

The Transition to Democracy in Turkey

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The Transition to Democracy in Turkey

The beginning of the formal transition to democracy in Turkey may be dated from 6 December 1983. On that day the National Security Council (NSC), the principal instrument of military rule since the Turkish armed forces seized power on 12 September 1980, was dissolved. With it went the extraordinary powers the Council had enjoyed for the past three years and the country was again placed under constitutional rule and civilian authority. The members of the NSC were given sinecures as members of the Presidential Council, with purely advisory functions. A new Chief of the General Staff, General Necdet Üruğ, and the four new commanders of the Land Forces, Air Force, Navy, and the Gendarmerie assumed their posts officially. In his farewell speech, broadcast on radio and television, President Kenan Evren noted that 'the soldier was there for the defence of the homeland. His duty is not to administer the country and it is not right for the soldier to be involved in political activity . . .' He assured the Turkish people that he would work hard to establish a democratic order and never permit a return to 'those bitter and crisis-ridden days', a reference to the period before 12 September 1980. 'In this endeavour,' he concluded, 'the strong hand of the state and the strength and unshakeable power of the Armed Forces will always be with us, it will be as one with us'.¹ Next day, Turgut Özal, whose Motherland Party had won the general election on 6 November, was appointed Prime Minister by the President and asked to form his cabinet.

The liberal intelligentsia in Turkey, with their apprehension concerning the generals' political intentions, gave a sigh of relief because these steps suggested that Turkey was indeed moving towards civilian rule and democracy, despite the ambiguities in Evren's speech. There had also been some doubts and rumours about the military High Command accepting Özal's victory at the polls. They had openly backed the Nationalist Democracy Party (NDP) led by a retired general, Turgut Sunalp. On 4 November, two days before the election, President Evren, who was supposed to be neutral, addressed the nation and said some

¹ *Milliyet* (Istanbul), 7 December 1983.

harsh words against Özal, virtually asking the electorate to support Sunalp.

This event has led political commentators to conclude that Özal was not the army's man. But that was not the case. The generals may have preferred a government led by Sunalp, but they had also arrived at a consensus that they would work with either Turgut Özal or Necdet Calp, leader of the Populist Party, men they had permitted to contest the election. It is worth remembering that both men had been loyal servants of the military regime, Özal as the architect of its economic policy, and Calp, a seasoned bureaucrat, as Prime Minister Bülent Ulusu's under-secretary. (Ulusu, a retired admiral, had led the military government after 12 September 1980.) Had the National Security Council wanted to eliminate Özal from the electoral contest, it could have easily done so given his connections with the dissolved National Salvation Party. If Özal was allowed to play politics it was because of his willingness to pursue policies acceptable to the armed forces. Whatever Evren's reason for making the anti-Özal speech on 4 November, his meeting with Özal on 8 November and his post-election message to the nation, asking everyone to accept the decision of the majority, laid to rest some doubts about the generals' intentions. Thereafter, the military government in its final month in office began to pass measures which would smooth the way for Özal.

On 10 November, the NSC extended martial law for a further four months (until 20 March 1984) and sanctioned the new restrictive laws on the press, and radio and television broadcasting.² There was speculation concerning which government would take responsibility for raising prices, a measure which was urgently needed, claimed Özal, if inflation, already at 40 per cent, were to be restrained. Would Ulusu's 'lame-duck' government raise prices and take the odium for this measure? Özal is said to have enquired.³ On 18 November, Ulusu obliged by announcing a price increase of just over 14 per cent for petroleum products which, everyone noted, would lead to price increases in all other areas of daily consumption. Perhaps the most valuable legacy left by the NSC to Özal was the power to issue edicts (*kararname*) which would have the force of law without having to be sanctioned by parliament. This was an odd legacy to pass on to a

² *ibid.*, 10 and 11 November 1983.

³ See Yalçın Doğan, 'Zamlar Kim Yapacak?', *Cumhuriyet* (Istanbul), 12 November 1983. Later Ulusu stated that 'I raised prices on Turgut's behalf'. See *Milliyet*, 7 July 1984. While Özal claimed that he had requested no such favour, the military government wanted to make things as easy as possible for Turgut Özal.

government whose main task was to lead the country back to democracy for it hardly encouraged the government to follow democratic procedures. So thoroughly did Prime Minister Özal abuse this power that President Evren was forced to intervene and warn him against its dubious constitutionality.⁴

The last law that the generals passed before dissolving the NSC was the law which made it illegal to do or say anything which might help to recreate the political climate prevailing before 12 September 1980. Thus it became illegal to blame, praise, or defend the parties that had been dissolved, or their administrations; as a result their leaders virtually became 'non-persons'. It was also illegal to discuss any actions or declarations of the NSC with the view to criticising or condemning them. Politicians under the ten-year ban were not allowed to make written or oral statements which could have a detrimental effect on internal or external policies of the government. The penalty for the violation of this law was a jail sentence of from three months to one year, a sentence not open to appeal.⁵

If the road back to democracy was paved with good intentions, it was also strewn with obstacles which made the journey both difficult and painful. The obstacles consisted mainly of legislation passed by the National Security Council and the Constituent Assembly and included the 1982 constitution. Much of this legislation would have to be amended before Turkey could be considered truly democratic again. Apart from the constitution, the laws in need of amendment included the laws on political parties, elections, the press, trade unions, collective bargaining and lockouts, professional organisations, and higher education, to mention only some of the most important. All these laws were restrictive in nature and curtailed the rights and freedoms usually associated with democratic regimes. The rationale for passing such legislation was the belief that this would prevent the recurrence of the political anarchy that had existed prior to the military take-over. Terrorism, which had accounted for about 20 murders a day at its peak, and the paralysis of parliament marked by petty political squabbling among the parties, was used to justify the new laws. The 1961 constitution and the liberal regime that had accompanied it were blamed for Turkey's troubles and were therefore purged severely. The

⁴ The power to use the edicts was contained within a temporary provision designed to expire on 19 June 1984. See *Nokta*, 5–11 December 1983, pp 15–16. Özal used this device quite regularly, issuing over 150 edicts before Evren intervened.

⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, 7 December 1983.

1961 constitution had permitted Turkish society to be politicised; the 1982 version attempted to reverse the process. 'Leave politics to the politicians' could have been a slogan of the military regime; everyone else—journalists, students, lawyers, architects, engineers, etc, and their professional associations—was expected to stay out of politics. The new democracy was to survive and flourish in a depoliticised society. Yet politics and political participation in more than just the context of elections is the very life blood of democracy. How would this dilemma be resolved?

There is a question even more fundamental that remains to be answered. Would it be possible to carry out an economic policy requiring great austerity and sacrifices from the bulk of the population under a democratic regime? People had begun to ask this question after the 'economic measures of 24 January' were introduced by the minority government of Süleyman Demirel in 1980, nine months before his overthrow. Turgut Özal, Demirel's under-secretary and head of the State Planning Organisation at the time, had thought not. He often complained during the months prior to the military intervention 'that the political climate did not exist for the proper implementation of the austerity measures'.⁶

The NSC shared his views and Özal was therefore appointed Deputy Prime Minister in charge of economic affairs in the new government, a post he held until his resignation in July 1982. For two years he implemented the most severe economic measures without any concessions to the various interest groups and without any opposition from the public. He was able to do so from behind the shield of the National Security Council which took all the political responsibility while Turgut Özal took the credit for the successes. Would he pursue the same policy now that he had to assume full political responsibility?

The generals were aware of this problem and therefore tried to prepare the ground for their successor. In the period following 25 April 1983 when the NSC permitted the formation of new political parties to contest the general election in November, it vetoed hundreds of 'new' politicians, apart from the 723 ex-politicians who had already been barred from the election. In this way politicians and parties with a genuine political base were kept out of the next parliament where they might have provided an alternative to the programme supported by the NSC. Thus the Great Turkey Party, the successor to the dissolved

⁶ See Feroz Ahmad, 'Military intervention and the crisis in Turkey' in *Merip Reports* (Washington DC) No. 93, January 1981, p 7.

Justice Party of Süleyman Demirel, was closed down on 31 May 1983. After all the vetoes only three parties—General Turgut Sunalp's Nationalist Democracy Party on the right, Turgut Özal's Motherland Party on the centre-right, and Necdet Calp's Populist Party on the left—were permitted to enter the election. The terms 'right', 'centre-right', and 'left' are used here not to describe the ideologies of the parties but only their positions relative to each other. In the prevailing climate, there was no room for a party of the left and the three above-mentioned parties were charged by the political parties law with the responsibility of continuing the 12 September regime, forcing them in practice into a common ideological mould.⁷

There were attempts to form at least seventeen parties but only three fought the election. Most of the others lacked any genuine political or social basis and their existence would have probably been ephemeral. But two parties, the Social Democracy Party, better known by the acronym SODEP, and the True Path Party (TPP—*Doğru Yol Partisi*), were authentic political organisations with deep roots in 'old politics'. SODEP would have attracted most of the left and centre-left votes which had formerly gone to the Republican People's Party (RPP) after 1973 and constituted about 40 per cent of the ballot. The TPP would have won the votes of the former Justice Party and the two-party system which was taking shape by the late 1970s might have been established. But that would have meant restoring 'old politics' and 'old politicians', something the generals were not about to do. They were determined to start afresh with new parties and new politicians.

By preventing SODEP and the TPP from entering the General Election, the National Security Council virtually robbed the results of their legitimacy. Özal had won the election fair and square, but that did not prevent people asking how he would have fared against the parties that had been disqualified. The Populist Party which came second and became the main opposition party in parliament was even more discredited. Few people took its social-democratic claims seriously and there was a general belief that if SODEP had taken part in the election it would have won more votes than the Populist Party's 30 per cent and might even have defeated Özal's Motherland Party. All this was pure conjecture but the impact of such talk was sufficient to heighten interest in the local or municipal elections which had to be held within a year, by November 1984. These elections soon acquired the significance of a

⁷ Feroz Ahmad, 'The Turkish elections of 1983' in *Merip Reports* (Washington DC) No. 122, March/April 1984, p 6.

general election because the results might be seen to undermine the position of the ruling party and force it to go to an early poll.

Thus, the period of transition to democracy began in an atmosphere of uncertainty and excitement. Despite over three years of military rule, political stability had still not been restored. Terrorism had been virtually eliminated but the trials of alleged terrorists, especially those belonging to extreme left-wing factions, went on with no end in sight. There were also the mammoth trials of the neo-fascist Nationalist Action Party (NAP) and the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers Unions, better known as DISK, with death sentences being sought by the prosecution for the leaders of both organisations.⁸ The trial of members of the Peace Association, an anti-war group, attracted more attention at home and abroad because members of Turkey's elite were in the dock, charged with carrying out communist propaganda and subversion. They included a former ambassador as well as prominent professors, writers, and artists. The major universities were in despair because the new Higher Education Law, in operation since November 1982, had led to the resignation or dismissal of many, including some of the most respected and talented professors. Over-centralisation and a rigidly uniform curriculum, it was alleged by the law's critics, would transform universities into glorified high schools.⁹

The continuation of martial law was also a reminder that the armed forces were still in command even though, technically speaking, elections had placed power in civilian hands. There was even some tension in the country because people were uncertain about the unity within the High Command.¹⁰ President Evren and the members of the NSC had finally taken off their uniforms and severed their links with the armed forces. They had been replaced by new commanders and General Necdet Urüĝ, who had become Chief of the General Staff after his tenure as the tough and ruthless martial law commander of Istanbul, was known to be a hardliner. He is said to have been responsible for making Turgut Sunalp leader of the NDP and Sunalp's defeat was seen

⁸ Death sentences are no longer being sought for the DISK leaders, a sign that the regime may be moving towards political moderation.

⁹ See the discussion in *Nokta*, 8–14 October 1984, pp 22–7 and 'Educated men rule, but academic chaos reigns', *The Times* (London) 11 December 1983.

¹⁰ See Evren Pasha's speech on the occasion marking General Necdet Urüĝ's promotion to chief of the General Staff. Evren noted that attempts had been made 'to shake trust in the armed forces'; 'to sow seeds of enmity'. 'They continuously spread rumours that I will never leave this post' ie the post of CGS. See *Cumhuriyet*, 3 December 1983, and *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 5 December 1983, ME/7508/c/3–4.

as his defeat rather than Evren's. There was therefore some concern about his relations with Prime Minister Özal.

There has been a tendency among observers to exaggerate the potential for tension between Özal and the High Command. But there is hardly any basis for such speculation because Özal is well known to the generals as a technocrat with no strong, overriding party affiliations and with a pragmatic approach to politics. They chose him to run the economy when they came to power and he did so faithfully. Little was expected to change now that Özal was Prime Minister: he would continue to manage economic affairs while internal security and foreign policy would be controlled by the President and his advisers.

Prime Minister Özal presented his cabinet within a week of his appointment and it was immediately approved by President Evren. He is said to have appointed ministers without consulting the party and there were protests against this procedure. Some ministers learned of their appointments only after the list was released. Such practice was in keeping with the character of the party which was, at this early stage, under Özal's absolute control. 'Motherland is not really a party', wrote Güngör Uras, a commentator close to the private sector, 'but the Özal Fan Club'. (*Özal Severler Derneği*)¹¹

Most of the names in the cabinet were unknown to the public and that was in keeping with the notion of the 'new politician' encouraged by Evren. The policies the new government intended to implement were, however, far from original. They were the continuation of policies in vogue since the mid-1960s and were designed to accelerate the concentration of economic power in the major holdings or corporations. That is why a number of ministers were taken directly from such holdings, and one in particular, namely ENKA, described as the Bechtel of Turkey, was reported to be influential even in policymaking. The State Planning Organisation provided about a third of the cabinet, men who were loyal to Özal, having served him in that organisation while he was its director. There was no representative of the unions in the cabinet—as there had been in the Ulusu government—or anyone concerned with the problems of workers or their needs. This was surprising given the fact that there was to be a great deal of collective bargaining for new labour contracts during the period of transition. The government's lack of concern suggested that it was not going to play an active role in the process, leaving the matter entirely in the hands of the

¹¹ *Nokta*, 26 December 1983–1 January 1984, p 48.

employers' and workers' unions, with the latter at a great disadvantage given the new labour law.¹²

The appointment of a totally inexperienced Defence Minister (Zeki Yavuztürk) came as a surprise to most people. There had been rumours that Haluk Bayülken, the former ambassador who had held the portfolio under the military government might be retained, even though he was an independent MP elected from the NDP list. Otherwise, Özal was expected to bring in someone from the defence establishment, perhaps a retired general. That he did not do so was a sign of independence, however limited. Nevertheless, Yavuztürk's inexperience did make him totally dependent on the defence bureaucracy.

Özal's Foreign Minister, on the other hand, was a professional diplomat of great experience. Vahid Halefoğlu was about to retire as ambassador to Moscow when he was invited to join the cabinet. This appointment was thought to be significant because of Halefoğlu's familiarity with the Soviet Union, where he had been posted twice. But he had also spent ten years in the Federal Republic of Germany as Turkey's ambassador. This was also an important consideration because Germany had, after America, become the most important country in Turkey's foreign policy considerations. The press was also quick to note Halefoğlu's connections with ENKA through his son who worked for the corporation.¹³

Politically, the civilian cabinet was said to represent four tendencies which, Özal claimed, constituted the philosophical character of the Motherland Party. Motherland, he liked to say, was not the continuation of any of the parties that existed until 12 September 1980; it was, however, an amalgam of the major political trends represented by these bodies. Motherland was therefore conservative, traditionalist (a code word for Islamist), nationalist, and stood for social justice. It was implied that these values were taken from the Justice Party, the National Salvation Party, the neo-fascist Nationalist Action Party, and the social democratic Republican People's Party respectively. After the closure of these parties, their supporters are said to have thronged to Motherland and melted into it, giving it a new identity. There was a lot of truth to these claims and the supporters of the first three parties had indeed rallied behind Turgut Özal, though this cannot be said for

¹² See Ronnie Margulies and Ergin Yildizoğlu, 'Trade Unions and Turkey's working class', in *Merip Reports* (Washington DC) No. 121, February 1984, pp 15–20.

¹³ The son's visit to Moscow as a part of ENKA's delegation aroused comment. See also *Nokta*, 5–11 November 1984, p 15.

Republicans. But it was still not clear whether the supporters of the defunct parties had abandoned old loyalties or whether they were struggling to fit the new party into old, familiar moulds. Islamist NSP elements were thought to be particularly influential in the party and it is worth noting that Özal had had very close links with the NSP. Action Party cadres were also a factor to be reckoned with. They were expected to become more influential and active within the party if economic policies failed and militancy in the streets became necessary once again. The influence of the Justice Party within Motherland also remained an unknown quantity. But no one doubted that it was considerable; the question was when it would be exerted and with what consequences.

The Özal government was overwhelmingly conservative and therefore unlikely to show much concern for liberal, democratic values. Only two ministers, Kaya Erdem, who was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State, and Vural Arıkan, Minister of Finance and Customs, were described by the press as liberals, with some of the qualities one associates with liberalism.

Within a few days of its formation, the government issued an edict designed to carry out a major reform of a number of ministries. This was in keeping with Özal's election promise to streamline the bureaucracy, cut red tape, and increase efficiency in implementing decisions. He intended to accomplish that by appointing an under-secretary for carrying out special tasks which had been undertaken thus far by the minister. For example, the finance ministry would no longer deal with the IMF or the World Bank, Özal's appointed under-secretary would. This was seen as a way to bypass the bureaucracy and speed up the process of decision-making, thereby meeting one complaint of business circles, indigenous and foreign. It also made the under-secretary more powerful than the minister. This was seen by some as a step towards American-style centralisation in which under-secretaries appointed by the political regime and not ministries were in control.¹⁴ This procedure also had political implications for it undermined the principle of cabinet responsibility by placing virtually all power in the hands of the Prime Minister and his entourage of under-secretaries.

As was to be expected, this process went furthest in the reorganisation of economic affairs, a subject very close to Özal's heart. He created a new secretariat for the 'Treasury and Foreign Trade' which became responsible not only for foreign trade, but also for foreign loans,

¹⁴ Y Doğan, 'Bakanlar Üstü Müsteşar,' *Cumhuriyet*, 16 December 1983.

banking, money policy, price ceilings, the organisation of a stock market, foreign exchange, and even public enterprises. In theory, it was attached to the finance ministry; in practice, it was independent of and more powerful than that ministry. The man placed in charge of this organisation was Özal's protégé, Ekrem Pakdemirli, a 42-year old professor of mechanical engineering. He was to be directly accountable to the Prime Minister.

Turgut Özal started out with a number of important political advantages. He enjoyed a good majority in parliament and an ineffective opposition which offered neither criticism nor any alternative. He was supported by a public which took seriously his promise to curb the bureaucracy, weaken the control of the state, and restore democracy as rapidly as possible. He had the ability to act quickly for the next six months by ruling through edicts, and he enjoyed the confidence and support of Western business circles.

Given these advantages, Özal might have been expected to present a more imaginative programme than the one he read on 19 December 1983. Though it was described by his supporters as a 'revolution in the economy', it was, in fact, a continuation of economic policies introduced in January 1980 and implemented by Özal until his resignation in July 1982. The policies had been modified by his successor because of the social and economic problems they had created; Özal was therefore reverting to familiar policies with which he alone seemed comfortable.

In order to bring down inflation, running at 40 per cent according to official claims and closer to 50 per cent unofficially, interest rates were raised to 52 per cent in the hope of reducing the money supply. Import and export regulations were liberalised and within a few months it was possible to buy a large variety of imported consumer goods, from instant coffee to Roquefort cheese. This was a great psychological boost for the small affluent middle class which could afford to buy such goods, liberating it from its siege mentality, as did the easing of restrictions on foreign exchange and travel abroad.¹⁵

Apart from trying to deal with inflation, Özal continued to restructure the economy by directing it away from import substitution towards exports. This policy had been proposed to Turkey by the IMF in 1979 and Ankara's first response had been the measures of 24 January 1980. Özal argued that the protectionist policies of the 1950s and the 1960s had made Turkish industry inefficient, expensive, and uncompetitive.

¹⁵ *Milliyet*, 21 December 1983.

The restoration of competition would force industry to become efficient and lead to the survival of the fittest. This 'industrial Darwinism' would be to the benefit of everyone, especially the consumer who would be able to purchase cheaper and higher quality goods. (The argument had a certain popular appeal and accounts for some of Özal's support.) Industry had therefore to be reorganised from top to bottom and small units had to make way for large, competitive ones. Only then could Turkey compete on the world market and export, taking advantage of the division of labour and concentrating on what it could do best.

Özal's economic programme did not appeal to all the elements in the private sector and the smaller entrepreneurs were most alarmed by its implications and began to complain. The large concerns which would benefit from export subsidies and increasing concentration of economic power naturally supported Özal. But once again there was a political split of the kind which had divided the right in the late 1960s and the 1970s, leading to political instability which had resulted in military intervention.¹⁶ The new laws and institutions were expected to prevent history repeating itself. The question was: Would they?

In Özal's programme, politics were given a subordinate place to economics as though politics were out of his domain and in the preserve of the martial law commanders. He accepted the fact that martial law would be lifted in phases and that implied that the transition to democracy would be a slow process lasting at least until the general election of 1988.

There was a possibility that an early general election might follow if SODEP and the True Path Party won more than 50 per cent of the vote in the local elections, thereby nullifying the 1983 results. Özal was aware of this danger and was determined to avert it. Passage of a Bill in parliament restricting local elections to parties which had contested the 1983 election would have effectively averted this threat. However, President Evren was expected to veto such a Bill because of its dubious legality and because of the negative effect it would have on public opinion at home and abroad. The only way out was to hold the local elections as soon as possible, before the new parties strengthened their position in the country and before the ruling party eroded its popularity.

On 22 December, Prime Minister Özal proposed that local elections be held on 3 June 1984. Even that seemed a late date for halting the advance of the two parties which were making gains all the time. The

¹⁶ On the split of the 1960s and the 1970s see Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy 1950-1975*, and reference in footnote 6.

Cumhuriyet of 25 December reported that 180 members of the Motherland Party had defected to the TPP in Tarsus. Özal became alarmed by this trend and decided to bring forward the date of the elections to 25 March. The issue was decided on 5 January despite the criticism of the opposition in parliament. Next day, Özal announced that there would be no price increases until after the polling.

For the next ten weeks the country's attention was riveted on the campaign; Özal's defeat would erode the legitimacy of his government and force him to hold an early general election. The situation was particularly serious because the three cities of Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir had voted social democratic before 1980. If they did so now, that would deliver 25 per cent of the vote of SODEP and the Populists and seriously weaken Özal.

However, Özal enjoyed the advantage of dispensing patronage, something he did with great skill. All the concessions he made were material; he refused to touch anything political. He introduced a scheme to refund 10 per cent of essential expenses to salaried and wage-earning consumers, agreed to repay to officials money they had contributed to a mutual fund, held down prices, distributed fictitious title-deeds to shantytown dwellers, and agreed to raise the minimum wage. Özal refused to even consider any political concession such as an amnesty for political prisoners or the re-examination and repeal of the Higher Education Law. He even aroused controversy by publicly stating that there were 'no political prisoners in Turkey as there were no political crimes'.¹⁷ This was a purely legalistic argument which revealed the political mentality of the Prime Minister.

The opposition parties had little to offer the voters. The two in parliament—the PP and the NDP—had discredited themselves by their passivity and their failure to criticise Özal. They were losing support to the extra-parliamentary parties which, for their part, were unable to provide a credible alternative to Motherland. This was difficult given the restrictive political climate that prevailed at the time, with martial law commanders always looking over the shoulder.¹⁸ The two parties vying for the social-democratic vote—the Populists and SODEP—spent

¹⁷ Speech in *Kütahya* quoted in *Cumhuriyet*, 10 March 1984 and Özal's interview in *ibid*, 12 March 1984.

¹⁸ Such was the tense political climate that the martial law authorities forbade the showing of a film, 'Hakkari'de bir Mevsim' because it was considered subversive. (*Cumhuriyet*, 26 February 1984); prosecuted Nadir Nadi, the doyen of Turkish journalists for an editorial he wrote in *Cumhuriyet* on 6 March 1984 (see *Cumhuriyet*, 11 March 1984); and called in the leader of the True Path Party to explain his speech of 22 March.

more time and energy attacking each other instead of joining forces against the ruling party. They alienated many supporters and weakened their chances of success at the polls.

The local election of 25 March confirmed Özal's standing in the country even though his party's vote slipped from 45.2 per cent in November 1983 to 41.5 per cent. That was bound to happen with two more parties of the right contesting the election. The real significance of the results was that the opposition parties lost their moral authority. The Populist vote declined from 30.5 to 8.7 per cent, and that of the NDP from 23.4 to 7.1 per cent. SODEP and True Path had become the second and third parties in the land, but they had no representation in parliament. They talked of organising extra-parliamentary opposition, but that was easier said than done. The danger was that without an existence in parliament these two parties would have a difficult time surviving intact until the next General Election.

Özal was finally firmly in the saddle and confident of his future. The opposition had been deflated and would require some years to regroup. This was true for the social democrats, already divided into two parties and more factions and threatened with the formation of another party calling itself the Democratic Left Party. It was also true for the right, though on this flank the big question was whether the Motherland Party would remain united much longer or would fragment into its various tendencies. This was Özal's principal concern though he constantly played it down.

Özal had to appease the various factions in his party by a shrewd policy of appointments. Thus a Professor Tunca Toskay, who was professor of tourism and had close ties with the now defunct neo-fascist party, was made director of Turkish Radio and Television.¹⁹ The administration of the universities had already been handed over to the extreme right by the military government; Özal simply adopted the practice. On 7 May, Professor Fikret Eren was appointed deputy rector of Ankara University. He had been an unofficial ideologue of the Nationalist Action Party and written *Milliyetçi Türkiye* (Nationalist Turkey) which popularised the party's ideology.²⁰ The rector who appointed him was Professor Tarik Somer, the man who is said to have controlled the Middle East Technical University in Ankara by recruiting party militants, the 'Grey Wolves', to intimidate faculty and students. Perhaps the most significant concession to the extreme right,

¹⁹ *Milliyet*, 28 March 1984 and *Nokta* 2–8 April 1984, pp 15–16.

²⁰ *Cumhuriyet*, 9 May 1984.

whose leadership is still on trial, was the decision of the Ankara martial law command to permit the Confederation of Nationalist Workers' Unions to operate again.²¹ This confederation had been deeply involved in the terrorist activities of the 1970s. It had financed and employed right-wing assassins and its relationship with NAP was well known. The confederations headquarters in Ankara, a police raid had revealed, also served as an arms depot and a bomb factory. Such an organisation was being given permission to operate again during the period of transition to democracy.

The political atmosphere in Turkey changed after the elections and the events described above were a reflection of the new mood. Özal's victory confirmed the regime's self-confidence, making it even more impatient with the defeated opposition's refusal to remain silent about the need to accelerate the democratic process and to restore fundamental rights. European pressure to hasten the restoration of democracy and human rights also annoyed the generals. This sense of annoyance is reflected in President Evren's speech of 11 May, when he spoke in Erzurum. He reminded his audience that 'a little while ago there were elections in Turkey. Turkey has once again moved to democracy. We now have a parliament, an elected parliament . . .'²² There was no talk of transition to democracy because of the conviction that democracy had already arrived with the elections. Turkey's enemies in the Council of Europe—'We have many enemies in that Council', observed Evren—refused to understand that. 'Now they want us to lift martial law' he complained. In his view, democracy was a matter of institutions. If there was a constitution and a parliament brought into being by elections 'fair if not free',²³ then there was democracy. Everything was relative and the character of the institutions did not seem to matter. This was how President Evren expressed it: 'If a member of the Council of Europe comes here, does not know our constitution and, turning to another constitution which he holds in his hand, says "You have yet to achieve democracy", I would have doubts about his good intentions'.²⁴

There was a feeling of frustration within the High Command brought about by 'the lack of gratitude' at home and 'the lack of understanding' in Europe. There may even have been some among the generals who

²¹ *Milliyet*, 22 May and *Cumhuriyet*, 24 May 1984.

²² *Cumhuriyet*, 12 May 1984.

²³ I owe this phrase to Tim Hindle's most useful article in *The Economist* (London) 3 November 1984.

²⁴ *Cumhuriyet*, 12 May 1984.

regretted the elections and the return to civilian rule. The petition, which has come to be known as the 'Intellectuals' Petition' and which was made public on 18 May, aggravated these frustrations. A petition, with 1,254 signatures of some of the most respected men of letters in the country, was sent to the President and Speaker of the Assembly. It urged that laws which violated democratic principles be removed from the statute books and the promise to restore full democracy, implicitly made by the new regime, be fulfilled. Prime Minister Özal, who was questioned about the petition in his press conference, was embarrassed but noted that the right to petition granted by the constitution was a retort to all those who claimed that there was no democracy in Turkey.²⁵ Evren did not take the matter so lightly. He denounced intellectuals in the strongest terms before the student body of Istanbul Lycée on 21 May; on the same day, the martial law command in Ankara opened proceedings against the signatories of the petition.

The political atmosphere remained tense throughout the summer and there were hints that all was not well within the High Command. In mid-June, there were rumours in Ankara that followers in the armed forces of Alparslan Türkeş, the leader of the Nationalist Action Party on trial for his life, had tried to free him from the Gülhane Military Hospital where he had been undergoing treatment for the past year. These rumours were never mentioned in the press let alone confirmed or denied by the authorities. But stories of intrigue within the upper echelons of the armed forces had become so widespread that President Evren was forced to broach the matter. He asked the public not to believe such tales. It was his opinion that 'Sources of anarchy and terror are spreading rumours that members of the Presidential Council have been detained. These are lies not to be believed.'²⁶ Statements such as these tended to fuel speculation rather than dampen it.

Such have been the ups and downs of this period of transition to democracy in Turkey. The picture is not all dark, however. For one thing, Turkey's intelligentsia has taken full advantage of the limited freedom available at present to press forward. If political and intellectual life may be judged by the new publications that have appeared in the last year, then there is room for optimism. A number of new publishing houses run by academics axed by the new education law are thriving. So are the weeklies, fortnightlies, and quarterlies which try to

²⁵ *ibid*, 19 May 1984.

²⁶ *ibid*, 18 July 1984.

bring all the important issues before the reading public.²⁷ On the other hand, if we talk about the restoration of economic democracy, the picture is totally dark. The new regime has shown no concern for the dramatic fall in the standard of living of the vast majority of Turks. This process which began in the late 1970s and accelerated sharply in 1980, has continued to get worse under Özal's government. Unless a serious effort is made to restore a measure of economic democracy, political democracy is likely to be derailed in the process of transition.

At present, the armed forces are still very much in control. Since it is not possible to talk about the inner politics of this institution, it is impossible to predict what course the generals might take in the future. Yet there are signs that they are reluctant to return to power directly and prefer to direct a civilian government. On 15 August 1983, the Turkish army began an operation in south-east Anatolia against Kurdish secessionists. There was deep gloom in Istanbul's democratic circles because everyone felt that the generals could now justify not only the retention of martial law but even turning back the political clock. That has not happened and there are signs that it may not. On 2 October 1984, President Evren visited the region and said that 'The State of the Turkish Republic can and has defeated these murderers [a reference to the Kurdish secessionists] within the democratic system. A struggle can be waged against them within the democratic system'.²⁸ One ought not to exaggerate the significance of these words, but they do show a certain commitment to democracy. Perhaps what they show is the High Command's inability to find a satisfactory alternative and therefore its willingness to walk the long, hard road to democracy.

²⁷ However, one of the most important of these publications, the fortnightly *Yeni Gündem* (New Agenda), which expressed all democratic opinion of the left and the right, was shut down by martial law in mid-October 1984.

²⁸ *Cumhuriyet*, 3 October 1984.