



Taksim Square **A Spatial Centre of the** **Political Conflicts in** **Turkey**

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The Republic of Turkey was established after the Ottoman Empire in 1923 and the political regime completely changed. In the years between 1923-1945, after the establishment of the republic, the country had only one political party in the parliament – Republican People’s Party (CHP). It can be said that the political process of Turkey just started to get shaped through the multi-party system and the establishment of non-governmental organizations in the country in the 1950s. The main purpose of this essay is to argue that Turkey has had an internal political battle from the 1950s to the present. To arrive at the claim of the internal political battle, the political process of Turkey will be discussed in three parts – 1923 to 1950, 1950 to 2002 and 2002 to 2013. In other words, the process of the one-party system, the effects of the multi-party system and the AK Party (Justice and Development Party – the existing government) period will be analyzed in terms of political conflicts.

Without doubt, the demonstrations and bloody events have been the most obvious signs of the battle. However, it is such a battle that it does not only continue with bloody events but also some other actions. For instance, when governments make big decisions, opposition political parties, non-governmental organizations and vocational organizations usually organize big protests in response. On the other hand, Turkey had two military coups in 1960 and 1980 and a few military memorandums in this period. The military overthrew governments for three times and closed political parties in order to make all the groups accept military’s power and domination.¹

After the political process of Turkey was explained, the essay will start with the stakeholders of the battle to describe the battle. The stakeholders will be categorized in five groups – governments, opposition political parties, non-governmental organizations, vocational organizations and the military. Although the actors of the groups have continuously changed, the essay will discuss how

¹ Kemal H. Karpat, *Türk Siyasi Tarihi: Siyasi Sistemin Evrimi* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2011), pp. 226-235.

the battle has progressed and got shaped. The second purpose of this essay is that, according to the political process and events, the battle needs to be evaluated in two stages – the physical process and the psychological process. The second half of the essay will illustrate both processes of the battle in Taksim Square in Istanbul (fig. 1). It is such an important square that a commission was established in 1926 to have a monument of the republic in the square.² The monument was completed and placed in the square with a great ceremony in 1928.³ Taksim Square is also very significant due to the fact that it has been one of the major spaces in which both stages of the battle have taken place.



Figure 1. *Taksim Square*, Photograph by Bertil Videt

Although activities are usually shifted towards Istiklal Street, Taksim Square is always the meeting point and live 24/7 with users of all ages.⁴ Apart from its intensive use, the square is also used for ceremonies by the government and demonstrations by non-governmental organizations.⁵ However, the process of the square after the 1980s reveals the change of use from political reasons to

² Çelik Gülersoy, *Taksim: Bir Meydanın Hikayesi* (Istanbul: TTOK Yayınları, 1986), p. 27.

³ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴ Aybike Yıldız, 'Tarihsel Birikime Sahip Kentsel Açık Alanların Dinamizmi: İstanbul Kent Örneği; Beyazıt Meydanı, Sultanahmet Meydanı ve Taksim Meydanı' (MA Dissertation, Istanbul Technical University, 2007), p. 65.

⁵ *ibid.*

other purposes such as transport and entertainment.⁶ After all, it could be said that Taksim Square is the most important square in Istanbul and it always maintains its significance because it connects the different parts of the city to each other through its geopolitical location.⁷

According to the survey conducted with 925 people in March 2013 for this essay, 403 of the respondents use Taksim Square at least once a month; 681 of the respondents use the square at least once every six months and 821 of the respondents use the square at least once a year.⁸ In addition, the respondents use the square for four main purposes – meeting (499), entertainment (473), social-cultural activities (434) and transport-transit (333) – and five other purposes – shopping (269), business (136), political demonstrations (73), unpolitical demonstrations (34) and official ceremonies (22).⁹ To show the relationship between the square and the internal political battle, September 6-7 riots, the bloody Sunday and the bloody May 1 will be firstly analyzed in terms of the physical process of the battle and then Tarlabasi demolitions, the mosque conflict and the pedestrianization project of Taksim Square will be discussed in terms of the psychological process.

When the process of the establishment of the republic is reviewed again, as mentioned above, CHP was the only one political party and the government party as well in the period from 1923 to 1950. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his friends announced the republic as the new system on 29 October 1923.¹⁰ With the new system, Atatürk became the president of the republic by the TBMM (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey).¹¹ In the early years of the republic, the maintaining of the new system was so important that six reformist principles

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 67.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸ Selman Çelik, 'The Survey of Taksim Square', March 2013, <[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1AEZzkyaJxNOBTrZghYFguhCGNLrbl3cRXOhMy\]Hw5oA/viewanalytics](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1AEZzkyaJxNOBTrZghYFguhCGNLrbl3cRXOhMy]Hw5oA/viewanalytics)> [last accessed 3 April 2013].

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Kemal H. Karpat, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi 1800-2012* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), p. 138.

¹¹ *ibid.*

– republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, secularism and revolutionism – were brought in order to achieve a secular system.¹² In this period, also, the sultanate and caliphate were abolished and some laws were changed for secularism such as the removal of the law ‘the religion of Turkey is islam’.¹³



Figure 2. *Opening of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) in 1920*

However, the management of the government had some anti-democratic processes. Koçak (2013) claims that “Turkey had not been managed from 1923 to 1946 by the republic, but the chieftaincy”.¹⁴ He supports his claim with a rule of the old charter of the party that CHP has an unchangeable president and according to this rule Ataturk and Inonu were the unchangeable presidents of the party.¹⁵ Ataturk were called ‘eternal chief’ and after his death, Inonu were called ‘national chief’.¹⁶ In an extraordinary general assembly of CHP in 1946,

¹² *ibid.*, pp. 146-153.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Cemil Koçak, *Tarihin Buğulu Aynası: Efsaneler Çökerken* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2013), p. 229.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 232.

Inonu suggested changing the rule of unchangeable president and then CHP chose its president itself for the first time.¹⁷

Despite the strict rules of CHP and the government, some significant improvements were taken place in the one-party period. For instance, the women were given their right to participate in the local elections in 1930 and then they were also given their right to be chosen as a reeve or village board member in 1932.¹⁸ Finally, the women were given their right to be chosen as a member of the parliament in 1934. 18 female parliamentarians were chosen for the first time in Turkey in 1935.¹⁹

Nevertheless, starting from 1925, the economic situation of the country were going in a bad way and then the worldwide economic crisis in 1929 highly affected the Turkish economy as well.²⁰ Ataturk was very worried and that is why he decided to encourage one of his friends (Fethi Okyar) in order to establish an opposition political party.²¹ The main purpose of Ataturk by doing so was having a different organization to check and question CHP.²² Then, an oposition political party named Free Republic Party was established in Turkey in 1930 for the first time.²³ However, the party suddenly became a strong competitor against CHP rather than only being an alternative party that questions CHP.²⁴ Hereby, the party was closed just after the first three months by Fethi Okyar who was the president of the party and afterwards Inonu admitted that the closure of Free Republic Party had caused the delay of democracy for fifteen years in Turkey.²⁵

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 234.

¹⁸ Hakan Toy and Defne Elmacı, *Kronolojik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi* (Istanbul: Karma Kitaplar, 2010), p. 44.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Kemal H. Karpat, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi 1800-2012* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), p. 153.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 154.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 155.

²⁵ *ibid.*

As a result of the deteriorating situation, Inonu was dismissed as prime minister by Ataturk in 1937.²⁶ However, Ataturk was very ill in this process and he died in 1938 as the president of both Turkey and CHP.²⁷ Just after one day, Inonu was chosen for Ataturk's ranks by TBMM.²⁸ Inonu tried acting in a more democratic way as a president compared to his previous management processes when he was the prime minister and he even established internal control commissions to check the government and CHP.²⁹ Nevertheless, though Turkey was neutral in the World War II (WWII), the management was very weak and the economy was not going well.³⁰ Furthermore, the politics of the government against religion had caused discontent among the people and the people then started discussing and looking for solutions and alternatives.³¹ In this process, Inonu chose to keep being quite democratic and he started to eliminate some political constraints.³²

The political process of Turkey was moving into a new direction. However, the press was on probation of the government. Newspapers were writing more about foreign policy and the WWII rather than the domestic policy.³³ Writing about the government and criticizing it were completely forbidden and only some official notices and announcements were allowed to be given space in the newspapers.³⁴ All the news about the WWII had to be given just in a single line in order to avoid any type of chaos and also suicide news were completely forbidden to write.³⁵ When the newspapers cross the red lines of the government regarding the politics, they were being closed by the government for a while.³⁶

²⁶ Sina Akşin, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 231.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 232.

³⁰ Kemal H. Karpat, *Türk Siyasi Tarihi: Siyasi Sistemin Evrimi* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2011), p. 40.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 41.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Cemil Koçak, *Tarihin Buğulu Aynası: Efsaneler Çökerken* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2013), pp. 260-263.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

On the other hand, the relations with foreign countries were not considered enough for the whole process of the one-party system. Atatürk never went abroad because of the worries regarding assassinations.³⁷ In addition, İnönü only went to the Soviet Union and Italy when he was the prime minister and also only went to Egypt after he became the president of the republic.³⁸ Moreover, no important leader came to Turkey in this period, but the king Edward V of England.³⁹ Considering these relations, it could be obviously said that Atatürk and İnönü focused on more the domestic policy and wanted to maintain the new political system of the country – the republic.

When calendars were showing the year 1945, some strong opposition voices began to be heard in CHP. As a result of these critiques, Adnan Menderes, Fuat Köprülü and Celal Bayar decided to establish a new political party named Democratic Party (DP) in 1946.⁴⁰ Before DP was established, İnönü had said that the only missing part of the political system was an opposition political party that can question CHP in a democratic way.⁴¹ However, after the establishment of DP, Menderes and his friends were accused of rioting by CHP because DP was highly welcomed by the public in a very short while.⁴²

In this process, the general elections were taken place in 1946 but the election style was not satisfactory.⁴³ Due to the pressures, a new law that defines the establishment of the supreme election council was agreed in 1950, and by doing so, the election style was changed from ‘open-ballot-secret-counting’ to ‘secret-ballot-open-counting’.⁴⁴ Before this change, people had to vote by declaring their

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 274.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 275.

⁴⁰ Hakan Toy and Defne Elmacı, *Kronolojik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi* (Istanbul: Karma Kitaplar, 2010), p. 102.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ İlber Ortaylı and İsmail Küçükkaya, *Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yüzyılı 1923-2023* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012) p. 171.

⁴⁴ *op.cit.*

choices and the counting process was being taken place in secret.⁴⁵ Moreover, if a political party won the elections in a city through only one vote difference, other parties had no parliamentarian chosen in that city.⁴⁶ Because of this rule and the election style (voting and counting), DP had only 66 parliamentarians in the 1946 elections.⁴⁷ After the democratic changes, DP had 408 out of 487 parliamentarians chosen and CHP had only 69 parliamentarians chosen in the 1950 elections.⁴⁸ This was the first time in the history of Turkey that CHP lost the elections and left the government to another party. In other words, the actual process of the multi-party system in Turkey was just beginning in the 1950s.

Menderes, as the new prime minister, established the government and started the changes in the country in the 1950s. First of all, religious prohibitions were abolished and foreign investments were supported and hereby Turkey was agreed as a member of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in 1952.⁴⁹ Visibly, everything was going in a good way and DP also won the 1954 elections by wide margin.⁵⁰

After the second victory, DP focused on economics and industrialization. As a general principle, DP also encouraged the public to invest in, apart from establishing governmental institutions.⁵¹ However, the politics of economics caused a big income difference in the public and particularly the fixed-income were affected from the economic implementations.⁵² The public and the outs then started to discuss the future of the government and its implementations.

⁴⁵ Sina Akşin, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 244.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 245.

⁴⁸ Kemal H. Karpat, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi 1800-2012* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), p. 168.

⁴⁹ Hakan Toy and Defne Elmacı, *Kronolojik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi* (Istanbul: Karma Kitaplar, 2010), pp. 102-103.

⁵⁰ *op.cit.*, p. 171.

⁵¹ Ali Yaşar Sarıbay, *Türkiye’de Modernleşme Din ve Parti Politikası: “MSP Örnek Olayı”* (Istanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1985), pp. 92-93.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 93.

These discussions especially centered in non-governmental organizations after the 1950s.

Non-governmental organizations were not allowed in Turkey during the years of the one-party period, but with the 1950s, DP allowed non-governmental organizations.⁵³ When the opposition voices started getting louder, DP tried dominating them rather than responding the critiques or making changes on requests.⁵⁴ Actually, DP's giving the green light to non-governmental organizations was because DP had intended to reach the people who are not interested in politics and do not enter any political environments.⁵⁵ However, it can be said that because DP was in the central-right wing, Menderes and his friends only thought to establish the non-governmental organizations in the same direction. In other words, DP did not think of the establishments and empowerment of the non-governmental organizations in the opposite direction (the left wing) and those organizations would have an important role on the way of the future of DP.

Finally, university students were included in the discussions and demonstrations. DP wanted help from the military to stop the students but the military refused to act against the students.⁵⁶ As a result of all the violence events, the military took over the administration and staged a military coup just in a few hours on 27 May 1960.⁵⁷ In spite of everything, the coup would be the first black mark on the way of democracy of Turkey, but not the last one. The military established courts and 402 defendants were sentenced to life

⁵³ Aysen İğci, 'Sivil Toplum Kuruluşu Üyeliğinin Siyasal Katılma Davranışı Üzerindeki Etkisi: Isparta Örnek Olayı' (MA Dissertation, Suleyman Demirel University, 2008), p. 17.

⁵⁴ Ahmet İçduyu, Zeynep Meydanoğlu and Deniz Ş. Sert, *Türkiye'de Sivil Toplum: Bir Dönüm Noktası; Uluslararası Sivil Toplum Endeksi Projesi (STEP) Türkiye Ülke Raporu II* (Istanbul: TÜSEV Yayınları, 2011), p. 56.

⁵⁵ Ayşe Elif Kaya and Zakir Avşar, 'A Political Communication Trial of Democrat Party Over Civil Society: Motherland Front Example', *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies*, 6/2 (2013), pp. 397-416.

⁵⁶ Kemal H. Karpat, *Türk Siyasi Tarihi: Siyasi Sistemin Evrimi* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2011), p. 148.

⁵⁷ ibid.

imprisonment and other heavy punishments.⁵⁸ However, it was the worst that Menderes as the prime minister and two other ministers were executed on 16-17 September 1961.⁵⁹



Figure 3. *Execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in 1961*

After the coup, the military was in control for a while with some strict changes such as closure of political parties and writing of a new constitution.⁶⁰ Then, though the military allowed the establishments of the political parties again, no party could become the government party itself and that is why, for the first time in the political process in Turkey, three coalition governments among the parties were established in the years between 1961 and 1964.⁶¹

However, Justice Party (AP) came to power in 1965 and stayed as the government party until 1971. Yet, in the second half of the 1960s, the events between the left and right wings became intensified.⁶² The military was uncomfortable with AP and eventually the second intervention (memorandum)

⁵⁸ Hakan Toy and Defne Elmacı, *Kronolojik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi* (Istanbul: Karma Kitaplar, 2010), p. 148.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Kemal H. Karpat, *Türk Siyasi Tarihi: Siyasi Sistemin Evrimi* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2011), p. 154.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 157.

⁶² Hakan Toy and Defne Elmacı, *Kronolojik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi* (Istanbul: Karma Kitaplar, 2010), p. 199.

was taken place by the military on 12 March 1971 by being given a notice to the president of the republic to make the government resigned.⁶³ After the memorandum, the Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel and the government resigned as expected.⁶⁴

During the years between 1971 and 1980, other coalitions were trying to fix the economy but they could not be successful. Furthermore, the left-right fights were becoming intensified again.⁶⁵ Eventually, the military actualized the third intervention and the second military coup on 12 September 1980.⁶⁶ This coup was planned more in details in comparison with the previous one; however, as expected, the political parties were closed again for three years and the military junta designed a new constitution in 1982.⁶⁷ The junta was so horrific that Kenan Evren, the head of the junta, defends himself by saying that “we were extremely equitable that if we had executed one from the left wing then we also executed another one from the right wing”.⁶⁸

In 1983, the country was going back to its normal course and Motherland Party (ANAP) was established by Turgut Ozal in this process. ANAP was the government party for the years from 1983 to 1991. Ozal followed a liberal way and made a lot of big changes in the country as the prime minister but then he became the president of the republic and the party began to retrogress.⁶⁹

With the 1990s, National Outlook Movement, which is founded by Necmettin Erbakan, started growing rapidly. The movement's main desire was an islamic

⁶³ Kemal H. Karpat, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi 1800-2012* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), pp. 203-209.

⁶⁴ op.cit., p. 201.

⁶⁵ ibid., p. 263.

⁶⁶ Sina Akşin, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), pp. 275-276.

⁶⁷ ibid.

⁶⁸ Davut Dursun, *Ertesi Gün*, (Documentary Film, 1999).

⁶⁹ Hakan Toy and Defne Elmacı, *Kronolojik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi* (Istanbul: Karma Kitaplar, 2010), p. 284.

management.⁷⁰ Erbakan's last party – Welfare Party (RP) – became to power as a government partner in 1996 and especially the military was worried with the situation.⁷¹ Eventually, the relationships were broken and a manifesto of a national security council (MGK), in which the government and the military come together, was announced on 28 February 1997. According to the manifesto, the military was forcing the government to change its politics to a very strict and secular way.⁷² Then the process after the manifesto was named 'the process of 28th February' and the manifesto itself was called 'the post-modern coup'.⁷³ As a result of the post-modern coup, the Prime Minister Erbakan resigned on 18 June 1997.⁷⁴

The economy of Turkey was going very bad when calendars showed the beginning of the 21th century. Bulent Ecevit (Democratic Left Party-DSP), Devlet Bahçeli (Nationalist Movement Party-MHP) and Mesut Yılmaz (Motherland Party-ANAP) were in power when the financial crisis occurred in 2001 in Turkey.⁷⁵ Turkey was searching its new hope for the next periods to develop and progress again.

Virtue Party (FP), formerly Welfare Party (RP), met for a general congress in 2000 and the party was divided into two groups – the innovators and the traditionalists.⁷⁶ After FP was closed by the supreme court on 22 June 2001, the traditionalists established Felicity Party (SAADET) on 20 July 2001 and against

⁷⁰ Kemal H. Karpat, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi 1800-2012* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), pp. 232-235.

⁷¹ Ali Bayramoğlu, *28 Şubat Bir Müdahalenin Güncesi*, (Istanbul: Birey Yayıncılık, 2001), pp. 169-174.

⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 117-119.

⁷³ Hulki Cevizoğlu, *Yakın Zamanlar Tarihi*, (Istanbul: Ceviz Kabuğu Yayınları, 2001), p. 209.

⁷⁴ Kemal H. Karpat, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi 1800-2012* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), p. 239.

⁷⁵ Sina Akşin, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), pp. 304-311.

⁷⁶ *op.cit.*, p. 243.

SAADET, the innovators established Justice and Development Party (AK PARTY) on 14 August 2001 under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan.⁷⁷

Any time of coalitions was not wanted again by the public. Hereby, AK PARTY became the government party and had 363 out of 550 parliamentarians in the general elections were taken place on 3 November 2002. For the first time in the process of the republic, only two parties could enter the parliament – AK PARTY and CHP.⁷⁸ According to the results, it can be said that the opposition voters also wanted only one big party to question and check the government party.

Erdogan and his friends expressed their party at every turn as a new party which follows a conservative democrat line and differs from the national outlook movement parties.⁷⁹ As promised, they shaped their party program according to secular and liberal views and that is why every segment of the population has voted for AK PARTY for three consecutive periods.⁸⁰ To see this fact, looking at any of AK PARTY's congresses or meetings is enough to realize the harmony of the people of different ideologies. According to Kemal H. Karpat (2012), in the final analysis, AK PARTY is both the result and the operator of a social revolution in Turkey.⁸¹

AK PARTY has believed a liberal economy that the government firstly determines the changes and rules then recedes to maintain the system. For the AK PARTY's economic program, the privatizations of the government agencies are very significant to make a balance policy. As a result of the program, Turkey's economy became the 16th largest economy in the world in 2012.⁸² According to the sources, AK PARTY has increased the national treasury incomes fourfold and

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Sina Akşin, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), pp. 391-392.

⁷⁹ Kemal H. Karpat, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi 1800-2012* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), pp. 243-244.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 254.

⁸² İlber Ortaylı and İsmail Küçükkaya, *Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yüzyılı 1923-2023* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012) p. 263.

has reduced the inflation from 68.5% to 8.4%.⁸³ In general terms, it can be said that the policies followed by AK PARTY have provided welfare and confidence for the Turkish society.⁸⁴

Apart from internal developments, AK PARTY has given importance to external affairs and hence Turkey has become an international force in the world conjuncture in the last decade. Especially the last processes in the Middle East (revolutions and the Arab spring) were related to Turkey as a guiding sample. As a key idea, AK PARTY has defended the policy of 'zero problems with neighbors' and it is already argued in a book of Ahmet Davutoglu, the minister of foreign affairs of Turkey, in 2001 (*Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).⁸⁵

On the other hand, it can be said that Turkey has gained a new dimension on the way towards the European Union (EU). The law changes and reforms regarding the EU are the best examples of the process.⁸⁶ The EU process is so important that the government considers the EU as a guarantor of all the developments done so far by the government and the existing political system.⁸⁷ Despite the opposite opinions of some EU countries on Turkey's situation to become a full member, the EU membership process of Turkey continues to progress.⁸⁸

As mentioned before, the main purpose of this work is to argue an internal political battle in Turkey. When the political process of Turkey from the 1950s to the present was considered, it can be seen that the stakeholders of the battle (mentioned at the very beginning of the essay as five groups – governments, opposition political parties, non-governmental organizations, vocational

⁸³ op.cit., pp. 257-258.

⁸⁴ ibid., p. 258.

⁸⁵ ibid., p. 286.

⁸⁶ Akif Özer, 'Avrupa Birliğine Tam Üyelik Yolunda Türkiye', *Sayıştay Dergisi*, 69/4 (2008), pp. 49-71.

⁸⁷ Sina Akşin, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 316.

⁸⁸ Kemal H. Karpat, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi 1800-2012* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), p. 286.

organizations and the military) always change under the conditions of the process. Therefore, the essay will try to determine the major actors (power-holders) of the groups.

As the government parties or the partner parties of the governments, Justice and Development Party (AK PARTY), Republican People's Party (CHP), Democratic Party (DP), Justice Party (AP), Motherland Party (ANAP), True Path Party (DYP), Democratic Left Party (DSP), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and Welfare Party (RP) are the major stakeholders of the political battle in Turkey. The governments group could be seen the major stakeholders group of the battle because their works directly affect all the other groups.

The second effective group of the battle is the opposition political parties. When the process was analyzed again, Workers' Party (IP), Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), Felicity Party (SAADET), Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), Freedom and Solidarity Party (ODP) and Social Democratic People's Party (SHP) could be listed as the most powerful opposition political parties apart from some parties from the governments group, which become opposition parties depending on the elections.

Non-governmental organizations are the third group of the battle and these organizations are actually the most important reason of the physical process of the battle. On the other hand, if the physical process is agreed as the first stage of the internal battle, non-governmental organizations, in other words, could be seen as the actual activators of the battle. The major non-governmental organizations of the battle are The Revolutionary Confederation of Labor Unions (DISK), The Confederation of Public Laborers' Unions (KESK), National Turkish Student Union (MTTB), Association Against Communism, Association of Turkish Cyprus (KTC), Revolutionary Left-wing Groups and Taksim Platform.

As a helping group for the third group, vocational organizations are the secondary activators of the battle. They are separated from non-governmental organizations because they are partly governmental and include the people of

different ideas. Additionally, it is quite important to state that the vocational organizations that are active in the battle are always against the governments. Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), Istanbul Chamber of Architects and Istanbul Medical Chamber could be shown as the leading organizations of the group.

The last group of the battle is the military and particularly contains four military juntas – the junta of 1960, the junta of 1971, the junta of 1980 and the junta of 1997. Although a military has to avoid politics in democracies, the military coups (1960 and 1980) and the military memorandums (1971 and 1997) in Turkey are the obvious evidences that the Turkish military is also an important stakeholder of the internal political battle in Turkey.

When focused on the battle, the physical process – the first stage of the battle – started with the changed system barely after 1950 because of the one-party system in the years from 1923 to 1950. As mentioned above, the multi-party system and the establishments of non-governmental organizations were the actual activators of the battle. Depending on the political process of Turkey, the battle has shifted to a psychological process in the last decade. This essay will illustrate the battle with both of its processes by arguing that Taksim Square is one of the major spatial centres of the internal political battle in Turkey. Firstly, in spite of the fact that Taksim Square has had a great number of events, September 6-7 riots, the bloody Sunday and the bloody May 1 will be discussed in this essay as the major examples of the the physical process of the battle in Taksim Square.

As mentioned in the chapter of the political process above, the country began to polarize with the influences of opposition political parties and non-governmental organizations in the 1950s. On the other hand, the Cyprus problem was the most important issue discussed at that time. The news of the attack to the house that Ataturk was born in Greece was announced on the radio and published on

Istanbul Express Newspaper on 6 September 1955.⁸⁹ Following the news, some student groups and the members of Association of Turkish Cyprus (KTC) gathered in Taksim Square for a big protest.⁹⁰ After the meeting, starting from the square to Istiklal Street, the shops of non-muslims were stoned and the events spread to other regions.⁹¹ It is argued that about 100.000 people involved in the events in the two days.⁹²



Figure 4. *September 6-7 Riots in 1955*

Mithat Perin, the owner of the Istanbul Express Newspaper, claimed that the news was published without his desire but he became the first responsible person after the riots.⁹³ Then, special courts were established and thousands of people were questioned. The government firstly accused communists and traitors and then the senior members of KTC were arrested for planning an

⁸⁹ Dilek Güven, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Azınlık Politikaları ve Stratejileri Bağlamında 6-7 Eylül Olayları* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2006), p. 25.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹³ Rıfat N. Bali, *6-7 Eylül 1955 Olayları Tanıklar – Hatıralar* (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık, 2010), p. 315.

attack.⁹⁴ As the result, all the detainees were released due to the fact that the evidences were not enough. On the other hand, in this process, a martial law was announced after the riots in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir for six months on 7 September 1955 and the minister of interior resigned on 10 September 1955.⁹⁵

Above all, the September 6-7 riots were the first bloody result of the political conflicts in Turkey and an obvious sign for the upcoming events. On the other hand, a political issue in Turkey caused a big and physical result that also affects the apolitical for the first time. In addition, the apolitical got involved in politics for big events for the first time. Stakeholders of the battle just appeared after the riots as the government, opposition political parties and non-governmental organizations. The riots were so important that even the government would be seen responsible after the military coup in 1960.



Figure 5. *The Bloody Sunday of Turkey in 1969*

The second major event of the physical process of the battle is the bloody Sunday. In the late 1960s, communist movements and organizations were growing. On the other hand, nationalist and religious movements were also popular at the same time. A meeting against the United States Sixth Fleet and imperialism was held in Taksim Square by the communist organizations on 16

⁹⁴ op.cit., pp. 73-75.

⁹⁵ ibid., p. 187.

February 1969.⁹⁶ In response to the meeting, some extremely right-wing groups came to the square and attacked to the communist groups.⁹⁷ Two people from the communist side were killed and more than a hundred people were injured during the clash.⁹⁸

The right-wing groups in the clash were anonymous but the only thing known about them was that they went there only to kill the communists. Therefore, the clash was evaluated as a provocation by the youth leaders of the time.⁹⁹ However, on the other hand, the bloody Sunday in Taksim Square was the first major clash of the left-right political conflicts in Turkey. Non-governmental organizations and movements were becoming stronger on both left and right wings and a big clash was ineluctable.¹⁰⁰ In terms of the political battle, the stakeholders were just starting to polarize and the political conflicts were increasing rapidly in Turkey.

Despite the political tensions, a glorious celebration of May 1 (the labour day) was held in 1976 in Taksim Square with the participation of hundreds of thousands.¹⁰¹ For a larger celebration, The Revolutionary Confederation of Labor Unions (DISK) was responsible again in the next year and everything was looking fine.¹⁰² However, there were many groups and especially the communists were divided into two major groups – the Maoist and the Leninist. DISK declared that the Maoist groups would not be able to enter the square but the Maoist groups stated that they would enter the square at any price.¹⁰³ Finally, on the morning of May 1, 1977, about 500.000 people gathered in Taksim Square.¹⁰⁴ However,

⁹⁶ Reşat Kasaba, *Turkey In The Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 226–266.

⁹⁷ İZTV, *Yaşayan Mekanlar - Taksim Meydanı*, (Documentary Film, 2010).

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Harun Karadeniz, *Olaylı Yıllar ve Gençlik* (Istanbul: May Yayınları, 1974).

¹⁰¹ Hakan Toy and Defne Elmacı, *Kronolojik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi* (Istanbul: Karma Kitaplar, 2010), p. 246.

¹⁰² Korhan Atay, *1 Mayıs 1977 İşçi Bayramı Neden Ve Nasıl Kana Bulandı?* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2012), p. 13.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 14.

anonymous people started to shoot people at random in the square when the president of DISK approached to finish his speech.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, 34 people died and 130 people were injured in the square.¹⁰⁶ This massacre was then called 'the Bloody May 1'. The police arrested 470 people after the massacre but neither the responsible could be caught nor the reason of the massacre could be clarified.¹⁰⁷ CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) of the USA, MIT (National Intelligence Organization) of Turkey and Counter-Insurgency in Turkey were discussed as the actual responsible.¹⁰⁸ However, it was such a professional attack that there were no evidence to find the killers.



Figure 6. *The May 1 Meeting in Taksim Square in 1977*

The bloody May 1 in 1977, from another perspective, was very close to the upcoming military coup in 1980. That is why, the massacre could be seen as a

¹⁰⁵ Mahir Öztaş, *Taksim: Bir Şenliği Yaşamak* (Istanbul: Heyamola Yayınları, 2010) pp. 87-88.

¹⁰⁶ Sina Akşin, *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 271.

¹⁰⁷ Hakan Toy and Defne Elmacı, *Kronolojik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi* (Istanbul: Karma Kitaplar, 2010), p. 248.

¹⁰⁸ Korhan Atay, *1 Mayıs 1977 İşçi Bayramı Neden Ve Nasıl Kana Bulandı?* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2012), p. 26.

milestone for the coup and if the May 1 could be clarified, the coup could be prevented as well.¹⁰⁹ When the process between the bloody May 1 and the military coup in 1980 is analyzed, it can be clearly said that the May 1 has an important role for the conflicts between the left and right wings. Particularly, the individual murders (including the president of DISK's) after the May 1 reveal the importance of the May 1 in Turkey.¹¹⁰

When all the major events of the political process in Turkey are analyzed, it can be clearly seen that the physical stage of the battle ends with the AK PARTY governments because the country has started to improve in the last decade. The violent and bloody events have become tense discussions. Although the bloody events stopped, the battle continues in the psychological process. All the actors now try to dominate each other without resorting to violence, but in democratic ways as much as possible. To illustrate the psychological process of the battle by using Taksim Square, the essay will consider the three major conflicts occurred in the square – Tarlabasi demolitions, the mosque conflict and the pedestrianization project.

The psychological process has began step by step before the AK PARTY period. In 1986, Bedrettin Dalan was the president of IBB (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality) as a member of ANAP that was the existing government party. As the president of IBB, he started the Tarlabasi demolitions right next to Taksim Square.¹¹¹ The explained aims were that the region and the square had to have a 36-meter-long avenue and the Tarlabasi region needed to get rid of being a 'sex market'.¹¹² For the first stage, 16 historic buildings were demolished.¹¹³ The demolitions were not allowed but Dalan said "we run a red light sometimes".¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 59.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 67.

¹¹¹ Rıfat N. Bali, 'Bir Varmış Bir Yokmuş, Bir Zamanlar Bu Diyarın Azınlıklar Yaşarmış', *Virgöl*, 25/1 (1999), pp. 4-7.

¹¹² Yücel Gürsel, 'Beyoğlu'nun Yıkımı ve Şehirlerimizin Geleceği', *Mimarlık*, 87/1 (1987), pp. 47-48.

¹¹³ Yücel Gürsel, 'Tarlabası Yıkımlarının Perde Arkası', *Mimarlık*, 86/2 (1986), pp. 21-22.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

Then, 15 of the buildings demolished were detected as registered historical monuments.¹¹⁵



Figure 7. *Tarlabasi Demolitions in 1986*

The Tarlabasi conflict was very popular in discussions but Dalan said “they clamor just because of 3-5 buildings” in spite of all the reactions.¹¹⁶ The reactive were worried that skyscrapers would be built instead of the historic buildings in the Tarlabasi region due to the fact that Dalan had indicated Tarlabasi Boulevard for the new 34 major investments.¹¹⁷ Because Tarlabasi is very close to Taksim Square, the buildings thought in the region would have great values. Above all, as a result of the process, 370 historic buildings (167 of the buildings are registered historical monuments) were demolished by IBB in the years between 1986 and 1988 to open the Tarlabasi Boulevard.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Yücel Gürsel, ‘Beyoğlu’nun Yıkımı ve Şehirlerimizin Geleceği’, *Mimarlık*, 87/1 (1987), pp. 47-48.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Burak Kara, ‘Elveda Tarlabası...’, *Gazete Vatan*, 18 Dec. 2011, <<http://haber.gazetevatan.com/elveda-tarlabasi/418561/1/gundem>> [last accessed 19 April 2013].

It can be said that the actors of the Tarlabasi conflict in the late 1980s were IBB and vocational organizations such as Istanbul Chamber of Architects. However, the conflict became popular again with new actors in the AK PARTY period. Beyoglu Municipality of Istanbul has started a new project named ‘Tarlabasi Renovation Project’. According to the project, 269 historic buildings (188 of the buildings are registered historical monuments) will be renewed in the Tarlabasi region.¹¹⁹ The project includes 52% residential area, 12% trade area, 17% tourism area and 14% office area.¹²⁰ However, Istanbul Chamber of Architects and some non-governmental organizations protest the project as they are worried what the ‘renovation’ means in terms of the project. The protestors claim that the history of Tarlabasi will be lost after the project because the municipality considers new demolitions. Above all, from another perspective, the Tarlabasi conflict is very important due to the fact that it is one of the major conflicts that direct the internal political battle to a non-physical stage in a democratic way.

Another important issue is that the stakeholders have always annoyed each other because of the mosque conflict in Taksim Square. Basically, the conflict starts with the fact that Erbakan’s Welfare Party (RP) was based on religious movements. In 1995, Erbakan said “we are going to build a mosque in Taksim Square and moreover we are going to do that in the recreation part of the square”.¹²¹ However, Erbakan was not yet in power when he said that sentence. As the result, the mosque could not be built in the square because of the responses and protests after Erbakan came to power. Additionally, the desire of building a mosque in Taksim Square could be seen as one of the major reasons to the post-modern coup held by the military on 28 February 1997.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Beyoglu Municipality, ‘Tarlabası Yenileniyor’,
<<http://www.beyoglubuyukdonusum.com/tarlabasi/detay/Tarlabasi-Yenileniyor/30/35/0>> [last accessed 20 April 2013].

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ Milliyet Newspaper, ‘Taksim Camisini Parka Yapacağız’, 09 Jan. 1995, p. 1.

¹²² The Economist, ‘Istanbul’s Heritage Under Attack’,
<<http://www.economist.com/news/21567416-how-mosques-and-other-new-buildings-may-damage-one-europes-finest-cities-under-attack>> [last accessed 21 April 2013].

With the last AK PARTY government, the mosque conflict has become popular again. Prime Minister Erdogan said that a mosque would be built in Taksim Square. After the statement, many non-governmental organizations and some vocational organizations such as TMMOB litigated against any mosque project in Taksim Square. As a result of the case, the court declared “the thought field for a mosque in Taksim Square is not too large and there is an unsightly mosque in the same field. Also, there is no drawback in terms of the public interest due to the fact that the region’s muslim population has increased very much and there is a lack of mosque as there is no any other mosque built in the region in the last century”.¹²³

On the other hand, because Erdogan had some important positions in Erbakan’s political parties before, some opposition political parties, non-governmental organizations and vocational organizations are worried that Erdogan wants to realize the mosque dream of Erbakan in Taksim Square as revenge. Köksal (1997) claims that “any mosque project thought in Taksim Square is not an urban project, but a political project”.¹²⁴ It is because there was a mosque demolished in Taksim Square before and all the conflict has to do with whether a mosque should be built again. Although there is no certainly final project, the mosque conflict in Taksim Square is growing day by day.

As the most up-to-date conflict, the pedestrianization project of Taksim Square constitutes a large part of the psychological stage of the internal political battle in Turkey. Actually, the pedestrianization project also has a background story like the mosque conflict. Gümüş (2011) states that Taksim Square was also considered in terms of pedestrianization in the years 1987 and 1994.¹²⁵

¹²³ Nazlı Ilıcak, ‘Taksim’e Cami’, *Sabah Newspaper*, 23 Jun. 2012, <<http://www.sabah.com.tr/Yazarlar/ilicak/2012/06/23/taksime-cami>> [last accessed 21 April 2013].

¹²⁴ Kaan Köksal, ‘Taksim’e Cami Projesi Kentsel Bir Proje Değil, Siyasal Bir Projedir’, *Mimarlık*, 97/2 (1997), pp. 49-51.

¹²⁵ Arkitera, ‘Yıllar Sonra Tekrar Gündemde: Taksim Meydanı Yayalaştırma Projesi’, 01 Dec. 2011, <<http://www.arkitera.com/haber/index/detay/yillar-sonra-tekrar-gundemde--taksim-meydani-yayalastirma-projesi-/5054>> [last accessed 21 April 2013].

However, those projects could not be realized by the existing leaders of their times until AK PARTY put the project to its new activity program.

To make the pedestrianization idea realized, IBB (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality) prepared a new project and started working in Taksim Square on 05 November 2012.¹²⁶ According to the project (fig. 8), from the car park on Tarlabasi Boulevard to Divan Hotel, the field will be closed approximately 240 days during the construction of a tunnel that is considered for the vehicle traffic and the transport systems.¹²⁷ However, alternative circulation plans for the construction period were also planned not to hamper the daily life in the square.¹²⁸



Figure 8. *The Pedestrianization Project of Taksim Square by IBB*

¹²⁶ Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 'Taksim Meydanı Yayalaştırma Çalışmalarına Başlandı', <<http://www.ibb.gov.tr/tr-TR/Pages/Haber.aspx?NewsID=20709#.UXUfmIKsBvU>> [last accessed 21 April 2013].

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

Nevertheless, the project pauses sometimes because of the responses of some opposition political parties such as CHP, some non-governmental organizations such as Taksim Platform and some vocational organizations such as TMMOB and Istanbul Chamber of Architects. For instance, as a result of pressures, The Second Regional Board of Protection of Cultural Property in Istanbul refused the construction of the artillery barracks that can be seen in the fig. 8, however, The Supreme Council of the Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection (a higher assembly) then approved the construction.¹²⁹ The actual artillery barracks was demolished in 1940 and the field of the barracks became a recreation area.¹³⁰ The outs claim that IBB wants to rebuild the barracks to prevent any large-scale meetings against the government but IBB justifies itself by declaring that the total area for any large-scale meetings will be expanded more than ever. Above all, the protests continue in Taksim Square everyday since 05 November 2012.

In a final analysis, it can be easily agreed that an internal political battle has been in progress in Turkey. Although the physical process describes the first stage, the actual battle starts with the psychological stage. It is because the battle has spread to more people and organizations more than ever in the psychological stage. In addition, the psychological process has had much less time than the physical process. On the other hand, the stakeholders have learnt how to fight without violence and weapons to show their power in the psychological process of the battle.

As a spatial centre of the battle, Taksim Square has been always affected from the political issues in Turkey and that is why it has been always changed in the hands of the stakeholders as an expression of power. From the physical to the psychological process, the square has been sacrificed starting from the centre to its surroundings. Taksim Square and its surroundings today have a lot of signs of the past leaders just because of the internal political battle in Turkey.

¹²⁹ Sabah Newspaper, 'Topçu Kışlası İçin Son Karar Verildi', 28 Jun. 2013, <<http://www.sabah.com.tr/Yasam/2013/02/28/topcu-kislasi-icin-son-karar-verildi>> [last accessed 21 April 2013].

¹³⁰ Mahir Öztaş, *Taksim: Bir Şenliği Yaşamak* (Istanbul: Heyamola Yayınları, 2010) p. 75.

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Illustrations

Figure 1. *Taksim Square*, Photograph by Bertil Videt.
<<http://alturl.com/8t9ki>> [last accessed 29/03/2013].

Figure 2. *Opening of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) in 1920*.
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Figure 3. *Execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in 1961*.
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