



# PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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Brookings Institution

## “The Implications of Turkey’s Constitutional Court Decision on the Justice and Development Party (AKP)”

Falk Auditorium, 1775 Massachusetts Ave, NW

Wednesday, August 6, 2008 3:30pm

The Brookings Institution invited **Cagri Erhan**, **Ibrahim Kalin**, and **Murat Yetkin** to discuss the court rulings and its implications for Turkey’s relations with the United States and Europe. Cagri Erhan is Vice President of the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies, Ibrahim Kalin is the Founding Director of the Foundation for Political, Economic, and Social Research, and Murat Yetkin is a columnist for *Radikal*, a Turkish publication. Brookings Visiting Fellow and former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey **Mark Parris** moderated the event.

**Mark Parris** began the event lamenting the recent death of fellow Brookings colleague **Peter Rodman**, who died over the weekend due to complications of leukemia.

Parris first asked each of the speakers what was at stake in the court’s decision. Kalin suggested that the case was really a reflection of a debate within Turkey regarding its past, present and future, and ended on **“a happy note for the time being.”** Erhan disagreed with Kalin’s assessment of the court acting as a “political” body, instead of merely a judicial one, and noted the distinction between “democratic” and “legitimate” actions. Yetkin saw the court’s decision as a mark of progress because they were able to find a middle ground, **a result that would not have happened prior to Turkey’s 2001 constitutional amendments.**

In regard to the role of the military, Erhan declared the military’s uncharacteristic silence was evidence that **Turkey passed the latest “democratic test”** and signified a “good step forward for democracy.” Kalin agreed, noting a rapprochement allowing **“some measure of confidence building between the AKP and military”** for the last 6 years.

In regard to future political battles, Kalin suggested that the AKP will remain under close scrutiny at least until the March 2009 elections. However, Kalin noted that **the underlying problem was not resolved.** “Now they won’t touch these issues [headscarf] because it will lead to a crisis, but sweeping under the rug doesn’t solve it. We have to find a way to form national reconciliation, and now that may be harder.”

In regard to political opposition, Erhan argued that the problem in forming a competitive opposition party **stems from a Turkish party system that is undemocratic.** Party leaders make

decisions and impose it on the party, instead of taking a consensus of its members. Without this, it will be difficult to mount a real political challenge to the AKP.

In regard to influence by the E.U., Kalin suggested that responses by E.U. officials led to debate within Turkey on what it means to join the E.U. and share sovereignty with other states. Erhan was quick to argue that political progress over the last decade in Turkey was due in part to E.U. candidacy, however he noted that now **many Turks are now skeptical of the E.U.** because they question whether the E.U. has a shady relationship with the AKP. In addition there are fears now that the Turkish court is susceptible to outside pressures.