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The Political Agenda of 12 June 2011 General Elections

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ABSTRACT

The political squabbling between 4 major Turkish political parties; AK Party, CHP, MHP and BDP are gradually increasing through the upcoming 12 June 2011 general elections. The heat of the discussions is closely related with the significant role of the upcoming elections. The election results will directly affect the futures of these political parties, the positions of the bureaucratic and political actors, and the public opinion through drafting the new constitution. As a result these parties are struggling to shape the new constitution according to their perspectives and the vital importance of the new constitution increase the importance of the vote percentages and deputy numbers of these parties.

In this respect, this policy brief discusses the political meaning of 12 June 2011 general elections with regards to the future of 4 major political parties (AK Party, CHP, MHP and BDP) entering the elections. In particular, it examines the positions and internal dynamics of political parties in the election process with reference to several historical movements in contemporary Turkish politics.

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INTRODUCTION

Turkey, after a long time, is undertaking elections to build a new future instead of overcoming a crisis situation. April 1999 general elections was held to overcome the political crisis of February 28th process, November 2002 general elections was held to overcome both the February 28th period and the 2001 economic crisis. The general elections of July 2007 were held to end the presidential election crisis. The upcoming June 2011 general elections, however, are going to be held to build a new future for Turkey.

The upcoming elections do not carry the same meaning for all political parties. While AK Parti (AK Party, Justice and Development Party) aims to build a 'new Turkey'¹ in the post-election period through a new civilian constitution, Cumhuriyetçi Halk Partisi (CHP, Republican People's Party) aim is first to preserve its new leading cadre and dynamism of change. Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP, Nationalist Movement Party) is trying to sustain its political existence and Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (BDP, Peace and Democracy Party) wants to emerge as the only politically legitimate representative of the Kurdish people. In other words, CHP, MHP and BDP attribute a limited meaning to these elections while trying to preserve their positions in the political system.

Even though political parties attribute different meanings to the upcoming elections, the current stable political atmosphere is reflected in the parties' deputy candidate lists. Almost every party nominated flexible and pragmatic political names, who can

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1. The approval of constitutional amendment package by 58% vote in 12 September 2010 referendum brought a new concept called "New Turkey". The amendments eliminated the control of the bureaucracy over the elected government and started a process for a new constitution. In this regard, the "new Turkey" refers to a new constitution which will reregulate the relations between bureaucracy and civilian politics on behalf of the civilian politics solve ethnic identity problems and ensure the consolidation of democracy.

The election results will directly affect the futures of the political parties, the positions of the bureaucratic and political actors, and the public opinion in the course of drafting the new constitution.

speak to the center. They are all trying to win support from different parts of the society rather than simply consolidating their own electoral bases. The stability in the current political system ensures that the parties propose long-term projects and promises extending to the next 12 years. In the first days of the election campaigning season, leaders preferred to explain their creative and exciting projects instead of quarreling with one another.

However, this optimistic political environment did not last long prior to the elections. The political and historical importance of the elections increased the tension eventually. PKK left its 25 years strategy of not targeting the political leaders and attacked the election convoy of the Prime Minister Erdoğan. The Supreme Electoral Council's (YSK) made an irrational and inconsistent decision that cancelled the candidacies of 7 independent deputy candidates backed by BDP and stepped back from its decision due to the increased tension and reaction from different parts of the political spectrum. The operations conducted by the security forces, strong statements by the BDP politicians in response, and the political mobilization due to the YSK's decision quickly transformed the political atmosphere in Turkey's southeast into how it was in the 1990s. The strategic release of secret videotapes targeting the MHP leadership prior to the elections led to the resignations of 10 senior MHP deputies and politicians.

The replacement of optimistic political atmosphere with heated debates and political squabbling is closely related with the significant role of the upcoming elections in new Turkey's building process. The election results will directly affect the futures of the political parties, the positions of the bureaucratic and political actors, and the public opinion in the course of drafting the new constitution. All parties are struggling to shape the new constitution according to their perspectives and the vital importance of the new constitution is provoking reactions to affect the election results outside the performance of the political leaders.

This policy brief discusses the political meaning of 12 June 2011 general elections with regards to the future of 4 major political parties (AK Party, CHP, MHP and BDP) entering the elections. In particular, it examines the positions and internal dynamics of political parties in the election process with reference to several historical movements in contemporary Turkish politics.

1. GENERAL VIEW OF JUNE 2011 ELECTIONS

1.1 THE CHANGE IN THE PARLIAMENT

The upcoming elections will radically renew the composition of the current parliament. Each political party in the parliament implemented a significant change in their parliamentary groups for different reasons. AK Party changed 187 of 333 current deputies including 20 names who chose not to run in this election (56% change) to eliminate charges of any exhaustion in its ruling performance. The new leading cadre of CHP

changed 64 names out of 101 current deputies (63% change) as it would be difficult to manage the change process with this parliamentary group under the influence of the former leader Deniz Baykal and Secretary-General Önder Sav. MHP implemented the most minimal change by not nominating 27 of its current 72 deputies (37% change) despite the possibility of remaining under the election threshold or an electoral base crisis similar to the one during the September 12th referendum. BDP, which enters the elections with independent candidates, nominated 14 of its current 23 deputies² (40% change). Overall, 287 deputies in the current parliament are not re-nominated, which is rather a radical change for a stable political system.

1.2 ARRESTED SUSPECTS DEPUTY CANDIDATES

In contrast to previous elections, there is a trend, on the part of the opposition parties, of nominating arrested figures as deputy candidates for the upcoming elections. Widely debated Ergenekon, Balyoz (Sledgehammer) and KCK cases now moved to the election agenda with the nomination of several suspects in these cases. Except for AK Party, almost all political parties nominated suspects of different cases as deputy candidates. CHP nominated two (Mehmet Haberal ve Mustafa Balbay) arrested suspects in the Ergenekon case, MHP nominated one (Engin Alan) arrested suspect in the Balyoz case as deputy candidates. The Labor, Democracy and Freedom Block led by BDP supports six (Hatip Dicle, Selma Irmak, Gülseren Yıldırım, Kemal Aktaş, Faysal Sarıyıldız ve İbrahim Ayhan) arrested suspects in KCK operations as independent candidates. Moreover, Çetin Doğan, an arrested suspect in the Balyoz case as well as Doğu Perinçek, Hasan Atilla Uğur, and M. Deniz Yıldırım arrested suspects in the Ergenekon case became independent candidates from the Republican Union of Force block. Tuncay Özkan who is the chairman of Yeni Parti (YP, New Party) and an arrested suspect in the Ergenekon case, also enters the elections as an independent candidate because YP decided not to run in this elections. Hanefi Avcı, an arrested suspect in the Revolutionary Headquarters case, is an independent candidate without the support of any political party or coalition block.

1.3 UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS TO AFFECT THE ELECTIONS RESULTS

Three significant developments have occurred that are almost certainly going to affect the election results. These developments are the increased tension and conflict in Southeast Anatolia due to PKK attacks and military operations, the Supreme Electoral Council's (YSK) initial rejection and eventual approval of 7 independent candidates supported by BDP, and the release of secret sex tapes of ten senior MHP deputies forcing them to resign. All of these developments have been interpreted as willful "provocations" by various groups intended to influence the outcome of the elections.

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2. In 22 July 2007 general elections, BDP has won 22 seats which later increased to 23 with the participation of independent deputy Ufuk Uras.

The ceasefire period was still in effect, but the encounter of the two sides resulted in several deaths and heightened tension in the region.

1.3.1 Increased Tension and Conflict due to the PKK Attacks and Military Operations

Although PKK declared “ceasefire” period until the general elections, low intensity conflicts occurred when patrolling Turkish military troops came across PKK militants, which in return increased the tension in the Southeast. The first incident involved the killing of a Turkish soldier in Osmaniye by PKK in response to the death of its seven militants in Hatay in the first days of April. Another crisis occurred on April 28th when seven more PKK militants were killed in their encounter with Turkish troops in Tunceli. Around 20 thousand people participated in one militant’s funeral in Hakkari and protested the deaths of PKK militants. Similar protests were held in Diyarbakır with the participation of ten thousand Kurdish people in the funerals of four militants. Several independent BDP deputy candidates from Labor, Democracy and Freedom Block also participated in the protests. The funerals turned into larger protests in a short time causing damage in the streets, shops, and banks. After these incidents, on May 4th, PKK struck one of the police cars in the election convoy of Prime Minister Erdoğan in Kastamonu and killed two police officers. On May 12th, PKK struck a police house and killed two more police officers although the declared ceasefire was still in effect. On May 15th, 12 PKK militants were killed in their encounter with Turkish military troops along the Turkey-Iraq border. The ceasefire period was still in effect, but the encounter of the two sides resulted in several deaths and heightened tension in the region.

1.3.2 The Decision of YSK on Deputy Candidates List

On 18 April 2011, YSK announced that it has rejected the nomination of 12 independent candidates including 7 candidates of the Labor, Democracy and Freedom Block. The cancelation of these candidacies was widely debated in terms of its legality and its political implications. On April 19th and 20th, BDP protested this decision in several cities in Southeastern Turkey and especially in Istanbul. In some of these protests, incidents such as throwing stones, fireworks and Molotov cocktails occurred and many protestors were taken into custody. While these demonstrations and protests accelerated the tension, most of the rejected candidates obtained “restitution of divested rights” documents from the courts on April 19-20 allowing them to reapply to the YSK for reconsideration. On April 21st, YSK declared the outcome of its reconsideration and the candidacy of 7 people (Harun Özcan, Hatip Dicle, Leyla Zana, Mehmet Salih Yıldız, Ertuğrul Kürkçü, Gültan Kışanak, Sebahat Tuncel) were approved while three of them (İsa Gürbüz, Çiçek Otlı, Şerafettin Efe) were rejected. As a result, only the candidacy of İsa Gürbüz from the Labor, Democracy and Freedom Block was rejected and the other two people still being reconsidered are the candidates of this block.

1.3.3 Release of Secret Sex Tapes of Senior MHP Deputies

After the release of secret sex tapes in a blog called *Farklı ülkücülük* (Different Idealism/Nationalism) on 24 April 2011, two deputy candidates and vice-presidents of MHP resigned from their positions in the party. Two more senior MHP members (a vice-pres-

ident and the Istanbul Provincial Head) resigned from the party due to the release of their secret sex tapes on the same blog on 8 May 2011. The same blog announced on May 18th that they had the secret tapes of six other senior MHP members who were deputy candidates of MHP and vice-presidents of Devlet Bahçeli. The blog threatened the party with the release of these videos if these six names along with Devlet Bahçeli did not resign. On May 21st, the blog released a video of one of the vice-presidents and threatened the party with the release of the rest of the videos. As a result, all six senior MHP members and deputy candidates resigned from MHP. In total, 10 deputy candidates of MHP were forced to resign in the election process because of the secret sex tapes scandal. This “strategic” release of the videos prior to the elections was interpreted as a calculated plan to both push MHP votes below the national election threshold of 10% and to effect leadership change in the party. While these interpretations will remain as speculations until the investigations reveal the true story, it is undeniable that this scandal put MHP in a very difficult and defensive position. The true impact of the scandal can only be measured after the elections.

2. POLITICAL PARTIES AND JUNE 12TH GENERAL ELECTIONS

Although there are 27 political parties eligible to run in the upcoming elections, only 15 parties decided to enter the elections and it seems clear that only four parties will enter the parliament because of the national 10% election threshold. Some of the political parties chose various strategies to enter the elections indirectly such as nominating independent candidates in a coalition block or nominating only their leaders as independent candidates or joining the elections under the roof of another political party by building a coalition.

As AK Party and CHP are two parties that are almost certainly going to pass the threshold, their vote percentages and deputy numbers are important for their election success. AK Party's votes will indicate the level of trust in its third government period and the number of its deputies will determine the level of initiative it can assume in drafting the “new constitution”. If AK Party wins 330 seats (qualitative majority), it will feel less pressured by the other political parties in legislation, especially, in making the new constitution. But if it wins less than 330 seats, it will have to build a coalition.

CHP with its new leading cadre is under pressure to increase its votes. Under the former leadership of Baykal, CHP's vote hovered around 20%. Since Kılıçdaroğlu's ascension to party leadership, CHP's priority has been to increase the votes of the party. When Kılıçdaroğlu became the leader in May 2010, the vote of the party was 23% according to the opinion polls. The leadership change increased it to 25% and did not fall under this percentage during the past year. The pressure on the party for the upcoming elections is whether it can increase its votes to 30% and above. The party will be regarded as successful if it wins close to 30% of the votes and unsuccessful if it wins less than 30%. These scenarios will determine the fate of the new leading cadre who is trying to develop new strategies and policies.

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AK Party was established on 14 August 2001 under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan out of the “National Vision” (Milli Görüş) movement following the closure of Fazilet Partisi (FP, Virtue Party) on 22 June 2001 by the Constitutional Court.

MHP has the risk of falling under the national threshold. It will not be a surprise if it passes or falls below the 10% election threshold with a minimum difference. Another crisis for MHP ahead of the elections is the consecutive resignations of ten senior deputies due to the release of secret sex tapes in April and May. This may carry MHP over the threshold by mobilizing its electoral base or may leave the party under the threshold by alienating its conservative base. The result of the elections will indicate the true impact of these “interventions” in politics on the Turkish electorate. It will also show the extent of the political crisis for MHP.

BDP enters the upcoming elections not as a political party but through independent candidates assuming the party will not pass the election threshold. BDP (at the time DTP) went to 2007 general elections through independent candidates as well and won 22 seats to form a party group in the parliament. In June 2011 elections, it is expected that BDP will win more seats through its independent nominees because of several factors. First, BDP has significant experience in running campaigns through independent candidates since the 2007 elections. Second, BDP nominated Şerafettin Elçi and Altan Tan to address conservative-religious Kurdish electorates. Third, it decided to support socialist independent candidates like Ertuğrul Kürkçü, Sırrı Süreyya Önder, and Levent Tüzel especially in Istanbul to get the support of the leftist electorate. Finally, BDP will have a strong hand in heavily Kurdish populated regions like the Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia as AK Party did not nominate strong Kurdish names in these regions. For these reasons, BDP will be in the parliament again after the elections with more seats. However, whether the increased representation of BDP in the parliament will strengthen the legal actors within the Kurdish political movement against illegal actors such as PKK is still uncertain.

2.1 AK PARTY

2.1.1 Historical Background

AK Party was established on 14 August 2001 under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan out of the “National Vision” (Milli Görüş) movement following the closure of Fazilet Partisi (FP, Virtue Party) on 22 June 2001 by the Constitutional Court. As conservative-nationalist sentiments weighed among the leading cadre, the party differentiated itself from the National Vision tradition and positioned itself in the center-right. It ran in 3 November 2002 general elections with the rapid development of its organizational structure at the local level. In the elections, all center-right political parties (DYP, ANAP, DP) were dissolved and AK Party became the ruling party by winning the 34% of the votes and 363 of the 550 seats in the parliament. Abdullah Gül became the Prime Minister of the 58th government as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan could not participate in the general elections as a deputy candidate due to a court decision. After the parliament enacted legislation for Erdoğan with the support of CHP to lift the legal obstacle, he ran in the interim elections from the province of Siirt on 9 March 2003. After his election, Erdoğan became the Prime Minister of the 59th Government on 15 March 2003. In 2007,

AK Party decided to go for early elections because of the Presidential election crisis in the same year and became the first party again on 22 July 2007 general elections by winning 47% of the vote and 341 seats. Now, AK Party is preparing for the general elections on 12 June 2011 and expecting to be the first party for the third time.

2.1.2 Position in Turkish Politics

AK Party entered Turkish political system in 2001 to fill the void for two traditional political positions, center-right and National Vision.³ During the 1990s, many of the political actors became inefficient, as they could not adapt to the transforming Turkey. The center-right political parties ruling Turkey since the beginning of the multiparty era -except for one or two years- lost their public support among many reasons, significantly because they did not respond to the identity demands of the society. Instead, they focused their political activity on services achievements and development. When the center-right tradition lost public support, National Vision empowered by RP (Welfare Party) ascended quickly by responding to the public demands. However, the Welfare Party was hindered by the military-bureaucratic elite which controlled the political power since 1960 in order to preserve the regime. The tension between Welfare Party and the bureaucracy continued throughout the 1990s. The February 28th period ended this tension by removing Welfare Party from power and forcing National Vision to divide itself into several parts.

In short, AK Party is established when center-right and National Vision traditions were in crises and the state-society relations were rapidly deteriorating due to these crises. AK Party became the ruling party in 3 November 2002 general elections 15 months after its establishment by adopting both services-achievements and development policies of the center-right tradition and National Vision's positive approach in responding to various identity demands. The party concentrated on economic stability and growth as well as democratization. It ensured stability throughout the 2000s leaving behind the political crises of the 1990s. Through the harmonization of center-right and National Vision traditions, AK Party also absorbed religious-right tradition that had disintegrated since the establishment of Milli Nizam Partisi (MNP, National Order Party) in 1970.

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3. National Vision is a political position established in 1970 with Milli Nizam Partisi (MNP, National Order Party) by Necmettin Erbakan. Erbakan and his colleagues argued that the current political parties at that time were imposing the ideologies of the West whereas their political ideology was a national vision derived from Turkey. The political parties of this movement were closed down consecutively as they were breaching the secularism principle of the republic. In 1972 Milli Selamet Partisi (MSP, National Salvation Party) is established after the closure of MNP in 1971. The military coup in 12 September 1980 closed down MSP along with other political parties and in 1983 Refah Partisi (RP, Welfare Party) is established. When RP is closed down by the Constitutional Court in 1998, all deputies of the party joined to the Fazilet Partisi (FP, Virtue Party). The movement dissolved with the closure of FP in 2001 and several deputies established Saadet Partisi (FP, Felicity Party) representing the National Vision while other deputies established AK Party which has a different political ideology from the movement. In the current Turkish political system SP still represents the National Vision tradition, while AK Party positions itself at center-right.

AK Party has won landslide victories in all elections it participated in since 2001. It became the first party in two general and two local elections and gathered the majority support in two referendums.

2.1.3 Election Results

	2002 General Elections	2007 General Elections	2004 Local Elections	2009 Local Elections
Votes	10,762,131	16,318,368	9,690,666	12,460,804
%	34.28%	46.47%	40.16%	38.64%
Seats/No. Municipalities	363	341	1750	1442

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- a. **General Elections:** In 2002 general elections, AK Party became the first party by winning 34.28% of the vote and 363 in 550 seats. In the following general elections, it increased its votes to 46.47% vote and became the first party again. However, its seats decreased from 363 to 341 due to the other parties' shares in the parliament. Also in this election, AK Party became the first government party, which increased its votes in consecutive elections.
- b. **Local Elections:** In 2004 local elections, AK Party became the first party by winning 40.16% of the vote and 1750 municipalities. However, in 2009 local elections, its votes decreased to 38.64% for the first time and won 1442 municipalities.
- c. **Referendums:** The 2007 Presidential crisis, which occurred with the candidacy of Abdullah Gül, was solved through AK Party's decision to go for early elections. The 2007 referendum was held to rearrange the terms for presidential elections and general elections. The constitutional amendment package included the election of the president, increasing the term in office to two five-year terms (as opposed to a single 7-year term). Referendum changed the frequency of the general elections by making it every four years instead of five years. The amendment package was approved by 69.1% yes votes in the referendum on 21 October 2007. The amendments in September 2010 referendum addressed the relations between politics and bureaucracy (especially the high judicial bureaucracy) in favor of civilians. The package was approved by 57.88% yes votes despite MHP and CHP opposition and BDP's referendum boycott.

2.1.4 Critical Decisions and Positions

- a. **EU Integration Process and Democratization:** Since 2002, AK Party has pursued an EU-policy for full membership which is seen as a means for democratization and the development of the rule of law in Turkey. Especially during AK Party's first rule of 2002-2007, many reforms were realized decisively to accom-

plish the Copenhagen criteria as well as to set an actual date for candidacy. The EU integration process led AK Party government to initiate many reforms on the promotion of human rights and freedoms, the rule of law, the civilian control over the military. These reforms consolidated the democracy in Turkey. As a result, Turkey was declared a negotiating country in the Brussels Summit of 2004 to start negotiations for full membership in October 2005.

- b. The 2007 Presidential Elections:** AK Party government nominated Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül to be the 11th President of the Turkish Republic on 24 April 2007. Since Abdullah Gül had an “Islamist” past and his wife wore headscarf triggered heated debates on his candidacy and it was argued that he might erode the secular establishment of the republic. The basic rule for the presidential elections was that the candidate who gets the two thirds of the votes (367) in the parliament would be elected. If there were no one elected in the first two rounds, then in the third round, the threshold dropped to simple majority, 276 votes out of 550. The debates turned into a crisis on 27 April 2007 on the first round of elections when the opposition party CHP claimed that there must also be 367 deputies (which is later named as the “367 rule”) present in the parliament to meet the quorum to start the election process. At the night of the same day, the Chief of the General Staff issued a statement called as “27 April e-memorandum” stating the concerns of the military for the presidential elections. CHP appealed to the Constitutional Court for annulment of the first round. Meanwhile, Gül could not be elected on the first two rounds as his votes were below the required 367 votes. On May 1st, the Court cancelled the first round of elections and ruled 9-2 that the two thirds of the deputies should be present in the parliament to meet the quorum. This “367 rule” was actually never brought up in the Parliament before in previous elections. After the Constitutional Court’s ruling, the first round had to be repeated on May 6th. But the opposition party CHP boycotted the elections and the session could not start since the number of deputies present in the parliament did not reach 367. This resulted in the withdrawal of Gül from the elections, and as there was no other candidate, the country went for early general elections on 22 July 2007, in which AK Party became the ruling party by winning 47% of the votes. The new parliament elected Gül as the president with 339 votes on the third round as this time there was quorum issue since the opposition party MHP with 71 seats also participated in the election. Although CHP and its bureaucratic allies have resisted the presidency of Gül because of the “anti-secular threat” he allegedly posed, the broad public support showed that the people disagreed with these elites.
- c. 27 April e-Memorandum:** Before the presidential elections, the Chief of Turkish General Staff General Yaşar Büyükanıt emphasized that the new president should be loyal to the secularism principle of the republic not only in words but also in actions. This statement amounts to an interference of the military in politics and also is a warning to AK Party government that it should not nomi-

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nate a candidate with Islamist roots who could be a threat to the establishing principles of the republic. However, the Prime Minister Erdoğan nominated his close colleague and one of the charter members of the party, Abdullah Gül on 24 April 2007 and the first round of the elections was held on April 27th. The same night, the Chief of Turkish General Staff General Yaşar Büyükanıt issued a very harsh and threatening statement on the official website of Turkish Armed Forces. This was the reason for calling the statement “e-memorandum.” The e-memorandum warned the AK Party government that the military was concerned about Gül’s loyalty to secularism and that the military would not hesitate to “openly demonstrate its position when it becomes necessary.” The following day, the government responded to the military in the same harsh tone. The statement of the government reminded the Turkish Armed Forces that it serves under the civil government’s authority and that it should not intervene in politics. The tough response of the government to the military was the first political reaction of its kind in the Turkish political history, which experienced four military coups. The elections results indicated the public support to the government tough response.

- d. **The New Constitution:** In 2007 general elections, AK Party promised a new constitution, which had been discussed since the 1990s by political parties and civil society organizations. After the elections, the government assigned a committee of six academicians in August 2007 to draft the new constitution. However, the bureaucratic elites and CHP were highly opposed to this draft. When the closure case against AK Party was brought to the Constitutional Court, AK Party postponed the new constitution initiative without ever getting the chance to make the new draft public. Although the closure case was brought right after the passage of the legislation freeing the headscarf in universities through the cooperation of AK Party and MHP, the closure case was an attempt to warn AK Party about its initiative for a new constitution. Thus, AK Party gave up drafting the new constitution.
- e. **Constitutional Amendment to Free Headscarf in Universities:** On 14 January 2008, Prime Minister Erdoğan argued in his speech in Spain that headscarf could not be banned even if some women wear it as a political symbol since political expression would not constitute crime. The next day, MHP leader Bahçeli claimed that headscarf ban in universities should be resolved within a social compromise. Through the end of January, the two parties compromised on the constitutional changes that would lift the headscarf ban in universities. The amendment bill was approved with 411 votes in the parliament and signed by President Gül on February 23rd. However, the Constitutional Court annulled the amendment on June 5th after the opposition parties CHP and DSP’s petition to the court. Opposition parties argued in their petition that the bill was against the non-amendable articles of the Turkish Constitution.
- f. **Party Closure Case:** Following the constitutional amendment attempt in 2008 that would lift the headscarf ban in universities, the Supreme Court Chief Pros-

ecutor filed a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court on 14 March 2008 to close down AK Party claiming that it had become “the focal point of anti-secular activities.” On April 3rd, the Constitutional Court took up the case and accepted the indictment of the Chief Prosecutor, which would close down the party and ban 71 senior AK Party politicians, including Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Gül, from membership in a political party for five years. On 30 July 2008, the Court gave its verdict not to ban AK Party with the qualified majority of the votes (7 out of 11) and issued a warning to cut treasury aid. The encounter with the closure risk of the ruling AK Party, which had 47% support in the elections just eight months ago, increased the tension between the government and the bureaucracy to its highest levels and showed that the political stability in Turkey could easily be disrupted. The decision of the Court that it is not necessary to close the party but it should be careful to prevent itself from being a center of anti-secular activities was interpreted as a serious warning by the high judiciary. This was also a warning against changing the established order through drafting of a new constitution and lifting regulations to wear headscarf in universities.

- g. Democratic Opening:** In July 2009, the ruling AK Party launched a “democratic opening” to solve the centennial identity problem. The initiative was first called “Kurdish opening” focusing on the chronic Kurdish issue and PKK problem in Turkey and later it was called “democratic opening” to address the obstacles before the expression of different religious and ethnic identities such as Alevis, Romans and minorities. Within this framework, for the first time in Turkish history, Kurdish problem was recognized as an issue by the high rank government officials like President, Prime Minister and politicians. Furthermore, this was the start of an initiative to solve this issue through democratization and socio-economic development aside from the “security” approach. All segments of the society widely discussed the Kurdish issue with respect to its political, economic, cultural, social, and psychological aspects. Debates provided a space for talking about the problem as well as the solution and increased the public awareness. For this end, several major steps have been taken like the abolishment of marshal law in the southeastern Turkey, the establishment of state channel broadcasting in Kurdish, legalizing the publications in Kurdish, opening Kurdish classes, allowing political campaigns in Kurdish, and increasing the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) investments. Similarly, a series of workshops to discuss Alevis’ problems were organized with the participation of Alevi dedes, Alevi intellectuals, academicians, politicians, and Sunni intellectuals. An attempt was made to discuss the Alevi issue under the leadership of a state minister and a coordinator assigned by the government. This initiative aimed to bring the problems of Alevis, which had been ignored since the establishment of the republic and were regarded as a taboo, into the agenda of the general public and the state. Also, this attempt ensured the discussion of the issue among Alevi and Sunni communities and increased the social consciousness about Alevis’ problems. The democratic opening fo-

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The amendments included major and minor changes on a wide range of topics, but the discussions mainly focused on the articles aimed at restructuring of the high judiciary, the Constitutional Court and the High Board of Judges and Prosecutors.

cusing on the Kurdish issue as well as on the problems of Alevis and Romans emphasized that the political problems should be solved through democratic means instead of security measures and the Turkish state needs to drop its perception of “internal threats.” The democratic opening process improved relations between different social groups who were previously ignorant of one another’s problems. However, despite these positive developments, the democratic opening has not yet brought about all required legal changes to solve the problems. Many new regulations and legislation are still needed to move forward on these issues. After the June 12th elections, AK Party, which is expected to be the ruling party once again, should continue its democratic opening project through legislation and enactment of legal regulations.

- h. Constitutional Amendment Package:** AK Party introduced a constitutional amendment package including 24 constitution articles and 3 provisional articles on 22 March 2010. The amendments included major and minor changes on a wide range of topics, but the discussions mainly focused on the articles aimed at restructuring of the high judiciary, the Constitutional Court and the High Board of Judges and Prosecutors. Another debated amendment was the elimination of the provisional Article 15, which has prevented the trials of military officers involved in the 1980 coup. After deliberating on the amendments with other political parties and NGOs, the package was brought to the parliament at the end of March. This process continued with the will of AK Party despite the opposition by other parties in the parliament, CHP, MHP and BDP. The opposition was against especially the amendments reorganizing the high judiciary by claiming that the amendments amounted to “court-packing” by AK Party. They charged that AK Party is trying to take over the courts and establish its control over the judiciary system, which would erode the independence of the judiciary. In response to these claims, AK Party argued that the privileged position of the high judiciary had limited the legislation and execution capacities of the governments since 1961 Constitution. According to AK Party, the control of the judiciary over elected government was against the national sovereignty as the members of the high judiciary together with the military elites were annoyed with the democratization of Turkey and took decisions to prevent its government from working. AK Party claimed that these constitutional amendments would eliminate the privileged position of the judiciary and move Turkey to the “supriortiy of law” from the “laws of the superiors”. In the parliament, one of the articles about the party closures was dropped from the package, as it did not reach the required quorum, 330 or more votes. Eventually, the parliament approved the package on May 7th with 336 votes, which was less than the necessary number to adopt the amendments in the parliament, but enough to bring the package to the referendum with the call of the President Gül. After the president’s approval, CHP and DSP appealed to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of the package on May 14th. On July 7th, the Constitutional Court announced its decision rejecting the annulment

of the package completely but annulling only the arrangements related to the selection of judges for the Constitutional Court and the High Board of Judges and Prosecutors. The Court also changed the content of the two constitution articles (Articles 146 and 159) and two related provisional articles (18 and 19). After the approval of the Constitutional Court, the amendment package was brought to the referendum.

- i. **12 September 2010 Referendum:** When the referendum process began, the political parties started their campaigns in a general elections mood. Three opposing parties in the parliament opposed the amendments. While CHP started a “No” campaign for the referendum by arguing that AK Party is trying to take control of the high judiciary, MHP also said “No” claiming that the amendments had a secret agenda serving the divisionist aims of PKK. BDP started a boycott campaign in the Kurdish populated Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia arguing that the package did not include any articles directly related to the solution of the Kurdish issue. In addition to these reasons, these parties opposed the package for the passage of the amendments would benefit AK Party in the general elections to be held within a year. On the other hand, AK Party organized a “Yes” campaign arguing that the amendments would end the tutelage of the judiciary bureaucracy over civilian politics and ensure the democratization of Turkey. It promoted the specific content of the package and asked for “yes” from everyone regardless of whom they vote for in the general elections. The scheduled date of the referendum (12 September 2010) provided AK Party with a psychological argument to present the amendments as a means of “paying back the casualties” of the 12 September 1980 coup and the military regime. Nevertheless, debates around “yes” and “no” led to polarization and heated discussions until the approval of the package with 58% “yes” votes. The result of the referendum indicated that people would support any democratization efforts by AK Party even they do not vote for AK Party in the general elections.
- j. **Economy:** Turkey achieved stability in macroeconomic variables such as capital budget balance, economic growth, and inflation through the reforms started in 2001 and economic policies of AK Party since 2002. Economic policy discipline ensures the security in Turkish economy for international investments and provides economic growth increasing GDP per capita. Also, structural reforms increased the attractiveness of Turkey for foreign direct investments and the multidirectional trade relations including the Far East and the Middle East decreased economic vulnerability. During the 2008 global economic crisis, Turkey was affected much less than the other developed and developing countries. Especially with the reforms instituted for EU membership as part of the accession process, liberalizing the economy and increasing the efficiency contributed to stability in the economy. Turkey, through decisive economic policies, achieved the “60 percent-Maastricht criteria” for public debt stock since 2004. The general economic indicators such as annual inflation rate de-

The result of the referendum indicated that people would support any democratization efforts by AK Party even they do not vote for AK Party in the general elections.

Despite the interpretations of this change as “axis shift”, Turkey actually follows a multidirectional foreign policy by diversifying its western-oriented approach to enhance its regional and global position.

creased from an average of 70.8% for 1993-2002 period to 18.4% in 2004, 9.7 in 2006, 10.1% in 2008 and 6.4% in 2010. The economic growth rate also significantly increased as it was 5.9% in 2003, 7.4% in 2005, 4.5% in 2007, and 8.9% in 2010. For 2011, the economic growth is expected to be 7%.

- k. Foreign Policy:** AK Party brought a visionary change in Turkish foreign policy since its first government in 2002. In the aftermath of the Cold War, when the international political system was restructuring, AK Party introduced a new foreign policy which would make Turkey a global political actor. For this end, AK Party has been following a multidirectional foreign policy. The pro-active foreign policy enriched by Turkey’s historical, cultural, and economic advantages places Turkey at the center and increases its role in regional and global affairs. Especially the Davos crisis in 2009 indicates the new language and priorities of Turkish foreign policy. In accordance with this new language, Turkey worked hard for the peaceful resolution of the disagreement between Iran and the West at first and then voted for “No” for the sanctions against Iran in the United Nations Security Council’s voting. Despite the interpretations of this change as “axis shift”, Turkey actually follows a multidirectional foreign policy by diversifying its western-oriented approach to enhance its regional and global position. This multidirectional foreign policy also includes the revision of the Turkey’s traditional alliance with the West. Hence the main purpose of this visionary change was to enhance Turkey’s place among the Western countries rather than moving away. For this reason Turkey was prioritized the issue of EU integration and instituted significant reforms to meet Copenhagen Criteria. It became a member of the United Nations Security Council and the head of Council of Europe. It also played a critical role in determining the current security strategy of the NATO. Turkey was a mediator in many disputes and conflicts in the Balkans, the Caucasians and the Middle East and its interference in to the crises as a mediator especially preferred by the West. The vision of the current pro-active foreign policy also enhanced the economic development and made Turkey a rising actor.

2.1.5 The Significance of 12 June 2011 General Elections

The significance of the upcoming elections is that the new parliament is going to draft the first civilian Turkish constitution in the multiparty era. All major political parties agree on the need for a new civil constitution. The AK Party government will be the most important agent in the building process of new Turkey and the new civil constitution will be the most important project of the government in this period. The September 2010 referendum results demonstrated Turkey’s will for democratization. In the new political period, AK Party will start a political reconciliation process including all political parties and NGOs to draft a new civil constitution. If AK Party wins 330 seats and over, it will have the qualified majority in the parliament to bring drafted new constitution to the referendum without the support of other parties. If it wins less than 330 seats, it will necessarily rely on other parties in the parliament. For this reason, AK

Party aims to win more than 330 seats to draft the new constitution, which is necessary for the resolution of many chronic structural problems. In its “2023 vision,” it promises long-term projects in many spheres such as economy, democracy, legal system, urbanization, and education for building the new Turkey. AK Party’s votes in the upcoming elections will indicate whether people trust in this 2023 vision.

2.1.6 The Profile of the Parliamentary Candidates

As the ruling AK Party promised to draft a new constitution in the new political period, the party needs to win at least 330 of the 550 seats, which is the quorum to take the new constitution to the referendum without having to build any coalition. For this reason, AK Party maintained its leading cadre in the deputy candidate list for the June 12th general elections. Especially in southeastern Turkey, AK Party did not prefer deputy candidates closely identified with the Kurdish issue. The party avoided candidates who may issue uncomfortable statements for the people in western Turkey. Yet, the party made a significant change in order to keep up with social change by changing 187 of the 333 parliamentarians. This 56% change in the deputy candidates indicates AK Party’s will to refresh its governing cadres after nine-years of ruling period.

2.1.7 The Assessment of the Election Manifesto

AK Party’s election manifesto proposes many long-term projects according to the 2023 Vision. The manifesto is a kind of government program of AK Party as it is almost certainly going to establish its third government after the upcoming elections. In the manifesto, the party considers the problems of the country and related solutions under 5 topics; Developing Democracy, Great Economy, Strong Society, Sustainable Environment and Brand Cities, and Leader Country. The most significant criticism to the manifesto is the space of democratization promises mentioned which is respectively less than the space devoted to the development projects. The emphasis on development projects rather than democratization is interpreted as AK Party is going to be more conservative and leave aside its reformist character. However AK Party responded to these claims by arguing that the new constitution is a significant promise with respect to Turkey’s democratization and prominence of the development projects is due to its government responsibility and 2023 Vision.

AK Party’s election manifesto proposes many long-term projects according to the 2023 Vision. The manifesto is a kind of government program of AK Party as it is almost certainly going to establish its third government after the upcoming elections.

2.2 CHP

2.2.1 Historical Background

After the 1980 military coup banned all political parties, CHP restarted its political activities in 1992 under the leadership of Deniz Baykal. The 1990s were the years of political instability. Between 1991 and 2002, in eleven years, nine coalition governments were established. In its first general elections in 1995, CHP barely passed the 10% election threshold with 10.71% of the vote. But in 1999 general elections, it remained under the threshold with 8.7%. However, in the 2002 general elections, the rise of AK Party with

CHP under the new leadership of Kılıçdaroğlu is searching for a new political language and policies leaving behind Baykal's legacy.

34% of the vote dissolved all center-right parties (DYP, ANAP, FP) and brought MHP under the threshold. This new structuring of the political system also led to the erosion of center-left political party DSP and other leftist parties. CHP, which could not develop a political identity as a remedy in the unstable political atmosphere of the 1990s, rose as an opposition party that guarded the regime and resisted change with 20% of the votes. In the June 2007 general elections, MHP and BDP entered the parliament, but CHP became the main opposition party with 20% of votes against AK Party with 47%.

2.2.2 Position in Turkish Politics

CHP represents the center-left political tradition against the center-right position since the beginning of the multiparty era. It adopted different political agendas in different periods as it was the first political party in Turkey established in 1923. CHP existed in the Turkish political system throughout republic's history except for the ten years interruption after the 1980 coup. While CHP preserved the "state party" identity under the leadership of İsmet İnönü (during the 1950s and 1960s) and it moved away from its close identification with the state under Ecevit's leadership (1970s). Under Baykal's leadership (1990s and 2000s), CHP returned to statist ideology arguing that the regime was in danger. Since Baykal left the leadership to Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu in May 2010, CHP is reverting back to a line similar to that of Ecevit's period.

During his leadership (1992-2010), Baykal transformed CHP to the position of the speaker of the bureaucracy. This was interrupted by democratization efforts and, as a result, the party is deprived of the support by the new societal segments. The party is squeezed to a small part of the society with regards to geography, demography, and culture and could not exceed 20% of the vote in the elections. On the other hand, CHP under the new leadership of Kılıçdaroğlu is searching for a new political language and policies leaving behind Baykal's legacy. The search for a new CHP responding to the democratic demands and responsive to social policies could extend its electoral base to the new segments of the society. CHP may end up being a social democratic center-left political party through this political "soul-searching."

2.2.3 Election Results

	2002 General Elections	2007 General Elections	2004 Local Elections	2009 Local Elections
Votes	6,090,883	7,316,242	4,991,575	7,977,498
%	19.4%	20.84%	20.68%	24.74%
Seats/No. Municipalities	178	112	467	503

- a. **General Elections:** In 2002 general elections, CHP became the second party by winning 19.4% of the votes and 178 seats out of the total 550. In the following 2007 general elections, its vote increased a little as it won 20.84% of the

votes and became the second party again. Its seat number decreased from 178 to 112 as MHP and BDP also received their share of seats in the parliament.

- b. **Local Elections:** In 2004 local elections, CHP became the second party by winning 20.68% of the votes and 467 municipalities. In 2009 local elections, it increased its vote to 24.74% and won 503 municipalities.

2.2.4 Critical Decisions and Positions

- c. **The 2007 Presidential Elections:** CHP under Baykal's leadership chose to oppose no matter what ruling AK Party proposed as Baykal preferred to voice the resistance of the secularist-Kemalist bureaucratic elites instead of developing an independent political strategy. Accordingly it strongly opposed to the presidency of an AK Party candidate with claiming that such a candidate would be a threat to secularism in 2007 presidential elections. CHP boycotted the elections for the presidency of Abdullah Gül (Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time) and petitioned the Constitutional Court for the annulment of the first round arguing that there must be two thirds of the deputies (367 deputies) present in the parliament for quorum. This "367 rule" was a new invention of CHP and never looked for in previous elections. In the meantime, the military issued an e-memorandum and secularist-Kemalist mass protests were held against Gül's presidency. After all these protests, the Constitutional Court interpreted the article in question in favor of CHP's petition and cancelled the first round of the elections with a 9-2 opinion. As AK Party fell short to meet the quorum to repeat the first round, Prime Minister Erdoğan called for early elections on May 10th.
- d. **27 April e-Memorandum:** When the Chief of Turkish General Staff General Yaşar Büyükanıt issued a harsh threatening statement (a memorandum) against the candidacy of Gül because of his "Islamist past" in 27 April 2007, CHP lent its full support. The leader of CHP, Deniz Baykal argued that the statement does not constitute intervention by the military in political issues but "the voice of a constitutional institution (Turkish Armed Forces) clearly mentioning its concerns and complaints about the future of the republic." Baykal also claimed that the presidential elections turned into a crisis because AK Party did not seek any consensus or reconciliation with the opposition parties. He argued that there existed a qualified majority in the parliament for the president's election as well as the good will of the opposition, which AK Party ignored. Baykal mentioned that Turkey was brought to a point where the state institutions had to issue warnings to the government because AK Party's activities.
- e. **Republic Protests:** On 14 April 2007, first of the "Republic Protests" were held by a great majority of secularist-Kemalist people who opposed the presidency of an AK Party candidate because of his "Islamist background." The meetings were organized by the Atatürkist Thought Association and drew hundreds

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of thousands of people. The slogan of mass protests was “We reclaim our republic” and the protesters shouted, “Turkey is secular, will remain secular.” The demonstrators represented a wide range including ordinary people, academicians, journalists, military officers, and members of the opposition parties. The leader of CHP, Deniz Baykal also joined this first rally in order to pressure AK Party in the presidential elections. The second meeting was held in Istanbul on April 29th against the candidacy of Gül. Four more rallies took place in different parts of Turkey in the following days. Retired General Şener Eruygur who was the president of the Atatürkist Thought Association during the republic protests is now an arrested suspect in the Ergenekon case charged with plotting a coup during the 2003-2004 period. This incident indicates that these protests might not be totally civil demonstrations, but a challenge against AK Party from the opposition powers.

- f. **Constitutional Amendment to Free Headscarf in Universities:** AK Party and MHP enacted a bill of constitutional changes to lift the headscarf ban in universities in January 2008. However, CHP challenged the amendment at the Constitutional Court. CHP opposed the bill because it allegedly was against secularism, an opinion the Constitutional Court agreed with on its June 5th decision finding that the new law was against the non-amendable articles of the Turkish Constitution. In October 2010, however, the Higher Education Board (YÖK) issued a notification to the universities ordering them that “students should not be kicked out of the classroom for any reason.” After this notification, universities let students wearing headscarf enter the classroom. The problem was resolved *de facto* without any legal amendments when the opposition parties, especially CHP under the new leadership of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, approached the issue positively and did not bring the issue to the Constitutional Court.
- g. **Constitutional Amendment Package and 12 September 2010 Referendum:** CHP strongly opposed the constitutional amendment package backed by the ruling AK Party by arguing that changes eroded the independence of the high judiciary. In order to prevent its deputies from voting for the amendments, CHP boycotted the vote. However, the package was approved despite CHP’s opposition. The amendment package passed in the parliament the same night as CHP leader Deniz Baykal’s secret sex tape was released leading to Baykal’s resignation. The new leader Kılıçdaroğlu continued to oppose the package and went to the Constitutional Court. When the Constitutional Court did not repeal the package except for two partial annulments, the amendments were brought to a national referendum. Then, CHP launched a “No” campaign for the referendum. However, Kılıçdaroğlu demonstrated his difference from Baykal by propagating against AK Party’s policies while discussing the content of the package, albeit briefly. His campaign increased significantly the “no” votes to 42%, but could not prevent the approval of the amendments.
- h. **New Leader, ‘New CHP’:** Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu was elected with the votes of an overwhelming majority of the delegates in the party congress of 22 May. He

also received the support of CHP General-Secretary Önder Sav, who had been involved in politics since the 1950s and served as the secretary of CHP since 2000. This leadership change was interpreted as the “plot of shady circles” that were not satisfied with CHP’s inability to counter AK Party. Kılıçdaroğlu used this opportunity to restructure the party promising to remove the “status quo party” label from CHP through new policies and a new agenda. On December 18th, the delegates approved Kılıçdaroğlu’s new party assembly members excluding the cadres of Baykal and Sav. During the leadership change, there was a struggle between the change and status quo supporters within CHP. As the new party members selected by Kılıçdaroğlu were elected on the December 18th party convention, the old practices of Baykal and Sav were dissolved to a large extent and “change” supporters owned the party. Also, in the current deputy candidates list for the upcoming elections, the new leading cadre of CHP nominated new names to support CHP’s new political position. This structure will be consolidated after June 12th general elections as many current deputies supporting Baykal and Sav are not nominated. This CHP promises change and reform differently than Baykal’s era of status quo. Despite resistance, the party proceeds successfully towards new policies and a new agenda. The change in the deputy candidate list and the leading cadre in addition to new statements by Kılıçdaroğlu on political and economic issues indicate that the “new CHP” is about to emerge.

Kılıçdaroğlu took the risk of transforming the party in order to change CHP’s elitist voice by visiting almost every town and city in the country. CHP’s success in this election will permanently consolidate this transformation in the party.

2.2.5 The Significance of the June 12th General Elections

The ‘new CHP’ and its new leading cadre will be tested in the June 12th general elections. It is important for the new CHP to exceed 20% and get support not only from the coastal provinces in the west of the country, but from all over Turkey. This would mean that the electorate appreciates the policies and promises of the new CHP and its language of “change” rather than the language of “status quo”. Within this context, the leadership of Kılıçdaroğlu compared to Baykal will also be tested. In Baykal’s era, the support of the secularist-Kemalist electorate resulted in the party’s mere opposition to every policy, thus alienating itself from the rest of the society. Kılıçdaroğlu took the risk of transforming the party in order to change CHP’s elitist voice by visiting almost every town and city in the country. CHP’s success in this election will permanently consolidate this transformation in the party. Another significance of the upcoming elections is that the new parliament is going to draft the first civilian Turkish constitution of the multiparty era. The approach of CHP to the new constitution issue seems very positive and firm. For this reason, in the new political period, CHP will support AK Party in this effort and contribute to the democratization process.

2.2.6 The Profile of the Parliamentary Candidates

The new leader Kılıçdaroğlu did not nominate around 63% of the current deputies appointed by the former leader Deniz Baykal and the former Secretary-General Önder Sav for the upcoming elections. This 63% change includes the candidacy of the newly elected party assembly members selected by Kılıçdaroğlu. Kılıçdaroğlu and his new

Some argue that CHP demonstrates a certain attitude to eliminate the old CHP cadre but still hesitates to change the old policies fundamentally. Others argue that CHP is trying to expand its position to address all segments of the society.

leading cadre consolidated their power in the party to prevent any opposition through such a radical change. New names outside the party such as Sezgin Tanrikulu, Muhammed Çakmak, Sencer Ayata, and Binnaz Toprak contribute to dynamism of change. This process seems natural to strengthen the new identity of the party. On the other hand, among the new candidates, there are several names known for their center-right orientation and for their involvement in the Ergenekon case. For instance, candidates Mehmet Haberal and Sinan Aygün are suspects in the Ergenekon case and are still on trial. These figures are going to be elected as they are placed at the top of the candidates list. However, the strategy of nominating these names raises questions. Some argue that CHP demonstrates a certain attitude to eliminate the old CHP cadre but still hesitates to change the old policies fundamentally. Others argue that CHP is trying to expand its position to address all segments of the society.

2.2.7 The Assessment of the Election Manifesto

The election manifesto of CHP is a comprehensive declaration of broad long-term promises including the development of democracy and economy, introduction of new social and public policies, urbanization and foreign policy. The manifesto introduces the new CHP through its approach to a new constitution in which they will contribute by promoting certain principles like freedom, equality, social justice, democracy, and secularism. In economy, the party aims to realize social justice and equal distribution of wealth through economic growth spreading to all sectors without spoiling the social balances. Also, the emphases on social policies and public services point out the social democratic orientation of CHP. These aspects of the election manifesto reveal important signs about the political position of the new CHP. This manifesto indicates that CHP had replaced its old-style policymaking with a new, progressive and, responsive political rhetoric. The projects of social policy and public services take a prominent part in the manifesto. However, electorates responsive to these comprehensive public and social policies have concerns and suspicions about the financing of these promises.

2.3 MHP

2.3.1 Historical Background

The 1980 military coup banned from politics MHP along with other parties. Its leaders were accused of “using force to alter the constitutional order” and of “forming an armed group.” The trials were huge disappointment for MHP because they had “fought for the state” against the “communist threat.” The aggressive approach of the military regime to MHP disturbed nationalists, and as a result, the party distanced itself from the state. The party leader Alpaslan Türkeş was released from prison in 1987 with the referendum removing the ban on political activity of pre-1980 political figures. However, the party was struggling with ideological dissolution and hence remained under the 10% election threshold by winning only 2.9% of the vote in 1987 general elections. This defeat was due to the disintegration of the party since the military coup and the party urgently needed an ideological base to recover. For this reason, the party identified

its ideology with the so-called “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” and became stronger with the participation of the old “idealists.” This ideological refresh ensured MHP’s success in 1991 general elections. MHP built a coalition with RP and İslahatçı Demokrasi Partisi (IDP, Reformist Democracy Party) and won 19 seats in the parliament. During the 1990s, the nationalist sentiment of MHP became significant especially in its position in the fight against terrorism. While MHP was fighting against communism before 1980, in the post-1980 period, it formulated its ideology in opposition to PKK. The leader Türkeş frankly stated, “they are ready with all means to eliminate PKK terrorism in southeastern Turkey.” In 1995 general elections, MHP remained under the threshold and Devlet Bahçeli became the new leader of the party in 1997 when Türkeş died. Bahçeli fixed the party image that was closely identified with violence and increased MHP’s urban votes. The capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan before the 1999 elections accelerated nationalism and this conjuncture sharpened the statements of Devlet Bahçeli. He increased party’s votes remarkably in 1999 elections by winning the highest number of votes in the party history (18%) and expanded the traditional electoral base from Central Anatolia towards coastal regions. This success made MHP a partner in the coalition government with other leading parties Demokratik Sol Parti (DSP, Democratic Left Party) and Anavatan Partisi (ANAP, Motherland Party) in 1999-2002. However, the limitations of the coalition government prevented MHP from realizing its promises and it failed in 2002 general elections. MHP, which passed the election threshold in 2007 general elections, now has the risk of remaining under the threshold in the upcoming elections.

MHP, which passed the election threshold in 2007 general elections, now has the risk of remaining under the threshold in the upcoming elections.

2.3.2 Position in Turkish Politics

MHP is a Turkish nationalist party. The main debate on its nationalism is the place of this ideology in state-society relations. Before the 1980 coup, MHP adopted a nationalist political position prioritizing the state and fought against communism in accordance with the state’s security perspective. However, after 1990, it followed a nationalist political agenda prioritizing the society. The arrests of MHP executives and local cadres after the 1980 coup led MHP to revise its nationalist ideology, and therefore, the party turned its face to the society. This change also transformed MHP’s relationship with the use of violence. While MHP became a part of the street battles before 1980, after 1980, it stayed away from violence. While MHP in the pre-1980 period correlated nationalism with anti-communism, in the post-1980 period, it formed its nationalism in relation to the disintegration and secessionism of PKK. Especially Devlet Bahçeli, who became the party leader in 1997, spent a significant effort to eliminate the belligerent image of MHP in public and centralized the party’s movement. In this period, it gathered the support of conservative-nationalist (idealists/ülkücü) people due to its moderate position and because of the tension between the RP and the military-bureaucratic elite.

However, MHP has faced the danger of losing its conservative electorate to the ruling AK Party since 2002. In order to overcome this crisis, it has begun to search for a new electoral base and started to address the secularist-nationalist (ulusalçı) people in Western Anatolia. People who were not pleased with AK Party and CHP for various

Today, MHP relies on two culturally and politically different electorate profiles, which are opposite with regards to conservatism and secularism but parallel on nationalism

reasons and had a reactionary nationalism because of the heavy Kurdish immigration to their region helped MHP to overcome this crisis. MHP substituted its former conservative-nationalist electorate with its new secularist-nationalist electorate in western Anatolia. Today, MHP relies on two culturally and politically different electorate profiles, which are opposite with regards to conservatism and secularism but parallel on nationalism. Because of this dualism, MHP adopts a redundant nationalism and moves away from conservatism.

2.3.3 Election Results

	2002 General Elections	2007 General Elections	2004 Local Elections	2009 Local Elections
Votes	2,619,450	5,005,587	2,444,407	5,318,532
%	8.34%	14.26%	10.13%	16.49%
Seats/No. Municipalities	Remained under the threshold	71	247	483

- a. **General Elections:** In 2002 general elections, MHP became the fourth party by winning 8.34% of the vote and remained under the 10% election threshold. In the following 2007 general elections, it passed the threshold with 14.26% of the votes and became the third party after AK Party and CHP, winning 71 seats out of 550.
- b. **Local Elections:** In 2004 local elections, MHP became the third party by winning 10.13% and 247 municipalities and in 2009 local elections it increased its votes to 16.49% and won 483 municipalities.

2.3.4 Critical Decisions and Positions

- c. **Early Election on 3 November 2002:** During the European Union accession process, ANAP and MHP strictly disagreed on several aspects of the Copenhagen Criteria especially on legalizing certain rights such as abolishing capital punishment, education, and broadcasting in one's mother tongue. While this disagreement created tension in the country, the reactions to the illness of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit which forced him to resign increased this tension. As the coalition government became inefficient, MHP leader Bahçeli proposed early elections in June 2002. Despite the opposition of coalition partner DSP, Turkish Grand National Assembly decided to go to early elections on 3 November 2002. However, the results of the elections were far from expected. All former parties remained under the election threshold and several of them (DSP, DYP, ANAP) were dissolved. Only two parties, AK Party and CHP entered the parliament. MHP, which insisted on early elections, did not predict the 8.34% votes. In fact, MHP's votes decreased because of its position on the coalition

government for preserving the status quo and opposing the change, which led to the shift of conservative electorates in Central Anatolia to AK Party. On the other hand, the dissolution of center-right parties except for MHP was a consolation for the party indicating that it still had an electoral base.

- d. The 2007 Presidential Elections:** During the first stage of presidential elections, which led to the legislation of “367 rule” (the quorum in the parliament to hold the election), MHP was not present in the parliament. After the June 2007 elections, MHP entered the parliament by winning 14.26% of the votes and took a positive stand in the second stage of the presidential elections. While CHP boycotted the elections, in the new parliament after the elections, MHP did not adopt this strategy against AK Party. It participated in the national assembly with all its deputies, but voted for its own presidential candidate. This way, MHP prevented a new presidential election crisis in the new period. Thus, MHP indicated that in this period it aims to be a part of the solution and progress in contrast to its position in the coalition government period.
- e. Constitutional Amendment to Free Headscarf in Universities:** Through the end of January 2008, the parliamentary groups of AK Party and MHP collaborated on constitutional amendments to lift the headscarf ban in universities. Although the amendment approved with the qualified majority (411 votes) in the parliament, the Constitutional Court annulled the changes on June 5th as a result of the petition of CHP. Although the issue is not resolved with the initiative of MHP, its positive attitude attracted attention of the conservatives and liberals, and decreased the political tension around this ban.
- f. Democratic Opening:** MHP strongly opposed to the “opening project” proposed by AK Party in July 2009. MHP argued that the project was the imposition of the external powers and the current process would eventually lead to the disintegration of the country by legitimizing the existence of PKK. MHP aimed to unite its dual electoral base, conservative electorate in Central Anatolia, and secular electorate in Western Anatolia on nationalism through such a strong opposition. This stance rejected the distinction between PKK and Kurdish issue. While the General Staff claimed that Kurdish issue should be solved through economically, culturally, socially and psychologically developed policies besides security measures, MHP rejected all options but the armed struggle against PKK. PKK attacks to sabotage the democratic opening also contributed to the strong opposition by MHP.
- g. Constitutional Amendment Package and 12 September 2010 Referendum:** Through the end of the 1990s, the electorates of MHP widened from Central Anatolia to coastal regions by attracting secularist-nationalists. This strategy increased its vote potential, but the different expectations of its traditional and new electorates; conservative-nationalist and secularist-nationalists forced MHP to address both bases. As a matter of fact, the 12 September

MHP argued that the democratic opening was the imposition of the external powers and the current process would eventually lead to the disintegration of the country by legitimizing the existence of PKK.

2010 referendum results show the explicit divergence between MHP's dual electorate. In the parliament's vote on the package and in the referendum process, MHP chose to adopt "no" campaign supported by secularist-nationalists in coastal regions arguing that AK Party attempted to establish its control over the high judiciary. On the other hand, the conservative-nationalists in Central Anatolia voted "yes" supporting AK Party.

The significance of the upcoming elections for MHP is that it will try to win back the votes of conservative-nationalists who preferred to support ruling AK Party's "yes" campaign in the 12 September referendum.

2.3.5 The Significance of the June 2011 General Elections

The significance of the upcoming elections for MHP is that it will try to win back the votes of conservative-nationalists who preferred to support ruling AK Party's "yes" campaign in the 12 September referendum. The referendum result demonstrated that MHP had lost most of its electorates in Central Anatolia and received votes from secularist-nationalists in coastal regions. This ideological dissolution revealed the tension in the party between the conservative-nationalists and secularist-nationalists. Since 2002, AK Party gradually received votes from MHP's conservative electorates. As MHP has been losing its electoral base in Central Anatolia, it leaned towards electorates in the west who were dissatisfied with the policies of CHP's former leader Baykal. This strategy was successful during the Baykal era, but now the party has the risk of losing these votes due to the dynamism and enthusiasm of Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership. MHP's votes in coastal regions are not stable because the leadership change in CHP may shift these votes back to CHP. Moreover, this situation creates the threshold problem for MHP if idealists vote for AK Party as happened in the last referendum and if secularist-nationalists impressed by Kılıçdaroğlu vote for CHP. Remaining under the threshold would start a chain reaction causing a change in party leadership. The forced change among the party's leading members has already started with the release of the secret sex tapes of ten major politicians. Ten senior MHP politicians had to resign as a result of this scandal. Release of these secret sex tapes ahead of the elections is certainly a plot to erode the votes of MHP. The election results will show the true effects of these tapes and the tension within the party.

2.3.6 The Profile of Parliamentary Candidates

The deputy candidates list is important for MHP as it faces the danger of remaining under the 10% election threshold. The 12 September 2010 referendum results indicated that there is a divergence between the idealists and the secularist-nationalists. The dilemma for MHP is to manage these two differentiated electoral groups without losing substantial votes from either group. The deputy candidates list is expected to solve this dilemma, but the candidacies of the former center-right political figures and the Ergenekon suspect Engin Alan may prove disturbing for the idealists, the core constituency in the party. The partition in MHP actually requires a change or a shift in the

leading cadre to win back the lost idealist electorates, but the leader Bahçeli continues to ignore this problem. The limited change (37%) he made in the deputy candidates list reveals this blindness to such a central problem.

2.3.7 The Assessment of the Election Manifesto

The election manifesto of MHP reveals the discontent of the party with the current system and specifies the policies that will reshape the order step by step. Through a 2023 Vision, which is the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the first government era of 2011-2014 is the reparation period; the second government era 2014-2018 is the development, unification, and leaping stage; the third government 2018-2023 period is the phase that Turkey will be the leader country. This long-term vision indicates that MHP adopts a positive political rhetoric in comparison with the earlier elections to cope with the achievements of ruling AK Party. On the other hand, nationalist tone of the manifesto and frequent emphases on the national identity, national unity, nation state, and national consciousness disregard the heterogenous structure of the society by putting Turkish identity forward as a supra-identity. All long-term projects and promises end with the aim of national solidarity and unity. Although this final end is the ultimate goal for a nation state, it brings the danger of ignoring the claims of different cultural groups instead of proposing a democratic solution for the Kurdish problem or satisfying the demands of Alevi groups. Nevertheless, the effort of such a nationalistic party to unite all segments of the society under an umbrella identity rather than discriminating against differences may be positive for the release of political tension in Turkey.

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2.4 BDP

2.4.1 Historical Background

Seven Kurdish deputies established Halkın Emek Partisi (HEP, People's Labor Party) in 1990 after their expulsion from Sosyaldemokrat Halk Partisi (SHP, Social Democratic People's Party) because of their participation in a Kurdish conference in Paris. This step was the beginning of the legal Kurdish political movement aside from the illegal PKK. In 1991 elections, they won 22 deputies in the parliament through a coalition with SHP. However, one of the party deputies, Leyla Zana took the oath in Kurdish during the opening ceremony of the Turkish Grand General Assembly leading to the closure of the party in 1993. Right after the closure, all the deputies of HEP joined the newly established Demokrasi Partisi (DEP, Democratic Party). Although these two parties were legal and had deputies legally elected, their pro-Kurdish legal activities and statements favoring PKK increased suspicions about the legality of their policies. In 1994, DEP was closed down by the Constitutional Court and seven deputies were arrested and their immunities were removed. The closure of DEP was followed by the establishment of a



BDP contributes to the democratization process within limited perspective and ignores other issues if they have no direct relations with the Kurdish problem.

new party, Halkın Demokrasi Partisi (HADEP, People's Democracy Party) in 1994. This party had the longest existence, but shared the same faith in 2003 with former parties. After the closure of HADEP by the Constitutional Court, legal Kurdish political movement was transferred to Demokratik Halk Partisi (DEHAP, Democratic People's Party) in the same year. At the same time, another closure case against DEHAP was opened, and the movement established Demokratik Toplum Partisi (DTP, Democratic Society Party) in 2005 instead of waiting for the case result. The movement had failed in all general elections, 1995, 1999, and 2002, as they could not pass the 10% election threshold with the exception of the 2007 general elections in which they participated not as a political party but through independent candidates to overcome the threshold obstacle. As a result, DTP won 22 seats in the parliament in the 2007 general elections. As the Supreme Court Chief Prosecutor opened a closure case against DTP in 2007, the movement established Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (BDP, Peace and Democracy Party) in 2008 because of the high possibility of the closure of DTP, which was later closed down in 2009. The legal Kurdish political movement currently continues its activities under BDP since the closure of DTP.

2.4.2 Position in Turkish Politics

BDP is the current representative of the legal Kurdish political movement, which has been arguing that the state ignored the reality of Kurds and tried to assimilate the Kurdish people. In general, BDP prioritized the political demands and problems of Kurds by subordinating other problems of Turkey, although it adopted a socialist vocabulary. According to the state and Turkish people's perspectives, the PKK-BDP relationship is the most significant dynamic that determines the political position and statements of BDP. The party largely depends on the Kurdish electoral base mobilized by PKK and the party strategies are not autonomous from this illegal organization. The PKK influence over the party prevents BDP from forming independent policies and from distancing itself from violence. This situation creates a dualism for BDP; while PKK influence guarantees a certain electoral base for the party, it also prevents it from enlarging its electoral base through addressing different segments of the society. Most of the conservative-religious Kurdish people do not vote for BDP because of the violent attacks by and the strongly secularist structure of PKK. Another handicap for BDP is its limited ethnic representation in a certain region as it only deals with the Kurdish issue. Because BDP does not discuss any other issue, it focuses on only the Kurdish problem in Turkey's democratization. It ignores, for instance, the developments in civil-military and judiciary-politics relations. Therefore, BDP contributes to the democratization process within this limited perspective and ignores other issues if they have no direct relations with the Kurdish problem. This limited perspective led BDP to adopt the "boycott" strategy in the 12 September referendum. Eventually, BDP could not broaden its electoral base due to its significant ties with PKK and its political position focusing only on the Kurdish issue.

2.4.3 Election Results

	2002 General Elections	2007 General Elections	2004 Local Elections	2009 Local Elections
Votes	1,933,680	1,656,649	1,136,679	1,640,165
%	6.14%	4.73%	4.71%	5.08%
Seats/No. Municipalities	Remained under the election threshold	22	64	96

- a. **General Elections:** The legal Kurdish political movement entered the 2002 general elections with DEHAP by forming a coalition with Emek Partisi (EMEP, Labor Party) and SHP and remained under the election threshold with 6.14% of the votes. In 2007, the movement entered the elections through independent candidates of DTP and won 22 seats out of 550 in the parliament.
- b. **Local Elections:** In 2004 local elections, DEHAP established a coalition with SHP and won 64 municipalities with 4.71% of the votes. However, in 2009 local elections, DTP increased its vote to 5.08% and won 96 municipalities.

2.4.4 Critical Decisions and Positions

- c. **The Importance of Local Elections:** The political parties of the legal Kurdish political movement have never passed the 10% election threshold as they received votes only from heavily Kurdish-populated areas in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. This electorate profile together with the pro-Kurdish statements of party politicians prevented these parties from becoming a party receiving votes from all over the country. Since these parties did not represent their electorates in the parliament, the local municipalities became significant in their access to people. In time, the movement won more municipalities ensuring to provide services and carry out their political mission. For this reason, the policies and activities of the Kurdish municipalities and mayors are more significant than the deputies in the parliament since they have political weight in the region over Kurdish people and politics. BDP, through its municipalities in southeastern Turkey, provides significant financial support and space for the movement. At the same time, it has the opportunity to create a sense of belonging to the Kurdish nation through various cultural activities. Even though these BDP municipalities are criticized because of their inefficient performance in providing services, they successfully increased BDP's votes and consolidated its electoral base with intense political-cultural activities.
- d. **Independent DTP Candidates in the Parliament in 2007:** Since the legal Kurdish political movement could not pass the election threshold in 1995, 1999 and 2002 general elections, DTP adopted a strategy of entering the 2007 general elections via independent candidates instead of as a political party. DTP hoped to overcome the 10% election threshold and win certain number of seats from the heavily Kurdish-populated regions with this strategy. In the

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election process, the candidates resigned from DTP and joined the elections as independent candidates supported by the Kurdish political movement. After the elections, 22 independent candidates formed the DTP group in the parliament. The existence of BDP in the parliament created an opportunity to discuss the Kurdish issue outside the shadow of PKK violence. But party's dependency on PKK prevented it from developing a peaceful solution. Nevertheless, BDP fulfills a major space by representing two million voters in the political arena. Although BDP could not formulate a policy independent of PKK, the openness of civilian politics to the Kurdish political movement is a value in itself and a significant alternative for violence.

- e. **Democratic Opening and the PKK Attacks:** Kurdish political movement built its political agenda around state's denial and assimilation policy of Kurdish identity. For this reason, the "democratic opening" project faced high resistance of PKK and the legal Kurdish political movement (BDP) as they concerned that they remained behind AK Party's game as AK Party took an important step for the resolution of the problem. In order to undermine the democratic opening, PKK increased its violent attacks on the military's guardhouses in southeastern Anatolia. Dozens of soldier deaths increased public suspicion about the democratic opening. DTP politicians did not support the project since success of the opening would derogate their initial political trump. If the Kurdish people in the region voted for AK Party due to improvements in their social and cultural rights, the political importance of the DTP in the region would be diminished. Therefore, DTP chose to exaggerate the limitations and mistakes of the democratic opening and argued that the real objective of the opening was to dispose of the Kurdish political movement. While PKK was increasing the tension in the country with severe attacks, the position of DTP eroded the pace of the opening. Now, the democratic opening seems to have lost pace and any step forward is reserved for the new parliament to take after the 12 June general elections.
- f. **The KCK Operations:** There are contradicting views on the KCK about what it is and what it does. According to several analysts, KCK, even though it is certainly connected to the PKK, should be tolerated as it interposes between BDP and PKK and may help to disarm PKK. For others, KCK functions in the cities as a branch of PKK in order to control civilian politics in accordance with PKK's orders. In other words, some think that KCK is a step to civilianize PKK while others argue that KCK is a PKK formulation to control civilian politics (BDP). The Police adopted the second argument, initiated several operations against KCK members at the end of 2009. The arrests of many active Kurdish politicians from BDP and former Kurdish political parties caused heated discussions. In regards to the arrests of these politicians, BDP argued that the state did not dispose of the security perspective just yet. The party claimed that there is no further step of democratic opening and the initiative had ended. These trials indicated that there were still two perspectives within the state establishment on the Kurdish problem. On the one hand, the ruling AK Party started a demo-

cratic opening project to solve the Kurdish question. On the other hand, many Kurdish activists, members of civil society organizations, and several mayors were arrested due to accusations of building bridges between the legal Kurdish political movement (BDP) and the illegal Kurdish movement (PKK). During the trials, another crisis occurred as defendants insisted on testifying in Kurdish and the court rejected this demand arguing that the defendants knew how to speak in Turkish. The operations against KCK members and detentions became, in a short time, a political case by shifting from its legal framework. The case is still in a deadlock as defendants refuse to speak in Turkish and the court still insists on rejecting their testimony in Kurdish.

- g. **Interviews with Öcalan and PKK's Ceasefire:** Although the democratic opening slowed down due to the reactions, the meetings between certain state officials and Öcalan in İmralı prison are still continuing. Even this is a controversial situation considering the closure of DTP and KCK operations. The state keeps talking with Öcalan in order to reach PKK and have at least a minimum control in its activities. As a result of these meetings, PKK declared "ceasefire" in August 2010 until the September 12th referendum. Öcalan, who is still the leader of PKK despite being in prison, finds this state initiative constructive to disarm PKK and solve the Kurdish question peacefully. After extending the inaction period for one more month, on 31 October 2010, PKK announced it had extended the inaction period until the June 2011 general elections.
- h. **Constitutional Amendment Package and 12 September 2010 Referendum:** BDP did not support the constitutional amendments package arguing that the amendments did not include any articles directly related to the solution of the Kurdish issue. In the parliamentary vote, the article that would prevent party closures was dropped from the package, which would benefit BDP the most. BDP did not participate in the vote and continued its opposition to the amendments during the referendum process. Although the military and bureaucratic elite contributed to the inveteracy of the Kurdish issue, BDP did not support the amendments that would strengthen civilian politics and weaken such elites. The party adopted a "boycott" strategy as a third option to differentiate itself from other opposing parties CHP and MHP in order to keep its electorate away from voting "yes". This strategy was a message to the ruling AK Party that BDP is a powerful actor for the Kurds and the Kurdish Question is the primary problem of Turkey, not part of other democratic amendments. As a result, in several heavily Kurdish-populated areas, participation in the referendum vote was below 50%, while in others, it was higher. This strategy indicated that BDP can control its electoral base. But it also demonstrated that BDP would not support reforms that are not directly related to interests of its electorate even if the amendments are for the democratization of Turkey in general.
- i. **Democratic Autonomy Discussions:** While the discussions on the democratic opening, KCK operations, PKK attacks and the Kurdish problem continue, a debate started with the declaration of democratic autonomy proposal at the

The referendum demonstrated that BDP would not support reforms that are not directly related to interests of its electorate even if the amendments are for the democratization of Turkey in general.



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end of the Democratic Society Congress (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi, DTK) on 18-19 December 2010 with the participation of several scholars, academicians, journalists and members of civil society organizations. The declaration argued for the autonomy of Turkey's "Kurdistan" region and the adoption of two official languages (Kurdish and Turkish) in the region. The discussion of several demands like a separate flag, a separate parliament, separate security forces, a separate education system together with supporting statements by BDP deputies disturbed the Turkish public.

- j. **Civil Disobedience Demonstrations:** Inspired by the current rebellions in the Middle East, BDP started civil disobedience demonstrations in the South-eastern Anatolia in April 2011 in order to protest the inattention of the state, by the order of Öcalan. BDP set up tents in regions where it received strong support and organized sit-down strikes. The party also performed the Muslim prayer on the holy day of Friday outside the mosques arguing that the state uses the Muslim prayer and other rituals to assimilate the Kurdish people. This was a strategy to address religious Kurds who had been alienated because of the secular policies of the legal Kurdish political movement and PKK. They calculated that the Kurdish people who are religious may more easily accept PKK and BDP through these activities. These demonstrations are significant to demonstrate the power of BDP and PKK in the region among the Kurdish people. This is also a trump card for Öcalan showing his control over the Kurdish people in certain areas to strengthen his hand in the negotiations with the state. This mobilization of Kurdish people in the Southeastern Anatolia started the election campaign of BDP earlier and reinforced its electorate base in the region. Consequently, civil disobedience demonstrations are a new and efficient tool of the movement to ensure the horizontal enlargement of the base. This new policy may end violence if it continues to be an alternative to armed struggle and opens a place for peaceful struggle.

2.4.5 The Significance of June 2011 General Elections

The result of the elections will indicate whether BDP is the ultimate representative of the Kurdish people. Since AK Party wins more votes of Kurdish people than BDP, BDP does not seem to be the only representative of Kurds. If BDP wins more votes than AK Party in the upcoming elections, it will become the strongest representative of Kurdish people proving that any solution initiative excluding BDP would not work. Considering the fact that the new parliament after the elections will draft a new constitution, BDP politicians will have a historical chance to join in this democratization process and discuss the demands of the Kurdish people.. The level of their constructive attitude will determine their contribution on behalf of their electorate. Nevertheless, it is not expected that they will act independently of PKK or Öcalan, however, they may have a chance to transform their illegal collaborators at least to the degree of non-violence and strengthen their own political positions.

2.4.6 The Profile of Parliamentary Candidates

In the upcoming elections, BDP will receive votes from heavily Kurdish-populated areas in Southeastern Anatolia. As a local party of Kurds rather than of Turkey, it is entering these elections with independent candidates. However, BDP nominated different names, who are not in line with the PKK or do not adopt militarist statements of Kurdish politicians, by building a coalition called Labor, Democracy and Freedom Block. This strategy of BDP indicates its attempt to broaden its ideological scope to win more votes. Nominating traditionalist-Islamist (Şerafettin Elçi, Altan Tan) and leftist (Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Ertuğrul Kürkçü, Levent Tüzel, Akın Birdal) figures may be useful to attract votes outside its consolidated base.

2.4.7 The Assessment of Election Manifesto

The election manifesto of Labor, Democracy and Freedom Block is a short declaration of the political objectives in various fields including democratization, economy, education, health, environment, youth, and foreign policy. Drafting the new constitution through political consensus and peaceful solution of the Kurdish question by establishing autonomous regional administrations are two main promises in the declaration. BDP also promises a "Commission for Searching the Facts and Justice" to investigate the truths behind massacres such as Dersim, Ağrı, Çorum, Maraş and Sivas. Main agenda items include lifting of the election threshold and education in one's mother tongue, abolishing the Higher Education Board, dissolving the National Security Council, and doing away with the village guard system.

CONCLUSION

Turkey will hold the most critical elections in its political history on 12 June 2011. The elections are significant as the struggle between the bureaucracy and the national will, tutelage and democracy will come to an important turning point. The other two significant movements of these struggles were the July 22nd elections and the September 12th referendum. AK Party successfully prevailed over the bureaucratic tutelage and this triumph made the building process of new Turkey possible.

Especially the September 12th referendum is significant as AK Party ended the bureaucratic tutelage over the political system established in the aftermath of the 1960 coup and strengthened over time. Approval of the constitutional amendments with 58% of the votes indicated the people's support for democratization and change as well as the unsustainability of "old Turkey". For this reason, the September 12th referendum was a triumph against bureaucratic tutelage and also a critical step for a new Turkey.

After the referendum, new Turkey-old Turkey debates set the political agenda. These debates indicate that the new constitution promise is identified with the hope for a new Turkey. The contribution by the political parties to the new constitution drafting process will be determined by the percentage of their votes in the upcoming general elections.

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The June 12th elections will not change the current positions of the government and opposition parties. However it will entail significant changes in Turkish politics.

Political parties have been rearranging their political positions and statements for the 12 June elections because of the consequences of the September 12th referendum. The change process of CHP started on the night that the constitutional amendment package was approved in the parliament. The CHP, which mostly represented the old Turkey, had to transform its current political position to adapt to the changing Turkish politics. The change in leadership was followed by changes in the leading cadre, political statements, policies, and deputy candidates lists. CHP is entering the upcoming elections by taking lessons from the consequences of the referendum.

Similarly, MHP could not carry on with its identity problem since the September 12th referendum. Through the referendum, its electorates were split into two camps as conservative-nationalist electorates in Central Anatolia and secularist-nationalists in Western Anatolia. This dualism of its electoral base caused an identity crisis when the choices of these different electorates clashed with each other. Now, MHP has the risk of remaining under the threshold. The party did not develop any policies to overcome this split in this interim period. The elections will indicate whether MHP overcomes this identity problem. Also the release of secret tapes of senior MHP politicians ahead of the elections is forcing MHP to change its current policies.

The September 12th referendum has significant consequences also for BDP. BDP's boycott in the referendum was not the best decision for its democratization message. The amendments were not directly related to the Kurdish issue but they did have a content that would ease the resolution of the Kurdish issue. BDP electorate supported the party's boycott decision, which was actually highly criticized by the public. Moreover, BDP is under pressure to increase its votes to contribute substantively to the new constitution. For this reason, it nominated religious-conservative names as independent deputy candidates and conducted civil disobedience protests in order to address the religious Kurdish electorate.

Consequently, the June 12th elections will not change the current positions of the government and opposition parties. However it will entail significant changes in Turkish politics.

- The June 12th elections will complete the transformation of Turkish political system started with 12 September 2010 referendum. The election results will indicate whether electorates appreciated the policies and promises of CHP, MHP and BDP that they formulated after the referendum.
- The election results will indicate whether electorates took seriously the provocations that had made prior to the elections to affect the elections results.
- The election results will also demonstrate whether the long-term projects of political parties set to the 2023 vision will bring stability in the political system.
- The election results will be determinant on to what extent the conceptualization of the "new Turkey" is possible.
- Finally, the elections results will show which party contribute how much in the drafting the new constitution.

The political squabbling between 4 major Turkish political parties; AK Party, CHP, MHP and BDP are gradually increasing through the upcoming 12 June 2011 general elections. The heat of the discussions is closely related with the significant role of the upcoming elections. The election results will directly affect the futures of these political parties, the positions of the bureaucratic and political actors, and the public opinion through drafting the new constitution. As a result these parties are struggling to shape the new constitution according to their perspectives and the vital importance of the new constitution increase the importance of the vote percentages and deputy numbers of these parties.

In this respect, this policy brief discusses the political meaning of 12 June 2011 general elections with regards to the future of 4 major political parties (AK Party, CHP, MHP and BDP) entering the elections. In particular, it examines the positions and internal dynamics of political parties in the election process with reference to several historical movements in contemporary Turkish politics.

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