

Ahmet Furkan Cihangiroğlu*

Death of Turkish Democracy: The “Turkish-Style” Presidential System

STUDIA I ANALIZY

Keywords: presidentialism, separation of powers, checks and balances, authoritarianism, government system

Abstract: Turkey has adopted the presidential system over parliamentarism in 2018 with the promise that the new system would bring more stability, democracy, and economic growth. As being the most recent country which changed its government system through a referendum to presidentialism, Turkey constitutes a very important example to be analyzed in order to see the effects of it after a long-adopted parliamentary period in the 21st century. This paper compares the basic features of democracy as well as the democratic presidential systems with the example of Turkey and aims at finding out if the presidentialism has performed well and if not, why, in the light of examples and chosen indicators. Findings of this study suggest that presidential system led to a “consolidation of power” which in its nature is anti-democratic. Analysis of certain indicators show that presidentialism did not perform well in Turkey on democratic, political as well as economic fronts.

Introduction

Even though it is not possible to define democracy in a universally-accepted nature, Schmitter and Karl state that it is a system where the elected representatives of a society rule and in return they are accountable

* ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6316-0963>; PhD Candidate, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies University of Warsaw. Email: a.cihangiroglu@student.uw.edu.pl.

for the actions they take¹. This understanding contrasts with the narrower definition of it which is demonstrated by Huntington as being “a procedure when the people elect their rulers in competitive elections”². Since the existence of the “competitive elections” does not guarantee fairness and a democratic outcome in each case, expansion of the definition with the following conditions that can be regarded as fundamental prerequisites for a system to be recognized as being a democracy is needed: fair elections, universal suffrage, protection of liberties and separation of powers³. Morlino claims that a “good democracy” is the one which satisfies all of the citizens of a given country (equality), ensures liberty, provides the people with the competences to hold the elected officials accountable for their actions and respects the rule of law and the rights of its citizens⁴. Neubauer also adds that two conditions must be present in democracies, that are: the wide-communication of different competing groups in order to prevent majoritarianism where the opinions of the winner groups are enforced, and compliance in order to prevent the losing party from opting-out from the decision-making processes of states⁵.

Democratic governmental systems can be divided into three sub-categories: presidential, parliamentary and semi-presidential systems⁶. Lijphart, when it comes to the distinction of the first two suggests that in presidential systems the president serves for a fixed term without any interference (if no impeachment is motioned), is elected directly by the people (or through an electoral body) and is responsible for the execution all by him/herself whereas in parliamentary systems the government is bounded by the confidence of the legislative body, is born from within the legislature, and therefore is selected by the elected and, the executive body is comprised of the cabinet⁷. Even though this paper is not concerned about the semi-presidential systems, a brief explanation about them can be regarded as follows: the president in a semi-presidential sys-

¹ P. C. Schmitter, T. L. Karl, *What Democracy is... and is not*, «Journal of Democracy» 1991, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 76.

² S. P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oklahoma 1991, p. 6.

³ S. Mainwaring, *Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination*, «Comparative Political Studies» 1993, vol. 26, no. 2, p. 201.

⁴ L. Morlino, *What is a ‘Good’ Democracy?*, «Democratization» 2004, vol. 11, no. 5, p. 12.

⁵ D. E. Neubauer, *Some Conditions of Democracy*, «The American Political Science Review» 1967, vol. 61, no. 4, p. 1002.

⁶ B. Yavuz, *Türkiye’ de Yargı Bağımsızlığı ve Tarafsızlığı*, Ankara 2012, p. 15.

⁷ A. Lijphart, *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government*, Oxford 1992, pp. 2–3; *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, New Haven 2012, p. 17.

tem also is the head of the state and is directly (or indirectly like in the example of presidentialism) elected by the people, is not the sole actor in executive competences and shares power with a prime minister, is not dependent on the parliament but needs to work in harmony with it. The cabinet is also independent from the president and only responsible to the parliament and the dual power structure exists not to block any processes but to compose a balancing mechanism⁸. Features of both of the systems have advantages as well as disadvantages among each other for which it is not possible to state that one of them decisively prevails over the other one. However, a comparative analysis can be conducted to be able to understand the nature of them.

In order to understand the pre-2018 era and the democratic backsliding in Turkey, certain events should be mentioned that are the “Gezi Park Protests, the coup of 2016 and the state of emergency declared right after”. Though it is hard to pinpoint when exactly the anti-democratic practices had started in Turkey, those mentioned events had clearly shown that Turkey was in the direction of becoming a non-democratic country. Gezi Park Protests in 2013 showed a considerable amount of unsatisfied Turkish people who wanted their voices to be heard. Even though they started as a protest against the decision of the government to start a construction at the location of a park, it quickly turned into a mass-gathering in which people also showed their discontent with the governmental interference into people’s lives, freedom of speech and media⁹. The naming and shaming by the (then) prime minister, Mr. Erdogan, with his discriminative narrative and the police reaction showed that a fundamental as well as a constitutional right of citizens that is freedom of assembly was at stake. After the coup in 2016, the government had declared a state of emergency which lasted for two years during which the country was governed by decree-laws¹⁰. The backsliding however had been formally institutionalized when the presidential system was adopted in 2018. The pro-presidentialists claimed that the new system would bring more stability, increase the quality of democracy and lead to economic prosperity. 2018 also marks as the year when the

⁸ A. Siaroff, *Comparative Presidencies: The Inadequacy of the Presidential, Semi-presidential and Parliamentary Distinction*, «European Journal of Political Research» 2003, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 290–291.

⁹ K. Kirişçi, A. Sloat, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Democracy in Turkey: Implications for the West*, 2019, p. 2, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/FP_20190226_turkey_kirischi_sloat.pdf (15.07.2021).

¹⁰ Z. Yılmaz, *Erdogan’s Presidential Regime and Strategic Legalism: Turkish Democracy in the Twilight Zone*, «Southeast European and Black Sea Studies» 2020, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 265–266.

Freedom House has defined the status of Turkey to “not free” for the first time since it started reporting in 1999¹¹.

There are many publications regarding the possible effects and the applicability of the presidential system in Turkey, however, the true results upon adoption of the presidential system are not yet properly shown. The main objective of this paper is to show the effects of the presidential system practiced in Turkey and how they differ from the initial projections as well as the standard norms of democracy and democratic presidentialism. This paper hypothesizes that democracy in Turkey effectively came to an end because of the very nature of the new system and it proved poorly over the span of two years upon its adoption. In order to prove my hypothesis, the questions I answer in this paper are as follows:

1. What are the basic features of democratic presidentialism;
2. What are the differences between presidentialism and parliamentarism;
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of presidentialism;
4. What were the main motives for Turkish authorities to introduce a presidential system in Turkey, and;
5. How did the presidentialism perform in Turkey in the light of exemplary practices and certain indicators.

Research methods used in this paper include content analysis, comparative analysis, process tracing, and case study.

“The” Presidential System

Separation of powers is respected in presidential systems at the strictest level and in a more moderate way in parliamentary systems because, in presidential systems, the president is elected by the people separately from the legislators and charged with executing the state affairs whereas in parliamentary systems the executive organ derives from within the legislature by forming a cabinet¹². The separation of powers in parliamentary systems, often called as “soft separation of powers” defines the cooperation between the three organs and suggests a mutuality. The president in the presidential systems is the head of the state alongside with being the head

¹¹ Turkey | Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2018> (2.02.2021).

¹² G. E. Tosun, T. Tosun, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal İstikrar Arayışı: Başkanlık ve Yarı Başkanlık Sistemleri*, İstanbul 1999, p. 57.

of the executive organ and is not responsible to the parliament or senate for the actions he or she is taking, making the him/her only responsible to the citizens¹³. Also in presidential systems, the term of office is usually defined and limited in order to prevent the president from turning into an autocrat by maximizing his/her power. The president can only be dismissed from the office through impeachment upon serious charges which is not a regularly-occurring incident. The president can veto laws issued by the parliament in order to be negotiated again to either modify them or reach a higher number of supporters and the ministers appointed by the president are only accountable for their actions to him/her without the consent of the legislative branch, therefore there is no vote of confidence sought in order to form a government in presidential systems¹⁴.

Unlike having independent legislative and executive organs, parliamentarism refers to a mutual dependence theory on two main accounts: cabinet of the prime minister should be able to secure a majority of confidence by other parliament members, and the parliament can put an end to the existence of the government and call for early elections. Also, Montesquieuan understanding of the rigid separation of powers gives its place to a softer form in parliamentary systems¹⁵. In addition to given features, the president in a parliamentary system oversees the works of the government which turns the system into a dualistic one. Under parliamentarism, the executors are not being directly elected by the people and can take an active part in both the execution and in the works of the parliament¹⁶.

Presidential systems are often praised for their advantages on their four distinctive features, that are: the head of the executive body, as well as the state is being directly chosen by the people, separation of powers is ensured and applied more decisively, actions taken on state affairs constitute quicker nature and system is more stable than the other democratic ones¹⁷. Probably the biggest importance attributed to

¹³ K. Gözler, *Türk Anayasa Hukukuna Giriş*, Bursa 2010, p. 95.

¹⁴ S. Abdulkadirov, *The Failure of Presidentialism in Central Asia*, «Asian Journal of Political Science» 2009, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 288.

¹⁵ Ç. Zarplı, *Türkiye’de Başkanlık Sistemi Tartışmasının Kavramsal-Kurumsal Analizi: Kuvvetler Ayrılığı Prensiplerinin Kökenleri*, «Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Yönetim Araştırmaları Dergisi» 2015, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 171.

¹⁶ Ç. Çolak et al., *Comparative Analysis of the Turkish Presidential System with Government Systems Including Separation of Powers*, «Kastamonu Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi» 2017, vol. 18, iss. 1, p. 123.

¹⁷ A. Stepan, C. Skach, *Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism*, «World Politics» 1993, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 3–4.

presidentialism is the stability which translates into a continuous term of a government with no deadlocks, particularly compared to parliamentarism where the formation of coalitions, withdrawal of confidence votes, and early elections occur very often¹⁸.

Critics, on the other hand, tend to express the imperfections of presidential systems from many aspects. The first imperfection of presidential systems can be regarded as the dualistic nature of them. Dualism in presidential systems refers to two separate powers directly being elected by the popular votes of the society that are the parliament members and the president, and therefore it gives both of them a populist legitimacy. In case of any conflicts between the legislature and the execution, the existence of a democratic legitimacy cannot be a solution for both of the bodies are directly elected by the people¹⁹. Another issue with the presidential systems can be counted as their "winner takes it all" nature which is a solution to the problem of coalitions, similar to a zero-sum game. This brings three major problems: the creation of a state where the democracy belongs only to a majority, sometimes only a proportional one, a subdued opposition with no tools to change the political course until the next elections, and a polarized society created by the "us and them" narrative the system compels in a way²⁰. The lack of an alternative for confidence vote in presidential systems may also bring about the question of accountability, especially of those who are appointed by the president for government offices. Combined with fixed-term tenures it would be hard to hold anyone in the presidential system accountable for their actions, especially after their erroneous practices²¹. Some studies show that even though coalitions occur most frequently under parliamentarism, they are not only limited to them for around thirty-two percent of coalitions took place under presidential systems²². Also, leaders who lose their popularity cannot be replaced with more popular ones before their terms ended since no mechanisms are established to enable it.

¹⁸ J. J. Linz, *Democracy, Presidential or Parliamentary: Does It Make a Difference?, The Failure of Presidential Democracy: The Case of Latin America*, Baltimore 1994, pp. 13–14.

¹⁹ J. A. Cheibub, *Minority Governments, Deadlock Situations, and the Survival of Presidential Democracies*, «Comparative Political Studies» 2002, vol. 35, no. 3, p. 285.

²⁰ M. P. Jones, *Electoral Laws and the Effective Number of Candidates in Presidential Elections*, «The Journal of Politics» 1999, vol. 61, no. 1, p. 176; R. Türk, *Feasibility of Presidential System in Turkey*, «Turkish Journal of Politics» 2011, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 38.

²¹ M. S. Shugart, *Semi-presidential Systems: Dual Executive and Mixed Authority Patterns*, «French politics» 2005, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 325.

²² J. A. Cheibub et al., *Government Coalitions and Legislative Success under Presidentialism and Parliamentarism*, «British Journal of Political Science» 2004, pp. 572–573.

Upon their appointments, presidents might face legitimacy problems due to their dual functions that are: being nominees of political parties (in most cases) and being the heads of states and the presidents of all of their citizens. Another disadvantage of presidentialism is the case where the political party of a given president constitutes the majority in the parliament which ends the separation of powers and establishes a fusion of powers with a president who can also legislate who effectively may turn into an autocrat. Fish states that there is a correlation between the strength of the parliament in a presidential system and democracy: the stronger the parliament the more democratic the system²³.

Sartori claims that theoretically presidential systems are more susceptible to induce instability than parliamentary ones and the American Presidential System is nothing but an exception due to its as well as the country's unique characteristics²⁴. Those characteristics include the bipartisan political system where those parties do not differ from each other categorically and their members are not high-disciplined, making them more involved in local matters. Therefore, it is not easy to suggest that the success of American politics is a product of its political system. Cheibub and his group state based on their research that presidential democracies are expected to have a life-span of around twenty-four years whereas it is almost around seventy-four years in parliamentarism²⁵. Mainwaring shows that it is less likely to sustain the democracy in presidential systems, especially in those that have a multiparty system. Based on his research that covers forty years, only one (Chile) country out of thirty-two stable democracies had a multiparty presidential system and only four of them had the presidential system as opposed to twenty-four parliamentary systems²⁶. Another study shows upon researching fifty-three non-OECD countries between the years 1973–1989 that democracy was sustained in those with parliamentary systems by sixty percent with presidential ones staying only at a twenty percent level²⁷. Alvarez and his team also express in their work that

²³ M. S. Fish, *Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies*, «Journal of Democracy» 2006, vol. 17, no. 1, p. 18.

²⁴ G. Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry Into Structures, Incentives, and Outcomes*, New York 1997, p. 120.

²⁵ J. A. Cheibub, A. Przeworski, S. M. Saiegh, *Government Coalitions and Legislative Success under Presidentialism and Parliamentarism*, «British Journal of Political Science» 2004, vol. 34, no. 4, p. 580.

²⁶ S. Mainwaring, *Presidentialism, Multipartism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination*, pp. 198–204.

²⁷ E. Özbudun, *Hükümet Sistemi Tartışmaları*, «Yeni Türkiye» 2013, vol. 51, p. 208.

the average rate of growth in presidential systems is far smaller than in parliamentary systems²⁸. The work shows that the income per capita is being doubled in thirty years in parliamentary systems contrary to around ninety-five years in presidential systems and in case of any economic downturns the average life expectancy of presidential systems is twenty-six years when it reaches a massive one hundred-forty-three years in parliamentary ones.

The “Turkish-Style” Presidential System

On the 9th of July 2018, Turkey has adopted the presidential system over parliamentarism upon the referendum held on the 16th of April 2017 which amended eighteen articles of the constitution²⁹. According to the new system, the office of the prime minister is abolished and the president is given the right to be a party member which was strictly prohibited in the parliamentary system. It also states that the presidential as well as the general elections are held on the same day every five years. The amended constitution strips the parliament off of its control competences over the government and gives the budget-proposal to the president which in the previous system was exercised by the parliament. The new system also declares that the head of the state also is the head of the executive organ. Another change introduced by the amended constitution gives right to the president to declare a state of emergency which in the previous system required the mutual decision of the president as well as the cabinet officers.

Then (and still) the president Recep Tayyip Erdogan had expressed on numerous occasions that a stable and strong government model is needed for Turkey to thrive on all fronts and especially on the economy³⁰. His solution, or his only dream in politics was the presidential system, which would bring stability to Turkey for the new system would not need coalitions and there would be no practical way for a government to be abolished until the next elections and would also end the dual-

²⁸ G. E. Tosun, T. Tosun, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal İstikrar Arayışı: Başkanlık ve Yarı Başkanlık Sistemleri*, Karton Kapak 1999, p. 93.

²⁹ *Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sistemi: Yasama ve yürütme ne durumda? | TÜRKİYE | DW | 07.07.2020*, <https://www.dw.com/tr/cumhurbaşkanlığı-hükümet-sistemi-yasama-ve-yürütme-ne-durumda/a-54066828> (11.12.2020).

³⁰ S. E. Aytaç *et al.*, *Taking Sides: Determinants of Support for a Presidential System in Turkey*, «South European Society and Politics» 2017, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 2.

ity problem where both the president and the prime minister in parliamentarism needed to share their executive rights³¹. According to one of Erdogan's key advisors, based on an interview he gave on February, 2016, the presidential system was needed in order to give more freedom and responsibility to the parliament members who do not need to do so in parliamentarism, to establish better control mechanisms for the parliamentary system lacks them, to limit the authority of the president and secure the strict separation of powers for the president cannot propose laws, to help the people elect both the parliament members and the president when they cannot do so under parliamentarism³². Maybe unfortunately he could not predict the article on the budget for he stated that the new system would give the parliament to offer and accept the budget which is more effective than the executive body doing it when reality proved to be the opposite. Another key-advisor to Erdogan also stated that the quick-decision making would only be possible, provided that Turkey had adopted presidentialism³³. Mostly due to the governmental crises that occurred in the 1990s which caused early elections and deadlocks in Turkey, Erdogan's populist narrative was found appealing to many, even though there were no explanations as to how the quick decision-making, absence of coalitions, and duality would translate into "rearing", a term often used by the supporters of the presidential system.

Mr. Erdogan's AKP (Justice and Development Party), established in 2001 and won the majority of the seats and the right to form a government without a need for a coalition in 2002 was able to carry on this legacy until the presidential elections in 2018. Therefore, Turkey never needed a coalition from the time the AKP was established until the end of parliamentarism in 2018. Considering the comment of Croissant that electoral system changes are usually attributed to the shrinking support of the incumbents and their aspirations to hold on to power, the change of the government system can be attributed to political calculations than needs. It should be also mentioned here that the only time AKP needed to join a coalition was the first elections after the presidential system

³¹ H. T. Fendođlu, *Başkanlık Sistemi*, «İnönü Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi» 2012, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 47.

³² *8 maddede neden başkanlık sistemi? – Son Dakika Haberler*, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/02/01/8-maddede-neden-baskanlik-sistemi> (2.02.2021).

³³ «*Hızlı karar alma başkanlık sistemiyle mümkün*», <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/cumhurbaskanligi-basdanismani-sener-hizli-karar-alma-baskanlik-sistemiyle-mumkun/518605> (2.02.2021).

is adopted, perhaps ironically. Therefore, just as an assumption made earlier, stating that multiparty systems tend to produce more coalitions proven to be correct. On the other hand, when the winner takes it all in a presidential system and might oppress those who are not in favor of him, a coalition government usually comes into sight as “the government type where the mutually agreed terms of larger fractions of a society are being represented”. The conclusion on this front is twofold: coalitions are not necessarily bad, and also the “Turkish-style presidential system” proves ineffective to terminate the need for coalitions.

One study shows that times of terror and security issues are when the general public opinion is usually in favor of statist discourses³⁴. Accordingly, the referendum of 2017 was not about those who favored the change of a system (or not) but more about those who favored Mr. Erdogan and who did not, which raises the second question: Were the results legitimate as far as the timing, the level of knowledge of the voters and the political atmosphere are concerned?³⁵ The answer, to my opinion, lies in the fact that AKP lost the parliamentary majority for the first time in the 2015 general elections until the snap elections that took place in the same year, and the consolidation was secured mostly due to the terrorist attacks between those two elections. Therefore, if the parliamentary majority was not easy to achieve anymore, the presidential system would be a blessing for a charismatic leader, such as Mr. Erdogan to be able to continue governing. Other factors such as the unbalance of the conditions of election during the state of emergency, the state power used excessively to promote Mr. Erdogan’s campaign, and the imprisonment of a presidential candidate during the elections detracted Turkey from the basic conditions of a democratic election³⁶.

Another question regarding the stability issue is the stability of whom is ensured in presidentialism: of the state or of those in power? An example to show the political instability in Turkey can be given is the removal of the president of the central bank, Murat Cetinkaya for not lowering the interest rates, directly by the president and appointment of Murat Uysal, who drastically decreased the interest rates and caused inflation, unemployment and the depreciation of Turkish Lira

³⁴ S. E. Aytaç *et al.*, *Taking Sides: Determinants of Support for a Presidential System in Turkey*, «South European Society and Politics» 2017, vol. 22, iss. 1, pp. 16–17.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

³⁶ *AKPM: 24 Haziran seçim kampanyaları eşit şartlarda yapılmadı | AVRUPA | DW | 05.09.2018*, <https://www.dw.com/tr/akpm-24-haziran-seçim-kampanyaları-eşit-şartlarda-yapılmadı/a-45372948> (11.12.2020).

to explain how the current system of an uncontrollable executive body does not guarantee the stability of policies³⁷. As a result, Mr. Uysal was also replaced by Naci Agbal in 2020, who started his tenure by increasing the interest rates back. Other examples include the foreign policy implementations in which Turkey started shifting its focus to the East and diverged from the U.S. as well as the European Union. Recent statements by Mr. Erdogan and other top officials show that Turkey is looking for ways for re-integration into the Western world³⁸.

As for the slow decision-making problem of the previous system, the solution proposed to tackle this issue is to designate a president who is not accountable for any of his actions to anyone but the public until the next elections. It is easy to assume that when there is no organ to defend one's actions against, decision-making would be a lot much quicker but the cost of this practice would be the abolishment of the checks-and-balances which was discussed earlier as one of the necessities of a democracy. Quick and personal decision-making does not guarantee the right decision-making at all times, and it is for that reason that the checks-and-balances system is devised, to right the wrongs of the decisions that are (about to be) taken. It is also natural to expect a system to take quick decisions when the topics that decisions should be taken on are under the auspices of relevant bodies instead of one person deciding on almost each and every issue. Also, being accountable only to the public is not a realistic approach, though it may sound feasible. Presidential elections in Turkey are set to take place every five years, but the loss of popularity in an earlier time only causes the problems to be resolved in a prolonged time-frame. Since the presidential elections take place at the same time as the parliamentary ones, it is almost impossible that the political party of the president to call for early elections and there are no other ways to warn the executive organ to reconsider its policies.

The amended constitution gives to the president the right to issue decree-laws, be a member (or even the chairman) of a political party, appoint a majority of the judiciary directly or indirectly, rectors to uni-

³⁷ *Cumhurbaşkanı ilk kez bu kadar açık konuştu: Merkez Bankası Başkanı laf dinlemiyordu – Ekonomi haberleri*, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2019/ekonomi/cumhurbaskani-ilk-kez-bu-kadar-acik-konustu-merkez-bankasi-baskani-laf-dinlemiyordu-5432100/> (11.12.2020).

³⁸ *Erdoğan: AB'nin yaptırım kararı Türkiye'yi ırgalamaz – Son dakika haberleri*, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/gundem/erdogan-biden-ile-yabanci-bir-isim-degilim-6160094/> (11.12.2020); *Erdoğan: Geleceğimizi Avrupa ile birlikte kurmayı tasavvur ediyoruz – Sputnik Türkiye*, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/202011211043266437-erdogan-gelecegimizi-avrupa-ile-birlikte-kurmaya-tasavvur-ediyoruz/> (11.12.2020).

versities, and also bureaucrats, and so on³⁹. It should also be noted that Turkey more often than not has strongly-disciplined parties that usually follow what their presidents would lead them towards, which in the “Turkish-style presidential system” translates into a president of a political party who happens to be able to hold a substantial majority in the legislature⁴⁰. Numbers show that almost one year after the presidential system was adopted, the number of articles issued by the presidential decree-laws amounted to 1892 compared to those issued by the parliament at a humble 555⁴¹. It practically means that there is no separation of powers between the legislative and the executive bodies of the Turkish government system. Also, the power to veto the laws issued by the parliament requires an absolute majority to be brought back in front of the president gives him a “dissuasive veto” right⁴². Therefore, the problem is not only that the president can make laws, but also he is in reality more powerful than the legislature itself as far as the legislative competencies are concerned.

Also, for the president should be neutral and be the president of all, being a member of a political party that supports, expresses, and defends certain ideologies, how can one be the president of each and every Turkish citizen if he receives his votes thanks to those ideological differences? Example of a tweet of Mr. Erdogan on the 27th of February 2019 shows how not⁴³. In that tweet, Mr. Erdogan compares two alliances in Turkish politics, the one formed by AKP and MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) named the “Alliance of the Public” and the opposing alliance formed under the name of the “Alliance of the People”. He explains what are the main features of his alliance by stating that it is: established on the streets after the attempted coup on the 15th of July; under the command of the people; the defender of the right and the truth; against the cruel and with the oppressed; until death them apart, and; only aspi-

³⁹ J. Marszałek-Kawa, A. Burak, *The Political System of the Republic of Turkey, Past and Present*, «Przeegląd Politologiczny» 2018, vol. 3, pp. 100–101.

⁴⁰ Ç. Çolak et al., *Comparative Analysis of the Turkish Presidential System with Government Systems Including Separation of Powers*, «Kastamonu University Journal of faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences» 2017, Volume 18, Issue 1, p. 125.

⁴¹ *Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sistemi: 24 Haziran 2018'den bugüne kaç kanun çıktı, kaç kararname yayımlandı? – BBC News Türkçe*, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-48788902> (11.12.2020).

⁴² S. Yokuş, *Elections and the Presidential System in Turkey: Is A Return To Democratisation Possible in this New Period?*, London 2018, p. 26.

⁴³ *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Twitter: «Bugün Türkiye’de iki ittifak karşı karşıyadır. <https://t.co/uRePo7rrRR>» / Twitter*, <https://twitter.com/RTERdogan/status/1100651748602056705> (10.12.2020).

rant to the service of the people. The other alliance, according to him is a product of secret bargain, political engineering, and calculation of interest; under control of Qandil (the mountains where the headquarters of PKK, a terrorist organization are placed) and Pennsylvania (where the head of those who attempted the coup of 2016 resides); never tired of lies, slander, and denial; rustic to oppressed and affectionate to cruel; until the smudgy relationships and clash of interests, and; aiming at carrying those who are the extensions of terrorist groups to town councils and to town bureaucracy. Considering that the opposing alliance gathers around fifty percent of the votes, the mentioned narrative does not show the quality of a neutral president of all citizens⁴⁴.

The next question is regarding the appointment of certain officials to their positions directly by the president with no need for a confidence vote and such. For the amended constitution presides the minister of justice over the legislative body as well as the “Council of Judges and Prosecutors” who is only accountable to the president and below him hierarchically, the third power can also be regarded as exercised by the executive both directly and indirectly, in addition to the fact that majority of the members of the council are being appointed either by the president or by the legislature, that is holding the majority for the political party of the president. In one recent example, a local court that was found “at fault” by the constitutional court on a political trial ignored the verdict of it, casting doubts of the oversight of constitutional court and the rule of law principle, as well as showing the politicization of judicial system in Turkey⁴⁵. Since there is no logical explanation of the link of appointments of university rectors directly by the president and a stronger state, the only interpretation of the appointments in those facilities is that as many sections of society as possible are being tried to be silenced or sided with, a common practice in autocratic regimes. As for meritocracy, the appointment of the president’s son-in-law, Berat Albayrak, who also was regarded by many as inexperienced and “not fit for the position” as the minister of treasury and finance constitutes an outstanding example⁴⁶. During his tenure, the foreign currency reserves

⁴⁴ *Siyasette kutuplaşma: Erdoğan-ın Zillet İttifakı söylemi | TÜRKİYE | DW | 28.02.2019*, <https://www.dw.com/tr/siyasette-kutuplaşma-erdoganın-zillet-ittifakı-söylemi/a-47729768> (11.12.2020).

⁴⁵ *Anayasa Mahkemesi: Enis Berberoğlu'nun siyasi ve kişilik hakları ihlal edildi – BBC News Türkçe*, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-54194581> (10.12.2020).

⁴⁶ «Financial Times»: *Erdoğan ekonomiyi aile meselesi yaptı – BBC News Türkçe*, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-44789804> (11.12.2020).

of the central bank hit a record low in the last ten years, based on his economic policy to confine the U.S. Dollar at a certain rate against the Turkish Lira⁴⁷. In a parliamentary system, members of parliament might have questioned his methods and withdrawn their votes of confidence without tens of billions of U.S. Dollars’ worth of national reserves were wasted.

The below table shows a comparison of seven indicators regarding Turkey over a five-year span by locating 2018 in the middle as being the year when it adopted presidentialism. They are: The Economist’s Democracy Index scores, Freedom House rankings, Fragile States Index scores, unemployment rates taken from the Turkish Statistical Institute as well as consumer price indexes, the exchange rate of the USD over TRY and the ratio of fiscal deficit to GDP, taken from the website of the Central Bank of Turkey.

Table 1. Comparison of certain indicators over the last five years

	Democracy Index Score	Freedom House Ranking	Fragile States Index Score	Unemployment Rate	Consumer Price Index	USD / TRY	Fiscal Deficit / GDP
2020	4,48	32	79,1	13,175	12,26	7,01	6,06
2019	4,09	31	80,3	13,7	15,46	5,67	3,04
2018	4,37	32	82,2	10,16 / 11,78*	10,77 / 20,91*	3,98 / 5,56*	2,36
2017	4,88	38	80,8	10,925	11,13	3,64	1,83
2016	5,04	39	77,3	10,97	7,5	3,04	1,38

* The first value shows the average score before the presidentialism (mid-June) and the second value shows the average value after presidentialism.

As can be clearly seen by the above table, effects of presidential system in Turkey has not proved any enhancement on the given parameters. The democracy score (the lower the more non-democratic) gradually worsened, the freedom (the lower the less free) has shrunk, the fragility (the higher the more fragile) has increased and the economy has gradually declined as far as the unemployment rate, consumer price index,

⁴⁷ *Eksi döviz rezerviyle ekonomi artık daha da kırılğan | EKONOMİ | DW | 08.12.2020*, <https://www.dw.com/tr/eksi-döviz-rezerviyle-ekonomi-artık-daha-da-kırılğan/a-55873967> (11.12.2020).

US Dollars to Turkish Lira exchange rate and the ratio of fiscal deficit to gross domestic product are concerned.

Conclusions

Upon comparison the basic standards of democracies and democratic presidential systems with the Turkish example, one can easily suggest that the presidentialism in Turkey and the most recent version of the Turkish Constitution are not democratic in their natures due to unfair elections, diminishing respect for basic liberties and the lack of separation of powers. Abolishment of checks and balances lead to major mistakes that are occurring at a rapid pace, Turkey is being ruled by a coalition at the present time, government posts are being filled by incompetent, yet loyal partisans, the discriminative narrative of the president only deepens the polarization within society, and the economy, as well as the democracy, gradually worsen⁴⁸. The fact that the president, directly and indirectly, holds three powers (and more) only turns the state into an autocracy or a neo-sultanate where the incumbent does not inherit the presidency but gets elected.

In order to uphold the basic norms of democracy, the most obvious suggestion is the return to a parliamentary system, one that solves the problems of the previous one as well as the ones created by the presidential system. Since there are many disadvantages of presidential systems even if a strong separation of powers and checks-and-balances system can be established, parliamentarism seems to be the most feasible option. Strong checks and balances and accountability mechanisms would establish a better-functioning state. Those tools should be regarded as “safety valves” of states and should be respected in all cases. It should be kept in mind that the scientists would not be able to test things that they could, had they not deactivated the safety measures in the Chernobyl power plant, alas the rest is history.

More studies, especially in statistical and data-rich nature are encouraged to further prove the hypothesis of this paper. Also, the same study can be conducted in other countries where democracy is on the decline

⁴⁸ *Commentary Five Questions: ‘Turkey is no longer a democracy’* | Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-getz-turkey-commentary-idUSKBN1JL2SN> (11.12.2020); *Turkish economy faces another year of turmoil*, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1765141/business-economy> (11.12.2020).

to prevent democratically major issues before taking place in the light of Turkish example.

Bibliography

- Abdukadirov S., *The Failure of Presidentialism in Central Asia*, «Asian Journal of Political Science» 2009, vol. 17, no. 3.
- Aytaç S. E., Çarkoğlu A., Yıldırım K., *Taking Sides: Determinants of Support for a Presidential System in Turkey*, «South European Society and Politics» 2017, vol. 22, no. 1.
- Cheibub J. A., *Minority Governments, Deadlock Situations, and the Survival of Presidential Democracies*, «Comparative Political Studies» 2002, vol. 35, no. 3.
- Fish M. S., *Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies*, «Journal of Democracy» 2006, vol. 17, no. 1.
- Huntington S. P., *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oklahoma 1991.
- Jones M. P., *Electoral Laws and the Effective Number of Candidates in Presidential Elections*, «The Journal of Politics» 1999, vol. 61, no. 1.
- Kirişçi K., Sloot A., *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Democracy in Turkey: Implications for the West*, 2019.
- Lijphart A., *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government*, Oxford 1992.
- Lijphart A., *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, New Haven 2012.
- Linz J. J., *Democracy, Presidential or Parliamentary: Does It Make a Difference?, The Failure of Presidential Democracy: The Case of Latin America*, Baltimore 1994.
- Mainwaring S., *Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination*, «Comparative Political Studies» 1993, vol. 26, no. 2.
- Marszałek-Kawa J., Burak A., *The Political System of the Republic of Turkey, Past and Present*, «Przegląd Politologiczny» 2018, vol. 3.
- Morlino L., *What is a 'Good' Democracy?*, «Democratization» 2004, vol. 11, no. 5.
- Neubauer D. E., *Some Conditions of Democracy*, «The American Political Science Review» 1967, vol. 61, no. 4.
- Sartori G., *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry Into Structures, Incentives, and Outcomes*, New York 1997.
- Schmitter P. C., Karl T. L., *What Democracy is... and is not*, «Journal of Democracy» 1991, vol. 2, no. 3.
- Shugart M. S., *Semi-presidential Systems: Dual Executive and Mixed Authority Patterns*, «French politics» 2005, vol. 3, No. 3.
- Siaroff A., *Comparative Presidencies: The Inadequacy of the Presidential, Semi-presidential and Parliamentary Distinction*, «European Journal of Political Research» 2003, vol. 42, no. 3.
- Stepan A., Skach C., *Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism*, «World Politics» 1993, vol. 46, no. 1.
- Türk R., *Feasibility of Presidential System in Turkey*, «Turkish Journal of Politics» 2011, vol. 2, no. 1.
- Yılmaz Z., *Erdoğan's Presidential Regime and Strategic Legalism: Turkish Democracy in the Twilight Zone*, «Southeast European and Black Sea Studies» 2020, vol. 20, no. 2.
- Yokuş S., *Elections and the Presidential System in Turkey: Is A Return To Democratisation Possible in this New Period?*, London 2018.