

Analysis

June 16, 2011

Summary: Results from the June 12 election indicate that Turkey maintained a moderate pluralist party system in structure in the parliament, consisting of the same four parties that were previously serving. But it looks as if Turkey is gearing up to become another example of predominant party system soon. Short of making a constitution that is considered as politically, legally, and morally binding for the political elites of Turkey, it will be difficult to assume that Turkish democracy is fully consolidated. The stage seems to be set for a start of negotiations for a civilian-made democratic constitution in Turkey. The governing AKP needs the support of at least five more deputies from other parliamentary groups. The Turkish political elites are good at confronting and fighting each other, but they seem not to be as capable or intent upon working together as government and opposition. The summer months may produce a period of cooling off for the political elites and for the Republican People's Party and Nationalist Action Party to settle their intra-party accounts before October.

Turkish Elections of June 12, 2011: Now What?

by *Ersin Kalaycıoğlu*

Introduction

Turkey's 17th national elections since 1946 were held on Sunday June 12, 2011, with 15 political parties and dozens of independent candidates running for the 550 seats in the single chamber of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM). Of the independent candidates who represented Kurdish ethnic nationalists, 36 seemed to have won parliamentary seats, which is more than enough for them to establish a parliamentary group of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). The governing conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) has increased its vote share from 46.5 percent in 2007 to 49.9 percent, yet its seat share in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) seems to have fallen from 341 to 326. The AKP seems to be a few seats short of the super majority of 60 percent of the seats, which is required to pass a constitutional amendment. The secular, social democratic Republican People's Party (CHP), which had a leadership change in May 2010, was able to increase its vote share from 20.8 percent in 2007 to 25.9 percent and its parliamentary seats from 112 to 135. Finally, the Turkish ethnic Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which was hit by scandalous revelations of personal

misconduct by some of its leading candidates that resulted in their resignation, lost its vote share from 14.3 percent in 2007 to 13 percent and parliamentary seats from 71 to 53. The participation rate in the 2011 elections was 87 percent, and about 95 percent of the electorate now has at least a deputy representing them in the TBMM.

These results indicate that Turkey maintained a moderate pluralist party system in structure in the TBMM, consisting of the same four parties that were previously serving. However, it is still dominated by a large but simple majority (59 percent) of the leading AKP, which has won the last three national elections including 2011. It looks as if Turkey is gearing up to become another example of predominant party system soon, just like Japan under the LDP rule from 1955 until 1993, or India from 1947 till 1987 under the Congress Party rule, or Sweden from the 1920s until the 1970s under the Social Democrats. That said, the opposition CHP has also increased its presence in the TBMM and the Kurdish ethnic nationalists have also received their highest share of the seats yet and have garnered 6.7 percent of the national vote, while the MHP



Analysis

seemed to have lost some ground. What sorts of challenges lie ahead for this new assembly?

Democratic Consolidation and Civilian, Democratic Constitution

What seems to be awaiting the 24th Assembly of the Turkish Republic is the daunting task of writing and adopting a brand new constitution. Although the election campaign was not fully focused on the different proposals of the parties for the substance of the new constitution, it seems as if the AKP, CHP, and the BDP have committed themselves to the making of a new constitution instead of the current constitution made by the last military government in 1982. The MHP seemed to be the only party complacent with the constitution. Short of making a constitution that is considered as politically, legally, and morally binding for the political elites of Turkey, it will be difficult to assume that Turkish democracy is fully consolidated. If such a step is taken, then it will be possible to assume that bickering about the fundamentals of the constitutional order, which has been creating one legitimacy crisis after another since Turkey aspired to democracy in 1945, has come to an end. It would also be possible then for the judiciary to resolve the political conflicts of the day with reference to that new constitution and without being accused of being partisan and political in its decisions. The question then becomes whether a new, democratic, and civilian-made constitution that is written with the full participation of the main political parties and forces of the country is possible now, or not?

Constitutional Engineering: Devil is in the Details

The stage seems to be set for a start of negotiations for a civilian-made democratic constitution in Turkey. The governing AKP needs the support of at least five more deputies from other parliamentary groups. It is also important to remember that any move by the AKP alone will be considered partisan, automatically triggering conspiracy theorizing about its motives and precipitating a major political conflict. The CHP and the BDP seem to be willing to cooperate in writing up a new constitution. And the party manifesto of the AKP is vague enough to provide it with huge flexibility. The only glitch seems to be that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been promoting a major democratic regime change, from the current parliamentary democratic structure to some form of presiden-

The question becomes whether a new, democratic, and civilian-made constitution that is written with the full participation of the main political parties and forces of the country is possible now, or not?

tialism, over which not only the other political party elites but some of his own AKP front bench have already declared their doubts. A debate over presidentialism may derail the process. However, if the ludicrous proposal of presidentialism can be avoided, then do we have the basic ingredients of a negotiation process for a new constitution?

The answer to that question is less than an unequivocal yes. The 2011 election campaign consisted mainly of ad hominem attacks, acrimony, and slanderous aggression used as oratorical style in the speeches, especially of Erdoğan toward all of the opposition party leaders and parties. The opposition party leaders also seemed to be engaged in similar rhetoric toward the AKP and its leader. For example, the leader of the CHP Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, seemed to have taken some joy (which he later denied) from a placard that insinuated that only those without brains voted for the AKP, and that Erdoğan claimed that he was not the “shameless, immoral, and scum” that Kılıçdaroğlu is. Kılıçdaroğlu had declared that he will sue the prime minister for slander and insults, and Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the MHP, also demands an apology.

Currently, the BDP is the only party whose elected candidates are continuing with defiant and provocative declarations, more or less attempting to blackmail the AKP and the CHP. They seem to be insinuating that if those two parties go ahead with negotiations and keep the BDP out, the BDP will further mount its attacks to delegitimize the constitution-making process. Kılıçdaroğlu has declared that he is ready for dialogue with the prime minister. The AKP



leadership also seems to be making favorable comments toward dialogue with the CHP. However, there are many in the CHP who are less than satisfied with the election results and have started to call for a convention. If the CHP finds itself in a new intra-party power struggle, Kılıçdaroğlu will lose much of his maneuverability in a prospective dialogue on the constitution. The MHP is also getting embroiled in its own intra-party squabbles.

The Turkish political elites are good at confronting and fighting each other, but they seem not to be as capable or intent upon working together as government and opposition. Erdoğan and his associates have thrived in their political careers as fighters, who deride opposition and abhor the very idea of coalition, and now they are expected to work with that very opposition that they have publicly scorned for so many years. The elite political culture and personalities of the political leadership are less than conducive to cooperation and compromise. Many things can go wrong in a very short period of time. The AKP may decide to transfer five deputies from other political parties, allowing them to surpass the 330 seat-threshold and go it alone. Thus, the negotiations on the constitution may not even start, or they could linger for a while and fizzle out. Alternatively, a committee on constitution making may be established that may start to work after the TBMM convenes in October. The summer months may produce a period of cooling off for the political elites and for the CHP and MHP to settle their intra-party accounts before October. Much will depend on what is to happen in the internal politics of the CHP, for it is perceived as the most important political institution of the “other” by both the AKP and BDP.

It is too early to say whether Turkey is moving toward a new constitution and democratic consolidation any time soon. Yet, two things are certain. One, Turkey has now become a delegative democracy, and there seems to be no going back to any lower standard. Two, there are so many scenarios available to the prime minister that it is yet uncertain which of those he will select. A whole summer will provide him the time to pick and choose his tactics and strategies toward his own career goals. We will know about his decisions probably no later than October. Until then, only uncertainty lies ahead on the issue of a new constitution in Turkey.

About the Author

Dr. Ersin Kalaycıoğlu is a Full Professor of Political Science at Sabancı University Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Between August 2004 and September 2007, Prof. Kalaycıoğlu functioned as the Rector (President) of Işık University, Istanbul, Turkey. He is a student of comparative politics and specializes in political representation and participation. He co-edited *Turkey: Political, Social and Economic Challenges in the 1990s*, authored *Turkish Dynamics: A Bridge Across Troubled Lands*, co-authored *Turkish Democracy Today: Elections, Protest and Stability in an Islamic Society* and *Rising Tide of Conservatism in Turkey* with Ali Carkoğlu of Sabancı University, as well as editing and writing other publications in Turkish. Currently, Prof. Kalaycıoğlu is carrying out studies of sociopolitical orientations and attitudes toward politics and voting behavior in Turkey in collaboration with Ali Carkoğlu of Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey, and conducting annual national social surveys as part of the International Social Survey Program.

About GMF

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) is a non-partisan American public policy and grantmaking institution dedicated to promoting better understanding and cooperation between North America and Europe on transatlantic and global issues. GMF does this by supporting individuals and institutions working in the transatlantic sphere, by convening leaders and members of the policy and business communities, by contributing research and analysis on transatlantic topics, and by providing exchange opportunities to foster renewed commitment to the transatlantic relationship. In addition, GMF supports a number of initiatives to strengthen democracies. Founded in 1972 through a gift from Germany as a permanent memorial to Marshall Plan assistance, GMF maintains a strong presence on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to its headquarters in Washington, DC, GMF has seven offices in Europe: Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Belgrade, Ankara, Bucharest, and Warsaw. GMF also has smaller representations in Bratislava, Turin, and Stockholm.

About the On Turkey Series

GMF's On Turkey is an ongoing series of analysis briefs about Turkey's current political situation and its future. GMF provides regular analysis briefs by leading Turkish, European, and American writers and intellectuals, with a focus on dispatches from on-the-ground Turkish observers. To access the latest briefs, please visit our web site at www.gmfus.org/turkey or subscribe to our mailing list at <http://database.gmfus.org/reaction>.