Turkey Reframed
Constituting Neoliberal Hegemony

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Introduction

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‘Looking at parties in Britain, which party do you think is similar to the AKP?’
‘We describe ourselves as conservative when it comes to family values.
When it comes to the economy, we are liberal.
And when it comes to income and poverty, we are socialist.’
This response was given by Mehmet Şimşek, the Minister of Finance of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) government, while speaking as a guest at the Liberal Democrat Party’s ‘Friends of Turkey’ group in 2011. The reporting newspaper added that the audience all laughed at this answer. Beyond doubt, Şimşek’s statement indicates the self-confident position of a political party that has been governing Turkey for more than ten years, with an increased share of votes in every election, and that is generally considered to be the party most likely to govern for the foreseeable future. As Şimşek’s comments illustrate, such a strong position allows party officials to make hegemonic claims about almost every issue affecting Turkey: the AKP represents both the left and the right. This self-confidence is not restricted just to party officials. Recently, an AKP-inclined pop-singer, a media vulture, went to Caracas to join the funeral march for Hugo Chavez and attacked ‘the so-called leftists of Turkey’ for their non-participation. Although right-wing politics, with almost all of its variations, has been the dominant and governing side in Turkish politics, as a result of the ongoing AKP era, it has become a respectable and positive, rather than reactionary, political identity, perhaps for the first time in its history. This edited volume is about understanding this reconfiguration of Turkish politics that British Lib-Dems reflexively laughed at.

The first decade of the 2000s, which was marked both by the major economic crisis of 2001 and by the coming to power of the ex-Islamist cadres organised under the AKP, has been a period of radical change in Turkish society and politics. The AKP era represents the reconsolidation of the neoliberal hegemony after the devastating effects of the 2001 crisis in particular and the 30-year painful constitution of the neoliberal hegemony in general. The main claim of this volume is that the AKP era, with all its peculiarities, should be contextualised within this general process of neoliberal hegemony constitution. Therefore, rather than discuss the hegemony of a political party, we discuss hegemony in its class terms, which has been put into effect and consolidated through the practices of a political party, namely the AKP. For us, the AKP matters in this context.

Throughout the 2000s, one symptom of this hegemonic struggle has been that the demarcations among political actors in Turkey have been radically