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**European Parties Elections
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ELECTION BRIEFING No.36 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN TURKEY 22 JULY 2007

Zerrin Torun
Sussex European Institute
University of Sussex
Email: z.torun@sussex.ac.uk

KEY POINTS

- The ruling conservative Justice and Development Party won a landslide election victory extending its share of vote to 46.58%.
- The main opposition, centre-left, fiercely secularist Republican People's Party suffered a major defeat, as its share of votes increased just by 0.49%, despite the electoral coalition with a smaller party.
- The right wing, extreme nationalist, Nationalist Action Party achieved a revival of support and became the third largest Party in the Parliament.
- 26 independent candidates, most of which were supported informally by the Democratic Society Party made it to the parliament.
- Both the ruling Justice and Development Party and opposition parties framed the elections as a decision on the characteristics of the state, such as democracy or authoritarianism, secularism or Islamism, nationalism or dependency.
- EU questions were not as salient as one would have expected which may be due to the perceived tardiness of the EU on Turkish accession.

BACKGROUND

Political Islam has always caused controversy in Turkey, a country where secularism is enshrined in the Constitution and strictly enforced in public institutions. The rise of the Justice and Development Party, which has its roots in Islamic movements, to power in 2002 with a majority to form a single-party government demonstrated that both the country and political Islam were going through major changes. Justice and Development Party at the time

was a new party, established by the moderate and reformist wing of the Virtue Party.¹ The success of the Justice and Development Party owed a lot to the exhaustion of the electorate with all centre, and/or centre-right political parties, the likely candidates for government, all tested before. These were left out of the Parliament in 2002, showing the magnitude of credibility loss they suffered after a period of corruption, political instability and economic crisis in the 1990s. On the other hand, the extent of support for the Justice and Development Party pointed to an increasing conservatism in the society and the success of a burgeoning religious middle class in Anatolia, which caused concerns among the secularist political establishment and some segments of the society.

General (parliamentary) elections, which were to be held in November 2007, were brought forward following the stalemate over the election of the new President by the incumbent Parliament. The ruling Justice and Development Party numerically had the capacity to elect their preferred candidate as the new President in the third round of the elections in the Parliament. Their candidate was the then foreign minister, Abdullah Gul, who has been seen as the conciliatory, mild face of the party as opposed to the blunt, uncompromising image of the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose potential candidacy could have caused more controversy. However, what could have been a smooth procedure, as it mostly has been in the past, has turned into a matter of the regime type preferences for many.

The fact that Abdullah Gul's wife wears a headscarf ignited the controversy surrounding the elections and led to concerns that the country will end up being more conservative, putting the life styles of the secular social segments under pressure. The main argument against the Presidency of Abdullah Gul was that the Presidency was the place where Turkey's basic values namely, secularism ought to be enshrined. Abdullah Gul's past declarations and the fact that his wife appealed to the European Court of Human Rights over the ban on using headscarves in public places increased the scepticism that secularism will be undermined. Furthermore according to those against Gul's presidency, although the Justice and Development Party had the majority of the seats in the Parliament, this was based on just above 30% of the voters' support. Therefore, had Abdullah Gul been elected, this would not have been truly representative of the majority's preferences. The fact that the Prime Minister did not seek the consent of the opposition parties for Gul's Presidency reinforced the criticisms and led to arguments that a process leading to a regime change in the country could be under way. Fierce criticisms against, as well as the boycotting of the elections by the opposition, in addition to rallies on the streets in major cities, (which were among the biggest in the history of the country), have put the legitimacy of the Presidential elections into doubt.

The army also got involved in the process. First, at a time when Recep Tayyip Erdogan's candidacy was being discussed, the Commander of Turkish Armed Forces, Yasar Buyukanit said that it was not enough to pay lip service to the principles of the Republic, reminding of the constant allegations by some in the country that the ruling party members never actually distanced themselves from their Islamic roots and/or that they have a hidden agenda to change the regime. Second, a statement was issued on the webpage of the Turkish General Staff about the concerns of the armed forces that the principles of the Republic were not acted on, pointing out the events that compromised secularism. This was called an 'e-coup', as the armed forces declared that, if necessary, it would take action to uphold the Republican principles, while warning about the danger of the election process turning into a debate on secularism. The response of the Prime Minister to the statement was seen and praised by

¹Virtue Party was dissolved by the Constitutional Court in 2001 because of its activities against the principle of secularism. Some other members of the Virtue Party established Felicity Party.

many as a sign of a healthy democracy, as he said that the military cannot challenge an elected government.

The opposition boycotted the elections. The Republican People's Party, the main opposition in the Parliament, appealed to the Constitutional Court, arguing that the requirement for the quorum of 367 was not met. The Court decided that the process lacked 'reconciliation' in the Parliament and considered the first round of vote invalid. When it was repeated, the opposition did not change its stance and boycotted the vote once more, which forced Abdullah Gul to withdraw from his candidacy. In an attempt to resolve the debacle, the government called for early general elections on 2 May and proposed changes to the constitution regarding the duration of the President's and the MP's tenures and the procedures for directly electing the President. The Republican People's Party went to the Constitutional Court to annul the voting once more, but this time the Court rejected the appeal as the timing of the application was not right according to the law. In the end, above-mentioned changes in the Constitution were left to be decided by a referendum after the general elections.

It is clear that, even before the campaign for the general elections started, a process which pit "Islamism against secularism, reformers against conservatives, one rising middle class against another, religiously observant Anatolia against sophisticated urban elites, politicians against generals"², was playing out, reflecting the competing visions of the country's identity by different social segments.

THE CAMPAIGN

14 political parties and independents competed for election to the unicameral Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA- the Parliament). Apart from the tension the discussion on competing visions of Turkey's identity produced, the campaign was smooth and mostly about all opposition parties criticizing the government. Hence, the landslide victory of Justice and Development Party in this election was made possible by the lack of any substantial or convincing alternative to what it has done in the past four and a half years. While the opposition parties claimed to have been running for being a single-party government, it was clear from the beginning that the ruling Justice and Development Party will have the majority in the Parliament again. After all, the period during their tenure was marked by political and economic stability, in contrast to the preceding coalitions' era.

There have been a number of tactical moves by most of the actors either to broaden their electoral support or to overcome the disadvantages of the 10% electoral threshold. For instance, centre-right and centre-left chose to make election coalitions. Republican People's Party united with the smaller Democratic Left Party. However, the parties on the centre-right, Motherland Party and the True Path Party, both formerly successful at different times, failed to unite under the umbrella of the defunct Democrat Party³, allegedly because they could not agree on the procedures.

The Democratic People's Party, which is the latest in a number of attempts to particularly represent Kurds in the Parliament, decided not to enter the election as a party because of the

² Leader, The Guardian, Thursday May 3, 2007.

³ A political party that was once quite popular in the 1950s, banned after the military coup in 1960. The Prime Minister and two of the former ministers were executed, which has left a scar in the country's psyche. Commentators agree that had the merger not failed, the two centre-right parties could have been successful.

electoral threshold. Instead it chose to informally support its candidates who stood as 'independents'. The same tactic used by other smaller parties and a number of other candidates was the novelty in this election, as this was not mainly about the lack of party allegiances or a personal preference resulting from dealignment from political parties. Finally, the ruling Justice and Development Party and the main opposition, centre-left Republican People's Party nominated candidates from opposing ideological backgrounds to steal votes from different segments of the electorate, which has been received negatively by the constituency of the Republican People's Party .

The Republican People's Party based its campaign on warnings of a joint threat to the regime, namely secularism, by the Justice and Development Party, as well as the one to the country's survival or integrity by the separatist/terrorist activities. The fact that the leader of Nationalist Action Party, Devlet Bahçeli has distanced the Party from its conservative basis, while like Baykal emphasising the problem of security posed by terrorism was seen as a preparation by these parties for a coalition government, which some in the country considered to be better than a Justice and Development government. However, both parties were criticized for basing their election strategy on threat perceptions and defence of Republican values, rather than offering fresh policies or a significant alternative to those of the Justice and Development Party.

With hindsight, this election strategy paid off more in case of the Nationalist Action Party compared to the Republican People's Party. Terror and the Kurdish problem, depending on the preferences of the actors to name it, were on the top of the election agenda, especially after a bomb explosion on one of the busy streets of Ankara on 23 May. The Republican People's Party and the Nationalist Action Party picked on the unwillingness of the government to conduct a military operation in northern Iraq, which was recommended by the army in order to put an end to the recently increased terrorist activities in the country. It was argued that the operation is the best way to quell the activities of PKK terrorist organisation in the country, which is based and/or supported in Northern Iraq. The leader of the Nationalist Action Party, Devlet Bahçeli went so far as blaming the government for not executing the previous leader of PKK, Abdullah Öcalan and waved a greased rope at the crowds in Erzurum, in the eastern part of Turkey. Bahçeli told that the government can use this to execute him, if they can't find any other. Although execution was banned in Turkey during a coalition government the Nationalist Action Party was part of, commentators agreed that this symbolic gesture has been effective in increasing the support for the party.

On the other hand, the independents, originally from the Democratic People's Party or from far-left of the spectrum argued that the policy of conducting cross-border military operations and as a matter of fact, military solutions of all types would not be a cure. Accordingly, the state had to accept the existence of different identities and embrace a democratic policy by acknowledging the rights of different ethnicities or minorities. Surprisingly, the leader of centre-right Democrat Party, Mehmet Ağar, who was formerly accused with establishing secret networks between the state security forces and the mafia to suppress terrorism and separatism, has called for 'those on the mountains' (i.e. terrorists) to come down to the 'plains' and engage in politics. The Justice and Development Party did not pay particular emphasis on outlining a policy specifically for this issue, although their manifesto reiterated their commitment to end both the terror and regional differences within Turkey. Their motto throughout the campaign has been 'one nation, one flag, one country, one state'. However, the fact that substantial constitutional and judicial reforms were made to meet the requirements of EU membership and the decision not to conduct a cross-border military

operation must have met the expectations of the electorate in the region and increased the party's support.

The state of the economy was another hot topic. Unemployment, a chronic problem of Turkish economy was picked on by almost actors, with no convincing alternative to the Justice and Development Party government policies, other than increasing the importance and the number of vocational schools, graduates of which already suffer from unemployment, like those of the universities. To highlight a few of the colourful/populist promises: The leader of populist Young Party, Cem Uzan, who is regarded as the Turkish version of Silvio Berlusconi because of the charges of corruption and the links with the media, claimed that he will end the problem of unemployment while giving a stipend to all the unemployed. How this would be done was not clear at all, as the party did not have an election manifesto and was content to reach the electorate through the media and internet, declaring just promises and principles. Another controversial and populist promise came from the Independent Turkey Party, which pledged to distribute a certain amount of salary to all housewives once they are in power.

Both the Republican People's Party and the Young Party promised to decrease the price of diesel oil to 1 new Turkish Lira to relieve the burden on the agricultural sector. The deteriorating condition of the agricultural sector was high on the agenda of the conservative Felicity Party as well. Like most of the political parties, they have criticised the government policy of keeping the price of the nuts produced in the northern part of Turkey at a lower level than it could have been. This policy was seen as an example of the many compromises given to the foreigners in the country. It was argued that the government could easily increase the purchasing threshold for nuts, as Turkey is the number one producer in the world. Similarly, the privatisation of certain major state companies was presented as another case of favouritism towards the foreigners at the cost of national interests. According to many in the opposition, although the government claimed the opposite, the state of the economy was actually getting worse due to the government's policies subservient to IMF and the EU. It is true that the decreasing inflation and growing economic development rates did not translate as improved purchasing power or a cheaper life for ordinary people. However, it was the smaller parties at the margins of the politics, like the Felicity Party and the small parties at the far-left which actually promised to end the agreement with the IMF. As for the bigger political parties, the promises regarding the improvement of economic conditions in the country did not seem to be convincing alternatives, given their performance when they were previously in power. The response of the Justice and Development Party was asking people if their living standards were worse than under the previous governments, pointing out its achievements and emphasising the importance of stability and continuity for the success of its economic policy. Their slogan during the campaign was 'no stopping, ahead on the road'.

The Republican People's Party particularly criticised the Justice and Development Party for turning what could be a welfare state into a charity state. Accordingly, instead of improving employment opportunities, and therefore welfare by its policies, the Justice and Development Party chose to distribute food, coal, money and allegedly even golden coins, to ensure the return of these favours as votes. The Justice and Development Party argued not only that these claims were exaggerated but also aid had been given through state agencies as a requirement of the welfare state well before the elections. There were also criticisms against the Prime Minister and a few ministers for nepotism and corruption, but these were not proved and apparently did not influence the majority of the electorate's choice.

The issue of the presidential elections continued to cause controversy during the campaign. The Justice and Development Party cast the election as a referendum on democracy versus authoritarianism, arguing that the functioning of the democratic process during the Presidential elections has been blocked. Accordingly, by boycotting the elections in the Parliament and preventing their MPs from entering the Parliament to ensure that the quorum of 367 seats is not met, opposition leaders showed that they were afraid of the “nation’s will”. Opposition parties in the outgoing Parliament, especially the Republican People’s Party blamed the Justice and Development Party for presenting this as an injustice or victimisation to win votes. Despite the criticisms of the opposition, it seems like Justice and Development Party won the argument. Commentators agree that public has seen the whole process as one of preventing “someone like them” from entering the Presidential Palace. Indeed, this feeling or image of “one of us” seems to have helped the Justice and Development Party a lot. Some argue that even the bluntness to the point of impoliteness of the leader of the party, Erdogan has created the feeling of “one of us” among people. It should also be stated that it was actually Erdogan, who toured most for campaigning throughout the country, while all other parties and leaders were more selective. There was a tendency among the political parties to increasingly use private television channels and internet for reaching the public instead of touring the country during this campaign.

THE RESULTS

The turnout was 84.25%. Despite approximately 1 400000 new voters and the summer, there has been an increasing interest in the elections compared to 2002, where turnout was 79.14%.⁴ As mentioned above, the 2002 elections changed the political landscape as the newly-formed Justice and Development Party received 34.28% of the votes, and had the power to form single-party majority government in Turkey for the first time in a decade. This was clearly a protest vote by the electorate, due to their exhaustion with existing political parties after a period marked by economic crises and political instability. In the 2007 elections, however, it is no longer possible to speak about tactical votes and protest votes as a significant factor.

⁴ Source: Higher Electoral Board. <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/docs/2007secim/gumrukdahil/gumrukdahil.htm> for 2007 elections and <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/docs/2002secim/gumrukdahil/gumrukdahil.htm> for 2002 elections.

Table 1: Comparison of the number and percentages major parties polled between 2002 and 2007. ⁵

| GENERAL/PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS | 2002 | | 2007 | |
|---------------------------------|------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | PARTY NAME | VOTE | % | VOTE |
| Independent Turkey Party | 150.482 | 0.48 | 182.095 | 0.52 |
| Felicity Party | 785.489 | 2.49 | 820.289 | 2.34 |
| Labour Party | 159.843 | 0.51 | 128.148 | 0.37 |
| Republican People's Party | 6.113.352 | 19.39 | 7.317.808 | 20.88 |
| Democratic Left Party* | 384.009 | 1.22 | _____ | _____ |
| Freedom And Solidarity Party** | 106.023 | 0.34 | 52.055 | 0.15 |
| Young Party | 2.285.598 | 7.25 | 1.064.871 | 3.04 |
| Democrat Party*** | _____ | _____ | 1.898.873 | 5.42 |
| True Path Party | 3.008.942 | 9.54 | _____ | _____ |
| Motherland Party | 1.618.465 | 5.13 | _____ | _____ |
| Liberal Democratic Party | 89.331 | 0.28 | 35.364 | 0.10 |
| Nationalist Action Party | 2.635.787 | 8.36 | 5.001.869 | 14.27 |
| Justice And Development Party | 10.808.229 | 34.28 | 16.327.291 | 46.58 |
| The Communist Party of Turkey | 59.180 | 0.19 | 79.258 | 0.23 |
| Independents | 314.251 | 1.00 | 1.835.486 | 5.24 |
| Democratic People's Party**** | 1.960.660 | 6.22 | _____ | _____ |

*Entered into an election coalition with the Republican People's Party

**Party Leader, Ufuk Uras resigned to stand as an independent as an election strategy

***Formerly True Path Party

****Banned from politics. Democratic Society Party is the successor to the party.

Table 2: Comparison of Number of MPs⁶

| PARTY NAME | 2002 | 2007 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|
| Justice and Development Party | 363 | 341 |
| Republican People's Party | 178 | 112 |
| Nationalist Action Party | - | 70 |
| Independents | 9 | 26 |
| TOTAL IN TURKEY | 550 | 549 |

⁵ Ibid. Data translated and merged in one table by the author.

<http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/docs/2002secim/gumrukdahil/gumrukdahil.htm>

<http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/docs/2007secim/gumrukdahil/gumrukdahil.htm>

⁶ Ibid. <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/docs/2007secim/turkiye/milletvekilisayisi.htm> and

<http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/docs/2002secim/turkiye/milletvekilisayisi.htm>

There were two winners in the 2007 elections. The Justice and Development Party increased its share of vote to 46.58% after its first term in office, which is a rare success story for the political parties in Turkey. It was successful in winning votes from across the whole spectrum of the electorate and became a centrist or a mainstream party consolidating its place. An interesting outcome of the elections was the fact that the Justice and Development Party had done better than the Democratic Society Party in the east of the country, which is seen as the bulwark of political parties like the Democratic Society Party, for which Kurdish problem is the key political issue. This meant the electorate in the region is becoming more conservative and more interested in economic development rather than prioritising the improvement of political rights. The result was also attributed to the incongruence between the far-left ideology of the party administration and the religious belief structure of the electorate. However, the Justice and Development Party, despite the increasing share of vote throughout the country, has ended up with less number of seats as the Nationalist Action Party passed the 10% threshold as well. Therefore, the Nationalist Action Party has been the second winner. The party has been successful in capitalising on the public anger at the increasing death toll due to terrorism and related aspects of foreign policy, such as the attitude of the USA and the EU to the issue, which will be reviewed in the following section.

The result was a big electoral defeat for the Republican People's Party and for the left in the country, as this was the lowest the centre-left polled. Despite the pre-electoral coalition with the Democratic Left Party, the party increased its share of vote only marginally. The result has led to calls for the left to restructure itself as well as for the leader of the party, Deniz Baykal to resign. According to some commentators, it was his uninspiring leadership and tactical move to the centre that brought about the defeat, but Baykal remained intransigent. The results revealed that basing the campaign on secularism came across as too distant from the masses while it resonated with the well-educated, upper-class segments of the electorate.

Another loser was the Democrat Party (formerly True Path Party) which saw its support slump, disappointing those who thought the symbolic value of the new party name would appeal to the voters. The leader, Mehmet Agar resigned immediately. Agar's self-reflection pointed to the boycotting of the Presidential elections and the failure to unify with the Motherland Party as the reasons for the defeat.

A salutary outcome for the women in the country has been the doubling number of female MPs in the parliament, which is a result of the calls of civilian initiatives and the media to the political parties to increase the number of female candidates. Nonetheless, the increased number is still low, only 10 % in the Parliament.

After the elections, those who have made electoral coalitions or stood as independents returned to their parties which reduced the number of independents to 5 MPs in the Parliament. Arguably, since the elections distributed the representation in the Parliament, this has been a healthy outcome for different segments of the society to have their voice heard in the Parliament. However, whether this means fewer polarisations in the country remains to be seen.

EUROPEAN DIMENSION

Turkish relations with the EU have been going through stagnation even before the elections. The issue of Turkish membership was perceived by many in Europe as part of the reason why the EU Constitution was refused in the referendums in the Netherlands and particularly in France. Whether or not this is the case, the EU has certainly turned inwards, losing interest in a new enlargement as a result of the deadlock on the future of the Constitution. Furthermore, the election of leaders who have a negative opinion on the Turkish membership of the EU, such as Merkel in Germany and Sarkozy in France surfaced serious questions about the future of the relations, as they have been in favour of a privileged partnership with Turkey instead of full membership. Hence, the issue of European Union membership was not particularly emphasised by the Justice and Development Party as one of its biggest successes during the campaign, despite the fact that the accession negotiations with the EU started during their term in government. The reluctance of the EU to go forward with the accession negotiations at full speed due to France's (or rather President Sarkozy's) reservations on the issue had already decreased the enthusiasm for the reforms in the country before the elections. This has also resulted in increasing the anti-EU rhetoric during the elections. The Justice and Development Party members kept on emphasising that they would continue with the reforms if they came to power again, while also pointing to the EU as the party responsible for slowing the process.

The Republican People's Party is officially in favour of Turkish membership of the EU. Nonetheless, at times it has been sceptical towards the reforms required, such as the abolishment of the law which sets 'insulting Turkishness' as a crime. The law has been used to punish authors, journalists, etc. in a way that compromises freedom of thought. The stance of the Party on this issue might be seen to be at odds with social democracy which the Party claims to adhere to. During the campaign, the Republican People's Party, like many other opposition parties blamed the Justice and Development Party for accepting EU impositions such as open-ended accession negotiations and one-sided concessions regarding the Cyprus issue. Its election manifesto emphasised that should they come to power, they would make sure Turkey is treated on an equal basis with other candidates and reject a 'privileged' status that falls short of full membership.

The Nationalist Action Party was the most vocal in its anti-EU rhetoric among the major political parties. Its election manifesto described the relationship as one of tutelage and impasse, arguing that Turkey has been stuck in a triangle of pressure, imposition and blackmail. Accordingly, the EU had to clarify its stance on Turkey's national unity and integrity, terror and separatism in the country, as well as Turkey's relations or problems with Cyprus, Greece and Armenia. It was implied that the reforms required for EU membership were harmful to national interests and sensitivities.

Although relations with the EU was not a salient campaign topic, it could be stated that the success of the Nationalist Action Party may have to do with the disillusion with the membership process as well as the perceived lack of support from EU member states and the USA for Turkey in dealing with terrorism in the country. As the unwillingness of the government to conduct a cross-border military operation in Northern Iraq to destroy the bases of PKK terrorist organisation in the area, was attributed to its submission to the demands of the EU and the USA.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

The Justice and Development Party achieved a landslide victory, becoming the second political party in the country to have enhanced its mandate after its first term. The main opposition in the outgoing parliament, the Republican People's Party suffered a major defeat as the support for the party increased only marginally even after the electoral coalition with the Democratic Left Party. Despite the fact that the party could not rise to power under Deniz Baykal's leadership for the fifth time, Baykal declared that the result was still a success. Commentators agreed that the problem was not only the leadership of the biggest political party at the centre-left, the left in the country had to reform and restructure itself. The Nationalist Action Party made its way back to the Parliament and became the third largest Party. The Democratic Society Party's strategy to support its candidates informally has borne fruit and 20 independents supported by the party became MPs. Although the number fell below their expectations, it may still be seen as successful. At the time of writing, 7 parties are represented in the Parliament, while there are only 5 independents left out of the 26 who have been elected.⁷

Although spurred by the crisis in the Presidential elections, the uncertainty over the issue continued after the general election. The results gave the Justice and Development Party a comfortable majority to form another single-party government, in this sense relaxed many who voted for the party thinking about stability in the country. However, despite the increasing share of the vote, which obviously is an improvement of legitimacy on the Justice and Development Party's part, it has not acquired enough seats to ensure the quorum in the Parliament for Presidential elections. Therefore the hint of the Nationalist Action Party leader Bahçeli after the results have been announced that they will be in the Parliament during the Presidential election came as a relief. The fact that the Justice and Development Party leader, Erdogan had promised to seek consensus on their Presidential candidate during the campaign and left it to Abdullah Gul to decide on whether he would like to stand for the Presidency, increased the expectations that another crisis may be avoided. Nonetheless, there were still calls for Gul not to stand for the Presidency. Despite these Gul stood as a candidate with the backing of the Justice and Development Party once more, this time with success. He visited the political parties and some civil society organisations to seek support and achieve consensus before the election. Two other candidates, a former Defence Minister, Sabahattin Cakmakoglu from the Nationalist Action Party and Tayfun Icli from the Democratic Left Party also stood in the election. Although the Republican People's Party continued its objections to Gul's Presidency and the party's members were not present during the vote in the Parliament, there was not a problem of meeting the quorum of 367. Gul was elected as the 11th President of the country in the third round of the vote on 28 August 2007. However, with the referendum on 21 October on the constitutional changes regarding the procedures for the election of the 11th President and duration of his tenure, there will be some legal problems to resolve.

Another uncertainty after the election was about the approaches of the Democratic Society Party and the Nationalist Action Party towards one another, which caused concerns about a

⁷Website of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA). Access on 25 September 2007. http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.dagilim

potential tension. Since the results meant that these two parties with opposing views on the Kurdish problem have to work under the same roof. Nonetheless, the leaders of both parties allayed the concerns by shaking hands at the opening ceremony of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (the Parliament) and declaring their intention not to create tension. However, much remains to be seen regarding the attitudes of these two parties and the approach of the Justice and Development Party towards the solution of the Kurdish problem.

In addition to these unresolved questions and uncertainties, substantial social, economic and constitutional reforms are waiting for the new government and the Parliament. Two months after the general election, the debate on a civilian⁸ constitution is high on the agenda in the country. Needless to say, secularism is still a hot topic due to the proposed changes in the draft Constitution, especially the one which aims at ensuring that the female students who wear headscarves can attend classes in the universities (they cannot under the current regulations).

EU questions were not as salient as one would have expected during the election due to the general stagnation in the relations. Despite the urges coming from the EU to speed up the reforms and the promise of the Justice and Development Party to continue with the reforms, a major positive change is not expected in the accession negotiations and/or the relations due to the political circumstances.

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⁸ Current Constitution was prepared under a military regime in 1982.