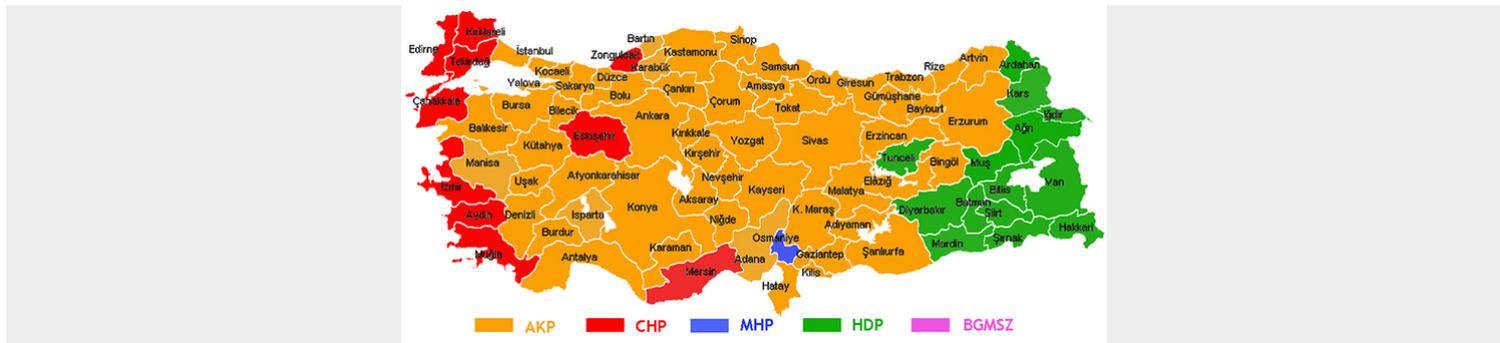


TURKISH ELECTIONS MARK TURNING POINT

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Raffi Bedrosyan, Toronto, 10 June 2015

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First a few facts and context: More than 85% of the eligible 55 million voters, or some 45 million people voted. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is supposed to be impartial and above party politics by law, relentlessly campaigned every day on behalf of his former party, Justice and Progress Party (AKP in Turkish), leaving the current Prime Minister and leader of the party Ahmet Davutoglu mostly out of the limelight. The two opposition parties, Kemalist/nationalistic Republican Party (CHP in Turkish) and the ultra-nationalistic / racist National Movement Party (MHP in Turkish) tried to attack the governing AKP party but was mostly ineffective. The rising star in the election was the newly-formed pro-Kurdish Peoples Democratic Party (HDP in Turkish) which ran an extremely effective campaign, organizing not only in Kurdish-populated regions but fielding candidates all over Turkey on a platform of equality, peace and democracy for all ethnic minorities and other underprivileged citizens. The HDP faced the additional obstacle of needing to go over the barrier of 10% of the total votes, failing which they would have lost the right to be represented in parliament.

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Failed Erdogan

Despite the enormous success of AKP and Erdogan in the previous elections, despite considerable progress in the economy and increase in the standards of living and prosperity, despite the accomplishments in eliminating the interference of the army in politics, and despite the success in starting a peace process with the Kurdish guerrilla movement and ending the daily killing of Turkish soldiers and Kurdish resistance fighters, the election had become a referendum on whether to allow Erdogan to become a dictator or not. Erdogan wanted to increase the powers of the presidential office in order to be able to govern without much interference and accountability to the elected politicians. He would have been able to have done that had the AKP elected 330 or more members of parliament. And Erdogan attacked the weak opposition of the CHP and the MHP with utmost contempt, meanwhile ignoring the swelling hatred against him and his cronies after the discovery of major corruption and bribery scandals, the opulence of a 1,100-room presidential palace that he built for himself, and the revelation of truckloads of arms secretly transferred by Turkish intelligence to ISIS and other forces fighting against the Syrian regime.

Failed Bid

The main obstacle against Erdogan's wish to become a Putin-like president with absolute powers seemed to be the unknown quantity of HDP voters. Had the HDP exceeded the 10% barrier, it would elect at least 60 MPs, but had it failed to exceed the 10 % barrier, all votes cast for the HDP would be lost and transferred to elect 60 or more MPs for the AKP. Therefore, President Erdogan, Prime Minister Davutoglu and other AKP leaders kept on attacking HDP more than attacking the CHP and the MHP. One of the strategies to discredit the HDP was employing the tried-and-true tactic of hatred against Armenians. It was claimed that the HDP leaders had made agreements with Diaspora Armenian leaders, promising land and compensation to Armenians. It was claimed that more than 100 HDP candidates were hidden Armenians. It was claimed that if the HDP came to power, it would kick out all Kurds from eastern and southeastern Turkey and cede those regions to Armenia. Kurds were warned against voting for the HDP, if they wanted to keep their lands. Kurds were ordered to stay away from the HDP election campaign, which was in reality organized by Armenians. During the election campaigns, seven HDP sympathizers were murdered, more than 500 HDP sympathizers were beaten, burnt and injured, more than 150 HDP party offices and campaign vehicles were attacked, burnt or bombed.

Election Results

Results of the election? The AKP elected 256 MPs with 40.86 % of the votes; the CHP elected 132 with 24.95%, the MHP elected 80 with 16.29 %, and the HDP elected 80 MPs with 13.12 % of the votes, easily exceeding the 10 % barrier. The election results indicate that the AKP cannot form a government on its own. Apart from this conclusion, there are now many uncertain scenarios emerging, as to the shape of the coalition government, and which parties will go to bed with each other. The AKP can form a government with either of the CHP, MHP or HDP. Failing that, to the horror

of the AKP, the three other parties the CHP, MHP and HDP can join and form a government. If that doesn't work either, then there will be early elections. At present, it is too early to tell what sort of policy toward Armenians within and outside Turkey will be adopted, as it will depend on the new coalition partners' composition.

Unprecedented Election

The election was unprecedented for several aspects. Three Armenian MPs are elected, one each from the HDP, CHP and AKP. Therefore, Armenians of Turkey are now over represented with 0.5 % in the parliament, versus a population of only 0.07 %. But as Garo Paylan, the newly-elected HDP MP stated: 'Rather than the number of Armenians in the parliament, it is more important what each of them will say in the parliament'. The other emerging fact to ponder is the emergence of the HDP as the winner in 16 border provinces. As can be seen in the attached map, with the HDP elected in all of the eastern and most of the southeastern provinces, Turkish people have now lost contact and borders with Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq and half of Syria. The story will continue to unfold in the near future.

