

TURKEY AFTER THE ELECTIONS: IDENTITY, DEMOCRACY AND FOREIGN POLICY

EVENT SUMMARY

On September 22, 2014, the Global Europe Program hosted a discussion with Fuat Keyman, Şebnem Gümüüşçü, and Bülent Aras on democracy, identity, and foreign policy following the first direct presidential election in Turkish history. The event served as the launch of the new series “Turkey Papers,” a joint publication of the Wilson Center’s Global Europe Program and the Istanbul Policy Center. Christian Ostermann, Director of the Global Europe Program, moderated the discussion, which addressed Turkey’s current foreign and domestic challenges as well as what to expect from Tayyip Erdogan’s presidency.

(drafted by Madeline Sweeney, Global Europe Program)

On September 22, 2014, the Wilson Center's Global Europe Program hosted a discussion of Turkey's current foreign and domestic challenges, focused on democracy, identity, and foreign policy following the recent election of Tayyip Erdogan as Turkey's first directly elected president. The speakers were: **Fuat Keyman**, Director of the Istanbul Policy Center and Professor of International Relations at Sabanci University; **Şebnem Gümüştü**, Assistant Professor of Political Sciences at Middlebury College; and **Bülent Aras**, Global Fellow at the Wilson Center and Senior Scholar and Coordinator at the Istanbul Policy Center. The discussion and subsequent question and answer session were moderated by **Christian Ostermann**, Director of the Global Europe Program.

Fuat Keyman spoke regarding the concepts crucial to understanding the political climate in Turkey. The first was the concept of a dominant party. Keyman argues that Erdogan's AK Party (AKP) is a hegemonic dominant party in Turkish politics, and stated that its cycle of dominance will continue as the party continues to win future elections. The second concept to understand is the idea that Erdogan considers himself the first president of "New Turkey," and he plans to produce a new constitution that will move Turkey away from a parliamentary system and closer to a presidential one. Keyman's third and final point concerned the three pillars of a New Turkey: sociology; new government structure; and the dominant party. Regarding sociology, Keyman argued the Turkish middle class will make the country egalitarian, offering enrichment and empowerment to the populace. In order for Erdogan to reform Turkey's government structure, the AKP will need to win enough parliamentary seats in 2015 to carry out constitutional reform. A move towards presidentialism will raise the question over whether the presidency and dominant party can be checked, and will bring to light problems with Turkish media and civil society.

Şebnem Gümüştü compared the AK Party to the Islamic governments of Tunisia and Egypt, claiming there is a huge difference in where democracy is heading in the three countries, but that the dominance of the countries' Islamic parties is similar. Democratization in Tunisia has been successful – the Constituent Assembly voted on a new constitution, and thus the government made a clear transition away from the former regime. In Egypt and Turkey, however, the two dominant Islamic Parties, the Muslim Brotherhood and AK Party respectively, inherited a centralized government from the previous regime, and the lack of strong opposition parties does not provide a platform for debate. Tunisia, on the other hand, has two parties open to compromise, which has created a culture of consensus and negotiation. In order for Turkey to democratize under the AKP's dominant party rule, civil society and the media must grow to provide checks on the government and pave the way for democratic debate.

Bülent Aras addressed expected foreign policy changes from Erdogan's presidency. Turkey will see a new soft power approach with less ambitious rhetoric and a focus on economic, humanitarian, and cultural diplomacy. Foreign policy management will move away from parliament and towards the president and his foreign minister. Erdogan and his pro-EU government officials will likely develop a policy that heavily emphasizes re-engagement with and investment in the west.

Turkey's upcoming parliamentary elections in June 2015 will be crucial in determining where democracy in Turkey is headed, and whether or not Erdogan's AK Party can win the number of seats necessary to see through their plans of constitutional reform.