

Embedded government

Friday 9 January 2009, by [Bülent Kenes](#)

For some time we have been hearing quite shocking remarks from the ministers, including the prime minister, of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party). When all of these remarks are collectively assessed, one can indisputably arrive at the conclusion that there has been a clear change in the AK Party government's policies. Now the government seems to be embedded in the establishment.

Although great hopes and expectations have been invested in him with respect to finding a solution to the Kurdish issue and, accordingly, 54 percent of the Kurds gave their support to him in the elections on July 22, 2007, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has recently started to use the typical pro-establishment/neo-nationalist discourse. He has frequently repeated his motto of "one nation, one state, one flag," which is the most obvious sign of this change of heart.

Moreover, Vecdi Gönül, the defense minister for the AK Party government, which has clearly steered away from the nation's demands vis-à-vis the "red lines" of the status quo, praised the forced migration of Armenians and the non-Muslim population exchange. Then Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Şahin attempted to defend the infamous Article 301, which is used to block freedom of thought and the press, saying, "I will not allow anyone to describe the state as a murderer." All these incidents serve as further evidence of this change. In addition, the replacement of Dengir Mir Mehmet Fırat with Abdulkadir Aksu, known as a pro-establishment Kurd, as AK Party deputy chairman and many other actions can be listed as evidence. However, we should not be overwhelmed by individual incidents or lose sight of the essence of the issue.

Like many intellectuals, I think that the AK Party has made a deal with the establishment — a compromise in return for not being shut down — and is now complying with the requirements of this deal. I can provide numerous incidents to prove my case. But the sharp turn in Kurdish policy and the backpedaling on the EU reform process are sufficient to prove it.

Until recently the AK Party was able to secure the support of all kinds of voters from every region due to its image of being outside the system and even being wronged by the system. It had managed to become the only political party that represented the unity and integrity of Turkey, thanks to the great support lent by the Kurds. Clearly this was a great opportunity for Turkey. But now I am afraid that the AK Party, which has been tamed and has a rough neo-nationalist discourse, is misinterpreting the support it received from Kurds in the last election. The AK Party is wrongly assuming that Kurds will support it at all costs and under any circumstance. With the help of this great support, which it assumes to remain intact, it is planning to uproot the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), which has been forced to adopt a pro-Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) line.

For this reason, it prefers a language of confrontation instead of dialogue with the DTP. Moreover, it makes the wrong calculation of compensating for the loss of votes caused by this discourse in the East and the Southeast with the extra votes it may produce in the west. With extremely pragmatic tactical calculations, the AK Party fancies that this discourse will boost its overall votes in the local elections in March 2009. On the other hand, I, as an ordinary citizen, see no difference in terms of the interests of Turkish democracy between an AK Party that secures 40 percent of the vote and an AK Party that secures 50 percent. However, I can imagine what kind of a political party will be produced out of the old AK Party: an AK Party embedded in the establishment, alienating itself from the sensitivities of the nation, losing its reformist identity and no longer giving hope for the solution of the Kurdish issue.

AKP's miscalculation ?

Ignoring the fact that Kurdish citizens are actually an extremely politicized group, the AK Party, it seems, plans to secure the support of Kurds and even increase its votes in the region through the Village Infrastructure Support Project (KÖYDES), the Social Support Project (SODES) and other educational and economic aid programs in the southeastern provinces. However, the signals we get from the region do not seem to lend support to this plan. For instance, an academic friend of mine who conducts polls in the Southeast told me that they had to abandon their recent poll in the region because of the extreme reactions to the government's recent discourse.

The AK Party fails to realize that even if a political party wins votes in the region by surrendering to the typical pro-establishment/neo-nationalist discourse and abiding by the red lines of the military, Turkey will lose its opportunity to solve the Kurdish issue and become a true democracy. Because of this pro-establishment/neo-nationalist discourse, which is new to the AK Party but well known to Turkey, the AK Party has only two options. Because of this discourse, the AK Party will either be more successful or fail in the local elections. Personally, I think this will only bring about a big failure. The AK Party will lose its status as the only political party that represents national integrity and the entire country. It will no longer be an opportunity for the solution of the Kurdish issue, and it will not be different from other parties except for having more voter support. In the end, the AK Party will lose, but the status quo that does not want a reformist AK Party will win.

Now, let us imagine the reverse. Let us suppose that, despite its recent pro-establishment/neo-nationalist discourse, the AK Party manages to boost its votes in the region thanks to its social policies and increasing investments in the eastern and southeastern provinces. It is no doubt that this, too, will prove beneficial for the status quo. If the AK Party can increase its votes in the East and Southeast despite this discourse, why should the status quo establishment reform its existing policies?

The AK Party should at once pull its head out of the sand and lend an ear to concerns about where it is heading. The AK Party and Prime Minister Erdoğan should not forget that Turkey does not need a government that makes short-term plans to increase its votes, but one that continues to change the country's social and political atmosphere and proceed with democratization and the EU reform process. A possible totalitarian AK Party that increases its votes with a pro-establishment/neo-nationalist discourse and without doing anything about democracy, pluralism and freedom will no longer be a source of hope for this country, but a major threat.

Sources

Source : 19 November 2008, Today's Zaman