



News
Business
Interviews
Columnists
Op-Ed
Arts & Culture
Expat Zone
Features
Travel
Leisure
Life
Cartoons
Health Briefs
Weird But True
Sports
Turkish Press Review

Turkey in Foreign Press

[The Daily Telegraph]
Turkey is vital to Europe's future
[Trinidad & Tobago Express]
AK Party and the other Muslim nations
[The Plain Dealer] Plusses to Turkey's political landscape



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Op-Ed

Turkey looks to the Spanish mirror (1) by ANTONI AVALOS, MARIEN DURAN*

The advance of the general elections in Turkey arose into the arena of hot international political issues this spring. They should have been held in November, but were instead held in July of this year.

This advance was caused by the political crisis that Turkey is and has been experiencing since the very first moment of the election for the new president of the republic in April. This crisis began with the statement of Chief of General Staff Gen. Yaşar Büyükanıt, published on the Internet on April 27 and followed by the Supreme Court's decision to repeal Parliament's vote. The main reason was the refusal to accept a member of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) as the holder of the highest position in the republic. This provoked demonstrations throughout the country supporting the republic's laïcité and revealed one of the bigger divisions in the system. The chief of General Staff's online statement introduced a new type of military intervention into politics that the media called an "e-coup." All the demonstrations were prompted by this e-coup and proved to be important events in recent Turkish history. Thus, this mobilization of the people would not weaken nor erode the government's party, as was noted in the results of the polls on July 22, with approximately 47 percent of support going toward the AK Party program.



The July 22 elections brought victory to the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), while giving a new shape to the 23rd Parliament with a bigger portion and various segments of Turkish society represented.

After these poll results, Turkey approaching the shore of a lake, with possibilities including the successful landing on a democratic shore, or sinking due to dangers threatening the crossing. The boat was built by the progressive economic growth the country recently experienced, a drop in the level of corruption within the government, the improvement of local governance, the deepening of democratizing reforms and respect for human rights. Furthermore, an improvement in the negotiations with the European Union can be observed, a favorable wind in this crossing. The governmental and economic results were proved by the elections in July and this could be an opportunity to gather a new momentum for political change, if this government is able to take advantage of the positive situation. In the future, it is possible that these elections could be considered the "elections of change" in Turkey. The challenge of the election of the president of the republic that involved the reaction from the military is indeed a turning point, without which progress can not take place with whatever suggested reforms taking place in the regime. This situation obviously requires some kind of gentlemen's agreement among all political actors, as well as societal support for the reforms. According to this, the election of former AK Party Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül as the new president was politically driven, as never before. The future of reforms needed in Turkey in order to achieve a stable democracy must follow a political profile. They must not only have a strong commitment to maintaining the constitutional foundations of the republic, but also must include a strong commitment to reforming the Constitution.

If we look for parallels in contemporary history, Spain's transition to democracy gives us an original example and a model of change from an illegitimate, authoritarian regime and weakened by its own tenure. In 1982, "elections of change" were held in Spain. The Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) received more than 48 percent at the polls in a milestone victory that underpinned the new system's legitimacy and the new democratic institutions. This was the primary factor that overcame the crisis that led to a coup d'état attempt in February 1981. The result was the containment of the Spanish army in the barracks. The army had a decisive role in the political constitution and the support of the previous regime, Francoism -- an authoritarian regime with an important amount of anti-modern elements -- as it was the role of the Catholic Church legitimizing the regime. The army moved from a central position to become one of the State's institutions and became controlled by the civil power. The army moved from a central position to become one of the state's institutions and was subjugated to civil authority. The army gave up political power and became a modern army, responsible for its duties as a part of the state.

The paths following both countries display some outstanding resemblances and contrasts that deserve to be briefly analyzed. If we begin our analysis with the international environment, we see that Spain began negotiations for accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1977, during the transition to democracy, and it gained accession in 1986 when the Cold War was in its second period, before fading because of the fall of the soviet regime from 1989 to 1991. In 1959, Turkey began early attempts to become an associated member of the EEC, when it was considered as democracy (Samuel P. Huntington, "The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century"). After several ups and downs in contacts with the present European Union and domestic political events, last year's situation was not the most favorable one: after Sept. 11, 2001 we cannot avoid the

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troubles that religion imposes over the creation of a global international society. On the other hand, the position that religion occupied in regard to Turkey's domestic realm, taking into account that the secularizing regime caused the position, was absolutely contrary to the political arena, apart from the rule that the army tried to exert on the state to control religion.

Furthermore, the fall of the bipolar order in the international realm (established during the Cold War from 1949 to 1989/91), opened new windows. However, these windows are not necessarily good for Turkey and its EU candidacy. The criteria that the European Council in Copenhagen in December decided to consider from that date on in accepting new members were not in force when Spain became a member of the EEC. These requirements are: the rule of law, with all its features; human and minority rights; and economic criteria apart from the *acquis communautaire*. Spain had time to obtain it when it was already a member of the EEC due to the very different international environment and the concern to have no more dictatorships in Western Europe. One of the examples of this process in Spain is the design of a coexistence framework in which the minorities have their place, under debate even today. This framework (*Estado de las Autonomías*, State of the autonomous regions) has brought something new in the always difficult search for solutions to the problem of nationalities inside the modern State. Turkey has a multidimensional problem that directly affects minorities and their political coexistence in the same territory, a problem that has to be solved before becoming a member of the EU.

Moreover, regarding domestic issues, not only nationalities, but economy, terrorism, the role of religion, military interventions and the role of the head of the state in both countries are also susceptible to comparison. We could consider the comparative framework in two periods: in Spain from 1977 to 1982 and in Turkey from 1983-2007. In 1983, the situation in Turkey after the coup d'état of 1980 was similar to the situation during the early transition period in Spain in 1976-77. The military intervention in Turkey in 1997 correlates to the attempted coup d'état in 1981 in Spain. In regard to the Spanish case, the stabilization of the democracy started in 1982 when the PSOE won the general elections. In Turkey the elections of July 22 may bring forward a stabilization process.

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