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TURKEY:
THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL CONSERVATISM

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Turkey: The Politics of National Conservatism

Turkey recently hit the international media headlines with two issues: the agreement on refugees with the EU, and a wave of violence with the end of the Kurdish peace process, followed by increasing repression against journalists and academics. In everyday political debates, it is discussed whether Turkey is becoming an 'authoritarian state', a 'constitutional dictatorship' under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's *de facto* presidency, or whether we are observing the emergence of a 'fascist regime'. So, the question arises as to whether in Turkey a form of civil authoritarianism is emerging under the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Parti, AKP) government, which has institutional control over the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, circumvents the checks and balances of a democratic system, and is transforming Turkey into an uncontrolled form of quasi-presidential regime. Ideologically, this regime draws on neo-liberal and national-conservative elements, with an increasingly strong religious colouring. This issue of the *Austrian Journal of Development Studies* seeks to contribute to the debate on the character of the regime and its policies from political economy perspectives.

1. Phase of iron rule (2010-?)

An increase of authoritarian tendencies has been observed since the governing AKP consolidated its hold on the state apparatus, in particular the former bastions of the Kemalist establishment – the military and the judiciary – after the partial constitutional reform in 2010 (Insel 2015: 138ff.; Cheviron/Pérouse 2016: 254f., 329ff.). On September 12, 2010, on the 30th anniversary of the 1980 military coup, a symbolically important date, 58

per cent of the electorate voted to reform the constitution. Or, better to say, a loose alliance including various segments of society said 'Yes, but not enough!' to the proposed constitutional changes. With the referendum, the political power of the military has been sidelined, leading to a declining of military tutelage over Turkish politics. The constitutional amendments paved the way for active government interference in the higher organs of judicial authorities such as the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors. Instead of consolidating liberal democracy in Turkey, in the following years the AKP government has combined a versatile control of bureaucratic apparatus with its inherited authoritarian traits (e.g. Council of Higher Education, [YÖK]), along with open repression and an increasingly tight control of mass media through both restrictive legislation and take-overs by financial groups close to the ruling party (cf. on the latter Cheviron/ Pérouse 2016: 274ff.). Concomitant with this increasingly authoritarian course, the AKP governments sharpened their national-religious profile both discursively and in concrete policies. Several elements have contributed to the AKP's increasingly authoritarian orientation and ideological narrowing. The economic dynamics have slowed down, and, thus, it has become more difficult for the governing party to gain adherence to its project through increasing consumption projects. The AKP government has also faced instances of open contestation. In foreign policy, the AKP government adopted a clear ideological profile in the wake of the 2011 rebellions in the Arab world. It has sided openly with Islamist forces, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, and has become deeply involved in the Syrian war. This foreign policy has been highly unsuccessful. The particularly harsh positioning of the AKP government against the striving for autonomy of the Syrian Kurds has a strong domestic dimension. The authoritarian tendencies in Turkey are at least partly related to the war in Syria (cf. Tuğal 2016).

The shift in accumulation dynamics has played an essential role in the hardening of AKP rule. High growth rates started to decline after the 2008 global financial crisis due to the unstable international capital flows and signs of exhaustion of credit-led construction and consumption. Although the government responded to changed circumstances by adding heterodox elements to its otherwise orthodox neoliberal policies, it has not been able to reverse the trend of slackening economic dynamics. This led

to the decline of the constitutive discourse built on growth and (economic) stability that was hegemonic, and could win adherence on a wider societal level. With the accentuation of national-religious discursive elements, attention could thus be deflected from class and social issues (cf. Yalman 2012: 22ff.).

The fragile alliance with liberals that had been enticed by the liberal-democratic discursive elements of the early AKP soon disintegrated (Taşkın 2016: 24). The alliance between the AKP and the likewise religiously orientated, but much more US-aligned Gülen Cemaati fell likewise apart – seemingly due to competition for power and due to external policy divergences (Cheviron/Pérouse 2016: 363ff.). Thus, the hegemonic strategy of AKP became less encompassing and its political power base seemed to be narrowed after 2010.

A key real estate project in the heart of Istanbul that symbolised the marriage of the real estate key plank of the AKP economic strategy with the revaluation of the Ottoman past, and which was particularly typical of the post-2010 AKP urbanisation and real estate strategies (Aksoy 2014: 39ff.), sparked off the Gezi protests in June 2013 (Dinler 2015). Activists wanted to protect one of the last green areas near Taksim and showed resistance in a small group. When police brutally cracked down on several dozen protesters, the protests spread into other cities and widened to a more general protest against the authoritarian tendencies of the AKP government and for more freedom and rights (Tuğal 2016: 251ff.). It was an extraordinarily wide political spectrum from leftists and feminists to ecological activists and anti-capitalist movements that assembled to protest (Ataç/Dursun 2013: 447). While there was a broad consensus about the extraordinary political breadth of the protest movement, its social character was much more controversial. For Cihan Tuğal (2013: 75), the protests started as a middle-class movement, but later transformed into a multi-class protest. For him, the middle class and democratic demands (like the right to the city) remained at the core of the protest. He observed that, "the non-socialist participants frequently voiced their contempt for the 'ignorant' lower classes who kept on voting for the AKP" (Tuğal 2016: 261). For Korkut Boratav (2015: 8ff.), those who argue for a strong middle-class imprint on the protest tend to define the middle class too broadly and to subsume the employees of the service sector too readily into the

middle class. He perceives, therefore, rather a working-class character to the Gezi protests. Yalçın Bürkev (2015: 19) argues that the protesters cannot be characterised as a "classical working class", but rather as a "proletarized middle class". Empirical data on protesters in Istanbul and Izmir presented by Yörük and Yüksel show a "heterogeneous class population" (Yörük/Yüksel 2014: 113). The composition was clearly not middle class: "54 per cent of participants were proletarians, 11 per cent petty bourgeois and 4 per cent capitalists" (ibid.). The AKP government was surprised by the emergence of this broad movement of open dissent and responded with repression (Cheviron/Pérouse 2016: 348f.) and coercive measures to suppress the protests. The government reacted as well on the media front. Both the AKP government and pro-government media portrayed the protestors as enemies or traitors and tried to frame and denounce the protests in cultural terms. The result was increasing polarisation.

One group with a strong tradition of resistance took a cautious line *vis-à-vis* the protests: the Kurdish Movement (cf. Tuğal 2013: 59). At the time, the peace process started, including imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP), the government, as well as the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT), working towards a political solution. During the previous spring, there were several delegations of Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (BDP) members, the predecessor of the HDP, who held meetings with Öcalan in prison. In March, Öcalan's letter was read both in Turkish and Kurdish during Nowruz celebrations in Diyarbakır, where he called for a cease-fire that included disarmament and the call for an end to armed struggle. However, the very narrow limits of concessions became soon quite clear in the debate on the constitution, where the AKP offered strengthening of individual rights and disregarded demands for (local) autonomy and collective rights (Sancar 2016: 42ff.; Cheviron/Pérouse 2016: 352ff.).

In the wake of the 2011 rebellions in Arab countries, the AKP government viewed – after initial hesitations – the rebellions as an opportunity to change the regimes in Egypt and Syria, and thus shifted its foreign policy from cordial relations with its neighbours towards the strengthening of the Sunni Islam, in the form of supporting Muslim brotherhoods in the region. After some hesitations and talks with the Assad regime in neighbouring Syria, it opted for supporting forces of the Sunni Islamist opposi-

tion after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. The war in Syria developed differently from what the AKP government had anticipated. The Assad regime proved more resilient, and, more importantly, an autonomous Kurdish region with a left-wing force, the Party of the Democratic Union (PYD), with links to the PKK, emerged as a powerful force. The emergence of the autonomous region and its successful resistance against the siege of the so-called Islamic State in Kobanê has broadened the alliance in the region and strengthened the political power of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. Ankara has spared no efforts to quell these Kurdish autonomous tendencies in Syria (Cheviron/Pérouse 2016: 361ff.).

The increasing authoritarianism of the AKP policies, the Gezi protests, the impasse in the foreign policy, as well as the publication of corruption tapes involving government members, led to a decline of the votes for the AKP in the parliamentary election in June 2015. Although the AKP emerged again as the majority party, 40.8 per cent of the votes were well below the 49.8 per cent it had achieved in 2011. The AKP clearly missed the majority that is necessary to amend the constitution and to introduce the strong executive presidency desired by President Erdoğan. The HDP was the first predominantly Kurdish left party in a bright alliance with radical and liberal left which passed the 10 per cent threshold in 2015. It had focused its election campaign on social issues and could challenge the dominant discourse of the AKP. It did well in the big urban centres and achieved very high results in the Kurdish region. For the first time, it gained most votes among the Kurds and pushed the AKP into second place among Kurdish voters (Küçük 2016: 143). It should not be forgotten that the Kurdish region in Turkey was one of the early electoral bastions of Refah Partisi, one of the forerunner parties of AKP (Cheviron/Pérouse 2016: 126f.).

Dissatisfied with the result, the AKP moved rapidly for fresh elections. This time, it banked clearly on the Turkish nationalist card. The incipient peace process was ended. The government massively deployed security forces in the Kurdish region. Repression against media was stepped up, and many critical websites were blocked. HDP was harassed. "In this period between the two elections, the AKP is definitely the only party able to campaign with all the means of the state (particularly the television) at its disposal" (ibid.: 398). AKP increased its votes back to 49.5 per cent

in November 2015, but still below the majority required for changing the constitution. HDP lost some votes, but with 10.8 per cent made it again into parliament. The AKP won many votes from former ultra-nationalist voters, while centrist Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) remained stable.

The second election did not mark the end of an escalation of violence. Against the backdrop of advances both of the Kurdish forces and the Russian-backed Syrian army against the Islamist forces in opposition, Ankara deployed even more military forces in the Kurdish areas and declared long curfews in many cities. It faced a "revolt of the chanceless" (Hermann 2015: 8) in Kurdish cities. The military response to the revolt has increasingly alienated the Kurdish middle strata from the AKP. Hamit Bozarslan has stressed that a radical Carl Schmitt approach to state sovereignty can be seen with the end of the peace process, as the state declares some of its citizens as enemies, and also with references to the destruction of parts of the urban landscape (2016: 76).

2. Phase of consolidation (2003-2010)

It has been a long road from the first AKP electoral victory in November 2002 to the present dominance of the party. The AKP was first elected into parliament under conditions of a severe economic and political crisis. None of the parties of the hitherto governing coalition made it into parliament. Since only the AKP and CHP passed the 10 per cent hurdle, the AKP achieved almost two thirds of the parliamentary seats with only 34.28 per cent of the votes. The AKP leadership was very aware of the hostile attitude of the key secularist bureaucracy in the military and the judiciary. Back to 2001, when the AKP was founded, the founding leaders declared a break with the Milli Görüş (National Vision) tradition led by Necmettin Erbakan. This tradition of Islamism was assumed not to be compatible with democracy and secularism, which led to the 'post-modern coup' in February 1997 by the military, and led to the decline of the ruling government. The AKP positioned itself in line with the centre-right tradition by filling the gap in the political field with references to the tradition of Adnan Menderes (Democratic Party), which was in power from 1950 until 1960. The AKP leadership, with its resolutely pro-business orienta-

tion, sought an alliance with liberal forces. Liberal-democratic reforms and neoliberal policies were to form the basis of that alliance. Close relations with international financial institutions, seeking EU candidate status, and fostering cordial relations with neighbouring countries were to contribute to stabilising the AKP government.

After 2003, the AKP presented itself as the agent of democratisation in Turkey. The pre-accession talks with the EU helped the AKP to some extent in its attempts to restructure the state and restrain the influence of the military (cf. Cheviron/Pérouse 2016: 232; Uzgel 2010: 367). It was, however, only in its second legislature, when the accession talks had already lost any momentum, that the AKP government was able to gain control over the military and the judiciary after the partial constitutional reform that blended "measures of general interest, in the sense of the democratisation of the country" with key reforms "centred on the conquest of power of the AKP and promoting its particular interests" (Cheviron/Pérouse 2016: 254). While the political power of the military has been neutralised, the role of the police, however, has been strengthened and thus contributed to dismantle the power of the Kemalist elites over the state, as Bedirhanoğlu, Dölek and Hülagü point out in their contribution.

In regard to reforming the institutions of economic governance, the AKP government continued the policies that had already been started under the preceding government, in close cooperation with the IMF (cf. Ataç 2013). The government sought to attract foreign capital inflows to feed a credit boom that sustained in turn a construction boom and increasing consumption. The years up to the global crisis witnessed strong growth that contrasted sharply with the endemic instability of the 1990s. 'Stability' was a crucial element for the legitimisation of AKP policies. Social policies were employed to shore up the AKP base among the more precarious workers in the rapidly growing peripheries of the cities. The local governments, together with clientelist and flexible redistributive politics, led to the emergence of 'service policies'. Social assistance has been increasingly channelled through municipalities, and the use of charities and new channels of redistribution have been introduced, which "contributed to the well-being of under-privileged sectors" (Taşkın 2016:27). The AKP continued, to some extent, with initiatives that had already begun under the preceding government. The role of employment-based social security arrangements

was reduced, while the access to basic services (e.g. in health sector) was widened, and the role of conditional cash transfers was increased, as was the role of commercial provision, which was branded by Erdoğan as 'Hizmet Siyaseti' (politics based on provision of services). Yücesan-Özdemir (2012: 146f.) concludes that, "policies are implemented not on the axis of social citizenship and universal principles, but in regard to charity". This is a material underpinning to the (national-)religious discourse of AKP. Within the official discourse of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis', a revaluation of the Islamic component could already be observed after 1980, while the religious component has been even more strongly emphasised by the AKP. This stronger emphasis on religious elements in defining national identity allowed the AKP more flexibility in dealing with the so-called Kurdish issue than had been the case with the Kemalist political forces. The first phase of AKP rule, its consolidation, lasted until 2010. This phase was characterised by its seeking relatively broad political support and by solidifying its social base.

3. AKP policies

This issue of the *Austrian Journal of Development Studies* analyses selective AKP policies and their evolution in the context of Turkey's political economy.

Evren Hoşgör, Joachim Becker, and Ulaş Şener deal with several aspects of the class-state-economy nexus. Evren Hoşgör argues that the dominant narrative on the state capital relations, which focuses on the divide between an ascendant religious-conservative bourgeoisie close to AKP and an established 'business oligarchy', is not sufficient enough to fully convey the growing contradictions within the Turkish bourgeoisie. Instead of a pluralist-institutionalist account, Hoşgör focuses on the possible multiplication of factions and the differentiations in their strategies, as she approaches closer to the complex and concrete analyses of the internationalisation of accumulation. From this, she elaborates on the contradictions that the intensification of internationalisation process cultivates for individual capitalists, and how these conflicts are manifested in the institutional architecture of the state.

From a regulationist-cum-dependency perspective, Joachim Becker locates industrial development and industrial policies in the wider context of the accumulation regimes after the 1980 turn to neo-liberalism. After 1980, he identifies three different regimes of accumulation. The first one, lasting from 1980 to 1988, was primarily export-oriented. It was followed by two regimes that had two different forms of financialisation – based, respectively, on the state debt and on rapidly increasing household debt – as their main trait characteristic. Financialisation brought with it major constraints on industrial policies, particularly regarding exchange rate and interest rate policies. Although the AKP government tried to soften these constraints after the 2008 global crisis, it has hit certain obstacles in doing so. In particular, the long years of an overvalued exchange rate have impaired the effectiveness of targeted industrial policies. During the AKP years, key weaknesses of the manufacturing sector, such as high import and technological dependence, have not been rectified. The accumulation regime promoted by the AKP has been characterised by an extreme reliance of foreign capital inflows and is highly vulnerable to crisis. In this regard, Becker observes symptoms of its exhaustion.Ulaş Şener analyses monetary policies of the AKP government. He argues that the institutional status of the Turkish Central Bank has been characterised by relative autonomy *vis-à-vis* social and political forces. He observes two distinct phases of monetary and exchange rate policies. Until the global 2008 crisis, the Turkish Central Bank pursued the (orthodox) policy of high real interest rates and an overvalued exchange rate, and had reduced inflation successfully. After the 2008 crisis, political pressure by the AKP increased so as to modify policies, and the Central Bank reduced interest rates and permitted limited currency depreciation, favouring an accommodative monetary policy. In this period, inflation rose again. Important government sectors viewed such a policy change as essential for stimulating consumption and growth. In this regard, the government claims to have re-established national sovereignty on economic policy making. However, as Şener shows, this sovereignty is much more limited than the government pretends, since, in the case of strong capital outflows, the monetary authorities are forced to increase the interest rates.

Evren Hoşgör, Joachim Becker and Ulaş Şener share the conclusion that the contradictions of the AKP development model have exacerbated

after the 2008 crisis, and that this has led to a certain shift in the balance of forces between different business interests and economic policy-making bodies. This has translated into certain transformations in economic policies.

Another issue is how insecurity has gained increasing significance through the everyday experience of violence against all sorts of social opposition over the last few years. Police operations in poor neighbourhoods, combined with extra-judicial executions and suppression of the social and political opposition through different forms of criminalisation have become everyday practices. In addition, the violent coercive measures of which became manifest after the Gezi uprising in June 2013 lead to a heated debate on the character of the political regime in Turkey about whether the state transformation in Turkey has entered into a new phase during the AKP-government rule. Pınar Bedirhanoğlu, Çağlar Dölek and Funda Hülagü discuss the restructuring of security relations in the context of the neoliberal state transformation in Turkey, and provide a class-based analysis through the use of the term 'subordination by dispossession'. They highlight how three specific processes – namely the private provision of internal security, the formation of public-private partnerships in policing, and the adoption of market rationality as norm in police operations – have been substantially restructuring social relations of security. The authors argue that these processes have deteriorated the labouring classes' physical conditions of security, by criminalising them as the 'dangerous classes' of the twenty-first century, and thereby decreasing their practical and ideological capacity to intervene through public policing. Although they show how this process has been a contested and contingent process shaped by complex political controversies and class struggles, they identify the conservative and pro-capital strategies of the AKP government, particularly how they transformed the institutional structure and ideological practices of the police in Turkey.

Perceived insecurity is one key element in the state housing strategy implemented by Toplu Konut Idaresi Başkanlığı (TOKI). Ayşe Çavdar identifies the construction of gated communities targeted at the middle and upper classes, such construction being a central plank of TOKI policies. The gated communities are strictly demarcated from their wider urban development and their service provision is highly dependent on a

privatised management system. This diminishes spatial autonomy for initiatives of the inhabitants. Apartments are usually acquired by long-term loans. Economic and political instability are perceived as a threat to the indebted inhabitants' ability to repay the loans. As Çavdar points out, the AKP has presented itself as a harbour of stability, and quotes inhabitants claiming that TOKI invoked the threat of higher debt service in the case of the AKP failing to win an absolute majority in the elections. She views TOKI as a key 'loyalty generator' for the ruling party.

Gülay Toksöz analyses how, after the slowdown in the EU membership negotiations in 2007, the egalitarian rhetoric in women's labour force participation was replaced by an emphasis on the importance of women for the perpetuity of the family unit. She shows how, under the AKP administration, instead of creating decent work for women, employment policies have increased informal jobs. She finds two logics behind this development. On the one hand, a neoliberal approach to maintaining a gender-based division of labour and promoting women's inclusion in the labour market through popularising flexible work options and supporting female entrepreneurship in order to supply cheap labour. On the other hand, policies that conserve the gender-based division of labour in a society that views women primarily as home-makers and care-givers consider women not as individuals, but as a part of the family. In policy documents, she discovers that gender equality is not among the primary goals of the government. With references to Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011), she defines the labour as a "neoliberal-religious/conservative mode of patriarchy" and discusses how concepts of private and public patriarchy work in tandem.

The dynamics of the AKP government cannot be properly understood without addressing the international and regional context and the foreign policies of the AKP. İlhan Uzgel points out that the international political economy opened new spaces for autonomous foreign policies of emerging powers like Turkey. The AKP government has not used these political spaces for building cross-continental alliances or increasing bargaining power in international organisations like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), but for the unrealistic project of building "a Sunni centered regional hegemony". In such a regional constellation, Turkish Islamists were to play a leading role *vis-à-vis* the region's Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood. Ousting the Assad regime became a key target of

this regional strategy. AKP regional policies, in particular in Syria, put not only a "heavy toll on the country", but also exacerbated the situation in Syria, concludes Uzgel. This Islamist alliance building has resulted in downgraded and strained relations with many countries in the region (Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Libya), while rifts have opened in relations with Washington and Brussels.

The contentious EU-Turkey agreement for returning migrants from Greek islands to Turkey in the context of the recent crisis of the European asylum regime, shows that Turkey is part of the European border regime that and different interests are at stake. Ilker Ataç discusses and compares negotiations of human rights in relation to irregular migration, refugees and borders in Mexico and Turkey. In both countries, new migration laws were unanimously approved in recent years by the respective national parliaments. He argues that these laws do not only constitute reforms of already existing migration laws, but instead are presented by national and international actors as completely novel legislative constructions strengthening human rights. By analysing the different framing strategies and references to human rights, Ataç argues that, in the Turkish case, in contrast to Mexico, human rights are socially constructed from above. Instead of migrants' rights and 'human rights from below', security questions and forms of migration management dominate the Turkish migration law, which came into force in April 2014.

4. Regime type and political project

The combination of a neo-liberal and national/confessional-conservative state project with authoritarian underpinnings is not unique to the case of the AKP. Parallels have been drawn to both non-European and European state projects and regimes. Wiebel (2016: 90) draws explicit parallels between the governing AKP and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, regarding a pro-business capitalist strategy with a conservative-religious agenda. Becker (2012) observes similarities between the AKP government and the Fidesz government in Hungary. Regarding the form of nationalism, he emphasises the parallels of the combination of ethnic and religious elements in the definition of the 'nation' by both the AKP

and Fidesz. Jan-Werner Müller (2016: 53) cites the AKP government as one of the cases of "right-wing populism". In his case, populism is characterised by the claim of the ruling forces that they are the sole representative of 'the people' (ibid.: 44).

Another debate in Turkey has recently discussed the AKP in an international comparison, with references to Eduardo Galeano's term "democradura", which criticizes the implementation of neoliberal politics in forms of democracy in the Latin American countries at the beginning of the 1990s (see Insel 2016). In this model, there are competing political parties and regular elections, yet the opposition is exposed to intense pressure. Charismatic leader are in power and act as if they were constantly campaigning for election. In contrast to totalitarianism, there is no direct offence to the values of the democracy; the charismatic leaders turn democracy to the more 'local and national', claiming they give a voice to 'the people' against the elites who do not listen to them. Indeed, all the cited governing forces, from the AKP, to BJP and Fidesz, as well as the Putin government in Russia or PiS in Poland, claim to be the 'real' or sole 'legitimate' representative of 'the people'. Their definition of 'the people' has national or, as very explicitly in the case of Turkey and India, religious/confessional underpinnings. There is an ongoing mobilisation against the 'elites' who are the intellectuals or members of the minorities. They are declared as the ones who betray 'the people'. Thus, this strategy excludes certain groups from the notion of 'the people'. Erdoğan's populism is based on a divide between "an active, influential Westernist minority" and "a silenced Muslim/conservative majority" (Taşkın 2016:24). The latter group is identified with "the authentic nation". The cultural polarisation occurs when those who do not share the AKP's views or who are not part of the project, are strongly attacked.

Elections continue to be an important legitimising device for national-conservative and populist regimes. In the recent election campaigns, the AKP presented itself as the expression of the "national will" (Cheviron/Pérouse 2016: 387). An electoral victory is perceived as a popular *carte blanche* for executing the Party's own programme with hardly any institutional fetters. Key powers tend to be concentrated in the hands of the party leader, and these parties tend to prefer a strong executive presidency. In this regard, Turkey is no exception (ibid.: 220 ff., 387ff.). Thus, democ-

racy is reduced primarily to elections. Electoral features are combined with authoritarian ones. Taşkın calls this type of regime "major-icratic authoritarianism" (2016: 29). Though the AKP claims to represent the 'national will', vast sectors of the population are opposed – often very strongly – to it. The oppositional forces are both politically and socially extremely heterogeneous (cf. Tuğal 2016: 252). One of the key strengths of the AKP regime is that it has been able, to a very significant extent, to define the lines (and forms) of conflict (ibid.: 253).

This populist or national-conservative political project deflects from class issues and tries to place cultural issues and identity in the focus of political conflicts (cf. Yalman 2012). According to Tuğal (2016: 253), the AKP regime has been rather successful in this regard. While the political projects tend to deflect from class issues, the national-conservative and populist regimes have a class character. The ruling party is closely linked to business interests, often entertaining very intimate links to specific capital groups (cf. e.g. Cheviron/Perouse 2016: 294ff. on Turkey; Becker 2015b: 71f. on Hungary). Wiebel concludes: "Both AKP and BJP with their centralised, authoritarian organisations serve as agents of flexible capital" (2016: 90). Parts of the middle classes are integrated into the governing bloc as well. In some cases, like in Turkey, the national-conservative parties have also integrated precarious workers living in the poorer outskirts of the cities.

The promise to the middle classes is increased consumption – often on credit. At times, consumption patterns are framed according to conservative norms. This might concern clothing norms, but also, as in the case of the AKP government, of building specific middle class residential quarters (cf. Cavdar in this issue). Wiebel (2016: 90) coined the term 'Hindu capitalism' for the BJP fusion of cultural conservatism, consumption and capital accumulation. The way in which capitalist interests are accommodated with other interests through the national conservative policies, depends on the position of the respective economies in the international division of labour, their specialisation, and the phase of the national and international business cycle. These policies might include measures that are regarded as heterodox from a neo-liberal perspective, if, however, these heterodox policies serve the interests of significant sectors of the power bloc and help to sustain growth and consumption, which is perceived

as crucial for the legitimacy of the government (cf. Becker 2015a: 62ff.; Şener in this issue). Social policies tend to be of a conservative nature – cementing conservative gender roles (cf. Toksöz in this issue) and, in many cases, working through clientelist networks. Through these conservatively designed policies, certain groups are bound into the electoral base of the national-conservative forces.

What all these regimes in the semi-periphery have in common is that they are closely linked to specific sectors of the domestic bourgeoisie, which they selectively favour in an increasingly internationalised economic context. Their spaces for building broadly-based hegemonies are, under the conditions of the forms of internationalisation of capital and emerging socio-economic inequalities, limited. Due to these constraints, they follow more narrow (religious-)nationalist and socially conservative legitimising strategies. The AKP regime is a relatively advanced form of contemporary neoliberal-national-conservative and populist rule. Indeed, it might be mirroring emerging tendencies in other regions of the world, including Europe. This issue hopes to contribute to a better understanding of these developments and to encourage further comparative research.

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