



## WILL A "TURKIC SPRING" FOLLOW THE "ARAB SPRING?"

The transformation process that started with the rebellion of people throughout the Middle East is expanding. The failure of dictators to provide sufficient natural resources for the people and the conflict between the popular will and the will of the authoritarian regimes has given way to the recent developments. It is now inevitable that in the medium term, the process will expand to engulf the entire Arab world. Even in Saudi Arabia, which appears to be the most stable Arab country, the footsteps of a parliamentary system accompanied by a symbolic monarchy can be heard in the decades ahead. These footsteps must have been heard by all of the governments of the Gulf countries, and the Saudi Royal House, as they have been announcing huge social support packages consecutively for the last twelve months.

A few months ago, Yemeni president Saleh handed over his power in exchange for immunity for himself and his family, marking the second victory of the spring after Libya. Should the natural process have progressed, the spring could have then blossomed in Bahrain. However, as the majority of the opponents as well as the general public were Shiites and were under the influence of the Iranians, this automatically brought about an intervention by the US. The US, unwilling to lose its military base in Bahrain and worried about the risk that Iran's power might penetrate into the region, will prevent the spring coming to the region with unnatural methods.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tepav.org.tr/tr/ekibimiz/s/1198/Huseyin+Rasit+Yilmaz>

The impact of the Arab spring was felt even in Kuwait, a country with a high level of welfare, which revealed that the core cause of the spring, which had been associated with the unequal distribution of welfare, had started to be left behind. Now, the main reason for rebellion was the absence of the popular will in administrative processes. Development statistics for the Arab spring countries suggest that all, despite their relative achievements in terms of development, had failed to prevent the upheavals.

To be able to understand this situation, we first have to comprehend the magnitude of "social globalization." The pace of development in the mentioned countries has been lagging behind expectations and the Arab people, who are now very well informed about the rest of the world, demand more. We might expect a new wave of spring in another geography suffering from similar problems: the Turkic republics.

In fact, a spring was witnessed a couple of years ago in Kirgizstan when the people mobilized to decide who would be in power. The Kirgiz people have decided the president three times, twice via street demonstrations and recently with a democratic general election. The president who took over the office from the overthrown Akayev was later forced to leave his chair and recently was replaced by the Otunbayeva administration via democratic elections, which serves as a promising example for Central Asia. The pioneering role of Bishkek in this respect must be given its due.

Judging by the latest remarks of president Nazarbayev that Kazakhstan had to start a multiparty regime and the development trend in the country, one might foresee that democratization will follow in Astana after Bishkek. The mass worker's movements that have been going on in Kazakhstan for months have resulted in an improvement in social mobility. Of course, the impact of the ever-rising radical religious groups on the process has yet to be identified. The rise of armed religious groups in certain regions of Kazakhstan similar to those active in Uzbekistan has the potential to increase US and Russian support of the respective governments.

Fierce resistance by some of the countries of the region against a potential Turkic spring would be no surprise. Although the intense pressure on the opposition in the mentioned countries narrows the niche of the opponents, they still seem to have the capacity to mobilize grassroots support. In Uzbekistan, which must be expected to resist the most fiercely against a Turkic spring, all opinion leaders who oppose the president are either in jail or abroad, signaling the severity of oppression. Azerbaijan is another country expected to show resistance. The country has a strong opposition group that experienced power in previous periods and still enjoys strong social support. Although the country recently has started to channel natural resources into urbanization and infrastructure investments, these efforts have not made a remarkable contribution to social peace. Recent professedly democratic elections were not actually that democratic, as the reports of international observers reveal.

Turkmenistan can be considered to be an intermediate regime compared to the other countries in the region. Though it resembles Kazakhstan in terms of offering natural resources to the use of the people, Turkmenistan's position is parallel to that of Uzbekistan with the administrative mentality of Berdimuhammedov following to a large extent from Niyazov (Turkmenbashi) and its attitude to remain aloof from the joint organization of the Turkic republics. The influence of Turkey on a potential Turkic spring would be limited under the scenario that the status quo prevails except in Azerbaijan as Turkey is not as credible and effective in the Turkic geography of deeper Asia as it is throughout the Middle East.

It is important what course Turkey's active intervention policy, as signaled in Libya and expected to turn into reality from rhetoric in Syria, will follow vis-à-vis a possible awakening in the Turkic geography. Turkey, taking a common attitude with the western world in this part of the world that is considered to be the primary field of influence of Russia, has the potential to cause the first large-scale tension after the Cold War with Russia, a power prone to use and experienced in using force to solve international crises.