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Effects of the February 28, 1997 Postmodern Coup on Turkish Political Life

28 Şubat Post-Modern Darbenin Türk Siyasal Hayatına Etkileri

Abstract

Throughout Türkiye's political history, democracy has not been practiced at various intervals and for various reasons. Coup periods in particular appear to be problematic for democracy and human rights. On the one hand, coups put pressure on political actors, while on the other, they cause Turkish society to experience dilemmas in many areas. This study examines the process in which the then-government was forced to resign as a result of the National Security Council's (MGK) decisions dated February 28, 1997, which is described as a postmodern coup in political terms. In addition, the study investigates the impact of influential actors such as the army and the media in this process and the limits of the outcomes of this process on social life. February 28 was a period of societal mobilization during which a section of society was targeted through the media, and finally, with a directive given by the military, civilian politics was shelved and authoritarian rule was experienced / implemented.

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Öz

Türkiye siyasi tarihi boyunca demokrasi çeşitli aralıklarla ve gerekçelerle uygulama alanı bulamamıştır. Özellikle darbe dönemleri demokrasi ve insan hakları açısından sürecin sorunlu yaşandığı dönemler olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Darbeler bir taraftan siyasi aktörler üzerinde baskı kurarken, diğer taraftan toplumun birçok alanda çıkmazlar yaşamasına sebep olmuştur. Bu çalışmanın amacı siyasal yaşamda Post-modern darbe olarak nitelendirilen, 28 Şubat 1997 tarihli MGK kararları neticesinde hükümetin istifaya zorlandığı süreci irdelemek, bu süreçte Ordu ve Medya gibi etkin aktörlerin sürece etkisini araştırmak ve sürecin sonucunun toplum yaşamına etkilerinin sınırlarını incelemektir. 28 Şubat toplumun bir alana mobilize edilmesi, medya aracılığıyla bir kesimin hedef gösterilmesi ve nihayet ordunun vermiş olduğu direktif ile sivil siyasetin rafa kaldırılarak otoriter bir dönemin yaşanmasının adı olmuştur.

Keywords

Postmodern, coup, media, secular, sharia

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Post-modern, darbe, medya, laik, şeriat

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Introduction

The February 28 or so-called 1997 military memorandum, refers to an important period that allows a critique of Türkiye social structure in the 1990s in all its aspects. It was a period in which social tensions and economic and social crises were strongly felt. The rising importance of the Welfare Party (RP) and its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, was the harbinger of social transformation (Yılmaz, 2003, p. 115). This rise in power triggered tensions between the secular and Islamist sectors. The military, which saw itself as the protector of secularism, considered the coalition government¹ in those days at the time as a threat (Çelik, 2004, p. 230). As an outcome of this unease, the National Security Council's (MGK) decisions were made in 1997 and the approach of military tutelage over civilian politics emerged once again. However, the conflict between secular and antiseccular understandings was not the only reason for this tension. The strengthening of the Islamist movement following the 1994 elections, economic problems, social conflicts, and the involvement of the media (Kaya, 2006, p. 322) caused the process to become unstoppable. The media played an active role in directing the public and wore down the Erbakan government. Rather than direct pressure from the army and the state, the government was put under pressure through a form of psychological pressure referred to as a "postmodern coup" (Öztürk, 2010, p. 148).

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The public was manipulated through intense media propaganda, thus the military did not see the need for direct intervention. Considering this period simply as a "postmodern coup" offers only a superficial perspective. In fact, the events of February 28 were a process that left deep traces in Turkish political life and led to serious transformations in the years that followed (Acar, 2008, p. 54); while it led to the emergence of new elites on the one hand, it led to significant damage to democratization on the other. The characteristic that distinguishes February 28 from other coups is that it was a postmodern coup; that is, psychological problems emerged as a result of the pressure on politics by the media and civilian actors rather than the physical violence and pressure seen in classic military coups. Herein, the aim was not to establish a military regime but to direct the existing government in the preferred direction. In this sense, it would not be wrong to define this process in Türkiye as a postmodern coup (Harris, 2006, p. 211).

The media played a critical role, manipulating society and rallying it around one view while at the same time keeping another group under pressure (Gunnell, 2013, p. 120). Postmodern coups also want to base their justification on legitimacy, which is none other than the security and survival of the state. Actors of postmodern coups explain this situation as a constitutional obligation and raise serious concerns about the democratic process in the long run (Gottfried, 2006, p. 157). As a result, it would not be wrong to argue that postmodern coups have a long-term impact on societies. This postmodern coup in Türkiye, which occurred in Turkish political life and is known as February 28, had significant effects on social life and resulted in the military forces' domination over civilian politics. During this process, the most

striking aspect was the suppression of the decision-making processes of Necmettin Erbakan, who was the target (Güney, 2009, p. 200). Therefore, the policy-making and implementation processes of civilian politics were prevented due to pressure from the military forces. In general terms, the study examines the actors who prepared and influenced the 28 February process and it examines how Turkish democratic history was affected by the process following 28 February.

Sociopolitical and Economic Background of February 28

The 10 years between 1990 and 2000 formed a period in which significant changes occurred in Turkish political life and social structure, and rapid and profound economic, social, political, and cultural transformations were experienced. The 1990s were characterized by an unstable political environment of coalition governments, which resulted in ineffective and unstable political representation (Erdem, 2001, p. 135). Another factor shaping Turkish politics in this period was the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) a terrorist organization from the 1980s, and the need for the government to develop policies in this direction; the PKK's actions revealed the weaknesses of Türkiye in terms of security (Kirişçi, 1996, p. 45). After the 1995 elections, the rise of the RP caused unease among secular institutions and tensions between people who preferred a secular lifestyle and those with religious sensitivities (Zürcher, 2004, p. 205). Turkish society, which was going through a politically depressed period was also experiencing economic difficulties during which high foreign debts, the economic crisis in 1994, and an increase in unemployment led to a negative outlook on the living conditions of the people and caused unrest (Öniş, 1996, p. 21).

In the aftermath of the 1994 economic crisis, economic reforms were introduced following an agreement with the International Monetary Fund, resulting in austerity policies, restrictions in the public sphere, and increased inequality, which led to dissatisfaction in society (Yeldan, 2001, p. 69). The crisis led to intense economic problems in society in the short term before the February 28 coup. The 1990s, when political and economic instabilities were rampant, were a period of social turmoil. Due to industrialization and urbanization, there was significant migration to big cities, especially after the 1980s. This period in which the rate of urbanization increased (Doğan, 1997, p. 119) has also significantly changed the social structure. One of the most important developments in social life has been in women's movement, and women's intense demands for more active participation in working life have turned into social movements (Kandiyoti, 1998, p. 76). In the conditions of the period, Traditional values created obstacles to these demands. The most serious debates in those days were on ethnic and religious identity.

The rise of religious identity and the debates on Kurdish identity were the areas that society focused on the most and in which the tension in social life was the highest (Kirişçi, 1996, p. 51). Religion and ethnicity were two areas where polarization and intolerance were most

intense. Before February 28, Türkiye was going through a period of political crises, both the economy and the social life were going through a turbulent period, and problems in religious and ethnic areas concerns were deepening. This approximately 20-year period of Turkish political life, which was a term of economic, social, cultural, and political depression, gradually began to be reflected in social life in the early years of the twenty-first century, primarily as a result of political attitudes. Later economic normalization helped overcome this abnormal environment.

The RP, which was the target of the February 28 process and suffered the most, was founded in 1983 under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan and was the rising political party of political life from the late 1980s through most of the 1990s. Erbakan founded the RP by using the cadres of the National Salvation Party, which provided the Islamist movement with a stronger representation in the Turkish political arena (Seydi, 2010, p. 124).

In the 1994 local elections, the RP won the municipalities of big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara, which increased the public's trust in this movement and was instrumental in the party receiving 21% of the vote in the 1995 elections (Köroğlu, 2009, p. 45). The RP emphasized Islamic principles in the life of both the individual and the society, based on a reflection of the Islamic lifestyle, which it adopted as a basic principle in its foundation (Gunter, 1997, p. 91). Behind the criticism that the party was adopting a capitalist approach was an emphasis on fair order, a strong economy, and the claim that especially the poor should be economically strong; therefore, the state should be economically strong (Cizre, 1997, p. 82). The RP advocated that modernization would take place to the extent that it approached Islamic values and that modernization would be possible by preserving the religious-cultural values of society (Zürcher, 2004, p. 115). Before February 28, Turkish society had a new understanding, especially in line with the discourses of the RP, which received both support and dissent. Important issues of the period were developments in the field of secularism, the military, and civilian politics. Erbakan and his party adopted the opinion that modernization should be realized by considering Islamic values, and with the rise of the RP, the religious references in the discourse of politicians caused concern for supporters of secularism (Ergüven, 2010, p. 42). In this process, the army saw itself as the body that had a duty to protect secularism in political and social life (Yavuz, 2002, p. 15). The fact that the Turkish army was an actor in politics after 1960, actively engaged in politics after the 1980 coup, and claimed to be the protector and guardian of secularism contradicts the basic principles of a democratic society (Kalaycıoğlu, 2001, p. 63; Yavuz, 2002, p. 15). In the period approaching February 28, tensions between civilian politics and the army was at its peak, and on February 28th, 1997, the Turkish armed forces intervened in the government with a so-called postmodern coup (Çandar, 2007, p. 98). In a memorandum, the military forces reminded civilians that they were the protectors of secularism and presented several proposals. After the memorandum, it became clear that military tutelage was deeply rooted in the society (Aydın, 2008, p. 133). As a result of the army's

intervention in politics, there was almost no possibility for the decision-making mechanisms of civilian politics to function properly. The principle of secularism was almost seen as the determining factor in the relations between the army and civilian politics.

The Role of the Army and the Media in February 28

As a requirement of the Turkish state tradition, the Turkish army has an important place in the Republic of Türkiye, as it did in the pre-republican Turkish states. It is significant at every stage of the republican period because of the effect of its successful struggle for liberation and the role it played in the establishment of the republic. The effect of this power can be seen in the army's desire to shape politics, and military interventions are indicative of this desire. This situation in which the military is involved has caused controversy in terms of democracy and legal grounds (Özbudun, 2010, p. 112). In almost all critical processes related to politics, the army has not remained indifferent; therefore, the army was seen in the field of politics with the clear stance it took during the February 28 process. The army's motivation was the desire to prevent the Islamist movement from gaining power. Regarding February 28, the influence of economic, political, and social factors can be emphasized rather than the military intervention (Yılmaz, 2002, p. 55).

Amid this tense political atmosphere in Türkiye, the rise of the RP increased the army's concerns about secularism, and Erbakan and the RP's rhetoric led the army to see itself as a party to protect secularism. In 1996, the government was led by Erbakan as Prime Minister and Tansu Çiller as Deputy Prime Minister. The biggest opposition to this government came from the Turkish armed forces. The army saw the RP as the head of the reactionary (irtica) movements, and the Western Working Group² scrutinized everyone connected to the RP. The prevailing opinion in the army was that the current government would definitely change (Bibrand & Yıldız, 2012, 181). The army's clearest reaction was the MGK meeting on February 28, 1997 (Kara, 2011, p. 243). As the most important actor of the February 28 process, the army was opposed to a government formula in which the RP was included from the beginning; it tried to organize politicians, and when it failed to succeed, it played a direct role in the fall of the government (Erkal & Temel, 2024, p. 232). Although some claim that the armed forces did not intervene directly, civilian politics became functionless/ powerless? as a result of the army's stance in the February 28 process. Even civil society organizations refrained from taking a stand in this process (Bayramoğlu, 2013, p. 58).

Politicians and other actors were so affected by this attitude of the military that it was impossible to make political progress and the government was forced to resign at the end of the process. The resulting situation showed that February 28 emerged as a result of the tension between civilian politics and the army. The understanding that the army was the main supervisory power of the state had a negative impact on Turkey's attempts to join the European Union (EU) at the time (Hale, 2000, p. 67). The MGK, which had a legal basis after the 1961

Constitution, turned into a control mechanism and its decisions rendered civilian politics inoperable and led to significant pressure on politics. The 1982 Constitution increased the power of the MGK and made its decisions binding (Özbudun, 2010, p. 124). The MGK, which had the authority to make decisions on the internal and external security of the country, turned into a critical decision-making and control mechanism under the prime minister, the president, the chief of general staff, ministers, and the commanders of the armed forces. The effectiveness of the army in this mechanism gave it a mission to direct policy and influence politicians.

One of the most important actors in the February 28 postmodern coup was the media. During this period, the concept of reaction featured frequently in the media, almost inviting a military intervention. As reaction was promoted, the opposition to reaction found wide support in the society and the intervention of the army became inevitable (Aydın, 2005, p. 57). The media assumed the role of directing public opinion as well as conveying information (Kaya, 2007, p. 43). Before February 28, the Turkish media almost brought the society to a point where people would accept a coup (Schori, 2000, p. 102); media propaganda during this period led the public to want such an intervention. Perhaps the most important effect of the media on society during this process was its transformation into a means of psychological pressure. While marginalizing one part of society with the concept of reaction, the other part was guided by constant messages that they would fight against a threat that would emerge shortly. In this case, both segments of society were put under pressure through various methods and an uneasy environment was created (Demirtaş, 2006, p. 68).

The media assumed the role of creating fear in society by manipulating the information it received instead of doing what it was supposed to do, which was to provide news (Gillespie, 2004, p. 116). In general, the media played a critical role in the process leading up to February 28, detaching the concept of reaction from its essence and presenting it to society in whichever form it wanted, excluding a certain segment of society based on the meaning it attributed to it, and instructing the others that this was a dangerous and grave situation to be feared. The media both paved the way for radicalization and tried to create a legitimate ground for military intervention by convincing some segments that there was no way out except for the army's intervention. In an environment of deepening social polarization, groups with secular sensitivity had no choice but to ask the army to play the role of the savior. The coups, which were thought to be a formula for the economic, social, and political stabilization of a depressed social structure, contrary to popular belief, did not go beyond inviting more depressed processes. The army, taking a stance against the Erbakan government from the very beginning as they saw the principle of secularism under threat and expressing this discomfort without hesitation at every opportunity, intervened in the RP and in civilian politics by taking advantage of the media's method of manipulating and targeting a certain segment of society to legitimize the military intervention. Thus, February 28 emerged as a product of the cooperation between the army and the media.

Erbakan's government was pressured mainly based on three issues. It is clear from the 18 articles written by the military at the MGK that these issues posed a serious threat: reactionary cadres that had positions in public institutions; imam-hatip (religious vocational) high schools and the young people who were trained in these schools, which had the potential to turn Türkiye into another/second Iran; and sects and their indirect goal of establishing a religious state (Işık, 2024, p. 129). By directing the society, the army reacted against a possible sharia state, and imam-hatip schools as structures to be fought in the name of secularism, and they emphasized that the coalition (Refahyol; see footnote 2) government, which it accused of paving the way for these structures, was responsible for the negativities experienced. This attitude can be seen as an effort to create legitimate grounds for the coup. The media, the other active actor / participant in the process, also played a dominant role, and the press perceived the army's attempt to directly manipulate politics as a guarantee of democracy. In this framework, the media either ignored the de facto interventions of the military or applauded them and brought them to the agenda. In such an environment, the government could not resist any longer after the MGK's decisions (Işık, 2023, p. 90).

February 28th Decisions and Their Impact on Democracy

The September 12, 1980, coup d'état and events in its aftermath led to a depressed period in the history of Turkish democracy. The armed forces were uncomfortable with conservative politicians gaining power after the coup and made continuous statements, especially against the rise of the RP. The army's habit of intervening in democracy occurred again in Turkish political history with the February 28 MGK decisions (Yiğit et al., 2023, p. 2151). The January MGK meeting began with tension, with the military wing in particular showing a stressed attitude. When President Demirel gave the floor to Admiral Güven Erkaya of the armed forces to speak, Erkaya expressed his reaction as follows: "The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and ministers are not obeying the law, even though Article 24 of the constitution clearly states that a sharia state cannot be defended. This increases reactionary activities and puts the democratic and secular republic in a dangerous situation" (Öztürk & Yurteri, 2011, p. 174). His statements indicate what message the army wanted to send to the government. At the MGK meeting of February 28, 1997, the army again reacted violently. The general who made the presentation said, "The RP became the main center of groups engaged in reactionary activities," emphasizing that the RP meant impiety with secularism and that all these disturbed the military (Öztürk & Yurteri, 2011, p. 182).

On the one hand, the army was controlling the government through the MGK, and on the other, it was organizing the society accordingly by using the media. The February 28 memorandum ironically brought those who said that the regime was in danger and the government together as a result of military pressure. This can be explained as an outward expression of

the tragedy of democracy (Bayramoğlu, 2007, p. 145). In summary, the February 28 decisions included banning the wearing of headscarves and restricting religious symbols—reducing the influence of religious communities and sects in society, controlling the media and preventing publications against secularism, supporting the military, preventing graduates of imam-hatip high schools and religious schools from working in government offices, and pressuring the current government. It would not be wrong to argue that democracy was almost shelved during this period and that intense efforts were made to do so. This process of oppression and intimidation, which began in August 1996, has taken its place in history along with many other examples. At every opportunity, the army tried to express its discomfort with the fact that the RP came to power. When the government had just been formed and had not yet received a vote of confidence, Erkaya made the statement, “We are facing an intention to eliminate the armed forces.” On August 7, 1996, Kemal Gürüz, the president of the Council of Higher Education, summoned university rectors to Ankara and visited Anıtkabir³, where they pledged to protect the fundamental pillars of the republic and to uphold secularism. On the same day, MGK Secretary General İlhan Kılıç’s statement, “The RP’s efforts to end terrorism by using intermediaries disturb the army” (Tayyar, 2012, p. 24), showed that the army was trying to use every opportunity and segment to shape public opinion. The RP, which had come to power with the vote of the people, was being dragged into an environment that was incompatible with the basic qualities of democracy, and democracy was being damaged. In fact, the democratization process, which was normalized following the 1982 Constitution, entered into a state of uncertainty after the February 28 MGK decisions. Both the ruling and opposition parties refrained from taking democratic steps under the influence of the MGK decisions, and Turkey’s attempts for democracy, albeit intermittent for more than a century (Erdoğan, 1999, p. 33), were deeply wounded by the impact of the February 28 memorandum.

The army’s stance caused Turkey at that time to shift toward totalitarianism (Erdoğan, 1999, p. 194). The idea that the country had gradually moved away from democracy and that the traces of this coup would not be erased for a thousand years was ingrained in society. The army’s obsession with creating a single type of person / a uniform individual/ a standardized individual led to a move toward totalitarian regime-like practices. The grounds for the resignation of the government were prepared with harsh messages given through the media, which led to a new deadlock in the name of democracy. Especially in 1997, the army started to use the media as a tool to shape public opinion, and the media tried to make the public accept the military intervention as an ordinary event by attributing political meaning to the statements of the army (Bayramoğlu, 2007, p. 103). In this chaotic environment, the Refahiyol government was forced to resign through an undemocratic practice, which impacted all segments of society. The most debated aspect of the February 28 MGK decisions was the impact on education. These decisions can be examined under three headings: the extension of primary education to eight years without interruption, the application of coefficients to the students of vocational

high schools and imam-hatip high schools in the university entrance exam, and—perhaps the one that attracted the most reaction from the society—the headscarf ban applied to female students when they entered their schools /during school hours? (Yiğit et al., 2023, p. 2151). In addition, the fact that the army used the power of civil society and the media to monitor the steps of the government (Büyükpınar, 2016, p. 112) established a ground before the coup.

One of the practices of February 28 that contradicted democracy was carried out through freedom of religion and worship. Freedom to perform religious practices in the public sphere caused deep debates, and social polarization between secular and religious groups deepened (Sakarya, 2019, p. 200). The situation of political parties undermined public confidence in democratization; the closure of the RP (Sakarya, 2019, p. 210) and political bans reinforced this mistrust. While tensions in the educational environment, the headscarf ban for female students, and practices regarding wearing headscarves in public spaces pushed society into a politically problematic process, the tension between secular and Islamic groups was a harbinger of long-term problems in Turkish political life. The conflict between those who want to preserve Islamic traditions and the supporters of modernization was not limited to the February 28 process; such conflicts have existed since the declaration of the Republic of Türkiye. In the post-1990 years, those practicing Islamic tradition began to criticize the steps of modernization, and the increasing number of private radio and television channels made Islamic symbols more visible. With the headscarf issue on the agenda, groups opposed to religious sensitivities claimed that the founding principles of the republic are not compatible with religious traditions (Güney, 2009, p. 150), which inevitably led to the emergence of tension between the supporters of these different views. An analysis of the history of democracy in Turkey reveals that a fragmented, patchwork democratization process has almost always been in place, and democracy has been interrupted frequently. The February 28 process and the events happening in its aftermath show that the reason democracy could not function properly is a matter associated with those in power. Those in power have been cautious about the transition to democratic life. They believed that subjugating the Turkish nation was the right method (Erdoğan, 1999, p. 50). Therefore, After 28 February, the wheels of democracy became inoperable.

Reflections of the Postmodern Coup on the Early Years of the Twenty-first Century

Postmodern coups are designed as a tactic to wear down governments by using the media and other forms of culture as an element of war, directing society toward a certain goal with the support of the media and overthrowing the governing power. Significant problems emerged in Turkey after the February 28 postmodern coup, and a chaotic atmosphere prevailed in most aspects of society, the most prominent of which were individual rights and freedoms, democracy and human rights, economy, education, social peace and tranquility, faith, and worship.

Postmodern coups have the power to transform societies and this continued to have an impact in the early years of the twenty-first century, with the media playing an important role (Baudrillard, 2003, p. 120). During the February 28 period, many segments of society were subjected to intense pressure from the media; however, in the field of education, the most victimized segment was the female students who wore headscarves. Some of these students were forced to drop out of school, some became depressed and committed suicide, and some were forced to compromise their values and beliefs. They were subjected to psychological warfare in the persuasion rooms⁴ (Mete, 2007, p. 102).

The headscarf issue had left the actors of February 28 with a mindset that would make it difficult for them to understand and forgive the girls they victimized in the following years; this state of being ignored would turn into one of the most difficult issues to compensate (Tezcan, 2020, p. 9). The attitude toward the headscarf was so rigid that Merve Kavakçı, the first elected female deputy of the Virtue Party (FP), who would go to the parliament on May 2, 1999, to be sworn in, expressed that she was worried about whether her own party would stand for her due to the impact of February 28 (Kavakçı İslam, 2014, p. 73).

The basic thesis of the FP, however, was freedom of belief, and in this respect, February 28 had created great fear about the political will. For the February 28 process, public opinion was formed, media support was obtained, and even the party whose basic thesis was freedom of belief was forced to experience an ambivalent situation. In the period following February 28, the government was trying to maintain its silence in the face of events while urging its base to be calm and patient to prevent reaction (Öztürk, 2013, p. 46). February 28 has special meaning only as the day of the MGK decisions, but the coup process had started long before and turned into a gradual process that would continue for a long time. The April 18, 1999, elections have once again shown that Turkish politics is ruled not by civilian actors but by media-backed state elites. The Welfare Party was shut down by the Constitutional Court on 16.01.1998 on the grounds that it was a ‘focus of actions against secularism’ (İhtiyaroğlu, 2021: 348). The party, which was forced to resign by a coup d’état in the process leading up to this point, had actually become an open target with its discourses contrary to the conditions of Türkiye at the time. The party’s anti-secularist discourses and its attitude towards imam hatip schools caused the party to be considered as an outlier in the Türkiye of the period. After February 28, the focus of these elites shifted to two areas: authoritarian secularism and nationalism. In this axis shift, while the former was developed against the rise of Islamism, the latter was against the Kurdish problem and external pressures on human rights (Erdoğan, 1999, p. 273). In this process, nationalist discourses gained momentum and the Kurdish problem was suppressed and ignored. The authoritarian secularism discourse manifested itself in a decline in the votes of the Islamists, as the votes of the RP dropped by six points in the first elections with the FP, which was considered its successor. The primary actor in making society sensitive to these two issues was the media, which was one of the responsible parties in the February 28 process. Especially after the MGK decisions, the understanding of nationalism and authoritar-

ian secularism showed a rising momentum for five to six years and directed the society in this respect. Following the closure of the RP, the FP, another representative of the national view, was closed down for almost the same reasons. In 2001, a new restructuring was inevitable for the national view, especially for the group known as the progressive group, in which contrary to the general anti-Western policy of Recai Kutan and the FP, Abdullah Gül and his supporters advocated a moderate policy with the West; from 2002 onward, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took steps toward the necessity of maintaining relations with the EU (Ezikoğlu, 2021, p. 95).

Although this was the national view, in 2002, a majority of people who suffered from February 28 were also dissatisfied with the current situation, and together with the Justice and Development Party (AKP), they would express their reaction through elections. The 2002 elections brought the vision of overcoming Türkiye's governability crisis and solving the country's problems with urgent action plans on democratization, development, and justice to the voters (Duran, 2022, p. 13). These approaches and efforts were met with interest by society because there was a need for. The AKP was seen as a recipe for recovery from the crisis caused by February 28. The AKP's discourses on economic and other social reforms attracted public attention. The fact that the AKP came to power increased the belief in prosperity among people who were economically depressed. Another group that reacted to February 28 was the female students who were subjected to pressure and psychological violence in the persuasion rooms, mainly by the administration and academics of Istanbul University (Bakır, 2024, p. 23). The postmodern coup left a chaotic environment in almost every field for the next five years. As the continuation of the national view movement, which was politically close to Erbakan's line, the segments that suffered the most from the environment created by February 28 began to rise politically after the first years of the twenty-first century. The conservative movement, which had reached a dead end due to the postmodern coup and the closure of their political parties, gained strength at the end of this period and became influential in Turkish political life in the last quarter of the twentieth century. After February 28, the changes observed in the social structure, labor market, family structure, and demographic parameters revealed that the existing social problems could not be solved with status quo policy instruments and made radical reforms inevitable (Akgeyik, 2019, p. 25).

The successive crises of November 2000 and February 2001 had a major impact on the Turkish economy (Sungur, 2015, p. 244). Entering political life with strong political and economic rhetoric under the conditions of the period, In this period, the path of those who were victimized in some way intersected with the AK Party. People felt the need to cling to this new formation to regain the freedoms they had lost through repression thanks to this party and to get rid of the antidemocratic environment created by autocratic discourses and actions. The problems caused by February 28 and the environment they created made the economic policies of the AKP meaningful. Thanks to the economic policies pursued by the AKP, both economic growth and integration with global economic policies were achieved. In addition, Erdoğan's strong leadership promised political stability, and the society was convinced of this fact. Be-

cause the AKP implemented policies in line with the social state approach, supported low-income citizens, facilitated the public's access to health services, and took steps toward equality of opportunity, it has been accepted by large masses of people. In this process, the EU, which was seen as a guarantee of human rights and freedoms, was considered to be an important problem-solving organ, and the party's EU policy and foreign policy steps attracted the attention of the public. It was seen as a step toward Turkey's economic and political modernization. The pressure exerted on society by the postmodern coup process caused the AKP, which promised libertarian and liberal policies, to emerge stronger from this process and to take its place in political history as a political organization with no alternative for almost a quarter of a century. The transformation process experienced by the military has also been effective here. Since the foundation of the republic, the Turkish armed forces have seen themselves as the guardian and protector of the state for many years, sometimes overthrowing governments through coups, sometimes threatening them through various methods, and sometimes causing governments to resign. In the 2000s, the authoritarian and interventionist structure of the military was tried to be changed through legal regulations (Gürsoy, 2014: 158). Finally, the military had to step back from its oppressive and imposing behaviour. The military's tendency to seize power in the civil-military debate incomplete sentence (Akal & Başpınar, 2021: 103). It has also caused important ruptures in terms of Türkiye's political history. For many years, an oppressive military structure ruled especially over political actors.

Conclusion

February 28, 1997 is an important turning point in Turkey's recent history. This historical event, which was later defined as a postmodern coup, has had a significant long-term impact on Turkish society. Its effects have continued on the relationships between religion and secular groups, the functioning mechanism of the state, military-civilian relations, the economy, and politics. After February 28, the Refahiyol coalition government led by the RP came to an end. The Islamist identity of the RP and its policies soon became unpopular with some segments of society. After the 1997 MGK decisions and Erbakan's resignation, a significant break occurred in Turkish political life, and the influence of the Islamist sector in the political arena waned. Relations between the army and civilians were tense due to the actors who were influential in the preparation of this process, and the armed forces succeeded in exerting pressure on civilian politics through various methods. The military bureaucracy did not hesitate to impose its own truths despite the civilian will. After the February 28 intervention, the military once again demonstrated how effective it could be in political life. One of the important consequences of February 28 was the emergence and deepening of a great tension between secularism and religion. In this process, some segments and the army, who saw the then-government and the conservatives as a threat to secularism, contributed to the emergence of a tension between religion and secularism, where it was the prosecularists, and therefore the army, who won. In

the process, the fact that religious references were perceived as extremism and antisecularism and the state policy in this direction prevented the people from certain religious expressions and freedoms. The headscarf ban and subsequent practices brought along many rights violations. The groups who were prevented from work and education on these grounds and whose personal rights and freedoms were harmed would start to take part as important actors in political life in the years to come. The violation of rights suffered by these groups was also found odd by different segments of society. After February 28, the closure of the RP created the need for representation for these groups. The FP, which was established with the same principles as the RP, did not politically gain recognition, and similarly, its closure by secularists and under the conditions of the period created the need for the emergence of a new understanding. In this respect, the AKP has filled this gap in the political landscape, and its liberal economic policies, moderate Islamist thesis, and discourse on establishing good relations with the West have led it to receive votes not only from Islamist segments who were victims of February 28 but also from other various segments of society. It can be argued that the February 28 postmodern coup left important traces in Turkish political life. Civilian politics was almost neutralized in the face of the army and the bureaucracy of the period. Religion was weakened in the face of secularism, and its social effects have spread over many years. Thus, a strong social reaction emerged and the groundwork was laid for the emergence of a new formation whose influence in Turkish politics would last for many years. Relations between the army and civic groups entered a new phase, and the army gradually began to lose its influence over civilian politics. The February 28, 1997, MGK decisions led to the fall of the government in those days, but in terms of its consequences, it also marked an important turning point in Turkish political life. This process led to an increase in the need for peace and trust in society and pushed not only those directly victimized by it but also other segments expecting social rights and freedoms to search for an alternative. The AKP, which promised to respond to the expectations of society under the conditions of the period, was able to emerge stronger from the process.

- 1 Wikipedia, The 54th government of Turkey governed from June 28, 1996 to June 30, 1997. It was a coalition government formed by the Welfare party (RP) and the True Path Party (DYP) and was known as Refahiyol, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/54th_government_of_Turkey.
- 2 A body established on February 28, 1997, to monitor the implementation of the decisions of the MGK. It was founded by General Çevik Bir as part of the process related to the 1997 military memorandum. The group's main activity was to categorize politicians, military personnel, journalists, bureaucrats, and others according to their ethnic origin, religious affiliation, and political leanings and to monitor the activities of those deemed to pose a potential threat to secularism, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Working_Group#cite_note-1.
- 3 A mausoleum complex located in Ankara, Turkey. It serves as the resting place of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder and first president of the Turkish Republic. It was designed by architects Emin Onat and Orhan Arda; its construction began in 1944 and was completed in 1953. In addition to the mausoleum, the complex consists of various structures and monuments.
- 4 Persuasion rooms were set up during the February 28 process. Female students wearing headscarves who won the university exam were taken to these rooms when they were registering for study programs. In these rooms, they were forced to remove their headscarves; if they did not, they were threatened that either they would not be allowed to enter classes or would not be able to graduate from their departments.

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