

European
Elections monitorfrom **Corinne Deloy**
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1 month before
the poll

Is Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party mowing towards victory in Turkey?

52,758,907 Turks (of whom 2,568,977 living abroad) are being called to vote on 12th June to renew the 550 members of the Grand National Assembly, the only Chamber in Parliament. 7,492 people in all from 15 political parties are standing in the election – 203 are independent candidates. The electoral law approved in 2010 modified Turkish legislation so that it now falls more in line with European standards. The eligibility threshold has been reduced by five years and now lies at 25. The law makes it obligatory to renew electoral equipment: ballot boxes will now be made of transparent plastic and not wood, envelopes will have a new format, voting booths will be made so that the person inside cannot be seen. It is obligatory to vote in Turkey.

The Supreme Election Council chaired by Ali Em rejected the request for Turks living abroad to be allowed to vote in their country of residence, a decision that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (AKP) criticised sharply. "It is a slap in the face for the voting rights of our citizens," he stressed. 1.3 million Turks live in Germany, 1.2 million in France and Belgium. Around 10% of them are travelling to Turkey to vote.

As stipulated by article 114 of the Constitution Justice Minister, Sadullah Ergin, Interior Minister Besir Atalay and Transport Minister Binali Yildirim resigned from their posts some weeks before the election so that this could take place in a neutral situation.

After 9 years in power what has the AKP achieved?

From a political point of view Turkey is a socially and regionally divided country. This can be seen every time there is an election and was evident for example during the referendum on the Constitution on 12th September 2010.

Regionally the country's south and west coasts are the strongholds of the main opposition party, the People's Republican Party (CHP). A majority in these regions rejected the constitutional reform. The CHP attracts the urban middle classes in the biggest towns such as Ankara and Istanbul who see the AKP as a threat to their Western lifestyle. These voters criticise Recep Tayyip Erdogan's authoritarianism whom they often accuse of being involved in affairs of corruption.

The AKP dominates Central Anatolia, a traditional-

ly conservative, religious region which in part has turned away from the National Action Party. The AKP is well established amongst the rural middle classes and amongst those living in average sized towns; however the AKP absolutely has to recover the support of the electorates in the major towns. Finally the AKP has planned specific action for young voters: two million first time voters will go to ballot on 12th June next.

The economic card is the AKP's best asset: the country's GNP has increased by 31% (230 Turkish pounds (102 billion €) nine years ago, 730 billion – 324 billion € at present), there has been a rise in income per capita up from 3000 to 10,000\$ in 9 years, the GDP grew by 8.9% last year and by 7% on average between 2003 and 2007), investments tripled over the same period (from 59 billion Turkish pounds – 26 billion € in 2002 to 161 billion in 2009 – 71.5 billion € - in spite of the global economic crisis),

General Elections in Turkey 12th June 2011

inflation decreased by 30% down to 6.4% and the national debt has been reduced (down from 23.5% to 5.5% according to the IMF). Unemployment had risen to above 14% of the working population in 2009 after the crisis but it is now down to around 11%.

At the end of April Husnu Ozyegin, Turkey's second richest man said he was pleased with his country's economic success and notably with the fact that the budgetary deficit and inflation were under control.

The AKP can also be proud of having improved Ankara's position in the international arena as seen recently during the revolutions in the Arab countries. A successful example of the merger between democracy and Islam, Turkey has often been quoted as a model for its democracy and its economic success. "To be called a model is an exaggeration, an example maybe," declared President Abdullah Gül on 3rd March last in Egypt.

According to the party's figures one voter in ten ie 5,165,000 people are AKP members. Several occupy key positions in the civil service and institutions where they have gradually replaced the traditional Kemalist elite. Indeed the AKP has a representative in every suburb; its leaders are increasing its contacts with the population, communicating on figures which reveal the successes of 9 years in office: the opening of 3,696 clinics, the building of 426, 483 council houses, the connection of 27,578 villages to the drinking water network etc...

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan hopes to win a new term in office to continue the work started on the Constitution (a new Fundamental law is being written at the moment). He wants to pursue the democratization of his country where he would like to establish a presidential regime of which some of the population are afraid because they fear Turkey will slip into authoritarianism.

On 30th March 2009 the AKP won the local elections with 38.8% of the vote – it took 45 main towns in the provinces and 447 districts. The CHP won 23.1% of the vote, 13 major towns and 170 districts; the National Action Party won 16.1% of the vote (10 major towns and 129 districts). Although the AKP came out far ahead of its rivals its advance has now come to a halt

On 12th June next 5,599 AKP candidates will be stan-

ding in the general elections. The party has held primary elections in 29 provinces. Half of the MPs (146 out of 333) will not be standing for re-election, since Recep Tayyip Erdogan wanted to give new or younger candidates an opportunity. Several ministers will be standing in key constituencies on the Mediterranean coast where the AKP usually records its lowest results. The head of government hopes to win 42% of the vote.

Does the opposition have a chance?

The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party, is firmly established on the western side of the country and notably on the coast. Under the leadership of Deniz Baykal the CHP moved away from its social-democratic origins in order to refocus its position. The autocratic style of its former leader divided the party and alienated the more liberal members some of whom quit the movement. On 22nd May 2010 Kemal Kilicdaroglu replaced Deniz Baykal as the CHP leader. The new head, who leans more to the left than his predecessor, has a different approach saying for example that he supports the wearing of the veil, that he favours dialogue with Abdullah Ocalan (leader of the Kurdish Workers' Party PKK, who is at present serving a life sentence for terrorist activities), and even a general amnesty for PKK militants who accept to lay down their arms. Kemal Kilicdaroglu has also started to renew his party's image by introducing new personalities. He has modified its nationalist, secular agenda to refocus the party on new issues in an attempt to reach out to the Turkish population. Indeed the CHP has to separate social conservatism and religiosity and update its liberal, pro-Western views. If it succeeds in forging a new image and if it comes to embody change then it may pose a threat to the AKP and reach the centre of the country to assert itself as a real alternative force.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who launched a lively campaign, says he will resign if the CHP fails in these general elections. The CHP will be putting 435 people forward. More than two thirds of the outgoing MPs (78 out of 112) have been taken off the lists.

On 2nd May last the police carried out searches and arrested about 40 people on suspicion of corruption

in towns that are managed by the opposition parties, notably Izmir and Kusadasi on the Aegean Sea. "This operation is mainly an attempt to influence the upcoming general elections. It looks like the policy of oppression and intimidation that has been ongoing in Turkey for some time" declared the CHP's Vice-President, Alaattin Yuksel.

Turkey's third party, the National Action Party (MHP) which is ultra-nationalist and lies on the far right was the dominant party in the centre of the country for a long time before seeing its electorate desert to the benefit of the AKP. It is threatened by the rejuvenation of the CHP. MHP leader, Devlet Bahçeli therefore chose to appoint several moderate candidates in order to retain his electorate and to attract some new ones.

The Kurdish "Problem"

The Party for Peace and Democracy (BDP) is the main Kurd party in Turkey. Created in 2008 it is led by Selahattin Demirtas. It replaced the Democratic Society Party (DTP) led by Ahmet Türk as the main political representative of the Kurdish community in Turkey that comprises 15 million people ie 20% of the country's total population. The DTP was dissolved on 12th December 2009 after the Constitutional Court banned it "for activities that threatened the indivisible unity of the State, the country and the nation and for having links with the Kurdish Workers' Party." Since 1984 it has been fighting for the creation of a Kurdish State that would lie across the north of Iraq and the south of Turkey. It declared a unilateral cease-fire on August 2010 but in February last it threatened to defer this saying that it wanted to defend itself more effectively against the security forces. Fights between the PKK and the Turkish security forces have led to around 40,000 deaths in all in Turkey.

The Party for Peace and Democracy stands as an ethnic movement that defends the claims of the Kurdish community, notably it demands greater autonomy of its members, the freedom of representation and the right to speak Kurdish. In December 2002 when it came to power the AKP lifted the state of emergency that had been in place for the last fifteen

years, it created a Kurdish TV channel, gave permission for private Kurdish language lessons and Kurdish study departments in some universities. A few years ago Recep Tayyip Erdogan was the first Turkish leader to acknowledge that the State had "made mistakes" during its previous negotiations with the Kurds. Recently he said that there was no longer a Kurdish problem in Turkey.

At the end of April the Supreme Elections Council announced its decision to ban 12 candidates from standing on 12th June next. Amongst these were 7 members of the Party for Peace and Democracy which led to a number of demonstrations in the Kurdish areas of the country. One demonstrator was killed and several others injured by the police forces during a rally in Bismil (in the province of Diyarbakir).

"It is a serious blow to democracy which is already weak," criticised Selahattin Demirtas, the co-chair of the Party for Peace and Democracy. "The eviction of the Kurdish representatives might lead to a boycott of the general elections," he added. The declaration of ineligibility was condemned by the leader of the Grand National Assembly, Mehmet Ali Sahin (AKP) who declared "This decision weakens parliament's mission."

Amongst the banned candidates are two outgoing MPs Sabahat Tuncel and Gultan Kisanak and also Leyla Zana, elected MP in 1991, arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison (1994-2004) "for collusion with the Kurdish rebellion" after she had tried to deliver her oath to Parliament in Kurdish. She was about to make a come-back on the Assembly's benches.

The Supreme Election Council finally revised its decision and allowed 8 of the 12 candidates to run, 6 of whom were from the group of seven independents in the Kurdish community. The Party for Peace and Democracy, which is putting forward 66 candidates in all hopes to see 35 of them elected as MPs.

On 30th April the police arrested 70 people in several of the country's cities (Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Mersin, Van, Mus, Isparta, Batman, Mardin, Siirt, Adiyaman and in the capital Ankara) who they suspect of having links with the self-defence units (OSB), structures that were created by the PKK which are said to take direct orders from Abdullah Ocalan. According to the secret services the units' members had been in trai-

ning for three months in camps run by the banned party in the north of Iraq. The authorities believe that the 70 people under arrest represent a danger since they might cause trouble during the electoral campaign.

On 6th May the Kurdish rebels claimed to be the authors of a fatal attack on an AKP road convoy in Kastamonu (north) where the Prime Minister had just delivered a speech. A policeman was killed and another injured. "This ambush was undertaken as revenge for the terror the police spread amongst the Kurdish people," declared the Workers' Party of Kurdistan. "Those who did this are terrorists. Those who cannot solve problems by elections think they can do so this way," said the head of government. Finally Abdullah Ocalan, via his lawyers, has threatened the powers in office with "war" if they refuse to negotiate after the general elections. "Either a serious negotiation process will start after 12th June or it will be the start of a major war," he declared.

"A boycott of the elections by the Party for Peace and Democracy would be a setback for Recep Tayyip Erdogan," stresses M. Birand, an analyst on TV channel Kanal D. "The legitimacy of the elections would be threatened and the Prime Minister would be very embarrassed because he wants to show that these elections are democratic and that everyone is taking part. He hopes to take votes from the Republican People's Party and so he is undertaking a nationalist party and is attacking the Kurds, accused of threatening national unity. As for the pro-Kurd party it is showing its strength and is demonstrating that it is defending its community," he added.

In Turkey there is a consensus on the fact that the Kurdish problem cannot be settled by force.

The Turkish Political System

Since the constitutional referendum on 21st October 2007 in 81 provinces the Grand National Assembly, the only Chamber in Parliament, has comprised 550 members elected every four years by a proportional voting system. The age required to stand is 25; the candidate must also have a minimum level of primary education. The publication of the last census led to a redistribution of the parliamentary seats. Istanbul

thereby gained 15 seats, the capital Ankara 3 and Izmir 2.

In order to be represented in Parliament all political parties must put candidates forward in at least half of the country's provinces and win a minimum of 10% of the votes cast nationally. This particularly high threshold is very damaging to the Kurdish parties whose electorate mainly lives in the east of Turkey. Since 2007 the latter have managed to navigate around this rule by putting forward independent candidates. In January 2007 the European Court of Human Rights advised that the threshold be brought below 10% and for discussions to be launched between political parties on this issue.

Finally the Turkish Prime Minister must be a member of Parliament

At present three political parties are represented in the Grand National Assembly:

- the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan created in 2001 rose from the ashes of the banned Prosperity Party (Refah). In office since 2002 it has 363 seats;
- the Republican People's Party (CHP), the main opposition and oldest political party founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1919. Lying on the centre-left and led since 22nd May 2010 by Kemal Kilicdaroglu – it has 178 MPs;
- the National Action Party (MHP), an ultra-nationalist party created in 1969 and led by Devlet Bahçeli, it has 71 seats.

26 independent MPs also have seat in Parliament 20 of whom represent the Kurdish community.

Fifty women sit in the Grand National Assembly ie 9.1% of all of its members, which places Turkey 101st in the world ranking (173 countries in all) by the Interparliamentary Union. In all 257 women are standing in the general election on 12th June: 109 for the CHP, 78 for the AKP, 57 for the National Action Party and the 13 for the Party for Peace and Democracy.

All of the polls forecast the AKP as the winner of the general elections. According to the Genar Institute it is due to win 41.7% of the vote and is due to take the lead over the Republican People's Party (25.2%) and the National Action Party 11.9%.

Reminder of the general election results of 22nd July 2007 in Turkey

Turnout: 84.40% (it is obligatory to vote in Turkey)

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats won
Justice and Development Party (AKP)	16 340 534	46,66	341
Republican People's Party (CHP)	7 300 234	20,85	112
National Action Party (MHP)	5 004 003	14,29	71
Democratic Party (DP)	1 895 807	5,41	0
Independents	1 822 253	5,20	26
Others	2 654 484	7,59	0

Source : Internet Election Site in Turkey (<http://secim2007.ntvmsnbc.com/default.aspx>)

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), running favourite in the Turkish general elections one week before the vote

J-7
7 days before
the poll

On 3rd March last the National Grand Assembly, the only chamber in Parliament, set the date for the next elections on 12th June in a vote 361 votes in favour out of a possible 550. In one week's time 50,189,930 Turks will appoint the 550 members of Parliament from 7,492 candidates who are running in 85 constituencies. The latest census led to a redistribution of the seats in parliament. 14 constituencies have gained and 28 have lost seats. Istanbul gained 15 seats, Ankara, Antalya and Diyarbakir gained 1 and those of Izmir and Gaziantep, 2. However the constituency of Mersin lost one seat.

The electoral campaign has been marked by a sex scandal. At the beginning of May the internet site Farkli Ulkücülük (a different ideal, a name which echoes the core of the doctrine of the National Action Party, MHP), published videos over the web showing MHP members having adulterous sexual relations. Five MPs - Osman Cakir, Umit Safak, Mehmet Taytak, Deniz Bolukbasi, Mehmet Ekici and the MHP's Secretary General Cihan Pacaci - resigned after the broadcast of these videos. The party received several letters threatening further revelations including about their leader Devlet Bahçeli. The latter accused the ruling party (AKP) of being behind this campaign of defamation.

Will this be the Justice and Development Party's third victory?

Outgoing Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (AKP) launched his campaign in Bayburt (in the north of the country). Running favourite in the polls the AKP hopes to achieve a 2/3 majority in Parliament, which will enable it to modify the Constitution without having to convene a referendum, so that it can write a new Fundamental Law and take Turkey towards a Presidential regime. The AKP owes its popularity to its socio-economic policy: a 31% increase in the GNP since 2002, the year it came to power; an increase in income per capita (from 3,000 to 10,000\$ over the last 9 years), GDP growth of 7% on average between 2003 to

General Elections in Turkey 12th June 2011

2007 (8.9% in 2010); a tripling of investments; a decrease in inflation from 30% to 6.4%. Unemployment that rose above 14% in 2009 after the international economic crisis now lies at around 11% of the working population. The outgoing government has also stepped up work on social aid programmes notably in the areas of healthcare, housing and energy.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced his project to build two new towns around Istanbul to counterbalance a possible earthquake (the region is in a danger zone; in 1999 around 20,000 people were killed in two violent earthquakes in the north west of the country). "The idea behind this project is to overcome a disaster by building housing in safe areas," he declared. The two towns will have a capacity of 500,000 people and will lie on either bank of the Bosphorous (one on the shores of the Black Sea and the other in Asia).

The second project announced by Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the construction of a 50 km long canal (150m in width and 25m in depth) which is to run alongside the Bosphorus linking the Black and the Marmara Seas – the aim being to relieve the river's maritime traffic. This canal will be "more important than the Suez and the Panama" by 2023 the year when the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic founded by Kemal Atatürk will be celebrated. On a visit to Ankara the outgoing Prime Minister announced the construction of two new 7000 bed hospitals in the districts of Kecioren/Ellik and Bilkent, a national botanical park, a library, research centres, the biggest zoo in the Middle East, the introduction of new means of transport between the district of Kizilay and the town's airport and finally the extension of the metro lines.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who said that Ankara will have finished paying its debt to the IMF in 2013, wants to make Turkey one of the greatest economies in the world by 2023.

A revived opposition

Last February the outgoing Prime Minister said that the opposition had neither goal nor project and had already lost the general elections. "The opposition parties have already accepted their defeat and they are looking for an excuse for this," declared Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Although one week before the election the AKP is still the favourite in the polls it should not minimise the danger which the opposition parties represent however, notably that of the People's Republican Party (CHP), which under the influence of its new leader,

Kemal Kilicdaroglu (who took over as party head on 22nd May 2010), has progressed over the last few months.

The main opposition parties do not focus so much on the AKP's Islamist threat but denounce the corruption and authoritarianism of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Kemal Kilicdaroglu is also active in the economic area. He has warned of the fragility incurred by over rapid growth and has pointed to Turkey's rising public deficit (according to the Central Bank it has more than doubled over the last year rising to a record 9.8 billion €) and the country's high economic dependency on imports. Kemal Kilicdaroglu has also promised, in the event of his party's victory, the drafting of a new Constitution that would grant greater freedom to the citizens, including the Kurds and the Alevi minority. The latter who are Shia comprise 10 to 20% of the Turkish population including around one third of Kurds.

The Kurdish Unknown

"In our opinion there is no difference between a Turk and a Kurd," declared the outgoing Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. However during his meeting in Hakkari (south east of the country, only 1000 people turned up and the town's shops all closed as a sign of discontent with the ruling party). At the same time further south Kemal Kilicdaroglu received a warm welcome. The CHP leader promised to abolish the 10% threshold of votes cast (every political party has to present candidates in at least half of the country's provinces and win a 10% minimum of votes cast nationally if they want to be elected; this particularly high threshold is unfavourable to the Kurdish parties whose electorate is concentrated in the east of Turkey), an old claim on the part of the Kurds and the establishment of an investigative commission into unsolved crimes that have taken place in the region.

"The People's Republican Party which never acknowledged the Kurdish issue and which has always denied the Kurd language and identity is now walking hand in hand with the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) – the main Kurd party in Turkey," mocked Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek –AKP – criticised Kemal Kilicdaroglu for have promised that if his party won the local Kurd administrations would become autonomous.

"The two camps, both Turkish and Kurd, have reached a certain level of maturity and we are now at a point when we

shall see whether a partnership is possible and what the future status of the Kurds will be," declared an optimistic Leyla Zana, MP since 1991, arrested and condemned to ten years in prison (1994-2004) "for collusion with the Kurd rebellion" after she tried to give oath in Parliament in Kurdish.

In the recent action taken by Kurdish separatists political expert Mustafa Oczan sees evidence of the revolution that has been ongoing since the start of 2011 in the Arab countries. In his opinion, inspired by these events, the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), deemed a terrorist organisation by the EU and NATO, led by Abdullah Ocalan, who is at present is serving a life sentence for terrorist activities, is doing everything it can for the Kurds to rise up in a national movement against the government in office. "After

vainly trying to provide a democratic solution to the Kurdish problem in 2009 the authorities are now passive and are not taking any real action," indicates Mustafa Oczan. In his opinion the government should be careful not to give the PKK any reason to attack. Incidents in Hopa at the end of May led to the death of one and injury of another of the Prime Minister's bodyguards after the head of government's convoy was attacked with stones.

The Kurd separatists have asked the ruling party to stop military operations against the PKK and regularly threaten to boycott the general elections on 12th June.

According to the latest poll by Konsensus for the daily Haberturk published on 1st June the AKP is due to win 48.6% of the vote. It will come out ahead of the CHP which is due to win 28.3% and the MHP with 11.6%.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party achieves his third consecutive victory after the Turkish general elections.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) made a landslide victory in the general elections that took place on 12th June in Turkey. The party took 49.9% of the vote and 326 seats in the National Grand Assembly, the only chamber in the Turkish Parliament (15 less than in the last general election on 22nd July 2007). The AKP came out ahead of the People's Republican Party (CHP), the main opposition party, led by Kemal Kilicdaroglu, which won 25.91% of the vote and 112 seats (+23) – it also beat the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), an ultra-nationalist movement led by Devlet Bahceli, which won 12.99% and 53 seats (-18). The AKP increased its number of votes but won fewer seats than in the previous election because of the proportional voting system. Those who stood mainly as independents (mostly Kurds) in order to get around the national 10% threshold, which is obligatory to be able to enter parliament, made a breakthrough winning 6.65% of the vote and clinching 36 seats (+10). "These Kurdish MPs will be able to play an active role in terms of minority issues. This is vital because if we do not negotiate with the Kurds in Parliament they might be tempted to take up arms," declared Ahmet Insel, a political scientist at the University of Galatasaray in Istanbul.

For the first time in fifty years a Christian member of the Syriac Church, Erol Dora, who was standing as an independent, was elected. Also 78 women were elected i.e. 28 more than in the previous term in office, but comprising 14% of all MPs only!

Turnout rose to 86.7% i.e. 2.3 points higher than in the previous general elections on 22nd July 2007.

Results

"Today, once more, democracy and national determination have won," declared Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan when the results were announced. "Gaza, Palestine and Jerusalem have also won," he added clearly showing his sympathy for the Muslim world and notably for the Palestinian cause. "There will be no surprises – it is not a question of who will win the elections but what the Justice and Development Party's majority will be and which steps will be taken to change the Constitution that dates back to the military putsch in 1980," stressed political scientist Soli Özel just before the election. "The point in these elections is not about who will win but whether the Justice and Development Party will have an adequate majority to re-write the Constitution," added Sinan Ulgen, a researcher at the Centre for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies in Istanbul. The Prime Minister's party almost won the absolute majority but failed to take two-thirds of the seats in parliament (367 seats) which are vital if it wants to change the Constitution without having to have the approval of the opposition forces and public opinion. Recep Tayyip Ergogan's party also failed to win the 330 necessary seats to be able to submit any change to the Constitution to referendum purely on its own decision.

"The people have given us a message to draw up a new Constitution using consensus and negotiation," he declared promising that he would seek "the widest consensus possible" with the opposition and Turkish civil society to "write a new, liberal Constitution that is worthy of Turkey," and that the new Constitution would be based on democratic, pluralist principles. He also promised to find a solution to the Kurdish question. "We are going to take democracy to a new, advanced stage extending rights and freedom. Our responsibility has now increased, our humility also," stressed Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The latter wants to transform the Turkish political system into a (American or French style) presidential regime. He wants the President of the Republic to be elected by direct universal suffrage (at present he is appointed by MPs) and for him to have extended powers. The head of government will however have to convince both public opinion and also of some members of his party, who do not

agree with the need to reform.

To a large extent the results of the AKP in office explain its 3rd consecutive victory in the general elections : GDP growth of 8.9% in 2010, public debt of 40% of the GDP, growing foreign investments, a 20% rise in trade, an unemployment rate of 10.6% after rising to 15% in the spring of 2009, inflation at 4.3% and GDP per capita tripled since 2001.

Since 2002 a new middle class has emerged and the AKP, the party of the "classless" has become the establishment party. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan who campaigned under the banner of "Let stability continue and Turkey grow", has set the goal of taking his country into the top 10 economies in the world by 2023, the year that Ankara will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the Turkish Republic by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Turkey is however experiencing some problems: according to the central bank its public deficit has more than doubled over one year to reach a record level of 9.8 billion € (8% of the GDP), the economy is highly dependent on imports and imbalances are growing to the point that economists are now advising to reduce growth to 5%.

Finally Turkey, which occupies a key position in the Middle East, which is now changing radically, has also asserted itself in the international arena, notably across the Mediterranean.

Ahmet Insel, (University of Galatasaray, Istanbul) believes that Prime Minister Erdogan has succeeded in creating "a solid base of popular middle class sympathisers". "For the popular middle classes, Recep Tayyip Erdogan represents economic and also political stability, which the opposition does not seem able to create" he declared adding, "the opposition is not credible in the eyes of most Turks because it cannot position itself as an alternative that might be able to govern without having to form coalition governments as in the 1990's." Although for the last ten years Recep Tayyip Erdogan has never had to face a credible political alternative things have been changing, especially since the appointment of Kemal Kilicdaroglu as head of the People's Republican Party (CHP) on 22nd May 2010.

The Prime Minister's authoritarian management, infringements of freedom (increasing intolerance

of criticism and threats and also attacks made against the media and journalists) are also being denounced by an increasing number of Turks. For example the Prime Minister demanded a two year prison sentence against Ahmet Altan, the manager of the newspaper Taraf, who qualified him as an "autocrat". More than 60 journalists are in prison at present in Turkey. "It is a reality and not a fantasy. Turkish society is one in which authoritarian reactions are prevalent; hence a movement as powerful as the Justice and Development Party experiences a natural trend towards authoritarianism," analyses political scientist Ahmet Insel. Finally secular Turks fear that another term in office for Mr Erdogan will help to strengthen the role of religion in Turkey. After two mandates under the AKP the country's main problem is undeniably the weakness of the opposition.

The European Union was almost absent from the electoral campaign and negotiations between Ankara and Brussels are now at a standstill. To date only 13 of the 35 chapters which comprise the accession process have been opened and only one has been finalised. Discussions are stalling because of Ankara's refusal to open its ports and airports to the island of Cyprus and to acknowledge the Republic of Cyprus in line with its commitments. For the first time since the launch of negotiations no new chapter was opened during the Belgian Presidency of the European Union which ended on 31st December 2010. According to a poll by TESEV 69% of Turks support their country's entry into the EU and 26% are against it. 36% of those interviewed believe that this will take place within the next ten years, 13% think this will occur over a longer term, 30% think that Turkey will never join the 27 and finally 21% of Turks say they have no opinion.

"I expect Turkey to be rather inward looking over the next few years and that it will take care of its own political, economic, and social problems. The Turkish political corps will be taken up by the debate over the new Constitution which the Justice and Development Party wants in order to rid the country of an authoritarian Fundamental Law that is the legacy of the military putsch in 1980," indicated Cengiz Aktar, a specialist of European issues at

the University of Bahcesehir in Istanbul.

57 year-old Recep Tayyip Erdogan who comes from the popular part of Kasimpasa (Istanbul) started his political career in the National Vision movement that was led by Necmettin Erbakan, before following the latter into the Islamic National Salvation Party (MSP) then the Prosperity Party (Refah). Elected Mayor of Istanbul in 1994 he became extremely popular by significantly improving the living conditions of the city's inhabitants and by waging a determined battle against corruption. On 6th December 1997 he was banned from political activity for 5 years by the Constitutional Court of Turkey and sentenced to prison for "encouraging religious hatred" after having quoted several verses of the nationalist poet Ziya Gökalp in public ("The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers....»[). He then drew away from Necmettin Erbakan whose movement was dissolved in the same year by the Court and he founded in 2001 the Justice and Development Party which won the general elections on 3rd November 2002. However Recep Tayyip Erdogan could not become Prime Minister because he was unable to take part in the election due to the five year ban on political activities (Turkish electoral law demands that the Prime Minister should also be an elected MP). He finally took over government after winning a seat as MP in Siirt, the town from which his wife comes in a by-election on 11th March 2003.

During his first term in office as head of government he achieved the launch of the accession associations to the EU in 2005. Re-elected to his position on 22nd July 2007 he developed the Turkish economy. The victory of the AKP on 12th June is therefore a hat trick for Mr Erdogan, the first Islamist democratically elected leader to have stayed in power for so long.

He announced that his mandate as head of government would be his last, according to the rule he established himself within his party, i.e. limiting the MPs to 3 consecutive mandates. However the leader of the AKP does not hide his desire to become the first President of the Republic of Turkey elected by universal suffrage.

General Elections Results on 12th June 2011 in Turkey

Turnout: 86.70% (it is obligatory to vote in the country)

Political Party	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats won
Justice and Development Party (AKP)	21 442 528	49.90	326
People's Republican Party (CHP)	11 131 371	25.91	135
National Action Party (MHP)	5 580 415	12.99	53
Independents	2 859 170	6.30	36
Others	1 949 664	4.89	0

Source : Internet site of the elections in Turkey <http://www.secimanketi2011.com> and <http://en.nkfu.com/2011-turkey-general-election-results/>

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