

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین یوم وېر زنده یک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/comparing-civilian-islamist-regimes-with-military-rule.aspx?pageID=449&nID=104647&NewsCatID=412>

Comparing civilian Islamist regimes with military rule

BARÇIN YİNANÇ

10/6/2016

I am travelling to Spain for a conference where we will be talking about European values and the EU's role in regional and global foreign and security politics.

The conference is taking place in San Sebastian, the 2016 European capital of culture. Spain is actually a very suitable place to be talking about European values, as Spanish political history played a major role in the European Economic Community's (ECC) transformation from an economic club into a club of democratic values.

Looking back at history and refreshing memories can be a helpful exercise, especially for Europeans.

For those who might not be familiar with the EU's history, it was the Franco regime's application for full membership in 1962 that opened the way to the famous Copenhagen criteria for membership. Motivated by protests from the regime's dissidents, as well as European non-state actors, the ECC refused to accept Franco's Spain as a member, and as a result democratic conditionality became an essential membership criteria.

Following the collapse of their military dictatorships, the ECC speedily granted membership to Spain, Portugal and Greece, in order to facilitate their transition to democracy. We also saw the same reflex towards Central and Eastern European countries after the fall the Iron Curtain.

By contrast, we have not witnessed the same kind of approach toward the Middle East, despite the region showing a desire for change. Recall France's reaction to the unrest in Tunisia under Ben Ali: Initially, Paris offered to reinforce the regime's security apparatus! There is also of course the case of Egypt, where Europe preferred a military regime to a civilian one.

In the case of Turkey too, European capitals held their breath for few hours on the night of July 15 to see whether President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's administration would be toppled in a military coup, and whether the alternative might be any better.

Europe's stance toward coups in the Middle East must be motivated by a fear that the likely Islamist nature of civilian governments may not lead to a transition to democratic regimes.

But look at current day Egypt. Under General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt has become a highly repressive regime. Torture, deaths in detention, forced disappearances, restrictions on civil society, the imprisonment of journalists and restrictions on freedom of expression are all common. Would that be the same if the Muslim Brotherhood had remained in power? Well, after failing to solve the country's problems the Brotherhood may well have lost in elections.

Some might argue that Mohamed Morsi could also have imposed an authoritarian regime. "Morsi would have followed on the footsteps of Erdoğan. What is the difference between Egypt and Turkey, where journalists are in jail, the media is under pressure, and free speech is restricted?" they might say, presenting Turkey as evidence that Islamists are authoritarian by nature.

But in Tunisia, Islamists stepped down after seeing that they did not succeed in governing the country. In Turkey, millions were taken out of poverty under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and a relatively successful economic performance led around half of voters to give a clear mandate to Erdoğan in successive electoral victories.

Today we are facing the question of whether Erdoğan will use this electoral mandate to impose an authoritarian regime. With emergency rule extended by another three months, many in Turkey believe we have already become an authoritarian regime.

But we could also argue that the problem we face in Turkey stems more from Erdoğan's personality than the Islamic characteristic of the AKP's ideology. Alongside Erdoğan's lust for centralized power, the Islamic taint of the AKP administration is almost a side effect.

Ultimately, there is no doubt that each step taken by Erdoğan and the government is speeding up the country's drift towards authoritarian rule. But Turkey is still a work in progress and not all the shots have been called so long as free and fair elections continue. Reversing the negative direction depends on both the Turks and the Europeans.

In sum, we need to do much more thinking before jumping to conclusions when comparing military regimes to civilian Islamist regimes.