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Where is Turkey going at full speed?

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Observing the atmosphere of domestic political reconciliation during and after the coup attempt on July 15, some expected that President Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) could use this positive energy to increase the quality of democracy in Turkey.

The four parties represented at parliament issued a joint declaration against the coup attempt, and they were united in accusing U.S.-based Islamist preacher Fethullah Gülen of being behind it. It is true that Erdoğan and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım did not want the Kurdish problem-focused Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) to join actions taken by the parties, saying that the HDP refused to unequivocally reject the acts of terror by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). But main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) head Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) head Devlet Bahçeli both agreed to take part in a commission to write a new constitution.

Today, the more pessimistic outlook is as follows:

- The HDP, with 59 seats in the 550-seat parliament (making it the third biggest group in the house), boycotted parliamentary works on Nov. 6, following the arrest of nine of its MPs,

including co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ. They are accused of being a member and helping a terrorist organization, the PKK. HDP spokesman Ayhan Bilgin denounced the arrests as a “coup against democracy in Turkey by the government,” while PM Yıldırım said a political party could never act as a shield for terrorism under the guise of duties at parliament.

- Nine executives and writers of the influential center-left opposition paper Cumhuriyet, including its editor-in-chief Murat Sabuncu and writer Kadri Gürsel - who is a board member of the International Press Institute (IPI) and the head of its Turkish chapter - were arrested on Nov. 5. They are accused of helping both the PKK and the “Fethullahist Terror Organization (FETÖ),” as the government denounces the secret Gülenist network. The number of journalists, writers and media executives in jail in Turkey has now increased to 142, according to the media platform website P24.

- Pumping up the radical demands after the coup attempt, the AK Parti government has pledged to bring back the death penalty to the Turkish constitution, after its abolition in 2002 within the framework of harmonization with EU legislation. The MHP strongly supports a return of the death penalty, as well as the arrest of HDP deputies. The CHP accuses the MHP of reaching a covert “death penalty in return for the executive presidency” bargain with Erdoğan and the AK Parti.

- Both Erdoğan and Yıldırım have announced that shifting from a parliamentary system to an executive presidential system through constitutional amendments is the AK Parti’s number one priority. Since AK Parti votes alone are not enough to take the issue to a referendum, extra support is needed. The MHP would not give that support unless its conditions are met. But Erdoğan seems to be determined to reach that goal as soon as possible, claiming that further consolidation of power with fewer checks and balances is the only preemptive way to avoid another coup attempt. Kılıçdaroğlu denounces such moves as a “counter-coup.”

- In answer to EU criticisms on freedom of expression restrictions and the death penalty, government members say such words are no longer relevant. That also goes for being ousted from the Council of Europe, of which Turkey was one of the founding members. While still carrying out talks with the Turkish government on visa flexibilities in return for tighter control over the flow of Syrian refugees, the EU is finally realizing that it has almost no political leverage left on Turkey.

- The CHP is among the sole opposition voices speaking aloud about the erosion of democratic life in Turkey. Kılıçdaroğlu, having survived a PKK attack against his motorcade a few weeks ago, is urging PM Yıldırım to “claim democracy in Turkey.” He is also trying to confront attempts from the government ranks, which accuse the CHP of providing protection to the so-called victims of prosecutions against the PKK and FETÖ. In this chaotic atmosphere there remains little room to maneuver to criticize the government’s foreign policy, as Turkey is deploying even more troops along the Syrian and Iraqi borders.

All these developments have been taking place at full speed, without putting the brakes on or lowering the gear. Erdoğan wants to achieve a smooth path for itself as soon as possible. Government circles see siding with Erdoğan as the only criterion for being against the coup

attempt and laying claim to Turkey's democracy.

To the question "Where is Turkey going The answer could well be: "It is not going to an advance democracy, at least."