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Decoding the authoritarian code: exercising ‘legitimate’ power politics through the ruling parties in Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia

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ABSTRACT
While neoliberal interventions and policies have had serious effects on all societies, their impact on the institutional setting of some countries in the European periphery has been particularly drastic. Over the last years, countries as Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia – which we have selected as an illustration for the trend – have gone through processes of Europeanization and neoliberal transformation. For the ruling parties the ‘European agenda’ and neoliberal structural adjustment reforms opened new spaces to alter established political routines and reconfigure institutional settings. In the light of generally weak institutions, the ruling parties in Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia have aimed at consolidating their power through the adoption of authoritarian patterns of governance. The three countries experienced a democratic rollback accompanied by a rise of authoritarian tendencies, limiting the space for democratic contestation. The article explores the foundations and mechanisms of the authoritarian patterns of governance in the three countries. Developments in Macedonia and Serbia are dealt in reference to the power system and the claims to legitimacy of the ruling Justice and Development Party in Turkey. The article argues that the ruling parties’ power derives from their legitimation strategies based on institutional reforms in line with EU conditionality, redistribution through informal channels and populist nationalist narratives. The ruling parties function as machines and clientelistic channels. They have been sidelining or replacing formal institutions and practices with negative long-term repercussions on democracy and the functioning of the state.

1. Introduction
After the third wave of democracy (Huntington 1993), which had promised the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama 1989) and the beginning of a global liberal age, in the twenty-first century the world has been witnessing a ‘democratic roll-back’ (Diamond 2008) characterized by a general decrease in the quality and attraction of liberal democracy and the emergence of new competitive forms of authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2002, 2010).
From the early 2000s on scholarly debates began to question the classical assumptions of a linear and normatively given direction of transitions from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy (Carothers 2002; Diamond 2008; Zakaria 1997 and others). Developments in many ‘transitional countries’ made clear that liberal democracy is only one among many possible outcomes of transition processes. Subsequently, scholarly attention focused on emergent mixed or hybrid political systems (Diamond 2002) which combine both; formal democratic institutions and procedures with authoritarian elements of rule. Situated somewhere in the ‘grey zone’ (Carothers 2002) between full-fledged authoritarian systems and liberal democracy these regimes have proven to be resilient.

‘Grey zone regimes’ are generally characterized by a partial incorporation or imitation of liberal democratic procedures and formal institutions, which are, however, simultaneously undermined by an overall logic of limited pluralism and control of society (Krastev 2011) (as we argue through ruling parties). Levitsky and Way have defined such regimes as ‘competitive authoritarian’ (2002, 53). They hold that political systems can be defined as authoritarian despite elections which are regularly held and free of fraud, but where the government’s abuse of state resources, the limitations for the opposition to appear in media, the harassment of candidates and supporters of the opposition – in short the ‘minimum criteria for democracy’ – are violated to an extent that they create an uneven playing field between the ruling party and the opposition (2002). Schedler holds that most often in such systems elections take place ‘in a nebulous zone of structural ambivalence’ in order ‘to reap the fruits of electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic uncertainty’ (Schedler 2002, 36–7). While the opposition parties have real chances to beat the ruling party in elections, this ‘requires a level of opposition mobilization, unity, skill, and heroism far beyond what would normally be required for victory in a democracy’ (Diamond 2002, 24). This new political configuration is described by Thomas Carothers as feckless pluralism, a partly pluralistic grey zone regime type outside of the ‘democracy vs. autocracy’-logic that can be politically quite stable and produce certain valuable outputs for the citizens without following the logic of democratic rule (Carothers 2002). Most of these systems are characterized by a high degree of adaptability, flexibility and pragmatism and few ideological values; features which have been compatible with neoliberalism.

Brown (2005, 2015), Harvey (2005) and Bruff (2014) are among the few authors who have linked the observable decrease in the attraction of democracy with the growing prevalence of neoliberal governmentality, which substantially opens a space for the ‘persistent weakness’ of the state and institutions. Different from classical liberalism that has assumed entrepreneurial behaviour to be a natural condition, neoliberalism has been a political project in which a directive state intervenes in order to encourage and cultivate entrepreneurial and competitive behaviour (Gilbert 2013, 8). Brown (2005, 40) highlights from a Foucauldian perspective that neoliberal governmentality has emphasized market rationality ‘submitting every action and policy to considerations of profitability’, and undermining the principles and institutions of democracy to an extent ‘that they are becoming nothing other than ideological shells concealing their opposite as well as the extent to which these principles and institutions even as values are being abandoned […]’ (Brown 2005, 52). Neoliberal governmentality has induced political leaders and movements to argue and appear in their political acts as if they are based on rational, value-free decisions in the name of market competition rather than on ideological values. Cavatorta rightly emphasizes that democratic as well as authoritarian regimes seem to be moving towards a common ‘system of
governance where de-politicization is the norm, real policy-making power is concentrated in a few hands, democratic institutions are not truly responsive and where the only difference between countries is the degree of protection for liberal rights’ (Cavatorta 2010, 218).

Michael Ignatieff highlights in reference to Turkey and Russia that; ‘a new political competitor to liberal democracy began to take shape: authoritarian in political form, capitalist in economics, and nationalists in ideology’ (Ignatieff 2014).

Turkey has experienced one of the most dramatic authoritarian turns. Once praised for its democratic and economic reforms in view of EU accession, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) manoeuvred the country into what can be best called a ‘competitive authoritarian regime’ (Esen and Gumuscu 2016). While reformism and an inclusive and liberal democratic rhetoric had defined the AKP’s first term in power (2002–2007), from 2008 on, this has been gradually replaced by a more partisan approach to politics and a majoritarian or even plebiscitarian conception of democracy that highlights the ‘ballot box’ as the only legitimate instrument of accountability (Özbudun 2014).

A decrease in the quality of democracy and the rise of authoritarian tendencies can also be observed in the Balkans. In 2002, the Freedom House Report (Freedom House 2012) already detected a new ‘fragile frontier’ for democracy in the European periphery, but the spill over effects of Eastern enlargement were hoped to function as a transformative power in the region. However, the attraction of liberal democracy in the region diminished in consequence of enlargement fatigue and the EU’s fading interest in bringing the Balkan countries closer to the community, but also with the effects of the global economic crisis which has hit the Balkans region particularly hard. The economic crisis has revealed the weaknesses of institutions and democratic governance in the region, leading to processes of ‘de-democratisation’ (Tilly 2007) and democratic regression.

In the last years, a sharp decline in democratic governance and an increasing overlap between business and political interests could be observed in most of the countries in the region (Freedom House 2012, 2–3). According to the Freedom House Report of 2013, many countries in the Balkans have entered a phase of ‘authoritarian aggression and the pressures of austerity’ (Freedom House 2012, 2013), these developments continued and further deepened until 2016 (Freedom House 2016). This visible democratic backsliding has posed a major challenge to the EU’s presumed transformative power.

Based on these insights, this paper focuses on the political actors, which have played a crucial role in the rise of authoritarian tendencies: the ruling parties. It highlights the family resemblances among the authoritarian neoliberal governance practices deployed by the AKP in Turkey, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) in Macedonia and the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in Serbia.

The Economist Intelligence Unit describes Serbia under the ruling SNS as a flawed democracy, whereas Turkey under the AKP and Macedonia under the VMRO-DPMNE are labelled as hybrid regimes (Economist Intelligence Unit 2015). Similarly, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, which includes ratings both for the Western Balkans as well as for Turkey, points to similar results (Bertelsmann Foundation 2016). According to the Global Democracy Ranking all three selected countries have ‘medium’ scores; Macedonia scoring 544 Turkey 551 and Serbia 621. But, Turkey and Macedonia are described as countries where democracy has experienced the most rapid decline over the last few years (Democracy Ranking 2016).
Deteriorations in regard to the freedom of press and limitations on the right to demonstrate could be gauged in all three countries. Similarly, the OSCE’s election observation reports for the three countries have detected limitations in regard to access to information (Turkey) (OSCE 2016a) an unequal ‘playing field for candidates’ (Macedonia) (OSCE 2014) or ‘undue advantage of incumbency and blurring the distinction between state and party activities’ (Serbia) (OSCE 2016b).

In 2016, the World Press Freedom Index issued by Reporters without Borders ranked Turkey in regard to the freedom of press as 151st, while Macedonia was listed 178th and Serbia ranked as 55th (World Press Freedom Index 2016). Similarly, Reporters Without Borders hold that in the Balkans region the state of freedom of press is worst in Macedonia with a tendency of further deterioration (World Press Freedom Index 2016). According to recent surveys, 53% of the citizens in Macedonia do not feel free to express their opinion, while 83% out of these 53% explicitly mention they worry about their personal safety as well as that of their families (Maricik 2014).

The article starts from the assumption that besides the effects of the global economic crisis, the decrease in the likelihood of short-term EU accession has been a major factor supporting the rise of authoritarian tendencies in all three countries. Although, the EU accession process of each of the three countries is stuck, their prospects for full-fledged membership strongly vary. In Turkey, hope for membership has almost entirely faded, reflecting in a decrease in EU conditionality and growing euroscepticism among politicians from the ruling party as well as opposition parties and the broader public (Gulmez 2013). The entire loss of an EU perspective has eased EU conditionality and fuelled eurosceptic nationalist rhetoric. Similar developments can be observed in Macedonia and Serbia, where, however, such tendencies are tamed by the still existing hope for membership. In the case of Macedonia, which has been a candidate to the EU since 2004 insecurity about EU accession due to the unresolved dispute with Greece over the country’s name has contributed to political destabilization and democratic regression (Balkan Insight 2016a). Serbia represents the youngest candidate among the three, but it is also the most likely to become a full-fledged member at the end of the process. However, despite ongoing negotiations, Serbia’s accession is rather unlikely in a near future due to the political crisis of the EU triggered by the British vote to leave, but also growing tensions with Croatia. In consequence, growing euroscepticism can be assessed within both Macedonia and Serbia (Balkan Insight 2010, 2016b).

The article argues that the comprehensive economic, structural and political reforms in view of EU accession have opened new spaces to alter established political routines. At the same time, the loss of short-term perspectives for EU membership has enabled the regression of liberal democratic conceptions and the rise of authoritarian patterns of governance. The gradual slide into authoritarianism, although in varying intensities, has been taking place against the background of neoliberal marketization. By focusing (a) on similar structural preconditions (in terms of state institutions and neoliberal reforms) in Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia and by (b) contrasting different stages of democratic regression and grades of authoritarian shades we aim at elaborating a structural pattern that defines developments much beyond the three countries and resembles the Bertelsmann Foundation’s picture of a new authoritarian ‘ring of fire’ in Europe (Bertelsmann Foundation 2016).

The focus lies on the ruling parties and the role they play in the emerging authoritarian systems. The AKP in Turkey, the SNS in Serbia and the VMRO-DPMNE in Macedonia are not simply instruments in organizing power, they are central in gaining and maintaining
power. They win elections and function as machines in the redistribution of state resources. The three parties are characterized by relatively weak ideological foundations (they represent reformed former ideological movements), a high degree of adaptability to neoliberal paradigms, and traits of strategic changeability, flexibility and pragmatism. In that regard, they come close to machine parties. A machine party defines a ‘non-ideological organization, interested less in political principle than in securing and holding office for its leaders and distributing income to those who run it and work for it. It relies on what it accomplishes in a concrete way for its supporters, not on what it stands for’ (Scott 1969, 1144). Populist policies and religiously connoted nationalist rhetoric have often substituted ideological principles. Flexibility and ‘ideological bonelessness’ have enabled them to easily borrow ideas, methods and attitudes from their democratic rivals rather than the other way around (Runciman 2013, 322).

Hence, the study is less concerned with the categorization of regime type, but rather examines the mechanisms and patterns applied by the ruling parties and the role they play in generating legitimacy, electoral support and the maintenance of power. The article does not claim to provide a full-fledged comparative study among the three countries. Turkey, as the most advanced competitive authoritarian system among the three, rather provides the major case study and reference for the family resemblances to be detected among all three cases.

The article applies a Weberian approach when examining the parties’ claims to legitimacy. Weber’s notion of legitimacy as a reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled provides an important tool that enables us to look beyond the façade of formal institutions and to decode the essence of authoritarianism integral to our three case studies (Weber 1966). Von Soest and Grauvogel (2015) and Merkel and Gerschewski (2011) are among the authors who have addressed the question of legitimacy in the context of debates on hybrid or mixed regimes at the grey zone between democracy and authoritarianism. As outlined by Gerschewski (2013), Von Soest and Grauvogel (2015) any political system needs to ‘attain a certain level of legitimacy in order to ensure its persistence in the long term’ (Von Soest and Grauvogel 2015, 5). The question is; which strategies they do apply. While mechanisms might differ, the basic assumption is that grey zone regimes are accumulating and maintaining legitimation and power through what Gerschewski (2013) defines as ‘specific support’ and ‘diffuse support’. ‘Specific support’ refers to the regimes’ delivery of goods (security, welfare and so on), whereas ‘diffuse support’ refers to what the regime ‘actually is or represents’ (ideology, forms of religio-nationalistic claims, the charisma of leaders and – real or imagined – external threats) (Gerschewski 2013, 20).

Whereas legitimacy defines the process, which reconfirms authority within an established mindset, we conceive legitimation strategies as a whole set of interlinked mechanisms and instruments, which also aim at creating a new mindset. Hence, rather than on legitimacy itself, we focus on the ruling parties’ claims to legitimacy, as they define the patterns of governance through which legitimacy is sought. Inspired by Von Soest and Grauvogel’s definition of six dimensions upon which post-Soviet authoritarian regimes have built their legitimation strategies (Von Soest and Grauvogel 2015), we subsume three areas which combine different claims to legitimacy such as output or input legitimacy and different mechanisms and instruments on which the three ruling parties have based their legitimation strategy and which have defined their patterns and modes of rule.
We assume that structural reforms in line with EU norms and the requirements of the IMF have constituted the first area on which the AKP in Turkey, the SNS in Serbia and the VMRO-DPMNE in Macedonia based their legitimation strategy. Reforms functioned as ‘legitimising devices’ to rearrange the institutional setting, weaken the powers of the old ruling parties and elites, reconfigure the state and advance specific (particular) political interests (Tsarouhas cited in Börzel 2012, 14). The second area upon which the three parties have based their legitimation strategies is the re-distribution of state resources. The redistribution of public goods has been taking place through informal mechanisms and patterns. Participation in the ruling parties’ clientelistic reward networks has been dependent on allegiance to the party and its leader. Re-distribution through clientelistic networks has helped create pro-party interest blocks and dependent clients at different levels. Finally, the third area the paper highlights are the narratives employed to support their legitimation claims. The three ruling parties set out as alternatives to the old power centres. They have presented themselves as the voice and champions of the little man and the defenders of the nation and its interest. Their discourses – be it inward or outward oriented – have transported the narrative of victimization and of defending the rights of the deprived for the sake of the whole nation.

The article proceeds as follows. The first part explores how EU reforms and neoliberal structural adjustment policies provided a ‘legitimising device’ and the basis for the re-configuration of institutional settings and the removal of the old ruling parties and their elites. The second part then elaborates informalization and clientelism as mechanisms of authoritarian power. They function as instruments through which the incumbents generate support, control economic redistribution and consolidate and legitimate dominance. In the third part, the article elaborates the main narratives on which the respective parties have built their claims to power and their legitimation strategies.

2. EU reforms functioning as ‘legitimising devices’ opening new spaces

Poggi (2001, 12–14) distinguishes two different sources of power; those which derive from agency and those which derive from structures such as institutional settings. Whereas, according to him established elite movements mostly generate power from the ‘unperturbed continuation of established arrangements’, movements which challenge the old elites and their established arrangements gain power from the ‘perturbation of established arrangements’ and the ‘unblocking of situations’ (Poggi 2001, 14). He defines the latter as ‘aoristic’ mechanisms of power.1 Although, there is hardly any power which is either solely based on agency or on structure and in most of the cases both forms of power are at work at the same time, Poggi’s distinction seems to be important as it highlights the two different dynamics and the different claims of legitimation that derive from them, as will be elaborated below.

While on the one hand perpetuating their position through the maintenance of the organizational status quo in some beneficial areas, the ruling parties in the three countries have at the same time yielded power through the disruption of continuities, the re-configuration of institutional settings and the smashing of political routines through ‘the unblocking of situations’ (Ganev 2007, 7). The EU accession process and structural reforms in line with neoliberal conceptions provided a source for the legitimation of the replacement of established power centres. Moreover, taking up a pro-EU line and the adaptation to neoliberalism gave the AKP in Turkey, which had emerged from the Islamist movement, the SNS in
Serbia which has represented a reformed nationalist movement, and the VMRO-DPMNE in Macedonia which changed under Gruevski from an old-fashioned ethnic nationalist party into a centre party, the image of modernizing reformers.

Coming into power in 2002, right after the crash of Turkey’s financial system in 2001, the AKP signalled a departure from the torpor of the 1990s. During its first term (2002–2007), the requirements of the IMF standby agreement and the EU’s Copenhagen Criteria constituted the basis for the reforms, which restructured state and economy. In the restructuring of coalitional and institutional settings marketization served ‘as an instrument through which political order could be generated and political power distributed’ (Schamis 2002, 7). Institutional reforms in view of EU accession such as the revision of the composition of the influential National Security Council, the replacement of the representatives of the army in independent bodies such as the Radio and Television Supreme Council and the Council of Higher Education through civilians (Müftüler Baç 2005; Özbudun 2007), weakened military tutelage and led to the ‘civilianisation’ of the setting of state institutions. Yet, the centralized character of the state and many of its authoritarian elements remained intact. Due to its overall majority in parliament, the AKP not only controlled the reform process itself, but also dominated personnel appointments in the public sector as well as in state-owned companies. Hence, reforms in line with liberal democratic and neoliberal economic global discourses also functioned as a ‘legitimising device’ for the infiltration of the state apparatus and the pushing through of particular political and economic interests. Particularly, in overly centralized systems with authoritarian structures and weak power balances, privatization increased the material resources of the rulers. Schamis holds that privatization represents ‘a movement from public to private, but also a movement from non-state to state, as the reduction of state assets leads to institutional changes that increase state capacity for defining and enforcing property rights, extracting revenue, and centralising administrative and political resources’ (Schamis 2002, 7). In Turkey, the 2001 crisis had led to the breakdown of many private-owned banks, most of them part of larger private holdings. While some of them had gone bankrupt, some larger companies were rescued by the state and put under the control and trusteeship of the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund of Turkey. The re-privatization of these businesses together with the liberalization of different market areas such as telecommunications and energy and the privatization of state-owned companies equipped the government with enormous resources to be distributed. The Savings Deposit Insurance Fund also played an important role in the construction of pro-AKP media (Diken 2014). Hence, one can hold that the ‘perturbation of established arrangements’ (Poggi 2001, 14) proliferated the ruling AKP’s political and economic capabilities.

In Serbia and Macedonia, the reforms initiated after the Balkans Wars of the 1990s were inspired by liberal democratic discourses and neoliberal economic concepts. The process of the ‘Europeanisation’ of the Balkans – the gradual harmonization of national policies and administration with EU norms, standards, regulations and procedures – entailed a large number of reforms on the institutional and the economic level. Market liberalization entailed privatization and structural adjustment. They way how privatization was implemented in the early 2000s contributed to the emergence of a symbiotic relationship between the new democratic forces at work and the representatives of the old power structures (Matic 2003). The new era soon came to be associated with corruption and the rise of new clientelistic networks, often protected by the authorities.
Nikola Gruevski and the VMRO-DPMNE, a people's party with a strong nationalist outlook, won the elections in 2006 with the promise to fight corruption, advance neoliberal economic reforms such as the introduction of a flat-tax and to revive the EU accession processes. Political and economic reforms in the name of modernization and EU accession provided opportunities to reshuffle power balances in favour of the ruling party. Critics hold that the lines between state and party have become increasingly blurred and that the coalition based on ethnic Macedonian and Albanian nationalism has created a form of ‘authoritarian consociationalism’ (Spaskovska 2014). In the light of an existing tradition of ‘partocracy’ in Macedonia (Spaskovska 2014), the VMRO-DPMNE set out to build its clique of pro-government businessmen.

Similar to Macedonia, in Serbia, the SNS of Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić set out to fight corruption and lead the country into the EU. Vučić’s new mantra was that Serbia needs a better ‘business climate’. The promise to provide better conditions for businesses legitimized the government’s reform policies, but also the reallocation of subsidies to government-friendly foreign investors. The neoliberal reforms under the SNS led government entailed cuts in the salaries of employees in the public sector and in pensions, but also the privatization of public enterprises and natural resources. Reforms involved a deterioration in workers’ rights. The party pushed ahead public administration reforms as well as the privatization of public enterprises and the state-owned media. The selective implementation of privatization played a large role in the conversion of political power into economic capital. It also helped integrate and legalize the ‘illegal and semi-legal profits of tycoons and criminal structures’ which were in support of the SNS (Babović, Cvejić, and Pešić 2016, 29). Structural reforms entailed that the regulatory competence of the state increasingly shifted to ‘responsible’ non-state actors (Brown 2005). Within a few years, the government pro-SNS clique of businessmen and a pro-government media block comprising various newspapers and TV stations were built at the hands of the government. Critics hold that they play an important role in guaranteeing the discursive hegemony of the ruling party (Balkan Insight 2016c).

Governing the reform processes has helped the ruling parties in all three countries gain a clear edge over their political competitors in the process of the redistribution of powers. Institutional reforms in view of Europeanization enabled the ruling parties direct personnel policies in the state sector. The ‘perturbation of established arrangements’ within the state apparatuses opened opportunities for a new generation of bureaucrats. Due to ruling parties’ claim to consolidate their influence over the state, many among them have owed their appointments to their loyalty to the party and its leader. In the economic field, the privatization and deregulation of the markets opened new spaces for the re-distribution of power. It created a powerful nexus between economic and political power. This led to the rise of new pro-government elites, including managers of state-owned companies, large businessmen and emergent middle-sized entrepreneurs (Cvejić 2016). As examined in more detail below, these networks have played a crucial role in the informal re-distribution of public resources.

One can assume that moments of comprehensive political and economic transition, such as the transformations in the course of EU accession processes and neoliberal structural adjustments have opened new spaces for the emergence of new elites and new patterns of governing. But the breaking up of established arrangements also conveyed to the parties’
constituencies the sense that the ongoing changes would yield new (mainly economic) opportunities for them.

One can hold that legal and institutional reforms in line with the requirements of the EU and the IMF have been accompanied by informal practices and legal and political uncertainty in regard to their implementation (Cvejic 2016). Schedler argues that while uncertainty has been an important element of authoritarian practices of governance, it poses also challenges to the rulers (Schedler 2013). In the case of Turkey, Serbia and Macedonia, the ruling parties have promoted uncertainty. An atmosphere of uncertainty helped strengthen the dependency of supporters, but at the same time, as the ruling parties have not yet been able to fully consolidate their rule, they have struggled over institutional uncertainties and aimed at transforming it (Schedler 2013).

3. Re-distribution through informal mechanisms

The ruling parties not only set out to reform and change the institutional settings, but they also promised the re-distribution and re-direction of public resources. The AKP has positioned itself as an alternative to the eroded centre-parties, which dominated Turkish politics since transition to multiparty politics in 1950. Different from the centre parties which were led by representatives of the secular urban elites, the AKP has claimed to be a true Anatolian movement whose leadership represents and lives the Islamic conservatism of the periphery. Besides ‘reformism’ in line with global liberal paradigms, the promise to re-distribute state-resources from the centre (represented by the Kemalist elites) to the Anatolian periphery (represented by emergent pious bourgeoisie) has been an important element in understanding the AKP’s appeal. Although the claim of re-distribution has the taste of social redistribution from the rich to the poor, the AKP’s policies diversified the beneficiaries of public goods, but did not reverse or alter social disparity, also because the re-distribution of public resources has been mainly taking place through informal mechanisms.

Informality is not a new phenomenon and can be generally understood as a broad generic concept that encompasses a wide range of activities – social, political and economic – occurring outside the formal sphere. Harders accounts that in many developing countries a ‘social contract of informality’ which foregrounds personalized relations as the basis of social solidarity, material distribution and professional promotion, has increasingly replaced enforceable citizen rights (Harders 2011, 24).

Giordano highlights that it is the weakening of statehood and the weak embeddedness of formal institutions, which support the emergence and proliferation of informal mechanisms and patterns (2013, 15). At the same time, informality is not just an unwanted consequence of structural reforms, but it has also been a deliberate ‘technique of governing’. All ‘more-or-less soft variants of authoritarian regimes’ (Levitsky and Way in Giordano and Hayoz 2013, 11–12) have relied on informality as a governance practice. Particularly in the light of weak or failing ideological movements, personal allegiance, based on material dependency, primordial ties as family, clan affiliation, ethnic origins or religion have represented the basis of clientelistic mechanisms of maintaining dependency and securing control.

Although clientelistic relations can be found in any society, independent from regime type or the stage of political or economic modernization, it is a dominant practice in authoritarian regimes. Clientelism helps regimes legitimating and masking the structures of domination and creating a feeling of dependence and loyalty (Eisenstadt and Lemarchand 1981, 10).
In Turkey, an emergent pro-AKP bourgeoisie took advantage of the ruling party’s clientelistic re-distributive policies. Businessmen and corporations close to the government benefited from preferential treatment in calls to tenders, commissioning, privatization and appointments in higher posts. An emergent and often more pious pro-AKP bourgeoisie has gradually replaced the established Istanbul bourgeoisie which itself had been created at the hands of the centre-parties through the re-distribution of public resources.

Proximity to the leader has defined the degree of participation in the big economic game. Businessmen who have dared to criticize Erdoğan or support the opposition or oppositional movements have been punished with financial audits or have been discriminated against in calls to tenders, while absolutely loyal businessmen, such as Nihat Özdemir or Mehmet Cengiz, could expand their companies with the help of the government into multi-billion holdings (Vatan 2013). The pro-AKP business sector has been important in building, maintaining and defending the AKP’s hegemonic position.

At the lower levels of the social pyramid, loyalty to the ruling party has been rewarded with access to public jobs, financial and material aid such as heating fuel, coal and other basic goods like the provision of health services. Particularly at the local level, the organizations of the ruling parties have functioned as channels through which people could gain access to central power and participate in the economic game. The clientelistic solving of everyday problems has supported the establishment of a feeling and a mindset tied to the party brokerage among many who have felt dependent on social services. The feeling of being dependent on the informal channels of re-distribution entailed that in many cases clientelistic interests rather than programmatic or ideological considerations have influenced voting behaviour (Marschall et al. 2015). In competitive political systems as Turkey, the re-distribution of state resources is re-negotiated on a regular basis in elections.

It has been the symbiosis of political and economic interests intertwined by an intrinsic patronage network with multiple layers which has guaranteed the ruling party’s consecutive electoral victories throughout the country. In many parts of the Anatolian provinces, legitimized by a strong electoral backing, often much beyond 50% (seçim.haberler.com), the AKP has been able to gain a hegemonic position in local politics and economy.

The AKP’s consecutive electoral successes in provincial areas² highlight the party’s embeddedness in local political economy and the functioning of the clientelistic networks, which form the AKP’s ‘bloc of interests’. The block of interest is an alliance system that joins economic interest with the interest of political privilege and dominion (Caciagli and Belloni 1981, 46) and which links the local, regional and national levels to each other. Infrastructure and public housing projects in partnership with TOKI (Turkey’s mass housing administration) have been important tools of clientelistic distribution policies at the local level (Marschall et al. 2015). Generally, infrastructure and construction have been the business sectors particularly vulnerable to clientelism. A major development programme, including huge infrastructure projects, urban development and urban gentrification plans, has not only served as a tool to nurture and develop the AKP’s clientelistic business networks but it has also served as a political programme that signals awakening, development and national pride. The construction of *Yeni Türkiye* (new Turkey) symbolized by mega infrastructure projects has served several ends: it is at the cost of ‘old (Kemalist) Turkey’, functions as a distributive mechanism towards an emergent pro-AKP bourgeoisie, supports a sense of awakening and pride and generates legitimacy.
The same can be said about Nikola Gruevski’s signature project ‘Skopje 2014’. The massive construction project financed by the government and promoted by the ruling VMRO-DPMNE has aimed at giving Skopje a more classical appeal by the year 2014. The project entailing the reconstruction of the centre of the capital has been assumed to cost around 600 million Euros, out of which according to some estimates 58 million Euros have remained unaccounted (Dimitrov, Jardanovska, and Taleski 2016). The costs of security and maintenance have constantly sucked off more funds from the state budget. As the investigative network BIRN proves on its webpage and app (http://skopje2014.prizma.birn.eu.com/en), the project plays an important role in the VMRO-DPMNE’s clientelistic re-distribution of public resources to pro-party business companies.

Serbia’s most controversial mega infrastructure project promoted by the government has been the so called ‘Belgrade Waterfront’ project. Prime Minister Vučić’s signature project has aimed at constructing a new and modern-looking centre on the right bank of the Sava River. The project has included office towers, residences and a mall. The project has been pushed by the government and presented as a boost for modernization. The tendering and contracting of the project have faced massive criticism from the opposition. Mohammed bin Zayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi has been one of the major foreign investors. His financial involvement at an amount of three billion Euros as well as his investments in Air Serbia, Serbian defence systems, an aircraft-component plant and other projects have been explained by his friendship relations with Prime Minister Vučić (Donaghy 2014). Similar to ‘Skopje 2014’, the ‘Belgrade Waterfront’ is considered to play an important role in the re-distribution of public resources to business networks close to SNS. At the same time, Prime Minister Vučić has presented the project as an example for increased foreign direct investment and the progress Serbia has made under his leadership. Moreover, the project feeds into the nationalist claim of Serbia’s ‘awakening’ under his leadership.

Similar to Turkey, also in Macedonia and Serbia personal proximity and loyalty to the leader and to the higher echelons of the ruling parties have defined participation in the big business game. At the lower levels of the social hierarchy the party organizations of the VMRO-DPMNE and the SNS have been key channels for access to jobs in the administration and state-owned companies (Stanojevic, Babović, and Gundogan 2016). In Serbia, on the level of municipalities, local representatives of the party have dominated the labour market and have functioned as patrons in the re-distribution of public resources. Similarly, in Macedonia a crucial criterion for employment has been a membership card of the ruling party and voting loyalty, which has been carefully observed. The monopolization of clientelistic reward networks helped the VMRO-DPMNE establish an exclusive and sophisticated architecture of power (Financial Times 2015).

4. The narrative dimension of legitimation strategies

The claim of working for the interest of the 'little man' has constituted the third area on which the ruling parties have built their legitimation strategies. Gerschewski (2013) defines ideology, forms of religio-nationalistic claims, the charisma of leaders and (real or imagined) external threats as those elements which characterize a system in the long term and define what the regime actually is (Gerschewski 2013, 20). These elements generate ‘diffuse support’ (Gerschewski 2013).
Populist nationalism, defining in and out groups and highlighting the power of the ‘real people’, has often concealed departures from democratic practices and provided a useful tool to mobilize broad parts of society. A rally-around-the-flag rhetoric and a new leader cult have helped to create a sense of unity and solidarity. Contrary to earlier eras, the charismatic, populist leaders have not aspired to act and to be perceived as elder statesmen, but they have cultivated their images as tribunes of the people, thus establishing a new kind of populism based on their authority and personal charisma. Scott (1969, 1144) highlights ‘populism through the image of working for the little man’ as an element of machine politics.

[...] The boss of the party acts also as a patron for those at the other end of the social pyramid. He conveys the image of working constantly for the interests of the poor and his attention is focused on their concrete needs and deprivations. Hints of municipal corruption are winked at, even applauded, by the machine clientele as the social banditry of an urban Robin Hood [...]. (Scott 1969, 1144)

The AKP has been able to present itself as the voice of the deprived ‘real people’ and the champion of their interests against the old elites. A divisive political rhetoric gained prevalence with the loss of a realistic perspective for EU membership.

In Serbia, the SNS has been able to establish itself on the one hand as the voice and champion of the interests of those who felt excluded by the system and on the other hand it could position itself as a pro-EU reform party. The SNS’s references to ‘real Serbs’ and the ‘real Serbia’ have served as a rhetorical tool to legitimize the party’s policies through nationalist frames and de-legitimize the earlier era of Boris Tadic and the Democratic Party, depicted as corrupted and ‘un-Serbian’. The claim of a clear break with the past legitimized the SNS’s efforts to destroy old power networks and replace them with new ones. The claim of authority to define the identity of the nation has seemingly strengthened cohesion and support among the followers. Its constituency, illustrated as the ‘real Serbs’, are mainly representatives of the periphery of society; the financially bleeding middle class, farmers, small- and mediums-sized entrepreneurs and workers. They have supported the party’s neoliberal reform agenda, because it promised the demise of old structures and interest networks from which they had been excluded. However, in the long run, neoliberal reforms have not improved the economic status of large parts of the party’s diverse constituencies (Cvejic 2016).

In Macedonia, Nikola Gruevski has presented himself as an ordinary man with whom people can identify. ‘He is like the bloke next door – and he is literally that, because he disdains his official residence, preferring to live in his small flat, with his wife and two small children’ (The Economist 2011). Gruevski could draw on the deeply rooted identity politics. Spaskovska holds that despite the seemingly exclusive ethnic- and identity-based politics of ethnically Albanian and Macedonian parties, the ruling coalition consisting of the VMRO-DPMNE and the pro-Albanian DUI has managed to forge a consensus around ‘anti-communism and (flirting with) religious conservatism’ (Spaskovska 2014). While political and economic reforms in the name of modernization and EU accession provided opportunities to reshuffle power balances in favour of the ruling party and gain the support of the economic elites and of foreign partners, the VMRO-DPMNE’s nationalist position in regard to the question of the country’s name helped mobilize the grassroots. After all, in 2010 82.1% of ethnic Macedonians declared that for them the preservation of the name Republic of Macedonia had priority over EU and NATO accession (Balkan Insight 2010).
Undeniably, ethno-nationalism entails a certain emotional component that helps mask economic weaknesses and political incompetency. References to national pathos and myths may enhance the popularity and even more so the legitimacy of the ruling party. As ethno-nationalist discourses refer to security threats to the nation and instigate the search for unity, they represent an efficient tool for political mobilization, control and the stabilization and consolidation of power. The emotional dimension serves the production of legitimacy and is usually the result of a mixture of subjective feelings such as fear, uncertainty, threat, apathy, isolation and the like (Connor 1994, 24–51).

Foreign policy has become an important domain of populist nationalist policies and an important source of legitimation for nationalist policies. Ethnic or national issues, as well as religious questions or questions of territory and national sovereignty are often used by the ruling parties as a means to mobilize voters or divert attention from particular interests and non-democratic and non-transparent practices (Bohle and Greskovits 2009, 62). In Serbia, Prime Minister Vučić’s pro-EU policies involved the softening of ultra-nationalist rhetoric in favour of more pragmatic and flexible positions in regard to relations with Kosovo. However, as growing tensions with Croatia have revealed Serbian nationalism still provides a useful tool in mobilizing the masses and masking domestic problems. Nationalist rhetoric against Croatia has reflected the growing pressure on the SNS from right-wing parties, but also from within the party itself. The rhetoric against Croatia has entailed historical references to the time of the Second World War, including allusions to the collaboration of Croatians with the German Nazi regime. These references easily build on well-known official historical narratives, transported by school books and curricula.

The Serbian Government utilized protests against the ‘Belgrade Waterfront’ project to mobilize against the opposition. In the night of 24 April 2016 several buildings in Hercegovačka Street in Belgrade standing in the way of the project were demolished by thugs. As Belgrade police remained inactive the grass-roots initiative ‘Ne Da(vi)mo Beograd’ staged a massive rally under the title ‘The masks have fallen’, demanding the resignation of a number of state officials. But more importantly, the protests revealed the ruling party’s clientelistic networks and the informal and violent practices it has applied in order to enforce the economic interest of its allies. The Serbian Government did not openly fight the protesters, but similar to Macedonia and Turkey, they have been delegitimized as ideologically motivated and supported by foreign centres, hostile towards Vučić, Serbia and its rise (Kmezic 2016).

In Macedonia, Athens’s stance in regard to the name of Macedonia helped Prime Minister Gruevski mobilize around Macedonian nationalism and consolidate his own leadership as well as the dominance of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE. Gruevski embarked on re-inventing Macedonian national identity. The reconstruction of the centre of the capital under the project ‘Skopje 2014’ has been the expression of a new and outspoken ethno-nationalism and has represented the desire to reconstruct the Macedonian nation based on historical myths and narratives. A massive statue of Alexander the Great at Skopje’s central square is a reference to a new national identity that builds on historic grandeur. The statue of one of the greatest conquerors in history is also a clear signal to the defiant neighbours; Greece and Bulgaria. ‘Skopje 2014’ as a symbol of a new ethnically Macedonian nationalist narrative has been divisive and contested among large parts of the population (particularly among ethnic Albanians). Yet this narrative managed to address feelings of national pride among the supporters of the VMRO-DPMNE and within a significant part of Macedonian Slavs.
In this case, nationalism at the cost of polarization between the different ethnic groups in the country served as a unifying source within the party’s power-base.

In May 2015, in Kumanovo, close to the Serbian border 18 people were killed (8 police officers and 10 belligerents) and more than 30 injured during a police raid in reaction to street protests. These events highlighted the highly explosive situation in Macedonia (Dimitrov, Jardanovska, and Taleski 2016). Kumanovo is a city with a history of tensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. It became again a hotspot when according to the authorities about 70 armed ethnic Albanians clashed with Macedonian police forces. A few weeks before, a group of 40 ethnic Albanians had seized control of a police station near Kumanovo, claiming the creation of an Albanian state within Macedonia. PM Gruevski and the ruling VMRO-DPMNE utilized the events to stage a public campaign highlighting the protection of stability and the need to protect the Macedonian nation from ‘terrorists’. As a consequence of these events, 20 people were arrested and accused of terrorism (Dimitrov, Jardanovska, and Taleski 2016). In the following days opposition parties organized rallies against PM Gruevski. The ruling VMRO-DPMNE responded by organizing a counter-rally in support of Gruevski and his government (Grabbe 2015). The rhetoric, symbols and references applied were reminiscent of the nationalist rhetoric of late 1990s and early 2000s, a period when Macedonia was on the brink of war.

The references to historical grandeur are reminiscent of the imperialist discourses and symbols applied by the AKP. The AKP’s discourse has not only imagined the Ottoman Islamic past as a glorious era of Turkish statehood and leadership and derived from it a regional and even global mission, but it has also referred to it as an inspiration for the reconfiguration and reinterpretation of the republic. The AKP’s discourses have not developed a new historical narrative, but they have aimed at upgrading the image and memory of the Ottoman pre-republican era. Ideologically weak movements need to hold diverse party activists together. The narratives they have constructed have often referred to ‘pre-democratic legacies or earlier episodes of democratic competition that enabled political actors to take steps towards solving problems of social choice in the construction of programmatic alternatives’ (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 9).

Similar to Serbia, in Turkey, President Erdoğan and the AKP made the claim to define authenticity and inauthenticity towards being milli (national). The claim of authority to define who is a good citizen and an integral part of the community and who is not, has seemingly increased the ruling party’s and President Erdoğan’s moral clout. On the domestic level, polarization based on an ‘either with us or against us’ rhetoric has aimed at drawing clear lines between supporters (representing the community) and opponents and keeping the electorate mobilized and attached to the party. Friend–enemy distinctions have the effect that they do not only pit groups against each other, they also create a unity by bringing those who are defined as friends together. ‘A clear enemy can give a sense of political purpose to an assortment of states, parties or movements, and conversely, the loss of such enemy might weaken the understanding of who they are and what they are fighting for’ (Arditi 2008, 12). In that regard, friend–enemy distinctions also help monitor how a group votes, something which is less costly than monitoring individual behaviour and which facilitates the negotiation of patronage (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 15–18).

The Gezi Protests in Turkey in 2013 initiated another phase towards authoritarianism. The AKP de-legitimized the protests as an attempt to overthrow the democratically elected government through un-democratic means. Protesters have been criminalized and depicted
as the ‘long-arm’ of foreign powers. In March 2015, the AKP majority in parliament passed a so called ‘domestic security package’ including major amendments to the law regulating the duties and powers of police. The amendments have tightened government control over the internet, further limited the right of demonstration and increased police powers to conduct searches and use weapons against demonstrators (Zeldin 2015).

The coup attempt on 15 July 2016, for which the government has accused the Gülen Movement (named after its founder Fethullah Gülen who lives in exile in the US) set another step on the way to the monopolization of the political discourse. The coup attempt has been used as a legitimizing device for comprehensive purges within media, universities and the public sector. The sacking and arrest of thousands of people (including secular and leftist critics of the AKP with hardly any relations to the religious Gülen network) has been accompanied by a concerted media campaign against the Gülen Movement and its domestic and foreign allies. The Gülen Movement and its supporters have been depicted as traitors and ruthless enemies of the nation. The constant reminder of the risks of another coup attempt has helped keep the AKP’s constituency mobilized and close the ranks. Even oppositional media have joined the choir. The failed coup attempt has further strengthened defiant nationalism and a leader-cult around President Erdoğan.

In all three cases, the ruling parties’ claim of the interpretative sovereignty to differentiate between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ citizens, has been accompanied by divisive and discriminating rhetoric and an ‘either with us or against us’ logic. This in turn has on the one hand helped mobilize the grassroots and close the ranks, but it has also led to polarization. Elections are central to these political systems. They are still the major source of legitimation and provide a platform for the re-negotiation of material reward mechanisms. They have been bitterly fought, and gained the character of referenda over the future of the nation. An aggressive discriminatory political rhetoric has often masked the lack of ideological and programmatic approaches. The ruling parties in all three cases, however in varying degrees, have diminished democracy to a mere ‘all or nothing game’ over power.

5. Conclusion

The attraction of liberal democracy is in decline. Many countries in Europe and beyond are experiencing a ‘democratic rollback’. In the European periphery, enlargement fatigue and the effects of the global economic crisis have been factors which have supported the rise of authoritarian tendencies. While this does not necessarily entail total regression into full-fledged authoritarianism, it involves the rise in authoritarian modes, behaviours and patterns of governance. Formal democratic institutions and procedures are largely in place, but they have been constantly undermined by an authoritarian logic. The scope for democratic liberties has been constantly restricted, often legitimized by security concerns. The rise of authoritarian features has not disturbed the functioning of a globalized (neoliberal) market economy. On the contrary, to a great extent, most of these regimes situated somewhere at the grey zone between liberal democracy and authoritarianism have been compatible with neoliberal economic approaches.

Based on the assumption that the prospect of EU accession has released enormous transformative forces, the article has examined Turkey, Serbia and Macedonia, three countries which are (still) candidates to the EU, but their prospects of membership strongly vary. The requirement of the implementation of the EU’s Copenhagen criteria had intended to
consolidate liberal democracy in candidate countries, but the loss of a realistic prospect of membership has not only weakened the appetite for substantial reforms, it has also enabled the rise of authoritarian tendencies. Whereas in the case of Turkey, hopes for EU membership have almost entirely evaporated, despite several political difficulties Macedonia and Serbia still hope to join the EU in a foreseeable future. Serbia has already started negotiations with the EU and is making progress. In the case of Macedonia negotiations could not start, mainly due to the name dispute with Greece. The varying degrees of hope to join the EU have, among other factors, determined the degree of authoritarian tendencies; hence Turkey being the most authoritarian, to be followed by Macedonia and then Serbia. Accordingly, Turkey served as a leading case study for the examination of authoritarian patterns of governance within formally democratic systems. The study has focused on the family resemblances among the authoritarian practices employed by the three parties.

The three parties; the AKP in Turkey, the SNS in Serbia and the VMRO-DPMNE in Macedonia represent reformed, post-ideological political formations, characterized by a high degree of adaptability, flexibility and pragmatism. In all three cases, a neoliberal approach to economy and a pro-EU line invested the parties with the aura of reformers and modernizers.

The aim was to look behind the façade, decode the authoritarian code and understand the instruments, patterns and mechanisms, which have guaranteed electoral support, the maintenance of power and the generation of legitimacy. Based on a Weberian approach (Weber 1966), we have identified and elaborated three areas on which the ruling parties have based their legitimation strategies. As argued in the paper structural reforms in line with EU norms and the requirements of the IMF have constituted the first area on which the ruling parties have based their legitimation strategies. Reforms functioned as ‘legitimising devices’ to rearrange the institutional setting, weaken the powers of the old power centres, reconfigure the state and advance specific political and economic interests. In other words, reforms in view of EU accession and in line with neoliberal paradigms allowed the perturbation of established arrangements and political routines and the creation of new power circles. Particularly, the privatization of state-owned companies, real estates and natural resources strengthened the governments’ financial capabilities.

The re-distribution of public resources has constituted the second area upon which the ruling parties have based their legitimation strategies. Against the background of historically state-dominated economies, where political power has been traditionally understood as a strategy ‘to build and sustain power by distributing material benefits generated by the state through clientelistic channels’ (Marschall et al. 2015), the re-distribution of public goods could only take place through informal channels. Informal patronage networks are neither new nor a particular feature of authoritarianism. But, considering the fact that the reforms have generated immense financial resources, being in command of the reform processes has helped the ruling parties gain a clear edge over political rivals. Without any serious disturbances, they have been able to create their own, loyal power centres within the state apparatus and economy and gain a hegemonic position. Preferential treatment in calls to tenders, privatization or commissioning helped the parties build loyal pro-government business groups at the national as well as the local levels. Infrastructure and construction projects have played an important role in the informal re-direction of state resources from the old to the new (pro-government) elites.
The fact that these policies created *nouveaux riches* has fuelled hopes for social and economic advancement among the economically deprived and concealed that redistribution hardly increased the wealth of the masses. Clientelistic re-distribution diversified the power centres, but it did not eradicate social disparity. While a few who have entertained good personal relations with the leaders became rich, those at the lower levels of the social pyramid benefited from social services such as health or welfare services in return for loyalty in form of active support and votes. Particularly, at the local level, the ruling parties have functioned as channels through which people could gain access to power and participate in the clientelistic reward networks. In an increasingly competitive atmosphere, the machines of the ruling parties have provided channels for participation linking the local, regional and national levels. At the local level, the symbiosis between political power and participation in the controlled market induced the emergence of a pro-ruling party interest block. This block has been essential in controlling and maintaining power. This is the link to the *third area* we explored in the paper, namely the narratives employed by ruling parties. The narrative of a departure from a black painted previous era and the promise of working for the ‘little man’ has been a common feature among the three parties. Bashing against the old elites and their foreign allies has conferred upon the charismatic leaders the image of a Robin Hood. Allegations and rumours of corruption have often been ignored by supporters or de-legitimized as defamations (Scott 1969, 1144).

The AKP’s, SNS’s and VMRO-DPMNE’s rhetoric has often drawn on a feeling of victimization. The leaders have not only been eager to highlight their modest backgrounds and present themselves as men of the people but they have also raised the claim of defining who the real people are (authentic Turks, real Serbs, Macedonians). Political polarization has helped the ruling parties organize society according to friends and enemies. This has facilitated the definition of political targets and strategies. A rally-around-the-flag rhetoric in turn has helped keep the grassroots mobilized and close the ranks. As the leaders and their ruling parties have claimed to defend the rights of the deprived and to act for the sake of the whole nation, dissent has been easily de-legitimized and criminalized.

Mega infrastructure projects have been used as references to an idealized past. In times of uncertainty and growing social disparity, they have been important instruments in constructing the image of awakening into a promising future. Historic references have aimed at conveying the sense of familiarity and security. But, at the same time they have helped feed a construction sector, which has been closely attached to the rulers and their parties.

Although, the three countries can look back to different historical paths and developed varying institutional and structural settings, the resemblances between the modes of neoliberal authoritarian governance are striking. The authoritarian patterns revealed might have an explanatory value for further cases of an emergent authoritarian ‘ring of fire’ on the European continent (Bertelsmann Foundation 2016). In all three cases the ruling parties and their leaders are sticking to the formal notion of democracy. However, although elections are regularly held and usually free of fraud, they have increasingly resembled plebiscites. Nevertheless, they are very important for the ruling parties as they provide a platform through which allegiance can be measured and material rewards re-negotiated. At the same time, the ruling parties do everything to guarantee electoral success. Democracy is considered as a game in which those who have the majority can change the rules, call for new elections, change the system, or simply disregard any critique coming from the opposition or international community/EU. Thus, as argued in the paper, EU reforms and the
implementation of neoliberal policies have opened new spaces for the generation of power resulting in a fundamental change of patterns of governance and the rise of a neoliberal authoritarian governmentality. Its attitude towards politics and democracy represents a major threat to liberal democratic values.

Notes

1. ‘Aoristic’ refers to a form of ancient Greek past tense describing one-off actions which contrary to the perfect tense – which describes an action that happened in the past but somehow continues in the present – occurred in the past but broke its continuity (Poggi 2001, 13).

2. The party’s monopolistic position in most of the central and eastern Anatolian provinces guaranteed the maintenance of shares in votes as 74.1% in Konya in the 1 November 2015 elections, in the elections on 7 June 2015 65.45% and in 2011 69.63%, in Erzurum 68.1%, on 1 November 2015, 52.02% on 7 June 2015 and 69.25% in 2011, in Çorum 61.3% on 1 November, 54.38% on 7 June 2015 and 61.62% in 2011. Similar to these results, the ruling AKP has been able to hold its share in votes between 50 and 70% in most of the Anatolian provinces (seçim.haberler.com).

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