

Current Political Developments in Turkey
June 1, 2007.

ELIAMEP organized a round-table discussion on "Current Political Developments in Turkey." Thanos Veremis, Professor at the University of Athens and Vice-President of the Board of Directors of ELIAMEP, moderated the discussion. He spoke briefly about the crisis that is occurring in modern Turkey; the debate over secularism, and the upcoming elections.

William Hale, Visiting Professor at Sabanci University, Istanbul, focused on the upcoming elections and gave an approximation of the results based on the past and the current situations. He emphasized the importance for a party to get at least 10% of the votes, since this guarantees them seats in the Parliament. He said that the AKP will either continue to govern the country, or form a coalition with the DPT.

Selim Deringil, Professor at Bogazici University, Istanbul, spoke about the causes behind the current crisis. He argued that Turkey's domestic political agenda changes very rapidly, that there are mixed messages coming from the massive demonstrations, and that there are opposing views on the desirability of E.U. accession. In agreement with Professor Hale, he stated that the coming elections are of vital importance and that the AKP will probably continue to have a central role in Turkish politics.

Udo Steinbach, Professor at the University of Hamburg and Director of the German Institute for Middle East Studies in Hamburg, spoke about Turkish democracy and how that is or is not reflected in the Kurdish situation. Specifically, he referred to the Kurds in Iraq, and on-going conflicts with the PKK. He also mentioned the internal contradictions of Turkey being pro-western, and at the same time, anti-E.U.

Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, Assistant Professor at Isik University in Istanbul as well as Research Fellow at ELIAMEP gave his account on the current political situation in Turkey. He presented a detailed overview of all the pertinent topics: secularism, the situation in Iraq, the possible entrance into the E.U. and democracy. Grigoriadis spoke of the large demonstrations and how important it is to notice the people that are attending these meetings, and that they are people who would support a very isolationist government. This, said Grigoriadis, is hard to imagine since that would mean Turkey would have to have a closed economy. He focused specifically on the difficulty that the goal of secularism has posed on a state that is religious, and said that visible religion would have to disappear from the public sphere if Turkey is to achieve this goal.

During the question and answer period, discussion focused on the role of the U.S. in Iraq and Iran, examining the prospects of an independent state for the Kurds. Members of the panel considered that the only logical solution would be to create a Kurdish state. The general consensus was that the U.S. will support a Kurdistan, and that the next U.S. administration will probably make its way out of Iraq.

There was also further discussion on the elections. Some more issues were examined, such as who will win the election, and who will be actually voting for the president: the parliament or the people? Speculations were made earlier of who was to win the presidency. It was said that if there was a referendum to decide whether or not the people would want to vote directly for the president, it would be detrimental to the election process, since 75% of the people would respond positively. Once posed, the question could not be taken back.

The audience consisted of approximately 100 people including academics, diplomats, university students, and journalists.