



Turkey: No to constitutional change!

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In his struggle for absolute power, Recep Tayyip Erdogan is pushing forward his attacks on the opposition. The referendum, expected in early April, will decide whether 18 articles of the Turkish constitution should be amended. This would retrospectively legalise the existing abuse of power, while a majority of No-votes would bring the danger that Erdogan and the ACP government could be prosecuted for precisely that. That, at least, seems to be the hope of many opposition leaders who have launched a Hayir (No) campaign. So, what are the articles of the Constitution and what would be the consequences?

New constitution

The fundamental point of the new constitution would be to give the President complete power. Subsequently, a presidential election would be held every five years at the same time as the parliamentary elections. The next election would be scheduled for 2019. The President could then enact decrees with statutory force, which would represent an extension of even his current powers under the State of Emergency. At the moment, such decrees must at least be formally confirmed by the Parliament, but that will not be required in future. which in the future will be easier. If need be, he can even dissolve the parliament at any time should being the leader of the governing party not be sufficient to guarantee him a majority.

In addition there would no longer any right to move a vote of no confidence in cabinet ministers, or even to ask parliamentary questions. If someone is brought before the Constitutional Court, they will confront judges personally selected by Erdogan; the members of the High Council of Judges, who appoint all other judges in the country, are appointed by him. In addition, there would be some minor reforms such as the reduction of the age at which people can stand for election from 25 to 18 years and an increase in the number of deputies from 550 to 600.

The aim of this constitutional reform is de facto the abolition of the separation of powers and the concentration of power in the hands of the president. The position of the Prime Minister would be abolished and the Cabinet would be appointed by the President. In his role as alpha-lemming, the current Prime Minister, Yildirim, is prudently supporting this measure, ?because a single man at the top would be a better leader.?

Why a referendum?

Although, according to surveys, over 70 per cent of the population does not know what the purpose of the constitutional change is, the propaganda machinery has already been set in motion. The ACP is relying on its successful strategy for the last elections: fear and blackmail. Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus clearly expressed the threat: "If the outcome of the referendum, God willing, is a clear yes, then these terrorist organisations will reach a point where nothing can be heard from them." Those winged words, "terror organisations" led in the last few days to arrests of opposition parties who participated in a ?No? campaign. If the constitution actually changes, a further intensification of repression is to be expected, and even a dictatorship is possible.

Why is a referendum taking place, anyway? For Erdogan to achieve his goal without a referendum, it would have been necessary for him to win a two-thirds majority in Parliament. Although the AKP has already largely brought the majority of its main adversary, the HDP, into line, the Kemalist CHP joined the No! campaign and thus prevented such a majority. The AKP is dependent on the support of the fascist MHP, but this is internally divided; although party

leader Bahçeli is behind Erdogan, part of the membership is afraid that, after the referendum, Erdogan could again enter into a "peace process" with the Kurdish movement, even if that is very unlikely. In order to pressurise their own MPs, but also the MHP, some ACP deputies abruptly abrogated the mandate of the secret ballot and threatened new elections, the implication being that Erdogan's opponents would lose their well-paid positions in Parliament. However, when the vote came in Parliament, there was only a three-fifths majority, which only allowed for a referendum.

It seems as if, for many, the only hope is that AKP and even MHP members might still change their position. This is a clear expression of the weakness of the opposition. The political orientation of the No! campaign unfortunately confirms this. Instead of combining opposition to constitutional change with a social programme and progressive, concrete demands, the focus is on moral superiority and an abstract concept of freedom. The current war against the Kurdish population and the detention of thousands, the dismissal of tens of thousands of workers and numerous other measures to eliminate "democracy" are not discussed. The self-declared aim of this imprecision is to win all possible people from the population for a No! vote, including MHP supporters. The trade unions TMMOB, DISK and KESK support the campaign, but now play a marginalised role in the largely ACP affiliated trade union movement. The HDP and the majority of the left openly call for a No! vote. So far, only Halk Cephesi (People's Front, a front organisation of the Maoist DHKP-C has called for a boycott.

Given the existing balance of forces, it would seem that the risk of Erdogan and the AKP not gaining a majority in the referendum is small, even negligible. They have virtually all the media in their hands and the democratic forces are massively suppressed. The regime controls not only the election campaign, but also the polling stations. Erdogan's goal is clear: a Yes! vote would further strengthen his presidential power by giving it plebiscitary legitimacy. At the same time, however, surveys show that a majority is by no means certain.

Perspective

The question of the struggle against constitutional change and the ever more open establishment of a presidential dictatorship, however, should not be limited to the referendum, especially since Erdogan would not change his goal, even if the result went against him. The question is rather how to build a strong movement against ACP rule itself.

Since the protests in Gezi Park in 2013, Turkish politics has been marked by strong youth movements as well as feminist, secular and Kurdish protests. What did not happen was, for example, solidarity with the democratic uprisings in the neighbouring country of Syria, or a progressive refugee policy on the part of left parties like the HDP. The actions of the reactionary dictatorship of Assad, or of the Islamic State, do not stop at the Turkish border. Above all, the security situation has become so unstable that Islamist-motivated attacks represent a real danger to leftist activists, although the extent of state participation is unclear and is never investigated.

The long arm of the Turkish state reaches as far as Europe, where mainly Kurds are accused of membership of alleged terrorist organisations in German courts. Since the failed coup attempt in July 2016, Erdogan has been using the State of Emergency to eliminate his political enemies. The leadership of the HDP has been silenced, and the threatening atmosphere has paralysed large parts of the previously active opposition. Attempts at united front projects failed because of internal political conflicts or because accusations of raising "too hard demands" led to the exit of different groups, most recently the TMMOB trade union from Demokrasi Cephesi (Democracy Front). The sectarian behaviour of the left-wing Party of Freedom and Solidarity, ÖDP, which rejects joint work with the Kurdish movement, is also problematic. They justify it by arguing that such work would cut them off from the Muslim population and people from the Black Sea region where Turkish nationalism is dominant.

Overcoming ethnic and religious conflicts is still a seemingly insoluble problem for the Turkish left. Anyone who fights with the Kurdish people loses Turkish support, and whoever defends Allouites is vulnerable to Muslims. However, as already described in our previous articles, the oppressive rule of the ACP is a repression by a particular section of the capitalist class against the entire population, and thus the working class, the peasants, the atheists, and the religious and ethnic minorities. A programme which addresses the economic worries of the people and connects that

with opposition to terror and oppression, instead of counterposing these two sides of the struggle against the regime, would be a first step towards a union of the oppressed against the reactionary Islamist, exploitative policy of the ACP.

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