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Turkey: Continuity and Change after Elections

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Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade

Summary

The April 18, 1999 election in Turkey reflected growing nationalism, a weakening of the political center, and a desire for more honest leadership. Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit of the Democratic-Left Party (DSP) is continuing in office, joined by the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and Motherland Party (ANAP). Ecevit and ANAP leader Mesut Yilmaz have prior government experience. MHP's Devlet Bahçeli does not, and his purported success in moderating the ultra-right MHP is being tested. DSP and ANAP control ministries of foreign and macroeconomic policy significance, while MHP holds portfolios important for its ideology and constituents in Turkey's Anatolian heartland. All agree on overall economic policies needed to reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund. The government may last longer than its immediate predecessors, given its hefty majority, but multi-party coalitions are inherently unstable and the historic distrust between DSP and MHP could dim its prospects. There are many issues to engage U.S. and Turkish officials: democratization, human rights, Greece, Cyprus, pipelines, the European Union, Iraq, and arms transfers. For background, see CRS Report RS20030 *Turkey: Government Update*; CRS Report 97-840, *Turkey: Situation Update*; and CRS Report 97-462, *Turkey's Unfolding Political Crisis*. This report will not be updated.

Background¹

Turkey has experienced unprecedented governmental instability in the 1990s. On June 9, 1999, parliament gave a vote of confidence to the fifth government in less than four years. A fragmentation of political parties, stemming more from personality than policy differences, has produced the frequent changeovers. Moreover, because the constitution mandates that the powerful military guarantee the political system, politicians

¹ Information in this report is derived from Foreign Broadcast Information Service daily reports online, primarily translations of Turkish newspaper articles, television, and radio broadcasts, Reuters and Associated Press news wires, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Financial Times*.

feel freer to act out of unalloyed self-interest. Nonetheless, as in many other countries, a national consensus on the need for economic liberalization and privatization has developed in recent years, rendering still-used labels of "left" and "right" increasingly unhelpful, if not meaningless. A comparable consensus exists on nationalism, which has been strengthened by the European Union's rejection of Turkey for membership candidacy, Balkans conflicts in areas that were part of the Turkish-ruled Ottoman Empire in the past,² the emergence of independent Turkic states from the ruins of the Soviet Union, and the 15-year Kurdish insurgency. Within Turkey, nationalists gained momentum in recent months from Europe's failure to understand or accept Turkey's view of the Kurdish conflict, and its lack of cooperation during Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan's flight and eventual capture.

Election Results

1999 Parliamentary Election Results¹

Party	Orientation	Leader	%	Seats
Democratic-Left Party (DSP)	Center-Left/Nationalist	Bulent Ecevit	22.2	136
Nationalist Action Party (MHP)	Right/Nationalist	Devlet Bahçeli	18.0	129
Virtue Party ² (FP)	Islamist	Recai Kutan	15.4	111
Motherland Party (ANAP)	Center-Right	Mesut Yılmaz	13.2	86
True Path Party (DYP)	Center-Right	Tansu Ciller	12.0	85
Republican People's Party (CHP)	Center-Left	Deniz Baykal ³	8.7	--
People's Democracy Party (HADEP)	Pro-Kurdish	Murat Bozlak ⁴	4.2	--
independents (unaffiliated)				3

¹ Other, smaller parties received inconsequential shares of the vote.

² Successor of the Welfare Party (RP). RP and its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, were banned in 1998.

³ Resigned after election. Succeeded by Altan Öymen.

⁴ Imprisoned.

On April 18, 1999, Turkey held simultaneous national and regional elections. The outcome surprised many. The center-right parties, ANAP and DYP, experienced continued declines that had begun in early nineties. The FP, successor to the Welfare Party (RP), whose leadership of a government in 1996-97 had provoked the secularist military to intervene in politics, also suffered a setback, reversing the Islamists' growth on the national stage. However, the Islamists retained mayoral posts in Istanbul, Ankara, and other municipalities. The nationalist DSP came in first, and the even more nationalistic MHP, that had not even been represented in the previous parliament, shocked itself and observers with a second place showing. The CHP, the party of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, failed to enter parliament for the first time ever. The pro-Kurdish HADEP, while also not making a mark nationally, unprecedentedly won six mayoral races in the southeast, including the regional capital of Diyarbakir.

² See CRS Report RS20149, *Kosovo: Greek and Turkish Perspective*.

There are many reasons for the changes. The Turkish public may have had a surfeit of the DYP and ANAP leaders' rivalry and alleged corruption, of the political machinations of the now former center-left CHP leader, Deniz Baykal, and of the equally manipulative behavior of the banned RP leader, Necmettin Erbakan. In other words, voters punished those whom they felt put themselves and their quest for power before the good of the country. Voters rewarded DSP and MHP leaders who have reputations for honesty and are fiercely nationalistic in the emotional climate following the capture of Ocalan, an ensuing surge in domestic terrorism largely attributed to Kurdish terrorists, and the Kosovo conflict. DSP leader Ecevit benefitted from his strong stand against the PKK and simply from being Prime Minister when Ocalan was caught. MHP leader Bahçeli profited from his efforts to redefine his ultra-right party as centrist/moderate since taking its helm in 1997, and from the public's nationalist tilt. In addition, MHP's strong grass roots work, especially among 5 million first time young voters and the central Anatolian *petit bourgeoisie*, paid off, as did its anti-PKK stand and reputation for supporting families of soldiers who had been killed fighting the PKK. The victors also may have drawn support from protest voters of 1995, who had then supported Islamists but now decided not to waste their votes on a party that the military would not allow to participate in government again. Remaining political distinctions in the new parliament focus mostly on political Islam and memories of street battles between left and right in the 1970s.

New Government

After the election, Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit replaced his prior single-party minority government with one of three parties, which together have 352 out of 550 seats in parliament. Once they agreed to form a government, DSP, MHP, and ANAP appeared to divide 36 ministerial portfolios easily. This may be attributed to DSP-ANAP's successful prior governmental collaboration in 1997-98 and to MHP's preference for seemingly less-powerful, non-controversial, patronage-laden portfolios. The coalition partners agreed to request parliament to authorize a third deputy prime minister for ANAP in addition to those from DSP and MHP, and did so promptly. Yilmaz opted not to participate for the time being in order to appeal corruption charges to the Supreme Court.

Among other portfolios, DSP retained the Foreign and Education Ministries, as well as the state ministry responsible for Cyprus. MHP received the Defense Ministry, which ensures it a seat on the National Security Council but is inconsequential given the military's dominance in that field. MHP also holds portfolios that will enable it to serve its constituencies and ideology: the Ministries of Agriculture, Industry and Trade, Public Works, and Transportation, the state ministry responsible for the Turkic republics, and the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (the equivalent of the U.S. Agency for International Development), which is vital to relations with the former Soviet republics. ANAP holds the Interior Ministry, the lucrative Ministry of Energy, and the state ministry responsible for relations with the European Union.

Primary Actors

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit was born in Istanbul in 1925. He became a Member of Parliament as a Republican People's Party (CHP) deputy in 1959 and served as Minister of Labor for a while. In 1966, he was elected Secretary General and, in 1972, General Chairman of the Party. Ecevit was Prime Minister at the time of Turkey's

invasion/intervention in Cyprus in 1974, and again briefly in 1977 and 1978. Banned from politics after the 1980 coup, Ecevit re-entered the arena in 1987, when he took over as General Chairman of the DSP from his wife Rahsan, who had founded the party and remains its Deputy Chairman. Ecevit served as Deputy Prime Minister from mid-1997 through 1998. In January 1999, he became Prime Minister of a DSP minority government that took the country to national elections. Intermittent reports suggest that the 74-year old Ecevit has health problems. One possible successor is Deputy Prime Minister Husamettin Ozkan, who conducted much of the coalition negotiations. Ecevit had been considered a reflexively leftist anti-American. In recent years, however, his appreciation for Turkey's friendship with the remaining superpower has grown. He supported the United States and NATO during the Kosovo conflict, and has allowed U.S. use of Turkish bases for Operation Northern Watch over Iraq.

Deputy Prime Minister Devlet Bahçeli was born in 1948 in Osmaniye, east of Adana. He is a Turkoman.³ Bahçeli was a founder of and activist in the ultra-nationalist Idealist youth organizations. In 1987, MHP founder and leader Alparslan Türkeş appointed Bahçeli Secretary General of the party. In the mid-1990's, the party began to adopt the appearance of moderation. In 1994, Bahçeli was named deputy party chairman. Türkeş died in 1997. Bahçeli won an ensuing power struggle with Türkeş' son, Tugrul, reportedly because of his organizational skills and party activism. He has worked to moderate the party's extremist image from that of the "grey wolves" thugs (Idealist militias) to a political player which strives for harmony. Some extremists were purged and others reportedly left the party with Tugrul after he lost the leadership. Bahçeli leads the party collegially with a coterie of professors. MHP's nationalism traditionally looks toward the Turkic world, seeking closer ties with Central Asia, and with Turks in Bulgaria, Russia, and China. MHP views foreign policy through a nationalist prism, supporting ties with Israel and the United States because they strengthen Turks. It is suspicious of ties with the EU that could harm Turkey's sovereignty.

Mesut Yılmaz was born in 1947 in Istanbul into a family from the Black Sea region of Rize. In 1983, he was one of the founders of ANAP and was elected to parliament. Yılmaz headed ministries in ANAP governments led by the late Turgut Ozal. In 1991, he was elected party chairman and served as Prime Minister until losing a national election later that year. In 1996, he briefly served as Prime Minister in a failed coalition with his political archrival Tansu Ciller of the DYP. In mid-1997, Yılmaz again became Prime Minister. In November 1998, he resigned after a vote of no confidence prompted by corruption charges. Yılmaz, who has a reputation for being better at intraparty politics than at governing, may need to participate in this government to dampen internal party dissent generated by ANAP's declining share of the vote, and perhaps to position the party for a merger with DYP, after the possible political demise of Ciller.

Program

Turkey faces many economic challenges. After a strong, 8.3% annual growth rate in 1997, its economy was harmed in 1998 by the global financial crisis, particularly in Russia, a key trading partner, when growth slowed to 3.8%. Growth projections for 1999 have been revised downward 0.5% and the budget deficit estimate upward to \$22.33

³ A tribe that speaks a Turkic dialect and has resided in eastern Turkey for centuries.

billion or about 7% of gross national product. Securing financing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has become more urgent. The government is set to continue the economic policies of its two immediate predecessors, led by DSP and ANAP: to fight inflation (which has come down from triple digits to about 50-55% annually), privatize state enterprises, and reform the banking and social security systems. Parliament already has passed a law to create a semi-independent supervisory panel for banks and a budget for the remainder of the year. Priority may then be given to legislation to reform social security, which pays pensions at a very young age, adding egregiously to budget deficits and national debt, and to permit international arbitration of business disputes in order to attract foreign investors, especially for Turkey's many energy projects.

The coalition partners have agreed not to revisit a 1997 law requiring 8 years of compulsory secular education or prohibitions on women wearing head scarves in public institutions. These agreements are viewed as MHP concessions to secularism because it has a religious constituency. However, MHP probably would prefer to avoid changes which might anger the military. The coalition protocol calls for a repentance law to allow PKK guerrillas to gain some form of immunity by regretting their actions, but DSP and MHP disagree about its urgency and substance. MHP seeks transparency in privatizations and limits on parliamentary immunity to fight corruption. Given the public's concern about corruption and the IMF's with transparency, DSP and ANAP probably will agree.

Prospects

Multiparty coalitions are inherently unstable and Turkish governments rarely serve out their terms. With over 350 seats in parliament, the DSP-MHP-ANAP government could last longer than its recent predecessors. Turkey needs political stability in order to implement economic reforms, and the patriotism of DSP and MHP, or their desire to stay in office, may allow the government to survive. Yet, historic differences and political ambitions could overtake their good intentions. DSP and MHP adherents fought each other in the streets in the 1970's. During coalition negotiations in May, Rahsan Ecevit publicly dredged up her memories of those years, underlining the continuing distrust for MHP. If DSP-ANAP connivance had deprived MHP of more powerful portfolios, it might be resentful. Moreover, after a period of governing, MHP may wish to try for first place in early elections. Should DYP change leaders, however, it could be viewed as a possible substitute for MHP in a government reconfigured without elections, limiting MHP's room for maneuver. DYP will not be a potential governing partner as long as Ciller is party leader, given Yilmaz's antipathy, her ineradicable reputation for corruption, and probable enduring military opposition due to her role in bringing the Islamists to power in 1996. Moreover, some political advisers recommend against relegating both MHP and FP to the opposition simultaneously, fearing a collaboration of "extremists."

Parliament will select a new President in May 2000. The coalition partners may engage in serious horse-trading before that date. Yilmaz is presumed to have presidential ambitions, while the intellectual Ecevit ironically does not meet constitutional requirements for the office because of his lack of a university degree. He may propose another candidate. MHP's views on the presidential race are unknown.

U.S.-Turkish Relations

President Clinton has invited Prime Minister Ecevit to visit the United States in September. There is a long agenda of issues to engage the two leaders. The Administration would like to see Turkey make substantive progress in democratization and human rights, particularly since Turkey has not fulfilled prior promises. The Administration is likely to express appreciation for Turkey's role in NATO air strikes during the Kosovo conflict, its aid to Kosovar Albanian refugees, and its participation in Kosovo peacekeeping, as well as for hosting Operation Northern Watch (U.S.-British-enforced no-fly zone over northern Iraq). The Administration was heartened by Turkey's cooperation with Greece on humanitarian issues during the Kosovo crisis, and may try to use it as a foundation for improving strained bilateral relations between the two NATO members in the Aegean Sea and on Cyprus.⁴ Ecevit, however, is more likely to make demands than concessions. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as an independent state and favors a confederal solution for the island, rather than the federal solution stipulated in U.N. resolutions. It also insists that Greece end its alleged support for the PKK, accept a dialogue on Aegean issues, and end obstruction of Turkey's European Union ambitions. Greece favors a Cyprus federation, denies supporting the PKK, wants Turkey to take Aegean disputes to the International Court of Justice, and may not concede much on the EU until Turkey complies.

The Administration seems certain to express continuing support for several of Turkey's more elusive goals: EU candidacy, construction of an oil pipeline from Baku, Azerbaijan to the port of Ceyhan in Turkey, and a trans-Caspian gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Turkey. Turkey has labeled the two energy projects its highest priorities. Despite the Administration's backing because it views the pipelines as good for Turkey and for enhancing the independence of the former Soviet republics, energy companies regard the pipelines as the most expensive routes for Central Asian energy exports, and some doubt that they are commercially feasible. Furthermore, Turkey has been unable to attain EU candidacy partly because it has resisted EU demands to change its Cyprus policy, improve relations with Greece, and redress human right abuses. Should Ocalan be executed, Turkish-EU ties could worsen. EU members condemn capital punishment and sympathize with Turkey's Kurds. Moreover, U.S. support for EU candidacy may mean less to Ecevit, who appears to regard EU membership as a lower priority than former governments.

For his part, Ecevit may express concern over the U.S. determination to replace Saddam Hussein. He is not convinced that U.S. policy toward Iraq is realistic and is worried about the possibility of a precedent-setting Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Ecevit may convey similar thoughts to Members of Congress, to whom he also may emphasize the cost Turkey has incurred by maintaining sanctions on Iraq since the Gulf War, and the detrimental effects that sanctions have had on Iraqi civilians. Ecevit also may complain about what he considers congressional interference in arms purchases and deliveries from the United States, which arise from congressional concerns about Turkish-Greek relations and Turkey's violations of the human rights of Kurdish civilians. He may object to what Turks consider interference in U.S.-Turkish relations by ethnic lobbies.

⁴ See CRS Report 97-799, *Greece and Turkey: Aegean Issues -- Background and Recent Developments*, and CRS Issue Brief 89140, *Cyprus: Status of U.N. Negotiations*.

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