



'ArduMania' – A Syndrome of Overblown Arrogance

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The Ottoman Empire existed approximately 600 years (1300~1900) occupying in addition to Anatolia large portions of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Not only that the subjugated populations enriched the Ottoman treasury (e.g., the impressive build-up of Constantinople, now Istanbul), it also inspired Turkish leaders seeking a return to the great days. Luckily, the defeat of Turkey in World War I eradicated these imperialistic aspirations, and the constitution of Turkey as a republic by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923 established a liberal state that even joined NATO after World War II. Its large size and critical location between Asia and Europe contributed significantly to the transformation of Turkey into a successful economy with tremendous industrial and agricultural potential. Unfortunately, many of the social and cultural achievements, especially those of women rights and the lift in religious control, as well as the developed economy were recently extinguished following the 2014 elections and the winning of the Justice and Development Muslim Party headed by Recep Yayıp Erdoğan (Arduan). The build-up of his political power and control over the army and police was accompanied by imprisonment of thousands of his opponents (liberal politicians, scientists, intellectuals, army officers, judges, artists and reporters), as well as changes of social rules instigating various Sharia customs, which increased women oppression and suppressed the pluralism and liberalism founded by Atatürk. These steps along with militaristic aggression against the ethnic Kurd population, involvement in the Syrian civil war, and mutilation of the relations with Western countries as well as with Israel (with which they heavily cooperated both economically and militarily) deteriorated the Turkish economy, foreign affairs, and international reliance. Quite clearly, Arduan's arrogance, inflated self-esteem, and religious piety domineered his rationale, and so, supported by his close circle of religious fans (those who are interested to sustain their hierarchy), he was unaware to the devastating results. Since the conspicuous deterioration in Turkish economy and foreign affairs due to Arduan's reforms was preceded by a long period of democracy, cultural pluralism and economic flourishing, the public frustration was particularly noticeable and the hopes for improvement by joining the European Community declined. Amazingly, despite the accumulated disappointment, Arduan managed to escape a revolutionary attempt in 2016, and almost miraculously kept his power. Since Turkey has not gained much from Arduan's reforms and extremism, but rather excavated the gap toward the European Community and the United States, the evident question is why have the Turks rescued him during the revolutionary attempt? The answer does not seem to be rational, especially when religious fanatics and inflated self-esteem were the leading factors. Despite his rich political experience (Major of Istanbul and Prime Minister of Turkey), it seems that Arduan's obsessive Islamism, which was good for maintaining his power, harmed the economy as well as the international foreign affairs of Turkey. The crisis in Turkey-Israel relations demonstrates how radical Islamic attitude is destructive as it wipes off long-term relations,

which took years to develop. Arduan ignores the history of Israel, that was established thousands of years before the rise of Islam, and the Jewish affiliation to their ancient homeland and Jerusalem. By reinforcing the Palestinian (originally refugees of the Arab states surrounding Israel and Beduins from the south) fabrication of their history and rights over this piece of land, and supporting the two terror organizations Hamas and Hizbullah, he categorizes himself as an Islamic extremist, while losing the credit Turkey gained prior to his election. Although Israeli experts claimed just a decade ago that the intense and regionally important military and economic relations between Israel and Turkey were unbreakable, we could all witness how the wrong man at the top of the pyramid, was able to demolish these relations instantaneously. The take-home message from Arduan's failure as well as from the results of the 'Arabic Spring' and temporal rise of Islamic extremists like Mohamed Morsi in Ejipt is that a dictatorship based on religious obsession may impede modern development and lead to regression rather than advancement. The case of Arduan and Turkey provides an example of how 'religious mania' and inflated self-esteem of a fanatic leader damages his political appeal and destroys previous hard-to-get values of democracy, liberalism, and cultural pluralism. These impractical, overblown manners may represent a prototype of a novel syndrome - "ArduMania".