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RESEARCH NOTE

The 2011 General Elections in Turkey: Potential Implications on Domestic and International Politics in the Shadow of a Discourse Change?

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On 12 June 2011, Turkey held its general elections. The government AK Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) was able to maintain its absolute majority and win a third consecutive term in office. This article assesses the key issues of the previous parliamentary term, examines the 2011 election campaign and provides an outlook on the key issues that Turkey and its government are facing post elections. This includes an explanation of the controversy about some parliamentarians who were elected whilst under arrest or being subject to criminal proceedings. Other than that, our analysis focuses particularly on previous and planned constitutional reforms, developments in the area of freedom of expression and Turkey–European Union relations.

1. Introduction

Turkey has recently seen the third consecutive general election, in which the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; hereafter AKP) obtained an absolute majority in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi; hereafter Parliament or Turkish Parliament). In the last three elections, the AKP succeeded not only in forming a single-party government, but also increased its share of the popular vote from 34% in 2002 to 46% in 2007 and, finally, to an impressive 49% in 2011 (see also Table 1). In an article published in this journal after the 2007 elections, AKP's success was defined as a 'landslide victory' (Polat, 2009). In the same article, the political discourse of the elections was depicted to compose three key players: first, the AKP that (or who) was ridding itself from its Islamic roots and rapidly moving towards

Table 1 Results of 2002, 2007 and 2011 elections in comparison

	2002 (percentage/seats/ difference in seats)	2007 (percentage/seats/ difference in seats)	2011 (percentage/seats/ difference in seats)
AKP	34.3/363/+363	46.7/341/−23	49.8/327 ^b /−14
CHP	19.4/178/+178	20.9/112/−66	26.0/135/+23
MHP	8.3/0/−129	14.3/71/+71	13.0/53/−18
BDP ^a	1.0/9/+6	5.2/26/+18	6.6/35 ^c +8

^aAll candidates ran and were elected officially as independents.

^bInitially only 326 were attributed.

^cInitially 36 seats.

being a central conservative political party with a liberal reformist agenda; secondly, a central secularist elite comprising the bureaucracy and military that used the fear of political Islam and opposition to Kurdish minority rights to resist political reforms, and thirdly, the European Union (EU) as a reform catalyst, helping the AKP to push through its reform agenda without facing much hostility and conflict due to the prospect of Turkish EU membership (Polat, 2009). Yet, four years on, the country's political discourse has changed substantially. On the one hand, the aforementioned bureaucratic elite have lost its leverage over the state's institutions to a great extent. On the other hand, the AKP government has seemingly embarked on a process of power centralisation that could potentially undermine democracy and the rule of law and thus threaten Turkey's path to EU accession. Additionally, the EU as a reference point for political, economic or social reforms has almost completely vanished from the public discourse in Turkey. Case in point is the recent electoral campaigns in which none of the big four parties made any reference (negative or positive) about the EU and Turkey's accession process.

In this note, we use the recent parliamentary elections in Turkey to analyse the changing political discourse on Europe and the steady centralisation of power in the hands of the AKP government. We start by providing a brief overview of the AKP's second term in office. In this, we look at the constitutional changes of 2010 and the trend of government restrictions vis-à-vis freedom of expression. This first section also analyses briefly signs for a potential shift in Turkey's foreign policy—both towards the EU as well as the Middle East region. We will then present an overview of the 2011 electoral campaigns (referring to the four main parties of Turkish politics) followed by an analysis of the election results. Finally, we present an outlook of what we think might be the key issues that the new/old AKP government will focus on including constitutional reform and the EU-accession negotiations, followed by a brief conclusion.

2. A brief look back: Turkish political discourse and the tendencies for the centralisation of political power during the past parliamentary term

The AKP came into power in 2002 with a pro-European reformist agenda and significant support both at home and abroad (Polat, 2009).¹ Likewise, in 2004 when the Council of European Union decided to open accession negotiations with Turkey (Brussels European Council, 2004) the AKP was credited for paving the way to this milestone decision by implementing significant political and legal reforms (Baç, 2005). The AKP's second term, however, is not a straight continuation from its first five years in office. In 2008, only three years after the opening of accession negotiations, the European Commission Progress Report on Turkey stated that the (then) newly re-elected AKP government had 'not put forward a consistent and comprehensive programme of political and constitutional reforms'. Similarly, the report pointed out that 'the lack of dialogue and spirit of compromise between the main political parties [in Turkey] had a negative impact on the smooth functioning of the political institutions'² (Commission Staff Working Document, 2008, 2010). It seems therefore that the initial momentum of EU accession negotiations has come to a halt.

Moreover, the government has departed on a somewhat more authoritarian path with regard to freedom of speech and the independence of the judiciary. Cases in point are especially the 'Ergenekon' and 'Balyoz' investigations as well as the 2010 constitutional reform. The former investigation was opened initially in 2007 against an alleged criminal organisation involved in terrorist and propaganda activities with the eventual aim of overthrowing the AKP government. The latter has been targeting an alleged military coup plan dated back to 2003. Particularly, the Ergenekon investigation became extremely complex in time with the release of 15 different indictments against more than a hundred defendants (Mavioğlu and Şık, 2010). Some go so far as to argue that the government has used Ergenekon as a pretext to punish vocal government opponents and to arrest government-critical journalists.³ The most prominent arrests under the investigation include Ahmet Şık, Nedim Şener, Mustafa Balbay and Soner Yalçın.⁴ Also, the leading columnist of *Taraf* (an originally pro-government Newspaper),

¹Erhan Doğan (2005) provides an excellent historical overview of the development of AKP's European agenda in comparison to previous predominantly Islamist political parties of the country.

²The 2010 progress report follows the same critical tone.

³'Onlar 101 gündür içerde . . .' ['They have been in jail for 101 days . . .'], *Hürriyet*, June 15, 2011.

⁴The only hard copies of Ahmet Şık's government-critical book, 'The Army of the Imam' (as well as electronic versions) were confiscated by the investigators. See also 'Yayınevine "İmamın Ordusu" baskını' ['"The Army of the Imam" down-raid to the publisher'], *Hürriyet*, March 24, 2011.

Ahmet Altan, has faced a civil lawsuit for breaching Prime Minister Erdoğan's personal dignity by means of a critical newspaper column.⁵ Fittingly, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared just one week before the elections that there should be clear limits to the freedom of expression in Turkey.⁶ The fact that the country has the largest number of imprisoned journalists in the world suggests that some of these limits are already in place (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 8 April 2011).⁷ Finally, commonplace wiretapping by state agencies (*The Economist*, 2009) as well as new regulations on internet censorship⁸ have also attracted negative international attention. This is not to say that the AKP government's track record in terms of limiting freedom of speech is worse than that of any previous Turkish government. Yet, the AKP came to power with the explicit, and unprecedented, promise that limitations of civil freedoms (including freedom of speech and that of the press) would be no longer tolerated, and thus, transforming Turkey into a modern western-style liberal democracy. In fact, those promises brought the first AKP government the explicit support of liberal intellectuals in Turkey and abroad.

In line with its proposed reform programme, the AKP government in 2010 proposed an extensive constitutional reform initiative. This comprised provisions that would bring Turkish legal standards closer to those of Europe in areas such as positive discrimination, protection of privacy, freedom of information and the judicial control of administrative and criminal decisions of the military.⁹ However, the package also brought a significant increase in governmental power with regards to the appointment of high court justices. This proposed change included the Constitutional Court (responsible for the judicial control of legislation) and the composition of the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (*Hakimler ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu*) that deals with the composition and

⁵In his column entitled 'Erdoğan ve Kof Kabadayılık' ['Erdoğan and Mere Bullying', *Taraf*, January 15, 2011], Ahmet Altan criticised the attitude of Prime Minister in the 'sculpture issue'. For the sculpture issue, see 'Turkey-Armenia friendship symbol being demolished', accessed at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13199787> on August 8, 2011.

⁶Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, live TV interview, 32. Gün, Elections Special Show, Kanal D, June 5, 2011.

⁷These journalists are held under arrest with general terrorism accusations with no conviction against them.

⁸'Turkey Slammed For "Ridiculous" Internet Censorship', accessed at <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/turkey-slammed-ridiculous-internet-censorship-news-504608> on August 8, 2011. See also Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2011).

⁹See the comparative table regarding the Proposed Legislation for the Amendment of Certain Provisions of the Constitution, accessed at www.akparti.org.tr/media/www/Anayasa%20de%20C4%9Fi%20C5%9Fikli%20kar%20C5%9F%20C4%B1la%20C5%9F%20C4%B1mal%20teklif%20tablosu.pdf on August 8, 2011.

administration of the judiciary. Civil society organisations and political parties in opposition were not invited by the government to take part in any part of the reform process. Rather the proposed amendments were single-handedly drafted by the AKP government. This was in spite of the strong opposition to the judicial reforms by civil society organisations, the Union of Judges and Prosecutors (Yargıçlar ve Savcılar Birliği; YARSAV) and the Union of Bars (Türkiye Barolar Birliği).¹⁰ The parliamentary vote on the reforms failed to reach the required two-third majority and the reform package was henceforth sent to a national referendum.¹¹ The opposition parties demanded that the different amendments were split into different questions on the referendum ballot paper to avoid a take-it or leave-it choice. That way constitutional changes advancing civil and fundamental rights could have been evaluated separately from those politicising the organisation of the Turkish judiciary (Milliyet, 2010). The government rejected this request, and on 12 September 2010, the entire amendment package was passed with the support of 57.9% of the vote—with a turnout of 73.7%.¹²

On the international stage, the AKP government under Prime Minister Erdoğan's leadership took steps to occupy a more powerful position, especially in the Middle East region. The year 2010 was particularly eventful, due to the flotilla crisis (*The Guardian*, 2010) as well as Erdoğan's visit to Tehran (alongside the Brazilian Prime Minister Lula da Silva) to sign an agreement on the trade of low-enriched uranium. The United Nation's final report with regard to the former event depicted the blockade of Gaza by Israel as legal under international law standards, thus caused criticism and disappointment on the side of Turkey. Since the early and unexpected release of the 'confidential' report in September 2011, tension between the Israeli and Turkish governments has reached a new climax (United Nations, 2011). The latter, Erdoğan's Tehran visit, was at odds with the well-known position of the USA, a long-time Turkish ally, who has long campaigned for sanctioning Iran's uranium enrichment programmes (Aguirre, 2011). Overall, these changes in Turkish international and regional politics have not gone unnoticed as some wonder whether Turkey's foreign policy

¹⁰See '982 Sayılı Anayasa Değişikliği Hakkındaki Yasa'nın Analitik İncelemesi—Ömer Faruk Eminağaoğlu Yarsav Kurucu Başkanı' ['An Analytical Analysis of Legislation Number 982 amending the Constitution- Ömer Faruk Eminağaoğlu, Founding Member of Yarsav'], accessed at www.yarsav.org.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=197:5982-sayl-anayasa-deiiklii-hakndaki-yasann-analitik-ncelemesi-oemer-faruk-eminaaolu-yarsav-kurucu-bakan&catid=1:ueyelerden-gelen-yazlar&Itemid=46 on August 8, 2011.

¹¹See Turkish Constitution, Art. 175 with regard to amendments to the Constitution.

¹²This is 12 percentage-points lower than the average turn out in national elections over the past 30 years.

focus may be shifting from West to East (Barysch, 2011). These reflections have been strongly rejected by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister, who argued that the objective of the government is to place Turkey in an influential position in international politics as well as its region while staying in the same distance to all players.¹³

3. Issue agendas of the major political parties in the election campaign

In principle, the language and substance that was used by the major political parties differed substantially during the 2011 election campaign. Nevertheless, they overlapped in leaving the EU accession out of the electoral discourse. None of the political parties openly addressed Turkey's EU membership objective or declared their political vision for the country's reform path towards accession. No party openly opposed accession or dismissed EU membership either. Europe simply vanished from the political agenda. This lack of EU reference appears to be all the more significant when compared with the two previous political elections in Turkey as well as the pre-accession political elections in central and eastern European member states, where EU-related issues (both positive and negative) had dominated the political election campaigns. Naturally, the reasons for the demise of EU membership from the electoral discourse cannot be fully discussed here for reasons of space and scope. It is worth mentioning, however, that those reasons include, but are not restricted to, the raise of increasingly anti-Turkish membership conservative governments in Europe; the eruption of economic crisis in Europe that consumes political and institutional capacity on the side of Europe and causes hesitations with regards to EU membership on the side of Turkey; the lack of prospects for the effective resolution of Cyprus conflict in the foreseeable future and the rapidly dropping public support for EU membership among the Turkish public due to all these factors.¹⁴

Still it must be surprising that the 2010 AKP election manifesto made reference to the EU on only two of its 160 pages. Here, the party promises to continue pursuing the objective of EU membership while voicing disappointment and criticism at the EU for its stand on the Cyprus issue and its consequential refusal to negotiate chapters in Turkey's accession negotiations (AKP, 2011). However, the AKP does not present a strategy on how to overcome the current stalemate in accession negotiations nor does the party state whether this is actually their objective.

¹³'FM Davutoglu says Turkey sets its own Axis,' accessed at www.aa.com.tr/en/fm-davutoglu-says-turkey-sets-its-own-axis.html on August 8, 2011.

¹⁴See also text to note 27 below.

When it comes to domestic socio-economic policies, the manifesto is essentially backward-looking. It makes sparing references to the AKP governments' past achievements without proposing concrete measures to be adopted in the future. The vagueness of the AKP's future plans is most peculiar with regard to the announced constitutional reform. In election rallies, the Prime Minister asked the people to give him the two-third parliamentary majority that is required to change the constitution unilaterally in parliament and without a public referendum. Yet, neither in the Prime Minister's speeches nor anywhere in the manifesto can one find concrete reference to the constitutional changes that the AKP plans to implement. The call for a two-third majority seems to suggest, however, that the party has clear ideas about the amendments—and presumably they are at odds with those of the other political forces in Turkey. Probably in light of the experience from the above-mentioned constitutional reform of 2010, the previously pro-government *Economist* (2011) called on Turkish citizens to vote for the opponent Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi; CHP) 'to deny the AK Party the two-thirds majority it needs to rewrite the constitution unilaterally'. Furthermore, during the 2011 campaign Prime Minister Erdoğan started to adopt a much more nationalistic tone, targeting particularly the Kurdish population. This strategy must be interpreted as an electoral tactic to push the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi; hereafter MHP) below the 10% electoral hurdle, thus, increasing the AKP's chances to achieve a two-third majority in Parliament—needed for the announced (but not concretised) unilateral constitutional overhaul.

The 2011 election was the first election experience for the CHP's new political management. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu was elected as leader by the Party Convention on 22 May 2010—just over one year before the recent elections. Under Kılıçdaroğlu, the Party has rid itself from the old secularist guard that was traditionally close to the military. In the election campaigns, the Party explicitly distanced itself from previous campaigns that centred almost exclusively on the threats raised by political Islam and the Kurdish movement against the secular and unitary structure of the Turkish Republic. Instead, the Kılıçdaroğlu leadership chose to use plain language focusing on economic problems as well as the increased level of state corruption (CHP, 2011). The most recent Eurobarometer indicates that a negative personal economic situation is still the largest single issue for the Turkish population. Thus, unsurprisingly the CHP promised a public 'family insurance' as a solution to the still wide-spread rural poverty. The Party made a strong effort to win over centrist and liberal voters by selecting parliamentary candidates that were often distinct from its typical conservative–secularist makeup. Those candidates include Şafak Pavey, a former UNHCR Public Affairs Officer; İlhan Cihaner, a previous public prosecutor who investigated the religious 'ismailağa tariqah' and was consequently investigated by the state

himself; Mustafa Balbay, a journalist arrested under the Ergenekon investigation; Prof. Mehmet Haberal, founder and former rector of Ankara Başkent University, also arrested under the same investigation; Prof. Binnaz Toprak, a sociology professor and the main contributor to the widely debated report 'Being Different in Turkey'¹⁵ prepared under the aegis of the Open Society Institute that reveals how people get more conservative under social pressure in rural Anatolia; and Emine Ülker Tarhan, Chairwomen of the aforementioned YARSAV.

The Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi; hereafter BDP) was in no need of detailed campaigning—their main goals, equality and improved minority protect, are well known. Particularly, education and the provision of other public services in their native language as well as a strengthening of autonomous-governance in the Kurdish areas constitute the key points in BDP's political agenda. The only issue that can potentially divide the Party's voters are religion and conservatism, since the Kurdish-populated areas stand among the most conservative areas of the country and this may at times cause tensions with the essentially leftist roots of the BDP. However, in the recent elections, the party chose its parliamentary candidates very carefully in order to prevent an alienation of conservative Kurdish voters. In fact, the party did not put forward a nation-wide party list but rather selected a diverse number of 'independent' candidates. This was done to circumvent the unusually high 10% electoral threshold that a party needs to pass in order to be represented in the Turkish Parliament. Their lists of independent candidates included long-time Kurdish activists, such as Leyla Zana (who was awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought by the European Parliament in 1995 but was not able to collect until she was finally released from prison in 2004) and Hatip Dicle;¹⁶ progressive candidates appealing to the younger generation, such as the movie director Sırrı Süreyya Önder and long-standing socialist Ertuğrul Kürkçü; as well as traditionally conservative Kurds such as Altan Tan and Şerafettin Elçi. Finally, the party had to cope with an intensification of operations against KCK (Koma Civakên Kurdistan, Confederation of the Kurdish People) allegedly representing the 'urban wing' of the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, Kurdistan Workers' Party). The operations involved arrests of more than a hundred party members, including a number of elected local officials, thus, disrupted the BDP's election campaign, especially in Southeast Turkey.

Finally, the nationalistic MHP was mainly concerned with internal damage control rather than with running a content-driven campaign. It faced serious

¹⁵ Accessed at http://www.aciktoplumvakfi.org.tr/pdf/tr_farkli_olmak.pdf on August 8, 2011.

¹⁶ The High Election Council of The Turkish Republic (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu) decided that Hatip Dicle is not qualified to serve as a member of the Parliament due to the existence of a pre-election criminal conviction against him. Decision No.1022, June 21, 2011.

turmoil shortly before the elections due to a sex scandal. The anonymous release of several video files resulted in a complete overhaul of the party's leadership prior to the elections. During the campaign, the Party portrayed itself as a victim of negative campaigning by implying that the government was behind the video release; although there was no actual proof for this. Moreover, the MHP leader, Devlet Bahçeli attempted to focus on economic issues by criticising the relative poverty of many Turks. However, Prime Minister Erdoğan was able to thwart these remarks by simply pointing to the country's continuous economic success under the AKP government.

Generally speaking, the political environment preceding the 2011 Turkish elections was very hostile and characterised by intense debates among the AKP and the remaining three major political parties. Apart from widespread accusations about corruption, indecency and others among the political parties, there were extensive protests and violence in some parts of the country. For example, in Artvin Hopa, an anti-government protestor died during police raids shortly after Erdoğan's visit of the town,¹⁷ while several others claim to have been tortured by the police while under arrest.¹⁸ In a TV interview, the Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that he was convinced that the protesters were there only to cause trouble, thus, rejecting the possibility of a public inquiry into the death or the torture claims.¹⁹ This attitude seems peculiar especially with a view to the AKP's 2002 launched policy of 'zero tolerance on torture'.²⁰

4. Results

The election results revealed two clear winners: the governing AKP and the Kurdish BDP. The AKP was able to obtain 49.9% of the popular vote—an all-time high in Turkey for an incumbent government. It was initially attributed 326 members and thus fell four seats short of the three-fifth majority that is needed to send constitutional amendments to a referendum; and 41 seats short of the wished-for two-third majority necessary to amend the constitution without a referendum. The Kurdish BDP was able to almost double its MPs and was initially attributed 36 seats in the parliament. Its candidates were successful in the densely Kurdish populated Southeast and also in Turkey's large cities,

¹⁷'Hopa'da AK Parti gerginliği: 1 ölü' ['AK Party Tension in Hopa: 1 casualty'], accessed at <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25218521/> on August 8, 2011.

¹⁸'Hopa protestolarına 15 tutuklama' ['15 arrests to Hopa protests'], accessed at <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25224462/> on August 8, 2011.

¹⁹Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, live TV interview, NTV, June 10, 2011.

²⁰'İşkenceye sıfır tolerans' ['Zero tolerance of torture'], accessed at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/icraat/293/iskenceye-sifir-tolerans> on August 8, 2011.

such as Istanbul and Mersin. The CHP also gained votes but fell short of its own expectations—attracting only 25.9% of the popular vote. However, its leadership was quick to point to the 23 extra seats the party won compared with the 2007 election. The nationalist MHP did not fall below the 10% threshold and made it into Parliament with 53 seats receiving 12.9% of the votes—a decline of just over 1% compared with 2007. Incidentally, had the Party not passed the electoral threshold, the AKP would have had its desired two-third majority of parliamentary seats—as was the case in 2002.

Following the official release of election results, the High Election Council of The Turkish Republic (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu) stripped Hatip Dicle—a BDP ‘independent’ candidate who had won a seat in Diyarbakir—of his parliamentary mandate due to the existence of a terror-related criminal conviction against him.¹⁶ Since the BDP fielded independent candidates rather than a party list, Dicle’s seat was reallocated to the AKP increasing total number of AKP seats to 327. Additionally, Turkish courts of first instance refused to release eight jailed (but not yet convicted) MPs. These post-election developments resulted in the emergence of a political crisis between the AKP government and the opposition. The BDP, in particular, decided to boycott all parliamentary activities until the AKP government would commit to a reform process that would allow all the elected BDP members to take their seats in the parliament. Negotiations between the AKP and the BDP for the resolution of crisis failed, upon which violence resurged in Southeast Turkey (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2011). As has been argued elsewhere by us, the post-election crisis will potentially play as important a role on Turkish internal and external politics as the election result itself (*Cengiz and Hoffmann, 2011a, c; Euractiv, 2011*).

The impressive AKP success in the election can be attributed to two predominant factors: first, Turkey’s strong economic performance over the past years (see also the next section). Although the AKP government has benefitted from reforms that were implemented by its predecessor in the late 1990s, Prime Minister Erdoğan’s government has presided over Turkey’s rise to the 17th largest economy in the world with an annual growth of 8.9% in 2010. Secondly, Erdoğan’s personal style of portraying a confident statesman strikes a chord with many Turkish people who share his aspirations for Turkey as a strong regional actor independent from the western agenda. Whether this can be attributed to a yearning to the powerful past of the Ottoman times or simply a resurged national pride after years of economic and geopolitical underperformance remains to be seen.

It is worth nothing that the new Turkish parliament comprises many first-time parliamentarians who do not live up to the characteristics of conventional Turkish politicians. Rather than middle-aged men who have climbed up the party ladder, many new MPs are unconnected to established political elites.

Their diverse backgrounds might arguably bode well for Turkey and its political future. Moreover, the parliament now has the largest number of female MPs ever in Turkish history adding further to the trend of an increased political diversity and plurality. It is hoped that, this new heterogeneity will result in a vibrant and vocal Parliament, which will be key, particularly with a view to the anticipated constitutional reform agenda that is discussed in the next section.

5. A future outlook

After the re-convention of Turkish Parliament in October 2011, Turkish internal politics is likely to turn its focus onto the drafting of a new constitution. There is no doubt that Turkey is in need of a constitutional overhaul. The AKP campaigned on this issue and its victory shows that the people also believe that fundamental legal reforms are key to build a sustainable Turkish democracy. Crucially, a new Turkish constitution should enshrine fundamental rights and freedoms, thus preventing any form of discrimination based on *inter alia* ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other. These rights and freedoms must be enforced by an impartial judicial system that is based on the rule of law and not political or military ideology. Additionally, given the pre-election process of centralisation of political power as well as the post-election crisis surrounding the MPs under arrest, protection of the freedom of expression and the press, as well as other fundamental political rights, particularly (Kurdish) minority rights, are expected to play the key roles in the constitutional reform process.

It should be noted that the forthcoming changes would mark Turkey's first civilian attempt at constitutional reform. Both the current 1982 and the previous 1961 constitutional texts were direct products of military coups (McLaren and Cop, 2011) and hence this rare opportunity to draft a contemporary, liberal constitution should not be missed. Constitutional reforms ought to be based on a broad societal consensus. In fact, many countries require significant institutional hurdles that can only be overcome if broad sections of population and politicians are supportive.²¹ Erdoğan chose a soft-tone in his victory speech, indicating that he will seek a broad compromise to implement the forthcoming reforms. Of course, the government does not have the best track-record on consensus-based constitutional reforms as the aforementioned 2010 experience showed. Similarly, such a path would be in contrast to the AKP's election campaign when it did not cease to point to the importance of obtaining a two-third majority to implement the party's (yet to be revealed) constitutional vision. Based on this, Erdoğan's change in tone is noteworthy but not entirely convincing.

²¹In bicameral systems, super majorities are usually required in both chambers; in the Netherlands parliamentary elections have to take place between drafting and adopting any constitutional change.

Moreover, there is ample evidence of the Prime Minister's strong desire to restructure the central political institutions along the lines of France's semi-presidential system (Star, 2010; Sabah, 2011). This system has served the Fifth Republic well and there is no immediate reason why it could not also be applied successfully in other countries. However, the French system was masterminded by General de Gaulle in a time of crisis because of the Fourth Republic's fragile political system that had led to an unstable and often dead-locked parliament with ever-changing governments and shifting parliamentary majorities (Gaffney, 2010). The situation in Turkey is not comparable to the France of late 1950s. There is no evidence of institutional inefficiency in Turkey's current parliamentary democracy that would justify such a drastic systemic change. On the other hand, in the light of the tendencies for centralisation of power, there is ample evidence of the need for stronger constitutional protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in this country.

In terms of international politics, the new/old AKP government's principal focus will most probably be in its region. This is indicated by Turkey's rising profile in the Middle East as well as recent developments such as the flood of Syrian refugees to Turkey²² and Turkey's key mediator position in the conflict between El Fetih and Hamas.²³ Of course, the key question for Turkey is whether it can continue its path towards a regional power without its close ties to the EU that come with the status of an accession country. Likewise, it is a key question for the EU whether it can afford to lose a stable and powerful partner in this volatile region without jeopardising its own aspiration to becoming a global security player. Our central claim here is that a successful continuation of EU-accession negotiations will be crucial for Turkey's as well as the EU's general foreign policy credibility.

From this perspective, the unusual exclusion of EU-related rhetoric during the election campaign is worrisome as it clearly indicates that EU is no longer a priority in the Turkish political agenda. Likewise, in a recent interview, Turkey's Ambassador to the EU, Selim Kunalalp, explained that the EU role in the constitution-making process will be minimal, since 'the EU has lost its leverage on Turkey'.²⁴ Likewise, during EU Enlargement Commissioner Füle's post-election visit to Turkey, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Davutoğlu, announced in another blunt statement that 'if the Greek Cypriot side stalls negotiations and

²²'Suriyeli mültecilerin sayısı dokuz bine dayandı' [The number of Syrian refugees reached nine thousand'], accessed at http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2011/06/110616_syria_turkey.shtml on August 8, 2011.

²³Ortadoğu diplomasisi ['Middle Eastern Diplomacy'], accessed at <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/ShowNew.aspx?id=18090524> on June 22, 2011.

²⁴Accessed at <http://euobserver.com/9/32510/?rk=1> on August 8, 2011.

takes over the presidency of the European Union in July 2012, this means not only a deadlock on the island, but also a blockage, a freezing point in Turkey-European Union relations'.²⁵ These statements affirm the sentiment that accession negotiations are in need of new impulses (see *Cengiz and Hoffmann, 2011b*) and stronger commitment by Turkey and the EU, as well as its member states. Currently, the EU refuses to continue the negotiation process in the open accession chapters due to Turkey's 'failure to apply to Cyprus the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement' regarding the Turkish–EU customs union.²⁶ This stalemate in accession negotiations resulted in a rapidly decreasing public support for EU membership among the Turkish public²⁷ that in turn gives the Turkish politicians the luxury of avoiding the contentious EU topic. As we have argued elsewhere, the EU institutions ought to develop immediate strategies to re-elevate this rapidly decreasing public support, such as concessions on visa restrictions that would eventually put the EU membership back on the agenda due to public pressure (*Cengiz and Hoffmann, 2011b*).

6. Conclusions

Never before has a third-time election winner accrued more votes than the AKP did in 2011 election. This success can be related back to Turkey's impressive economic record as well as a newly acquired boldness in its foreign policy. Yet, we have found some indications, notably the undefined plans for constitutional reform and the deadlock in Turkish–EU relations, that give reason to watch the new government's legislative agenda carefully. The success of the Kurdish party and its 'independent' candidates might yet be tarnished by the judicial decisions and will no doubt attract further media exposure and academic commentary in Turkey as well as abroad. Overall, it seems to us that Turkey is at a crossroads, its buoyant economic performance and growing ambition to become a powerful regional player stand in contrast to its stagnating EU-accession negotiations and its somewhat authoritarian stand on the freedom of expression. The Turkish people have given the government a powerful mandate—both numerically and symbolically—how it uses this

²⁵'Turkey says EU ties will freeze if no solution to Cyprus', accessed at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/13/us-turkey-eu-cyprus-idUSTRE76C1PK20110713> on August 8, 2011.

²⁶See Commission website on Turkish–EU relations, accessed at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/candidate-countries/turkey/eu_turkey_relations_en.htm on August 8, 2011.

²⁷The 2004 Autumn Eurobarometer had shown 62% of the country looking favourably towards EU membership with only 20% opposing it. In contrast, the Autumn 2010 Eurobarometer revealed that only 42% believed EU membership would be a good thing, 32% believed it would be a bad thing and the remaining interviewees had either no opinion or thought membership would be neither good nor bad.

power over the next five years might well have a lasting impact on Turkey's standing in Europe and the wider world.

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