



Turkey: Erdogan declares himself victor

Svenja Spunck, GAM Infomail 939, Berlin Sat, 22/04/2017 - 16:38

Svenja Spunck, GAM Infomail 939, Berlin

It was a tight race between the Evet (Yes) and the Hayir (No) camp in Turkey on the evening of 16 April. The first results, published shortly after 8 pm, put the AKP and Erdogan ahead with 63 percent of the vote. As if in a fight to the death, they lost one percent after another in the course of the evening but, unfortunately, the Evet camp hung on and shortly before one o'clock Erdogan stepped in front of the cameras to proclaim a 'historic victory' with just 51.3 percent.

This victory is indeed historic, it is historically bad for the AKP. The three largest cities of Turkey, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir all voted against the constitutional change, although the AKP has had control of Istanbul and Ankara for more than ten years. Other major defeats were in the Kurdish regions and in the south-west of Turkey, where more than 70 percent voted against them. Officially, the AKP, MHP and smaller right-wing parties all campaigned for the Yes vote, but its share of the vote was less than they won in the last elections, in November 2015. Although this does not mean, of course, that these voters have now turned entirely against the AKP or MHP, it at least expresses a weakening of support for Erdogan's programme. However, he still has the most support in the centre of Turkey and the region bordering the Black Sea.

It was clear from the outset that this referendum would not be properly conducted. International electoral observers were denied access to the electoral districts, mayors stood alongside the polling booths forcing voters to reveal their ballot papers and threatening dismissal, men cast their wives' votes as well as their own, some men voted as many as five times and two No voters were shot by political opponents when an argument broke out in front of a polling station.

Many of the Evet voters photographed their ballot papers next to guns and flick knives to reinforce what high-ranking AKP politicians had already made clear in recent weeks: if Evet won, the opposition will be left for dead. One particularly large scandal would seem to be the fact that several tens of thousands of ballot papers, which were not stamped by the High Electoral Commission, were quickly declared admissible after the opening of the ballot boxes. This, and the persistently contradictory statements about how many votes had already been counted, led the opposition parties CHP and HDP to request a recount. The same thing happened, however, during the last elections, when it was found that some stamps were missing, but the votes were still accepted.

Reaction

Of course, it is legitimate to demand a recount, and it is important that all electoral fraud should be exposed, but the real fraud lies not in unstamped papers, but in the policies of the AKP. Many votes that would have gone to the Hayir camp died with the people who were murdered in the bloody Civil War in recent years. Others did not even go to vote, for fear of either having their passports seized or being arrested. The HDP was not given a minute on television to advertise its campaign, but Erdogan was on all channels around the clock every day of the week. Journalists have been arrested or driven out of the country and feared for their lives even abroad. More than ten thousand academics and teachers have lost their jobs, suppressing an important part of the political discussion from the public. All these people would surely have achieved a different result under other conditions, but fear is an effective tool in every political struggle.

The No-campaign of the Kemalist CHP was half-hearted, although it is the largest opposition party. The reason for this is surely the fear that if they spoke out more strongly they would find themselves behind bars, just like the HDP deputies. In fact, this timidity has played into the hands of the AKP because, as the CHP knows from its own history, a

controllable opposition is always useful for silencing critics who call one a dictator and an enemy of democracy. That is why the work of distributing daily leaflets for the No campaign fell to the already weakened, but still courageous, rank and file, mainly young, members of the HDP, who were then arrested in droves.

If you were to believe the government's hate campaign, you would think half of the Turkish population are terrorists. That, of course, also has a high potential.

Although the right-wing camp is weakened overall, the referendum has nevertheless been won and it is very unlikely that this will change through recounts. The very next day, the state of emergency was extended until July, when it will celebrate its first birthday. Erdogan will not lose any time in changing the Constitution to secure for himself absolute power.

Bureaucratic formalism will not stop him. Instead, what is necessary is the consolidation of the grassroots movement created by the No campaign. In many neighbourhoods, there were weekly discussions and education campaigns, which must be continued. There, political perspectives must be discussed, and all left parties, organisations, trade unions, or even individuals affected by state repression should participate.

In particular, the opposition must not underestimate the paramilitary AKP units, which have formed during the last few months. Self-defence structures must be organised before the first serious attacks occur. These must go alongside the struggle for the recovery of political rights. This means demanding the annulment of the referendum, the immediate release of all imprisoned HDP politicians and leftist activists, lawyers, the repeal of the state of emergency, the abolition of the PKK prohibition and the reinstatement of tens of thousands of arbitrarily sacked people, as well as the ending of the war against the Kurdish population and the withdrawal of the army and the police from the Kurdish regions. All people who have been deprived of their right to leave the country must be allowed to travel again, just as in Europe we must continue to demand a visa - free regime for Turkish citizens and open borders for all those fleeing from the regime, as well as the removal of the PKK and its organizations from the 'terrorist lists' of EU countries.

First international reactions

The victory of Erdogan, as the extension of the state of emergency and threats against protest demonstrations in many parts of the country have already shown, means further, and even harsher, repression. A referendum on the death penalty has already been announced.

That, however, will certainly not bring 'stability' to the country. It is not only that the economic situation is uncertain, there is also the threat of disputes with the EU. There, the extreme right disguises its racist agitation against migrants and Muslims as 'criticism of Erdogan' and presents itself as a defender of democratic rights in Turkey, which they would like to remove at home, and the sooner the better. Meanwhile, the 'democratic' politicians from the conservative, green, social-democratic or 'left' camps threaten to end, or at least 'freeze', the accession negotiations with the EU while, on the other hand they 'naturally' want to maintain 'economic relations' and cooperation in the racist border controls of the Union.

In view of this hypocrisy, Putin hopes to deepen his cooperation with Ankara. Moreover, Trump is at least verbally engaged with Erdogan's party. 'Democratic' procedures are alien to a president who is striving for complete personal power and the elimination of troublesome obstacles. He simply congratulates, and explores whether and how Turkey will once again become a reliable US ally.

The situation in Turkey will therefore sharpen not only for internal political and economic reasons, but also because of the increasing global competition.

Resistance

It is very clear that the Turkish left needs solidarity in its struggle against the dictatorship. Against this victory of Erdogan, which is a further expression of the international advance of reactionary forces, an international movement is

necessary. In Turkey, Europe and the rest of the world, we need a movement, rooted in the oppressed parts of the population, which is not based on illusionary hopes in the EU or the CHP-led part of the Turkish bourgeoisie. Such a movement must raise democratic demands, fight any imperialist support for Erdogan, and combine this struggle with the struggle against the social attacks of the AKP government. Linked to this is the struggle for the construction of a revolutionary workers' party in Turkey, a party that not only fights the growing dictatorship of Erdogan, but also against the capitalist system that created it. The question that is being raised in Turkey, like many other places in the world, is still ?socialism or barbarism??

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/turkey-erdogan-declares-himself-victor>