

## **Workshop**

### **2023 parliamentary and presidential elections in Turkey**

The workshop, held on May 8, 2023, at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the NAS RA, was devoted to the parliamentary and presidential elections in Turkey. The purpose of the workshop was to comprehensively discuss the current situation in Turkey and outline possible scenarios after the elections. The main theses of the speeches of the speakers who participated in the round-table discussion were:

1. Before the earthquake, it was more or less clear how events would turn out in terms of Erdogan winning the second round of the presidential election and the opposition holding a majority in the parliament. However, the devastating earthquake significantly changed the general environment of the election campaign. The looting that occurred in the days after the earthquake, whose culprits have not yet been found, also contributed to the development of this situation. The aid provided by the authorities to those in the disaster area was provided selectively, which caused the justifiable dissatisfaction of the population. Initially, it appeared that the opposition would heavily rely on the numerous issues brought on by the earthquake, the level of corruption, and looting in the pre-election campaign, but over the past month, Erdogan has successfully pushed these issues to the side and deprived the opposition the chance to use them to his advantage. Erdogan succeeded in directing, shaping, and seizing control of the dominant informational and propaganda narrative. With various propaganda techniques, Erdogan also managed to weaken and discredit the rival opposition. Only on the third day did the Turkish army begin to participate in the relief operations in the disaster area, which may have been a result of Erdogan's worries and fears that the army might take some action.
2. Erdogan defined the pre-election campaign's core themes, which include constant displays of Turkey's achievements, from the country's initial nuclear

power plant to the development of its defense industry. While attempting to concentrate on economic issues, presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has problems adequately responding to those agendas of the government, trying to focus on economic issues. The Erdogan circle manipulatively keeps anti-American rhetoric, which is widespread in Turkish society, on the foreign policy agenda. The government wants to weaken the opposition by doing this since it is linked to and identified with the West.

On March 27, the High Electoral Commission of Turkey approved the main four candidates for the position of the country's president, two of whom are particularly interesting: Muharrem Ince and Sinan Oğan. The first joined the campaign as an independent candidate quite late. In the 2018 presidential elections, he was Erdogan's opponent; he received almost 30% of the vote and stood for the opposition "Republican People's" party. In order not to harm the united opposition, it was suggested that he remove his candidacy; nevertheless, he refused. There is an approach to his candidacy that is aimed at getting votes from the main opposition bloc. The other candidate, Sinan Oğan, is of Azerbaijani origin and has lived and taught in Azerbaijan for many years. Turkish far-right nationalist groups support his candidacy. There is an opinion that Aliyev, the president of Azerbaijan, financially supports this candidate. The diversity of political forces supporting opposition candidate, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, shows that there is no ideological or moral consensus among them; the only thing that unites them is the desire to see Erdogan removed from power, and it is still unclear how this multifaceted coalition will function once in power. How will they get past the barriers?

3. Erdogan's election campaign was formally launched this year, although it actually began in October of last year with his key speech, "The Century of Türkiye." Erdogan is using the military and military-industrial achievements, as well as the potential of extreme nationalist and Islamic parties, including the "Nationalist Movement," "Great Union," "Hüda-Par," and the religious tariqats and brotherhoods operating in the country, their waqfs, and networks,

like the "Menzil" tariqat, in this pre-election campaign. The networking prospects and income potential in those tariqats are fairly good. The most talked-about option is the potential for a second round of presidential elections, while it is probable that Erdogan will do everything in his power to prevent one and find a solution in the first round. Additionally, a scenario like this could occur in which the winning candidate for president does not gain a majority in the legislature, causing a political crisis on the domestic policy.

4. The pre-election manifesto of the opposition "Nation" alliance is mostly focused on internal political and state issues, while the foreign policy is presented quite modestly and generally. Instead, it is a general program that was accepted as a compromise to first appease the bloc's members with various ideologies, values, and foreign policy objectives. The opposition alliance's foreign policy vision is to make "Peace in the country, peace in the world," the guiding principle of the Kemalist foreign policy, a reality. Respecting the principles of independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of regional countries, not interfering in internal affairs, and acting from an impartial position in regional conflicts are emphasized. Another important emphasis is on ending foreign policy based on internal political calculations and ideological deviations. These stand in stark contrast to Erdogan's extremely individualized, prejudicial, and ideological foreign policy. The opposition's program calls for reforming the current methods for ensuring the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' staff, as well as restoring the function and significance of the Foreign Ministry in formulating and carrying out decisions and redefining foreign policy. These clauses and the strategies put out by advisers working for the opposition indicate institutionalization of foreign policy, depersonalization, the avoidance of manipulative behavior brought on by domestic political objectives, rationalization of the implementation of foreign policy, etc. The opposition appears to be trying to reassert Turkey's standing in the West based on some of the declaration's emphasis points. For Kılıçdaroğlu, foreign policy is a

relatively unfamiliar field, and advisors will play a major role. As a rule, advisors in such cases are more inclined to a cautious and predictable foreign policy so as not to create additional risks in their area of responsibility. Additionally, over-concentration of resources will be necessary for the declared priorities of economic stabilization, systemic change in the state administration, and the rule of law. In such circumstances, foreign policy might be formed through the lens of promoting these internal agendas. The degree of ties with the EU may be the biggest issue, even though there haven't been any choices made on a lot of matters yet, which is also objectively understandable. If the opposition wins the election, its foreign policy will be quite tough to implement because it will depend on how united their pre-election alliance or coalition is, which will be challenging to ensure.

5. The "People's" alliance's foreign policy program is already well-known among specialists. The pre-election manifesto gave a key place to foreign policy, and it is more of a vision, which is the ambitious continuation of Erdogan's foreign policy. The main goal is the formation of the "axis of Turkey," with the aim of achieving strategic autonomy. There is constant emphasis on the great and powerful Turkey, being a global player in the international system, and increasing the influence of foreign policy. The program is distinguished by the components of the ideological and cultural mission characteristic of the AKP. The construction of "a fully independent Turkey" in the chaotic international system, in which a key place is given to the power component, is declared a key goal.
6. The Kurdish forces have a sizable electorate in Turkey since the late 2000s. It was determined that the pro-Kurdish "People's Democracy" party received roughly 60 mandates in the 2018 elections, or 11% of the vote. In pre-election proceedings, Erdogan has always been able to leverage the Kurdish element. Thanks to Erdogan's approach, the Kurds' influence in Turkey's pre-election processes increased after 2002. This is particularly evident

when examining the outcomes of the elections that were held after 2002, where the AKP and Erdogan have a notable edge in the areas where the populace appears to support the government the least. This is related to the effective way Erdogan leverages Kurdish votes to his advantage by separating them from the "Kurdistan Workers' Party" (PKK). This is related to the effective way Erdogan leverages Kurdish votes to his advantage by separating them from the "Kurdistan Workers' Party" (PKK). The notion that Erdogan will bring Kurds and Turks together has recently come up for discussion in Kurdish circles. This makes it evident that the Kurds support Erdogan, and it leads us to believe that he will be able to maintain and even grow his support among them during the upcoming elections. There is a deep conviction among Kurdish people that by avoiding the PKK, they may live more prosperously in Turkey. The Kurdish community, especially in the areas of the Kurds living in the southeast of the country, is strongly supportive of the idea of coexisting in a strong Turkey with the Turks. The Kurdish issue in Turkey remains within the logic of the country's pure citizenship.

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