resigned, and the party elected a new one, Mr Kılıçdaroğlu. The party executive was also rejuvenated at the party's 33rd Congress.
- The average Turkish voter has long identified the CHP with the authoritarian state, although the party has not ruled for decades. This is due to its long alliance with the civil and military bureaucracy and to its defensive reflexes. These have tended to try to preserve the republican secular order. Obviously, this instinct of preservation is what one might expect from a conservative party. But the new party leadership is promising a move towards a less nationalistic and more social democratic position.



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Historical Overview

The People's Party was established in 1923 by the leaders of the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922), just before the proclamation of the Turkish Republic. Its path through Turkey's recent history can be summarised as follows.

Single-party period (1923–1946): The CHP (Republican People's Party) was the sole political organisation of the state and was led by the head of state. All governments were formed by the CHP. After Atatürk's death in 1938, İsmet İnönü assumed the leadership.

Bipartism/multi-party period (1946–1960): From 1950, the new Democratic Party (DP) pushed the CHP into opposition. In 1954 and 1957, the CHP lost against the DP whose authoritarian tendencies provoked a military coup in 1960.

Evolution of the CHP to social democracy (1960–1971): The new constitution opened the way to individual and social freedoms. The Justice Party (AP) was founded as successor of the banned DP. In the mid-1960s, İnönü established the CHP's ideological position as *left of centre*. This was the first step towards social democratisation.

Fragmentation of the party system; the coup of 1980 (1971–1980): In 1971, the army brought down the AP Government led by Demirel. Bülent Ecevit, the CHP Secretary General, protested against this military intervention. Gaining popular support by this democratic reaction, Ecevit succeeded İnönü at the head of the CHP. Ecevit led, until 1979, two coalition governments. Excessive political polarisation and the emergence of a kind of civil war between left-wing and right-wing groups provoked the army to intervene.

Disintegration of the left and rule of the centre-right; period of depoliticisation (1980–1995): A new constitution, restricting individual freedoms, curbing trade union and social demands, and glorifying the state was adopted in 1982. All political parties were banned, but the coup more or less destroyed the left. As a consequence, Turkey was ruled until 1998 uninterruptedly by governments led by the centre-right: the ANAP (Motherland Party), which was founded and led by Özal, and the DYP (True Path Party), which was the unofficial successor of the DP-AP line; both were representatives of the right-wing populist

tradition. CHP followers split into three parties: the People's Party (HP), the Social Democracy Party (SODEP), and the Democratic Left Party (DSP). HP and SODEP united, in 1985, under the name Social Democratic People's Party (SHP); but the DSP remained apart.

Recovery and recent developments (1995–2010): The CHP managed to resume in 1993 and was joined by the SHP in 1995. However, the Turkish centre-left continued to be represented by two parties: the CHP and the DSP. The CHP obtained about 10 per cent of the votes, just above the threshold, in the elections held in 1995. Subsequent parliamentary elections have taken place in 1999, 2002 and 2007.

In 1998, the DSP had formed an interim minority government with the support of DYP and ANAP. But just before the elections in 1999, Öcalan, leader of the Kurdish PKK, was captured while Ecevit's government was still in power. This event led to a nationalistic upheaval that explains the electoral success of Ecevit's DSP and of the nationalist MHP (Nationalist Movement Party). The left was already divided into two parties, as already mentioned; one of them (DSP) took power, while the other (CHP) could not surpass the 10 per cent threshold. President Baykal resigned after this electoral disaster, but was recalled by the party faithful after a year.

Turkey became a candidate for EU accession in 1999, under the coalition government DSP-MHP-ANAP, under Ecevit's leadership. This government adopted three major harmonisation packages. Nevertheless, the Turkish economy went into a deep crisis, as a result of problems accumulated under previous legislatures, and the Turkish currency collapsed in 2001. Kemal Derviş, a reputed right-wing social democrat, introduced an emergency economic reform programme. The government passed many important laws, for example, on banking reform, unemployment insurance, autonomy of the Central Bank and so on. Elections were held in 2002, before the positive effects of these reforms could be discerned. The voters held all the coalition parties responsible for the economic disaster and penalised them, as a result of which none of them could exceed the 10 per cent threshold. The newly established AKP (which received 34 per cent of the votes) formed the government and the CHP (19 per cent) formed the opposition. Neither had been represented in the previous parliament.

The reforms accomplished before the AKP's accession to power and the global economic upswing enabled the AKP government to ensure economic stability and high growth rates between 2002 and 2007, and to be rewarded by the voters once again in 2007. In fact, the AKP (47 per cent of the votes and 341 seats) won a sweeping victory, with the CHP (21 per cent) and the MHP (14 per cent) forming the opposition. Thus, the CHP has been the main opposition party since 2007. However, there was a substantial decline in the AKP's share of the vote (38 per cent) in the local elections in 2009, which is certainly due to some extent to the economic crisis.

Analysis of the Current Situation

The Republic of Turkey was founded in the 1920s on the ruins of an empire that had ruled for six centuries in accordance with religious precepts. Comprehensive reforms were needed to transform the simple subjects of the sultan into the prototype of »secular and modern citizens« under the Republic. The CHP was conceived by its founders as a political instrument for the rapid modernisation of the country through these reforms. Thus, within a couple of years life became totally different for ordinary Anatolians. Nearly everything changed, from the alphabet and clothing to the education system and the place of religion in public life. This abrupt transformation obviously created some strains. The reaction to these strains has been, for about 80 years, the main political capital of all conservative parties representing the opposition to the Kemalist and republican tradition of the CHP.

Therefore, the »centre–periphery« polarisation is the most important cleavage shaping the Turkish political landscape. Perceived as the »centre« – in other words, as the authority imposing secular republican precepts – the CHP has always lost elections against the right-wing populist stream representing the »periphery«. Military putsches interrupting the democratic process were aimed at keeping down peripheral excesses and restoring the secular republican order. Every military intervention has victimised a particular politician, a martyr whose populist political line was defended by a successor who always did well at the next elections. Erdoğan and his party, the AKP, were the latest winners in this game. Similar arguments were used by Erdoğan during his campaign before the referendum in September 2010. But the AKP's role of »martyr« is no longer convincing after eight years of

almost unlimited power and rigid rule aimed at reducing the opposition to silence, including press, army and NGOs.

Identified for years with military interventionism and reputed for its defensive secular reflexes and nationalistic views, the CHP has now decided to definitively distance itself from the armed forces and to adopt universal democratic and social democratic norms. In fact, the CHP has long been out of touch with popular feelings and people's daily concerns, while the conservative-rightist parties have always been able to stay close to them, mainly through populism and religion. The CHP's new leadership is implicitly proclaiming its intention to take heed of the political periphery, which will certainly enhance its electoral chances.

The CHP is traditionally regarded as the party of retired civil servants, officers and academics: namely, the party of the old Kemalist elite. Considering their high rate of abstention, young people seem to have lost interest in politics over the past two to three decades. This is a worldwide phenomenon, however, attributable to the crisis of representative democracy. But its effects are particularly striking among Turks under 40 years of age, the generation affected by the post-1980 depoliticisation. It seems that the more educated the voter the more likely they are to vote CHP. No significance can be detected regarding the distribution of votes by gender. Women have a lower average level of education, and less educated women in rural zones usually vote for the party indicated by the male head of the family, father or husband. The CHP performs remarkably well among those with higher incomes, but have virtually no support among the poor. Thus there is a striking contradiction between the CHP's voter structure and its ideological label. Geographically, the CHP is particularly strong in the West, and in the Aegean and Mediterranean coastal regions, but is practically absent from Eastern and South-eastern constituencies. The classic CHP voter can be described as well educated, middle-aged or older, comfortably off, secular minded, and living in prosperous western and coastal constituencies. Nevertheless, there was a big upsurge in membership in all regions after the election of the new chairman, but there are no reliable data on total membership.

The Third Congress of the CHP, in 1935, declared six basic principles: »republicanism, nationalism, populism, etatism, secularism, revolutionism« to be the ideological

substance of the party. But these principles have been updated since then and some of them no longer hold. Only nationalism and secularism have real political significance today, although they are not interpreted as rigidly as during the single-party period. Nevertheless, religious voters continue to perceive the secularism as anti-Islamic. This is still an electoral handicap for the CHP.

Trade unions backed the CHP until the coup of 1980. Since then they have lost much of their political power. Left-oriented confederations, such as DISK and KESK, and professional organisations – lawyers, engineers and so on – still support the CHP. Social democratic foundations TUSES and SODEV operate in a fairly academic way, organising and training independent social democrats. What the CHP has in common with some other NGOs, such as ÇYDD and ADD, is secularism, but not socialism. In the recent past, significant mobilisation of CHP supporters has been possible only when secular rule and the republican order seemed to be under threat. Huge demonstrations were organised in 2007 by these NGOs, with massive participation by CHP voters. TUSIAD, the biggest and the most influential employers' organisation, shares some socio-political fields of interest with the CHP: secularism, a common position against religious communities, lifestyle and so on. The fact that employers sometimes seem to back the »social democratic« CHP more enthusiastically than the workers reveals a special feature of Turkish politics: the cleavage between secularism and Islam (centre/periphery antagonism) to some extent prevails over economic considerations. However, the economic cleavage may be better articulated under the new CHP leadership, which would be electorally beneficial.

The last party programme »Change for Contemporary Turkey«, published in 2008, contains most of the programmatic elements of a European social democratic party. However, the programmes of the CHP are not generally the outcome of long discussions and debates among members. Instead, they are developed by a number of leading ideologists in a relatively short time. Consequently, they are neither interiorised nor embraced by all the members and therefore their implementation has never been wholehearted.

Although the party statutes emphasise the crucial role of democracy within the party, the dominant role of the leader is evident. In the twenty-first century, public opinion can be directly addressed by political leaders through

television and the internet in all democratic countries. But the leader must take care that his statements and those of the party programme do not diverge. This basic rule is rarely respected in Turkey. To summarise, Turkish political parties operate on the basis of oligarchic groups. It is nearly impossible to unseat leaders in the usual ways, for example, by the election of another candidate or the resignation of the leader subsequent to an electoral defeat. According to the CHP's statutes, a new candidate must be proposed by at least 20 per cent of the delegates, who are designated by the president himself in the first place. Thus, congresses generally take place with a single candidate and the president is duly confirmed in his position. Without the regrettable scandal regarding his private life, Baykal would never have been dethroned.

Two things which any electoral system must take into account are fair representation and stability. The second is too strongly emphasised by the present electoral system. The intention behind the introduction of the 10 per cent threshold in the 1980s was to prevent the unstable multi-party coalitions of the 1970s and to put a stop to the fragmentation of the mainstream parties. However, the threshold did not prevent Turkey from being ruled by coalitions from 1991 to 2002. Besides, as a catastrophic side effect, in 2002, approximately 46 per cent of the votes were unrepresented in the parliament. The AKP, before coming to power in 2002, promised to remove the threshold. All other parties, including the CHP, have also committed themselves to lifting the threshold. Nothing has been done since then, however. Nevertheless, after his election Kılıçdaroğlu presented a proposal to the parliament to bring down the threshold to seven or five per cent. But Erdoğan refused, arguing that the political stability »that Turkey needs« could be guaranteed only by a 10 per cent threshold. Similar attitudes have been displayed by both parties regarding parliamentary immunities. Against the CHP, which is willing to reduce the number of immunities for MPs under the shelter of the parliament, the AKP insists on maintaining the current broad interpretation of MPs' immunities, including malpractice.

Reasons for Past Electoral Defeats

Since the 1970s, social democracy has steadily lost votes in both Europe and Turkey, each decade proving more difficult than the previous one. Obviously, the CHP's social

democratic policies are strongly influenced by national conditions. However, its social democratic understanding depends to a large extent on the ideas developed by European social democracy. The electoral reverses of Turkish social democracy therefore have both European and domestic causes.

A key element in the negative public perception is connected to the CHP's past as a state party and also its actions during its minority or coalition governments in the 1970s. The CHP is generally reputed to be incompetent in economic affairs, and is perceived, like some other European social democratic parties, as good on redistribution but »inefficient« when it comes to achieving growth. In fact, the CHP has had no opportunity to form a majority government since 1950. This means that there is no way of assessing how the CHP would have performed if it had had the opportunity to govern. Nevertheless, the CHP must concede that it has not remained in touch with voters' daily concerns during its period of opposition. A further problem is that the political agenda has been shaped by the AKP in accordance with its own needs. The CHP's new leader has changed party policy, which is now concentrated on unemployment and corruption, which are the Achilles heel of the AKP.

Another important reason for the electoral defeats is the leadership issue. Former CHP chairman Baykal was not corrupt, but he was highly unpopular. Although he performed remarkably well in television debates, a mass of prejudices obstructed his path to power. Furthermore, his authoritarian manner led to the formation of a group of devoted politicians around him; he discouraged general participation and prevented the development of democracy in the party. The leadership has seemed to be neither accessible to the public nor active among the lower classes. The overwhelming majority of CHP members, indeed, were inactive. Monthly or annual dues were not collected systematically, and no real feeling of affiliation was associated with formal membership.

The working class generated by late industrialisation in Turkey has always had limited power in electoral terms. The majority of the population was employed in the agricultural sector until the 1970s and has never displayed »working class« reflexes, having voted mostly for right-wing conservative parties. This has been an evident electoral handicap for the CHP, which espouses welfare state principles. Since the 1970s, however, agriculture has lost

ground in favour of industry, while from the 1980s the industrial sector declined in comparison to services. Advances in technology have allowed skilled labour to supersede unskilled labour in many ways. The new prototype worker is quite different from the previous one. He does not reject change, provided that this change does not involve major cultural and socio-economic upheaval. As a rule of thumb, one should envisage Turkish skilled workers as fasting in Ramadan but at the same time taking a keen interest in the stability of the stock market in which they have invested their modest savings. Thus, any social democratic party with aspirations to power needs to accommodate itself to this new »conservative-modern« working-middle class, which is an important and dynamic constituent of the population. This class does not approve of abrupt change and risk-taking. The CHP has failed to win elections because it has not designed its policies appropriately. However, the CHP has started to show respect for religious values, has abandoned its statist claims and accepts the market economy, provided that the welfare state is not overlooked.

In fact, competition between left and right no longer takes the form of strong divergence, as was the case until the 1980s, but is generally to be found somewhere in the centreground. As a result, the political space has narrowed between the centre-right and the centre-left parties, and in some cases there are no noticeable differences in terms of economic and social policies between social democratic and conservative parties. A substantial number of workers no longer feel protected by the CHP. In countries which lack a deeply rooted socialist tradition, social democrats differentiate themselves in specific ways. Thus, the CHP has started more and more to emphasise its protective role regarding the Republic's secular basis. For example, the government led by Ecevit (1999–2002), a social democrat, could be distinguished from the first AKP government (2002–2007) merely in terms of its nationalistic approach and extreme secularism. Both governments implemented exactly the same economic policies laid down by Kemal Derviş, a social democrat of liberal tendencies. As leader of the opposition, Baykal based his stance on nationalism and secularism, without substantial criticisms of the AKP's neoliberal policies. That inevitably reduced the social democrats' room to manoeuvre in Turkey.

The worldwide dominance of neoliberal discourse constitutes an immense problem for social democrats. The

neoliberal order has displaced equality and solidarity, the classic values of social democracy. The first civil government in Turkey after the coup of 1980 was led by Özal, a convinced neoliberal technocrat who ruled until the 1990s. Neoliberal indoctrination in Turkey started with his period of office and continued under right-wing governments in the 1990s and 2000s. The CHP has resisted the temptation of neoliberal discourse as far as possible and still criticises »unnecessary« privatisations and the reluctance of the government to intervene in certain socio-economic issues. But the party's formal opposition to privatisation generally has no ideological origin: the CHP simply has no confidence in the AKP's ability to operate without succumbing to nepotism and corruption.

Social democracy has not been able to take effective action against the negative effects of globalisation. Indeed, in many countries, including Turkey, social democrats have expressed divergent views on the matter. Social groups such as the new poor of the suburbs, the marginalised, retirees of working age, at-risk youth, the new precariat, but also skilled labour employed in uncompetitive sectors feel threatened by the new challenges of a globalised world. Members of such groups feel insufficiently protected by the social democratic party. On the other hand, well-educated social democratic elites which have traditionally spurned conservatism but do not feel threatened by the effects of globalisation are turning towards liberalism. In both cases, social democracy is losing out. This evolution obviously has led to a further weakening of the CHP.

The most dramatic worldwide consequence of multiculturalism due to immigration is the loss of a sense of solidarity. Large-scale unemployment combined with a large immigrant labour force inevitably gives rise to populist and xenophobic parties. Similarly, domestic emigration in Turkey has reached considerable proportions since the 1970s. Masses of people have moved from the east to the west of the country and from rural areas to the towns. As a result, an unqualified young labour force has agglomerated in suburban areas, especially around big cities in the west and in the coastal regions. Immigrants have not tended to come from other countries, as in Europe. Rather less educated, culturally different masses, overwhelmingly of Kurdish origin, have »invaded« cities inhabited by more educated citizens, giving rise to a »multicultural« Turkish society. Domestic emigration is continuing, but to a lesser extent. The economic and

cultural integration of the newcomers is rendered particularly difficult by two things: (i) increasing unemployment – in other words, the incapacity of the economy to absorb the proliferating unskilled labour force – and (ii) increasing strains between Turks and Kurds in western regions, exacerbated by PKK terrorism. Both the suburbs and the migrants should have been fertile soil for the social democratic party, but until 2010 the CHP was unable to accomplish this political mission, so that all the votes concerned went to the conservative AKP in both 2002 and 2007.

Per capita income in Turkey is still below USD 10,000 and unemployment rates – especially among young people – are high. Regional disparities mean that poverty is particularly striking in the east and southeast. The CHP has been both physically and electorally absent from these very areas – which are inhabited overwhelmingly by Kurdish people – because of its uncompromising and nationalistic state-party attitude to the Kurdish issue. Thus, these citizens have had no political choice but the Kurdish nationalism of the ethnic party or the Islamism of the AKP.

The atomisation of the political demands of different categories of voters is another factor making life difficult for the CHP. Since the 1980s, the bulk of the Turkish population has lived in urban areas. Since productivity in agriculture is steadily increasing, emigration from rural to urban areas will continue. Furthermore, alongside unskilled and unemployed workers, many individuals are benefitting from opportunities to develop themselves and to diversify their personal interests. Such persons are starting to pass from the »survival« stage to the »self-expression« phase, in Inglehart's terms. The long-familiar homogeneity of »socio-political« demands is also disappearing. These citizens rarely find that all their »atomised« demands are satisfied by the discourse of a large social democratic party designed in accordance with the needs of the shapeless majority of the working class. This complicates the task of the CHP and favours the formation of small »flash« parties with niche policies and able to attract former or potential social democratic voters. This is one of the reasons why some more educated constituents – potential social democrats – do not vote for the CHP but opt for abstention or support more marginal leftist political formations.

Recent Developments and Expectations

For years now, CHP voters have done little more than gone to the ballot box at election time, without participating in the party's activities in any other way. CHP local organisations display little vitality or desire to enlist new members, while the AKP's local organisations have established close contacts with the voters. The new leader of the CHP is now trying to mobilise all its regional organisations and is exhorting them to establish a presence in the voters' daily lives. One positive experience of active politics has already been provided by the »Kılıçdaroğlu/Tekin« (candidate mayor of Istanbul and the head of the CHP in Istanbul and presently member of the executive board) team during the local election campaign in 2009. They went out and about in the suburbs, visiting people and taking an interest in their daily concerns. As a result, the party in Istanbul did much better than it did nationally, registering 38 per cent of the vote in comparison to 23 per cent nationwide. This was a milestone on the road which has taken Kılıçdaroğlu to the top of the CHP.

Kılıçdaroğlu was perceived by many Turks as a potential leader of the opposition before the events leading to Baykal's resignation. As soon as he announced his candidature even the supporters of the former chairman rallied to his cause. The congress elected him to the presidency of the CHP on 22 May 2010. The first test of the new leader was the referendum brought forward by the AKP aimed at amending a number of articles of the Constitution. Confronted by the need to conduct a campaign immediately after his election, Kılıçdaroğlu made a huge effort, but the performance of the party overall has not been convincing.

In terms of both the procedure followed in its preparation and its content, the amendment package was not what those who recognised the need for a new Constitution – including the CHP – were expecting. Many unrelated articles were submitted within the framework of the referendum to be voted on as a whole. The CHP expressed its willingness to support the articles that would help to improve human rights in Turkey if two others on the reorganisation of the judiciary were separated from the package. But the AKP refused to accept this compromise, insisting on its »take it or leave it« approach in an effort to leverage acceptance of the two controversial articles – which could serve to further consolidate the hold of the executive over the judiciary – through the articles

concerning human rights. All appeals and petitions were ignored by the ruling AKP and Erdoğan was determined to go ahead with the referendum, showing little interest in consensus seeking.

Criticisms were also tabled by people who were in favour of totally rewriting the Constitution, rather merely tinkering with it, cobbling together an eclectic assortment of poorly worked out amendments in a couple of weeks. As a result, it has been impossible to hold a rational debate on the process either before or after the referendum, thus deepening the existing political polarisation in Turkey. The amendment was passed by 58 per cent in September 2010. This result has had two negative consequences for the opposition. First, the governing party has created constitutional opportunities to strengthen its grip on the judiciary; second, the decline of the AKP and the ascent of the CHP that could be observed since the local elections in 2009 have both been reversed.

It was evidently impossible that the new and democratic CHP could prosper with its leader and party establishment in conflict. An opportunity was provided to enable the new chairman to work with his own team by a confrontation between Kılıçdaroğlu and Sav, the secretary general, which led to the latter's resignation in November 2010. Kılıçdaroğlu established a central executive committee of 15 members, including himself, a new secretary general and 13 deputy chairs, mostly intellectuals, academicians and politicians who had opposed Baykal's policies. Subsequently, a party congress took place on 18 December 2010. The previous party council of 80 members was composed of politicians elected during Baykal's presidency, thus making harmonious cooperation with the new leader impossible. The congress elected a new party council (party assembly) that will be more amenable to the new leadership.

There were two urgent issues on the agenda that the renewed CHP had to tackle immediately after its internal reformation: the Kurdish problem and the headscarf question. Both these issues entail cruel political dilemmas for the CHP, risking a conflict between party policy and the views of the nationalistic and secular sections of its electorate. The CHP recently declared that the Kurdish problem is not merely an economic one. The CHP has more effective ideological instruments at its disposal than any other party for understanding the cultural demands of the Kurds and their potential conciliation with

a unitary state structure. The CHP must be aware that it is the unique political formation able to lift the burden of religious fundamentalism and ethnic fanaticism from the Kurdish people of Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia.

Although the headscarf is a religious symbol, its wearing in universities is perceived as an individual freedom by the overwhelming majority. No other party but the CHP could find a durable solution to this problem without being accused of Islamist fundamentalism by the core secularist electorate. However, the CHP, which recently declared its acceptance of the wearing of the headscarf, would prefer the practice to be limited to universities. It is doubtful that the AKP would refrain from extending it to other educational institutions. Therefore, this is a dangerous area for the CHP which faces a dilemma: accepting the will of the majority or possibly opening the way to fundamentalism. However, this problem does not seem to be on the agenda in the run up to the general election.

The AKP is expected to retain its majority at the next general election, to be held in June 2011. If nothing dramatic intervenes before then, the CHP should, however, increase its effective presence in the parliament and be able to operate as a more efficient opposition during the coming legislature. But the drafting of a new constitution with broad popular participation is incumbent on the CHP; the party must take the lead on this issue immediately after the election.

One special feature of Turkish politics must be emphasised. The expectations are huge and the strains on the CHP are immense. Citizens and supporters want the party to change urgently and radically. However, a party that was in stasis for years clearly cannot be reanimated in such a short period of time. Nevertheless, the CHP's electoral campaign does exhibit real improvements, justifying the hopes of genuine Turkish democrats suffering under the excesses and despotic tendencies of the governing AKP.

Future Prospects – Europe-wide and in Turkey

Social democracy must, first of all, oppose the worldwide dominance of neoliberal discourse and promote its own values. The CHP already shows signs of an awareness of this. Its critical attitude with regard to consumerism and the prevailing model of society will enhance its electoral

chances. If the space has indeed narrowed between conservatives and social democrats, it is because the right has not been able to resist the social pressure exerted by the left. Social policy is therefore of crucial importance for social democrats. The new CHP promises that, under its rule, all households with an income under a certain level will receive assistance from the state in order to attain decent living standards. Progressive politics in Turkey should be aimed at easing poverty today and preventing its emergence in the future.

The CHP has no recent experience in power except at the regional level. It will have to overcome the electoral effects of unjust prejudices regarding its economic competence. This can be achieved by ensuring that regional administrations perform effectively and by implementing concrete social projects. In social policy, the CHP claims to be able to do better than the AKP, but no social democrat would like the CHP to be transformed into »an AKP on the left«. Therefore, the CHP must emphasise its differences from the populist AKP which distributes food just before elections in order to win the votes of needy households. Thus, any deviation towards populism by promising social projects without saying how they are to be funded would harm its image. Reliability and credibility depend on realism, integrity and accountability. Also risky would be to narrow its perspective to social policy. That would reinforce the prejudice that social democratic parties are keen on redistribution but do not produce growth.

Neoliberal concepts are neither appropriate for conciliating economic competitiveness with social cohesion nor for implementing efficient economic policies. State intervention in favour of the working class and the socially excluded is worthwhile not just to combat social justice, but also to establish a more rationally functioning and efficient society. Social democrats in Europe and in Turkey will have to stabilise and reduce the gap between high and low incomes through tax regulation. In this connection, reform is necessary in Turkey. However, it must be proportionate and well-balanced in order to avoid further tax evasion, since a substantial part of the Turkish economy is already in the informal sector.

At this stage, the most important thing for Turkish social democrats is to rethink the role of the state, including ways to regulate the markets. The problems arising from inequalities must be solved efficiently. This implies that

social democrats must pay more attention to the needs of their »own« – in other words, the workers – such as their low wages. Concerning social policy, the CHP looks set to benefit, for several decades to come, from a particular advantage in contrast to European social democratic parties, because the development of Turkey's demographic structure favours them. According to Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP will venture out into the suburbs and less developed regions which have been ignored hitherto. Turkey's social democrats certainly need to cultivate closer contacts with low income groups and the social excluded, not only as a moral and democratic necessity, but also as a rational way of accessing potential voters.

The CHP must also pay attention to dynamic social strata which are transforming the socio-political landscape with their post-industrial needs. Well-educated young constituents shy away from the authoritarian structures of traditional political parties, and adhere vaguely to a sort of apolitical liberalism, focusing on the sustainability of economic growth and ideas of social justice. A social democratic party could relatively easily and quite naturally attract such ascending social groups, since »equality« (social policy) and »sustainability« (environmentalism) are interrelated issues. The CHP must heed the value they put on self-expression and their post-materialist sensibilities, and encourage participation, commitment and individual engagement. In this way, young people may become interested and increasingly involved in politics. But they need to see ways in which they might be able to make change happen in the CHP.

To gain credibility among its members and voters, the CHP must set a series of objectives in order to establish true internal democracy. In Turkey, the system does not allow members of parliament to operate independently of the party leadership: essentially, the parliament functions like an assembly of nominees designated by party leaders. The party leader should consult more and party bureaucracies need to seek the advice of their members more often and give them more responsibility. Members and ordinary voters must be listened to. This is a dream of several decades' standing for CHP members.

The democratic system based on representation must be transformed into a participatory democracy. The CHP must avoid maintaining a rigid hierarchy in its internal structure and reorganise so that it is more open to the influence of civil society and sensitive to people's everyday

experiences. CHP members must feel involved and engaged through their personal and material input, in the form of participation and membership dues. Dynamism can also be enhanced by bringing in more women and young people, groups hitherto unrepresented in Turkish political life, including positive discrimination, if necessary. In short, there must be a new process of democratisation, politicisation and activation in the CHP.

As already mentioned, one of the two main streams dividing the Turkish political universe is republican secular modernism represented by the CHP, which is trying to evolve into social democracy. But republican modernist tendencies have gradually been transformed in the 2000s into a sort of national conservatism, even isolationism as a consequence of various external threats, such as the negative effects of globalisation, the sovereignty issue arising from the EU accession process, PKK terrorism and so on. This development has given rise to a bifurcation between upholders of the national conservative interpretation of the mainstream and a category of social democrats adhering to international norms. Many of the latter are former CHP members who have deserted the party because of its conservative attitudes, nationalistic positions and isolationist tendencies. The new leadership has started to win back a substantial part of them. It is obvious that the nationalistic approach of its Kemalist core electorate (15–20 per cent) will, as before, play an inhibiting role in party policymaking. However, the rigid ideological attitude of this electorate will certainly be softened by the new leadership, especially if the party obtains better electoral results by attenuating its nationalistic approach, embracing national minorities and promoting human rights and democratic values.

During the campaign leading up to the general elections of June 2011, the CHP has increasingly adopted a politics and rhetoric directed towards voters' daily lives rather than constantly focusing on values and is sincerely trying to set the political agenda. But the CHP must, first of all, establish democracy in its own organisation. This is a prerequisite of the development of democracy and human rights in Turkey. The new party leader has renewed the leadership and promised to rejuvenate internal democracy by changing the party statutes. Since votes cast for the CHP hitherto have been in direct correspondence with the level of education and income of the voter, social advance inevitably favours the CHP. Other voter categories, such as working/middle classes, low income cat-

egories, the socially excluded, disaffected leftists, young people with post-industrial sensibilities and so on are – theoretically – natural supporters of social democracy, but have not voted for the CHP, either recently or ever. If the CHP can mobilise their support it can count on much greater success than in the past.

European Perspectives

CHP is a full member of the Socialist International (SI). President Baykal was vice-president of the SI between 2003 and 2008. The CHP is also an associate member of the Party of European Socialists. Mr Rasmussen was the first European socialist personality to address a message of congratulation to Mr Kılıçdaroğlu after his accession to the leadership in May 2010. However, relations between the CHP and European institutions or social democratic parties have not always been characterised by perfect mutual understanding over the past decade. Unfriendly political attitudes and inopportune declarations by politicians or governments should not affect inter-party relations. Clearly, the CHP has not been active enough in developing relations with European social democrats. Intensification of contacts with European socialist organisations, as well as equivalent political parties seems to be among its new priorities. The visits made and contacts established with the SPD in Berlin and the European Commission in Brussels by the new CHP chairman and participation in the SI Congress in Paris provide convincing precursory signs of the new approach.

The global visions of the CHP and of European social democrats coincide perfectly. In the course of its evolution to social democracy a party with such deep historical roots should make every effort to play an active role in European socialist institutions. Furthermore, the CHP's future policies must be shaped, as much as possible, in the perspective of a Europe-wide harmonisation process. Ironically, on many issues during the past five years European social democrats have backed the AKP against the CHP. The fact that the European left-oriented institutions support the conservative AKP has been very frustrating for the CHP, which considers itself the inheritor of the modernising and westernising reformist political tradition in Turkey. However, the new approaches being adopted by the CHP tending to social democracy, as well as more frequent contacts between the party and its Eu-

ropean counterparts will certainly reverse the opinion of the European Left.

It is true that, in the recent past, the CHP has unfortunately espoused political attitudes that are incompatible with social democratic norms. But European social democratic parties must also make an effort to inform themselves properly about the CHP. European social democrats should look at the whole picture. A more discerning approach on the part of European social democracy to the CHP would help it to move towards a less nationalistic position and shape its future policies in accordance with social democratic norms. More cooperation and mutual comprehension will surely clear the CHP's path to social democracy.

Turkey's path to the EU, from the Ankara Treaty in 1963 (signed by İnönü) by way of the document of candidature in 1999 (signed by Ecevit), has been paved by social democrats. The first harmonisation measures and reforms, such as the abolition of the death penalty, were adopted under Ecevit's government. The AKP government was very enthusiastic about EU accession between 2002 and 2005 because membership would probably guarantee all religious freedoms, including the headscarf in schools and the turban in public areas. In principle, the CHP has supported Turkey's EU accession since the beginning because it considers membership a natural extension of the republican vision, a project of modernisation and integration with the contemporary world. It would be difficult to understand if the new CHP leadership did not end its vacillation and take the initiative with regard to EU accession.

Turkish public opinion is undecided about Turkish EU accession, but pro-European Turkish citizens are undoubtedly in the majority compared to eurosceptics. Incidental decreases in popular support tend to be the result of superfluous and untimely declarations by European leaders about Turkey, as well as of the belief of the majority of Turkish citizens that the EU will never admit Turkey as a member. European social democrats are aware of the need for Europe to integrate Turkey in the long run, as former German Chancellor Schröder declared in an article published in May 2010. The presence of Turkey within the EU would confirm and strengthen its claim to be a global power. In contrast, without the prospect of EU membership the position of pro-European Turkish democrats and social democrats would be weakened consid-



erably, thereby reinforcing nationalism, isolationism and fundamentalism and an inevitable eastward slide of Turkish foreign policy.



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