

TOWARD A FINAL CONFRONTATION

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✘ **Yavuz Baydar**, [Today's Zaman](#), 22 January 2012

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Continuous signs of erratic behavior of the government help establish a widespread pessimism. Emre Uslu -- who wrote yesterday about his concern about a tough 2012 -- and many others have a point. Something is wrong in Ankara, and it is, paradoxically, both easy and difficult to pinpoint. The verdict on the Dink case was the last straw in spreading the depression. The process of passing the match-fixing law, and the venomous debate about it was the first blow. The massacre in Uludere was the second one. All three are enough to depict the way of governance that has become the trademark of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) since the elections in June last year. "I do not recognize the AK Party I have known. No longer," I was told by a source from within. This is a view that you hear more and more these days.

Some explain this with "power fatigue;" that a 10-year period has now shown the limitations of the ruling party, its "end of the road." If this is meant to be "over-relaxation," I agree. But, there are also others -- like Uslu -- who argue that the power relations in the upper echelons of the AK Party and with the mainly Kemalist state actors are undergoing serious change. This is also true, and it would be fair to say that what takes place is a combination of the two.

The AK Party stands now without a political challenge -- neither in nor outside Parliament -- and in its visible immobility regarding reforms and Kemalist-style hard-line vis-à-vis the Kurdish Question, it -- again paradoxically -- becomes vulnerable. It is now turning slowly into a nest for growing infighting -- just like Germany's Christian Democrats under an invincible Helmut Kohl after a decade. The sense of political "omnipotence" of the party also has created a delusion that it can resolve any issue whichever way it wants.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan rules single-handedly with his sight on the presidency, and the more this style is adopted, the more distant the party becomes from the very base it is based on: the grand coalition of the electorate. The AK Party's erratic moves create a mass-perception in such a way that more and more will come to question the difference between the benevolent and malevolent leadership. It seems inevitable, because the election pledges of the AK Party are no longer seen as crucial issues by its deputies. The "fatigue" or "relaxation," depending on the way you look at it, in politics at such a critical time with all sorts of crisis inside or out, stems from the sense that "We will be in power at least 20 years or more" -- a sense that has spread like a disease among the deputies.

Issues again pile up. The so-called "third package of judicial reform" has been described as a disappointment even by those law experts who are close to the government; others call it a balloon. It contains only minor improvements in fundamental issues such as legal investigations against journalists, while it declares reforms in other areas (less punishment for those who issue bad checks, etc.) that will cause new debates about injustices. According to a fresh poll by Kadir Has University, those who demand a new constitution are now above 73 percent; but nobody seems to believe they will see that day.

Nobody can sincerely express belief that with the current escalation with the Kurdish segment -- the Uludere incident simply alienated Kurds further from Ankara, and Kurdish Communities Union (KCK) operations do not seem to help the Kurdish vote run away from the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) -- a consensus is possible any longer.

The AK Party's opening gap with its key voter segments, its "eye for an eye" policies with the PKK-BDP shows, when combined with the outcomes of crucial cases like the Dink assassination, causes worry, more than anything else, about its political nature and weakness. The more it adopts the conventional manners of old Turkish politics, the more open it becomes as a target for the very forces of the state it now seems to ally itself with. The ancien régime is not dead; it is waiting its moment to take revenge against the party, which much more than any other in Turkey's history, shattered its foundations and privileges. If the AK Party's current mood is based on the conviction that the "gangster core" of the "shadow state" no longer poses a threat, it is simply a delusion. Alive and well, it has now chosen to invite the AK Party onto the old path, shrewdly paved with political mines.

Undoubtedly, we are now closer to witnessing various attempts to reverse all the reform processes with new tricks. If Erdoğan once more does not surprise us in 2012 and beyond, we will see an intense battle for democracy -- or not. The real struggle starts now, simply because all the ghosts are out of Pandora's Box.

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