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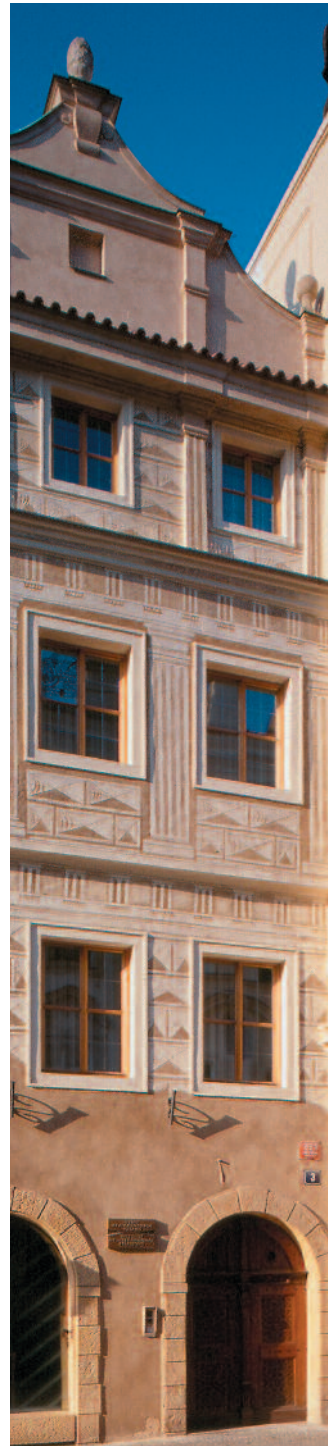
What's next for Turkey? Lessons of the 2014 presidential elections

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2014 Turkish presidential elections have demonstrated that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP were able to overcome their previous political crises during the last, one-year-long eventful period, and they were successful in continuing to mobilise their electorate.

Erdoğan's victory at the presidential elections of 10 August 2014 may lead to the introduction of a presidential system and further centralization of power in Turkey. However, it can also be an overture for changes in the opposition.

The EU has to keep being involved in Turkish domestic politics, especially in the democratization process, and support the emergence of a more plural Turkish political community.



Introduction

Authors of future history books will probably characterize Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's victory at the Turkish presidential elections of 10 August 2014 as a "new chapter" in Turkish history. After being the Prime Minister for eleven years, Erdoğan can now sit in Kemal Atatürk's chair as the twelfth, but the first directly elected President of the Republic as of 28 August 2014. The elections' result was close to the anticipated result, as major polling institutes suggested that he would receive some 50–55 percent of the votes, which means that the actual outcome of the elections could not be much of a surprise for those who closely follow Turkish domestic politics.

2 However, Erdoğan's triumph was not a slippery slope triumph despite his first round victory. Although the mobilization of the opposition parties was not adequate to challenge him, he has achieved the maximum of his electoral performance, as the recent elections also show.¹

Furthermore, after the couple of weeks following the elections, the European Union could see that Ahmet Davutoğlu, a famous foreign minister of the country, has been nominated for the Prime Minister's post. Simultaneously this move clearly showed Abdullah Gül's (the former President of the Republic) defeat as he became marginalized – at least in some aspects.

This policy paper aims to provide an overview of the presidential election period and its immediate consequences in Turkish domestic politics. By carrying out this research, it intends to give some recommendations to EU decision-makers for how to handle the current tendencies taking place in Turkey. It presents the main features of the election process and the campaign as well. It reveals the three candidates' strategies and their party politics in seeking votes. Moreover, it evaluates the outcomes and the possible effects on Turkish domestic politics of the election victory of Erdoğan and his choice for a successor.

The AKP and Erdoğan's road to victory

Starting with the wider concept, it is worth mentioning that the growing support of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) in elections has been almost unbroken since 2002. Its electoral performance was rather convincing: in 2002 it got 34.26 percent of the total votes, in the 2007 parliamentary elections it got 46.58

¹ He received some 21 million votes in 2014, while at the 2011 general election he got 21 million 399 thousand votes.

percent, in the last parliamentary elections (2011) it received some 49.9 percent of the votes, and in the recent presidential elections it received 51.79 percent. This achievement was due to various factors such as economic growth and a (political) stability that resulted in growing salaries, immense infrastructural project rates and social transformation. Furthermore, the AKP has managed to create a kind of civilian control over the military during the last 11 years, as well as creating for itself the image that made it look like the only actor with the ability to resolve the long-lasting Kurdish issue. Certainly, the realization of these changes was not without problems and unbalances; however, the majority of the Turkish electorate appreciated them.

Needless to say, though, last year's events, such as Gezi and the scandalous corruption probe, have eroded Erdoğan's image, as preliminarily they showed the government's weakness and malpractice (see the wiretap affairs). Moreover these developments also affected the AKP's preparation for the presidential bid, as the Prime Minister turned the local elections in March into a pre-presidential election campaign.

The Gezi events that began in late May 2013 showed that the AKP governments' achievements could not eliminate the criticism, and a solid and resilient but non-majority core within the Turkish society had the willingness to express its dissatisfaction with the party.² Last summer can be perceived as a tremendous moment in Turkish domestic politics, as at this time, protests and clashes occurred in all the major cities in Turkey, but especially in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. These events demonstrated the significant tensions within the country. Finally, however, the government managed to overcome these challenges, and by late summer the demonstrations ended, albeit the social resistance has continued in other forms.

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Simultaneously, an international criticism of Turkey has emerged because of its freedom of speech restrictions,³ the government's disrespect for "other" voices,⁴ the brutal oppression of the Gezi protests and the abuse of power related to these events.⁵ Even the European Parliament has expressed its strong disapproval of these measures.⁶ In the Progress Report published in fall 2013, the European Union has stated that the excessive

² Taştan, Coşkun (2013) "The Gezi Park Protests in Turkey: A Qualitative Field Research." Insight Turkey. Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 27–38.

³ Janssen, David (2013) "Stranglehold on Freedom." The European, 29/08/2013. Online: <http://www.theeuropean-magazine.com/david-janssen--2/7323-freedom-of-speech-in-turkey>.

⁴ The Economist (2013) "Zombie Democracy." The Economist, 22/07/2013. Online: <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21579850-note-turkeys-prime-minister-among-others-winning-elections-not-enough-zombie-democracy>.

⁵ Amnesty International (2014) "Adding Injustice to Injury." Amnesty International. Online: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR44/010/2014/en/82acd54b-cb1a-4918-be8c-64c528ab1467/eur440102014en.pdf>.

⁶ Today's Zaman (2013) "Criticism against AK Party Grows in EU Parliament." Today's Zaman, 06/06/2013. Online: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-317559-criticism-against-ak-party-grows-in-eu-parliament.html>.

use of police force and the lack of dialogue have raised concerns.⁷ More and more criticisms have emerged that connected Erdoğan with authoritarianism.

In the following period every scandal in Turkey has triggered demonstrations or creative forms of resistance – as was the case, for example, with the Soma mine disaster.⁸ However, their intensity seemingly diminished. During the anniversary of the Gezi events on 31 May 2014 fewer people joined the related manifestation than in the previous year, though this was probably due to, among other things, the huge police force (some 25 000 people)⁹ ordered to secure Gezi Park and Istiklal Caddesi (Istanbul’s fashion street) and the inefficiency of previous demonstrations.

A few months after the Gezi events, a corruption probe¹⁰ beginning on 17 December also threatened the government stability. Erdogan was quick to reshuffle the government by “accepting” the resignations of four ministers¹¹ that were related to the corruption cases, and keeping his power even when wiretaps about him and his family were made public, prior to the local elections. This was probably the biggest challenge he needed

The campaign also favoured Erdoğan.

to tackle; however, as the local elections show, he was successful in meeting this challenge as well.

Various leaks were released with the aim to discredit him, but some of these backfired and even pushed some parts of the population to support the AKP.¹²

His “Gülenist-AKP war” rhetoric granted him a favourable position for the future. In his discourse, he skipped (or intended to avoid) the theme of corruption as a problem in Turkey and linked the whole affair to an attack whose target was him and Turkey itself. The projected message to the AKP’s electorate was that he is a charismatic leader who has to defend his own homeland against external and internal forces, the “Parallel State”.¹³ The message was simple and it found a vast responsive community. Furthermore, the AKP’s crisis-management – excessive use of police forces for protests (see Gezi), removing or relocating police officers and prosecutors,¹⁴ reforming the judiciary

⁷ EU (2013) “Turkey Progress Report.” European Commission. Online: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2013/package/brochures/turkey_2013.pdf.

⁸ Bianet (2014) “Protestors Take Streets After Soma Workplace Murder.” Bianet, 14/05/2014. Online: <http://bianet.org/english/labor/155657-protestors-take-streets-after-soma-workplace-murder>.

⁹ Sabah (2014) “Gezi’nin yıldönümünde eylem.” Sabah, 01/06/2014. Online: <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2014/06/01/gezinin-yildonumunde-eylem>.

¹⁰ See the following detailed collection of the corruption-related events: Müller, Hendrik (2014) “Turkey’s December 17 Process: A Timeline of the Graft Investigation and the Government’s Response.” Online: <http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2014-muller-turkeys-december-17-process-a-timeline.pdf>.

¹¹ Today’s Zaman (2013) “Embattled Erdoğan Brings Loyalists to Government in Cabinet Reshuffle.” Today’s Zaman, 26/12/2013. Online: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-335030-embattled-erdogan-brings-loyalists-to-government-in-cabinet-reshuffle.html>.

¹² Bayram Balci (2014) “Turkey: Local Elections Gave Huge Victory to Erdogan.” Carnegie Endowment, 03/04/2013. Online: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/04/03/turkey-local-elections-gave-huge-victory-to-erdogan>.

¹³ Aksam (2013) “Erdoğan’dan paralel devlet çıkışı.” Aksam, 21/12/2013. Online: <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/erdogandan-paralel-devlet-cikisi/haber-270629>.

¹⁴ Hurriyet Daily News (2014) “Turkey Removes Around 800 More Police Officers.” Hurriyet Daily News, 30/01/2014. Online: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-removes-around-800-more-police-officers.aspx?PageID=238&NID=61784&NewsCatID=341>.

system, expanding the National Intelligence Organization's (MIT) competences¹⁵ and adopting the famous internet bill¹⁶ – was highly criticized abroad and by the opposition, but it did not alienate his electorate. Even the Gülenists' obvious disappointment¹⁷ could not influence in a determinant manner the outcome of the local and presidential elections. These acts were implemented despite the criticism of the European Union, which shows the limited leverage of Brussels over Turkish domestic politics.¹⁸

The campaign also favoured Erdoğan, who announced his widely anticipated candidacy on 1 July. In his candidacy, he benefited from his position at the top of the government, for as Prime Minister he could get more television coverage than his opponents. By opening the Istanbul-Ankara high speed railway¹⁹ or appearing at other state events, he could publicly show his strength and the image of a strong leader (even his slogan referred to “national strength”).²⁰ International observers, e.g. the OSCE, disseminated their criticism about the lack of fair media broadcasting and of a balanced campaign,²¹ as the two other candidates had fewer opportunities to appear on television screens.²² During the presidential campaign the candidates focused on hot topics and utilized a populist rhetoric, and in the process, Erdoğan highly criticized Israel and the conflict in Gaza.²³ As this political message was already beneficial for him prior to the local elections in 2009 (during the Davos conference, where the Turkish Prime Minister condemned Israel in front of the cameras), Erdoğan could not miss this opportunity. In this respect, he accused Ihsanoğlu of being a pro-Israeli figure and of not even knowing the Turkish national anthem.²⁴ The future of the planned presidential system was also a key issue in the campaign, as Erdoğan promoted its implementation while Ihsanoğlu campaigned for keeping the then current system. As a result, Erdoğan got nearly 52 percent of the total votes. According to the result, Erdoğan was successful in convincing the Central and Northern Anatolian electorate²⁵ to vote for him by demonstrating his force and his capability to run the country.

¹⁵ Anadolu Ajansı (2014) “Turkey’s Parliament Approves Wider MIT Powers.” Anadolu Ajansı, 17/04/2014. Online: <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/315169--turkey-mps-pass-bill-on-top-spy-agency>.

¹⁶ Reuters (2014) “Turkey’s Gul Approves Law Tightening Internet Controls.” Reuters, 18/02/2014. Online: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/18/us-turkey-government-idUSBREA1H1XL20140218>.

¹⁷ Timeturk (2014) “Cemaatler Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimlerinde kimi destekliyor.” Timeturk, 09/08/2014. Online: http://www.timeturk.com/tr/2014/08/09/cemaatler-cumhurbaskanligi-secimlerinde-kimi-destekliyor.html#U-Pe7uN_spo.

¹⁸ Hurriyet Daily News (2014) “Turkish Parliament Approves Internet Bill Despite Concerns.” Hurriyet Daily News, 06/02/2014. Online: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-parliament-approves-internet-bill-despite-concerns.aspx?pageID=238&nID=62088&NewsCatID=339>.

¹⁹ TRTTürk (2014) “Yüksek Hızlı Tren açılış töreni gerçekleştirildi.” TRTTürk, 25/07/2014. Online: <http://www.trtturk.com/haber/yukse-hizli-tren-istanbulda.html>.

²⁰ Radikal (2014) “Logosu tünelin ucundaki ışık, sloganı 'milli güç.'” Radikal, 01/07/2014. Online: http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/logosu_tunelin_ucundaki_isik_slogani_milli_guc-1199619.

²¹ OSCE (2014) International Election Observation Mission Republic of Turkey, Presidential Election, 10 August 2014 Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, p. 7.

²² OSCE, p. 10.

²³ Al-Monitor (2014) “Erdogan Uses Gaza as a Campaign Tool.” Al-Monitor, 04/18/2014. Online: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/daloglu-turkey-erdogan-akp-israel-gaza-hamas-genocide-race.html>.

²⁴ Milliyet (2014) “Başbakan'dan İhsanoğlu'na İstiklal Marşı tepkisi.” Milliyet, 31/07/2014. Online: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/basbakan-dan-ihsanoglu-na-istiklal/siyaset/detay/1919227/default.htm>.

²⁵ The majority of Turkish nationals living abroad, who had the opportunity to participate in the elections, also voted for him.

The second set of winners: the Kurds

The nomination of Selahattin Demirtaş as a presidential candidate from the ranks of the Kurdish People's Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP) was also a novelty in Turkish politics. The Kurds, who had to face oppression and an assimilation campaign during the last few decades, gradually made several major achievements: they established their own political parties (in the 1990's), they entered the parliament and formed a faction (2007) and now they had a distinct candidate for Turkey's first directly-elected presidential elections. What is more important, however, is that Demirtaş has managed to secure nearly 10 percent of the total votes, which is a much higher amount than what is usually gained by Kurdish parties in local or general elections. This result is even more favourable than the outcome of the local elections in March, where the Kurdish party Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi – BDP) got 4.64 percent of the total

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total votes and the HDP got 1.97 percent, and together they gained 6.71 percent of the total votes.²⁶

Demirtaş and his relatively newly founded party, the HDP,²⁷ started to create a new image for themselves: instead of emphasizing the

party's ethnic (Kurdish) affiliation, it presented itself as a liberal-leftist party fighting for the rights of minorities – not just for the Kurds, but even for the LGBT community.²⁸ Demirtaş has managed to fill (at least partially) the role of a powerful supporter of the Leftist parties and groups by standing up for the Gezi protesters in his campaign and creating alliances with various Leftist parties who had no opportunity to be represented in the parliament. This success positively influenced his electoral performance. Another one of his gains was that the Alevis' votes also favoured him in the elections. The Alevis, a distinct religious community constituting some 10–20 percent of the Turkish population,²⁹ usually voted for the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – CHP), and they constituted an ungainable electorate for the AKP. The nomination of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu as the CHP's candidate, however, alienated some Alevi organizations while Demirtaş started to open up towards them,³⁰ especially by taking part

²⁶ Hürriyet (2014) "Yerel Seçim Sonuçları." Hürriyet, 2014. Online: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-secim-2014/>.

²⁷ The HDP was founded in 2012. At the 2014 local elections the HDP ran as a complementary party of the strongest Kurdish party, the BDP, which then already had parliamentary representation. After the elections BDP deputies joined the HDP in creating a parliamentary faction.

²⁸ See the party's constitution: HDP (2014) "Halkların Demokratik Partisi Tüzüğü." Online: <http://www.hdp.org.tr/parti/parti-tuzugu/10>.

²⁹ There is no given official data about their numbers and the proportion of the total population that they constitute, but only rough estimates.

³⁰ Radikal (2014) "Aleviler, Demirtaş'a oy verir mi?" Radikal, 02/07/2014. Online: http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/aleviler_demirtasa_oy_verir_mi-1199837.

in the Gezi protests, where Alevis participated in great numbers³¹. This campaign strategy seemed to be fruitful for him, as in Tunceli/Dersim, a province inhabited mainly by Alevis which was a CHP bulwark in the past, he secured the most votes by getting 52.25 percent of the local votes while Ihsanoğlu seized just 33.39 percent.³²

However, the party's main electorate continued to be constituted by Kurds, as the electoral maps show. Selahettin Demirtaş got the majority of the votes in the south-eastern provinces, which are inhabited mainly by Kurds. His main message – to keep alive the Kurdish peace initiative – was aimed at this population. Although Demirtaş's odds of winning the elections were low, his performances in which he gained almost ten percent of the votes demonstrated the Kurdish community's force. From this point of view, for Demirtaş, the presidential election was rather a means of making measurements and preparing for the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2015. However, it is worth keeping in mind that his unprecedented “nearly 10 percent” performance in the election was based not just on Kurdish votes, but also on the AKP's “alliance” with other Leftist groups. An important part of the Kurdish community gave its vote to Erdoğan, who was thus mostly the second place candidate in terms of votes in the south-eastern provinces. A possible explanation for why he was not the first place candidate is that his more “liberal” agenda, including such topics as LGBT rights, may not be so attractive for conservative Kurdish masses as well as more nationalist groups.³³

The losers: the opposition parties in an impasse

The two main opposition parties, the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – CHP) and the National Action Party (Milletçi Hareket Partisi – MHP) have decided to run with a joint presidential candidate in the elections. This decision was not uncontested, but it was an easy one for a Secular-Leftist (CHP) and a Nationalist-Islamic party (MHP). However, their leaderships concluded that their chances of winning would increase if they found a common candidate who would be acceptable for some AKP voters as well.

The elections clearly showed that the main opposition parties' calculations were wrong. The common candidate, Ekmeleddin Mehmet Ihsanoğlu, a former secretary general of

³¹ Al-Monitor (2014) “Alevis Split on Turkey's Presidential Elections.” Al-Monitor, 18/07/2014. Online: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/tremblay-alevis-presidential-elections-erdogan-ihsanoglu.html>.

³² Haberlec.com (2014) “Tunceli Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçim Sonuçları.” Haberler, 2014. Online: <http://secim.haberler.com/cumhurbaskanligi-secimi/tunceli/>.

³³ The HDP's emergence and moving to the center of Kurdish politics has resulted in a smaller clash within the BDP. One BDP parliamentary deputy refused to participate in the HDP's faction.

the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), where he held this post between 2004 and 2014,³⁴ preliminarily seemed to be an adequate candidate: he was a leader of a prestigious international organization and a religious diplomat who spoke various languages, including Arabic. However, as the results show, he could not attract many votes from the AKP. Ihsanoğlu's main weakness stemmed from the fact that he was not sufficiently embedded in Turkish domestic politics, and consequently he was rather unknown for the vast majority of the population. Furthermore he was unable to send an attractive message to his opponents' supporters. His campaign of providing a vision of prosperity ("Ekmek için Ekmeleddin")³⁵ was not enough to convince Erdoğan's supporters to vote for him. For them, he remained the CHP's candidate, and consequently

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he was seen as unacceptable.

However, his nomination as a joint candidate resulted in a discontent in the CHP and the MHP's ranks. Çilek Ağacı concluded that

CHP and MHP voters had a greater willingness to not participate in the election process than AKP supporters (14 percent, 16 percent and 10 percent of each party's voters, respectively, abstained from voting). Also, some prominent Secular politicians, such as the former president Ahmet Necdet Sezer (2000–2007), did not go to the ballot boxes either.

Furthermore, Ihsanoğlu could only get some 55 percent of the MHP voters while 28 percent of the party's supporters voted for Erdoğan.³⁶ Other polls conducted before the elections also pointed out that some parts of the MHP voters may favour the PM; however, they also predicted a lower level of support for him compared to Ağacı's numbers.³⁷ All in all, he was not able to reach the combined proportion of the two parties' results at the local elections (the CHP seized 25.59 percent of the votes while the MHP gained 17.63 percent).

The lower participation rate crushed the opposition's hopes for a victory. This resulted in a harsh criticism towards people who refused to go to the ballot boxes (boykotçular)³⁸ and/or who were on holiday at the time of the elections (tatilciler).³⁹ These circumstances paved the way towards a particularly low participation rate – 74.13 percent – and

³⁴ Biyografi (2014) "Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu." Biyografi.net, 2014. Online: <http://www.biyografi.net/kisiyrinti.asp?kisiid=3212>.

³⁵ Hürriyet (2014) "Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu seçim bildirgesini açıkladı." Hürriyet, 10/07/2014. Online: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/26777633.asp>.

³⁶ Çilek Ağacı (2014) "2014 Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçiminde Oy Kaymaları." Cilekagaci.com, 13/08/2014. Online: <http://cilekagaci.com/2014/08/13/2014-cumhurbaskanligi-seciminde-oy-kaymalari/>.

³⁷ See Metropoll's results: Metropoll (2014) "Türkiye'nin Nabzı Temmuz 2014 'Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçimi.'" Metropoll, 02/08/2014. Online: <http://www.metropoll.com.tr/report/turkiyenin-nabzi-temmuz-2014-cumhurbaskanligi-secimi>.

³⁸ Milliyet (2014) "Tatilciler, boykotçular, küskünler damga vurdu." Milliyet, 11/08/2014. Online: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/tatilciler-boykotcular-kuskunler-gundem-1924319/>.

³⁹ The time of the elections – late summer – was also criticized by the opposition as a great number of people go on holiday at this time.

the first round victory of Erdoğan. The consequences of the electoral defeat appeared soon after the elections, especially in the case of the CHP, where, due to internal pressure, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu called for a party congress for the beginning of September.⁴⁰ The result of this extraordinary session was ambivalent, though, as it demonstrated the declining trust in him: while he was re-elected as party chairman, he received fewer votes than expected, as his rival Muharrem İnce got some 400 votes against Kılıçdaroğlu's 700 votes.⁴¹

The changes after the victory

Due to Erdoğan's clear victory there was no need to hold a second round (that would take place on 24 August). While Erdoğan's ascendancy to Çankaya Palace⁴² was secured, the AKP's main issue was the need to find an adequate person who could follow him in the positions of Prime Minister and party leader. The party held a congress to decide on this matter on 27 August, where the seemingly most likely successor, Ahmet Davutoğlu, was elected as the party's chairman.⁴³ That raised some questions, especially concerning Abdullah Gül.

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Gül, a former President of the country, has stated that he would have joined the party (and possibly been elected as its chairman).⁴⁴ Erdoğan called Gül's decision to return to his party "natural."⁴⁵ However, the decision to hold a party congress to elect the party leader and consequently also the Prime Minister made it impossible for Gül to run for the position, as current laws do not permit one to hold a party position and simultaneously be the President of the Republic.

⁴⁰ Hürriyet (2014) "CHP'de kurultay tarihi belli oldu." Hürriyet, 17/08/2014. Online: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/27021787.asp>.

⁴¹ Today's Zaman (2014) "Kılıçdaroğlu Wins over CHP Congress, but Support Lower." Today's Zaman, 07/09/2014. Online: http://www.todayszaman.com/national_kilicdaroglu-wins-over-chp-congress-but-support-lower_358020.html.

⁴² Finally Erdoğan decided to stay in the newly-built Prime Minister's Palace, in the Atatürk Orman Çiftliği.

⁴³ Hurriyet Daily News (2014) "Turkish Politics Enters Critical Week to Designate Next PM, Ministers." Hurriyet Daily News, 18/08/2014. Online: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-politics-enters-critical-week-to-designate-next-pm-ministers.aspx?pageID=238&nID=70549&NewsCatID=338>.

⁴⁴ Hürriyet (2014) "Abdullah Gül partisine geri dönüyor." Hürriyet, 11/08/2011. Online: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/26984622.asp>.

⁴⁵ Zaman (2014) "Erdoğan'dan Abdullah Gül açıklaması." Zaman, 12/08/2012. Online: http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem_erdogandan-abdullah-gul-aciklamasi_2237246.html.

Nonetheless, Gül's popularity among his party's members is high, which means that he will have at least enough measurable political capital to influence Turkish domestic politics in the short run. However, this political capital seems to be insufficient to challenge Erdoğan's authority. Although speculations about a possible party formation have appeared, he denied the reality of such an option.⁴⁶ In this situation he has no other choice but to wait and start to build his own base; but this would be difficult under Erdoğan's leadership.

The former Minister of Foreign Affairs has changed the lineup of people in the government as well. These changes put some figures that were close to him into key positions – for example, Yalçın Akdoğan, Erdoğan's former advisor, was nominated for the position of Deputy Prime Minister. Meanwhile, Davutoğlu was replaced by Mevclüt Cavuşoğlu – who led the portfolio for EU affairs after Egemen Bağış's resignation in late 2013.⁴⁷ Cavuşoğlu's ascendancy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could lead to more accession-oriented efforts; however, the expectation that its prospects would be good is less probable, which Brussels needs to take into account.

Although many candidates have emerged for the position of Prime Minister, Erdoğan has *de facto* chosen Davutoğlu as his successor in this post. This situation may suggest that one could make a Putin–Medvedev parallel; however, it is still premature to forecast

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such a scenario for Turkey. Despite some criticism, in a case of an imperfect harmony, Gül followed Erdoğan's policies, which had already created a relatively strong monolith of decision-making. This monolith will be stronger in the future, especially when (or if) the AKP manages to transform the current political system into a

presidential one in the long run. Preliminarily, we can assume that the main change in the post-Gül era will be that Erdogan is not going to continue in Gül's more cooperative, consensus-seeking attitude. Though the Turkish society has a loyal prime minister on the "backstage," the society's polarization may grow in the future despite the fact that the opposition was not able to create a real alternative (neither the parties nor the Gezi protesters were successful in this). Concerns about freedom of speech will emerge in the future too. To conclude, it is highly questionable whether Erdogan will be able to

⁴⁰ Hurriyet Daily News (2014) "Former President Says He Won't Form New Party." Hurriyet Daily News, 19/09/2014. Online: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/former-president-says-he-wont-form-new-party.aspx?pageID=238&nID=71933&NewsCatID=338>.

⁴¹ Hurriyet Daily News (2014) "Davutoğlu Keeps Erdoğan's Cabinet with Few Changes." Hurriyet Daily News, 29/08/2014. Online: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/davutoglu-keeps-erdogans-cabinet-with-few-changes.aspx?pageID=238&nID=71061&NewsCatID=338>.

appease a great part of the society which will be hostile towards him, and create a “New Turkey.”

Final recommendations

The European Union has to closely follow these changes, pay particular attention to Turkish domestic politics, push the country towards further democratization and preserve its critical attitude towards the shortcomings of the “democratic process” associated with the AKP’s efforts. During the period when the AKP was the government party in Turkey, the possibility of the country’s EU accession has played an important role in Turkey. After Erdoğan’s victory, the EU should keep alive the accession process as a tool for the democratization of the Turkish society and political system.

Furthermore it should work more on boosting Turkish civil societies, supporting bottom-up democratic processes in Turkey and bringing the (positive) EU-discourse back into Turkish domestic politics.

EU policy-makers should also pay attention to the changes in the Turkish Left. The internal weaknesses of the CHP, its incompetence to challenge the AKP and the creating of a strong leftist agenda favoured the emergence of the HDP, which could become a much stronger player in the upcoming elections.

Furthermore, the supports for the internal dialogue between the two, Turkish and Kurdish political leaderships may enhance the efforts to find a solution to the Kurdish issue. The EU has to support initiatives to solve this outstanding problem.

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