



Turkey: AKP bombs its way to a majority

Svenja Spunck Thu, 12/11/2015 - 04:12

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On November 1, the Justice and Development Party, AKP, led by Ahmet Davuto?lu, but in reality dominated by the authoritarian Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an, swept back to power with an absolute majority, gaining 317 seats in the country?s 550-member parliament. There can be little doubt that the AKP will use that power to increase the suffering of the country?s large Kurdish minority, 15-20 million out of a population of 78 million, to repress the radical youth and the Turkish left, and entrench itself in power by working towards a draconian presidential regime.

For five months, the country has been convulsed by a renewed war between the Turkish armed forces and guerilla forces of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) both in south eastern Turkey and across its borders in northern Iraq. These months were also marked by a wave of violence against Kurdish political parties, including the torching of their offices and beating of their militants by gangs clearly linked to the AKP as well as far right groups. Attacks took place against Turkish leftists who support Kurdish rights. Opposition journalists have been arrested and sentenced to jail terms for insulting the president and the opposition press and media have increasingly been silenced.

The greatest outrages were the murderous terrorist attacks, in Suru? on July 20 and in Ankara on October 10, carried out by a Turkish cell of Islamic State, ISIS, but which the Turkish state, having done nothing to protect the peaceful demonstrators, then used as a pretext to increase repression against the victims; the Kurdish and Turkish leftists.

So, this was no normal democratic election. Erdo?an, thanks to his heavy-handed control of the media, blamed the violence on its principal victims and hammered home the argument that voting for the AKP was the only way to restore peace and order.

Erdo?an?s bid to reclaim power

The AKP, which had ruled Turkey since 2002, lost its absolute majority in the Turkish parliamentary elections held on June 7. This was due, in the main, to the left, pro-Kurdish, HDP breaking through the exceptionally high 10 per cent hurdle for winning parliamentary seats. The HDP won 13.12 per cent, over 6 million votes and 80 seats. This nullified Erdo?an?s plans to amend the constitution and give himself full executive powers.

Immediately after the June setback, Erdo?an avoided the constraints that forming a coalition would have imposed on him and set November 1 for a new election. The AKP then set out to use the intervening period to terrify the voters and reduce the opposition to impotence. According to the Human Rights Association, ?HD, in the month following the Suru? massacre, 2,544 people were arrested; of these, only 136 were associated with ISIS, and many of those were released. After a PKK attack on September 8, fascist mobs, the Ottoman Hearths (Osmania Ocaklar?) close to the AKP, were unleashed and hundreds of HDP buildings all over Turkey were attacked, in some cases set ablaze.

Across the Kurdish regions, reports of gross electoral malpractices abounded: the army intimidating voters at voting stations and actively blocking people from voting; ballot boxes removed whilst voting was still in progress; electricity cuts in critical voting areas; election monitors expelled from polling stations and some arrested.

?This campaign was unfair and characterised by too much violence and fear,? said Andreas Gross, the Swiss head of the mission representing the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

The observer mission's preliminary report said that violence against opposition party premises, especially the HDP, seriously hindered their ability to campaign freely, citing the arrest of activists in the run-up to the vote. It also said press freedom was an area of serious concern, because "Criminal investigations of journalists and media outlets for support of terrorism and defamation of the president, the blocking of websites" and the effective seizure of some prominent media outlets reduced voters' access to a plurality of views and information.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/29/turkish-media-denounce-biggg...> [1]

Erdogan has rendered himself more or less immune from serious criticism from the "democratic" governments of North America and Western Europe by allowing the US to use the huge Nato air base at Incirlik to bomb Syria and by striking an agreement with the EU to stem the tide of refugees crossing the Aegean. Both cases, the rise of ISIS and the flood of refugees, are, to an important degree, the results of Turkey's policy of fomenting the Syrian catastrophe and, at the very least, turning a blind eye to the rise of ISIS, which it saw as an aid in crushing the Kurds on both sides of Turkey's south eastern borders.

The election and its consequences

The night of November 1 was a shock to all those who believed the opinion polls that the result would not differ greatly from June: the ACP had won back its absolute parliamentary majority, increasing its total by 8.5 per cent to win 49 percent of the popular vote. The HDP on the other hand lost 2.4 per cent compared to June. Nevertheless, by just exceeding the 10 per cent barrier they managed to get into parliament. The vote of the Kemalist CHP remained almost unchanged at 25.4 per cent.

The only consolation to be drawn from November 1 is that the far right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) lost nearly two million votes (or 4.4 per cent) falling to 11.9 per cent. With 40 seats, it is now only the fourth-strongest party in the Parliament, with less than the HDP's 59 members

(<http://secim.ntv.com.tr/#City=&County=&Party=&Tab=&TabGroup> [2]).

Many of the Kurdish people and HDP supporters accuse the government and the state institutions of electoral fraud. Whilst the Turkish state could certainly be capable of this, the fact is that the votes for the HDP were not "stolen" on the day of the election, but by the atmosphere of tension the government had built up in the run up to the vote.

The HDP has not increased its percentage in any district of the country, it has consistently lost. It seems like the strategy of the AKP has succeeded: to so intimidate the population through war, terrorism and the massacres in recent weeks that the desire for stability, led to a majority AKP government being returned to power.

At the beginning of the election campaign, Erdogan often stressed that he would go for an amendment to the constitution to create a presidential system, giving himself greater room for manoeuvre and freedom from control. This desire for dictatorial powers, however, did not go down well even amongst his own voters, which is why, at least in his speeches, he withdrew this proposal into the background. The AKP's goal was to win more than 330 seats, which would give it the right to put constitutional changes to a referendum or, even better, with 367 seats, to bypass a referendum altogether and change the constitution directly within parliament. The present results will make this difficult, if not impossible.

What next for the HDP?

The hopes raised by the defeat of the AKP on June 7 now seem to have been dashed. While Prime Minister Davutolu confidently continued arguing for amendment of the Constitution in his first speech after the November 1 victory, the joint chairpersons of the HDP, Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş, seemed completely dejected in their media interviews.

They criticised the AKP's election campaign for its goal of driving the HDP's score below the 10 percent hurdle once again. They thanked the voters for their support and apologised for the lack of dynamism in the Party's election campaign, giving as the reason the desire to protect its supporters, especially the youth, from further attacks.

More significantly, the HDP's official statement said; "We will be a constructive opposition with policies appropriate to this - including civil libertarian, democratic reforms to a new constitution, and we will continue our principled stance for a peaceful solution (in the present conflict). One million votes were lost, but we have managed to stand tall against fascism as a party, the third strongest in parliament."

<http://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/hdp-secim-sonuclarini-degerlendiriyor> [3]

Demirtaş predicted that the HDP would recover the ground lost in the next election, in 2019, and dedicated the struggle for this to all those who had to die in recent months for the successes of November 1. He gave no clear condemnation of the dirty campaign of the AKP, the state terrorism, which cost his own party up to one million votes, put thousands in the prison, killed around 1,000 people since June and further criminalised the PKK.

In the "Kurdish capital", Diyarbakir, where the HDP lost 8 per cent, votes were transferred directly to the AKP. The PKK, whose views are understandably somewhat more militant, now threatens launching guerrilla actions in the cities. Only the future will show whether this is merely sabre-rattling.

But, justified as armed self-defence by PKK is against the repeated attacks on it, in spite of its repeated ceasefires and offers to negotiate, guerrilla tactics are not what is needed. We should not forget that the peace initiative by the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, and the emergence of the HDP, were precisely a result of the failure of the guerrilla strategy. Nor guerrillaism the basis for building solidarity between and Kurdish and Turkish workers and breaking the AKP's hold on the latter.

The wave of arrests of HDP militants, and attacks on its meetings and offices, have shown that it still represents a serious threat to the AKP government. Erdoğan is unwilling to tolerate the emergence of a legal left mass party which, politically, is located somewhere between the European Left party and the Greens. The HDP's goal, to unite in one party all the oppressed and exploited sections of Turkish society, is a correct one. But the merger of left groups under the undemocratic control of a petty-bourgeois leadership cannot create a revolutionary party based on a programme that can shake the foundations of capitalist society and its highly repressive political representatives, whether Islamist or Kemalist.

After the election victory in June, the arrogant behaviour of the Kurdish parties in the HDP, as compared to the more heterogeneous leftist groups, was strongly felt. The Kurdish movement's victory suddenly seemed within reach and any further discussion on how to develop the party's programme was blocked. Things could have been different. In any case, now things must change if an organisation is going to be built that can draw in the majority of the oppressed, namely the working class all over Turkey, and be linked to similar parties throughout the Middle East.

The demand for the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people and support of their liberation struggle should be non-negotiable for any sincere democrat, let alone socialist. For the latter, equally obligatory is the slogan of a united struggle by both the Turkish and Kurdish parts of the working class. Left parties, those inside and outside of the HDP, must now, more than ever, fight for a revolutionary and internationalist programme, which represents a clear break from seeking agreements with the Turkish State ("responsible opposition").

Here and now, this means demanding investigation of the massacres of recent months and the grossly undemocratic conditions under which the November election took place. Mounting a "strong opposition" in parliament or expressing beautiful ideas about the need for humanity and legality is not enough when these are under constant attack by barbarous forces that buy their "victories" at the cost of so many human lives.

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