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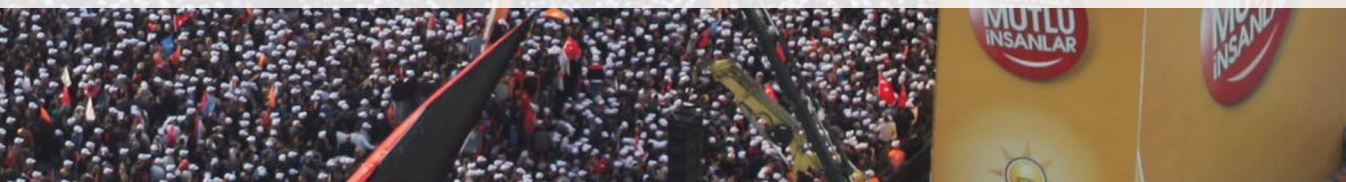
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The Longest Year of Turkish Politics: 2014

TAHA ÖZHAN*

ABSTRACT *Like all long political years, the year 2014 did not begin on January 1st; rather, 2014 politically began at the end of May with the Taksim events. Nevertheless, the year may end on an optimistic note. It could be said that, unless the date of the upcoming general elections change, the long political year of 2014 will extend to June 2015. Had the government been overthrown by the police-judiciary coup in December 17th., Turkey would have been sentenced to a neo-tutelage regime for many years to come. The first phase of the tripartite elections race in Turkey ended with Erdoğan's victory. The upcoming presidential elections in August 2014 will be the second phase. The March 30 elections clearly demonstrated that the AK Party will continue to play an important part in Turkey's political scene for years to come.*

Some political years are longer than others. Turkey witnesses a long political year every decade or so. The first half of the 19th century had several of these long political years. In 1945, for instance, not only the world but also Turkey witnessed the worst of the Second World War. For those who lived through it, 1945 must have seemed to stretch endlessly. Or, take the year 1960. The events that precipitated the coup d'état of May 27, 1960 must have made every single day seem like a year. Same thing could be said for the year 1971. Then, there is the year 1980 — every single day of which brought a different disaster. Any of the ten years that made up the 1990s, which has since been dubbed the lost decade, could be considered the longest political year of the decade. However, the year in which Turkey experienced a post-modern coup, 1997, was probably the longest.

At the turn of the millennium, the calendar seemed to move not day by day, but hour by hour. On the one hand, there was the anxious anticipation of the invasion of Iraq and, on the other, an ever-intensifying political and economic crisis that exhausted all hope. With the November 2, 2002 elections, the

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Justice and Development Party (AK Party) brought Turkey a single party administration, after many long political years.¹ Since then, Turkey has moved further and further away from the political diseases of the coalition(s) era. However, this did not put an end to the phenomena of

long years, as 2007 was another long political year. The presidential elections of 2007, which customarily took place in May, led the country into total chaos.² Like all long political years, the year 2014 did not begin on January 1st; rather, 2014 politically began at the end of May with the Taksim events. Nevertheless, the year may end on an optimistic note. It could be said that, unless the date of the upcoming general elections change, the long political year of 2014 will extend to June 2015. If so, the political year of 2014 will last two calendar years. Understanding how the political year of 2014 could last two calendar years can help clarify recent political crises in Turkey.

Why is 2014 likely to be a long political year? Since the June 12, 2011 general elections, even without knowing how exactly events would unfold, it was clear that 2014 would become a very difficult political year. Turkey, with its tripartite electoral calendar, would soon experience the same undercurrents that many countries, such as the U.S., Russia, China, Iran and France, experienced simultaneously in 2012 — local elections in March 2014, presidential elections in August 2014, and general elections in June 2015. The tripartite of elections appears much like a flag race. The fact that the outcomes of local, presidential and general elections become tied to each other is not an ordinary occurrence. This extraordinary turn of events is as much a result of the peculiar characteristics of Turkish politics, as it is due to Turkey's transformation under the AK Party administration.³

The AK Party, having prepared Turkey for the transition to a Post-Kemalist era, has made it impossible for any other political party to win as it has a base of constituency across the nation as a whole. Since it came to power in 2002, the AK Party's capacity to represent all segments of the political landscape in Turkey has been unsurpassable. Other political parties will be unable to cultivate the same capacity of cross-national representation if they do not overcome their ethnic, sectarian, secularist, psychological and political barriers that constrain them to a particular social segment. As this is unlikely in the near future, local, general and presidential elections become indicators, not of voter preferences in terms of political actors or platforms, but of the identity politics that rule Turkish politics. It is precisely due to this reason that the AK Party, which emerged victorious out of the 2014 local elections, has a high chance of achieving the same success in the 2014 presidential and 2015 general

elections. As such, the claim that 2014 will witness many difficult twists and turns would not be a far fetched prophecy.

The Political Year 2014 Began in 2013

Most of 2013 was spent debating the resolution process of the Kurdish issue. In 2012, the PKK, having misread the crisis in Syria, staged multiple attacks that resulted in the death of many civilians and over a thousand of its own members. When the PKK decided to take up arms once again even as Turkey was democratizing, all hope that the Kurdish issue would be resolved through political means was lost. At a time when it seemed hopelessness, Erdogan took a brave first step. In late-2012, he announced the initiation of peace talks between the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, and Turkish National Intelligence Agency (MIT).⁴

Turkey's century-old Kurdish issue became an armed conflict with the emergence of the PKK after the 1980 coup d'état. This created an impasse in Turkey in which tens of thousands of people lost their lives between 1984 and 2000. On the one hand, the military tutelage regime, with its security focused perspective, reduced the Kurdish issue to a security threat. On the other hand, Kurdish nationalism, with its leftist utopianism, sought to gain Kurdish rights through armed struggle. Until the AK Party administration, any attempt to deal with the impasse politically, or even label the problem as the "Kurdish issue," was sanctioned by the military tutelage regime. Erdoğan was the first leader to have the courage to make a public statement in August 2005, in which he admitted that the state had made many mistakes in the past and declared that he would make the "Kurdish issue" *his* issue. In the years that followed, the AK Party found itself in a struggle against the tutelary regime for its very existence. The AK Party, having survived coup threats in 2004 and 2005, barely escaped being dissolved by the Constitutional Court in 2008.⁵

After the AK Party survived the attempt, it became the first administration that took steps towards resolving the Kurdish issue. A project, dubbed the "Initiative," was launched in 2009 and became a target for tutelary groups. The military regime, in an attempt to mobilize the masses against the AK Party, resorted to the provocative discourses of lumpen nationalism and Kemalism. Nevertheless, the Initiative played a crucial role in the resolution of the Kurdish issue. Due to the progress made by the Initiative project, citizens learned the truth beyond the official discourse that was fed to the masses by the tutelary regime through its control of the mainstream media. For the first time in history, the Turkish Parliament (TBMM) convened to discuss the Kurdish issue, which was a revolution within itself. Erdoğan managed to force the public,

politicians and the parliament to confront the Kurdish issue without labeling it as such.

The 2009 Initiative failed because of the PKK's anachronically ideological structure. The PKK turned a deaf ear to Erdoğan's calls to 'disarm and enter the political system'. It could be said that the PKK, which had been trapped in an armed struggle for years, was disconcerted by the possibility of a political resolution. The PKK's internal conflict became more apparent in 2010 during the constitutional referendum, which was a big blow to the tutelary regime. Only a year earlier, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which replaced the DTP after it was dissolved by the Constitutional Court, boycotted the constitutional amendments that would have rendered the dissolution of political parties unconstitutional. The BDP is still unable to offer an explanation as to why it sided with the Turkish nationalists and Kemalists in its rejection of the constitutional amendments. Shortly after the boycott, the PKK took to arms and started to plan attacks once again. The attacks resulted in the deaths of both soldiers and civilians.⁶ In 2011, it was revealed that the intelligence agency was engaged in peace talks with the PKK. The voice recordings that were leaked to the media proved that the state was making an effort to reach a resolution. Nevertheless, the PKK, at a time when the tutelary regime had begun to retreat and steps towards actual democratization were being taken for the first time in Turkish political history, continued its insurgency as if nothing had changed. The continued violence is as much a result of the PKK's misreading of the crisis in Syria as it is due to the Kurdish political movement's failure to build an intellectual structure to aid the PKK in distancing itself from violence.

The year 2013 began with a revolutionary intervention into the Kurdish issue and a vicious cycle of PKK attacks. The resolution process officially began in late-2012 with Erdoğan's declaration of the peace talks between Öcalan and the government. The 2013 Resolution Process, contrary to the 2009 Initiative, had a specific roadmap. According to the plan, to which all parties consented, the process would have three phases: the PKK would retreat from Turkey, legal and institutional reform would facilitate a certain degree of "normalization," and the PKK would begin to disarm. Erdoğan took a great risk and used all his political capital to convince the public and manage the nationalist sensibilities. Resisting Erdoğan's efforts, the Kemalist and nationalist opposition parties invoked the military tutelage regime's slogans from the 1990s to oppose the resolution process. The PKK failed to retreat beyond Turkey's borders and thus did not implement the first phase. Instead, it trapped itself in the impasse of a ceasefire. Despite this issue, polls showed that more than 70% of the public still supported the resolution process. This put great pressure on the PKK and it found itself at the risk of appearing as "the actor that rejected the resolution" if it chose to take up arms again.⁷

While the discussion of the resolution process continued to shape 2013, the Taksim demonstrations in Istanbul, which began at the end of May, changed the political agenda completely. One of the most important, but equally unsightly, city squares in Istanbul, Taksim Square was intended to undergo major renovations. In an unprecedented turn of events in the metropolitan municipality parliament of Istanbul, all parties reviewed and consented to the renovation project. In other words, the project was the first to receive unanimous approval. Demonstrations against the renovation led by a small environmentalist group ignited a bigger wave of protests. The disproportionate use of police force poured fuel on the fire. The three biggest cities in Turkey (Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir), as well as four other cities (Adana, Hatay, Eskisehir and Antalya), became the stage for the demonstrations. There were a few other demonstrations in smaller cities on a much lesser scale.⁸

The demonstrations in Taksim were unique for two reasons: the identity of the demonstrators and the reason for the protests. In addition to the hundreds of millions of dollars of damage in all cities, particularly Istanbul, seven people – including police officers — died as a direct result of these demonstrations. The protests were extensively covered by the international media. In fact, even the bloody coup in Egypt, which occurred barely a month later, did not receive as much international media coverage. While the protests continued for two weeks, somewhere along the line they were transformed. By the second day, the environmentalists that started the protests left the scene and were replaced by leftist and anarchist groups, with massive support from the Kemalists. For this reason, the demonstrations remained limited to the cities mentioned above.

The Taksim protests cannot be analyzed without an inquiry into the identity of the demonstrators and their demands. The biggest obstacle to such an inquiry is the tendency, particularly by the Western intelligentsia, to analyze Turkey through newspaper headlines. As truisms about Turkey turned into the dogma of the Western intellectual world, any meaningful analysis into Turkish politics has become impossible. That is to say, the Western intelligentsia and media insist on analyzing Turkey from the same old perspective in terms of political actors. In order to understand Turkish politics, one needs to acquire an understanding of the opposition in Turkey. Although there are various parties in the opposition in Turkey today (such as Kurdish and Turkish nationalists), the Kemalists still constitute the main opposition. That's is to say, the position of "main opposition" in Turkish politics is held by Turkey's first political party the Republican Peoples Party (CHP) which represents the Kemalists.



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Gezi Park activists wearing Guy Fawkes masks flash the V sign as they stand on a damaged public bus in Istanbul, June 2013.

EPA / Tolga Bozoğlu

In the face of the protests, it would be legitimate to ask why the opposition and not the administration should be the object of such an inquiry. This is where Turkey's peculiarities become visible. The underlying reason of the Taksim Protests was not the administration in office, but rather the incapacity of the opposition party. To put it simply, the common thread that tied the many diverse groups who took to the streets during the Taksim protests together was their loss of faith in the opposition party's ability to represent their interests in the political arena. A denial of this fact would require the admission that the renovation of Taksim Square, to which their party had already given its consent, was the only reason behind the protests. So who were those masses that took to the street after they lost all hope?



According to the polls and surveys done during the Taksim protests, the majority of the protesters identified themselves as CHP voters, which explains why the protests only occurred in cities with a CHP constituency. The small minority of protesters that did not associate themselves with the CHP were affiliated with marginal leftists groups. The CHP constituency that made up the majority of the protesters was not homogenous. It was the first time that higher-educated, white-collar urbanites took to the streets in protest.⁹ In addition to the urbanites, lower-middle income groups, mostly from the Alawi sect, were also driving forces in the protests. This could be evinced from the fact that most of those who lost their lives during the protests were Alawi. In the end, the Taksim protests gave rise to a chaotic situation, in which the demands of maximalist leftist-liberals were expressed through violence and the dangerous fault lines of the community were activated. The administration engaged in high-level (the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister) dialogue with the protesters and listened to their demands. As such, a project that was approved by the municipal council, members of which were elected by Istanbul voters, was essentially halted.¹⁰

With the Taksim events, the opposition in Turkey changed. Street politics, instead of effective opposition work in the parliament by means of legitimate politics, became the new trend. The opposition began to see small marginal groups that were limited to certain neighborhoods in a handful of cities as

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representative of their constituency. This new trend only brought more harm to the CHP, which was already restrained by its inability to maintain a social base outside of a few select cities. The harmful effect of this new political trend became evident after the local elections were held on March 30th. The protests of May 2013, in fact, carried into 2014, which brought an important turn in Turkey's political fate – local elections in March 2014 and presidential elections in August 2014. To wit, 2014, the year of tripartite elections, with the Taksim Protests, began early.

December 17: An Inexplicable Coup Attempt

While the postmortem analyses of 2013 Taksim protests continued, another disaster struck Turkish politics on December 17, 2013. Early in the morning on December 17, the police took approximately 50 people into custody in simultaneous operations. The fact that three of the detained individuals were children of ministers currently in office dropped like a bomb on the Turkish political scene. Most of those detained and subsequently arrested had no connections or affiliation to one another. In fact, it was peculiar for them to be the subject of the same investigation. It was suspicious that despite the fact that those who were arrested were part of more than 10 different ongoing investigations, they were taken into custody simultaneously. In fact, there is evidence that some of those investigations were completed months ago, but the prosecutors kept them on ice to be activated on December 17.¹¹

Even before the allegations and content of those files were known, almost everyone had come to the same conclusion. The usual suspect was the Gülen Movement, whose presence among the police and the judiciary was widely known but rarely articulated. The Gülen Movement, whose tension with Erdogan had been widely publicized in the media, had mobilized only a few months before the elections. This was hardly Gülen Movement's first incident. Only two years prior, on February 7, 2012, there had been a similar attempt against the Undersecretary of the MIT (National Intelligence Service), which was orchestrated by a group from within the police and the judiciary. The police and the judiciary attempted to use the leaked transcripts of the Oslo Talks — an initiative undertaken by the MIT to resolve the Kurdish is-

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sue — as grounds for arrest warrants for the MIT director and his deputies. There were also operations between 2009 and 2012, known as the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) investigations, which aimed to prevent the PKK from establishing a stronghold in cities. These investigations were used as

an excuse for the judiciary and the police to arrest thousands of people for being members of the PKK, whether or not they really were. In fact, at some point, the front page news of the media controlled by the Gülen Movement was a story about the KCK investigations. Similarly, a slanted version of the attempt made against the MIT on February 7 was

fanatically publicized in Gülen Movement media organizations for months. After this point, the Gülenists' infiltration of the police and the judiciary had become too obvious to cover up. Therefore, by the time the December 17 operation rolled around, enough suspicions had been raised about the Gülen Movement.¹²

On December 25, there was a second wave of operations. In another attempt to influence politics directly, an operation forged multiple irrelevant investigations into one case in order to arrest tens of people, including many legitimate businessmen and the Prime Minister's son. This second attempt only served to make the Gülen Movement's intentions evident to all. Once the Gülen Movement's involvement was known, the fabrication of evidence, the irrelevance of the investigations and the incoherent charges became public knowledge. Most importantly, the public, instead of feeling assured that widespread corruption in the government was caught, felt anxious. The public was anxious because they knew, from experience, what kind of problems cooperation between likeminded law enforcement officers, prosecutors and judges could cause.

The Gülen Movement, which emerged as a religious movement towards the end of the 1970s, focused its energies on educational activities in the late 1980s. First, it prioritized university education in order to promote higher education as mainstream.¹³ Activities directed towards university students began by providing housing to thousands of students. Later, it established test preparation programs to prepare students for university entrance exams. By the 1990s, the university entrance test courses reached thousands of students, who could not have otherwise afforded test preparation. Around the same time, the first generation beneficiaries of university housing had graduated and began contributing towards the education of the next generation. The Gülen Movement encouraged students to pursue careers in law enforcement, the military and

the judiciary in order to form a “parallel state.” The movement’s efforts to infiltrate state organs intensified during the AK Party administration. Since the AK Party had not yet accumulated the necessary human resources, the career paths of Gülen followers remained wide open.¹⁴

Since the early 1980s, the Gülen Movement remained distant and suspicious of any emerging political movement. Although it is a religious group, the Gülen Movement did not hesitate to distance itself from Islamist movements too. If one were to describe the Gülen Movement of that era as a political movement, it would be safe to say that it was nationalist structure with an inflated sense of regard for the sanctity of the state. Until their disdain for Erdoğan became a public affair, they had neither engaged in any kind of political strife with any political figure, nor had they publicly uttered a single criticism of the Kemalist regime. Moreover, the Gülen Movement, which had given its explicit support to the bloody coup of 1980, gave direct support to the 1997 coup that had specifically targeted Islamists.¹⁵

Fethullah Gülen, after 1999, moved to United States and carried the headquarters of the movement with him. Gülen, particularly between 2007 and 2010, publicly supported the Erdoğan administration. Erdoğan’s exit from the 2010 Davos meeting in reaction to Peres was a turning point in the Gülen Movement’s relations with the Erdoğan administration. Gülen, who had never offered a single statement of disapproval against Israel, maintained its position even after nine unarmed Turkish citizens lost their lives during Israel’s unsanctioned attack on a vessel carrying humanitarian relief in international waters. Whatever bonds the Gülen Movement had forged not only with the AK Party, but also with the masses in Turkey were severed when Gülen publicly criticized those who insisted on delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza. Gülen, after this point, effectively ended the alliance between the Movement and the AK Party, which was only forged a few years ago. The real motive behind the Movement’s support of the AK Party during the 2010 constitutional referendum became evident only after the events of February 7. The Gülen Movement had supported the constitutional amendments in order to clear the way for its infiltration of the judiciary.

How did December 17 Effect the Elections?

After the joint police-judiciary operation of December 17, the local elections of March 30 immediately came to mean much more than ordinary local elections. The political agenda of the country changed dramatically. The main opposition party, which had surrendered its ability to pursue legitimate politics to street politics during the Taksim protests, surrendered again to the Gülen Movement after December 17. At that point, the CHP stopped being

the main opposition party and became a platform for all those who wanted to settle accounts with the government. The Gülen Movement sincerely believed that the December 17 operation would bring about the fall of the Erdoğan government. They were convinced that neither Erdoğan nor the AK Party would be able to resist the public pressure to step down. According to their calculations, even if the government were not ousted before the elections, it certainly would not survive the allegations of corruption. The movement was so convinced that would be the case that they repeatedly used a survey that predicted the AK Party would only receive around 30% of the vote in their media outlets.

What the Gülen Movement failed to account for was Erdoğan's resistance against the attempted coup. Erdoğan removed the four ministers who were implicated in the investigations from office. Furthermore, these ministers were not representatives of the traditional AK Party line to begin with. As such, the AK Party constituency did not identify with the accused ministers. After the elections, members of the parliament from the AK Party brought a proposal to the floor to form an investigatory committee that would ensure that the ministers were brought to justice. Erdoğan issued a state of exception and shuffled around thousands of Gülen followers who had been positioned in law enforcement and the judiciary. While the country was dealing with the repercussions of December 17, the Gülen Movement made one more attempt. Gülen followers in law enforcement, with the assistance from the prosecutor's office, stopped MIT trucks that were carrying aid intended for Syria and attempted to arrest MIT agents. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. Erdoğan reacted harshly and the public began to question where the Gülen Movement's loyalties lay. Around the same time, an investigation into the IHH, a humanitarian organization, was launched. The IHH was the organization that attempted to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza and was thwarted by the Israeli attack. The investigations were quickly dubbed the "Al-Qaeda Operation to IHH." The Gülenist media outlets offered extensive coverage of the investigation and the police raid on IHH offices. However, the police raid only served to intensify the public's doubts about the Gülen Movement.

After Erdoğan survived the December 17 debacle, the Gülen Movement is believed to begin to leak approximately hundreds of wiretaps to the media. The recordings, despite being part of ongoing prosecutions, were illegally publicized as propaganda material against Erdoğan. The main opposition party constructed its entire campaign strategy around these materials. The wiretaps of various politicians became available to public at large via YouTube almost every single day during the campaign. Around the same time, it was revealed that hundreds of thousands of citizens' phones were illegally tapped. Law enforcement officers and prosecutors abused their powers (as if they were mem-

bers of an illicit organization) to put illegal wiretaps on the phones of politicians, journalists, businessmen and public officials in every city.

The eavesdropping scandal that became public before the local elections would indicate, at the very least, two things. First, the revealed list is clearly intended for more than just wiretapping. Second, the list offers the world a better understanding of the chaotic and naive world wherein the Gülen network operates as a neo-tutelage actor. The list of names that went public simply shows that the perpetrators grouped together thousands of people as part of a grand design.

The long list fits into the broader set of investigations that began on December 17, 2013 as a guideline for widespread arrests, as there seems to be no clear reason why such unrelated people would end up in a fictional “terror organization” together. The list’s diverse nature, therefore, highlights that the individuals behind this activity share considerably more overlapping perspectives compared to those featured in the list. So, we must ask how the aforementioned perspective emerged, given that it would be ridiculous for the prosecutors to eavesdrop on so many people as part of a routine investigation. We must question how a list that lumped together these individuals, who, even if they committed a crime, would never join forces or commit the same crime, came into being.

The Gülen Movement, which emerged as a religious movement towards the end of the 1970s, focused its energies on educational activities in the late 1980s

Clearly, a clique within the judiciary and the police opted for a supposedly complex tutelage regime instead of getting tangled in the troublesome and risky world of politics. The group abused historic events such as the Ergenekon, Sledgehammer and KCK trials by watering down the truth with inaccurate elements. As such, members of this network wrongly assumed that it had eliminated competing groups that sought to establish their guardianship over the nation, while conveniently exploiting Erdoğan’s steadfastness for their own gain. The ruling AK Party thus represented a necessary evil that would either destroy itself or be forced out by the Movement. Misguided by massive abuses of power over the past few years, this clique lost touch with reality and established a hit list, including numerous targets and highly institutionalized structures, as well as individuals that barely pose a threat to the network’s interests. Amid all this, the Gülen network remains obsessed with the “crime scene” of neo-tutelage. On December 17, they continued their efforts, which went public on February 7 when they attempted to arrest Turkey’s intelligence chief for establishing dialogue with Kurdish militants two years ago.¹⁶

The list of individuals whose phones were tapped would indicate a rough road map. Unsurprisingly, the road map almost entirely corresponds with the Gülen Movement's political priorities, including the Iran obsession, the Kurdish question, and business and the media. These three broad categories, of course, come with numerous subgroups that become meaningless in the face of the predatory instincts of the judiciary and the police, which draw ridiculous road maps only comparable to the Middle East maps of neo-cons.

The fact that a covert group violated the privacy of thousands of people and accused them of belonging to fictional "terror organizations" represents only a minor part of the big picture. The true disgrace relates to the judicial authorities that authorized such a mass wiretapping. To be sure, it would only be possible to get a warrant to eavesdrop

on such public figures if the police, prosecutors and judges shared a certain vision.

The opposition parties, in what appears to be a mental paralysis, not only failed to determine appropriate campaign topics, but focused the message of their campaigns on the December 17 operation

Although it was not available in general political debate or agenda, two weeks before the local elections, a number of Gülenist media prophesized that the Turkish government may launch an attack

against Syrian targets prior to the elections. Simultaneously, the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader warned the government at campaign events not to escalate tensions with the Syrian regime. These claims became clear when the biggest blow happened right before the elections. The recording of a meeting between Turkey's intelligence chief, foreign minister and deputy head of the military about a discussion on potential military action in Syria was leaked on YouTube was by far the most serious breach before the March 30th elections.¹⁷ This only implied that they knew about the sound recordings before they were leaked and celebrated the perpetrators as bureaucrats with a conscience.¹⁸ This scandal was good enough for many to reach conclusions about Gülen Group and its infiltration into the state. After Syrian leaks, Dec. 17th operation and Gülenist parallel state treated as a national security risk by the government. Public perception towards the crisis would have become quite obvious in the election, which held just couple days after the leaks.

The results of the elections held on November 2, 2002 were revealed on February 19, 2001, when a "crisis of the state" emerged between then-Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer. The outcome of the July 22, 2007 elections was already determined on April 27, 2007, when the military issued its e-memorandum. The results of the elections held on

June 12, 2011 became clear right after the constitutional referendum held on September 12, 2010. Similarly, the outcome of the elections of March 30 was already determined by the events of December 17, 2013. In that sense, the last three-and-a-half months, apart from holding the public captive to campaign agendas, did not really mean much. Recently conducted polls affirm the above observation. It seems that voter preferences remained exactly where they were at the end of December.¹⁹

When the race for the March 30 elections began, there were at most 15-17 swing vote cities that were up for grabs. In all but one of these swing cities, in which all the opposition parties were competing against each other, the race was between the AK Party and only one other opposition party. Therefore, it would be accurate to state that the March 30 race took shape not in a nationwide campaign, but in certain swing cities. Given this simple political landscape, the reasonable strategy for opposition parties would have been to avoid national political issues as much as possible and focus on local contentious issues. The opposition parties, in what appears to be a mental paralysis, not only failed to determine appropriate campaign topics, but focused the message of their campaigns on the December 17 operation.

One thing the race on March 30 showed is that constituents take exception to political manipulations against a legitimately elected government. In fact, any action against legitimately elected governments that lack credulity is perceived as a manipulation of the will of the people. The December 17 operation was a feeble attempt to oust the government by forging a case out of dozens of irrelevant investigations. The forged case would overthrow the government and inevitably lead to a call to hold national in addition to local elections on March 30. Well, one thing spoiled this otherwise perfect plan: Prime Minister Erdoğan did not back down. On the contrary, he employed extraordinary measures, even at the risk of heavy criticism, and the elected government was able to weather this coup attempt.

Had the government been overthrown by the police-judiciary coup, Turkey would have been sentenced to a neo-tutelage regime for many years to come. The government, bureaucratic institutions, businessmen, media and various civil groups would have been obliged to surrender to the police-judiciary junta. The breadth of the recent eavesdropping scandal provides enough evidence to justify these claims. It appears that since 2009, the phone lines of over one million people were wiretapped and thousands more were put under surveillance. It is impossible not to discern a pattern of targeting from the list of those eavesdropped on. It is also impossible to take those who refuse to acknowledge the gravity of the situation out of spite for Erdoğan seriously. The situation Turkey is facing is truly dismal. In sum, the outcome of the March 30 elections was determined after the events of December 17.

March 30 Election Results and Analysis

Although the outcome of this election was clearly evident, roughly 70 percent of the Turkish media outlets told a completely different story. The same clichés and slogans were reiterated time and again as if their perpetual and collective repetition would magically transform these slogans into facts. These clichés and slogans were confronted with reality on March 30. There is a considerable market for these Kemalist and liberal platitudes in the global media. In fact, these truisms offer a picture of a comfortable intellectual world. So much so that the need for analyses that rely on history, sociology, politics and geopolitics are completely eliminated.

The experience is not all that different from that of following only the news from a TV channel that broadcasts “headlines” around the clock. Those who perceive themselves as followers of Turkish politics are only aware of the events in the most general of terms. They possess neither the contextual nor the factual knowledge necessary to comment on events in Turkey. Of course, that is not to say that Turkey is exempt from the responsibility of expressing itself more often and clearly. However, those who are interested are equally responsible for critically evaluating the media sources from which they derive their news about Turkey. At the very least, they should be able to acknowledge that there is a different story at play than the one that conveyed March 30 as the expiration date for both Prime Minister Erdoğan and the AK Party for the last three months.

Some 70 percent of the Turkish media depicted the electoral race as if they did not reside in Turkey. They appeared to have forgotten that Turkey, and therefore the electoral race, consists of seven regions and not just the two in which the CHP did slightly better than the AK Party. The CHP collected less than 10 percent of the vote in 40 of the 81 provinces in Turkey. Their vote ratios are even lower than one percent in some eastern and southeastern provinces. Under these conditions, it is impossible for the CHP to compete against the AK Party in any electoral race, let alone win. Other opposition parties are in even worse conditions than the CHP. This political reality is not really all that difficult to comprehend.²⁰

To win elections in Turkey, one must run in all the races. The AK Party wins elections because it is the only party that is capable of running in all political districts in Turkey. But why is that? Answering this question first requires the purging of all media truisms and liberal platitudes. It requires an extensive comprehension of the dynamics that constitute the AK Party’s dominance. Once empty rhetoric is set aside, a picture in which opposition parties circumvent every attempt at democratization becomes clear. Answering this question also requires an understanding of what Erdoğan – with all his faults and vir-



tues – means for this country. It requires the recognition that it was Erdoğan who put a stop to 30 years of bloodshed for the last 18 months. This list can go on.

In the elections, the AK Party won 60 percent of all metropolises, 59 percent of all cities, and 61 percent of all villages. The CHP won 20 percent of all metropolises, 15 percent of all cities, and 17 percent of all villages. The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) won in 10 percent of the metropolises, 9 percent of cities, and 11 percent of villages. The BDP won in 7 percent of the metropolises, 15 percent of cities, and 7 percent of villages. There has to be a reason behind the AK Party's 60 percent success rate, beyond the platitudes offered in the media. The March 30 elections marked not only a success for the AK Party, but also an unprecedented rate of electoral participation. This is not simply the result of a successful election campaign; it is the result of a maturing AK Party identity in Turkey.²¹

The AK Party has become the primary party in all seven regions in Turkey. It was able to go toe-to-toe with the CHP in the Aegean region, due to the alliance between the CHP and the MHP. In nearly all other regions, there was at least a 10 percent difference between the AK Party and its closest competitor. This difference was 31 percent in the Black Sea, 25 percent in Central Anatolia,

Turkey's Premier Recep Tayyip Erdoğan claimed victory at the local elections night in Ankara on March 30.

AA / Kayhan Özer

12 percent in Southeast Anatolia, 11 percent in Eastern Anatolia, and 10 percent in the Mediterranean. The AK Party's share, compared to the 2009 results, increased in 74 cities, while it decreased in only seven.²²

What this landscape tells us is that the AK Party is the only party that cuts across all political lines in Turkey. Turkey's "unity" is ensured by the AK Party's constituents. This is why there have been dramatic increases in the AK Party's share of the vote at times when it seemed like the country was on the cusp of a crisis. It is only natural that the AK Party, which is able to reach all identities and regions in the country, is the only party that fills the lack of stability and security that still haunts Turkish society.

Let's set aside the absurd 55 percent (the total gained by all other parties) analysis and the peculiar practice of comparing local and general election results for now. What needs to be made clear is that if the AK Party, which has emerged victorious in all the elections that it has entered, wins its fourth general election, it will secure its place as the country's dominant party. Therefore, the AK Party now shoulders the responsibility of assuaging all of Turkey's democratization pains. As evinced from the results of the elections, desperate opposition actors are not strong enough to shoulder this burden, which is hardly surprising. The problem is that the pressures of this landscape have been reflected in the democratization process. While this situation delays democratization, it gradually strengthens the fault lines that unite the AK Party but divide the opposition.

As the results of the March 30 elections reveal, the AK Party is the only party in Turkey's political history that appeals to all social segments. This, ironically, causes the opposition parties to assume less responsibility for those segments that may have felt marginalized by less inclusive parties. The AK Party continues to do politics without a functioning opposition, which it has become accustomed to. Nevertheless, this situation has to come to an end because democratization can only be achieved through amendments to the Constitution. The opposition could become a national party by supporting the government's efforts for this change.

The outcome of the March 30 local elections rendered Turkey's political landscape even more visible, allowing detailed analyses to be drawn. Those who look at this map and infer 'division' are mistaken. The political landscape that emerged shows dispersion, rather than division. The dispersion is not a moment captured in a snapshot. On the contrary, it has become a prevalent trend that appears to be persistent. From the AK Party's perspective, the landscape shows the potential for expansion. This can be easily demonstrated by the increase in the AK Party's share of the vote in 74 cities, including cities that it lost. Therefore, it could be said that the more the AK Party pushes its own

potential, the more it forces the opposition's boundaries.

As long as this trend continues, the AK Party will continue to force the opposition to either rise up to increase its votes or accept a loss in their share. This situation is not sustainable for the opposition. Even if the CHP increases its share of the vote by 20 percent and reaches 30 percent overall, it will never achieve any kind of political depth in Turkey unless it develops a strategy to change the geographical concentration of its constituency. This applies to other opposition parties as well.

The biggest obstacle preventing the opposition from geographically expanding its constituency is its unwillingness to break out of its comfort zone. It is impossible for the opposition to expand its constituency without causing discontent among its existing voters and overcoming Kemalism or Turkish nationalism. Our political history is marked by political movements that, when faced with a crisis, chose to split instead of taking on the risk of transformation.

Most governments, if not all, emerged out of these movements. The CHP-Democratic Left Party (DSP), MHP-BBP and RP-AK Party splits are the closest examples of this. Although there is no evidence pointing to another CHP-DSP scenario at this point, the pattern in Turkish political history cannot be overlooked.

A scenario similar to the split between the Social Democratic People's Party (SHP) and the People's Labor Party (HEP) is probable. A branching out in the CHP, unlike the DSP split but similar to splits within the Kurdish political movement in the past, is also probable. Thus, it is imperative to recognize the juvenile attempts of those who interpret Turkey's landscape as a narrative of division. Since it is impossible for the CHP to reach out to all segments in Turkey's political landscape by only appealing to the elites, it is important that the party decides on its strategy with the Kemalists in the future. On the other hand, the Kemalists need to decide on what to do with the new CHP elites. After all, the current situation is not unlike the SHP-HEP separation, which occurred in 1992 and resulted in the leadership of Deniz Baykal.

It is clear that current party leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroglu, can manage the crisis for a little while longer. However, if the outcome of future elections is the same, there will be no realistic reason for the Kemalist core of the party to remain idle. That is to say, voters will rightfully question, as they have done in the past,

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why they should endlessly give their support to “a team” assembled with the promise of expanding the party’s reach after they have clearly failed.

When Will 2014 Come to an End?

The year 2014 is a candidate not only for one of the longest years in Turkish political history, but also one of the most interesting. The Kemalists, who were the dominant elites in the establishment until only a decade ago, are not even players in the intense power struggle going on in Turkey right now. This is the first time that they have become mere spectators in a power struggle in the country. They are compelled to ally themselves with the Gülen Group, whom they had previously declared public enemy number one. Years from now, for those who will be writing history, this new alliance will be worthy of intensive inquiry.

The first phase of the tripartite elections race in Turkey ended with Erdoğan’s victory. The upcoming presidential elections in August 2014 will be the second phase. The Kemalists, for the first time in history, do not have any significant say in who will occupy the presidency, which is considered to be the highest level of the tutelary regime. The debate over the presidential seat is and will continue to be a debate for the AK Party alone.

The March 30 elections clearly demonstrated that the AK Party will continue to play an important part in Turkey’s political scene for years to come

As demonstrated from the current political landscape in Turkey, it would be extremely difficult for a candidate from the CHP to be elected president. The future president of Turkey will most likely have conservative or conservative-nationalist tendencies because it is difficult for Turkish voters to elect a president whose identity is radically different from theirs. The only question that hangs in the balance in the upcoming elections is what will happen if Erdoğan is elected president. The current president, Abdullah

Gül, who already announced in April 2014 that he intends to retire from politics, initiated the presidential debate immediately after the local elections. Liberal pundits, who have accused Erdoğan of becoming another Putin for some time, are now facing an interesting quandary. Ironically, the only solution they can offer is another “Putin-Medvedev” formulation. In other words, they want Erdoğan, whom they had dubbed Putin, wanted to change offices with Abdullah Gül, whom they cast for the role of Medvedev. The president terminated these naïve sentiments with a single sentence.

In the current situation, if Erdoğan becomes the president, the AK Party will be forced to continue with a new Prime Minister. However, this is hardly the end

of the problem. This is the first time that Turkey will elect a president by popular vote. Former presidents in Turkey, until now, were elected by the parliament. When the tutelary regime intervened in the 2007 presidential elections via the military, the AK Party passed a bill for a constitutional amendment that allowed for the president to be elected by the people. In other words, the Kemalists, by intervening in the presidential election by deploying the military and the judiciary in order to prevent the AK Party candidate from becoming president, inadvertently erased any possibility for another Kemalist candidate to become president.

The Turkish state is a parliamentary system. Inherent to all parliamentary systems is the problem of electing and managing the president. Any system in which the president is given a wide range of powers needs to be redefined when the possibility of popular elections enters the equation. Should the president choose to use all the powers granted by the constitution while trying to govern the political capital invested in him by the people's vote, it will become impossible to serve as a symbolic head of state. Under these conditions, Turkey will be obliged to either to maintain a certain level of harmony between the government and the president's office, or change its political system.

The March 30 elections clearly demonstrated that the AK Party will continue to play an important part in Turkey's political scene for years to come. Unless the AK Party intentionally removes itself from the political landscape, the process of building a New Turkey will be evident in the party's governance. The biggest problem that the AK Party faces as the dominant party in Turkish politics is the lack of a proper opposition party that can engage with the AK Party politically. This places the burden of democratization entirely on the AK Party. It is unlikely that Turkey's political landscape will normalize in the short-term. This indicates only one thing: there will be many long political years like 2014 in Turkey's near future, and Turkey will continue to experience normalization pains. ■

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