

Turkish elections, June 7th 2015: Turkey back to the changing swing

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Introduction

The elections of June 7th have emerged as a crucial factor that will reshape Turkish politics and society. Whatever the results of the ballot box, mid-term or long-term turmoil should be expected after June 7th. The intensity and violence of the turmoil will depend on the results of the elections and of the dynamics after them. Overall, the general feeling in Turkey is that in the morning of June 8th the country will wake up in a new era.

A central issue of these elections and the ultimate catalyst for the post- June 7th era will be the success or failure of the pro Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) to reach the threshold of 10% required for representation in the Parliament. An additional central issue that will have an immediate impact on the elections and will shape the political life after June 7th is the debate and the dynamics concerning the constitutional reform that would allow for a full Presidential system instead of a Parliamentary one.

The upcoming elections are of critical importance for several reasons, the most crucial of which are:

AKP's end of a political cycle and the beginning of a new one, with main characteristics being the ideological introversion and the tensions between those who support President R.T. Erdogan and his ambitions to have his own Presidential system in one hand and those who do not support it and who tend to see R.T.Erdogan and its ambitions as a liability for the movement.

The beginning of a new cycle for the Kurdish movement, with main characteristics being its dynamic momentum to leave the margins and move towards the center of Turkish politics (and society) and the opening up to the Turkish left and progressive circles.

The ongoing –albeit frozen for now- peace process; the efforts of Ankara and the Kurds to find a common ground for a long lasting and peaceful settlement of the Kurdish question is yet another variable that will have an impact on the elections.

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Regionally and internationally, different dynamics have already changed and will continue to change the environment in which Turkey and the AKP have operated in the last decade. These ongoing changes are attributed primarily to the following reasons:

The end of the positive (for Turkey) circumstances in international finances that pushes Turkey into a much slower growth rate and that will oblige the next government to deal with an urgent need for important structural reforms to deal with a slower growth rate.

A shift in the international and regional balances, with the crisis in Syria and the regionalization of the Kurdish factor dominating the region and the historical US shift towards Iran and away from Saudi Arabia. These regional and international recalibrations will emerge as one of the main challenges for the new government's foreign policy; Ankara will be obliged to take sides in the next period in a more pronounced way than it had to do up to now.

This paper will describe the circumstances under which the elections of June 7th will take place, provide basic information concerning the main political parties in view of the elections, and will assess different scenarios that could emerge from the ballot box.

June 7th elections: Protest, social change, divided Islamic movement and the Kurds

Since Spring 2013, the essence and the forms of protest in Turkey have acquired a new symbol: The Gezi demonstrations of May-June 2013. Gezi created a different environment for social and political protest and the upcoming elections can be seen as a slow process that started in Gezi. At the same time, despite the dominant hyper-conservatism promoted by the current government and by the Islamic/conservative circles, very strong undercurrents of social change and various forms of pluralism are recorded within the Turkish society. These undercurrents have an impact on the electoral behavior within the current heavy polarized environment.

Since the beginning of its "success story", the AKP presents for the first time an important number of signs of fragmentation and fatigue. The ongoing fight against what is perceived as a "parallel structure threat" of the Gulen movement and the debate about a constitutional reform in order to have a Presidential system accentuate this fragmentation as well as the polarization in view of the elections. Last but not least, the re-emergence of the Kurdish issue and the "peace process" initiated by R.T.Erdogan in 2012 has created a singular political environment: . The "peace process", in parallel with the debates about the Presidential system, have brought the Kurdish issue in the heart of the political developments in Turkey; together with the regionalization of the Kurdish identity, these developments have



created a very special political environment where the interaction of regional politics and domestic politics will decide the future of Turkey's state structure and society.

Gezi, the mother of all battles?

The dynamics of the upcoming elections can be seen as a slow process that started in Gezi, two years ago for three reasons. The first is because Gezi brought, for the first time, Turks and Kurds together, even if it was physically in a small scale. Psychologically and symbolically, Gezi changed the perceptions and the dominant narratives about the Turkish state and about the Kurdish unrest: Suddenly, for many Turks, the Kurdish issue emerged not as a mere security problem but as a deep problem of democracy and state. And from the Kurdish point of view, it emerged that collaboration with Turks is not only feasible but also needed. The ongoing process of the Kurdish movement to open up to Turks and to the Turkish left and the progressives was probably enhanced by Gezi's "heritage". During Gezi, the militant and non-militant Turkish leftists, the intellectuals of the Turkish left and the progressives (crisscrossing class boundaries) that had never really seen any action and state repression against them, experienced for almost a full month the Turkish police state. This experience brought for a first time ever these various groups closer to the experiences of the Kurds in the southeast and this new "rapprochement" initiated new dynamics between Turks and Kurds.

The second reason why Gezi could be seen as an important catalyst for the present dynamics is that it gave the possibility to different people to come together and to openly defy R.T. Erdogan. It was the first time that R.T. Erdogan, then a Prime Minister, was defied in such a confrontational and all-over-the-country way.

The third reason is deeper and less palpable but it is nevertheless present: Underground protest is becoming stronger in many Turkish cities, and especially in Istanbul, and takes the form of music (hip-hop, rap, heavy metal, punk), street arts, tattoos, literature etc. The dynamics of these underground subcultures are becoming more visible and are putting in doubt major narratives of the Turkish establishment and the AKP. Ethnic dividing lines as well as social/class divisions are blurred within these subcultures. Along with these dividing lines, the subculture dynamic in Turkey blurs yet another basic dominant narrative, the one of "east vs. west" and "Turkey being a bridge between east and west". These fault lines have been promoted mainly by AKP -but also by some progressive circles- in order to gradually re-orient Turkey after the end of the bipolar world and mainly after the electoral victory of AKP in 2002. Having accomplished their initial goal, eg recognizing officially that Turkey has also a very important part of "east", these lines seem today obsolete mainly because individuals tend to espouse/create pluralist identities bypassing the dividing identity lines.

By overcoming this dominant narrative, an important part of the young generations create the conditions for radical changes in the way Turks see themselves and their



country. These changes are not expected to emerge immediately, but the momentum is there. And they will play their own role in these elections and the era that will start on June 8th.

Social change and the limits of polarization

Intrinsic to, and much wider than, Gezi, the deep social transformations occurring in the Turkish society have prepared the terrain for a political exploitation of the fear of change. Behind the government engineered social changes (classic reflexes of all Turkish governments, not only AKP's), with dominant characteristic a tendency for a hyper-conservative Sunni supra-culture, the Turkish society is in deep transformation and does present signs that the "otherness" is tolerated and in some cases even accepted. This is recorded on various polls, despite the ongoing fears of erosion of traditional hierarchies and authorities. Individual behaviors and choices seem to operate in wider limits than before and in that sense, the hyper-conservative outbursts could be seen as reactions to change.¹

The fear of change has emerged as one of the most constant political tactics of AKP and mainly of R.T.Erdogan during the last years. The resistance to what could be seen as a "dangerous" social change and the control of the society have become major tools in the politics of R.T.Erdogan. In that sense, as Jenny White puts it, "AKP voters do not fear autocracy, they fear chaos".² R.T.Erdogan relies on this and has cultivated this fear of chaos and presents himself as the only obstacle against chaos, treason and dishonor.³ Using polarization to consolidate his electoral basis has become the major strategy for R.T.Erdogan. These elections will bring this strategy to its limits.

"Erdoganism" vs Islamism (Akyol⁴)?

Inherent to these dynamics of change is also the fact that R.T.Erdogan seems to become problematic for AKP and the wider Islamist movement in Turkey. Turkish political and social Islam is not impermeable to change; on the contrary, the open and behind the scenes questioning of R.T.Erdogan's primacy (not as a natural leader but as the leader who has the right to take the ultimate decisions about everything) is yet another sign of its ongoing transformation.

The debate about a major constitutional reform in order to have a Presidential system in Turkey is one of the main dynamics within AKP and the relation of the party and the wider Islamic movement and their interaction with R.T.Erdogan.

¹ An interesting argument concerning an aspect of the social change can be read in Mustafa Akyol's article, referring to Volkan Erit's book on secularism in Turkey. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/turkey-is-getting-more-secular.html>

² <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/02/02/the-turkish-complex/>

³ idem

⁴ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/turkey-erdoganism-is-becoming-distinct-from-islamism.html>



Last but not least, the ongoing struggle of the government and R.T.Erdogan in person against the “parallel threat” represented by the movement of Fetulah Gulen, has created a very deep cut within the Islamic movement in Turkey. While its impact is still too early to assess, its presence is nevertheless a factor of shifting alliances and balances in the wider islamist movement as well as in the tactics of R.T.Erdogan. One of the most visible shifting alliances of R.T.Erdogan are his efforts for a “rapprochement” with the Turkish military, as recorded by various media reports and analysts.

Kurdish issue: The game changer

Initiated first in 2009 and then again in 2012, the “solution process” (or “peace process”) for a settlement of the Kurdish question in Turkey has emerged as a game changer for the political and social life of the country. Ankara and the Kurds continue to see the Kurdish issue in different perspectives: For Ankara it is mainly a security problem that could be dealt if the outlaw Kurdish organization PKK declares a permanent farewell to the arms. For the Kurds it is mainly a democracy problem and they insist on democratic and civil rights.

The process was de facto frozen after the interventions of R.T.Erdogan, with many analysts suggesting that the Turkish leader has originally thought that the peace process would bring him more votes in view of the elections, but when he realized that actually it was HDP that could gain more from it he decided to intervene and block the process instead.

Despite these developments and the ongoing fundamental differences between Ankara and the Kurds, it is very important to note that there is for the first time a dialogue – not yet negotiations – between Ankara and the imprisoned Kurdish leader A.Ocalan and that the dialogue has also indirectly engaged other parts of the Kurdish movement.

The peace process gave a new visibility and centrality to the Kurdish issue in Turkey and that was inherent to the wider visibility that the Kurds gained the last year in the region and their resistance to the “Islamic State”. Kurdish dynamics and politics, not only within Turkey but also around Turkey and in countries with Kurdish population, as is the case with Syria, Iraq and to a certain extend Iran, already play a very important role in domestic politics in Turkey and in the Turkish foreign policy. This trend is expected to be enhanced after the elections, bringing the Kurdish factor at the heart of the debates and the political life of Turkey.



The big mirror: Political parties and their candidates

The dynamics of change, the transformation in the political and social spheres, the fears and the hopes of the society are all extremely well-reflected in the major parties' lists of candidates in view of the upcoming elections. Two major tendencies can be recorded: AKP seems to go towards an introvert/conservative moment; CHP and HDP seem to go for an extravert/inclusive moment. Significant in view of the elections and the period after them are also two additional developments: The first is the presence of women in historically big (and eligible) numbers in these elections, a fact that comes to strengthen the dynamics of social transformation in Turkey. The second is the EU's 'absence' from these elections, a fact that can put into question its past instrumentalisation in the domestic politics. The EU absence from the electoral campaign is indicative of the new dynamics in Turkey, where there is no more a substantial external leverage for democratization, a development with positive and negative impacts.

AKP: A turn towards introversion?

AKP's candidates' lists are the result of the internal struggle between R.T.Erdogan and the Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. Deeper than and inherent to this struggle, is a major turning point of the party that does not any longer count on the support of liberals and progressives and seems to turn instead towards the most conservative/exclusive roots of the wider Islamic movement, sidelining concurrently the reformist/inclusive roots.

AKP's lists seem to do have reached a balance between the "Reis" (natural leader) of the party, R.T.Erdogan and the "Hodja" (respected Teacher) A.Davutoglu (Zeyrek⁵); thus the lists include the very personal choices of R.T.Erdogan's inner circle as well as those individuals who are very close to A. Davutoglu (A. Davutoglu is recorded to have managed to eliminate from the lists people close to rom A. Gul and B. Arinc). There are no candidates from minorities (except one Armenian), no Alevis, no liberals and no progressives (a significant number of whom have believed in the reformist dynamics of AKP during the first long period of the party, almost until 2009-2010).

The introvert and statist turn of AKP is also seen with the candidates in the Kurdish southeast region, where AKP broke from its idea not to cooperate with tribes and feudal factors (a classic statist practice since the birth of the Republic). The party is including members of the local feudal establishment (Cevikcan⁶). This move could

⁵ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/28685181.asp>

⁶ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/28685181.asp> ; <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-erdogan-hassasiyeti-davutoglu/gundem/ydetay/2041149/default.htm>

also be interpreted as a reaction to the fear of losing power in the southeast against HDP.

The party also included 99 women, keeping a balance between women wearing the headscarf and those who do not. Women do play a major role in these elections and AKP is not lagging behind this wind of change; on the contrary it acknowledges their importance.

The AKP that will emerge after the elections will be party under the shadow of a great dichotomy or even schism: With the third term rule (forbidding a member of the party to be a candidate for more than three consecutive terms in Parliament), almost half of the current MPs of the party will not be present in the new Parliament. Furthermore, a significant number of candidates are close to the hyper-conservative, Sunni, nationalist/Islamist old timer Milli Gorus movement (to counterbalance the losses from the Gulen movement). The genuinely reformist tendencies of the Islamist movement seem to be very much under-represented. But this does not mean that they are not present within and around the party: Reformist and realistic trends and dynamics of the Islamic movement in Turkey should not be underestimated.

The new Parliamentary group (and to a wider extend AKP itself) will be mainly divided between people faithful to R.T.Erdogan and those faithful to A.Davutoglu (Karagulle⁷). There will be more presence of conservatives than of reformists, while the old ideologists who serve a wider cause will be much less present contrary to a the younger generations of members who seem to be more loyal to personalities than to causes. Reformists like A.Gul, A. Babacan and ideologues like B.Arinc (just to name the most important figures) will play a major role after the elections; the results and the impact of the question of the Presidential system, along with the developments in the Kurdish question and the economy, will determine if these figures and the schism of the movement will stay within the party or if another party will emerge as a counter balance to an introvert and personality crippled AKP.

The question of the Presidential system will be one of the major historical catalyst for AKP's and the wider Islamist movement inner trends: Although the presidential system is something that has historical legitimacy in the Turkish Islamist tradition, parliamentary democracy is still a very valuable system and gets its legitimacy from the Islamic political modern thought and the theology of the consultation. In that sense, major figures of the movement but also mid and high ranking members of AKP do not favor a Presidential system and are afraid of the lack of checks and balances that might occur if R.T.Erdogan manages to impose his ambitions.

⁷ <http://t24.com.tr/haber/yeni-akit-yazari-ak-parti-secim-hatalari-yapiyor-secimden-sonra-adil-duzen-partisi-kuralim,293389>



Turkish contemporary Islamist movement and its main vehicle AKP do have reformist and democratic reflexes. One of the main breakings with the political tradition of the Islamic movement in Turkey that the co-founders of AKP wanted to make was not to repeat the one-man-leadership of N.Erbakan in the movement. AKP was initially created to keep checks and balances to a one-man-show. How strong are these reflexes and how deep is the erosion of the original reformist ideas in the movement will be one of the major tests that will emerge from the upcoming elections.

HDP: The opening of the Kurdish movement to Turkey?

HDP's lists of candidates' main characteristics are significant not only in terms of the major dynamics of transformation of the Kurdish movement, but also in terms of the wider call for pluralism from important parts of the Turkish society (Cevikcan, Calislar, Tastekin⁸): Alevis, Armenians, LGTB, militants, leftist Turks, Kurdish ideologists, progressives and moderate conservatives are included. With 268 women candidates, HDP is the party with the highest number of women candidates.

After years of marginalization, the Kurdish movement has managed to come closer to the heart of the Turkish politics and to open up to the Turkish population at large. HDP seeks to get extra votes from the Kurds who do not want to vote for AKP anymore because of the Islamic State and Kobani, as well as from the Turks, mainly from the left, that see HDP as the only genuine democratic alternative against R.T. Erdogan. The party's main challenge is to reach the threshold of 10% required for a political party to enter the Parliament. It is the first time that a party directly linked to the Kurdish movement decides to run as a party; until now, and in order to circumvent the 10%, the movement presented only independent candidates. It is also the first time that a party linked to the Kurdish movement presents itself as a party representing the wider demands for democracy and willing to become a democratic alternative for Kurds and Turks alike.

HDP is struggling not to be branded as a "one-topic" party, i.e. the Kurdish issue, but to emerge as the party offering a common ground for the democratic forces of the whole society. HDP faces an additional challenge, which will emerge after the elections and depends on the results, namely to strengthen this inclusive dynamic and to keep the inner balances between the Kurds and the Turks and specifically the balance between the different ideologies each side represents.

The party is operating under crucial and fragile balances of the different political leaderships, ranging from those that push towards the opening to the Turks and the Kurdish nationalists, to the Kandil mountain based PKK leaderships, to A.Ocalan

⁸ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/hdp-listesinin-onemi/gundem/ydetay/2040570/default.htm> ; http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/oral_calislar/aday_listeleri_neler_soyluyor-1332287 ; <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/turkeys-minorities-join-race-for-parliament.html>

and S.Demirtas; that means there needs to be a balance between the introvert/Kurdish-centered politics and the inclusive/wider society-centered politics.

The opening up of the Kurdish movement to the Turkish society and to Turks and HDP's trend towards the center of Turkish politics, contrary to the margins in which it was confined until now, can still prove fragile. After the elections, the consolidation of the party and its identity will be yet another major challenge. Nevertheless, the very fact that HDP has today the dynamic to reach the threshold of 10%, combining Kurdish and Turkish voters, is a historical turning point for the political and social life in Turkey.

CHP: Winds of change?

The Republican People's Party's (CHP) lists are the result of various dynamics in the party: Two major ones seem to be (a) the need felt by segments of the party to reinvent itself, and (b) the lack of a strong leadership. Indicative of the need to reinvent itself and to open up to the rest of the society is the fact that CHP's candidates' lists include Alevis, Armenians and Kurds.

For many analysts it would be too early to talk about substantial change in the party and some are critical towards its leadership, suggesting that CHP "fell into the identity syndrome of AKP" (Ozyurt⁹). Despite these criticisms, the very fact that CHP included people from different parts of the society in its lists is a sign that the party is not impermeable to the winds of change.

The list includes a significant number of women as well, 103 to be exact. Its leadership is still seen as weak compared to the leaderships of the other major parties. CHP was the only party that went through primary elections to decide its the candidates, a development seen by some commentators as genuinely democratic and by some others as a party weakness to impose its choices. Whether CHP will play a major role after the elections will be decided by the elections' outcome; alternatively, the party will continue to be one of the stagnant bastions of political conservatism. The second factor that can push CHP in the proactive political scene will be the developments in the Kurdish issue. If the "peace process" manages to enter in a phase of substantial negotiations and positive perspectives, it seems that CHP is able today to adopt a rather constructive and proactive stance; on the contrary, within a perspective of conflict developments that would bring Kurds in frontal collision with Ankara, CHP might probably espouse a conservative stance which will not permit to the party to play a substantial proactive role.

⁹ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/the-unbearable-lightness-of-candidacy.aspx?PageID=238&NID=80832&NewsCatID=515>



MHP: Stability and continuity?

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) is still under the strong grip of its leader Devlet Bahçeli. Despite its nationalistic discourse and its past, MHP under D.Bahçeli has emerged as a cold-blooded element of the Turkish nationalist right, especially given the ongoing developments on the Kurdish issue. For many years, D.Bahçeli was very clear in a number of occasions that the members of his party and mainly of the hardliners “Ulkuçular” group, will not go into the streets (the latest being October 2014 with the massive Kurdish reactions to Ankara’s unwillingness to assist Kobani); by doing so, D.Bahçeli prevented any violent escalation that could emerge if MHP’s hardliners have gone to the streets against Kurds.

MHP’s appeal to the electorate seems stable, with the Kurdish issue being one of its major “*raison d’être*”. MHP might play an important role after the elections, but for the time being it seems that it continues to operate in the shadow of the pitch battle between AKP and HDP.

Post elections scenarios: The good, the bad and the ugly

These elections can have a catalytic outcome depending on success or failure of HDP to reach the required 10% to enter the Parliament. The basic assumptions of most analysts and pollsters on whether or not HDP will achieve its goal are summarized below

In order for HDP to reach 10% it will need approximately 1,5 million extra votes in addition to the existing 3 million it has from the “traditional” basis of the party (in the last general elections independent candidates from the Kurdish movement received approximately 6,5%, while in the Presidential elections last August, S.Demirtaş received 9,5%). The extra 1,5 million votes could essentially come from AKP and CHP. If HDP gets into the Parliament, it will be at the expense of AKP as it will be the main party to lose seats to HDP. (Erdem¹⁰; interesting are also the calculations underlining the importance for HDP of the vote of Turks living abroad, Basaran¹¹. According to Basaran’s article, HDP might probably need extra votes from abroad in order to catch the 10% threshold; this dimension of the elections will give new insights to the role and the capabilities of the Kurdish diaspora to mobilize Kurds living abroad).

In view of the above, two are the main scenarios (each with different variations) that can occur after the elections: The first is that HDP reaches 10% and enters parliament. In this case, AKP has the necessary number of MPs to form a government, but not enough to change the constitution or to bring the constitutional reform to a referendum. The second scenario is that HDP does not reach the goal of

¹⁰ <http://t24.com.tr/haber/tarhan-erdem-halk-bu-secimde-akpye-dur-diyecek-erdogan-aklini-basina-almali,291245>

¹¹ http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ezgi_basaran/7_haziran_secimleri_icin_en_gercek_matematik-1331519



10%. In this case, AKP reaches the necessary number of MPs to bring the constitutional reform to a referendum. It could also eventually even reach the necessary number of MPs to change the constitution without a referendum.

HDP succeeds to enter Parliament

If HDP reaches 10-11% and enters the Parliament, rough calculations by various analysts estimate that the party will have 50-60 MPs, AKP around 270-290, CHP around 130 and MHP around 70.¹²

In practice, this means that AKP will get enough MPs to form a government (276 needed) but not enough (330 needed) to bring the constitutional reform to a referendum. Alternatively, AKP fails to get more than 42% and in that case it also loses the capacity to form a government and is obliged to collaborate with at least one more party.

In the case HDP makes it to Parliament, “there will be a different Turkey” after the elections (Basaran¹³) and the first crucial question will be if R.T.Erdogan can still have his desired Presidential system. According to the rhetoric of the parties, no party in the next Parliament is willing to collaborate with AKP and push forward for a Presidential system, as envisioned by R.T.Erdogan.

Nevertheless, a dilemma for HDP could eventually emerge: Will the party negotiate for a Presidential system or not?

S.Demirtas and other members of the party have made it clear that HDP will never give R.T.Erdogan the Presidential system he wishes. HDP having pushed forward the philosophy and strategy of becoming a Turkey-based party (vs. a Kurdish-centered one) that will struggle for the democratization of the whole country, it will be indeed very problematic to go towards any kind of deal with AKP for a Presidential system as envisioned by R.T.Erdogan. In addition to that, the fact that HDP has included liberal and leftist Turks is making this perspective even more far-fetched, as these circles would see any kind of deal with R.T.Erdogan as treason.

On the other hand, the realities after the elections might prove much more complicated: it might turn out that negotiations for some kind of Presidential system –ultimately maybe not the one R.T.Erdogan wants for himself- will be the only way to have a constitutional reform that could also deal with aspects of the Kurdish issue and of wider democratization.

A key issue will be the Kurdish question and the peace process. Inherent to that will be the question of decentralization: In many Kurdish and Turkish circles, decentralization would be the best way to deal with the Kurdish issue but also to strengthen democratization in Turkey. The nature of this decentralization is not yet

¹² A very useful arithmetic analysis of the possible outcome of the elections is provided by Gursel
http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/seyfettin-gursel/scenarios-for-the-general-election_377643.html

¹³ http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ezgi_basaran/7_haziran_secimleri_icin_en_gercek_matematik-1331519

identified nor thoroughly debated publicly, but the assumption of many analysts and members of various political parties is that decentralization would concern the totality of the country and not only the Kurdish southeast and that the basic frame could eventually be the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

In practice, an eventual emergence of the decentralization factor linked to the peace process could become a bargain chip for a Presidential system, which could lead to new developments. The peace process is expected to start again after the elections and it will define the political lines accordingly.

Decentralization, in theory at least, could become the main “check and balances” mechanism in a Turkish style Presidential system; in that case the debates and negotiations will be extremely tense and delicate for all parties. This is because decentralization would mean a radical change of the traditional centralized and statist character of the Republic.

It is important to note that A.Davutoglu in his public presentation of AKP’s political manifesto in view of the elections included, as expected and despite the resistances from within AKP, the constitutional reform in order to change the system from Parliamentary to Presidential. A.Davutoglu spoke of a Presidential system with the existence of “democratic control mechanisms”¹⁴. These “democratic control mechanisms”, and the inherent decentralization, are expected to emerge as crucial elements that will determine the negotiations and the inner party balances, in AKP and HDP, after the elections (assuming HDP is represented in the Parliament and can thus have an official and institutional role) That said, HDP would not be the sole player in these developments; the other crucial factor for the Presidential system perspective will be AKP itself. Will Ahmet Davutoglu effectively collaborate with R.T.Erdogan to push for a Presidential system that will, by definition, annihilate the role of the Prime Minister? Will those circles in the party who are against the Presidential system and in the wider Islamist movement collaborate to make R.T.Erdogan the absolute “master” in Turkey? What forms will the “democratic control mechanisms” and broadly the checks and balances in a Presidential system have? What will the figures of the movement like A.Gul, A.Babacan, B.Arinc and others do?

The answers to these questions largely depend on the results of the elections. If for instance AKP gets less than 44-45% A.Davutoglu’s leadership might easily come under criticisms and fire from R.T.Erdogan’s supporters. For now, it seems that R.T.Erdogan’s “own worst enemy” is himself and if he continues with the same polarization tactics and insistence to control and interfere in the work of the

¹⁴http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/basbakan_davutoglu_partisinin_secim_beyannamesini_acikliyor-1336170



government, AKP will be in a very difficult situation (Tol¹⁵). The difficulties are not only in regards to the elections, but rather primarily in regards to the post-June 7th environment.

We could also see another case, where R.T.Erdodgan's "worst enemy" is actually the Islamist movement. Could R.T.Erdogan, if he eventually manages to persuade his own party about the Presidential system side with MHP's nationalists in order to have his way with the Presidential system? In that case, what would the nationalists win? Will we see an environment where there is a sort of guarantee that the unitary and mono-identity character of the country remains intact? Siding with the nationalists would have tremendous consequences because it will spark very strong reactions from the Kurds but also from within the moderates and reformist Islamist circles.

Dangers and risks are still high in this scenario: Negative developments in the Kurdish peace process, accentuation of Turkey's weak position in the region, negative developments in the economy and split within AKP government.; all these risks can severely hurt a possible positive dynamic that could start with HDP entering the Parliament.

Nevertheless, this scenario, with AKP forming its own government but not being able to change the constitution and with HDP in the Parliament, seems to have more positive perspectives than the scenario where HDP does not make it to 10%.

For many Turks, the scenario of "R.T. Erdogan loosing and A.Davutoglu winning", i.e. the former loses his chances for a Presidential system as he wants it and the latter being able to form a government, seems to be the good scenario¹⁶.

Another version of the abovementioned scenario is the case where AKP and HDP together do not reach 330 MPs. This case would emerge if CHP and MHP get more votes than generally expected. In this scenario, the major options of negotiations could reach a dead end, unless AKP tries to strike a deal for the Presidential system with MHP, if the number of MPs is enough to reach 330. If such a scenario comes out from the ballot boxes the political situation will probably become very tense, despite the immediate relief that the imminent difficulty to go forward with the constitutional reform might bring to many circles.

In case AKP fails to reach 43% it will be incapable to form a government on its own (as it will have less than 276 MPs). Some polls have suggested indeed that AKP could record such a fall on June 7th. Speculations about possible alliances between

¹⁵ <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/erdogan-his-own-worst-enemy>

¹⁶ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/best-june-scenario-erdogan-loses-and-davutoglu-wins.aspx?PageID=238&NID=80653&NewsCatID=416>



AKP and MHP or even AKP and CHP have been circulating. The most plausible perspective in this case seems to be AKP collaborating with MHP to form a government. Such a development would have a very negative impact on the Kurds and the Kurdish movement, but it would place extra strains within AKP. This scenario, with AKP incapable to form a government, would bring political instability and difficulty to manage the country and its rising interior and regional challenges. It could be the bad scenario for Turkey.

HDP fails to enter Parliament

If HDP does not reach 10%, that would practically mean that the pro Kurdish movement will be completely absent from the Parliament and that most probably AKP will have enough MPs to bring the constitutional change in a referendum (330). However, today it seems rather unlikely that AKP will have enough MPs to change the constitution without the need for a referendum (367 MPs needed). R.T.Erdogan will be in a strong position to ask from the party to push forward with the reform and the Presidential system; however, equally strong from such an electoral victory will emerge A.Davutoglu. The strains within the party could then reach extreme tensions. The insistence of R.T.Erdogan for a Presidential system as he ambitions it could eventually threaten AKP and the wider Islamist movement with a split.

More dangerous would be the developments in the Kurdish front: A failure of HDP to enter the Parliament will enhance the Kurdish nationalists against the strategies followed by S.Demirtas' leadership and it could eventually strike a fatal blow to the opening of the Kurdish movement to the Turks and the society as a whole. Subsequent, introversion and extreme reactions could be the result of a failure of the party to reach the 10% threshold. There is a wide spread rumor/information that in that case, the Kurdish movement will try to declare its own local Parliament in Diyarbakir and such an act would have tremendously threatening impact for the stability of the country. This scenario would be the ugly scenario for Turkey.

If HDP has no institutional role, through its representation in Parliament, it seems that its importance will once again be limited to the Kurdish issue; and that R.T.Erdogan will be tempted to give to any Kurdish demands a less important weight in the framework of any developments concerning the Presidential system and the constitutional reform.

Conclusions

The upcoming elections will have a historical impact on Turkey and the country will definitively emerge different in the morning of June 8th. Regardless of the outcomes, mid-term or long-term turbulence should be expected after the elections. The intensity and violence of the turbulence will depend on the results of the elections and of the dynamics that will emerge after them.

If HDP makes it into Parliament and AKP secures the capacity to form its own



government, Turkey will enter undoubtedly in a period of negotiations, debates and recalibrations of the political life. The path will not be easy and the risks will stay very high (political, economic and regional). Nevertheless, in such a scenario, Turkey could eventually start a new era where the perspectives of democratic compromises and concessions would be visible and reachable.

In the event AKP cannot secure the necessary number of MPs to form a government, Turkey will come closer to the brink of a long lasting period of instability and tensions. In case HDP does not make it into the Parliament, there will be tremendous consequences on the behavior of the Kurds and their allies and the country will enter a long lasting period where the danger of civil unrest and violence will be high. The period from now until the elections is already depicted by high tensions and mutual accusations of provocations from all sides, but mainly between AKP and HDP. These tensions could continue to escalate until June 7th.

A widespread assessment is that since AKP's voters long for stability and fear chaos, tensions and situations that exacerbate these feelings work in favor of AKP. The culmination of international positions concerning the Armenian genocide centennial (April 24th) and the Turkish reactions are also seen as a consolidation opportunity for AKP.

(A personal guess of the author, based on observations in Turkey and discussions with various people in the country, is that HDP has today the momentum to reach 10% and that AKP is not yet immediately threatened to receive less than 43% of the votes. However, this guess is subject to change at any moment because of the extreme volatility of the environment in and around Turkey until the elections).
