



Dear Özgehan,

The 'repeat elections' take place less than four months after the elections in June. What may possibly have changed in such a short time period?



Turkish elections: Play it again, Sam!

On Sunday 1st of November 2015, citizens in Turkey will return to the ballot boxes in order to elect their representatives. Again. This is a repeat election of those who took place only four months ago, on 7 June. As no competing party managed to gain the necessary 276 seats out of the total of 550 in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, coalition negotiations were necessary. When these talks failed, the President of the Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, called for repeat elections. Play it again, Sam!

But what has actually changed since June?

The main question for the June elections was whether the HDP, a pre-dominantly Kurdish party, would get the 10% of the votes required to enter the parliament or not. In the past, the HDP, under different names, had managed to go around this threshold with individuals running as independent candidates in certain cities only. Their decision in 2015, however, to target the 10% threshold as a party, changed the political scene significantly. As they managed to obtain 13% of the votes, the seats they won were mostly at the expense of the AKP, which is the second strongest party in the regions with predominantly Kurdish population. If the HDP had failed to pass the 10% threshold, all the seats would have gone the second party, which would have put the AKP in a comfortable position to form the government and, in addition, even reach the percentage required to make changes in the constitution.

As discussed in earlier electoral notes in the "Mails from Europe" series, this was exactly what was needed to fulfill the political aspirations of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the founding leader of the AKP, who wants to change the system from a parliamentary democracy to a full presidential regime (for the time being, the President is limited to a merely representative role).

For next Sunday, the main question is no longer the HDP's figures. Successive polls since June have consistently demonstrated that HDP is likely to preserve its 13% vote share and will once again successfully enter the parliament. The main question for the 1st of November is therefore whether the AKP, the ruling party since 2002, can get the necessary 276 seats to form a government on its own or not. The latest polls suggest that voters did not change their minds over the last 4 months. As a result, while the AKP is rather certain to come out of the elections with around 40% of the votes, the distribution of seats is too close to call in several electoral districts.

Above all, the major question in Turkish democracy is beyond electoral outcomes. It seems that the polarization within Turkish politics has finally reached a level which has created a drastic divide or gap in the society. Turkey is entering the elections more divided than ever, and rather than being based on ethnic, ideological or socio-economic reasons, the divide is now between AKP supporters and non-AKP supporters. Many are concerned and worried that whatever the election results, these social tensions will not ease up but perhaps even deepen further.

Take care!
Özgehan

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