

The Turkey Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING

VOL. 2 NO. 23

21 DECEMBER 2009

ANALYSIS:

AFTER THE DTP CLOSURE: FROM DIALOGUE TO MONOLOGUE?

Careth Jenkins

For a party which has frequently expressed its opposition to the closure of political parties, the muted response of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to the outlawing of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) spoke volumes. Few appear to have mourned the banning of a party which in recent months had broadened its support base in southeast Turkey at the AKP's expense. However, the AKP appears unlikely to be able to exploit the closure of the DTP for its own electoral advantage.

COULD TURKEY'S "GLASNOST" ESTABLISH EQUALITY AS THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLE OF THE STATE?

Halil M. Karaveli

With its policies of a "democratic opening", the AKP government has embarked on an enterprise that ultimately challenges the core identity of the republic as a specifically Turkish state. The revulsion that the notion of putting Turkishness on an equal footing with the other identities of society is eliciting suggests that it may, once again, prove difficult to find a liberal way out of the perennial dilemma of Turkey – to establish a secure foundation for the state in a setting of societal heterogeneity.



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

The Turkey Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING
VOL. 2 NO. 23
21 DECEMBER 2009

ANALYSIS

AFTER THE DTP CLOSURE: FROM DIALOGUE TO MONOLOGUE?.....3

Gareth Jenkins

For a party which has frequently expressed its opposition to the closure of political parties, the muted response of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to the outlawing of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) spoke volumes. Few appear to have mourned the banning of a party which in recent months had broadened its support base in southeast Turkey at the AKP's expense. However, the AKP appears unlikely to be able to exploit the closure of the DTP for its own electoral advantage.

COULD TURKEY'S "GLASNOST" ESTABLISH EQUALITY AS THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLE OF THE STATE?.....7

Halil M. Karaveli

With its policies of a "democratic opening", the AKP government has embarked on an enterprise that ultimately challenges the core identity of the republic as a specifically Turkish state. The revulsion that the notion of putting Turkishness on an equal footing with the other identities of society is eliciting suggests that it may, once again, prove difficult to find a liberal way out of the perennial dilemma of Turkey – to establish a secure foundation for the state in a setting of societal heterogeneity.

What the Columnists Say.....11

The decision of the constitutional court to close down the Kurdish Democratic society party (DTP) and the ambush in which seven Turkish soldiers were killed have dominated the Turkish political scene. Notably, several liberal commentators have leveled harsh criticism at the PKK, which they accuse of colluding with the forces of Turkish nationalism in ambushing the "democratic opening" of the government. In general, the closure decision has been interpreted as proof that the "democratic opening" does not enjoy the support of the state establishment. Several commentators have noted that recent developments have above all served to make it plain that the jailed leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan remains the most important Kurdish political player.

THE TURKEY ANALYST

Editorial Board

Svante E. Cornell, Editor-in-Chief
Halil Magnus Karaveli, Managing Editor
M. K. Kaya, Associate Editor

The Turkey Analyst is an English language journal. It is a publication of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Joint Center, designed to bring authoritative analysis and news on the rapidly developing domestic and foreign policy issues in Turkey. It is published biweekly, and includes topical analysis, as well as translations and summaries of selected Turkish news reports.

The Turkey Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what authors write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. *Analyst* articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news, and are backed by solid evidence. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. The lead analyses appearing in the *Turkey Analyst* are unsigned, being written by one, two, or all of the three Editors.

The *Turkey Analyst* occasionally publishes signed guest analyses, which are normally solicited. Each 1,000-1,500 word analytical article offers a concise and authoritative statement of the event or issue in question. An article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, the *Turkey Analyst* does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

The Editors reserve the right to edit the article to conform to the editorial policy and specifications and to reject the article should it not be acceptable to our editorial committee for publication. The copyright for the article will reside with the *Turkey Analyst*. However, the author may use all or part of the contracted article in any book or article in any media subsequently written by the author, provided that a copyright notice appears giving reference to the contracted article's first publication by the "Turkey Analyst, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center."

Submission Guidelines:

Analytical articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,200 and 1,400 words. The articles are structured as follows:

KEY ISSUE: A short 75-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

BACKGROUND: ca. 500 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 500 to 700 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

CONCLUSIONS: ca. 200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

Those interested in submitting an article to the *Turkey Analyst* should send their submission, or an article query describing the main arguments of the article, together with a CV to: info@silkroadstudies.org.

Editorial Coorespondence should be direct to:

Editor, *Turkey Analyst*
Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program
Institute for Security and Development Policy
V. Finnbodavagen 2, SE-13130 Stockholm-Nacka, Sweden
info@silkroadstudies.org

AFTER THE DTP CLOSURE: FROM DIALOGUE TO MONOLOGUE?

Gareth Jenkins

The Turkey-Israel alliance is over. After more than two decades of close cooperation, the Turkish government is no longer interested in maintaining close cooperation with Israel. Nor is it—for all practical purposes—willing to do anything much to maintain its good relations with Israel. The absence of any substantial, public criticism in Turkey of the Turkish government’s break with Israel does suggest the Turkish-Israeli relationship lacked deeper roots in Turkish society, and hence the potential to become a permanent one.

BACKGROUND: On December 11, Turkey’s Constitutional Court voted unanimously to close down the DTP on the grounds that it had become “a center of activities incompatible with the indivisible integrity of the state” and, in a reference to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), had “links with a terrorist organization.”

The Constitutional Court also voted to forbid 37 DTP members from participating in any organized political activity, such as representing or working for a political party, for a period of five years. Those banned included two parliamentary deputies, Ahmet Türk, the party leader, and Aysel Tuğluk, in addition to four DTP provincial mayors. The announcement of the DTP’s closure came at a time when the AKP’s “Democratic Opening”, launched in July 2009, already appeared to be foundering.



Ahmet Türk and Aysel Tuğluk

The initiative appears to have been motivated by a combination of factors, including a sincere desire to end the bloodshed resulting from the PKK’s 25 year-old insurgency. The “Democratic Opening”

was deliberately vague from the outset, as the AKP sought to test the waters before making any specific commitments. By early fall it had become clear that the AKP had seriously misread both the public mood and the attitudes of the opposition parties. In recent years, a number of concessions have already been made to Kurdish cultural rights. Yet these have not only fallen short of Kurds' demands for full equality but also engendered widespread resentment amongst ethnic Turks, with a disturbing rise in an often aggressive anti-Kurdish racism. Nor was it ever likely that the nationalist opposition parties would sign up to a process which offered them no political advantage. Both the CHP and the MHP were aware that participation could lose them Turkish nationalist votes; while any electoral credit for the "Democratic Opening" would most likely accrue to the initiator of the process, namely the AKP. As a result, the only other party which publicly expressed its support for the "Democratic Opening" was the DTP.

In October 2009, the DTP successfully hijacked the one concrete product of the "Democratic Opening", namely the arrival of eight PKK militants at Turkey's Habur border crossing with Iraq. AKP officials had claimed that the militants would surrender as the first step in a process that would culminate in the dissolution of the entire organization. But it failed either to create a legal framework for the dismemberment of the PKK or to secure an unequivocal public declaration by the organization that it was abandoning violence. When the militants arrived at Habur on October 19, no attempt was made to arrest them. On the contrary, they declared that they were emissaries from the PKK in the first stage in a process of negotiation between the organization and Turkish state; the initiation of which had long been one of the primary goals of the PKK's campaign of violence. As Turkish nationalists took to the

streets in protest, the DTP paraded the eight militants through southeast Turkey as conquering heroes. More damagingly for the AKP, the DTP began to claim that it was the party, not the AKP, which was responsible for bringing the PKK militants down from the mountains and would also deserve the credit for any subsequent concessions to Kurdish rights as the result of the "Democratic Opening".

Haşim Kılıç, the president of the Constitutional Court, is responsible for setting the court's agenda and thus the timing of its decisions. Kılıç is widely regarded as being sympathetic to the AKP. The case against the DTP was filed on November 16, 2007. A similar case to close down the AKP was filed on March 14, 2008 and a verdict announced on July 30, 2008. As a result, the timing of the verdict in the DTP closure case has fuelled suspicions amongst the party's supporters that Kılıç was acting at the AKP's behest in an attempt to stifle the DTP at a time when it was increasing its popularity at the expense of the government.

The distrust between the AKP and DTP intensified in the days after the verdict. Initially, the 19 remaining DTP parliamentary deputies announced that they would resign their seats in an attempt to force by-elections. AKP officials immediately made it known that the government would block the resignations. Few doubt that they were motivated by a desire to prevent the government suffering a humiliating defeat in the by-elections.

IMPLICATIONS: The DTP is the fifth pro-Kurdish party to be banned in Turkey in the last 16 years. Every banned party has been accused of being linked to the PKK; a charge that each has denied. On December 18, Ahmet Türk announced that – rather than resigning – the 19 deputies would remain in parliament and transfer to a new party, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which had been established to replace the DTP. In

explaining their change of heart, Türk declared that imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan had held a meeting with his lawyers on December 16 and asked them to instruct the 19 DTP deputies to remain in parliament. It was the first time that a leading member of a pro-Kurdish political party had been so candid in acknowledging the influence of Öcalan and the PKK on the DTP.



Türk's admission was greeted with outrage by many Turkish nationalists; and the explicit identification of the DTP with the PKK appears likely to increase tensions on the streets of Turkey. In recent weeks, there have already been several attacks by Turkish nationalists against both the DTP and ethnic Kurds. But Türk's statement also highlighted one of the greatest weaknesses of the Turkish state's past policies on the Kurdish issue. The tendency of the Turkish authorities to identify any expression of Kurdish nationalism with the PKK has not only prevented the emergence of an alternative to the organization but indirectly bolstered the PKK's claim to be the sole legitimate representative of Kurdish nationalist aspirations. As a result, despite the

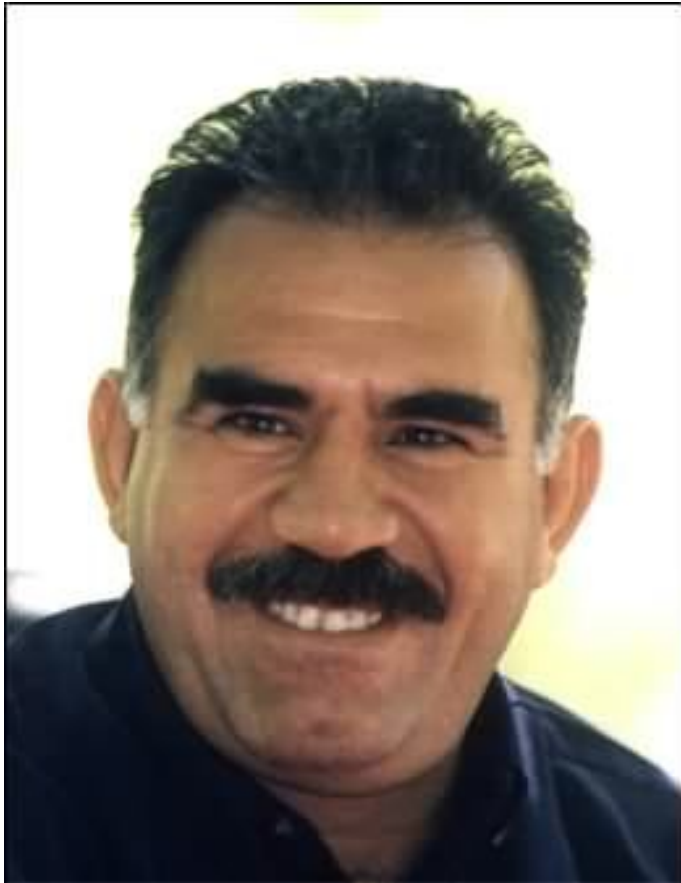
often brutal violence of its insurgency, the PKK continues to enjoy considerable support among Turkey's Kurdish minority.

Publicly at least, the Turkish authorities have always insisted that they do not negotiate with "terrorists". In reality, there have long been intermittent indirect contacts with the PKK, which accelerated and intensified in the run-up to the arrival of the PKK militants at Habur in October 2009. The DTP's refusal either to condemn the PKK or to admit its close links with the organization infuriated many Turkish nationalists. But it did provide the AKP with a publicly less unpalatable interlocutor than the PKK itself.

It is still too early to make any precise predictions about the policies and attitudes likely to be adopted by the BDP, not least because the future leadership of the party currently remains unclear. But the early indications are that the BDP is likely to be more, not less, hard-line and that – if Türk's statement is a sign of things to come – less reticent about admitting its links to the PKK. There is certainly no evidence to suggest that – as many in the AKP appear to have hoped – that the closure of the DTP will enable the government to reassert its ownership of the "Democratic Opening" and that the BDP will be cowed into distancing itself from the PKK.

There is a general acknowledgment both in the government and the security forces that military measures alone cannot eradicate the PKK. Yet if, as the AKP has always maintained, the "Democratic Opening" is a process of dialogue, then the government needs interlocutors. More critically, it needs an interlocutor which can either "deliver" the PKK or capture its support base. Ahmet Türk's statement of December 18 suggests that, far from driving a wedge between the DTP/BDP and the PKK, the events of recent

months have served only to tighten the relationship between them.



Abdullah Öcalan

In the absence of a political actor able to represent Kurdish aspirations yet operate independently of the PKK, the AKP would appear to have no choice but to engage with the DTP/BDP. But doing so would risk the DTP/BDP claiming the credit for any progress towards a solution; while also laying the AKP open to accusations that it was negotiating with the PKK.

The other option for the AKP – and one which it currently appears likely to take – would be for the government to try to go it alone and push through a number of concessions to Kurdish rights without consulting with any other political actors. But trying to introduce such concessions without the support of the BDP would be extremely risky. Perhaps more critically, the rising ethnic tensions and recent street violence suggest that the only concessions extensive enough to attract Kurdish votes from the BDP to the AKP would not only lose the government even more Turkish nationalist votes but could lead to severe domestic instability.

CONCLUSIONS: The decision by the remaining DTP parliamentary deputies not to resign their seats will have come as a relief to the AKP. But it is likely to be only a temporary respite. The AKP's recent rhetoric suggests that the dialogue promised when the “Democratic Opening” was launched will now be replaced with a “monologue”, in which the government attempts to make some concessions to Kurdish rights despite – rather than together with – the other political parties. Given the current tensions in Turkish politics and Turkish society, such a strategy appears to have little chance of success; and, with a general election due in a little over 18 months, the AKP cannot afford a repeat of the errors and miscalculations that have characterized the last six months.

Gareth Jenkins is a Nonresident Senior Fellow with the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program's Turkey Initiative.

COULD TURKEY'S "GLASNOST" ESTABLISH EQUALITY AS THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLE OF THE STATE?

Halil M. Karaveli

With its policies of a “democratic opening”, the AKP government has embarked on an enterprise that ultimately challenges the core identity of the republic as a specifically Turkish state. The revulsion that the notion of putting Turkishness on an equal footing with the other identities of society is eliciting suggests that it may, once again, prove difficult to find a liberal way out of the perennial dilemma of Turkey – to establish a secure foundation for the state in a setting of societal heterogeneity.

BACKGROUND:

For the last two centuries, the ruling bureaucratic elites of Turkey and its predecessor state, the Ottoman Empire, have been haunted by the same, perennial question: As they strove to keep the state strong, indeed alive at all, the ruling elites groped with the question of how to cope with the reality of a multiethnic, heterogeneous society. For much of this period, the expressions of societal heterogeneity have been deemed detrimental to the overriding concern of shoring up the state. For more than a century, the answers to the perennial question of how state power was going to be secured have ranged from ethnic cleansing to assimilation. Although the extent of coercion and violence has varied, the basic assumption has been that society needs to be



kept subdued, that its diversity must be neutralized, either homogenized or purged, in order for the state to survive and prosper.

For the nationalist Committee of Union and Progress that ruled the Ottoman Empire during its last years, the solution to the dilemma faced by the state was spelled ethnic cleansing. The inheritor Kemalist republic was eventually to succeed, not without recourse to violence, in molding a large part of the Muslim population of Anatolia into a

nation “happy to call itself Turkish”. Nevertheless, the policies of assimilation were ultimately to fall short of the objective of turning a majority of the recalcitrant Kurds into Turks. With no end in sight to the quarter of a century-long PKK insurgency, the search for a novel approach is inevitably imposing itself on the state establishment.

Indeed, at one level the Kurdish or “Democratic opening” of the AKP government purports to offer salvation for the state. In that respect, it is reminiscent of the “glasnost” (Openness) that was once proclaimed with the purpose of saving the Soviet Union. The Turkish public has used the opportunity to broach almost every aspect of the Kurdish issue as never before. But just like the glasnost of Mikhail Gorbachev, the opening of

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has unleashed forces that are proving destabilizing.

The “opening” represents an attempt to harness societal heterogeneity, rather than suppress it. With it, the Turkish experiment in modern state building has come full circle: The first modernizers of the Ottoman Empire had similarly endeavored to save the state by an opening to “the others” of the empire, the Christian minorities. As inauspicious as the Gorbachev analogy is, so are the resemblances between “the opening” and the ultimately unsuccessful Tanzimat reforms of the period 1839 to 1876.

The Tanzimat reformers sought to forestall the danger of the state’s collapse by binding the Christian populations to the state. The principle of universal equality was announced; the institution



Armenians being marched off in 1915

of a common citizenship valid for all peoples of the empire was proclaimed. The Tanzimat reforms, however inconsistent and ambiguous in their application, nevertheless implied a most radical breach with tradition: they amounted to nothing less than an attempt on the pillar of the state that they were supposed to save, at its Islamic foundation. It called upon Muslims to relinquish their superior status, to forego their dominance, and to accept non-Muslims as equal citizens. The Tanzimat elicited the wrath of the Muslim majority - the declaration of equality set in motion a violence that became the prologue to the ethnic cleansing of 1915 - and was ultimately undone by the opposition to it from within the very state establishment where it had originated. Turkish historian Taner Akçam ascribes the failure of the original "opening" to the hostility of the Muslim majority that "together with the state's poor planning to implement such equality, rendered all efforts impotent."

IMPLICATIONS: In a similar vein, the AKP government's planning of the opening has elicited strong criticism. It has subsequently also become evident that opinions within the AKP diverge, and that Turkish nationalists within the ruling party have been mounting a successful opposition to the pursuit of a more radical reform agenda.

Many in the AKP may have seen the "opening" as primarily offering a means that promised to secure the party's grip on power by holding out promises to the Kurds. The AKP leadership has also been at pains from the start to present the "opening" as enjoying the support of the state security establishment. The "opening" may indeed be a state project, inasmuch as there have been indications that parts of the state establishment, to a certain extent even the military, have concluded that something new ought be attempted to bring about an end to the eternal Kurdish insurgency. However, it is also evident that the "opening" is

intended as something more than a remedy to a precarious security situation or as an electoral expedient.

It would seem that the overriding concern for the authors of the "opening" is to set the stage for the assertion of societal autonomy. "The reforms aim at empowering the society to express itself freely", declared Ayşenur Bahçekapılı, a deputy chairman of the parliamentary group of the AKP, recently. Bahçekapılı is explicit about what has been implicit in the declarations of Prime Minister Erdoğan, that the "opening" entails a change of the identity of the state and of the definition of citizenship: "The AKP is going to change the constitution. If we think about the democratic opening in the short, the medium and the long run, it becomes fairly evident that it has to lead to a constitutional change in the long run."

Indeed, Erdoğan himself has stated as much, that the constitution will be changed in the long run. However, he has refrained from specifying the particulars of the constitutional overhaul that has apparently been in the working. Bahçekapılı is more plain-spoken: "The definition of citizenship is also going to be substituted. Everyone will be allowed to express his or her ethnic origin and there will be a supra-identity to adhere to by stating "I am a citizen of the republic of Turkey". And that will solve the problem." The deputy chairman of the AKP parliamentary group emphasizes that the current reference to "Turkishness" in the constitution is "of course" going to be removed: "Otherwise, democratization will remain elusive."

Dengir Mir Mehmet Fırat, the former deputy chairman of the AKP, points out that "constitutional citizenship" is the sine qua non of solving the problem: "If we base citizenship on the constitution, instead of on ethnicity as is the case today - which requires everyone to declare himself

to be Turkish – then the whole problem will have gone away.”

CONCLUSIONS: With its policies of “democratic opening”, the AKP government has embarked on an enterprise that ultimately challenges the core identity of the republic as a specifically Turkish state – in the image of the Tanzimat reformers that challenged the Islamic core identity of the Ottoman Empire with their introduction of the notion of equal citizenship.

Historians assessing the Tanzimat era have often described the reformers as insincere, as the declarations of equality were seldom followed by concrete action. The reforms were designed to save the state, and did not spring for any cultural awakening of the ruling Ottoman elite to the virtue of liberalism. The “opening” of the AKP has a similar, instrumental vein. Indeed, the AKP is hardly a liberal party; rather, what initially set the reforms in motion was the religious conservative thrust to open up further space for the assertion of the Muslim identity. However, liberal supporters of the AKP, such as Şahin Alpay, a columnist in the daily *Zaman*, hold that the “opening” nevertheless expresses a conversion to liberalism, as “Muslims have finally recognized that they can only be free if others, Kurds, Alevis and non-Muslims, are free as well.”

Yet, even if the religious conservatives have indeed become liberals in spite of themselves, the principle of universal equality still remains as poorly appreciated by the majority of the Turkish population as it did one hundred and fifty years ago. Ahmet İnsel, a leading liberal intellectual, asserts that “Turkey’s main problem is that the

Sunni Turkish majority does not accept those who are not Turkish and Sunni – the non-Muslims, Alevis and Kurds – as equals. This is a problem that goes back to the Reform Edict of 1856. The sultan’s declaration of the equality of all Ottoman subjects was perceived as the worst disaster that had ever befallen on it by the dominant population.”

There is nothing that suggests that the dominant Sunni Turkish population of today is any more prepared to accede to sharing its state with the “others” of society. Turkish nationalists, incensed by the suggestion implicit in the “democratic opening” that Turkishness may be dispossessed of its constitutionally enshrined superiority and put on equal footing with the other identities of the country, are gathering in the streets – and they do it in cities such as Izmir, with a self-image of being “westernized” and “enlightened” – to attack Kurds.

The conclusion of historian Taner Akçam has an eerie relevance today: “While the reforms [of Tanzimat] were expected to bring about closer relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, in fact the very opposite occurred.” Its inability to forge a common bond of equal citizenship doomed the Ottoman Empire. The continued opposition to equality as the basis of the state suggests that it may, once again, prove impossible to find a liberal way out of the perennial dilemma of Turkey.

Halil M. Karaveli is Managing Editor of the *Turkey Analyst* and a Senior Fellow with the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center.

WHAT THE COLUMNISTS SAY

The decision of the constitutional court to close down the Kurdish Democratic society party (DTP) and the ambush in which seven Turkish soldiers were killed have dominated the Turkish political scene. Notably, several liberal commentators have leveled harsh criticism at the PKK, which they accuse of colluding with the forces of Turkish nationalism in ambushing the “democratic opening” of the government. In general, the closure decision has been interpreted as proof that the “democratic opening” does not enjoy the support of the state establishment. Several commentators have noted that recent developments have above all served to make it plain that the jailed leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan remains the most important Kurdish political player.

KORU: DOES THE CLOSURE OF THE DTP MEAN THAT THE “DEMOCRATIC OPENING” IS OVER?

Fehmi Kuru in Yeni Safak writes that the decision of the constitutional court to close the Kurdish Democratic society party (DTP) hardly came as a surprise for anyone. On the contrary, the representatives of the DTP had even given the impression lately that they were in fact looking forward to their party being closed down. The representatives of the DTP have reason to ponder why so few regrets have been expressed at the closure of their party. However, the fact that the decision was anticipated obviously does not mean that it was right to dissolve the DTP. The constitutional court could have chosen a less “legalistic” approach, and taken into consideration the new atmosphere that the

“democratic opening” of the state has created in the country. The question that is on everyone’s mind now is of course if the closure signifies that the “democratic opening” of the state has been sunk by the constitutional court. Is the “opening” about to be ended? We will have to wait some time before we know the definite answers to those questions.

SAZAK: WE NOW HAVE THE FINAL PROOF THAT “THE DEMOCRATIC OPENING” WAS NEVER A STATE PROJECT

Derya Sazak in Milliyet describes the closure decision of the constitutional court as a severe blow against the “democratic opening” of the government. It is now clear that the project of

bringing down the PKK militants from the mountains and disarming them will have to be postponed until at least after the next general elections. The AKP has been left alone in the pursuit of a radical solution to the Kurdish problem. The AKP has been at pains from the start to designate the “democratic opening” as a state project; yet, the institutions of the state had on an early stage made it plain that they were in fact not on board. Let us recall how interior minister Atalay late August was forced to backpedal and assure that the “democratic opening” did not entail any constitutional change, and that education in Kurdish was not in the cards after the General staff had clarified where its red lines ran. The closure decision of the constitutional court is the final proof that the “opening” indeed was not any state project. The state did what it knows best to do, and closed down the DTP, thus making the proposition that the “democratic opening” ever was a state project utterly untenable.

GÜRSEL: A KURDISH-TURKISH CLASH IN THE MAKING?

Kadri Gürsel in *Milliyet* makes the observation that the conditions of an inter-communal conflict erupting between Turks and Kurds had not been as threatening as they are now since 1978, when the PKK was founded. Yet, does that also mean that the factors that speak against such a scenario are correspondingly weak? Not necessarily. Despite all its efforts, the PKK has so far not succeeded in becoming organizationally implanted in the western parts of the country. That is in large part due to the efforts of the police, but it also reflects the structural deficiencies of the Kurdish movement. I don't think that PKK stands any better chance in

succeeding today. Instead I recommend those who wonder “will there be any outbreak of inter-communal fighting?” to pay closer attention to the Turkish side. There will be serious trouble only if and when the provocations of the PKK are met with systematic and organized responses from that quarter. Several factors will be important in this regard: It will matter greatly that the Nationalist action party (MHP) manages to keep its youth organization under control; and if the police acts vigilantly, yet with respect for human rights. Then we will have less reason to fear inter-communal fighting, even if the actions of PKK do contribute to drive Turks and Kurds apart.

ÇANDAR: THE DEMOCRATIC OPENING IS UNDER THE CROSSFIRE OF PKK AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

Cengiz Çandar in *Radikal* writes that the attack in Reşadiye, where seven Turkish soldiers were killed and that the PKK has claimed responsibility for is a “provocation” intended to hurt the “democratic opening”. Likewise, the decision of the constitutional court to close the DTP is an act of “sabotage” against the opening. Are we really expected to believe that the timing of the ambush that just happened to occur as Prime Minister Erdoğan was about to meet President Barack Obama at the White house was a mere coincidence? The fact that the PKK is resorting to violence once again, and that it does so with the unreasonable pretext of protesting against the change of the prison conditions of Abdullah Öcalan (who has recently been moved to a new cell-house that is insignificantly smaller than his previous one) means that the PKK leaves no space for

democratic Kurdish forces. The PKK presents the government with the choice “negotiate with me, or else, be prepared for civil war”. And the closure decision of the constitutional court signals that “certain institutions” of the state that escape the control of the government or of Prime Minister Erdoğan have on their own initiative decided to clear out the democratic field.

ERGIN: TURKEY IS AT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE

Sedat Ergin in *Hürriyet* writes that Turkey is at a most critical juncture, with a growing risk of inter-communal fighting between Turks and Kurds. As long as the violence was restricted to the remote, south-eastern corner

of the country and only involved soldiers and PKK militants, we didn't have to fear such a scenario. Today however, as the regular fighting has decreased in intensity, we are experiencing the growth of Turkish-Kurdish animosity. The indications are multiplying that the conflict is being transferred to the cities in the west that have received large numbers of Kurdish immigrants. In such an atmosphere, Turkey has become vulnerable for every kind of provocation. The fact that the government and opposition are locked in confrontation makes matters worse. Prime Minister Erdoğan faces the most serious challenge so far to his leadership. It is incumbent upon him to put aside the politics of stridency and take the initiative for the search for a societal compromise.