

The last Turkish junta and the nazi « Machtergreifung »

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« ... it really did not look like a hotel. It rather resembled, to be honest, Auschwitz. » (Mustafa Akyol, A farewell to rulers in arms Tuesday, February 23, 2010)

Well, for German readers and those with specific historical insight, the better comparison would have been Dachau, or Buchenwald. You know, the first generation of Concentration Camps, or KZs, which targeted German politicians and unionists in first line. By the way it included some religious people, homosexuals, artists, and some of their own boys. They (that is the SS, or Nazi forces) applied quite the same methods, the same justifications, and they pursued the same targets and achieved them to a similar degree as did the Turkish coup.

In plain words, the 1980 coup in Turkey was faithfully following a Nazi model, indeed, but that of the takeover period, the « Machtergreifung » (or « catching of power »). Much similarity also with « Sledgehammer », by the way. What they achieved was to scare the people and make them followers. Hence, Mr. Idiz' observation (« Is this democratization or dissolution ? », Thursday, February 25, 2010), is no surprise in that « ... the military is the most trusted institution ». But do you understand what it actually means ?

The Turkish junta seems to have understood the two mechanisms suitable to evoke allegiance in the population beyond the fear they themselves caused : economic success, and war. In a way they failed in the first, because Özal applied a different method to achieve it, liberalization, quite successful economically, but in the long run politically harmful for the junta regime. Yet, it was incredibly valuable for the country.

The Nazi way was substantial and sustained (but by definition unsustainable) deficit spending, and in 1938 Germany was absolutely bankrupt. At that date, they saved themselves with robbing of Jewish fortunes, then the capture of (the) Austria (-n National Bank), then the Czech, Polish, Dutch, Belgian, Luxembourgian, Danish, French and so on. In the end, all to no avail but causing incredible destruction, and poverty beyond imagination throughout Europe. Look what the economic concepts in the respective Turkish circles are today, and you may understand what an ultimate disaster Özal may have saved you from by a hair's breadth.

But implicitly it lead to today's stepwise civil revolution and therefore defeat of the junta.

The second way to make the « Machtergreifung » irreversible was the war itself, the threat to the people and the military discipline it brought about ; yet, the Turkish generals chose the war against « internal enemies ». Kurds, reactionarism, communism, you name it. And yes, a glimpse of external strive with those who volunteer for it, most prominently Greeks and Armenians (who remain the semi-internal post-Ottoman enemies, or the rivaling former Ottoman millets). But the civil war with the Kurds is the most « valuable » as it provides those fabulous funerals suitable to herd the public sheep behind the generals, ironically also the butchers. Are there journalists who still follow (or do they (mis-) lead ?) these masters ? Are there people who try to torpedo peace agreements with the Kurdish insurgents, for instance ? Something like shepherd dogs ?

All in all, this is a fascinating case of « alternative history ». What would have happened if the Nazis had

applied a different economic policy and avoided WW2 ? We may see a tentative answer in Turkey.

Anyway, of course, there emerges another question : Where did they get it ?

Who studied the Nazi example in so much detail and transferred the knowledge to Turkey ? Even some methods of humiliation, and of torture ? (Though, admittedly, already the Ottomans had a rich repertoire of these on their own.) Who replaced the economic trap with something more suitable for economic success in the medium term ? Time for conspiracy theories.

However, that may be left to historians. The more immediate question, naturally, is where everybody stands in late- to post-fascist Turkey, today. Who defends that regime, who tries to overcome it, and to which end, respectively ? Who uses cheap (or actually expensive ?) excuses ?

Curiously.