

Insights into Turkish Domestic and International Politics during November 16-30th 2013

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Key Points:

- *The AKP-Gulen Movement split hits the front pages and airwaves in Turkey.*
- *Once friendly outlets controlled by the Gulen Movement turn on Prime Minister Erdogan after a 2004 action plan is released describing AKP complicity with the military to undermine Gulen-owned companies.*
- *The Constitutional Commission fails on its mission having only agreed to half of the required articles.*
- *Contentious issues regarding citizenship, the Kurdish issue and a new presidential role remain unresolved.*
- *Turkey and the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq look set to sign a pipeline deal despite continued opposition from Baghdad.*

Gulen-AKP split goes public

Tension continues to mount between the AKP and its one-time allies in the Gulen Movement. Theories abound concerning the initial source of tension between the two camps, but one thing is certain. The once symbiotic relationship between the two is fractured. Whether it is beyond repair remains to be seen.

The AKP benefitted heavily in its early years from the organizing abilities of the Gulen Movement. In turn, the Movement prospered under the past decade of AKP governance.

While tensions have been high following Prime Minister Erdogan's decision to close the private schools known as *dershanes*, it emerged this week that the AKP's leadership had signed off on an action plan as far back as 2004 that would undermine the Movement. The Turkish daily *Taraf* released a 2004 National Security Council document that called for the government to implement a plan that would weaken the Gulenists both inside and outside Turkey. It advised that the government introduce legislation that would legally disrupt Gulen-affiliated institutions, specifically singling out the Ministries of Education and Interior to monitor *dershanes*.

But the action plan should also be understood in the context of the time in which it was drafted. In 2004, the Islamist AKP was far from the political heavyweight that it is today. Yes, Prime Minister Erdogan and then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul signed onto the plan along with the country's military leadership. But their complicity should also be viewed as former enemies and of the very body on which they sat. Erdogan's association with the Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party government, which had been overthrown by a military coup in 1997, eventually cost him a term in prison. Signing off on an action plan against an openly Islamist movement like Fethullah Gulen's was a litmus test by the then-influential military.

Regarding the current break, it most likely began in 2012, when an Istanbul special prosecutor, known to be a Gulenist, summoned National Intelligence

Organization chief, Hakan Fidan, for questioning. Fidan, an Erdogan acolyte, had overseen the government's attempt at secret negotiations with the outlawed PKK. The Movement, which is notoriously hostile to the PKK, was seen as interfering in a matter that should have solely been the realm of the government. Fidan and other witnesses escaped prosecution due to the prime minister's strong-arming, and the prosecutor was quietly removed from his post.

The two camps are also split on Erdogan's ongoing feud with Israel, a country which Gulen tends to view somewhat more favorably. (Kutahyali, "Turkey's AKP-Gulen conflict in context," www.Al-Monitor.com, 26 November 2013.) The Mavi Marmara incident displeased the American-based Gulen, including Erdogan's infamous walk out at the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos. (Bennhold, "Leaders of Turkey and Israel Clash at Davos Panel," *The New York Times*, 29 January 2009.)

The opposition parties have seen an opening to exploit the once formidable Gulen-AKP partnership. The CHP's Kemal Kilicdaroglu continues to hammer away at the prime minister, most recently seizing on the National Security Council memorandum. Consequently, the CHP has begun to receive more favorable press in Gulen-owned outlets.

The Kurdish BDP has taken a different stance, attacking both the AKP and Gulenists alike. Party co-chair Selahattin Demirtas was frank in his views, saying "The democracy [models] that both the AKP and the movement are offering are absolutely not based on freedom. Our advice for both is the following: They should stop their race for domination over the Turkish society, because that is nobody's property." ("AKP and Gulen movement should stop their race to dominate Turkish society: BDP co-chair," *Dogan News Agency*, 29 November 2013.)

The reclusive Gulen has even taken to the press to air his views. He remarked that the release of the National Security Council memorandum left him "shattered" and "speechless". ("Gulen 'speechless' on the government's action plan against Hizmet

movement," *Today's Zaman*, 30 November 2013.) Most notable of those media outlets owned by the Movement, the once AKP-friendly *Today's Zaman* has unloaded salvo after salvo against the prime minister.

Zaman Editor, Ekrem Dumanli, made the rounds on a number of print and broadcast outlets owned by the Media Group. He waded into the row over the Education Ministries' plan to close the *dershanes*, equating it with the actions of former military coup installed governments, saying "we tell them that they have no such right to close these prep schools. They could only have the right to do this when they bring an advanced education system which will wipe out the necessity of the prep schools."

"If you see it legitimate to close an education body with the force of government, then you have to legitimize the closure of the *imam-hatip* schools closed by the former government," said Dumanli. "Technically there are no differences in closing both of these institutes."

Erdogan clearly believes the political capital he has accrued as prime minister is powerful enough to offset conflicts that may arise with domestic opponents. His success in cowing the generals and fellow politicians is emblematic of this. Yet the Gulen Movement is not as centralized as these opponents, and while its reputation is much more sinister than in reality, its reach differs from any the prime minister has tangled with. This could affect him and his party's results in the upcoming years of elections.

Constitutional Commission fails to reach a consensus.

On November 18, more than two years after initially forming, the commission in charge of drafting a new constitution for the Turkish Republic officially called it quits. AKP Deputy Cemil Cicek, made it official by withdrawing his delegation from the commission. The body, consisting of three deputies from each of the Parliament's four largest parties, had only been able to agree on half of the required changes to the current constitution which followed the 1980 military coup.

It was a sad state of affairs for those who had hoped that compromise and reconciliation would take precedence over the divisiveness of present-day Turkish politics. Yet the entrenched positions of all involved were too much to overcome. The Kemalist CHP had as of late, tried to use its leverage on the commission to negotiate the release of its jailed deputies, while the nationalist MHP refused to accede to drastic changes to the current constitution, especially concerning the definition of Turkishness. The BDP, somewhat understandably, tied its role in the negotiations with that of the current talks with imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

While the agreement on 60 articles was a step in the right direction, the most divisive issues affecting the country remain largely unresolved. Matters such as the first four articles of the current constitution, which concern the nationalistic preamble, the nature of the republic as a staunchly secular entity, education in mother tongue and the centralization of power, remained too contentious.

The prime minister pinned the blame on the opposition parties, specifically calling out the Kurdish BDP for its view on the citizenship matter.

"The BDP asks for using 'people of Turkey' instead of 'Turkish people' or 'Turkish nation' in the charter. Due to disagreement on such simple issues, the process of drafting a new constitution has taken more than 25 months while it was expected to be finalized in 12 months," said Erdogan. ("Citizenship definition a breaking point in new constitution process: Turkish PM," *The Journal of the Turkish Weekly*, 21 November 2013.)

The main concern for the CHP and MHP on this particular issue was that it would be a first step for Kurdish autonomy, despite their lip service to the wording's necessity for the unity of the nation. The Kurds, along with smaller ethnic groups like Armenians and Greeks, see the use of Turkish as an ethnic designation, rather than a political one. The CHP and MHP's inability to compromise over the less divisive "people of Turkey" shows how strong the role

of 'the other' remains in the country's political system.

The commission's failure puts the onus on the AKP to win a parliamentary majority in the 2015 election. Should it secure this, it could push through a new constitution despite no consensus from the opposition parties. Erdogan has made it clear he would seek the presidency if the post became a more powerful position with a new constitution. Despite his frustrations over the last year with Gezi Park and the situation in Syria, Erdogan is a master politician and campaigner. He has nothing to lose and everything to gain going forward.

The AKP currently holds 326 seats in the 550-seat Parliament, and would need to capture a total of 367 to force through a constitution with a two-thirds majority. Yet in addition to fears by opposition parties of Erdogan taking over a presidential role that would have expanded executive authority, there are dissenting voices in his own party that might seek to undermine the prime minister. (Solaker, "Hopes fade for a new Turkish constitution," *Reuters*, 18 November 2013.)

For the present, election season has begun. Local and municipal elections in March 2014 will be the first test. The mayoral race in Istanbul, which has long been a barometer of electoral fortunes for later national elections, is the most notable of these. Former CHP member Mustafa Sarigul is the mayor of the city's Sisli district, and looks set to closely contest the AKP candidate. Though he is an outlier from the Kemalist core that makes up the CHP, Sarigul's attractiveness to voters in Istanbul's most diverse and cosmopolitan district make the ruling party's hold on the city questionable. In particular, this takes into account the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests from this summer that galvanized urban opposition in the area.

Following that bellwether election, August 2014 brings the first presidential election in the Republic's history decided by the vote and not appointment.

Ultimately, the Constitutional Commission's failure was emblematic of the country's current political

atmosphere. Thomas Markert, Director of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, summed it up best in his conversation with *Daily Hurriyet* columnist Murat Yetkin:

"There is a lack of compromise culture in Turkey...The 'winner takes all' mentality characteristic for new democracies seems also to exist in Turkey and political parties seem more inclined toward confrontation than co-operation." (Yetkin, "Lack of compromise scuttled new charter," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 28 November 2013.)

Until that attitude changes, where victorious political parties learn to stomach compromise with their opponents, Turkey's democracy is in for a contentious future.

Turkey-KRG Energy agreement in the works

Turkey and the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) look set to sign a massive energy agreement despite lacking approval from Baghdad, which maintains that it has sole authority to sign off on international energy deals. On November 27, Prime Minister Erdogan met his KRG counterpart Massoud Barzani in Ankara. This was the second meeting between the two men following their earlier visit to the Kurdish majority city of Diyarbakir on November 16.

Turkey had done the groundwork in anticipation of an agreement, with Energy Minister Taner Yildiz proposing a payment mechanism intended to satisfy Baghdad's demands. Yildiz' solution, which would have created a Turkish-based escrow account that would collect the revenues from KRG shipped energy to Turkey until a solution on payment was worked out, was soundly rejected by Baghdad.

Currently, the KRG produces 300,000 barrels a day, two thirds of which are transported overland by truck. While such a system is inefficient in comparison to pipelines, the KRG has raised current revenues to \$12 billion in comparison to the paltry \$150 million of seven years ago. (Gursel, "Ankara, Erbil explore strategic partnership," www.Al-Monitor.com, 21

November 2013.) Turkish owned Genel has said that its two fields, Taq Taq and Tawke, are capable of producing 230,000 barrels a day and predicts that if a pipeline is built and further exploration is pursued, that capacity could go up by the end of 2014. (Pamuk, "Kurdish oil seen flowing through Turkish pipeline within weeks," *Reuters*, 22 November 2013.)

Iraq continues to suffer from the lack of a parliamentary agreement on the 2007 Hydrocarbon Law, which would have settled payment and revenue sharing with each Iraqi region. The KRG has long contended that it wanted 17 percent of the country's total revenues given its population density, citing an article in the Iraqi constitution. Yet in Baghdad's fraught political atmosphere, there is little room for compromise at the current time, and legislative resolution is the least likely of outcomes in the immediate future.

Reports are that once the agreement is announced between the KRG and Turkey, Barzani will fly to the Iraqi capital to negotiate a solution. Speeding up the need for a compromise is word that the Turkish

Energy Company is establishing operations in the KRG for 13 exploration blocks, half of which will be shared with U.S. partner ExxonMobil. (Pamuk and Coskun, "Exclusive: Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan ink landmark energy contracts," *Reuters*, 29 November 2013.)

And while the U.S. looks unfavorably on the deal between Ankara and Erbil, President Barak Obama has done little to get in the way of American firms operating there. But as noted in the previous version of this publication ("Turkey-KRG Energy," EGF Turkey File, 1-15 November 2013), there may be some room for compromise. Despite the animosity between the KRG and the Iraqi Government, any proposed project must ultimately connect with Iraq's current pipeline infrastructure if it is to be pumped to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. Turkey simply lacks the proper infrastructure to make such a project possible. Should a solution arise, it will likely be an agreement that both allows Baghdad to save face and keeps the energy and profits flowing to Turkey and the KRG respectively.

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