Twitter Thread by Gulay Turkmen



Gulay Turkmen
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Watch the entire discussion if you have the time to do so. But if not, please make sure to watch Edhem Eldem summarizing ~150 years of democracy in Turkey in 6 minutes (starting on 57'). And if you can't watch it, fear not; I've transcribed it for you (as public service). Thread:

> https://t.co/1GtPJaxi1H - Ka\xe7\u0131rmay\u0131n bu muhte\u015fem Bo\u011fazi\xe7i hocalar\u0131 ge\xe7idini !
>
> — dilek cinar (@dlkcinar) February 16, 2021

"Let me start by saying that I am a historian, I see dead people. But more seriously, I am constantly torn between the temptation to see patterns developing over time, and the fear of hasty generalizations and anachronistic comparisons. 1/n

"Nevertheless, the present situation forces me to explore the possible historical dimensions of the problem we're facing today. 2/n

"(...)I intend to go further back in time and widen the angle in order to focus on the confusion I believe exists between the notions of 'state', 'government', and 'public institutions' in Turkey. 3/n

"In the summer of 1876, that's a historical quote, as Midhat Pasa was trying to draft a constitution, Edhem Pasa wrote to Saffet Pasa, and I quote in Turkish, 'Bize Konstitusyon degil enstitusyon lazim' ('It is not a constitution we need but institutions'). 4/n

"A prophetic vision if one considers that the present government proposes to draft a new constitution which is likely to strengthen even more its hold on the country. 5/n

"I believe that this is precisely the problem of Turkish politics, and has been the problem of Turkish politics for the past century and a half: The fragility of institutions leading to the weakening of the state. 6/n

"This may sound strange in a country whose politicians keep bragging about the power and strength of the state, yet I believe it is this weakness of the state that makes it a constant prey of governmental encroachment which often leads to cannibalization and takeover. 7/n

"Sultan Abdulhamid, in the 1880s, inaugurated the process by dismantling the still fragile and sketchy institutions of the Tanzimat and by replacing a still timid rule of law with arbitrariness and unpredictability on which he eventually built his autocracy. 8/n

"He also innovated, by using ideology, in fact Islam, in a modern way, to polarize the population in the wake of the exodus of Muslims from the Balkans, after the crushing defeat of 1878. 9/n

"After him, the Unionists, the Ittihatcilar, used a very similar strategy, based on defeat and polarization, to conquer the state, and turn it into a dictatorship managed by a clique within the party and leading to the tragic consequences we know. 10/n

"Their successors, the Kemalists, didn't have to destroy anything as the Great War had already done it for them.What they did was to build the state anew designing it from the very start as a perfect overlap of state&government as embodied in the single party rule of the CHP.11/n

"The transition to pluralism after 1945, revealed that the opposition, the Democract Party at the time, intended to do exactly the same thing, that is to conquer the state, using a mix of populism and Islam. 12/n

"The 1960 military coup was a backlash of the old guard who made sure that the core of the state stayed in 'safe hands', the army and the judiciary. 13/n

"The rest became a relatively liberal and democratic system, which functioned pretty much like a sandbox, from which political actors and parties could be removed at any time if they were to misbehave. 14/n

"And this is indeed what happened in every decade or so from then on. The present government has brought this practice of conquering the state to its Bonapartist perfection. 15/n

"They have managed to stay in power long enough to conquer the state completely while at the same time taming the traditional 'watchdogs' of the Republic: the army and the judiciary. 16/n

"The adoption of the Presidential System has crowned this endeavor, bringing into effect a de facto single party rule, reminiscent of Kemalist times. What they are attempting to do now is to conquer the last pockets of autonomy that remain. Bogazici is just one of them. 17/n

"The boundaries between state, government, and public are now blurred, if not altogether erased. State and government have become one, and autonomous institutions are being turned into departments of government. 18/n

"Many probably believe in Turkey that because it is a state university it is only legitimate that Bogazici should be governed by the state, or at least an appointment by the state is in the nature of things. 19/n

"The appointment of a president is thus conceived as the consequence of a legitimate top-down chain of command within the state structure. 20/n

"What they fail to understand, or what some probably understand too well, is that universities are precisely among those precious institutions which represent a crucial element of the public wheel as distinct and autonomous from the government... 21/n

"... and which guarantee the legitimacy of the state as well as the preservation of a public sphere. 22/n

"If this historical pattern proves to have any merit and if Bogazici is just one episode of a larger plan to conquer the state, this means, first, that a solution is highly unlikely (at least a solution based on negotiation)... 23/n

"...and second, that we may soon have more to worry about than just Bogazici. Gloomy as this might be, I am forced to make this historical comparison." 24/n

Thus ends the longest thread I've ever posted on Twitter (I believe). Note that I haven't included the last few sentences, you can go watch if you're curious about them:) 25/25