



Possible Escalation:

No Love Lost between Erdogan and Turkish Opposition

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Turkish opposition pledged to take down President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the June 2023 elections and to restore the parliamentary system. Meral Akşener, leader of the İyi (Good) Party, promised that the next president will be from the Nation Alliance consisting of her party and the Republican People's Party ((CHP) - the biggest opposition party in Turkey). It is noteworthy that the Turkish opposition won the 2019 municipal elections in Istanbul and Ankara by following the same strategy of alliances.

Unified Opposition:

Lately, Turkish opposition parties have taken several steps with the aim of uniting against Erdogan's government, some of the most prominent of which are the following:

1- Attempting to unify the opposition: Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), stressed on September 12 that the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA), led by Ali Babacan, and Future Party, led by Ahmet Davutoğlu, are welcomed to join the Nation Alliance. It is noteworthy that both parties were formed as a result of a split from Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP). Kılıçdaroğlu said that if both parties agree to join the Nation Alliance, this will mean they have reached a mutual understanding and are willing to cooperate ,

especially pertaining the return to the parliamentary system.

2- Seeking the Kurdish bloc's support: A delegation from the CHP visited Iraqi Kurdistan on September 5, and met Masrour Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan region, and Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). This shows that the CHP is trying to secure Kurdish votes in the upcoming elections.

According to estimates, it is necessary for the Nation Alliance to win the votes of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), if it desires to defeat People's Alliance (which comprises Erdogan's AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)); in this case, the CHP will win an absolute majority of the parliament seats (50+1).

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3- Promoting the idea that the approval rates of

Erdogan's regime is declining: Opposition-backed media are highlighting opinion polls showing that Erdogan's (and AKP's) approval rates are declining. These polls include the following:

A. The Eurasia Public Opinion Research Center Poll (September 8): 36.7% of the participants said that they will vote for the Nation Alliance, whereas 34.7% will vote for the People's Alliance. The poll also showed that 56.9% of the participants will not vote for Erdogan in the next elections.

B. The Area Research Poll (August 2021, in Ankara): 31.2% of the participants in this poll support the Republican People's Party, whereas only 20% support AKP.

C. Metropoll (August): This poll showed that the ruling party, which won 42.56% of the votes in the 2018 parliamentary elections, would have got 29.3% of the votes had the elections been held in August.

Erdogan Reacts:

The Turkish government fiercely attacked the opposition parties, both in the media and on various political occasions. For instance,

1- Erdogan criticizes the CHP: On September 10, Erdogan implicitly criticized the CHP, suggesting that it is trying to assume power through lies, and to end the multi-party system to go back to the one-party system. Erdogan also accused the party of reviving the ideological conflicts of the 1970s, and of trying to cause instability and insecurity similar to what happened in the 1990s. Besides, he said that opposition parties in general cannot keep up with AKP's projects and services offered to the public.

2- State-backed media attacking the opposition:

The state-backed media referred to an alleged conflict between the allied opposition parties over the identity presidential election's candidate. A case in point is a statement by Garo Paylan of the HDP, in which he said that the party's vision is different from the Alliance's vision, and that the party will not vote for the CHP's Party in the upcoming elections. On the

other side, the Iyi Party wants to nominate its leader Meral Akşener, or mayor of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu

Mutual escalation

The reasons for the mutual escalations between the Turkish opposition and government can be summed up as follows

1- Disagreement over amending the constitution:

Early in September, Erdogan revived his advocacy of a new constitution. He said that he, together with the Nationalist Movement Party, agreed on a certain vision of a new constitution, which will be published for the citizens so that they gather feedback from the public. This means that Erdogan is actually trying to impose his own vision on the opposition parties, despite that this is not entirely true.

Opposition parties, on the other hand, are keen on stressing that they disagree with the Turkish president concerning the constitution. The opposition made it clear that its prime concern is to change the presidential system of governance into a parliamentary system. This deprived Erdogan of public support. As a result, he began to fiercely attack the opposition.

2- Change of the election threshold: Following his visit to Bosnia on August 27, Erdogan announced that the electoral threshold for parties to be represented in the parliament will be lowered from 10% to 7% of the total votes. Erdogan is seeking to make sure that the Nationalist Movement Party, his ally, will be represented in the next parliament. It is noteworthy that opinion polls show that the Nationalist Movement Party will not be able to get the 10% threshold.

Erdogan is also trying to lower the election threshold to allow less popular parties to be present in the parliament, as this will mean fewer seats for the opposition. In addition, Erdogan can even form alliances with these minor parties with the aim of increasing his odds of dominating the next parliament.

3- Opposition's proposal of early elections: The opposition is hindering Erdogan's attempts to amend



the constitution before the 2023 elections, as the current political sentiment that make it difficult for Erdogan to win again. Furthermore, constitutionally, article 101 makes it clear that a person can only run for president twice. Though article 106 allows candidates a third chance in case early elections are held. In this scenario, due to his declining approval rates, Erdogan will be keen not to go for an early election,


as this might lead to the end of his presidency.

4- The start of the electoral race: Though the elections are supposed to be in 2023, steps have already been taken to begin forming alliances and gaining the support of public opinion. In this regard, both the ruling party and the opposition realize that internal conflict and splits within parties, as well as withdrawals, need to be addressed as early as possible.


In conclusion, it is evident that the Turkish opposition is escalating its rhetoric and actions to confront Erdogan's attempts to amend the constitution, and recruiting more parties for the People's Alliance. On the contrary, Erdogan is hindering efforts to unify the opposition. This indicates that preparations for early elections have already started, and that the next months will witness more decisive and well-defined moves in this direction, especially in case of Erdogan's failure to change the constitution. Consequently, the rivalry between the opposition and Erdogan's regime is expected to grow fiercer in the near future.

ABOUT FARAS

Future for Advanced Research and Studies (FARAS) is an independent think tank founded on April 4, 2014 in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. FARAS seeks to enrich public dialogue, support decision-making and enhance academic research pertaining to future trends that currently constitute a real problem in the Middle East region. In light of instability and unpredictability, the overarching goal of FARAS is to help ward off future shocks regarding these developments.

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