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DOMESTIC SCENARIOS AND  
FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

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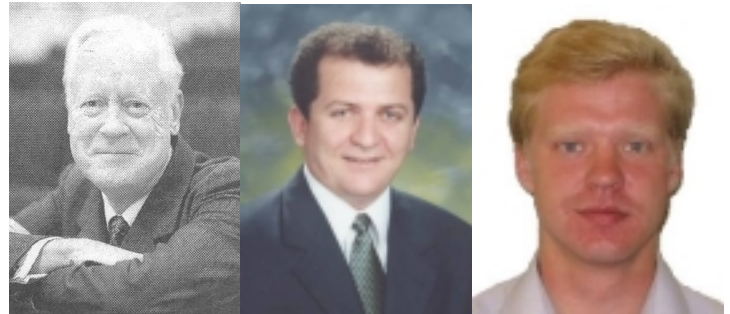


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## **TURKEY'S ELECTIONS: DOMESTIC SCENARIOS AND FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS**



**By Ambassador Erik Cornell, Dr. Kemal Kaya, and Dr. Svante E. Cornell**

*On November 3, Turkey is facing one of the most unpredictable elections of its modern history. This election, coming against the backdrop of one of Turkey's worst economic crises, is set to rearrange the upper political echelons in the country. While the election is likely to produce a strong showing for the moderate pro-Islamic AK Party, it is also likely to wipe out some of Turkey's best-known political parties together with their leaders. Most dramatically, the last few weeks before the elections are seeing the rapid rise of a rabidly populist party led by a controversial businessman. Turkey is clearly in flux, and the outcome and implications of this elections are highly debated. Only, Turkey is in such a domestic and international environment that neither Turkey nor its neighbors or the international community can afford long-term instability in Turkey. This Brief seeks answers to some of the most common questions regarding Turkey's*

*upcoming elections: Who will win? What government alternatives are there? How will this elections affect Turkey's EU bid, its civil-military relations, and its foreign policy in the Middle East and Eurasia?*

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The 57<sup>th</sup> Turkish Government came to power on April 18, 1999, composed of the DSP, MHP, and ANAP, under the premiership of Bülent Ecevit. It had a large majority of 350 out of 550 seats in the parliament, and has actually been the longest living coalition government in the history of democratic Turkey. In spite of its large majority, the 57<sup>th</sup> government proved unable to bring radical solutions to the series of problems Turkey had accumulated for decades. Soon after its inception, the government was rocked by the devastating

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earthquake of August 16, 1999, which hit the Marmara region, one of Turkey's key industrial regions. After this, two large-scale economic crises in November 2000 and February 2001 affected the government's performance, and in the final analysis, this government has failed to live up to the expectations that were pinned on it when coming to power. With 35 ministers, it had one of the world's largest cabinets, complicating the swift taking of critical decisions. Moreover, when World Bank economist Kemal Dervish was brought in the aftermath of the economic crisis to take charge of the treasury, the reform programs that were implemented with the support of the IMF were resisted especially by the Nationalist wing of the coalition government, thereby hindering their implementation and delaying the results of these reforms. Moreover, increasing political differences within the government also obstructed its efficiency and effectiveness.

Elections were normally scheduled to be held on April 18, 2004. But the failing of ageing Prime Minister Ecevit's health in May 2002 meant an end to the fragile political stability in the country. Unrest began to spread in the Prime Minister's Democratic Left Party (DSP), with large tracts of the party as well as the public feeling Ecevit was physically unfit to govern and should hand over power to younger forces within the party. Then, Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) Devlet Bahçeli during a trip to China announced he would not support a set of legal reforms necessary for Turkey's application to membership in the European Union. With the increasing demands for early elections in the fall, the country plunged into instability. The resignation of Prime Minister Ecevit's right hand man,

Hüsamettin Özkan, triggered the collapse of the largest party in parliament, the DSP, with 61 parliamentarians (roughly half of its mandate) resigning to form a new party.

With the government losing its parliamentary majority, the Turkish Grand National Assembly decided to hold early elections on November 3, 2002, with a great majority of votes, excluding the remainder of the DSP, while allowing the incumbent government to continue exercising its functions until that date. Shortly thereafter, an important set of judicial amendments called the National Program were passed through parliament for the harmonization of the legal system with European Union regulations, and supported by all parties except the MHP. With the approval of the President, these changes were signed into law. The MHP's negative stance was conditioned partly by its nationalist ideology, but equally by the apprehension of military circles as well as a pragmatic objective to secure the support of the anti-EU voters in the forthcoming elections.

The parliament had recessed after the early election decision, but was called back into session on October 1, at which point an attempt to postpone the elections was aborted. The Motherland Party (ANAP), the New Turkey Party (YTP) founded under former foreign minister Ismail Cem and consisting of former DSP members, and the pro-religious Saadet (Happiness) Party took support from a group of 'disgruntled' deputies whose names were omitted from the party lists in the upcoming elections to try to prevent the holding of an election in which all these parties were almost sure not to pass the 10% threshold on parliamentary representation. This attempt was rejected by a

difference of 21 lawmakers. After this event, nothing short of an immediate crisis leading to war in Iraq can prevent the holding of the November 3 elections.

After the decision on early elections, a number of opinion polls have been made by various organizations and media outlets. Though showing great fluctuations both among each other and over short time spans of only several weeks, it is clear that the two coalition partners DSP and ANAP are far under the 10% threshold, while the MHP is hovering around this crucial level. Moreover, the opposition True Path Party (DYP) of former Prime Minister Tansu Çiller is in a similar situation, just over or around the threshold, while the Saadet Party and the YTP of Ismail Cem are far below the level of entry to the parliament. Among parties currently represented in the parliament, only the Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the former Mayor of Istanbul, is certain to pass the threshold, in spite of the party leader himself being banned from participating in the election due to his earlier conviction according to art. 312 of the Turkish Criminal Code, for inciting hatred. While the AKP, usually branded as a pro-Islamic party though it tries to portray itself as an equivalent of western Christian Democratic parties, is set to rank first, the Republican People's Party (CHP), which failed to gain representation in the 1999 elections, is at present poised to emerge the second largest party after the elections. While all this points to the flux and unpredictability of Turkish politics, another development has taken this feeling of uncertainty to new heights. The 'Youth Party', Genç Partisi (GP) founded only two months ago and led by the controversial businessman Cem Uzan is approaching the 10%

threshold according to most opinion polls, with an unprecedented rise of popularity assisted by media and public relations experts.

The roots of Turkey's political instability are deep. Since multi-party democracy was introduced in 1946, three outright (1960, 1971, 1980) and one additional (1997) military interventions have occurred, a major factor hindering the democratic development of the country. The military interventions gradually contributed directly to the fragmentation of the political scene, destroying the pre-existing situation with two major political parties. In the aftermath of the 1971 military intervention, the military managed to split the then dominant party of the right, the Justice Party (AP). This led to the return from exile of Necmettin Erbakan, whose religious party in different incarnations grew in size until becoming as the Welfare Party (RP) the largest party in the country in 1995, with a very narrow margin. The RP formed a government with the DYP in 1996, but was itself, having challenged the secular order, forced to resign from government after a military intervention in the NSC in February 1997. The successive military interventions have weakened the political cadres in the country, leading to ever weaker party bureaucracies entering parliament. Most destructive was the 1980 coup, whose ambition to redesign a political system for the country buried the basic two-party system in the country and led to the present, fragmented picture.

Conversely, the politicians in Turkey have failed to shoulder responsibility for the country's politics. They have often acted as if they lived in the safe knowledge that if they failed to bring the country's problems to order, even if they failed miserably,

they were always assured that someone else would step in to resolve the most immediate problems – namely the military. This condition, acknowledged in private by senior Turkish politicians, has fuelled the climate of irresponsibility in Turkish politics. Hence though the successive coups did contribute significantly to the fragmentation of politics, they have at different occasions saved the secular order, prevented anarchy and civil war, and taken place with the support of large tracts of the population, most notably in 1980.

After the 1980 coup, the Motherland Party (ANAP) under Turgut Özal managed to gain control over the parliament, and introduced and implemented a large series of free market reforms, leading to an unprecedented economic boom in Turkey. However, by the beginning of the 1990s, the fragmentation of the political scene had developed, and Turkey has ever since been run by weak coalitions of left and right parties. These weak governments have been a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution for Turkey, and have contributed significantly to bringing about the present chaotic situation.

### **ELECTORAL SCENARIOS**

It is to be expected that two or three parties will pass the 10% threshold and establish parliamentary groups. Only AKP and CHP are certain to gain representation. Whether or not MHP, DYP, and GP will pass the threshold will only become clear in the final week before election day, and it is at this point too early to make any conclusions; the trend, however, is that MHP has a very stable base of ca. 8%, but how many extra votes it will get remains unknown; DYP seems to be losing votes to the rapidly expanding GP, but whether the GP bid for

parliament will eventually be successful is presently a matter of conjecture. All other parties, including ANAP, DSP, YTP, and SP are almost certain to fail to pass the threshold, possibly implying the threat of extinction for DSP and ANAP. Opinion polls show AKP leading with ca. 30 percent of the vote, and CHP second with ca. 15-20 percent. If these figures prove correct, the AKP will probably be able to achieve the 275 seats necessary to form a majority government, even if a third party enters parliament with ca. 10-12% of the vote.

Because of jail sentence for inciting hatred over a 1997 poem he read publicly, AKP leader Tayyip Erdogan was barred from being a candidate in the elections. In spite of this, he attracts very significant amounts of people at political rallies across the country. Speculations suggest that the people, feeling cheated by the economic crisis, have in fact identified ever more with Erdogan, given a widespread feeling that his ban from politics is also a form of cheating by the state.

AKP is a party that finds its origins in Erbakan's Refah party and its earlier antecedents. But although the party is issued from a religious-conservative background, its political experience has brought it closer to the center, making it a rightist coalition of forces, where nationalist, conservative and liberal views are found alongside and parallel to Islamic views. In this sense, it is similar to the ANAP of the 1980s, except for the leftist wing that ANAP possessed. Suffering from the image of a leader having been sentenced for religious incitement to violence – as criticized as that court case has been – has pushed AKP to adopt a policy of trying to overcome and turn around those suspicions, portraying itself as promoting more generally

acceptable nationalist and liberal values. The weak character of party cadres related to the many military interventions is true for the AKP too, and if it comes to power, AKP will experience a desperate lack of experienced politicians and statesmen.

Since Tayyip Erdogan can not be a member of parliament, he will not appear as leader of the party either. As such he will not be able to become Prime Minister even should AKP get a majority of its own. The question of who will be the prime ministerial candidate of the AKP is yet publicly undecided, though speculations abound. The leading candidates are the Party's Deputy Chairman Abdullah Gül, former deputy speaker of parliament Vecdi Gönül, and a new name in politics, Vahit Erdem, who is known for his liberal conservative beliefs, his good relations with the military, the bureaucracy, and the business community. Two other possible names not to be ruled out are deputy chairmen Bülent Arınç and Abdulkadir Aksu. This uncertainty regarding the leadership of the party is also mirrored within the party ranks itself, and the leadership struggle may lead to internal difficulties after the elections. Moreover, there is a significant risk that an AKP Prime Minister perceived as remote-controlled by Tayyip Erdogan will find it difficult to build legitimacy for his government.

The AKP is explicitly pro-EU in its policies. It supported all harmonization reforms in August with the exception of the abolition of the death penalty, which it did not support for electoral reasons. Even during the vote on the death penalty, the AKP voted against, but made sure a significant number of its parliamentarians were not present in the

plenum to vote, thereby ensuring the bill would pass.

According to all opinion polls, the CHP, which received only 8,5% of votes in 1999, is expected to enter parliament as the second largest party with around or over 15%. Deniz Baykal's CHP has strong support from the media, the so-called 'deep state', as well as the business community, but has been unable to draw the amount of public support it expected. In fact, this support by traditional powerbrokers may be a drawback rather than an asset for the CHP. Baykal's reputation as a spoiler is also not forgotten among the people. Even though Baykal managed to recruit Kemal Dervish, who had originally supported the YTP of Ismail Cem, he has failed to bring the CHP to a level of popularity comparable to the AKP. For Baykal to be able to form a government that excludes the AKP would likely require at least two other parties to enter parliament, which seems unlikely at this point. Even then, the AKP could form a government with any one of the other parties, unless it receives far less votes than all opinion polls suggest at present. It is hence likely that Baykal, who seems to be the west's favorite candidate, will remain in opposition.

The biggest surprise of this election campaign has been the surge in popularity of the Youth Party (GP) of Cem Uzan, a business tycoon best known for the "Motorola Affair" – the Uzan family operates Turkish second-largest cellular phone network, Telsim, which is facing billion-dollar lawsuits in New York launched by its former business partners Motorola and Nokia. Uzan's populist campaign is especially successful among the young, unemployed, and uneducated population of the large cities of Turkey. An anti-establishment

campaign of dissatisfaction with the current leadership is coupled with promises of free land to everyone, tractors for farmers, 250 new universities, and other staggering promises that seem unrealizable. Uzan's Bosnian origin also appeals to the Bosnian and Balkan-origin population of western Turkey, and indeed a predominance of Balkan-origin politicians are found in the GP.

This is only the most prominent example of the changing of the structure of Turkish politics. As a result of military interventions, the two-party system in Turkey has given way to a political atmosphere where twenty-one parties will contest the November 3 elections, raising important questions regarding these parties' bases in society. Turkish politics are not grounded in social class divisions in the way most European polities operate. In Turkey, religion and increasingly ethnicity seem to be the main markers of political allegiances. At the outset, the political spectrum was divided into the CHP, supported by the modernist forces and the Alevi religious minority, whereas its opponent, the Democratic Party and its followers, rest on the support of the Sunni conservative masses as well as populations adversely affected by the establishment policies and its reform programs. This political structure has been completely dismantled, giving way to a balkanization of the political scene, which is illustrated by a few examples.

The DEHAP-HADEP group is explicitly pro-Kurdish and based in the southeast; the Youth Party, as described above, has a support base of Bosnian-origin citizens; the small Yurt Partisi of former Interior Minister Sadettin Tantan is dominated by Turks of Georgian descent; the MHP

is a nationalist, pro-Turkic and even pan-Turkic or "Turanic"; the SP is based around the Naqshbandiya Sufi order or *Tariqat*, whereas the Grand Unity Party (BBP) is the representative of one wing of the same *Tariqat*, and the small Independent Turkey Party (BTP) is composed of the Qadiriya *Tariqat*. The AKP, though drawing mass support beyond its social bases, is run by a core cadre with a background in the Nakhshbandiya order. The CHP still represents the modernist and westernized elite and the Alevi religious minority. As for the Süleymanci and Nurcu, which form two other religious groupings with considerable following within the Sunni majority, they possess no parties of their own, and have traditionally supported the ANAP or the DYP.

This balkanization along ethnic and religious lines is attributed by conspiracy theorists to a divide and rule policy by the 'deep state', the coalition of the high ranks of the military, the judiciary, and the high civilian bureaucracy that is the ultimate powerbroker in Turkey.

#### **DOMESTIC IMPLICATIONS**

Two government alternatives are likely to emerge from the November 3 elections. The first is a single-party AKP government, while the second is a CHP-led coalition government of whatever parties pass the parliamentary threshold. That the AKP would form a government with one of the parties entering parliament is a possibility, but a distant one at present, given the strong establishment pressure to avoid AKP participation in government if at all possible. That the military has a strong influence on the political process, in particular after the NSC meeting of February 28, 1997, is a well-known fact. The military forms an important part of the deep



state, which collectively is negatively inclined to an AKP government. The 'deep state' will have no choice but to respect the results of the elections, but will do its best to manipulate on the basis of these results to prevent the AKP from coming to power.

The AKP strategy differs significantly from that of its predecessor, the Welfare Party (RP). Where the RP challenged secularism, the AKP has been very careful not to make any statements raising tensions with the secular establishment, especially as concerns secularism. In foreign policy terms, the AKP, unlike the RP which pursued a foreign policy emphasizing links with the Muslim world, has positioned itself in line with the pro-western orientation of the establishment. With regard to Iraq, AKP has argued that Turkey should act in coordination with the rest of the western world, and has refrained from anti-American statements, to the contrary even sending friendly signals to the U.S. Given this constructive approach on the part of the AKP, it is unlikely that a strong reaction against an AKP government will come from the west, excluding some forces in Europe that may seek to utilize its coming to power to legitimize EU keeping its distance to Turkey. But except for this, acceptance of the AKP by the international community is likely, and could have a positive effect on the relations between the AKP and the 'deep state'.

The military's influence on the political scene is unlikely to diminish in the short term. The main reasons for this is the very tense and critical agenda facing Turkey both internally and externally. Especially armed confrontations or the threat thereof near Turkey's borders, and a likely military

operation in Iraq, will ensure that the military keep a strong influence over political developments. Should war break out in Iraq involving Turkey directly, the role of the military is likely to increase, not decrease, as is the case in most countries. The military influence on the political system can only diminish if Turkey achieves a date of the start of membership negotiations with the European Union. But in the short term and given Turkey's geopolitical environment as well as its cultural realities, it is unrealistic to assume that the military's role in politics and society will decrease to the level of western European countries. In due time, military influence is likely to stabilize at a level acceptable to everyone – Turkey's political actors and public, the military itself, and the EU.

### **FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The November 3 elections are nothing less than critical for Turkey, and will highlight a number of crucial domestic and foreign policy issues facing the country. The number one problem for the next government will be the still lingering economic crisis in the country, which has been far from overcome. In the external realm, the most crucial issue remains the European Union, with Turkey's expectation of getting a date for the beginning of membership negotiations from Brussels, and connected to this, certain reforms that may still be needed and the ever-present Cyprus issue. In addition to this, the expected American military action against Iraq, if implemented, will have deep economic, political, and military implications for Turkey. In particular, developments toward the creation of an independent Kurdish state or state-like entity in Northern Iraq are being watched with caution and apprehension in Turkey. Turkey has

reiterated that the proclamation of an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq constitutes a *Casus Belli*, and is mounting a military mobilization on the border with Iraq, including forces physically inside Iraq.

Culturally as well as geographically, Turkey is situated in the midst of several crisis areas of international significance, and its foreign policy fits firmly into the western security architecture with regard to these areas of crisis. From the Balkans to Afghanistan, Turkey participates in all peacekeeping operations, it leads the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, and hosts the American and British that patrol the No-Fly zone in Northern Iraq, while it plays an important role in stabilizing the Caucasian states of Georgia and Azerbaijan, where its economic role is crucial and its military assistance significant. Hence while being in economic turmoil at home, Turkey has come to be a central element in regional and therefore in global security affairs. Whether the Balkans, the Caucasus or the Middle East are concerned, Turkey is the closest country to be part of the western security architecture, and has the second largest military force after the United States within this system. While having either political, military or economic relations of significance with practically all conflict areas that have gained attention on the international scene after September 11, 2001 (the Middle East, Central Asia, Afghanistan), Turkey is also poised to become a central actor in the security and transportation of Caspian energy resources westwards. Construction has begun on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that will bring Azerbaijani oil to the Ceyhan terminal on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, which will be completed by 2005. Turkey is also the most

complicated element in the European Union's enlargement strategy, an issue which affects the entire European security system given Turkey's role in NATO. Finally, by the very composition of its population, Turkey is linked by millions of its citizens to the nearby regions of the Balkans, Caucasus and Middle East, with which these citizens keep close contacts. Likewise, by its millions of immigrants in Europe, Turkey is connected on a grassroots level with the EU countries as well.

Whatever government emerges from the November 3 elections, no major foreign policy changes are to be expected. An AKP government, if it comes to power in spite of all the efforts by the establishment to prevent its victory, will have membership in the European Union and the achievement of a starting date for negotiations as its chief foreign policy aim. In accordance with this aim, an AKP government will be likely to continue the process of reforms to harmonize Turkey's legislation with that of the EU. The AKP is the self-proclaimed voice of the conservative and low-income population groups worst affected by the economic crisis, and is likely to cooperate with other parties as necessary to continue reforms in the field of personal freedoms without major political upheavals, in order to improve the conditions of this important constituency. However, hawks among both civilian and military circles are likely to remain staunchly opposed to European policies on Cyprus, thereby possibly forming an obstacle to the resolution of that problem.

Most political forces in Turkey are determined to prevent developments in Northern Iraq or Iraq as a whole from affecting Turkish interests negatively.

Turkey urges unconditional access for UN inspectors in Iraq, and advises the U.S. to conform to International Law and is hence not positively inclined to an American invasion without UN Security Council support. Moreover, a military operation would negatively affect economic indicators that are already in crisis or recovering from a deep recession. Most foreign observers note that Turkey's economic recovery is closely linked to continued American-supported IMF programs, and therefore Turkey is likely to allow for the use of American bases in southern Turkey for the operation.

Turkey's approach to the Iraq issue is simply damage control: to minimize the adverse effects of an invasion for Turkey, which also implies that Turkey seeks to influence the outcome of an operation and the Iraq that will emerge after military operations are completed, in accordance with Turkish national interests. Basically, Turkey seeks to ensure that the situation that will emerge in Iraq will not from a threat to Turkey or to Turkish interests. Turkey will seek to prevent the emergence of a Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq; it will seek to protect the interests of the Turkoman minority there; it will do its best to uphold Iraq's unity and territorial integrity; and will demand compensation for its economic losses from the war from the United States.

## CONCLUSIONS

The domestic and international economic and political issues in which Turkey finds itself are critical, and do not allow for political instability to continue beyond the November 3 elections. Should the AKP emerge victorious of this election, the current situation indicates that contrary to the RP's

coming to power in 1996, there will be a relatively smooth transfer of power. While the AKP's credentials are questionable, especially in the economic field, it would potentially form a stable and united government able to pursue a coherent political agenda. Successive coalition governments, on the other hand, have failed to resolve Turkey's now almost institutionalized economic and social problems. A CHP-led coalition government would need to include a combination of at least two of the three serious contenders for parliamentary representation: the MHP, the GP, and/or the DYP. That would mean a coalition of a leftist party with two or three right-wing parties: the rigid nationalist and EU-skeptic MHP, the populist and inexperienced GP, and/or the corruption-tainted but mainstream DYP under Tansu Çiller. That such a coalition government would be able to overcome the large differences between its component parties and effectively address the domestic and regional problems facing Turkey is highly unlikely.

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