Modernizing the CHP:
A History

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Abstract

The Republican People's Party (CHP), the oldest political party of Turkey, celebrated its 100th anniversary on September 9th, 2023. The CHP can be seen as the product of the national liberation struggle pursued against the Allied and Greek occupation forces between 1919 and 1922. However, its historical roots stretch back to the early modernization efforts in Ottoman Empire at the turn of 18th century. After governing Turkey 27 years uninterruptedly, 15 years of which under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk, the CHP handed over power to the Democrat Party peacefully with the 1950 elections. The CHP did not have the possibility to govern Turkey alone since then but proved to be a resilient and persistent political actor which played an important role in Turkish politics during most of the time following the 1950 critical juncture. In the formation years of the republic and the party itself, the CHP stood as a solidarist party, sometimes ideologically ambiguous, seeking to stand above all social classes and even ideologies. The CHP's main role was then modernizing the society and polity, along with leading the nation-building process. It was during the 1960s that the CHP started to position itself on the centre-left of the political spectrum. CHP underwent significant transformations, revised its policy objectives, and had either broadening or shrinking electoral bases throughout its history. Such changes bolstered CHP's power in many instances but brought about divisions and declines as well.

Keywords: CHP, modernization, party reform, Republican People's Party, Turkish politics.

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A Concise Roadmap for a 100-year-long Journey

The Republican People's Party (CHP) faced serious, sometimes existential challenges from a wide range of competitors at four critical junctures throughout its 100 years. The critical junctures during which socio-economic structure, institutional settings, and geopolitical landscape transformed were 1) the creation period of the party and the new Turkish republic itself, 2) transition to multi-party politics, 3) social stratification and ideological polarization era due to the advancement of capitalist mode of production, and 4) the challenge coming from the authoritarian Islamist rule.

The first critical juncture entailed a radical transformation of institutional settings, the second one was meant to be a less drastic—but still vital—change of institutional settings induced by the transformation of the geopolitical landscape, the third one constituted a socio-economic transformation, and the fourth one involved transformations in all three aspects being mentioned, most notably the institutional settings. Had the CHP not been successful in strategic adaptation and reform, it would have probably been marginalised. Hence, it would not survive until the present day.

Introduction

The Single-Party period ruled by the Republican People's Party (CHP) began in 1923 and came to an end in 1945-1946. On September 9, 1923, the First Parliamentary Group in the First Turkish Grand National Assembly (1920-1923) led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha was transformed into People's Party, therefore marking the establishment of the CHP one and a half month before the declaration of the Republic of Turkey on October 29, 1923. Except for two independent candidates elected on August 15, 1923, all members of parliament were candidates of the First Group.[1]

The members of the Second Group, who were opponents of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, were not present in the new parliament. The Progressive Republican Party (Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası) was born out of the People's Party in November 1924. Yet, according to the provisions of the Law on the Maintenance of Order promulgated in March 1925, this new party would be closed in June 1925. The Free Republican Party (Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası), the actor of the attempt for transition to a multi-party regime in 1930, lasted only for ninety-nine days and its founders dissolved the party. Apart from the brief interruptions between 1924 to 1925 and 1930, the Single-Party Regime lasted for twenty-three years. The permit for the establishment of different political parties was granted in 1945. Following the 1946 elections, the

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[1] Ahmet Demirel, *Tek Partinin İktidarı: Türkiye'de Seçimler ve Siyaset* [The Rule of the Single Party: Elections and Politics in Turkey] (1923-1946) (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2013), 35.

Democratic Party (DP) successfully formed a parliamentary group following, henceforth terminating the Single-Party regime.

Linz and Stepan categorized Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal and numerous military junta regimes in various places across the world, including Turkey's Single-Party regime, as "authoritarian dictatorship." According to Linz and Stepan, such regimes embody a significant economic and social pluralism. Some of them may even allow political pluralism, albeit limited. The regime does not monopolize the administration of the economy.[2] Linz stressed that these regimes are based "less on an elaborated ideology that guides many aspects of life but more on amorphous and flexible governing mentalities."[3]

The Single-Party regime, as the name reveals, is evidently not a democratic rule. However, what was the vision of this regime? Since the mid-20th century, researchers have proposed two different approaches. The first approach suggests that the Single-Party regime was governed by a cadre that aspired to cultivate a culture of democracy and create the necessary infrastructure for a democratic regime. Those who embraced the second approach maintain that the Single-Party CHP had not have a perspective of democratization and that the regime had incorporated some totalitarian qualities.[4]

The First Critical Juncture: The "Creation" of the CHP (1923-1931)

Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later Kemal Atatürk) first told his project to establish the People's Party (Halk Fırkası—HF) to the press in December 1922.[5] A month later, he presented the HF project on his mind in a detailed fashion. He explained what kinds of relations the HF would establish with various social classes as well as the economic and social policies the party would execute. Mustafa Kemal emphatically told that the HF would embrace the whole nation, not solely a few social classes. The party would gather all social classes in the spirit of solidarity. Making an elaborated class analysis of the society, Mustafa Kemal summarized how social classes should form relations with one another. In his view, peasants, workers, middle-class tradesmen and big capital owners need each other. It is vital that the national capital grow so that the

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[2] Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); quoted in Yunus Sözen, "Siyasi Rejimler: Demokrasiler ve Diğer Sistemler," in *Karşılaştırmalı Siyaset: Temel Konular ve Yaklaşımlar*, eds. Sabri Sayarı and Hasret Dikici Bilgin (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013), 47-48. Linz and Stepan identify other dictatorship types as totalitarian, post-totalitarian and sultanism.

[3] Sözen, "Siyasi Rejimler," 48.

[4] For the arguments of researchers of both approaches, see Murat Turan, *CHP Yönetiminin Dünya Partileriyle İlişkileri—Yaklaşım, Yöntem ve Tercihler— (1923-1950)* [The Relations of the CHP Administration with World Parties -Approach, Method, and Preferences- (1923-1950)] (İstanbul: Libra, 2017), 97-110.

[5] Demirel, *Tek Partinin İktidarı*, 33.

country would not depend on foreign capital. The working class is weak to establish its own political party. Moreover, the intellectuals do not constitute a social class. Their duty is to enlighten the people. In another address to the public, he said, "The party is established on the basis of its economic purpose. Any party outside this purpose is a party of interest-seekers and a party of plunderers." This demonstrates the significance Mustafa Kemal attributed to economic and social development and proves that he conceptualized the politics through modern terms.[6] More importantly, Mustafa Kemal's remarks indicate that an ideological stance that extends from the Ottoman Second Constitutional Era (1908-1913) to the Republic has become even more concrete: populism (Halkçılık).

The populism that the Republic inherited from the Constitutional Era is nurtured in two veins. The first of these veins is the Narodnik movement in Russia, which could be described as "peasantry socialism." Narodnism influenced Turkic intelligentsia who migrated from Russia to the Ottoman Empire and constituted the foundation of their perception of populism. The second, and more important source of populism is the solidarist thought particularly based on Durkheimian sociology, deeply influencing Ziya Gökalp, the most influential intellectual of the era. Solidarism was the most powerful political movement in the Third Republic (1870-1940) in France. Based on principles of preventing class conflict, ensuring harmony among different social classes, resorting to state intervention in economy when necessary, and instituting a welfare state, solidarism would form the fundamental ideological direction of the CHP under "the principle of populism" (halkçılık umdesi).[7]

Republican People's Party convened its congress in October 1927. The congress of the party is of high significance since it staged Mustafa Kemal's famous speech stretching to six days, approximately thirty-seven hours long, known as "Nutuk." Another noteworthy detail on the congress is the adoption of a new party bylaw that replaced the first one which was adopted in 1923. With that congress, the party makes a vital progress in terms of institutionalization in the aftermath of a tumultuous period and clarifies its ideological and political direction.

The first article of the bylaw describes the party as republican, populist, and nationalist. Laicism is not referred by its name. Hence, it is not listed as one of the party principles. However, the third article points to laicism without naming it: "The party [...] considers the complete separation of religion and the world in the matters related to the state and the nation one of the most important principles." The sixth article states that the party's leader is His

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[6] Ibid., 34.

[7] Zafer Toprak, "İkinci Meşrutiyette solidarist düşünce: Halkçılık" [Solidarist Thought in the Second Constitutional Era: Populism], *Toplum ve Bilim* 1 (1977): 92-95.

Excellency Gazi Mustafa Kemal. The seventh article establishes that the first six articles cannot be amended.[8]

The 1931 convention marked the completion of the party's institutionalization, clearly defining its ideological identity and the political programme. The Six Arrows were included for the first time in the programme, and in 1937 were enshrined in the constitution. The influence of solidarist populism is visible in the 1931 Programme: "It is one of our fundamental principles to regard the people of the Republic of Turkey not as a society consisting of different classes but as a community [...] composed of various professionals broken down according to division of labour." This article is summarized by the following sentence: "There is no class, but division of labour."[9]

Populism

The foundation of the early Republican period populism was based on the intellectual environment of the Second Constitutional Era. The first spring that harboured the environment during that period was the Narodnik movement in Russia. Narodniks, to a great extent, were middle class intellectuals. They advocated for a model of rural socialism consisting of village communities. "Going to the people" and raising the awareness of the people formed their basic political programme. However, what they meant by raising the awareness of the people did not entail making them adopt foreign values by way of indoctrination. They upheld the idea that the salvation of a society was (...) embedded in its own values. The Narodnik movement gradually dissolved both because of the autocracy of the Tsarist regime and the increasing domination of Marxism on the Russian revolutionary movements by the end of 19th century to the early 20th century.[10]

Solidarism, which moulded Ziya Gökalp's ideas, had a more powerful influence on the CHP's populism than that of Narodnism, though. Solidarism was also the ideology of the Radical Party, which was one of the most crucial political actors in the French Third Republic. Solidarism favoured free entrepreneurs as well as the immunity of property but on the other hand strived for the elimination of class conflict by state interventionism in economy. It was a pacifist ideology that advocated social solidarity and secular education. Although solidarists approached socialists generally on friendly terms, the

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[8] For the 1927 Bylaw of CHF see Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek Parti Yönetimi'nin Kurulması* [The Establishment of the Single-Party Rule in the Republic of Turkey] 1923-1931 (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2005), 398-412.

[9] For CHF's 1931 Programme see Tunçay, *Tek Parti Yönetimi*, 474-483.

[10] See Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Popülizm* [Populism in Turkey] 1908-1923 (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2013), 25-26, 170-171, and Niyazi Berkes, *Türk Düşününde Batı Sorunu* [The Question of West in the Turkish Thought] (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2016), 207.

former did not adopt the latter's goal for social change and did not go to the root of social inequality while supporting social justice.[11]

The ratio of urban population to the aggregate population in Turkey was above 25 percent prior to the First World War. In 1927, however, this ratio dropped to 18 percent as an aftermath of the enforced population movements and finally the distortion of the country's social fabric due to population exchange.[12] Turkey had a significantly large rural population and "what to be done" with this colossal social group presented a vital political and ideological issue during the Single-Party era. The fact that peasants made up 80 percent of the Turkish class structure was a serious hurdle for the implementation of corporatism. In 1950, the year when CHP rule ended, urban population accounted for 20 percent of the total population in Turkey where an overwhelming majority of peasants were small producers. A significant portion of the urban population was self-employed professionals engaging in trade and service sector (wage earners working for employers only constituted 2 percent of Turkey's population).[13]

The discourse of peasantism was widespread, however, there was no attempt to establish professional associations or producer unions in rural areas. The land reform, which came to the fore in the 1930s, led to continuous deliberations and was finally accomplished with the enactment of law on providing land to farmers in 1945 when the Single-Party regime was about to end. With the removal of tithe in 1925 as well as the project of Village Institutes ("Köy Enstitüleri") that was realized in the 1940s (and later disrupted by the conservative faction of the CHP), the land reform was one of the few steps taken with a view to practically supporting the widespread discourse of peasantism. However, it did not certainly signify a radical change in property relations. Keyder defines:

> The land distribution project from 1946 to 1950 was carried out in a timid fashion and 33,000 families were granted land. However, during the rule of the Democrat Party, the leader of which initially objected to land reform, 312,000 families became landowners in the period of 1950 to 1960. Moreover, land size per family was 20 percent larger than the first land distribution during CHP rule.[14]

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[11] Toprak, "İkinci Meşrutiyette solidarist düşünce: Halkçılık," 94-95. See also Toprak, *Türkiye'de Popülizm 1908-1923*, 292-295.

[12] Çağlar Keyder, *Türkiye'de Devlet ve Sınıflar* [State and Classes in Turkey] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2013), 104.

[13] Keyder, *Türkiye'de Devlet ve Sınıflar*, 148.

[14] Ibid, 157.

Karaömerlioğlu considers land reform "a Kemalist conservative modernization project". Per his argument, peasantist motives behind this project was accompanied by the concerns of unrest in the rural areas, the fear of urbanization, proletarianization and socialist ideas, and the aspiration to empower republican ideology in the rural areas.[15]

According to Ali Yaycıoğlu, the CHP was founded as a coalition between a cadre of intellectuals, soldiers and bureaucrats whose vision was mainly shaped by their stance against the despotism of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the provincial notables and landed gentry who largely maintained their loyalty to the sultanate until 1918. This coalition between the various military-bureaucratic fractions of the central Ottoman state and the wealthy and powerful figures of the provinces can be stretched back to the late 18th century. During the single-party reign of CHP between 1925 and 1950—leaving aside the short-lived multi-party moments brought about by the Progressive Republican Party ("*Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası*") and the Liberal Republican Party ("*Serbest Fırka*")—the party witnessed significant changes in its structure, social base and ideological formation. Between 1925 and 1929, CHP tried to broaden its base beyond the above-mentioned coalition and partially succeeded in bringing the urban merchant class closer to the party. On the other hand, between 1929 and 1938 when CHP tested different projects while pursuing a radical revolutionary agenda, the party base underwent a relative contraction. During this period, there was an obvious tension between provincial elites and CHP. Therefore, a more technocratic cadre gained prominence within the party. Between 1939 and 1950, CHP made peace with the provinces, again. İsmet İnönü, the successor of Kemal Atatürk, made a nationwide tour and as a result, many prominent families in the provinces were once again invited to join the party. This was also the period when CHP tried to establish a new relationship with the rural population. But this did not fare well as the harsh economic conditions of the Second World War directly hit agricultural producers.[16]

The Single-Party Turkey's Reformism within the International Context

The Kemalist Turkey was a successful example of struggle for independence and an impressive model of modernization and nation-building for many Muslim countries. It served as an epitome not only for the "enlightened despots" such as the rulers of Iran and Afghanistan, but also for the peoples of post-Ottoman lands. The influence of the young Turkish republic reached beyond Turkish communities of Bulgaria and Turkish Cyprus where the Latin alphabet was

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[15] M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, "Elite Perceptions of Land Reform in Turkey," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 27, no. 3 (April 2000): 115-141.

[16] Ali Yaycıoğlu, "Tarihin Penceresinden CHP" [The CHP Through the Window of History], *Gazete Oksijen* (June 18, 2021), https://gazeteoksijen.com/yazarlar/ali-yaycioglu/tarihin-penceresinden-chp-32814 (accessed June 10, 2023).

adopted. The non-Turkic and non-Muslim communities of the post-Ottoman space were also affected by the Kemalist modernization. Kemalist reforms in Turkey provided guidance for many attempts at modernization including the debate on a new civil law in the 1920s' and 30s' Albania ruled by Zog I. The discussion on traditional and modern dress in Egypt referred to Kemalist Turkey. Turkey's reforms were also closely observed by Muslims and non-Muslims of Yugoslavia in the 1930s where the new policies on women's emancipation were especially admired.[17]

The relations between the Radical Party (RP) of France and the CHP throughout the 1920s and 1930s are particularly worth mentioning in this regard. Radical Party was one of the most significant parties of the French politics from the early 20th century to the beginning of the Second World War. In the interwar period when 42 governments were set up in France due to the unstable political environment, RP secured the office of prime ministry in coalition governments by mobilizing predominantly leftist parties. At the beginning of the century, RP occupied the left side of the political spectrum, but the party became relatively closer to the centre in the interwar period. A slow disintegration of the RP unfolded following the Second World War. Two tendencies, right wing and left wing, emerged within the party. This divergence gradually weakened RP. Pierre Mendès France,[18] the most influential politician of the RP cadres following the Second World War was the leader of the left wing and became prime minister of the cabinet that was formed in 1954 and lasted 7.5 months. During the 1960s, RP's power declined, and the intra-party schism between its left and right wings eventually resulted in a split in 1972. The right wing seized control of the party.[19]

Toprak indicates that "Some members of the French Radical Party, notably prominently Pierre Mendès France, who leaned towards leftist ideology, were described as 'Jeune-Turc' (Jön Türk) in the 1920s.[20] RP embraced CHP during its most powerful decades in 1920s and 1930s. In 1927, CHP was invited to become a member of the International Entente of Radical Parties[21] of which radical parties across the world were members. Positioned in a place between

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[17] For the impact of Kemalist reforms in the post-Ottoman territories see *Kemalizm: Osmanlı Sonrası Dünyada Ulusaşırı Siyaset* [Kemalism: Transnational Politics in the Post-Ottoman World], eds. Nathalie Clayer, Fabio Giomi, and Emmanuel Szurek (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2022).

[18] France was assigned to short-lived 2nd Popular Front government led by Léon Blum in 1938 (The first one was established in 1936). For Popular Front governments leftist parties established in Spain and France against the threat of fascism see Eric Hobsbawn, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 2001), 148.

[19] A similar intra-party struggle that took place within the CHP during 1960s resulted in the triumph of the leftist wing following the splits in 1967 and 1972.

[20] Toprak, *Türkiye'de Popülizm 1908-1923*, 172.

[21] The entente's full name was International Entente of Radical and Similar Democratic Parties ("Entente Internationale des Partis Radicaux et des Partis Démocratiques Similaires").

liberalism and social democracy in so far as economic matters are concerned, radical parties also supported common views including republicanism, laicism,[22] and the development of civil rights that favour women such as divorce and abortion. Particularly, the French Radical Party considered the CHP to be similar to itself.

Turan's work profoundly presents detailed information about the relations between CHP and RP as well as CHP and the International Entente of Radical Parties. The entente's invitation to CHP was discussed during the 1927 congress. CHP Secretary General Saffet Bey, who attended the entente's congress in Karlsruhe and introduced his party to the participants, provided the CHP congress members with the information about his engagements at the entente's congress. Afterwards, the congress deliberated on whether to become a member or not. When asked by Yusuf Akçura, a prominent intellectual and CHP MP, about his stance, Saffet Bey stressed that it boils down to the discretion and decision of the party council. The council ultimately voted against CHP's participation.[23]

The reason the party council did not decide on accession to the entente has not been clarified completely. Turan is convinced that the decision had already been taken by the highest party administration prior to the CHP's 1927 congress.[24] During the discussions at the congress, Yusuf Akçura contended that he considered the entente a low-profile organisation. He pointed out that most of the parties that were members of the entente were not the ruling parties in their respective countries and further noted that the French Radical Party, most powerful among the members, could not manage to sustain its rule. Accordingly, Akçura remarked, any demands that the entente could ever propound would be the demands of the minority. He emphatically pointed out that CHP's situation was remarkably different since the party held absolute power. For Akçura, there was incompatibility between the position of the entente members in their respective countries and the position of CHP in Turkey.[25]

Tunaya maintains that CHP had not wanted to become a member of the international entente of radical parties because the party "could not identify its social and economic statism in a conscious, knowledgeable and consistent manner, therefore remained hesitant." He therefore explicates CHP's timid behaviour as ideological uncertainty and inconsistency. "However, Radical Socialist parties are not socialists. They were indeed central parties," Tunaya writes, unravelling the confusion among the CHP officials.[26]

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[22] Laicism signified advocating the separation of state and church for radical parties prominently in France and a number of other countries.

[23] Turan, *CHP Yönetiminin Dünya Partileriyle İlişkileri*, 184-189.

[24] Ibid., 189.

[25] Akçura's statements quoted in Turan, *CHP Yönetiminin Dünya Partileriyle İlişkileri*, 187-188.

[26] Tarık Zafer Tunaya's remarks quoted in Turan, *CHP Yönetiminin Dünya Partileriyle İlişkileri*, 207.

CHP developed close relations during the ensuing years with the entente despite not becoming a member. As Turan notes, CHP attended the entente's 1931 congress in Athens and 1933 congress in Sofia as an observer in addition to its participation in the 1926 congress in Karlsruhe. CHP was insistently invited to all congresses until 1939 although it did not attend most of them. In a correspondence, the entente asked the CHP to submit the French translation of its new party programme (1935) to be published in its bulletin even if the CHP would not send a representative to the entente's congress. The working reports of the congress that CHP did not attend were sent to Ankara. CHP in return shared party publications with the entente administration. Edouard Herriot, a prominent figure in the RP who served as a prime minister three times, showed the keenest interest in the Kemalist Turkey. During a visit to Turkey prior to the 1933 Sofia Congress, Herriot met with Atatürk, İnönü, and Recep Peker (then Secretary General) and praised the young republican regime in several speeches. "I am a laic and Radical politician. You are also laic and Radical (...) there is no doubt that Your Grand Chief Gazi Mustafa Kemal is the most revolutionary man in the world. I cannot find the appropriate words to describe this great man who abolished the sultanate and caliphate and prepared a prosperous future for the Turkish nation with the revolutions he accomplished."[27]

In his statements, Herriot particularly lauds Kemalist republic's initiatives for laicity: "I am a laic politician and belong to leftist camp. (...) The structure Gazi and friends had built is beautiful to look at in every perspective. (...) [On Yusuf Hikmet Bayur's expression:] How can I not admire you? You deported the caliphate out of your country, however, the Paris representative of the Papacy (...) overthrew my government."[28]

Toprak highlights that Atatürk was impressed by solidarist economists such as Charles Gide and Charles Rist. Moreover, the chapter he dictated to Afet İnan entitled "Solidarity" shares to a great extent significant similarities with Gide and Rist's analyses on welfare state. In his definition of welfare state, he employs the concept of "state socialism" which is a completely different type of socialism from the socialism in the Soviet Union. Atatürk had a special interest in the French Revolution and the French Third Republic. He extensively read a great number of works by French philosophers, sociologist, historians, legal theoreticians and economists ranging from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Emile Durkheim.[29] On CHP's ideological evolution, Toprak writes, "The fact that solidarist thought provided basis for right wing ideologies as much as it did for socialism could not be ignored," and continues, "Republican People's Party entered a path close to right wing ideologies on political terms after 1935

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[27] Ibid., 189-220.

[28] Ibid., 214.

[29] Toprak, *Türkiye'de Popülizm 1908-1923*, 386-400.

during the interwar period, proving that solidarism became functional on a slippery slope."[30]

An Assessment and Overview of the Single-Party CHP

Single-Party CHP's Kemalism was a solidarist ideology. The pamphlet the party published on its 20th anniversary in 1943, for instance, explained the party's standpoint on social structure and progress in light of a solidarist perspective.[31] In a world where the number of constitutional and elected governments declined from 35 in 1920 to 17 in 1938,[32] and in a Mediterranean political context where only France was governed with democracy among the riparian states, the CHP carried Turkey to the multi-party politics in 1946, immediately after the Second World War, and transferred the power to Democrat Party (DP) in 1950. This was the consequence of the democratic initiative ensured by the solidarist worldview. George Orwell recognized that the Kemalist Turkey was one of the few countries in the 1930 who opposed the appeasement of the European dictatorships. He wrote: "In the years 1935-9, when almost any ally against Fascism seemed acceptable, left-wingers found themselves praising Mustafa Kemal."[33]

The CHP was distant from the leftist ideology during the 1940s. The anti-communist character of the party became more visible in the wake of the Second World War. The core of the anti-communist policies of the right-wing governments of the Cold War era could be traced back to the 1940s. The political liberalisation after 1945 did not mean full-fledged democratisation. Anti-communism that rose in parallel with Turkey's entrance into the capitalist Western bloc since the beginning of the Cold War brought along increasing authoritarianism against the left. In Boratav's words, "the multi-party regime began, but true pluralism in all spheres of the superstructure was precluded particularly by way of preventing the leftist politics."[34]

The Second Critical Juncture: Rise of DP

The Law on the Provision of Land to Farmers supported by President İnönü in 1945 was met with reaction from big landowners. Celal Bayar, Adnan

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[30] Ibid., 172.

[31] Ahmet Demirel, *Tek Partinin Yükselişi* [The Rise of Single Party] (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012), 332-333.

[32] Toprak, *Türkiye'de Popülizm 1908-1923*, 424-425.

[33] George Orwell quoted in Feroz Ahmad, "The Historical Background of Turkey's Foreign Policy," in *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, eds. Lenore G. Martin and Dimitris Keridis (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 22.

[34] Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye'nin Faşizmleri ve AKP* [Fascisms of Turkey and the AKP] (İstanbul: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, 2015), 13-15, 19.

Menderes, Fuat Köprülü, and Refik Koraltan, all prominent CHP politicians, opposed this law and voiced democratic demands by submitting their "Motion with Four Signatures" ("*Dörtlü Takrir*") to the party leadership. This group of four left the party through dismissals and resignations and went on to find the Democrat Party (DP) in January 1946. Following their defeat in the rigged elections of July 1946, the DP managed to come to power as a result of the first free and fair general election of the republican era in May 1950.

The single-party regime's decision of transition to multi-party politics was related to both domestic and international factors, as Zürcher highlights. On the national plane, the governing coalition of the ruling classes split due to the state-interventionist measures that were taken during the WWII. The bourgeoisie and landowners were unhappy with those measures, while the urban and rural masses also endured economic hardships caused by the WWII, despite Turkey managing to stay out of the war. A huge number of men were conscripted for years with the fear of invasion, bringing about an immense economic burden. As a response, İnönü sought to allow some political opposition as a "safety valve". The international factor was that Turkey perceived a Soviet threat soon after the end of war and sought to align with the US. A democratic regime coupled with a liberalized economy was seen as an effective way to secure American political and military support, as well as benefit from the Marshall Plan.[35]

As Yaycıoğlu puts it, the 1950s witnessed increased attempts by the CHP to open up to different segments of society, as some of the provincial elites began to support DP. Although the urban middle class, civil servants, teachers and especially students still formed the base of CHP, the divide between CHP, on the one hand, and the urban and small-town merchants and tradesmen, villagers and big landowners in the regions won over by DP, on the other, grew wider. This was a divide that the CHP would not be able to overcome for decades to come.[36]

In response to the increasing authoritarianism of DP, CHP made a declaration on primary goals ("*İlk Hedefler Beyannamesi*") in early 1959. It promised institutional reforms aimed at reinstituting democratic rights and liberties, the rule of law, and the separation of powers. As CHP became the dominant power within the Constituent Assembly established after the May 27, 1960 coup d'état which overthrew the DP rule, both the new constitution and most of the newly established institutions as well as new laws were shaped by the goals stated in this declaration. Without CHP's contribution, it was highly likely that the coup would have been followed not by a democratic regime, but a military dictatorship. Among the stated goals are ensuring the impartiality of the national public broadcaster TRT, establishing a Constitutional Court,

[35] Erik Jan Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi* [Turkey, A Modern History] (İletişim: İstanbul, 2008), 303-308.
[36] Yaycıoğlu, "Tarihin Penceresinden CHP."

ensuring the impartiality of the President, establishing a bicameral parliament, establishing a Council of Judges, improving social rights, and guaranteeing legislative immunities.

The Third Critical Juncture: CHP's Swing to the Left

The adoption of the import-substitution industrialization in Turkey following the May 27, 1960 coup d'état contributed to a rise in the exercise of the freedom of association, higher levels of politicization, as well as higher incomes among wider segments of society. This, in turn, caused a fundamental shift in the politics of populism. The populism between 1960 and 1980 was indeed a past variant of the contemporary left populism and was radically different from the populism of the Single-Party era when the existence of social classes was denied, and society was envisaged as a homogenous political entity. It was also very different from the market populism of the DP era, which was shaped by the wider influence of the masses' aspirations and demands on politics. This era was marked by the integration of village life with markets, the rising wealth of the commercial bourgeoisie, and economic growth — which, however, lost its steam by the mid-1950s. Historically, this new and modern form of populism was rooted in the principle of populism which was one of the six foundational principles symbolized by the six arrows on the CHP flag. In contrast to the 1930s' populism, this was a doctrine which aimed at improving the status of working classes and paid more attention to social stratification and economic exploitation without being opposed to private enterprises.

The Left-of-Centre movement which came to the fore on the eve of the 1965 elections and was to be led by Bülent Ecevit following his election as the party secretary-general in 1966 deepened and elaborated the legacy of populism inherited from the Atatürk era. It was to become hegemonic first within CHP, then in the whole domain of domestic politics.

In all the elections during the 1950s, CHP won the first place in a province across the west of Ankara (which were economically more developed) only once and that was in Uşak in the 1957 election. During this period, CHP did not win enough votes in the Marmara and Aegean regions which were known for their relatively advanced economic outlook in terms of capitalist development and could not gain the support of urban working classes and villagers who changed their ways from subsistence farming to market-driven production. It was able to win parliament seats mainly in economically backward provinces where landowners were able to determine the voting behaviours of the larger masses.[37]

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[37] Feroz Ahmad, *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye* [Turkish Experiment in Democracy] (1945-1980) (İstanbul: Hil Yayın, 2007), 153.

At this point a confusion may arise in readers' mind as to whether DP drew its support from landowners and rural voters or urbanized areas. In fact, landowners were divided along the DP-CHP cleavage and the prosperous areas were yet to be urbanized. The proportion of the rural population was around 80 percent in 1950, and it just dropped to 70 percent in 1960. Western part of Turkey, namely the Marmara and Aegean regions, were more developed than the rest of the country, but they were still far from completing their urbanization process. Immigration from villages to cities accelerated in the 1960s and did not slow down until the 2000s. Istanbul (Marmara), Izmir (Aegean), and Adana (South) were the most economically advanced cities. However their close hinterlands were mainly rural, let alone the villages in their suburbs. The disparity between the developed and under-developed regions was also reflected in the political divide among Turkey's traditional elites, landowners and notables. Those in the developed regions tend to side with DP, while the majority of those in the under-developed parts of the country chose to remain loyal to CHP. The economic hardship that kept worsening throughout the second half of the 1950s hit the metropolitan population most. Wage-earners were badly affected by the rising cost of living. As a result, the gap between the two parties lessened, and CHP won over DP in Ankara[38] and Adana in the 1957 general election.

Table 1. The 1950 General Election
(electoral system: First-Past-The-Post in multi-member districts)

Parties	Vote share	Seat share
DP	52.7%	85.2%
CHP	39.4%	14.2%
Nation Party	3.1%	0.2%
Independents	4.8%	0.4%

Source: Erol Tuncer, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Seçimler* [Elections from the Ottoman era till present] (1877-2002) (Ankara: TESAV, 2003), 363.

Table 2. The 1954 General Election
(electoral system: First-Past-The-Post in multi-member districts)

Parties	Vote share	Seat share
DP	57.6%	92.8%
CHP	35.4%	5.7%
Republican Nation Party	4.9%	0.9%
Peasant Party of Turkey	0.6%	0.0%
Independents	1.5%	0.6%

Source: Erol Tuncer, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Seçimler* [Elections from the Ottoman era till present] (1877-2002) (Ankara: TESAV, 2003), 364.

[38] The capital city and the second largest city in terms of population.

Table 3. The 1957 General Election (electoral system: First-Past-The-Post in multi-member districts)

Parties	Vote share	Seat share
DP	47.9%	69.6%
CHP	41.1%	29.2%
Republican Nation Party	7.1%	0.6%
Freedom Party	3.8%	0.6%
Independents	0.1%	0.0%

Source: Erol Tuncer, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Seçimler* [Elections from the Ottoman era till present] (1877-2002) (Ankara: TESAV, 2003), 365.

When the electoral system was reformed according to the principle of proportional representation in the 1960s, the CHP began to win seats all over the country. However, it was not clear which social classes or strata it should build its politics on. Feroz Ahmad noted that "the 30-40 percent traditional vote was no longer guaranteed, as so many votes [...] were being cast for the [rightist] Justice Party and [leftist] Workers Party of Turkey." The solution to this problem was the so-called Left of Centre. "If the party wanted to win elections, it would have to widen its appeal to workers and villagers at the expense of losing the support of narrow-minded and traditional wealthy landowners.", in Ahmad's words. CHP lost the elections in 1965. The 1968 local and Senate elections, as well as the 1969 general elections did not bring any major success either. However, the party "began to lose in regions dominated by its traditional supporters, namely the landed gentry, while gaining support in more developed and modern regions".[39]

Ergun Özbudun also pointed out that CHP received more votes in the Marmara and Aegean regions in the 1969 elections, while it suffered heavy losses in the least developed areas of Turkey. He concluded that the Left-of-Centre policy "began to appeal to the low-income classes in the developed regions".[40] However, the shift to the left which was led by Ecevit and later named as the "Democratic Left" in the 1970s, would only bear fruit four years later, in the 1973 elections.

The electoral campaign of the party for the 1969 elections was built around a reform program to change the system ("*Düzen Değişikliği Programı*") with a populist perspective focusing on the improvement of the material conditions of the poverty-stricken rural population. Back then, around 65 percent of Turkey's population lived in villages. What was most striking about Ecevit's slogan "Land belongs to those who till it, water belongs to those who use it" was how it encapsulated the commitment to nationalizing the land so that it

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[39] Ahmad, *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye* (1945-1980), 317, 320, 323-324.

[40] Ergun Özbudun, *Türkiye'de Parti ve Seçim Sistemi* [Party and Electoral System in Turkey] (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011), 38-39.

could be redistributed to those villagers who owned no land or who made a living through tenancy, usufructuary and sharecropping. This campaign also encouraged the village people to enter into a cooperative system like establishing a cooperative bank, providing agricultural insurance for farmers, barring foreign capital from the management of natural resources, establishing as much public control as possible over the mining industry and ensuring that any private enterprise in this sector is thoroughly supervised.[41]

The party declaration for the 1973 elections entitled "Towards Better Days" (*Akgünlere*) was another text that was very reflective of the left populism of the era. It offered a clear distinction between elites and the people, where the elites were defined solely in economic terms. It referred to the privileged segments of society as "big business" or "monopoly capital":

> "[...] Wealthy interest groups and parties serving these interests pursue the primary goal of accelerating the process of capital accumulation in favour of monopolistic capital groups. The easiest way to achieve this is to increase cost of living through a vortex of inflation. This vortex helps transfer, in increasing proportions, of the incomes generated by the labours of workers and low-income groups to big capital. The poor get poorer, the rich become richer. [...] This is a backward economic perspective which aims at accelerating capital accumulation in the hands of monopolistic capitalist groups by impoverishing and exploiting the masses [...] It is bound to harm not only low-income groups, but also small and medium-sized enterprises".[42]

As CHP began to describe a large majority harmed by a very small class-based minority and policies designed to protect this minority, it also started defending cooperative initiatives that would help to combine the small savings of the people for the purposes of bigger investments. These cooperatives, it was claimed, would form a third People's Sector in addition to the public and private sectors.[43] The People's Sector was an important element of the populist discourse of the party in the 1970s. For instance, in an article published in the magazine *Özgür İnsan* (Free Human) in 1974, Kemal Derviş[44] argued that the principle of shared management presupposed in the notion of a People's Sector was a tool to stop the minority from ruling the majority. He asserted that

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[41] Hikmet Bilâ, *Sosyal Demokrat Süreç İçinde CHP ve Sonrası* [CHP within the Social Democratic Process and the Aftermath] (İstanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1987), 319-321.

[42] Ibid., 382-383.

[43] Ibid., 383.

[44] Derviş would much later (in 2001 and 2002) serve as the Economy Minister in PM Ecevit's cabinet.

"Adopting the principle of shared management would not threaten the freedom of enterprise or the private property regime, but it would not allow capital to rule labour as if it were its natural right to do so".[45]

The People's Sector, *Halk Sektörü*, was also mentioned in the 1976 programme of CHP, this time as *Halk Kesimi*, a slightly different, synonymous rendering in Turkish:

> The people's sector is an economic sector formed by the merged capital of the people coming together either as citizens or through cooperatives, unions, and social security and welfare organizations, in order to prevent economic power and the resulting political power to concentrate in the State or in the hands of persons or limited social segments. It is, however, open to contributions by the State, local governments and public institutions without allowing them to acquire a dominant role.

The party congress in 1976 was indeed one of the most important congresses in the history of the party. The process of seeking a social democrat identity which began with the Left-of-Centre movement in the 1970s found its culmination in this congress when the ideology of CHP was declared to be "democratic left". The congress also declared a programme where the six principles of a Democratic Leftist position were said to be liberty, equality, solidarity, the primacy of labour, the integrity of development and the self-government of the people. It was also underlined that in order for CHP to establish a social order in line with these principles, the party would adhere to the principles of Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism, Statism, Laicism and Reformism.

CHP was able to become the first party in the 1973 and 1977 elections and entered coalition governments twice as the senior partner. Nevertheless, as the country was suffering *de facto* civil war conditions especially from 1978 onwards, it was not able to bring its left populist or social democratic programme to life. On the other hand, after winning the municipal elections in 1973 in major cities like İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, the left populist/social democratic agenda which could not be fully realized at the central-government level, found a relatively successful area in local administrations. The left-wing municipal approach tried to offer solutions to urban problems like shanty towns and poverty. To respond to local needs, municipalities took the initiative to directly produce the goods and services they needed. Among their efforts were establishing asphalt plants, attempting to establish bakeries, prioritizing public

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[45] Quoted in Kerem Hocaoğlu, *1973 Seçimlerinde Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* [Republican People's Party in the 1973 Elections] (unpublished master thesis) (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü, 2018), 91-92.

transport and trying to offer housing. These initiatives were well-received by the urban poor. Thus, it resulted to their success in the elections. Unfortunately, most of the leftist elected municipal leaders and high-level administrators were ousted from their positions and the municipal councils were disbanded after the September 12, 1980 coup d' état.[46]

As put by Yaycıoğlu;

> The period following the year 1960 saw the biggest splits in the history of CHP. The party which founded the Republic decided to become firstly a left-of-centre and then a democratic left or social democratic party. [...] As CHP tried to reach out to the working class, the new ways in which it began to relate to other leftist parties and organizations also resulted in complexities. [...] In addition to the ideological shift from Kemalism to social democracy, this diversity among the supporters and cadres of the party provided lively grounds for intra-party rivalries. The harsh 1970s also saw the party become more inclusive and receive support from villages and small towns in specific regions. Although CHP was not able to defeat right-wing coalitions and become the ruling party in the 1970s, we saw it become the party with the widest social base.[47]

CHP's Relations with the Military 1923−1980

Although Atatürk, the founder of the republic and the party, and İnönü, his successor, were generals who led the post-Ottoman Turkish national liberation struggle, the military in the early republican era did not play a decision-making role in political affairs. A significant part of the cadres who rose during the 1919-1922 War were high-level officers, and they turned into civilian politicians after the proclamation of the republic − including both the followers and the opponents of Atatürk. The latter group quit the CHP in the late 1924 and founded the Progressive Republican Party along with the civilian critics of Atatürk. Nevertheless, the military as an institution did not openly intervene to politics until 1960.

A significant share in the military's distance to politics can be attributed to Fevzi Çakmak's personality. Çakmak was the only field marshal in the Turkish Armed Forces other than Atatürk. He served as the chief of general staff between 1921 and 1944. His authority over the armed forces was undisputable

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[46] Ebru Deniz Ozan, "Toplumcu belediyecilik," in *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Siyasal Hayat* [Political Life from the Ottoman Era till Today], eds. Gökhan Atılgan et al. (İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2015), 723-724.

[47] Yaycıoğlu, "Tarihin Penceresinden CHP."

and he refrained from playing a political role until his retirement. Çakmak was known to be conservative in his private life but he never objected to Atatürk's radical secularization reforms.

İnönü resigned as the PM in the late 1937 as a result of the friction he had with President Atatürk. Throughout 1938 Atatürk's health deteriorated rapidly, and in the summer, it became clear that he did not have much time. The anti-İnönü faction in the state apparatus sought to convince Çakmak to be the second president of the republic but he refused to resign from the military. The PM Celal Bayar also distanced himself from the anti-İnönü faction and did not support their attempts to make Çakmak Atatürk's successor.[48]

In terms of the "succession question", the two tendencies amongst the generals were staying neutral or supporting İnönü. After a series of closed meetings within the military, the second tendency prevailed. In addition to the military's positive view, İnönü managed to get the support of Bayar, his successor as PM. He also managed to maintain his influence over the parliament, the bureaucracy, and the party after having an unwilling break in his political career. Hence, the powerful actors of the regime agreed upon İnönü's presidency weeks before Atatürk passed away on November 10, 1938.[49]

Çakmak retired in January 1944 due to the mandatory age limit but the real reason was the Allies, who were clearly turning the tide against the Axis during that time, regarded him as pro-German due to Turkey's neutrality during the WWII.[50] The military, whose highest-level officers were loyal to the President İnönü, continued to stay out of daily political issues. However, the martial law in effect from 1940 to 1947 gave the military a stronger rolewithin the polity.[51] Following CHP's defeat in the 1950 election, some generals suggested that İnönü interfere with the newly elected DP government and annul the election results, but İnönü rejected it.[52] In June 1950, the DP government under Adnan Menderes' premiership dismissed the top generals in the chain of command.[53]

Since 1946, many retired generals, including former chiefs of general staff, entered the parliament on DP lists, and Menderes largely managed to keep the high command loyal to him throughout his reign.[54] The DP leaders were, however, always sceptical, even anxious about İnönü's influence over the military. That phobia, known as the "Pasha factor",[55] fuelled the DP's growing repression on the CHP over time.

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[48] Cemil Koçak, *Türkiye'de Milli Şef Dönemi* (1938-1945) Cilt 1 [The National Chief Era in Turkey (1938-1945) Vol. 1] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996), 126-128.

[49] Ibid., 134-137.

[50] Cemil Koçak, *Türkiye'de Milli Şef Dönemi* (1938-1945) Cilt 2 [The National Chief Era in Turkey (1938-1945) Vol. 2] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996), 237-238.

[51] Ahmad, *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye* (1945-1980), 190.

[52] Ibid., 192, and Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi*, 319.

[53] Ahmad, *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye (1945-1980)*, 192-193.

[54] Ibid., 188-196.

[55] Ibid., 57-58. Pasha was İnönü's nickname.

The 1960 coup was successfully plotted by a junta mainly, though not wholly, consisted of mid-level officers. These were well-educated and ambitious officers who were aware of the significance of military modernization and the general backwardness of Turkey. Turkish military underwent a modernization program initiated by Turkey's NATO membership in 1952 and benefited over two billion dollars from American aid. Amongst the coup plotters were officers who spent some time abroad through the NATO exchange and education programs.[56] İnönü correctly predicted the coming of a military coup and, in the run-up to the May 27, 1960 coup, he warned the DP government that they could not rely on the loyalty of the armed forces.[57]

The junta got divided into two groups following the coup—the moderates and the radicals. The first group sought to transfer political authority back to civilians as soon as possible to bring CHP to power. Despite lacking ideological coherence, the second group stood against a rapid normalization and posited that the military should be in command for at least four years—a period during which all social and political institutions were to be radically transformed.[58] The moderates eventually prevailed over the radicals by purging them, leading the elections in October 1961, a month after Menderes and his two cabinet ministers were executed by death penalty for violating the constitution. The CHP won the 1961 elections, and İnönü led three coalition cabinets until February 1965 as the PM, as no party held a majority in the parliament.

Up until the end of 1963, the military, which had many juntas and groupings extensively involved in politics, was distant from the Justice Party (the successor of the banned DP), hence İnönü's premiership was sought, even imposed by the generals.[59] However, in December 1963, the Justice Party leader was appointed to form a new cabinet by President Cemal Gürsel, a retired general who accepted the plotters' proposal to lead the 1960 coup and who was elected as President by the parliament in 1961. The military, hence, began to regard the Justice Party as a legitimate political actor. In other words, İnönü's tutelage over politics was no longer necessary.[60] Although, the Justice Party chairman failed to form a coalition cabinet in the late 1963, resulting in İnönü becoming PM for the last time, his premiership was nearing its end. Between 1965 and 1971, the Justice Party alone governed the country.

The PM and Justice Party leader Süleyman Demirel was forced by the military to resign in March 1971, but the parliament and parties were not dissolved. A dispute arose between İnönü and the CHP Secretary-General Bülent Ecevit as to whether to support the military's intervention. İnönü

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[56] Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi*, 347.

[57] Ahmad, *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye (1945-1980)*, 102, 205.

[58] Ibid., 212-213.

[59] Feroz Ahmad, "Politics and Political Parties in Republican Turkey," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey Vol. 4*, ed. Reşat Kasaba (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 242.

[60] Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi*, 362.

favoured taking part in the coalition governments under military's tutelage whereas Ecevit opposed collaboration. The intra-party power struggle was won by Ecevit, who subsequently ended İnönü's 34-year leadership in 1972. Ecevit became the new CHP chairman and successfully cooperated with Demirel in 1973 to avoid the election of the Chief of the General Staff as President, despite pressure from the armed forces.

Relations between the CHP and the military grew increasingly problematic between January 1978 and October 1979, a period during which Ecevit led a not-so-strong coalition cabinet composed of the CHP, two minor parties, and a group of independent MPs who quitted the Justice Party. The political violence between leftist and neo-fascist militants reached a level that could be described as an "undeclared civil war" in 1978, with different segments of society being mobilized by these radical group. The Ecevit government's capacity to deal with the bloodshed was indeed limited.

Throughout 1978 and 1979 the military alienated itself from the CHP. The generals were worried about the rise of Kurdish radicalism, and they considered Ecevit not to be sensitive enough on this issue. In September 1978 the army conducted a manoeuvre in the Kurdish populated south-eastern region with the aim of getting prepared for a probable insurgency that was criticized by CHP circles, particularly by the party's Kurdish MPs. The criticism disturbed the military high command.[61]

Towards the end of 1978, the Justice Party of Demirel and the ultra-nationalist MHP were increasingly pressing for the declaration of martial law. Ecevit resisted for a while but had to accept their demand following the massacre that targeted the Alevi and leftist population in the city of Maraş in December 1978. The course of events did however not satisfy the Justice Party and the MHP. They kept accusing the CHP government of undermining army's struggle against terrorism. Ecevit indeed failed to institute a coordination mechanism with generals who were unwilling to care about rights and freedoms.[62]

In addition to Ecevit's refusal to adopt hardliner policies under the reason of fighting Kurdish radicalism, the military high command got alienated from the CHP government for several reasons. A significant number of CHP MPs were criticizing the measures taken within the framework of martial law, and Ecevit's foreign policy preferences were met with unfounded scepticism. His friendly attitude towards Tito's Yugoslavia and his view that Greece was a bigger threat for Turkey than the USSR were exaggerated as signs of his intention to leave the Western camp. Additionally, he was sceptical about the military's clandestine organization involving civilian armed militants under the pretext of fighting communism—many NATO member states had similar

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[61] Mehmet Ali Birand, *12 Eylül Saat: 04.00* [12 September 4 am] (Istanbul: Karacan, 1984), 63-64.

[62] Ibid., 82-83.

illegal offshoots.[63] After losing the by-elections in October 1979, Ecevit resigned and Demirel became PM.

The Fourth and Prolonged Critical Juncture: Fighting Authoritarian Opponents

The political landscape radically changed following the pro-authoritarian coup of September 12, 1980. All parties, including the CHP, were shut down and new parties were founded accordingly. The CHP remained closed until 1992. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the political landscape was highly fragmented, with multiple major parties competing to dominate their respective areas of influence in both the center-right and center-left. Specifically, the True Path Party and the Motherland Party were bickering each other for being the dominant centre-right party, while on the center-left, the number of major parties rose to three between 1992 and 1995: the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP), Democratic Left Party (DSP), and the reopened CHP. The SHP merged with CHP in 1995 but this could not prevent the rise of the DSP under the leadership of the former CHP chairman Ecevit, which came at the expense of the CHP.

The fragmentation mentioned and the continuous economic hardship contributed to the rise of Islamists throughout the 1990s. Finally, the 2001 economic crisis paved the way for Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party's (AKP), a new party with a liberal image covering a hidden Islamist agenda. This party gained power in November 2002. The AKP managed to largely absorb the centre-right votes in the coming years while the CHP found itself as the only opposition party in the parliament in late 2002 and the major anti-AKP political actor from then onwards. The CHP adopted a more centrist stance since the centre of gravity in Turkish politics moved rightward as a result of the consecutive electoral victories of the AKP. The latter obtained 46.6 percent in 2007, 49.9 percent in 2011 and 49.5 percent in the snap elections of November 2015.

The CHP, however, managed to become the centre of gravity of the anti-authoritarian political forces in Turkey especially from 2017. As a response to the consolidation of the authoritarian regime under Erdoğan's personalistic rule, the CHP has successfully become the backbone of the pro-democratic political camp in Turkey. Prior to the 2023 May elections CHP took part in the Nation's Alliance ("*Millet İttifakı*"), a political alliance composed of six parties of whom five are right-wing. Its objective was to bring back the parliamentary system instead of the presidential system that was adopted with a 51.4 percent affirmative vote in the 2017 referendum. CHP's pro-democratic leadership reached its peak in the 2023 May elections where Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the

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[63] Ibid., 86-91.

leader of the party, stood as a presidential candidate against Erdoğan with the backing of a very large coalition composed of liberals, pro-democratic Islamists, nationalists, social democrats, socialists, and the pro-Kurdish party HDP. However, he failed with a 47.8 percent in the runoff on 28 May 2023.

Conclusion

The Republican People's Party (CHP), the oldest political party of Turkey, celebrated its 100th anniversary on September 9th, 2023. From a short-term perspective, the CHP can be seen as the product of the national liberation struggle pursued against the Allied and Greek occupation forces between 1919 and 1922. However, its historical roots extend back to the early modernization efforts in Ottoman Empire at the turn of 18th century. After governing Turkey for twenty-seven uninterrupted years, fifteen of which under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk — the leader of the national liberation movement and founder of both the new Turkish republic and the party — the CHP handed over power to the Democrat Party peacefully in 1950 as a result of the first free and fair multi-party general election of the republican era.

Since then, the CHP did not have the opportunity to govern Turkey alone, except for a month-long minority government without vote of confidence in 1977. However, it has proven itself to be a resilient and persistent political actor which played an important role in Turkish politics since the 1950 critical juncture. There were a number of general and local elections in which the CHP, the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP), which stood in the absence of CHP, and the Democratic Left Party (DSP), which eclipsed the CHP by electorally replacing it, emerged victorious. Several coalition governments were also formed with the participation of these three parties, either as senior or junior partners. However, it is also an undeniable fact that Turkey has generally been governed by right-wing parties since 1950. Additionally, three military coups materialised, the first one in 1960 favouring the CHP but the last two, in 1971 and 1980, promoting right-wing policies in contrast.

During the formative years of the republic and the party itself, the CHP stood as a solidarist party, sometimes ideologically ambiguous, seeking to rise above all social classes and even ideologies. The CHP's main role was to modernize society and polity while leading the nation-building process. It was the 1960s that the ideology began to play an important role in Turkish politics and the CHP started to position itself on the centre-left of the political spectrum from the mid-60s. CHP underwent significant transformations, revised its policy objectives, and experienced broadening or shrinking electoral bases throughout its history. Such changes bolstered CHP's power in many instances but brought about divisions and declines as well. The CHP proved to be a lasting, flexible, and efficient party anyway. It emerged as an alternative to the authoritarian Erdoğan regime, this time by gathering a number of pro-democracy right-wing parties under its leadership. The CHP, therefore,

achieved the possibility to determine who the next president of Turkey would be in its 100th anniversary but could not fulfil its role since its leader and presidential candidate Kılıçdaroğlu has been defeated by Erdoğan in the May 2023 elections.