

## Middle East Centre and LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies Workshop

### *The State of Democracy in Turkey: Institutions, Society and Foreign Relations*

20 March 2015

Turkish democracy finds itself, in early 2015, at a critical juncture. A spate of elections – municipal, presidential, parliamentary – follow the tumultuous events of *Gezi* and mark the end of the third AKP term in office. This workshop, co-hosted by the **Middle East Centre** and **Contemporary Turkish Studies Programme** at the London School of Economics, brings together various experts on Turkey to examine questions on the country's democracy in an in-depth and comprehensive manner.

The workshop will explore questions of democracy in Turkey from both the angle of the state and its laws and that of society in all its diversity. It will also investigate the ways in which the development of Turkish democracy influences – and is influenced by – the country's foreign relations. In particular, the focus will be on the achievements and failures of the post-2002 AKP government. Although current events will be touched upon, the ultimate purpose of the workshop will be to study the question of democracy in Turkey within a broader historical context and reflect on the profound changes undergone by Turkish society and politics.

## Speakers

### Session One: State Institutions and the Rule of Law

#### **Dr. Levent Korkut, Hacettepe Üniversitesi**

##### **The constitution and legal changes**

This paper explores the long-standing constitutional debates in Turkey and the changes to the constitution that have been proposed and carried out over the past decade. In particular, the focus is on the effect that the constitutional processes have had on democratic practices and institutions.

#### **Dr. Levent Koker, Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi**

##### **The judiciary, the legislature and separation of powers**

The focus here is on the judiciary and the legislature, analysed both separately and together, and their relationship to the executive. This paper explores the question of judicial independence in Turkey and the internal changes undergone by the judiciary, as well as the main transformations to the position and powers of the Turkish National Assembly.

**Dr. Yaprak Gursoy, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi**  
**Security sector reform and democratization during the AKP era**

Security sector reform has been at the heart of questions of democracy and democratisation in Turkey. This paper explores its evolution in the post-2002 period, focusing on the role of the armed forces, intelligence and police services. It argues that reforms in civil-military relations brought Turkey close to being an ideal type of democracy. However, an overall assessment, not only of civil-military relations, but also of the police and intelligence services, tells us that these reforms fell short of bringing about democratisation.

**Session Two: Civil Society and Political Culture**

**Dr. Berna Turam, Northeastern University**  
**Rethinking political opposition: splits in the city and schisms in the state**

This paper discusses changes and continuities in state-civil society relations, with specific emphasis on the complex network of relations between *cemaat*, state, and the government. It also explores the tension between growing demands for freedoms and heightening authoritarian tendencies.

**Dr. Mücahit Bilici, City University**  
**Minority issues in Turkey**

This paper explores the evolution of government policies as well as popular attitudes towards minorities. The focus of the presentation is the peace process with the Kurds and, more broadly, issues of recognition and the ignoring of their demands. The presentation will also focus on the AKP's attitudes towards sectarian issues and their impact on the Alevi population.

**Dr. Salih Can Aciksoz, University of Arizona**  
**Body, violence, and the state in new Turkey**

This paper builds on the findings of two ethnographic research projects: one on the disabled army veterans of the Kurdish conflict and the other on the use of tear gas during the Gezi protests. It examines the changing discursive and technological modalities of political violence in Turkey. Focusing on the political production of disabled bodies in relation to different configurations of sovereignty and state violence, this paper analyses the violent contents and discontents of the AKP era.

**Dr. Serkan Delice, London College of Fashion**  
**Between Culturalism and Capitalism: the localisation of LGBT identities in Turkey**

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) movement plays a leading role in giving voice to broader demands for increased freedoms and recognition of difference in Turkey.

Whilst recognising the centrality of the movement to the struggle for democracy, this paper focuses on the concomitant (and problematic) localisation of LGBT identities in Islamist and neo-Ottomanist discourses, which obscure and reinforce the hegemony of capitalism.

### **Session Three: Democracy, the European Union and the Middle East**

#### **Ms. Emma Sinclair Webb, Human Rights Watch**

##### **The trajectory of legal reform for advancing human rights in Turkey and the role of civil society**

This paper explores the impact of international norms (either through the legal process or, more informally, in terms of ideas and norms) on the development of democratic laws, attitudes and institutions in Turkey. This is done through investigating legislative changes, government initiatives and civil society practices.

#### **Dr. Meltem Müftüler-Baç, Sabancı Üniversitesi**

##### **Backsliding into authoritarianism in Turkey: the European Union accession process and the limits of political conditionality**

This paper assesses the impact of the changing EU-Turkey relationship on democratic practices, laws and institutions in Turkey, placing the accession process within the context of the broader political relationship between Turkey and the EU.

#### **Dr. Nuri Yurdusev, Middle East Technical Üniversitesi**

##### **Turkey and the Middle East: Turkish activism and value-based foreign policy**

This paper investigates the impact of democratic norms on Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East, simultaneously looking at the ways in which this foreign policy has influenced political practice and ideologies within Turkey itself.