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## Political Parties in Turkey: From 2010 Referendum to 2011 June Elections



## ABSTRACT

Debates on the changing political landscape in the run up to the 2011 elections and the promises for new Constitution in the aftermath of the elections are of critical importance for the future the Turkey. This report provides an up-to-date analysis of how current political parties contribute to debates on political questions and constitutional expectations. The report also shows how political actors in Turkey perceive social and political transformations in this critical period when the fundamental political dynamics of the Republic are undergoing significant changes.

This report consists of English summaries of the analyses written in Turkish for SETA by journalists who are well known experts in their fields. The report focuses on four major political parties in Turkey: The Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi), The Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi), The Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) and The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi).

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# POLITICAL PARTIES IN TURKEY: FROM 2010 REFERENDUM TO 2011 JUNE ELECTIONS

## A. INTRODUCTION

Recently there has been a fundamental change taking place in the Turkish political landscape. Political actors as well as domestic and foreign policy options are undergoing a transformation in the country. The general elections on 22 July 2007 and the constitutional referendum on 12 September 2010 not only crystallized these changes but also indicated what the new orientation might look like. Following the referendum all political parties promised a new constitution. The promise of the new constitution raises expectations from the general elections on 12 June 2011 to build a “new Turkey.” As a result of the debates on the new constitution and the new Turkey, political parties prepared their election manifesto for the 2011 elections according to their 2023 targets. Political parties made their economic and political promises with respect to 2023, that is the centenary of Turkish Republic. People are longing for a new Turkey free from its problems as large scale centenary celebrations are expected to take place in 2023.

Debates on the changing political landscape in the run up to the 2011 elections and the promises for new Constitution in the aftermath of the elections are of critical importance for the future the Turkey. This report provides an up-to-date analysis of how current political parties contribute to debates on political questions and constitutional expectations. The report also shows how political actors in Turkey perceive social and political transformations in this critical period when the fundamental political dynamics of the Republic are undergoing significant changes.

This report consists of English summaries of the analyses written in Turkish for SETA by journalists who are well known experts in their fields.<sup>1</sup> The report focuses on four major political parties in Turkey: The Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi), The Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi), The Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) and The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi).

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1. For the longer Turkish version of analyses see [www.setav.org](http://www.setav.org). The views expressed in these reports do not represent views of the SETA but those of authors.

AK Party's success in the economy is one of the reasons why it won two general, two local elections and two referendums. The second factor which was effective in attracting voters is its policies on democracy, freedoms and fundamental rights.

## B. THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (ADALET VE KALKINMA PARTİSİ- AK PARTİ)

By YAŞAR TAŞKIN KOÇ\*

When Justice and Development Party (AK Party) was established in 2002 and became one of the crucial actors of Turkish political life; both the National Vision it distanced itself from and Turkey were undergoing a serious crisis. AK Party emerged from the crisis that the National Vision underwent while it came to power alone thanks to the economic crisis in the country. Due to 2001 economic crisis, the society punished at the ballot box the ones who it saw responsible for the crisis in order not to take an economic and political risk. Consequently, other parties couldn't meet the national threshold on 3 November 2002 elections. The society wanted to prevent the decrease in prosperity thus paved the way for a powerful party to come to the power alone. In the end weaknesses of coalition governments at those times paved the way for AK Party to come to the power alone and expunged other parties from the political life.

AK Party's success in the economy is one of the reasons why it won two general, two local elections and two referendums. The second factor which was effective in attracting voters is its policies on democracy, freedoms and fundamental rights. AK Party believed that these two factors interact thus it developed policies towards maintaining economic stability while it also adopted other policies towards maintaining political stability and meeting demands for right and freedoms.

### I. REASONS BEHIND THE AK PARTY'S ELECTION SUCCESS

The AK Party started its journey by believing that the fundamental demand of society is economic and political stability.

#### Economic Performance of the AK Party

The AK Party realized the importance of radical changes for the benefit of society in education, health, and construction sectors. It showed significant performance with regard to welfare benefits. The AK Party did not make any concessions on fiscal policies in order to prevent new economic shocks and paid attention to the increase of production and privatization of state economic enterprises. Industry, trade, and agriculture sectors began to develop during this calm period. Production and exports were increased and the state kept its distance from interventions that would speculate sudden ups and downs in foreign exchange rates. The average annual inflation rate declined

from 70,8% in 1993-2002 to 18,4% in 2003 after AK Party came to power. In 2004, the average annual inflation rate was calculated as 9,3% for the first time after long years and declined to 6,4% in 2010. The inflation rate is aimed to be 3,99% as of March 2011, which hasn't been witnessed for almost a half century. Economic growth was calculated as 5,9% in 2003; 9,9% in 2004; 7,4% in 2005; 6% in 2006; 4,5% in 2007 and 1,1% in 2008. However there was a 4,7 % recession in 2009 as a result of the global economic crisis. Afterwards, the economic growth in 2010 was calculated as 8,9%. When the first quarter of 2011 is considered, economic growth is expected to surpass 7%. If we also consider other figures, it is seen that in 8 years of its rule, the AK Party did more than what has been done in the first 79 years of the Republic.

### Political Performance of the AK Party

The AK Party defines its position in Turkish political life as a "conservative democratic party." If we look at what AK Party has done during its reign of 8,5 years instead of debating this definition, we will have a clearer idea about the party's opinions. AK Party openly announced its political perspective that will deeply influence upcoming economic, social, cultural process through its party manifesto and state programs. It put this perspective into practice under the framework of Constitutional amendments, amendments on commerce, penal code and similar fundamental legislation and law of harmonization code of the European Union during its reign. AK Party witnessed the most serious political crisis in 2007 during Presidential election process. When the AK Party nominated Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül as its candidate in presidential elections in 2007, the party encountered great resistance. This resistance came not from the society per se but from other groups, namely the military bureaucracy, certain segments of the judiciary, the media, and CHP who saw themselves as the natural partners of civil power. In addition, the Turkish General Staff released "e-memorandum" on its website on the night of 27 April and the Constitutional Court stipulated a quorum of 367 parliamentarians for the election of the President. As a result, the AK Party decided to go for an early election. This showdown brought a great victory to the AK Party which received 47% of the votes. This showed who and what the Turkish society supported in both economic and political arenas: Society supported the change brought about by the AK Party in economic and political arenas.

Following the 2007 election victory, the AK Party passed constitutional amendments on the headscarf ban together with Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), however, the decision was canceled by the Constitutional Court. In March 2008, as a result of its headscarf initiative, a closure case was opened against AK Party, which had received votes almost from half of the society. The Constitutional Court, famous for its political decisions, took a decision, which warned the AK Party instead of making a decision that would affect the future of the country in a negative way. The most critical phase of democratization was the 12 September 2010 referendum held on the constitutional

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amendments package. This package contained the amendments, which would decrease the influence of the judiciary on civilian politics and prevent the judiciary from having a share in the political power. While CHP (The Republican People's Party) and MHP (The Nationalist Movement Party) started their "no" campaigns, BDP (The Peace and Democracy Party) took a "boycott" decision. The 12 September referendum was supported by 58%, which not only showed AK Party's constructive role in economy and foreign policy but it also proved that AK Party is the leading actor of change in the political arena.

## II. THE AK PARTY'S STRUGGLE WITH BUREAUCRACY

Following the 27 May 1960 military coup d'état, military and civil bureaucracy, judiciary, bourgeois, and the media assumed much greater roles in the exercise of civilian power. Even if their influence and power fluctuated from time to time, there was a great obstacle to popularly elected parties to govern the country on their own without needing a coalition government.

When the Turkish economy continued to develop, various new actors entered the political scene, ending the monopoly of the bourgeois. These new actors adopted different attitudes than the Turkish bourgeois and tried to contribute to the development of democracy. This was partially because this new group adopted one of the fundamental values of AK Party's ideology, namely conservatism. When the new actors participated in the system, the leadership role of the media dating back to the military coups was also changed. When the new bourgeois increased its voice through the media, the media became more diversified. It was no longer possible for coup d'état attempts to get support in the media. Therefore, bourgeois and media are no longer in the historical coup d'état formula of "junta, bourgeois, media, judiciary."

In addition to these changes, the real shock, which put an end to classical pro-junta mindset, was the Ergenekon investigation. The investigation officially began after hand grenades were found in a slum house. Since then various people from commanders in chief of armed forces to businessmen from journalists to academicians were arrested for the alleged coup plot. It was inevitable that the last move would be against the judiciary during this period when the AK Party eliminated these actors, which are illegal but were rendered legitimate in the military tutelage system. As a matter of fact, thanks to the constitutional amendment package accepted in the 12 September Referendum, the role of the judiciary in politics was weakened.

The AK Party won this struggle; which harmed the opposition parties in three ways: First, because they expected that the AK Party would lose this struggle and they would take over the power; they failed to create new social and economic projects. Second, because the opposition parties remained silent with regard to coup d'états, opposed multi-lateral foreign policy, considered the deadlock in Cyprus as a solution and failed to adopt a particular attitude towards the Kurdish question, they failed over and over. Third, because they have failed in 4 elections and 2 referendums since 2002, opposition

parties faced great difficulties in establishing stability within their parties. The reason Deniz Baykal had to resign from CHP and the division in the MHP base following the 12 September referendum are the concrete results of these difficulties.

### III. AK PARTY'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS IN DOMESTIC POLICY

It was inevitable for the AK Party to address chronic political and cultural problems following its economic activities and political views it adopted during its 8,5 year rule. The most crucial political problem that Turkey faces is without a doubt the Kurdish question. What was done with regard to the Kurdish question up to now, the Unity and Fraternity Project, and the current critical situation will shape AK Party's policy on this issue following the 2011 elections. It seems that the AK Party is in quest of solutions on issues such as Alevism, Romani people, and minority rights. Even if these issues are not as problematic and painful as the Kurdish issue, they are still considered problems. In this sense, the AK Party will probably expand rights and freedoms in order to solve these issues. What is more crucial is the fact that the AK Party defended the idea that groups from each and every opinion, ethnicity, and religious sect must come together. These actors and the state will have to listen to each other and contribute to the preparation of a solution package. It is possible to say that implementation of these packages will be accelerated and some practical steps will be taken following the elections. Since the establishment of AK Party governments, military-civil, military-state relations ranked first on the list among all domestic and external issues. The military bureaucracy had a significant share in Turkish power structure, which was the gift of the 27 May coup d'état and was consolidated by the following ones. This partnership was not only protected by an unwritten legitimacy of half century but also protected legally thanks to the MGK (National Security Council), certain articles of the Military Code, and the High Judiciary. It is clear that the AK Party failed to completely remove the influence of military on politics even if it took various steps towards limiting the military's power. However, we must note that the AK Party came a long way with regard to this issue.

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### IV. THE POSSIBLE SCENARIO FOR THE JUNE 2011 ELECTIONS

The AK Party's fundamental argument in the 12 June elections will be the declaration of its achievements so far. Second, the AK Party's election strategy will certainly rely on the new constitution. It is evident that in addition to the new constitution, democratic developments, concrete initiatives on fundamental rights and freedoms will also have media coverage. As we can see from the election manifesto, the third trump card of AK Party will be local projects. In addition to the flagship project *Canal Istanbul*; constructing two new cities/neighbourhoods in Istanbul, highways, maintaining the projects with regard to housing, establishing new universities, increasing the number of cities, explaining what has been done in health and education sectors will be on the agenda of the AK Party during its public meetings. Because the society does not have a clear

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idea about what CHP and MHP think about the most fundamental problems of Turkey and does not believe the proposals of these two parties, the opposition parties will be disadvantageous in these elections. As a result, the AK Party will be the party that will have the advantage.

## CONCLUSION

The AK Party will probably come to power alone following the 12 June elections. However, the number of the parliamentarians that the AK Party will have in the parliament is a crucial issue. AK Party's vote rate and the number of the parliamentarians it will bring into the parliament will determine the political priorities of the party during its third reign period. Factors such as Kurdish question, AK Party's attitude towards democratization, the timing and the content of the new Constitution, the parameters of the new Turkey and the required time for building the new Turkey will be determined according to AK Party's election results.

Similarly, AK Party's election results will play a great role in the future of other political parties. CHP's election results will directly influence the change process in the party and its power struggle. If MHP can't meet the threshold or it barely meets the threshold, not only MHP's internal balances but also its role and durability in Turkish politics will be questioned. BDP's election results will directly influence the resolution process and procedure of Kurdish question. In brief, AK Party will not only influence its role and durability in politics but also the fate of other political parties.

AK Party will probably achieve a victory in the upcoming elections and came to the power for the third time. Thus it will not only have more responsibility but also take more risks. Reforms that AK Party accomplished during its first reign put century-old problems of the Republic at the top of the agenda. It is no more possible to postpone these issues varying from identity issues to income distribution, from the governmental system to power balances in the political regime. These issues will be a test for AK Party during its third reign period especially with regard to the new constitution.



## C. THE REPUBLICAN PEOPLE'S PARTY (CUMHURİYET HALK PARTİSİ-CHP)

BY MAHMUT ÖVÜR\*

### I. CHP'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

CHP was established on 9 September 1923 under the name of "People's Party" by Mustafa Kemal. The Party adopted its main ideological principle, as republicanism, nationalism, statism, populism, laïcité and revolutionism known as Six Arrows in 1931 that are still valid today. In 1937, Six Arrows of CHP were put into the constitution. After 1945 with the victory of democracies in the post-WWII era, Turkey felt the need for adopting a multi-party political system. CHP lost the general elections held on 15 May 1950. And a newly established Democratic Party (DP) came to power, ending the single party rule of CHP. Consequently, a long opposition era began for CHP.

Following the victory of DP, even though CHP maintained its one-party era principles; it also continued to search for "change" that would keep up with time. In the mid-1960s, CHP formulated its desire for change as "centre-left." In 1972 during the Bülent Ecevit government, CHP boomed for the first time in the history of the party with the slogans calling for "the system to change" and "land reform." The CHP leader Bülent Ecevit didn't change CHP's fundamental principles but added new ones or softened the old ones.

CHP was closed down for the first time by the 12 September military coup d'état in 1980. CHP was the victim of the bureaucratic military structure it had built. It wasn't reopened until 9 September 1992. Following the reopening of CHP, its leader Deniz Baykal adopted a different political mission. After 1993, CHP and Turkish urban elites were mobilized over the concern for the principle of laïcité. Turkey was deliberately dragged to the middle of two dangerous conflicts: Kurdish-Turkish and secular and non-secular. This process led CHP to be the "protector of the regime." 28 February post-modern coup d'état affected not only the Kemalist and secular groups but also the center-right and nationalist groups.

A new era began on 3 November 2002 elections when AK Party came to power alone by receiving 34% of the votes. While many parties including DYP (True Path Party), ANAP (Motherland Party) and MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) could not enter the parliament, CHP could take part in the parliament by gathering 19% of the votes. In the two-party parliament, CHP saw its primary mission to defend the regime. During this period, instead of finding solutions to chronic political problems such as the Kurdish question, headscarf, and Cyprus issue, CHP adopted a policy which was only based on

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protecting the secular republic. CHP didn't even welcome the EU membership candidacy in 2004. Deniz Baykal changed the party rules in 2008 and pruned away the problems, turning the party into a "rose garden without thorns." CHP failed to get more than 20% of the votes, however, even this rate was sufficient for Baykal because the fundamental mission of CHP was to protect the regime. Questionable actors entered the political scene. To create chaos, suspicious attacks against the Council of State, murders of three Christians in Malatya Zirve Publishing house, Santoro and as well as murder of Hrant Dink were carried out by shadowy organizations.

Yet, it was impossible to stand in the AK Party's way by appealing to coup d'états or conducting politics with help from institutions such as the High Judiciary. As a result, a new political language which "touched society" and was represented by Istanbul provincial chairman Gürsel Tekin appeared for the first time in 29 March 2009 local elections. Istanbul metropolitan mayoral candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu along with Gürsel Tekin brought in something new in terms of CHP with its new political language. They went to previously unvisited places, sent messages to religious groups through the "headscarf initiative" and they mobilized ghettos in metropolitan cities. Thus, two new political actors who defended the regime emerged.

## II. VIDEO TAPE CONSPIRACY AND THE KEMAL KILIÇDAROĞLU ERA

Baykal was satisfied with CHP; however, the military-civil bureaucrats and the High Judiciary who thought they were the owner of the system weren't satisfied. Turkey witnessed a shocking conspiracy on the night of 7 May 2010 when the constitutional amendment package was put to the final vote in the Turkish parliament. The CHP leader Deniz Baykal's illicit relationship with one of the parliamentarians of his party had been videotaped and was disseminated on the Internet. For the first time in the Turkish political life and the CHP's 87 years of history, a party leader had to resign because of such a tape. Two names came up for the party leadership: Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Gürsel Tekin. Kılıçdaroğlu declared that he would not be a candidate, however, he changed his mind after Önder Sav, a traditional ally of Baykal, stepped in. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu became the CHP chairman following the party meeting.

Kılıçdaroğlu's party leadership deeply influenced both the CHP base and the society at large. This change provided hope in terms of the normalization of Turkish politics. However, the strong position of Önder Sav created a "double-headed" CHP perception in society. For the normalization of CHP, Gürsel Tekin had to replace Önder Sav. In the end, this change was put into place by the Supreme Court of Appeals prosecutor's call for the implementation of the party rules accepted in 2008. CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu challenged Sav, who resisted the implementation of the party rules and decided to hold an extraordinary meeting, which amounted to an intra-party leadership coup attempt. After the meeting, Kılıçdaroğlu managed to eliminate Sav and delivered his

strong speech: “We destroyed the empire of fear in the party, now it is time to destroy the empire of fear in Turkey...”

### Hidden Codes of the Change

According to political experts, CHP will either do politics through concrete realities of Turkey or will be divided and disappear. Today, there are a lot of conflicting political actors in the party. For example, Süheyl Batum is from the former center-right and a representative of nationalist groups who sparks debate from time to time and Sezgin Tanrikulu is the leading actor of Kurdish civil politics who proposes “Truth Commissions” to be established to investigate extrajudicial killings. Such opposing views are housed in the same party. Similarly, Muhammet Çakmak, the grandson of Sheikh Halit Hodja from Naqshbandi religious order and Enver Aysever who comes from socialist left are in the same party. We must also note Sencer Ayata who tries to define the social base of CHP with his research on the new middle class and Binnaz Toprak who sparks debates with her controversial statements on religious groups and religion in general are also doing politics in CHP.

In 10 months’ time after taking over the leadership position, Kılıçdaroğlu and Tekin paved the way for change by coming up with different ideas in a status quo party of 87 years. What makes it different from the “democratic left” quest of 1966 and the following “left-of-centre” quest of the 1970s is the reflection of social dynamism on the CHP leadership. This outlook also affects the political language and party policies. CHP has different projects for the 12 June 2011 elections. Even the last two projects namely “Family Insurance” and “Easy Military Service” show that new political language are welcomed by society.

### Electoral Base

The social base which CHP will rely on is a point under discussion. Political experts agree on that the real power which brought the AK Party to power is the Anatolian capital. So, which economic class and which social groups will CHP rely on? In this sense, the common opinion is that a social democratic party relies on “people”. Professor Sencer Ayata talks about a new middle class. Accordingly, workers, the poor, agricultural proletariat will be included in CHP, which is supposed to be a social democratic party. Today in Turkey on the one hand, there is an urban culture and a powerful middle class while on the other hand Turkey has a social structure divided into religious, secular, Kurdish and Alevi groups. In this context, CHP aims to bring together the divided groups while at the same time it relies on the middle class.

The former CHP gained votes from urban centers, coastal areas, and bureaucratic elites. CHP failed to receive more than 23% of the votes in the last two elections with this

According to political experts, CHP will either do politics through concrete realities of Turkey or will be divided and disappear.

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base. How will the new CHP increase its votes? According to the opinion polls, CHP will receive 26.5% of the votes. It is evident that this small increase is not sufficient. It may not be difficult at all for CHP to increase its votes by 30% if it maintains its current tempo.

### III. CHP'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE PROBLEMS IN DOMESTIC POLICY

Former CHP took a step back from the 1990 Kurdish Report of SHP (Social Democratic Populist Party) up until 1999 when it readopted a similar policy. Nevertheless, following the 2002 elections, CHP adopted a completely different policy. CHP adopted a "nationalist" policy in the 2000s and it severely reacted to almost every initiative concerning the Kurdish question. Because CHP failed to express its position concerning this problem, the party in power not only slowed down its democratic steps but also took those steps cautiously.

In fact, the new CHP does not have a clear position towards the Kurdish question. Rather, it focuses on the economic development of the Southeastern region of Turkey. We must note that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu visited cities in the region and presented CHP as a "third way" other than the AK Party and BDP during this period. CHP had failed to visit the region before. However, this time it began to communicate with the region although partially. Another initiative, which contributed to this attitude, was the meeting on the "Kurdish Initiative" held on 20 February 2011 in Van. CHP's behavior is still very timid in terms of this issue because it is anxious about the base of the former CHP. Even though CHP tends towards Kurdish people living in bigger cities, it does not expect large number of votes from the Kurdish electorate at least in these upcoming elections.

Even if the new CHP does not have clear policies for now; it is clear that the party will adopt a more new initiative oriented attitude than the former one. CHP has always taken a position close to the army with regard to civil- military relations, the most critical issue of Turkish history. Even if Kılıçdaroğlu did not come out with concrete policies in this sense, he emphasized the "civilian" line. He made his clearest statement during a meeting in Berlin that he took part during his visit in Germany: "We want civil-military relations to be democratic. If a coup d'état is to happen I will be the first one to stand against the tanks." On the other hand, Süheyl Batum complained that the army doesn't intervene in politics enough and he called the army as a "paper tiger". Conflicting statements of CHP party chairman (Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu) and CHP secretary general (Süheyl Batum) indicated that the party does not still have a clear attitude towards "civil-military relations". Nevertheless it is clear that CHP has a tendency to move towards more civilian politics.

### IV. CHP'S OUTLOOK ON ECONOMY

When compared to Baykal's CHP, it is possible to say that a new era with regard to economy has begun. If we look at the Kılıçdaroğlu era, a classical "mixed economy" attitude, which is based on "state-private sector" balance in economy draws attention.

The party's manifesto for the 12 June elections mainly covers proposals on economy. It seems that CHP will be a political actor in economy thanks to its promises such as granting 600 TL to each and every poor family under the framework of "Family Insurance," granting zero-interest credits to SMEs, employing 800 thousand people, providing new opportunities to retired people, farmers, students, and the youth.

However, the weakest side of the "new CHP" is that it creates a pessimistic scenario for the current situation and uses a negative political language. CHP does not adopt even a single positive approach with regard to what the AK Party did during its 8 years of rule in CHP's "New Economy Strategy" booklet of 37 pages.

Attitudes and proposals on economy, promise of new constitution, approaches towards the Kurdish identity, and promise to remove amendments added by Turkey in the 1990s to the European Charter of Local Self-government of the Council of Europe are indicative of change. This effort of CHP will not only change CHP but also set a higher standard for democracy in Turkey.

## V. CHP CANDIDATES AND THE ERGENEKON REALITY

One of the significant criteria of change within CHP was the list of candidates for the 12 June 2011 elections. People were wondering about the choice the new CHP would make between left, social democratic candidates, and Ergenekon suspects. However, when the lists were announced, people faced a CHP that took a "centrist" position. The list aimed to make CHP the "umbrella" of opposition against the AK Party. CHP did not include former social democratic political actors in the list, which caused people to think that "CHP is becoming rightist." But Ergenekon suspects who were included in the list drew the most attention. Especially, the candidacies of Mehmet Haberal and Sinan Aygün were widely debated. On the one hand, CHP called for "change," while on the other hand, it included in the list people who were associated with past coup d'états.

As a matter of fact, people wondered whether CHP, which both changes and protects the status quo at the same time, will succeed in elections. There are two conflicting opinions on this. Some argue that CHP has become distant to the left and closer to the right and preserved the alignment with the "deep state." Others believe that CHP is trying to be "the party for everyone" by positioning itself in the center. Even though the CHP candidates are controversial in contrast to the Baykal-era CHP, the party is trying out a new list by including center-right, Kurdish political actors, people who represent left and labor market and even Ergenekon suspects rather than being limited to its "secular Kemalist" approach. It is certain that this will be more successful than the previous one. However, it is also certain that it will not pave the way for CHP to come to power.

## CONCLUSION

CHP is a nationalist, secular, and social democratic party, which is at the same age with the Turkish Republic. The party base covers middle classes that are sensitive about the Kurdish issue and what they perceive as the emergence of religious groups. CHP was

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limited to a "secular-Kemalist, statist" ideology that failed to renew itself thus its base was also limited to city centers and coastal areas. This situation forced CHP "to change." CHP, which lost every election to the AK Party since 2002, could assure neither the tutelary regime nor the capitalists nor the media. At this point, videotape scandal of Baykal broke out. A new era for CHP began and former members were eliminated.

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's Kurdish-Alevi identity and Gürsel Tekin's Kurdish identity indicate that a different change will occur in an elite bureaucratic party such as CHP. Whichever purpose the political engineers, who disseminated scandal videotape of Baykal, had in mind; CHP tries to focus on fundamental problems by taking into consideration the need for change of Turkish society. Kılıçdaroğlu emphasizes his Kurdish-Alevi identity and he promises to remove amendments added by Turkey to the European Charter of Local Self-government of the Council of Europe; which not only determines the direction of change but also contributes to the normalization of politics in Turkey.

Without a doubt, people are more curious about what kind of results that these quests will bring within CHP. Some wants CHP to be a contemporary social democratic party while others wants it to be a leftist-Kemalist party. Nevertheless, it seems that CHP is behaving as a "centrist" party which covers former center-right and all opposition actors without offending the left, the social democrats and the Kemalist actors and will probably continue to do so until the 12 June elections. As a result, the real change will occur after the 12 June elections. And the votes that CHP will receive will determine this process.

## D. THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT PARTY (MİLLİYETÇİ HAREKET PARTİSİ-MHP)

By HÜSEYİN KOCABIYIK\*

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) is one of the powerful political movements in Turkey because of its historical background and its influence on society and politics. Although MHP was established on 9 February 1969, it is possible to trace the origins of this party to the intellectual movements of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When nationalism was brought to the political arena and became an ideology of a party, one of the most powerful anti-communist nationalist organizations of the cold war era was formed.

The cold war era prior to 1980 resulted in ideological struggle that prevailed in the streets in Turkey. MHP took part in violence in the name of saving the state as a prominent representative of the anti-communist political campaigns before 1980. Consequently, on the one hand MHP got more support from people while on the other hand its legitimate image in the eyes of public opinion was damaged. Following the 12 September coup d'état the junta confronted also MHP and idealists, which was mainly because of this image.

Following the 12 September coup d'état, it kept its distance from the state and adopted a society-based nationalism. In fact, the MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli took and implemented serious decisions especially in terms of determining the role of the "idealists" in political and social life. For instance, he prevented the idealist youth from participating in street protests so as to avoid ethnic conflict. Considering that today there are 2500 nationalist youth associations known as *ülkü ocakları* where young people gather, Devlet Bahçeli's call for "*idealists who use computers not weapons*" is a great example of responsibility. It must be noted that Devlet Bahçeli and MHP administrators had a great role in preventing fraternal fight and an ethnical conflict in Turkey despite all provocation.

Thanks to this choice, MHP increased its votes from 2,9% in 1987 to 18% in 1999. The party was able to come to power by forming a coalition with Motherland Party (ANAP) of center-right origin and Democratic Left Party (DSP) of leftist origin. Nevertheless, MHP's votes decreased by 10% and it could not meet the national threshold in the 2002 elections. This indicates that it was not successful at all in its coalition government of 3,5 years. MHP received variable votes from 1999 elections to 3 November 2002 elections, from 2004 local elections to 2007 general elections thus it is possible to make certain predictions on MHP towards 12 June 2011 elections. According to recent public

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opinion polls, MHP may sink below the electoral threshold of 10% in the forthcoming elections. There is no doubt that MHP has a dynamic structure and is affected directly by conjectural developments. Therefore, it would be wiser to be careful about making predictions on whether or not MHP will meet the electoral threshold.

### **I. MHP POLITICS SINCE THE 22 JULY 2007 ELECTIONS**

MHP has always warned the ones who try to intervene in democracy before every election and reminded that Turkish Grand National Assembly is the center of national will. As a matter of fact, MHP's attitude was welcomed by voters thus it increased its votes from 8,4 to 14,3 in 2007 general elections.

Following the 22 July 2007 elections, MHP has continued to play a constructive role in political crises. MHP adopted a problem-solving attitude during presidential elections thus saved Turkish democratic life from a serious chaos. Besides, MHP's attitude towards the headscarf issue and the initiative it took in order to solve the problem are noteworthy. MHP showed that it is on the side of rights and freedoms thanks to the constitutional amendment on headscarf issue that it proposed to the party in power.

### **II. POLITICS ANCHORED IN THE KURDISH QUESTION**

When the AK Party government launched the "Democratic Initiative" in 2009, MHP changed its constructive role it assumed during the political crisis between CHP (Republican People's Party) and the AK Party. Since then, MHP focused on the Kurdish question and the interpreting political developments in an exceedingly nationalist rhetoric. MHP creates tension through the Kurdish question and by doing so aims to gain political power. If MHP adopts an attitude towards finding a solution to the Kurdish question then it will not only contribute to social peace but it will also become a party, which helps to balance the political dynamics in Turkey.

Nevertheless, instead of adopting this attitude, MHP assumes a role based on polemics, blaming games, and tensions, which hinders possible solutions. If MHP insists on this attitude then the Turkish people who associate MHP with security, may consider MHP as a party which exploits funerals of security forces who lost their lives in terror attacks. Because of this attitude, MHP is seen as a one-dimensional party, which readopted statist nationalism.

### **III. THE GREAT TURNING POINT: THE 12 SEPTEMBER REFERENDUM**

MHP maintained its statist and conservative policy it had adopted since the democratic initiative process in 12 September 2010 referendum. The constitutional amendments would have put an end to the tutelary structures constructed by the military coup d'états. MHP showed immense resistance and succeeded in conducting an effec-



tive “no” campaign. In this sense, the 12 September 2010 referendum on constitutional amendments was the greatest turning point in the history of MHP of 42 years.

MHP didn't support the constitutional amendments package which strengthens civil power against military and judicial bureaucracy thus contradicted the nationalist-conservative policy it adopted. It was impossible for MHP members who had suffered from the 12 September coup d'état to decline a referendum package that would put an end to 12 September regime. As a matter of fact, a considerable number of nationalist-conservative MHP base in central Anatolia left aside their loyalty to the party and voted in favor of the referendum.

So, why did MHP take such a decision at the risk of dividing its base?

First of all it must be noted that “no” decision of the MHP is not an ideological attitude but a “tactical” attitude that it adopted due to certain concerns. MHP has witnessed that its nationalist-conservative base in Central Anatolia became closer to AK Party. As a result MHP tried to receive votes from coastal areas, metropolitan cities, Thrace and Marmara region. This was one of the reasons why MHP discourse became nationalist from time to time. In this framework, MHP didn't believe that it could appeal to AK Party base and expand its own base through nationalist-conservative policies. Moreover, it took the risk of losing its conservative base to AK Party.

Even if this policy caused harm to MHP's idealist base; it paved the way for MHP to increase its votes in coastal areas, Marmara, Mediterranean and Aegean Region in 2009 local elections.

Taking a position in the “no” bloc in the referendum is probably a result of such a strategy. MHP'S Central Anatolian base wanted to support the constitutional amendments package in the referendum while its West Anatolian base preferred to vote against. MHP preferred to support its West Anatolian base.

In this framework, we must interpret “no” decision of MHP as a tactical attitude. MHP witnessed that its nationalist-conservative electorate in central Anatolia became closer to the AK Party for a long time. Therefore, it tried to have new bases in coastal areas, metropolitan cities, the Thrace and the Marmara regions.

#### **IV. WHY IS MHP LOSING VOTES?**

According to recent surveys, MHP receives 9,5 to 12% of votes. If sudden changes in Turkish politics are properly analyzed, it will be easier to explain why MHP loses votes. First of all we must focus on the fact that MHP drifted away from its nationalist-conservative electorate in central Anatolia. MHP thought that its own base got closer to the AK Party, thus it couldn't compete with the AK Party. Accordingly, it changed its discourse and political attitude and tried to receive votes from the metropolitan cities and coastal regions. However, in order to yield results, this strategy needed someone like Deniz Baykal whose actions would degrade CHP and would fail to give any hope to voters dissatisfied with the AK Party.

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Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu who took over CHP leadership after Baykal aroused excitement in the current and the potential new CHP bases. In this framework, 5% of the votes, which were transferred from CHP to MHP, returned back to CHP. When the votes MHP received in 2002, 2004, 2007, 2009 elections and the results of opinion polls conducted after Kılıçdaroğlu became the party chairman are compared, the mobility of MHP voters can clearly be seen. In this framework, we can draw the following conclusion: MHP can't meet electoral threshold not because of the AK Party but because of CHP with Kılıçdaroğlu. Kılıçdaroğlu adopts a bipolarization policy through attacking Tayyip Erdoğan personally. And this renders the election strategy of MHP ineffective.

## VI. WHAT WILL HAPPEN ON 12 JUNE?

MHP is one of the important parties of Turkish politics. A peaceful and democratic MHP that adopts positive nationalism is always needed in Turkish politics. It is possible to say that thanks to MHP Turkey played a role that regulated and balanced political sociology. However, MHP adopted wrong strategies and discourses and made wrong choices thus caused serious damage to its base including its upper-level cadre. Nevertheless, if MHP can't take part in Turkish Grand National Assembly in the upcoming elections, this will be a great loss for Turkish politics. However, it is not possible at all to compensate the mistakes of years in a short time.

If MHP cannot meet the electoral threshold of 10% in 12 June elections, it will face a painful period. Following such a result, the party leadership will probably change. In such a case, the ideological structure of MHP will also undergo certain changes and party will adopt a strong nationalist attitude. If MHP can meet the electoral threshold, it will probably give up its current political posture and ideological attitudes and adopt policies in line with social demands and the democratic process. In brief, 12 June elections will have a serious impact on MHP's future.

## VII. MHP CANDIDATES

Lists of candidates that parties made for 12 June elections give hints about the political strategy of the parties. In this sense, it seems that MHP leader, Devlet Bahçeli preferred to continue with his previous team. It can be understood that Devlet Bahçeli doesn't expect "political creativity" from these people but he prioritizes "harmony." On the other hand, it is clear that MHP leader will not change his attitude with regard to his current political views and certain political-social issues in Turkey and will not adopt new political initiatives. Many candidates who did politics in center right were nominated by the party at the top of the election candidate lists. Without a doubt, the most surprising candidate was a Sledgehammer suspect, retired lieutenant general Engin Alan. He was nominated from Istanbul's first electoral district as the first candidate. Even if MHP base doesn't welcome Ergenekon and Sledgehammer case suspects, the MHP

leadership insisted on Engin Alan. Accordingly, people are curious to know whether this is a personal preference of Bahçeli or is in harmony with party policies for the upcoming period.

### VIII. EFFECTS OF CONJUNCTURAL DEVELOPMENTS ON MHP

As mentioned in the beginning of this analysis, MHP has difficulties in competing with the AK Party in Central Anatolia. Therefore, MHP adopts a political strategy both in order to keep nationalist-conservative voters in Central Anatolia and to attract new voters with nationalist sensitivities in Mediterranean-Aegean and Thrace regions. First of all, it takes a political position, which focuses on the Kurdish question. Here, the symmetrical relationship between MHP that symbolizes Turkish nationalism and BDP-PKK that symbolizes Kurdish nationalism draws attention. This relationship indicates MHP's importance and position in current Turkish political life. The second attitude adopted by Bahçeli is much more tactical. This creates a bipolarization between MHP and the AK Party thus leaves MHP base hanging in midair. In addition, the reason why Bahçeli adopts such an attitude is that he believes overly politicized groups vote for the party, which strongly opposes the AK Party. As a result, MHP adopts a bipolarizing attitude towards the AK Party and Prime Minister Erdoğan at every turn.

### CONCLUSION

MHP with its political view will survive in Turkish politics regardless of the election results. This political movement has been glaringly indifferent to the new process of change that could develop the party itself and allow MHP to embrace the masses. Instead of contributing to the solution of problems such as the Kurdish question and the EU issue, MHP adopted a reactionary attitude, turning itself into a regional party. Today, MHP is regarded as a party, which lost its nationalist-conservative votes to AK Party and gained CHP's votes. However, it lost the votes it received from CHP base in a short time when Kılıçdaroglu became the party leader. The shock among the MHP base after MHP positioned itself in the 'no' bloc in 12 September referendum is still alive among the party constituency. Today, MHP faces a real threshold problem. Unless MHP comes up with long-term strategies according to its history and conditions unique to Turkey, it is impossible for MHP to be a party embracing the whole Turkey. The 12 June elections will be challenging one for MHP that will fundamentally shape MHP's future.

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It is necessary to discuss the BDP by going beyond its current composition and to place in the wider political scene.

## E. THE PEACE AND DEMOCRACY PARTY (BARIŞ VE DEMOKRASI PARTISI-BDP)

By RUŞEN ÇAKIR\*

This chapter deals with the significance of 2011 general elections for the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), its election strategies and possible effects of the election results on the BDP's future. A discussion on the BDP must include the trajectory Kurdish political movement as well as the Kurdish Issue. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the BDP by going beyond its current composition and to place in the wider political scene. What lies behind the emergence of the BDP as a political party is the historical background of the Kurdish Political Movement. The Kurdish Political Movement became effective in legal politics in the beginning of the 1990s.

Having been banned from The Social Democratic People's Party (SHP) because they participated in the international Kurdish Conference held by the Paris Kurdish Institute; seven Kurdish parliamentarians founded the People's Labor Party (HEP) on 7 June 1990. The following year HEP had 22 representatives in the Turkish Grand National Assembly thanks to its coalition with the SHP. However this party was closed down in 1993. Afterwards, Democracy Party (DEP) was founded and members of the HEP joined the new party. The parties were closed by the Constitutional Court one after another because they were claimed to be related to PKK and to damage the unity of the country due to their policies. Following DEP, HADEP (The People's Democracy Party), DEHAP (The Democratic People's Party), DTP (Democratic Society Party) and BDP were founded.

The BDP is the current representative of this tradition, which began with People's Labor Party (HEP) on 7 June 1990. The Legal Kurdish Political Movement is an inseparable part of the Kurdish Political Movement although it is not the decisive actor. The Legal Kurdish Political Movement was generally managed by the illegal (Öcalan and the PKK) and the semi-legal (Democratic Society Congress and its directors) actors. Actors on the legal side failed to openly criticize actors on the illegal side and eventually became ineffective as the representative of the Kurdish Political Movement.

### I. BDP TOWARDS 12 JUNE ELECTIONS

**Democratic Initiative:** AK Party launched the "Kurdish Initiative" in the summer of 2009. Afterwards, it renamed this initiative as "Democratic Initiative" and in the end this initiative turned into "Unity and Fraternity Project." This period completely changed the way the Kurdish question was perceived. As the AK Party defined and decided to come

to terms with the “Kurdish Question,” the Kurdish Political Movement (and of course people around BDP) was concerned about losing its trump card, as its strategies were based on opposition to dismissive and assimilationist state policies. Instead of revising its discourse, the Kurdish Political Movement contributed to problems by trying to lead the process toward a “deadlock.” Even though the Kurdish Political Movement doesn’t blame the state for “assimilation and denial” as it did before, it claims that this new democratic initiative aims to eliminate this movement.

**KCK operations and elimination concerns:** The main reason behind “elimination” concerns are raised by the Kurdish Political Movement is the operations conducted against the PKK’s alleged urban wing, KCK (Koma Ciwaken Kürdistan, Kurdistan Communities Union). Following the 2009 elections, many political party leaders, NGO members, and mayors were arrested under the framework of these operations for allegedly serving as a bridge between the legal and illegal wings of the Kurdish political movement (the PKK and DTP). The state was expected to focus on policies for disarming the PKK, however, these arrests aroused concerns that the state gave into “security” policies. On the other hand, these operations enabled the Kurdish Political Movement to get out of its political crisis. The state failed to break off relations between legal and illegal Kurdish political movements and people in favor of legality and civil politics failed to be effective in these parties. KCK suspects demanded for defense in Kurdish and the court adopted an archaic attitude by refusing this request. Court’s attitude contributed to the Kurdish Political Movement in that it strengthened the political struggle of KCK in the eyes of its base. In brief, these operations will be a trump card for BDP in 12 June elections. As a matter of fact, BDP had already nominated a KCK suspect as an independent candidate.

**Ongoing meetings in İmralı:** State authorities continue meetings with Abdullah Öcalan, which is inconsistent with KCK operations. These two different attitudes of the state indicate that it still doesn’t have a consistent strategy. What will determine this period is the concern about paving the way, facilitating or at least not making difficult the “meetings for solution” with Öcalan. Accordingly, it is possible to state that BDP’s election strategy is based on strengthening Öcalan’s position.

**Civil disobedience actions:** The Kurdish political movement’s civil disobedience actions were inspired by the Arab uprisings and were ordered by Öcalan. Öcalan wants to strengthen his role during his meetings with the state officials. Therefore, Öcalan doesn’t want PKK and BDP to conflict “carelessly” with the state and to give in to the state. It is not possible for the Kurdish Political Movement to be inspired by Arab uprisings. Because opposition in the Arab countries is unable to take part in politics whereas the Kurdish Political Movement can be represented in the parliament even if there is a 10% national threshold and it can also win many municipalities in Southeastern Turkey. Nevertheless, one can conclude that BDP expanded its base thanks to these civil actions even if they didn’t have much media coverage. Moreover, a political party conducted a long-lasting and effective “civilian” campaign for the first time in the history of

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Legal Kurdish Political Movement despite its failures and weak points. If BDP followers learn from the previous experience and bring strong representatives into the parliament, they can deeply influence politics of the Kurdish question.

**Religion Factor:** BDP brought “civil disobedience” actions to the religious arena hence undertook a crucial “card” in the hands of the state. The Kurdish political movements have ignored religious issues up to now despite a large devout Kurdish constituency in the region. Generally the state paved the way for religious groups in order to hinder PKK. Even if the State assumes an identity which appeals to religious groups, it didn’t benefit particularly from this identity in its policy on Kurdish people. In this way, the expected great reunion, “State-Kurdish religious people alliance” could not be achieved. Recently, KSH tried to utilize the “religion card” through “civil disobedience” actions and succeeded in this to some extent. Nevertheless, one can claim that KSH fails to see the reality that religion cannot be a trump card which any political actor can play with easily. If overcoming or at least slowing down rivals and enemies through the religious card had been possible, then Turkey would have eliminated PKK long time ago.

## II. THE BDP’S DEADLOCKS

The BDP has certain deadlocks on its path towards the 12 June elections.

**Difficulty in understanding the change:** The AK Party was not a rival of BDP in South-eastern Turkey only but it also received votes from the electorate of Kurdish origin who had migrated to large cities. BDP fails to interpret the economic, cultural, political and social factors that lie behind the fact that people from all different walks of life support the AK Party and its leader, Mr. Erdoğan. BDP adopted a strategy claiming that the Kurdish initiative launched by the state is only a deception despite the fact that the vast majority of Kurdish people recognize the improvements achieved following the initiative. This strategy is unlikely to succeed. In this context, one can claim that any positive result obtained by Öcalan’s meetings with the state will cause BDP to move into a deadlock.

**Being limited to the PKK base:** BDP followers believe that legal political struggle is not as “old” as the PKK. They claim that they are forced to do politics through the PKK base. Therefore, the PKK base is a test for BDP. It must be noted that being limited to the PKK base isn’t the only problem that the Kurdish Political Movement faces. The Kurdish Political Movement also fails to embrace all of the Kurdish people within its base.

**Not being able to be a party of Turkey:** Since HEP, the Legal Kurdish Political Movement parties believed that they will become a “party of Turkey” by running candidates who are not of Kurdish origin or by building coalitions with parties which aren’t related to the Kurdish nationalism. However, these people and parties proved to be useless. Moreover, BDP representatives tried to address certain economic and social problems in the name of being “the party of Turkey” however failed to get public attention.

**Being stuck in between two public opinions:** The Legal Kurdish Political Movement is pressured to “distinguish itself from the PKK” by the public opinion. The establishment launches closure cases against the Kurdish parties and arrests their representatives. On the other hand, the Kurdish parties face PKK, Öcalan and their supporter, namely the Kurdish public opinion. The PKK and Öcalan believe that these parties owe their existence to PKK and Öcalan. Up to now, the Kurdish parties have only paid attention to their own base and ignored the Turkish public opinion. As a result, the general public’s empathy for the Kurdish people has decreased in time as they perceived the Kurdish political movements too closely aligned with the illegal actors of the Kurdish issue.

**Not being able to institutionalize because of the prohibitions:** The Kurdish parties did not enjoy a long-lasting party life, which is one of the greatest problems of the legal Kurdish movement. The image of the Legal Kurdish Political Movement as a “party cemetery” makes things difficult for every new party. A great number of experienced party members cannot take part in new parties as they are banned from politics. New and inexperienced people manage these parties. As a result, power struggles within the party increase. Moreover, because parties are somehow seen as “temporary,” under the state pressure, the PKK and Öcalan, who are considered “permanent,” have a greater say.

**The PKK oversight:** In the Legal Kurdish Political Movement’s history, no party succeeded in going beyond the PKK base. They failed to adopt independent and autonomous policies. Öcalan and the PKK pressure is the biggest obstacle before the Kurdish parties. Öcalan and the PKK never allowed parliament members to adopt an independent route for the party. They attacked police offices and put an end to the BDP’s civil initiatives such as “back to the people” which emphasized going back to the ballot box to advance the resolution of the Kurdish issue. Experience shows that legal Kurdish parties do not have any independence at all. Because of this pressure by the PKK, other actors prefer to get in touch with the PKK/Öcalan rather than negotiating with the Legal Kurdish Political Movement’s representatives in order to solve problems pertaining to the Kurdish question.

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### III. BDP’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PKK AND ÖCALAN

Even if BDP’s relationship with the PKK and Öcalan is the most crucial problem for BDP, it is evident that BDP cannot simply deny or ignore the PKK influence. That is because not only BDP has a natural relationship with the PKK but its party program is also compatible with the discourse utilized by Öcalan and the PKK. However, certain people in favor of BDP believe that PKK gave up its initial aim to establish an independent Kurdistan and chose to create an autonomous Kurdish region within Turkey. They also claim that they can change many things if they are given the necessary political space. Nevertheless, BDP has a confidence problem: Turkish public opinion loses trust in BDP following every PKK attack. BDP members claim that they are a part of Turkey and that

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they do not seek solutions outside Ankara in order to overcome this confidence issue. However, they also do not have confidence in the system. As such, lack of trust on both sides towards each other hinders the long-term solution and peace.

#### **IV. BDP'S STRATEGIES FOR 12 JUNE**

It is possible to see hints of an election campaign that independent candidates supported by BDP will carry out in "civil disobedience" campaign. Election campaign will mainly consist of demands such as education in mother tongue, release of political prisoners, decreasing the election threshold, and putting an end to military operations against the PKK. Besides, it is understood that BDP's campaign will be in line with Öcalan's "democratic constitutional solution" project. "Democratic constitutional solution" mainly demands from the new parliament to issue a "new civilian constitution" in order to meet the Kurdish demands. BDP will probably not put domestic and external problems other than the Kurdish question onto the agenda and it will not get closer to voters who aren't of Kurdish origin, either. In fact, BDP will not try to win electorate's votes through promises in the upcoming elections. Instead, it will try to convince its own voters to go to the polls and distribute their votes among candidates so that the party can bring into the parliament as many representatives as possible.

#### **V. PROFILES OF THE INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES**

The Labor, Democracy and Freedom bloc under the leadership of BDP supports 61 independent candidates in 39 provinces in 12 June elections. BDP leadership held local primaries in 11 provinces in order to select candidates for nomination and conducted public opinion surveys in other provinces. BDP has difficulty in determining the election districts for running more candidates. Because none of the candidates is resident of the city they represent. If we look at the political profile of 61 candidates, 6 candidates who were arrested in KCK operations draw attention. Şerafettin Elçi, who is known to be close to Mesut Barzani, the leader of IKDP (Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party) that has a different position than the PKK, stands out. Running alternative candidates such as Altan Tan who is known for his Islamist background can advance debates on "unity" within the Kurdish Political Movement. However, these names can only contribute to the Kurdish Political Movement in a "symbolic" sense not by achieving to bring new votes.

#### **VI. INTERVENTION OF SUPREME ELECTION BOARD IN THE ELECTION PERIOD**

The Supreme Election Board (YSK) vetoed only 12 candidates out of thousands by claiming that they were convicted for various reasons. Seven of them were supported



by BDP, however, following their objections, the Supreme Election Board approved candidacies of 6 of them. The vetoed candidates, namely Zana, Dicle, Kürkçü, Kışanak and Tuncel, were among the leading Kurdish candidates. As a matter of fact, as soon as the veto decision was announced, BDP condemned the decision as an act of conspiracy by the state and the Supreme Election Board. A young man, İbrahim Oruç died in the ensuing protests. The Supreme Election Board's decision was criticized by many including the media, the President Abdullah Gül and political parties except MHP. Not only the public opinion but also the other public institutions were dissatisfied with the decision because the Kurdish Political Movement was already in a difficult situation as a result of the national threshold. BDP reacted to the decision of the Supreme Election Board with protests. In the end, the Supreme Election Board first vetoed their candidacies but then had to take a step back. This helped BDP candidates to begin their campaigns in an early period.

## VII. A HISTORICAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE KURDISH POLITICAL MOVEMENT: 12 JUNE ELECTIONS

The Labor, Democracy and Freedom bloc has more powerful and well-known people than it had four years ago. Thus, it will not be surprising that the BDP members form a new group in the Turkish Grand National Assembly with around 30 parliamentarians. For the new assembly to function as a "constituent assembly" for drafting "a new civilian constitution," this group's presence in the parliament will play a crucial role. When the diversity of candidates is considered, it may be difficult for BDP to form a coalition. There are conflicting Kurdish politicians among the candidates. Each has a very different point of view about the Kurdish question. Therefore, it is highly possible that tension will increase when the new constitution is being drafted, which is a very critical process. BDP's attitude towards Öcalan and PKK will determine whether or not BDP will seize the opportunity to contribute to the constitution making process after the upcoming June elections. BDP members will certainly not challenge the PKK and Öcalan, however, if an improvement is to be made during the Öcalan-state meetings, then the influence of PKK will decrease while BDP becomes more effective. Accordingly, the future of BDP and the Kurdish Political Movement doesn't depend only on themselves and the way in which the new assembly is formed on 12 June will be crucial. Nevertheless, the question remains the same: Will Öcalan allow BDP to be on its own after the elections?

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Recently there has been a fundamental change taking place in the Turkish political landscape. Political actors as well as domestic and foreign policy options are undergoing a transformation in the country. The general elections on 22 July 2007 and the constitutional referendum on 12 September 2010 not only crystallized these changes but also indicated what the new orientation might look like. Following the referendum all political parties promised a new constitution. The promise of the new constitution raises expectations from the general elections on 12 June 2011 to build a “new Turkey.” As a result of the debates on the new constitution and the new Turkey, political parties prepared their election manifesto for the 2011 elections according to their 2023 targets. Political parties made their economic and political promises with respect to 2023, that is the centenary of Turkish Republic. People are longing for a new Turkey free from its problems as large scale centenary celebrations are expected to take place in 2023.

Debates on the changing political landscape in the run up to the 2011 elections and the promises for new Constitution in the aftermath of the elections are of critical importance for the future the Turkey. This report provides an up-to-date analysis of how current political parties contribute to debates on political questions and constitutional expectations. The report also shows how political actors in Turkey perceive social and political transformations in this critical period when the fundamental political dynamics of the Republic are undergoing significant changes.

This report consists of English summaries of the analyses written in Turkish for SETA by journalists who are well known experts in their fields. The report focuses on four major political parties in Turkey: The Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi), The Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi), The Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) and The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi).

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