

FINANCIAL TIMES

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Turkish democracy

The armed forces have always had a special role in the Turkish republic. Under its founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (who died in 1938) it was in essence a military dictatorship. In 1950 it became a multi-party democracy, in which power could and did change hands through elections. Yet three times since then the army has intervened to depose the elected government, and even the politicians directly affected have been reluctant to protest. Many seem to accept that the army has a legitimacy, as guardian of the republic's core values, which they themselves somehow lack.

By and large, Atatürk's secular revolution was a success and few Turks now wish to reverse it. A benign view of Mr Necmettin Erbakan, the present prime minister, would be that he aims at a historic compromise, reconciling Turkey's Islamic tradition with the more modern values introduced by Atatürk, including notably democracy.

A less benign view is that the rise of Mr Erbakan and his Welfare party brings Turkey perilously close to a point of no return, after a long period in which Islamic education has been steadily expanding. After a mere five years of compulsory state education, increasing numbers of Turkish schoolchildren move on to special schools whose ostensible function is to train imams and preachers.

Turkey's secular establishment wishes to protect children

from obscurantist indoctrination in these schools by extending compulsory state education for another three years. More conservative Turks, not only in the Welfare party, see this as an unwarranted threat to religious and intellectual freedom. It is not easy for outsiders to say who are the liberals and who the indoctrinators.

The army, however, is in no doubt, and it has decided to make the extension of state education the litmus test of Mr Erbakan's good faith. Mr Erbakan himself seems willing to accept this, as the price of staying in office, but the leader of his party in parliament has vowed to block it.

Most observers believe the government cannot last much longer. In the short run its fate depends on the junior partner in the coalition, the True Path party led by Mrs Tansu Çiller. So far she has pledged to keep the government in office, but maybe only in order to negotiate a new coalition from a position of strength.

The Welfare party does not have a majority on its own, and it won only 21 per cent of the votes in the last election. Most Turks are attached to secularism, and there would be nothing undemocratic about forming an alternative government composed of secular parties. But in a mature democracy, elected leaders would take such decisions for themselves, without being prodded by the army.

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NEWS: EUROPE

Turkey's government under pressure as army demands anti-Islamist measures as 'matter of life or death'

Erbakan under fire from generals

By John Barham in Ankara

Turkey's generals yesterday increased pressure on the Islamist government of Mr Necmettin Erbakan to quit, stating that "eliminating fundamentalism is a matter of life or death for Turkey".

Senior officers reiterated their stance three days after telling Mr Erbakan that he must implement anti-Islamist measures or resign.

The generals also demanded a tougher policy towards Greece and Iran, which they accused of provoking separatist and Islamist agitation in Turkey.

General Kenan Deniz, head of the army's internal security department, said: "The threat to Turkey is coming from the PKK [Kurdistan

Workers' party] and fundamentalism. All organisations aiming to destroy Turkey are in close co-operation no matter what their origins."

But Mr Erbakan denied the rigidly secularist armed forces threatened Turkey's fragile democracy, saying: "The army is completely loyal." He said rumours of an impending coup were "all lies." Mr Erbakan said he was willing to hold early elections: "Today, at any moment, whoever wants it, we are ready for elections."

The generals spared no effort at a news conference yesterday to ensure that Turkey's most influential political commentators, editors and television presenters understood their message. Lutrid slides of

blood-spattered corpses, maps and graphs depicted the progress of the struggle against the PKK.

Gen Deniz claimed Greece and Iran were supporting both Kurdish rebels and Islamist extremists, implying that Refah had ignored the armed forces' warnings against rapprochement with Iran.

He said: "Turkish society would not tolerate those who want to establish a primitive regime by holy war."

In a setback for European Union-led attempts to improve Turkish-Greek relations, the commanders said they would not tolerate "Greece's expansionist attitude".

Admiral Mustafa Ozbey, head of the general staff's Greek desk, stated that Athens was attempting

to foment "conflict between secularists and Islamists, Turks and Kurds" and isolate "Turkey from Europe and the EU".

Although he said Turkey sought peaceful dialogue with Athens, he warned that Greece's objective "is to take Cyprus into the European Union and so achieve union with Greece. The [Greek and Greek Cypriot] joint defence doctrine is part of a possible operation to surround Turkey."

● Greece yesterday maintained its long-standing veto on European Union financial aid to Turkey, damping hopes of an improvement in the rocky relationship between the EU and Ankara. Lionel Barber writes from Luxembourg.

The veto cast a shadow over the

long-delayed Association Council between the EU and Turkey which was due last night to be attended by Mrs Tansu Ciller, Turkish foreign minister.

Despite intensive diplomatic efforts to unblock aid worth Ecu375m (\$424m), Mr Theodoros Pangalos, Greek foreign minister, said Athens could not lift the veto until Turkey stopped threatening Greek sovereignty in the Aegean. But he agreed to take part in the Association Council.

The long-blocked financial aid package is an integral part of the package which the EU offered to Turkey when it concluded a customs union, which came into force in January 1996.

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Ο Ερμηνεύων βάζει τα αυτιά τους στα αφηγήματα

- Οι Τούρκοι στρατηγοί, πάλι, άσχημα εύγλωτο γιέβει στην κυβέρνηση του Ισχυριστή Ερμηνεύων. Ζήτησαν εκζηρότερη νομοτική προς την Εγγάδα κ' το Ιράν, που προταζούν διασκό κ' αναταραχή στους Ισχυριστές στην Τουρκία.
- Ο β. Δελιζ δήλωσε ότι η Εγγάδα κ' το Ιράν έχουν κ' οι δύο στήριξη των Κούρδους αντάρτες κ' τους εφευρετικές Ισχυριστές.
- Μερικοί από αδυναμία της Ε.Ε να βεβαιώσει ως Εφύρο-Τουρκικές σχέσεις οι στρατηγοί δήλωσαν ότι δεν θα κεντρώνουν την επεξεργασία της Εγγάδας. Ο στρατηγός Μ. Ουβέγ γόνισε ότι η Αθήνα προσηλαί να ηυροδοτήσει βήμους ή ανάμεσα στους φαίρους κ' των Ισχυριστές Τούρκους κ' Κούρδους κ' να αποκαλύψει την Τουρκία από την Ευρώπη κ' της Ε.Ε.
- Αν κ' η Τουρκία επιδιώκει ειρηνικό διάλογο με την Αθήνα προειδοποίησε ότι ο στόχος της Αθήνας είναι η επανίδει η Κύπρος στην Ε.Ε κ' έτσι να οφθαλμώνσει με ένωση με την Εγγάδα. Το ενιαίο αφηγητικό δίπλωμα Εγγάδας Κύπρου είναι ανδρών να απορροφεί μέρος μιας εισεργασίας να απορροφούν η Τουρκία.