



## **TURKEY'S NOVEMBER 2002 ELECTIONS: A NEW BEGINNING?**

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*Turkey's November 2002 elections ended with a stunning victory for the new Justice and Development Party. Since only one other party reached the 10 percent minimum necessary to hold seats in parliament, the victorious group was left with close to a two-thirds' majority. This article analyzes the meaning of the election, the fate of the different parties, and the attitudes of the electorate*

Turkey's November 3, 2002, general elections ended with a predicted but still impressive victory for the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*-AKP), the first party since 1987 to secure a clear majority in Parliament. The rapid rise of AKP support marks another step in the electoral collapse of centrist politics in the country. The left-leaning Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*-CHP) is the only other party passing the 10% nationwide electoral support threshold to gain seats in the Parliament. AKP got about 34 % of the votes compared to 20% for CHP. The remaining 46% of votes did not elect anyone since all other parties did not gain the minimum 10% needed. (See Table 1 below).

The incumbent government's coalition members suffered the heaviest losses. Compared to the 1999 election, the largest incumbent coalition partner, the Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Parti*-DSP), shrunk down to about 1.2%. It may have set a world record for being the largest party in one election and losing almost all its support in the next one. Among the other coalition partners, the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*-MHP) lost 9.6 percentage points, while the junior partner the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*-ANAP) lost 12.9 percentage points. Hence, the coalition partners together lost

about 39 percentage points of electoral support from the April 1999 elections.

The two major opposition parties did not perform much better. While the pro-Islamist Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*-SP) suffered a loss of 12.9 percentage points, the True Path Party (*Dogru Yol Partisi*-DYP) lost 2.5 percentage points. Besides CHP and AKP and to a lesser degree the Democratic People's Party (*Demokratik Halk Partisi*-DEHAP), all opposition parties incurred significant losses of electoral support. Consequently, all the leaders of those losing centrist parties, except the leader of the SP, were forced to step aside.

The leadership of the winners seems committed to integrating Turkey into Europe. However, their religiously conservative constituency is known to be skeptical toward EU membership. From the perspective of economic interests, AKP supporters seem to reflect resurgent conservative Anatolian capital against the secular establishment of Istanbul, the largest city of Turkey. The influence of upwardly mobile Anatolian firms may aim to shift the power balance in their favor through advocating irresponsible populist social and economic policies together with revitalized pro-Islamist actions and a push for private business gains through access to or effective control of the government.

If AKP does not keep a neutral stand in such a power struggle among the top

economic players it would be politically self-destructive since the perception of honesty is one of its main attractions. The corruption associated with the previous liberalization period under the centrist ANAP and DYP was one of the main reasons for declining trust in the centrist parties among the electorate.

Besides the issue of EU membership--which the AKP leadership started to push as soon as their electoral victory became certain--a number of other issues present the new government with potentially explosive problems. Most obvious among those are the long-lasting Cyprus conflict and the impending military engagement in Iraq.

On the domestic front, AKP's consultative meetings with a wide variety of civil society organizations seem to have pleased public opinion as a first step in the direction of a more inclusive and open government. At the same time, though, the AKP's overwhelming power coupled with its Islamist politics could create serious internal conflicts. In short, the message of the election may either be the end of politics in Turkey as it has been practiced for decades, or a temporary deviation, which voters will reverse at the next opportunity.

This article provides a short overview of the main characteristics of the Turkish party system and electoral behavior. The November 2002 election is evaluated in light of these historical patterns. Next, the campaign period will be critically considered and linked to characteristic patterns of the Turkish party system. Finally, I will venture into a speculative appraisal of the near-term implications of the new AKP government.

#### **PARTY SYSTEM CHARACTERISTICS AND VOTE DETERMINANTS**

Looking at the Turkish electoral scene after the November 2002 elections and trying to foresee what lies beyond, one needs to bear in mind characteristics of the

post-1980 Turkish party system. The electoral preferences reflected in election outcomes are very volatile. On average, over the more than half-century of competitive multi-party elections, nearly 23% of the electorate changes its preferences from one party to another in each election. In the early 1980s high volatility was primarily due to a changing menu of parties facing the electorate due to the closing and merging of different parties. However, for at least the last three elections--1995, 1999 and especially in 2002-- we observe that the electorate shifts from one party to another for reasons other than the nonexistence of a previously available party.

Given the available election results and expectations concerning the impact of continuing economic crisis on party preferences, it should be hardly surprising that an even higher level of volatility compared to 1999 preferences took place in November 2002. As Table 1 below shows, nearly half of the electorate seem to have shifted from one party to another from the 1999 to the 2002 elections. If we divide the party system into four ideological groups--extreme left, center-left, center-right, and pro-Islamist and nationalist party groups--we observe that about 20% of the voters seem to have switched from one group to another between the 1999 and 2002 elections. Besides CHP, and DEHAP, which inherited its predecessor HADEP's electoral tradition of representing Kurdish ethnicity in the country, there are no parties which gained on their 1999 vote level. AKP and the Young Party (*Genc Parti*-GP) are the other two newly established parties that gathered significant electoral support. GP was the dark horse of the November 2002 elections and relied on no previous electoral tradition. AKP clearly had the RP/FP constituency as their target and competed with the SP for that base. In short, increasing volatility seems to benefit new right-of-the-center parties.

In 2002 the pro-Islamist and nationalist group of parties peaked in electoral support

reaching nearly 53%, an all-time high in Turkish politics. As such, this group is about 3.3 times larger than the center-right parties and about 2.5 times larger than the center-left parties. However, the real question is whether and when will the electoral support become consolidated and stabilized behind these new parties. If the past pattern continues, the next election is bound to create not only some deterioration of electoral support for AKP but rather a major one creating yet another new right-of-center winner.

support for getting representation in the parliament, more and more parties were able to attract voters' support in elections and ultimately winning representation. This is usually achieved by splits in parties after elections. Factions that could not get 10% nation-wide support first get in on a party list and then become independents or create a smaller party. Larger centrist parties could get representatives of smaller fractions into the parliament under an umbrella ticket. However, they could not keep them under the same umbrella for long since their

<b>Table 1: Election results and aggregate party system characteristics 1999-2002</b>					
				<b>Seats in the</b>	
	<b>Vote Share (%)</b>		<b>% wins and losses</b>	<b>Parliament</b>	
	<b>1999</b>	<b>2002</b>		<b>1999</b>	<b>2002</b>
<i>Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti-DSP)</i>	22.19	1.22	-20.97	136	0
<i>Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetci Hareket Partisi-MHP)</i>	17.98	8.34	-9.64	129	0
<i>Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi-FP)*</i>	15.41	2.48	-12.93	111	0
<i>Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi-ANAP)</i>	13.22	5.13	-8.09	86	0
<i>True Path Party (Dogru Yol Partisi-DYP)</i>	12.01	9.55	-2.46	85	0
<i>Republican People's Party (Cuhuriyet Halk Partisi-CHP)</i>	8.71	19.40	10.69	0	178
<i>People's Democracy Party (Halkin Demokrasi Partisi-HADEP)**</i>	4.75	6.23	1.48	0	0
<i>Grand Unity Party (Buyuk Birlik Partisi-BBP)</i>	1.46	1.02	-0.44	0	0
<i>Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi-AKP)</i>	0.00	34.28	34.28	0	363
<i>Young Party (Genc Parti-GP)</i>	0.00	7.25	7.25	0	0
<i>Independents***</i>	0.87	0.99	0.12	3	9
<b>Total</b>	96.60	95.89		550	550
<i>Other Parties</i>	3.40	4.11	0.71		
<i>Volatility</i>	20.15	50.91	****		
<i>Fractionalization</i>	85.15	81.44	*****		
<i>% of vote unrepresented in the Parliament (%)</i>	18.32	45.33			
<i>Extreme-Left (EL)</i>	6.02	7.27			
<i>Center-Left (CL)</i>	31.35	21.77			
<i>Center-Right (CR)</i>	26.77	16.13			
<i>Pro-Islamist &amp; Nationalist (PIN)</i>	34.85	53.37			
<i>Ideological Volatility</i>	12.70	20.00	****		
*In 2002 Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi-SP)					
**In 2002 Democratic People's Party (Demokratik Halk Partisi-DEHAP)					
***In 1950 9 independents gained seats in the Parliament, in 1954 10 and in 1969 13 independents won seats.					
**** Highest (ideological) volatility ever in the Turkish party system.					
*****Lowest fractionalization since 1991 elections.					

The Turkish party system of the post-1980s is also increasingly fragmented. Until the November 2002 elections, despite the very limiting 10% nation-wide electoral

inner-party democratic character does not allow factions but rather pushes them out to become outsiders.

Besides fragmentation in the parliament, increasing fragmentation in election

preferences can also be seen. More and more parties were able to obtain vote shares within the range of 4 to 14 percent. In 1987 there were two parties within this range (DSP and RP) and one at around 3% (MCP). In 1991 DSP reached about 10% and the RP-MHP coalition got about 17%. In 1995, CHP, DSP, HADEP and MHP were all within this range. Finally, in 1999, ANAP, CHP, DYP, HADEP and FP fell into this range while MHP and DSP were close with about 18% and 22% respectively. Looking back at the 1999 elections, it is clear that given the volatility of the electorate it was not possible that the party system could maintain that many parties within such a close range of support. Coming into the 2002 elections however, we observe that only two parties get significantly above the 10% threshold while 5 parties (ANAP, DYP, MHP, GP and DEHAP) remaining between 4 to 10 percent and DSP and SP getting about 2%. In other words, while the electoral preferences remained very volatile, they also remained highly fragmented. Compared to 1999 and 1995 the party system is less fragmented. However, it still is more fragmented than the results of the 1991 election.

Many experts have claimed that the electorate could unite the fragmented system behind one or two major parties in November 2002. This expectation would have been valid if there were no social, economic, ethnic, sectarian and thus also regional differences in electoral preferences dominating the election results. Over the past nearly half a century it has always been local and regional factors rather than national ones that shaped election results.(1) It would have been a real surprise if this general trend had changed in November 2002.

As Table 1 shows, fragmentation remained high despite a downturn in that trend and a relatively increased focus on one or two parties. Looking at the unofficial election results from provinces, my calculations show that the overall dominant

position of the local component in election results continues in the Turkish party system. The AKP and CHP vote experienced a significant rise in their national component and in the case of AKP the national component is now the dominant factor shaping its electoral support. As such, AKP becomes the first party in Turkish electoral history to gather behind it a uniform swing across the nation in its favor.

Another striking characteristic of the aggregate election outcomes across Turkish provinces is its clear geographical regionalization pattern. Recent overall evaluations of the results for the 1950-1999 period show that Turkish provinces reflect three regions. One that covers the so-called "deep" East and Southeastern provinces; another covering the coastal provinces from the Eastern Black Sea down to Eastern Mediterranean including the whole of Trace and Aegean provinces; and lastly a large number of provinces that seem to have been squeezed in between these two regions. In terms of their socio-economic characteristics as well as political preferences these three regions reveal a clear pattern as well. The East and Southeastern provinces are the least developed in all respects and have an ethnic reflection in their political preferences. Their clear preference for DEP/HADEP in the 1990s and DEHAP in the last election have its roots in the early 1950 and 1960s when this region also showed a distinct inclination for either the opposition parties or personalized minor parties.

The coastal provinces are typically the most developed and modern in their socio-economic backgrounds. Their political preferences are centrist. The Anatolian plain provinces fare relatively better in terms of socio-economic development compared to the "deep" Southeast but significantly worse off than the coastal regions. These provinces are the hotbeds of Turkish nationalist and pro-Islamist electoral support.(2) The results from the provinces indicate that a similar pattern is

again observed in the last election. The distinct preference of the “deep” Southeast for DEHAP is again obvious but this time we observe a significant rise in its level as well as its spread across the provinces of the East and Southeast. The changing of electoral forces that in a sense challenge the system applies not only to the Kurdish electoral base but even more so for the pro-Islamist electoral base that seem to have advanced from the East into the West and the coastal regions. In a sense, the conservative preferences of the Anatolian steppes have expanded onto the coasts and Western provinces where we still observe some, but significantly shrunken, centrist-right or centrist-left support.

The election system, which requires 10% nation-wide support to gain representation, consistently kept 14 to 19 percent of the electorate unrepresented in the parliament since 1987. The largest share of the unrepresented votes in elections prior to the last one occurred in 1987 (19.8%) leaving the centrist DSP as well as right of the center MHP and RP out of the parliament. In 1991, the pre-election coalition between the RP and MHP kept the unrepresented votes at a bare minimum. However, in 1995 the two extreme ends of the Kurdish issue--that is the nationalist MHP and the ethnic Kurdish People's Democracy Party (*Halkin Demokrasi Partisi*-HADEP)--remained out of the parliament, with total unrepresented votes reaching 14.4%. In 1999, MHP got in and this time CHP remained out of the parliament, which meant 19% of the votes cast did not get represented.

Given the fact that no large pre-election coalitions were formed before November 2002 and the persistent fragmentation in preferences, the unrepresented portion of electoral preferences in the parliament reached a peak with about 45% of the vote. What is remarkable about this large unrepresented segment is not only its sheer size but also its ideological nature. AKP together with the independent MPs could conceivably make changes even in the

Constitution with little difficulty. However, AKP's seat advantage in the Parliament does not translate into a vote majority in electoral support. Therefore, any time AKP fails to obtain CHP's cooperation in such changes, CHP and other opposition parties are justifiably going to question the legitimacy of such changes made by a party with only minority support and pressure AKP to back down. In other words, AKP's single party government needs to build a consensus in and also out of the Parliament in order to maintain its legitimacy as a government.

Among the parties that remain out of the Parliament the ethnic Kurdish DEHAP has always suffered from the 10% nationwide representation threshold. As a predominantly regional party obtaining its support from the East and Southeastern provinces it nevertheless consistently increased its vote share over the last three elections (running under the HADEP banner in the first two). DEHAP has enlarged its support significantly and reached a larger vote share than ANAP, SP, DSP and the Grand Unity Party (*Buyuk Birlik Partisi*-BBP). As such, it is now the sixth largest party in the system. But since HADEP and DEHAP's regionally concentrated electoral support is unrepresented in the Parliament this factor favors the parties that capture the second largest vote shares in those provinces. In 1995 and 1999 the pro-Islamist RP and FP benefited from HADEP being left out of the Parliament. In 2002 it was AKP which on average gained less than half of the electoral support that DEHAP obtained in East and Southeastern provinces that benefited from this representational threshold.

Another important pattern that emerges from the aggregate data is a high correlation between incumbent party's or coalition's electoral support and the performance of the economy during its tenure. In other words, the worse (or better) the economy performs during inter-election periods, the largest is the drop (or gain) in the electoral support

for the party or coalition held responsible for this performance.(3) Not surprisingly, we also observe a great deal of effort on the part of the incumbents to manipulate the economic policy tools in such a way as to please their target constituencies. Reflections of these manipulations are typically observed in agricultural support prices, government employment and salary raises, delay of price increases in goods and services controlled by the public sector.(4) Typically, however, incumbents fail to stay in power and only get the economic balances worsen.

Such manipulations in the economy have become very difficult under the present economic austerity program. Intricate public bidding and spending arrangements implemented just before elections and in such a way as to support a certain party constituency is always possible. However, having been in power during the deep economic crisis of 2001, the DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition which, in the aftermath of 1999 elections, had an electoral support of about 54% obtained only about 15% of the votes in November 2002. This is the largest drop in Turkish electoral history for an incumbent or coalition in two consecutive elections.

Over the past nearly two decades we see a consistent shift of voters from centrist left-right ideological positions to the extreme-right end of the spectrum.(5) The average Turkish voter now places himself or herself on a clear right-of-center ideological position and nearly 20% of the voters seem to be placed on the far right position; i.e., at 10 on a 1 to 10 left-right ideological scale.

Individual preferences seem to reflect two dimensions that command the ideological competition in the Turkish party system.(6) The first and the relatively more dominant is the secularist vs. pro-Islamist cleavage. It is noteworthy that this cleavage largely overlaps with the center vs. periphery formations in Turkish politics and also the left and the right wing orientations similar in many respects to the Western

European traditions. The second dimension is the ethnic-based nationalist cleavage placing the Turkish and Kurdish identities as opposed to one another.

On the first dimension, as an individual becomes more religious in terms of attitudes, behavior and worship practice as well as self-perception, we observe an increasing tendency to support a distinct group of pro-Islamist parties. Declining religiosity of the same variants also differentiates the voters' tendency to support center-left parties of strict secularist policy preferences. Similarly on the second dimension, nationalistic attitudes and feelings concerning not only the Kurdish issue but also the EU membership and Copenhagen criteria that binds these issues together, differentiate an individual's likelihood of support for the right-wing parties. In other words, despite the fact that EU remains an obscure and technical issue for most Turkish voters, the Copenhagen criteria and the legislative arrangements required to meet them concerning abolishment of the death penalty and minority rights provide a convenient anchor for nationalist circles to exploit a eurosceptic rhetoric to their advantage.

The heart of political competition thus seems to be shaped around pro-Islamism and secularism blended with varying doses of Turkish nationalism. While the overwhelming majority of the Turkish electorate is located around ideological orientations that reflect these issues, the traditionally state-centred Turkish left is still far from such arguments. The two important minority groups, the Alevi and Kurdish communities, seem isolated on the Turkish ideological map. While HADEP/DEHAP undertakes the representation of the Kurdish constituency, CHP, still seems the closest party to the Alevis. The Sunni pro-Islamist AKP and SP are the most distant party from the Alevi constituencies.

The electorate's rising disenchantment with the existing parties is also evident. For a long time surveys showed a large segment

of voters undecided as to which party to support while an equally large segment refused to vote for any one of the available parties.(7) The inability of governments to respond to emergency needs after the devastating earthquakes in 1999 and the following economic crisis obviously occupy an important place in popular anger towards politicians and politics at large. The Turkish electorate seems unhappy with their lives and outraged with the inability of the politicians to solve their problems.

It remains to be seen whether the AKP can do better at these tasks and hold its support in the April 2004 local elections and those that follow. The rise of the AKP in a consistent pattern across the Turkish provinces can be seen as a continuation of the peripheral challenge to the statist centre of Turkish politics.(8) The resistance of the centre a la Mardin (1973) has never been this weak in the past elections. However, to what extent the peripheral forces have come under the AKP's banner and accept its ideas and policies is not yet clear. AKP now inherits not only the pro-Islamist tradition but also the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti-DP*), Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi-AP*) and the DYP tradition together with that of the market developmentalist ANAP of the 1980s.

How the AKP leadership can balance these hardly reconcilable orientations is unclear. Would the alienated masses hurt by the economic crisis of the 2001 remain behind AKP or move to another new or already existing party? Could a leader, new or already in politics, mobilize them or would they be attracted by a traditionally centrist party or yet by another pro-Islamist or nationalist one? Would the cumulative disenchantment of the masses with the inability of the parties to respond to their basic needs and expectations lead to a further abandonment of centrist tendencies? How fast would this movement to one of the extreme ends be? How would the existing parties and the powerful state bureaucracy react to these developments? Answers to these questions can only be

given by future events. Below, I speculate on possible developments on the basis of the above analyses.

### **A CRITICAL TURNING POINT?**

In order to assess whether the November 3, 2002 election was a turning point in Turkish electoral history, we need to consider two historical developments. One is the economic crisis and ruling coalition's ineptitude that created impatience and anger toward the Ankara establishment. The other is the surprising initiative taken by the outgoing Parliament to pass the legal adjustment package before the elections. The Ankara establishment's willingness to bring the EU adjustments to the election agenda reflected a need to reshape the debate with an eye toward meeting the challenges of becoming a viable EU candidate.

Regarding the two-year-long economic crisis plaguing Turkey, the centrist parties, reluctant to make populist promises, lost their appeal. No matter how incredible the promises of AKP and GP might have been, they nevertheless signaled the masses that they would change the status quo and adopt more caring policies for the masses. The incumbent coalition partners could not credibly respond to such a rhetoric simply because they had already had their chance and had not acted effectively. Even the challenging opposition parties such as DYP, CHP and SP were unable to come up with credible alternatives that could attract the suffering masses.

SP's problem was different than those of the CHP and DYP. SP's adoption of a pro-Islamist rhetoric under the leadership of now banned Necmettin Erbakan seem simply to have left the impression of reactionaries unable to achieve anything in practice. Besides a few nationalist left-wing parties such as the Workers' Party (*Isçi Partisi-IP*) and the Turkish Communist Party (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi-TKP*) a left-wing perspective in the economy could not be underlined during the campaign. These extremist perspectives also were seen

as adventurous and non-credible given the foreign aid dependent Turkish economy. DYP's credibility was equally blemished given the past performance of its leader Tansu Ciller in office when the 1994 economic crisis hit the country. The only credible party that could have used the economic alienation of the masses for building an electoral base was CHP. However, CHP also failed to deliver on this front despite, or perhaps because, of the fact that it had the widely popular Kemal Dervis who runs the economic program already.

At one point in early summer 2002, the electoral appeal of Dervis was seen as tremendous. However, as the summer progressed and the campaign began, the choices made by Dervis at critical junctures disillusioned many. First came his distancing from the New Turkey Party (*Yeni Turkiye Partisi*-YTP). Despite his damage control efforts, in the minds of the Turkish voters this may have seemed too slick a move. After all, Dervis had been involved in a failed attempt to eliminate DSP and Bulent Ecevit from the political scene, trying to discredit him in an unprecedented campaign bordering on character assassination. This plan collapsed once MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli called for early elections. Unprepared for such a move, the other coalition partners could only play along. After the election, Ecevit called this decision "political suicide". In the eyes of Turkish public opinion, Dervis suffered for the maneuvers that created this situation.

Next came his new party of choice; CHP. Now that Dervis had broken away from YTP, the CHP leadership did not need him or his obscure team. For its part, since Dervis failed to attract significant newcomers, CHP continued to project an image of being unchanged. Dervis added little. Dervis' effort to push CHP might have been wrong from the start. If this election was about the economic crisis, corruption and Ankara's clumsiness about helping the people, Dervis may never have had much to offer. The financial panic

might have ended nearly after 18 months of work by him but much of the economy has not felt any improvement. His image as a "World Bank man" could not easily "sell" among an increasingly angry and alienated electorate. If the election was about the future of the economy, then Dervis needed to project a new fresh team of experienced specialists in the CHP lists, which he also did not provide.

Dervis's charisma might also have been exaggerated. Old-style campaigning with mass meetings and hand-shaking might still be more important in Turkey than making a good impression on television interviewers. Moreover, Dervis projected a disillusioning, almost authoritarian pro-militaristic, image in perhaps the only "uncooked" interview he gave to Nese Duzel in *Radikal* daily newspaper on October 21, 2002.<sup>(9)</sup> For those wanting a fresh left perspective on not only economic policy matters but also on larger social issues he simply seemed to be projecting an old statist view. Dervis might have all the credentials for a successful savior on the economic scene but he failed to provide a larger vision.

While Dervis was trying to focus naively only on economic policy matters ignoring the underlying struggle for enlarging the country's democratic agenda AKP, was appealing to mass disillusionment. This strategy was far less successful than the AKP's appeal to the masses' unhappiness. As Tarhan Erdem aptly noted in an interview with Nese Duzel, "Dervis chose to reconcile with the status quo".<sup>(10)</sup> In contrast, AKP made a populist call for economic equality, while only scarcely using such controversial Islamist-related issues as the wearing of headscarves in schools.

In retrospect, the decision to go to early elections, DSP's loss of credibility, and Ecevit's passing from the scene, gave the AKP what it needed to win the majority in the Parliament. Neither Dervis, nor ex-foreign minister Ismail Cem, nor the old-time CHP insider Deniz Baykal could fill the vacuum. Baykal's insistence on relying



on his party's old guard ensured it would not be revitalized. Instead of being an alliance of young, dynamic agents of change in Turkey adopting democratic, egalitarian and progressive issue stands, the CHP became a faction of resistance to change.

Another important observation concerns developments on the EU front. The most surprising development of Summer 2002 came with the unexpected passage of an impressive EU adjustment package from Parliament. This package was passed after the Parliament had taken the decision to go for an early election. Even the most optimistic were not expecting such a move. With large number of resignations from the largest coalition partner DSP in Summer 2002 and the resulting New Turkey Party (*Yeni Turkiye Partisi*-YTP) under the leadership of former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ismail Cem, EU and EU related issues seem to be pushed to the forefront of political debate in the country. However, other political party leaders have by that time only tangentially dealt with this issue in front of the electorate. Besides Cem, ANAP leader Mesut Yilmaz stood in favor of this issue in his campaign. MHP leadership openly questioned the worth of EU membership. At the time, ill-looking Ecevit did not seem to care about the EU issue or was simply unable to push behind any issue he believed in. Although publicly in favour of EU membership, DYP leader Tansu Ciller seemed reluctant to push the issue perhaps considering backlash of the conservatist constituencies in their competition with the AKP and MHP. AKP's core constituency was known to be skeptical about EU issues and thus the leadership was not willing to take the lead on this issue. In short, if the EU issue were going to shape the electoral agenda in the next general elections, the political elites' willingness to raise the salience of the EU issues would be a major factor behind this development. If one believes that politicians only move by electoral incentives then one would also claim that ANAP, more than

anybody else, saw an electoral pay-off that no one dared to touch and took its chances by taking the initiative to pass critical pieces of legislation from the Parliament before the election campaign actually started.

The EU-oriented legislation passed just before the election included limiting the use of death penalty and opening the way for teaching and broadcasting in native languages other than Turkish (in principle allowing the use of Kurdish in such activities). The EU adjustment package was seen by some as democratizing new regulations bringing the country closer to EU membership, while an opposing group portrayed these as one-sided concessions undermining Turkey's unity and independence. The parties in Parliament were clearly divided. MHP alone rejected all the legislation, while AKP opposed only the death penalty change, knowing this vote would not impede the package's passing. ANAP was the new laws' main advocate, hoping it would lead to electoral support and the EU's agreement to advance Turkey's membership application.

ANAP's hopes, however, were not realized. It assumed that voters would reward it for acting on the EU issue and that the EU would also be pleased. But any action by the EU bureaucracy would only take place after the election. Similarly, public opinion was little affected since the measures would not be implemented until later. The November 2002 election was not determined by EU issues. Even ANAP's campaign was not effective in pushing this issue since the party organization was falling apart on the expectation that it would not survive the 10% nationwide threshold. Many influential names resigned and joined AKP, MHP or became independent.

One of the emerging new parties was Cem Uzan's Young Party (*Genc Parti*-GP), which few took seriously at first. When a polling result was published on September 30, however, GP seemed to be above the

threshold and one of the few parties likely to gain seats.(11)

This situation revealed some of the problems in contemporary Turkish politics. GP was and is a typical one-man show and completely funded by Uzan. Its campaign was a slick commercial show using Uzan's television and radio stations, as well as his cellular phone network. Many tenets of this campaign were in direct violation of the law of political campaigns but no serious steps were taken to stop it. Uzan's speeches were full of irresponsible populist promises, including: increasing the number of provinces from 81 to 250; 200 square meters of state-owned land to be given to every family; cheap credits for every family to be paid back in 30 years; distribution of all school books for free; abolishing VAT on foodstuffs; no tax on minimum wage and an overall reduction of taxes; and higher support prices for agriculture.

Some of these points--like no taxes on minimum wage--were shared by MHP and DYP. Uzan's promise of a university for every province was matched by DYP and even surpassed by promising new ones in provinces that already had one university. It seems however, that once this bidding game started, others--especially DYP's Tansu Ciller--followed suit with her own version of populism like promising a tractor for every farmer and shifting the state banks for agriculture and small merchants to farmers and small merchants.

These populist promises were blended with anti-establishment rhetoric reminiscent of Ross Perot in the United States and Silvio Berlusconi in Italy. Uzan, and to some degree Erdogan, turned their campaign speeches into expressions of hatred against the establishment and government. Obviously, none of Uzan's promises could be realized within the austerity program. But this type of campaigning was meant to convince voters that leaders cared about them and intended to do something about their suffering. A sophisticated argument about the lack of resources to achieve such goals would not

influence many. The people wanted change, blamed the establishment, and sought to express their anger. Uzan, and in some ways the AKP, seems to have given them exactly what they wanted.

At first sight Uzan's 7.25% seemed to have been largely attracted from MHP. However, Uzan's power base did not turn out to be anywhere close to traditional MHP strongholds. Rather, GP gets most of its support from the western coastal provinces where CHP dominates the polls. It seems that GP appealed to the uneducated, unemployed masses hardest hit by the economic crisis and angry at the ruling coalition. Although it is impossible to say what would have happened if the GP had not been in the election, it is clear that the votes it received helped prevent other parties, probably centrist ones, from passing the 10% threshold.

Where did AKP get its vote? Geographically speaking, AKP's vote is concentrated in the central Anatolian provinces. However, unlike the traditional conservative provinces this time AKP led in large metropolitan cities like Istanbul, Ankara and Bursa. AKP voters appear to be religious, young, shantytown dwellers who do not support EU membership. CHP supporters, on the other hand, appear to be secularist leftists who are not particularly young and who support EU membership.

#### **END OF POLITICS AS WE KNOW IT?**

The November 2002 election brought to power a very different group of leaders and, for the first time since 1991, a single-party government. While AKP's core constituency is skeptical about EU membership, the new rulers began with an impressive tour of European capitals and a push for a starting date on negotiations regarding Turkish membership. Similarly, they seemed to move forward on supporting a solution to the Cyprus issue. A success for AKP on either issue would strengthen the new government. Since the real difficulty that is expected to shortly become binding is on the economic front, if these efforts

succeed, AKP would have started its tenure with a first minute goal. Consolidation of EU-Turkey partnership with the start of negotiations would lift the uncertainty surrounding Turkish economy's direction and potential for the future. Even if the much-expected military engagement in Iraq materializes, its impact on the Turkish economy could be kept at a minimum. Under this rosy scenario AKP would be much more powerful to conduct the much-needed reforms in public administration, agriculture, education and many other policy areas.

Under such circumstances, the only opposition party in parliament, CHP, could find little on which to gain popularity by resisting the government. If the economy goes well, AKP could afford to move slowly on such Islamist issues as that of the headscarf. And if AKP follows a moderate path in beneficial circumstances it could replace the centrist parties of the Turkish party system. Although harder-line elements within AKP might not like this policy, they would find it hard to overturn it. This would be the most likely course of events if AKP's victory would prove a long-term, basic shift in Turkish politics rather than a temporary aberration.

With a much weaker center in parliament and a populist right-of-center in power, the post-election period is more likely to see several crises, including an uneasy relationship between the prime minister and a president known to be a liberal secularist. Another is the headscarves or turban issue. However, for this to become a major issue, the CHP or other parties would have to challenge the AKP. Pressure might also come from the AKP's own constituency to take action.

Regarding such issues as Cyprus, EU conditions, and Turkey's relations with the United States or Israel, the military might also again become a factor if it believes the AKP is acting in too Islamist a fashion. Another possibility of crisis could come from international criticism of government economic policies which could lead to a

crisis of confidence and thus more internal economic problems.

AKP's big test is its ability to appeal to average people through its economic policies while transforming itself from a marginal to a centrist party. In rosy scenarios, AKP's challenge will be to maintain a long-term growth strategy rather than just exploiting a short-term opportunity. In gloomy scenarios, AKP could face internal conflict and opt for more extremist policies. In all likelihood, whichever direction events take, Turkey's politics are likely to be far different than they were before the November 2002 elections.

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#### NOTES

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