

The Impact of “thin” and “thick” Globalization on Turkish Democracy

Hüseyin I. CICEK

Abstract

This paper seeks to show how the complex historical and political development of Turkey influenced by global politics affects the democratic processes in Turkey. Globalization understood as an enmeshment of political, cultural, social, individual and economic systems enables democratic processes and also leads to uprooting of some “class” members which can lead to anti-democratic policies.

Keywords : Kemalism, thin and thick Globalization, Democracy, Turkey, Islam

Introduction ¹⁾

Since the end of the Turkish war of independence in 1923 Turkey has been trying to establish a democracy. The first steps toward this great aim were lead by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Turkey was a small piece of what once was known as the Ottoman Empire. The country intended to cut all historical, political, economical and social relations with the Ottomans. While the multiethnic Muslim state built its constitution on Islamic law, the new rulers of the young Turkish republic chose a different way. They focused on the democratic states in the west and took them as role models. Since the downfall of the iron curtain until today, Turkey has not been able to establish a democracy like that found in western European states and some east European nations for several reasons. Therefore this essay will focus on existential developments in Turkish politics with a focus on globalization.

There is a huge amount of literature on globalization and its meaning in different scientific realms while little agreement on the nature and process of globalization has been reached so far. The topic became very popular particular in social sciences during the past four decades. Keohane and Nye ²⁾ identify four dimensions to globalization: economic, military, environmental as well as social/cultural. Of course there are very strong relations between these four dimensions and this should be taken into account. For this essay’s purpose, however, it is enough to focus briefly on what is called economical and political globalization. Therefore, the next two paragraphs will explain those terms. In the following, they will be interpreted in the perspective of the Turkish democratic development.

Some scholars identify the process as globalization in the economic relations between individual states rather than in the integration of those into the world-economy system or the influence of transnational companies on a global scale. Other scholars claim that the “political integration of individual states” constitutes the central trait of globalization.³⁾ In addition, environmental issues like the exploitation of natural resources and cultural influences on a global scale are also explained as effects of globalization. However, the term globalization is multi-faceted and lacks a singular concept of the process. Hence, it should be understood in a multi-dimensional way involving different meanings and aspects.

In the course of another scientific discussion of globalization, the process is classified as “old or new”. People, cultures and empires have always influenced each other. However, it needs to be discussed whether it is right to understand historical processes in terms of a phenomenon which, according to scholars, is new and which goes beyond everything that took place in the past. Keohane and Nye distinguish between “thick and thin” globalization. According to these researchers, globalization always existed but was less complex without global influences. Since only the “developed” parts of the world were influenced by historic globalization, Keohane and Nye call this phenomenon “thin”. On contrary “thick” globalization has a huge influence on the world’s economy, it is highly complex, intensive and the whole world is involved. This process started during the industrialization era and still influences the world markets and politics.

In the so called “thick” globalization nation states coexisted peacefully for a long time. However, since recent decades many scholars emphasize the negative influence of the former on the latter.⁴⁾ According to this stream of literature, the sovereignty and autonomy of the nation state is in danger to lose its legitimacy because of the development of “thick” globalization which is naturally hostile to such systems.⁵⁾ Omaha published a book⁶⁾ in the mid 90s with the purpose of showing exactly how the nation state is losing power because of the rising process of “thick” globalization. According to the author, transnational capital and the increasing integration of national economies under the banner of a world economy leads to uniformity. As a result, markets and capital gained an increasing power over the individual nation states and continually lead to reduction of political and juridical rights, cultural values and practices inside national territories. Ulrich Beck, for instance, argues that the “thick” globalization process, which now dominates the world, is primarily driven by economical imperatives.⁷⁾

The impact of “thick” globalization on world politics and on the politics of nation states is also in the focus of researchers. The process which leads to uniformity, as being mentioned above for the economic realm, is being promoted by several Institutions like the UN, EU, International Law or the IMF in the political area. Especially since the dawn of the Cold War, transnational organizations appear to weaken the sovereignty and autonomy of the individual nation states. To speak with Keohane and Nye: a “complex interdependence” characterises the political form of “thick” globalization. In addition, James Rosenau points out that the process may shape a form of “global governance” which can be seen as an outcome of complex relations between capital and politics.⁸⁾

The belief that “thick” globalization weakens the sovereignty of the nation states is partly right. However, it also strengthens the rights of the individual all over the world and helps creating new nation states or at least helps transforming existing political systems. Of course there is a long way to go, however, the contemporary situation in some African states (Egypt, Libya, Yemen and etc.) shows that the process of “thick” globalization also supports the rise of democratic movements. The term “complex interdependence” is a good description for the influence of “thick” globalization. Because of economical relations, many African tyrants were able to subdue their people under inhumane regimes; for a long time western states were accepting such systems without challenging them, because of economical advantages. Because “thick” globalization should be understood as a multi-dimensional process, the voices of human rights organizations, NGO and simple people as well, who criticize dictatorships and violence in those countries and outside, should be considered as a democratic process that was also mainly driven by “thick” globalization.

The case of Turkey

A. The dawn of the secular Republic

Like humans, nation states also influence each other on different levels. After the Turkish republic was established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his fellows, they tried to cut all relations to the vanished Ottoman Empire. This can be characterized as the first time the Turkish government tried to influence a “thick” political globalization to support their new politics. The aim of Atatürk and his compatriots was to transform the traditional Muslim society into a modern secular one, which should be free from religious ties. Therefore they established the Swiss civil code and abandoned the Sharia (Islamic law), adopted the separation of powers; and the political and juridical situation of women, compared what had existed in the Ottoman Empire and in some European states was changed in a very positive way. In short, a process, which had influenced Europe and the rest of the world, since the French and American revolution, was now influencing Turkey in its political, economical, cultural and social core. The concept of Kemalistic secularism was trying to set up a citizenship based on universal rights for all different kinds of people within the state. However, the regime had also a very vital interest in supporting racist theories; being swayed by German, Russian, French and other racist national ideas from Europe and outside, the Turkish elite had a very existential interest to declare Turks as the real “Arian” people of the World. During the political modernization of the republic, ideas of non-democratic leadership or racism were very attractive and had a very strong effect on Turkey. This paradox situation can be explained with regard to “thin” and “thick” globalization. Since the aristocratic and clerical hegemonies in Europe were losing power to structure their societies, a new form of structuring came to the surface. Ethnicity, which was understood as a group of people belonging to the same pedigree, was the new way to unite an entire population. In the nation building process, which can be characterize as “thick” and began with the revolutions in France and America, the concepts of “liberté, égalité,

fraternité”, very soon were transformed through a particular conception of racial hierarchy. Equality was not a universal concept; it was reserved to a certain group of humans in a restricted area. This had a very strong impact on Turkey’s democracy and it structured it for decades to come. The Kurds e.g., the biggest minority in Turkey were classified as a group of “sub humans” and because of this they were not allowed to speak their language or practice their religion. They were forced to assimilate and to accept themselves as Turks. This new way of structuring a society, can be called “thick” and the racist ideas which came up to support it, can be called “thin” globalization. Both influenced Turkey from its birth.

B. The dawn of the global Cold War and Turkish Democracy

After the Second World War the beginning of antagonism between the Soviet union and the United States of America, the world entered a new age of “thin” and “thick” globalization. The world was divided by the two superpowers into a communist and non-communist (liberal, democratic) realm. Very soon after World War II, Turkey voluntarily joined the US block and was a very important strategic partner of NATO. This forced Turkey to change its political system; during the first three decades the republic had a one-party-system rather like a dictatorship and had very strong antidemocratic laws. Until the dawn of the Cold War the party of Atatürk, the Republican Peoples Party (CHP), was ruling Turkey. Atatürk and his followers forced a radical modernization, that’s why the Turkish society was divided into two parties, the one which supported the modernization and the other party who were against the radical movement. The modernist mainly lived in the big cities or in industrialized parts of Turkey. The traditionalists were to be found mostly, but not only, in the countryside or not-industrialized parts of the state. However during the period between 1923 and 1947, at two times other parties were allowed to participate in the elections with the CHP. Both times the opposition was accused of being anti-democratic and in trying to turn Turkey into an Islamic state, which was a pretext to keep the power in control of the CHP.

With the change of political reality during the early 1950’s, the republic had no other choice but to change its political system. The USA claimed to be the leader of the defenders of the free world; this meant to support democracies, free and liberal markets, human rights etc. Turkey as a partner of the US had to realize at least some of those principles. This forced it to change its one-party-system into a multi-party-system and to allow democratic processes. The impact of a primarily “thick” political globalization changed political realities in Turkey; this does not mean that Turkey was becoming a democracy; it means that the way to such a development was open, which allowed for a broader diversity of political, economical, cultural and social change. However, critics of the political system, or of Atatürk, progressed very slowly but nonetheless constantly. Yet, violence against political opposition and oppression of the ethnical minorities still dominated the daily politics of Turkey.

The influence of the Cold War should be considered in terms of “thin and thick” globalization. The change of the political system and the establishment of a system, which was open to democratic

process was the impact of “thin” globalization; the outcome of a minimum agreement between Turkey and the USA. The impact of “thick” political globalization was to strengthen the military, market level and make sure that communist tendencies were suppressed in Turkey.

C. 1978, resurrection of Islam in a globalized World and Turkish democracy

As mentioned before, Turkey's radical break with its Muslim identity led to different conflicts on the social, cultural and political levels. Turkish people had to find a way to accept the radical modernity movement of Kemalism and to combine it with their Islamic traditions. This led to different kinds of conflicts; however, as during the late 1970s and early 1980s the regime of Reza Shah in Iran was violently displaced by Ayatollah Khomeini, in Turkey the voices of Islamists grew stronger. This development did not really change the political realities of the republic; the military, which was loyal to the ideas of Atatürk, was watching with curiosity the developments in the neighboring state. Turkish Islamists were under the control of the Kemalist elite, since the early days of the republic. However Turkish military, politicians, intellectuals and others were using the developments in Iran to achieve a paradox symbiosis between the teachings of Islam and Turkish nationalism, or rather Kemalism. Although the military elite was in favor of Mustafa Kemal's views on religion; nevertheless, they were very concerned about the fact, that because of the lack of religious instructions—in that the influence of Islam was cut down to a minimum—Turkey's population was much more open to the ideology of communism. Since 1938 Turkish political elite, press and intellectuals were trying to convince their countrymen, that the USSR had a vital interest in turning Turkey into a satellite state. It is very interesting that after the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in 1938, the relations between the USSR and Turkey changed to the worse. The successor of Atatürk, İsmet İnönü, was an anticommunist and therefore he cut the relations. Although Mustafa Kemal himself was not a communist, he kept very good relations with Lenin. The leader of the communist revolution supported Atatürk financially and with armament supply during the independence war. However after the end of the military regime all political parties and previously arrested political leaders in 1980 began to build an artificial relationship between Islam and Kemalism. In the primary and secondary schools instructions in religious culture and moral education were established. The main idea behind that was that the goal of religious education was to convince the Turkish population that the Kemalistic teachings on modernity, nationalism, and fatherland were comparable to the teachings of Islam. In other words: to serve the ideal of Turkish nationalism was to serve Islam; because the Turks have lived throughout history after such principles, therefore similarities between Islam and Turkish nationalism had always existed and those who served the Islam served simultaneously Turkism and vice versa.

Here again we have a good example of the influence of “thin” and “thick” globalization. Regional changes and conflicts forced Turkey's political leaders and military authorities to change their radical anti-Islamic politics. The developments in Iran during the early 1980's influenced, on the “thin” level of globalization, several Muslim countries and changed the conditions of local politics.

In Turkey the government tried to achieve a symbiosis between Islam and modernity, which had little to do with a democratic development, it was simply a way to stabilize the status quo in Turkey. It was also a way to engage “thin” and “thick” globalization with each other.

D. End of the global Cold War and Turkish Democracy

Political systems can change very fast. Sometimes this change can hardly be controlled. After the Cold War era, it seemed that Turkey somehow lost its political identity. First of all, its strategic importance for the US government was lost importance. Secondly, the United States could find much more easily new allies in the former Warsaw pact territories, because the USSR did no longer exist. Thirdly, since the 1960's Turkey had been (and was still) unable to join the EU. However, political and economical challenges were also influencing the countries daily politics. Islamist and radical nationalist were gaining power. For radical religious parties the end of the Cold War was a chance to unite with Islamic countries and to build a Muslim “EU”, which could help them to develop and undermine the political and economical power of “Christian” nations. With such claims Turkish Islamists wanted to reestablish the Caliphate again and to rebuild a Muslim “Empire” according to the archetype of the Ottoman Empire. Their efforts found an audience in Turkey which supported them, but outside the Turkish borders their claims were hardly noticed. This is because for many Arab countries the Ottomans were occupiers, which oppressed them for a long time. Radical Muslims in Turkey tried to show the Muslim Empire, which was destroyed during the First World War, as the best Islamic Empire which existed through Muslim history. Beside the Islamists, radical nationalists were also trying to establish a “Turk Union” and to realize their dream of a Turkish Empire built on racial equality. Of course such ideas had no real influence on the majority of the Turkish population, but it is worth mentioning them, because ideas of religious and racial rather ethnical conflict theories became very famous in the mid 1990's. The civil war in Yugoslavia and other civil wars all over the world, somehow made scientist believe, that the future conflicts could come up between religious or ethnical groups rather than between states. Therefore famous US politicians and political scientist, like Henry Alfred Kissinger and Samuel Philips Huntington, favored a division of the World into religious or ethnical territories to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

During the early 1990's and until 9/11 Turkey's political system can be compared to a roller coaster. This is because of the influence of “thin” and “thick” globalization. A close look to the developments back then shows, that the influence of “thin” globalization found its expressions in religious, racial or ethnical conflicts – which was the case in Yugoslavia or Ruanda. However, it is interesting to point out, that symmetries between the conflict parties are bigger than the differences. This fact makes Huntington's Thesis hard to accept. The breakdown of the USSR gave way for the creation of new states and was also an occasion for already existing states to position themselves as regional powers. Turkey's foreign policy since the end of Cold War can be classified as an effort to convince its neighbors of that it is a regional power. It involves itself much more

aggressively and openly in the Middle East question and tries to take the role as a mediator in several conflicts, between Palestinians and Israelis or other groups; such political challenges and developments had an immense influence on Turkey. At the same time we should also observe the influence of “thin” globalization. For the first time after the Second World War, in the 1990, the US had no real competitor, who could place itself in its way. However as a result of having so much “freedom” in the choice of its partners, the US sometimes disregarded his old allies. One of them was Turkey. This did also led to anti-democratic movements in Turkey. However, with the upcoming threat of religious terrorism, or rather Islamic terrorism, once again Turkey’s geographic advantages became important for the US. Furthermore, a profound transformation within the radical Islamist party in Turkey took place. Comparable to the developments of the Christian conservative parties, a little part of the party decided to leave the radical corner and to participate more in the democratic process. One of these moderate party members was Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is also the current leader of moderate party AKP; as in European countries in the beginning of the 20th Century, a liberal movement within the radical Islamist parties created a new party, which since 2001 runs the Turkish government. The AKP has weakened to some degree the anti-democratic and military bureaucracy, not only to fulfill the requirements of the EU, but also to stabilize Turkish democratic culture. However, the Kemalist elite has been very strong and the “strong tradition of the state” still exists.

E. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction the process of globalization is best described as a “complex interdependence”. As being shown in the beginning of the republic the process of “thin” globalization had a enormous impact on Turkey and its political, economical, cultural and social system; however with changing realities in western Europe, with the dawn of the Cold War, with its breakdown and since 9/11 Turkey has been undergoing several process of globalization. All this has shaped its current political and democratic character, which compared to Germany or Austria still has some way to go, but it also shows how important outside influence can be in order to establish a democratic system.

Notes

- 1) First of all I would like to thank Professor Gotoh and Professor Dumouchel again for inviting me to Kyoto and for their wonderful hospitality. Additionally I would like to thank all the participants for their critical comments and interesting questions after my presentation.
- 2) See Koehane and Nye 1989.
- 3) Ardic 2009: 18.
- 4) Professor Dumouchel also emphasized such developments in his opening speech during the conference.
- 5) See Ohmae 1995.
- 6) See Ohmae 1995.
- 7) See Beck 2001: 101.

8) See Rosenau 2001.