



Turkey Report

No11

Tensions Rise over the Local Elections

All political parties and media agree that the upcoming local elections will shape Turkey's near future. The increase of violence and threats against politicians has worried the public. Tensions rise as the elections approach and rivals deliver inflammatory speeches. The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader, Devlet Bahçeli, underlined the danger of high polarization in his latest speech. Indeed, the killing of an MHP spokesman in an armed attack last month created a potentially explosive situation. The deputy of the Nationalist Movement Party, Celal Adan, claimed that it was a terrorist attack. Bahçeli said that the perpetrators' aim was to provoke MHP supporters, but they should not give provocators a chance. Afterwards, another attack was reported, yet it was a false alarm. Moreover, armed gunmen opened fire against the municipal building of Şişli. The assault seemed to target Mustafa Sarıgül, mayor of Şişli and the Republican People's Party (CHP) mayor candidate for Istanbul . In addition, rival Kurdish party supporters, Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and Huda-Par, clashed in Diyarbakır. BDP co-chair Demirtaş emphasized that the incident was a provocation . Security concerns for the elections were also expressed by Ankara's Mayor, I. Melih Gökçek, who claimed there could be political assassinations on the eve of the polls.

Although political violence has caused turmoil, the political parties' election campaigns continue to unfold. The main opposition party, CHP, is at the centre of a dispute over its candidates. Actually, there were several resignations from the CHP over its mayoral nominations . Nasuh Mahruki was suggested as a mayoral candidate for Istanbul's Kadıköy district but he was not chosen since he is a member of the Workers' Party. As no consensus could be reached for Kadıköy (and other major districts of Istanbul), the CHP's leader, Kılıçdaroğlu, said that he would determine these candidacies himself and stated that the party's new slogan would be "Turkey's unifying power ."

The ruling Justice and Development Party's campaign is not yet complete. The AKP leaders' election cycle will start in Sivas. The main aim of Erdoğan is to persuade the public that the notorious corruption case is an international plot against his government. Furthermore, the ruling party declared that, apart from Turkish, Kurdish would be used while campaigning. Meanwhile, Selahattin Demirtaş, the co-president of the BDP, emphasized autonomy in his speech in Diyarbakır . Finally, the Workers' Party mayoral candidate for Istanbul

Research: Gökhan Göçmen

Editor: Evangelos Diamantopoulos

The Centre for Mediterranean, Middle East & Islamic Studies posts a multitude of positions in the context of free academic debate. These do not necessarily reflect the positions of the CEMMIS.

Centre for Mediterranean, Middle East and Islamic Studies

www.cemmis.edu.gr

will be the famous actor, Levent Kırca.

Sabah, "Bahçeli'den provokasyon uyarısı," (8/2/2014)

<http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2014/02/08/bahceliden-provokasyon-uyarisi>

Hürriyet, "Şişli Belediyesi'ne silahlı saldırı," (28/1/2014) <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/25670947.asp>

CNN Türk, "Demirtaş'tan Lice yorumu: "Halk tepkisi"," (31/1/2014)

<http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/turkiye/demirtastan-lice-yorumu-halk-tepkisi>

Yeniçağ, "Valilere seçim öncesi provokasyon uyarısı!," (1/2/2014)

<http://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/valilere-secim-oncesi-provokasyon-uyarisi-94251h.htm>

Vatan, "CHP'de istifa depremi sürüyor!," (11/2/2014) <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/chpde-istifa-depremi-suruyor/608654/1/gundem>

El, Kıvanç, "Son sözü Kılıçdaroğlu söyleyecek," *Vatan*, (10/2/2014) <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/son-sozu-kilicdaroglu-soyleyecek/608330/9/siyaset>

Dünya Bülteni, "Ak Parti'den Arapça, Kürtçe ve Zazaca seçim şarkısı," (10/2/2014)

<http://www.dunyabulteni.net/gunun-haberleri/289099/ak-partiden-arapca-kurtce-ve-zazaca-secim-sarkisi>

Hürriyet, "Demirtaş: Seçimden sonra özerklik ilan edeceğiz," (12/2/2014)

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/25793190.asp>

Ulusal Kanal, "İşçi Partisi Defne'ye talip," (10/2/2014) <http://www.ulusalkanal.com.tr/gundem/isçi-partisi-defneye-talip-h22369.html>

The New Controversial Internet Legislation

The Turkish government enacted a bylaw that might restrict access to the internet for more than 42 million users. The new internet law was approved by the Parliament on February 6 and gives to the head of the telecommunications authority (TİB) the ability to block access to certain web pages. It has been widely seen as a government move to increase control over citizens' online activities.

According to a recent report by the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), the law is used as a tool by the government to censor the internet . Indeed, the regulation allows a governmental agency, the TİB, to block access to websites without a court order if they are deemed to violate privacy or have "insulting" content.

The main issue, as far as the government is concerned, is the leak of illegal phone recordings to the internet, which has gained pace since a graft probe was launched against ministers, their relatives and businessmen collaborating with the state. Prime Minister Erdoğan referred to the illegal recordings targeting his opponents, the CHP and the MHP, as an example of cyberspace misuse . Yeni Şafak and Star reproduced Lutfi Elvan's declaration: "We are not putting a ban on the internet, we are getting rid of the previous mechanism which

could easily ban the internet ."

However, opposition parties in Turkey have called on President Abdullah Gül to veto the controversial internet restrictions. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the CHP, asked the President to "support democracy and veto the law." MHP leader, Devlet Bahçeli, underlined that the new internet legislation would restrict freedom of speech. Members of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) also criticized the state-imposed filter plan. Furthermore, Turkey's leading business organization, the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TÜSİAD), and some international organizations have urged President Abdullah Gül to veto the bill . Despite all these objections, President Gül disappointed the opposition and approved the internet bill with small changes.

Finally, the new regulation has drawn increasing criticism from the EU. The President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, called on the Turkish government to guarantee freedom of the press. In addition, the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, Štefan Füle, expressed concerns over the independence of the judiciary, the separation of powers and the impartiality and transparency of online investigations.

Boyacıoğlu, Hacer, "Türkiye'nin internet karnesi zaten kötü! Pahalı ve sansürlü!," *Radikal*, (9/2/2014)

http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/turkiyenin_internet_karnesi_zaten_kotupahali_ve_sansurlu-1174729

Varlık, İbrahim, "Erdoğan: Baykal ve MHP'ye kurulan kaset tuzağının arkasında paralel yapı var," *Cihan*,

(11/2/2014) http://www.cihan.com.tr/news/Erdogan-Baykal-ve-MHP-ye-kurulan-kaset-tuzaginin-arkasinda-paralel-yapi-var_9275-CHMTM1OTI3NS8xMDA1

Mallı, Ayfer, "Kişilik hakkına müdahale yok," *Yeni Şafak*, (6/2/2014) <http://yenisafak.com.tr/ekonomi-haber/kisilik-hakkina-mudahale-yok-07.02.2014-616660?ref=manset-10>

Kırmızı Haber, "Kılıçdaroğlu'ndan İnternet Sansürüne Tepki," (7/2/2014)

<http://www.kirmizihaber.com/kilicdaroglundan-internet-sansurune-tepki/>

Haber Evet, "Devlet Bahçeli'den İnternet Sansürüne Sert Tepki," (6/2/2014)

<http://www.haberevet.com/haber/20140206/727206/devlet-bahceli-den-internet-sansurune-sert-tepki.html>

Medya 365, "TÜSİAD'dan Gül'e 'internet sansürü' mektubu," (7/2/2014) <http://bit.ly/NuST0m>

European Commission, "LIVE EC Midday press briefing of 06/02/2014," (6/2/2014)

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I086146>

Media Leaks: The Bitter Truth

Some voice recordings appear to reveal Erdoğan's direct interference with press freedom. These recordings of various phone conversations allegedly between the Prime Minister and Fatih Saraç, deputy chairman of Ciner Media Group which owns the Habertürk newspaper, were leaked to the internet. In one of these recordings, Erdoğan orders Saraç over the phone to stop broadcasting a press conference of MHP's leader, Devlet Bahçeli . The Prime Minister's son allegedly plays a role in this game of power to manipulate and intimidate the media since he was contacted later on by Saraç who was asking for forgiveness. In addition, three journalists were dismissed for publishing a news report which criticized deficiencies in the public health system after Erdoğan complained to Saraç about it.

In an interview with CNN Türk, Fatih Altaylı, Daily Habertürk's editor-in-chief, acknowledged that he had been used by the government. Without denying the authenticity of the recordings, Altaylı described them as a development that "showed for the first time the pressure put on the media ."

"About the phone call from Morocco, yes indeed, I called. I only made some reminders," Erdoğan said on February 11 following a journalist's question during a press conference in Ankara . Tension erupted during his statements to the press when another reporter took the floor to ask a question over the legality of the PM's summer houses on the Aegean coast . The journalist was accused of being close to the movement of the USA-based Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen that Erdoğan blames for orchestrating the latest graft probes.

Both the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader, Devlet Bahçeli, and the Republican People's Party (CHP) leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, pointed out in their speeches that the Erdoğan administration was putting pressure on the media . Kılıçdaroğlu also mentioned the existence of another tape which is a phone conversation between Minister Binali Yıldırım and a businessman connected with Bilal Erdoğan and emphasized that it was legally intercepted for the ongoing anti-corruption investigation .

More breaking news came from Basri Özbey, the vice chairman of the Workers' Party, who shared an alleged video recording of Abdullah Öcalan. The video was filmed during his interrogation after being arrested by the Turkish security units in 1999. In this video, Öcalan appears to describe the executive staff of the PKK as "vicious men." Öcalan offers also his full service to the Turkish security units by saying that he is already a soldier of the state . The MPs of the BDP have described this video of the leader of the PKK as fabricated.

Cihan, "New voice recording reveals PM Erdoğan's interference in media," (10/2/2014) <http://bit.ly/1kaPsH5>

CNN Türk, "Fatih Altaylı ses kayıtlarına cevap verdi," (10/2/2014)

<http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/turkiye/fatih-altayli-ses-kayitlarina-cevap-verdi>

P24, "Artık saklamıyor!," (12/2/2014) <http://www.platform24.org/medya-izleme/160/artik-saklamiyor>

Milliyet, "Erdoğan:Fas'tan sadece hatırlatmayı yaptım," (11/2/2014) <http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/erdogan-fas-tan-sadece-hatirlatmayi-siyaset/detay/1835341/default.htm>

Gazeteport, "Habertürk'ten 'Alo Fatih' manevrası," (11/2/2014)

<http://www.gazeteport.com.tr/haber/161140/fatihcikler-kurmali-fatihler--->

Radikal, "Kılıçdaroğlu grup toplantısında tapeleri dinletti," (11/2/2014)

http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/kilicdaroglu_grup_toplantisinda_tapeleri_dinletti-1176249

Peker, Sedat, "İMRALI'DAKİ APO (1999) SORGU - TEK PARÇA FULL İZLE," *YouTube video*, 35:35, (11/2/2014)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGBOgt9liuA>

Ulusal Kanal, "Demirtaş, Öcalan görüntüleri ile ilgili konuştu," (10/2/2014)

<http://www.ulusalkanal.com.tr/imralidaki-apo/demirtas-ocalan-goruntuleri-ile-ilgili-konustu-h22374.html>

Police, Jurists and the "Parallel State"

December 17 was a significant point for the Turkish political arena since on that date the Gülen movement and Erdoğan, close allies in the past, parted their ways. After a period of reciprocal accusations, the political crisis has turned into a regime one. According to Erdoğan, the Gülen movement has transformed into a "parallel structure." Pro-AKP newspapers argue that the recent corruption investigations are led by the parallel structure which has been organized inside the police and the judiciary in order to weaken PM Erdoğan. They also claim that there was an involvement of police officers in a case where trucks suspected to be loaded with weapons were found near the borders with Syria . Moreover, Erdoğan's advisor Yalçın Akdoğan argued that the Gülen community staged a political conspiracy against the army in the disputed Ergenekon and Balyoz cases .

Erdoğan has vowed to battle the "state within the state" while referring to Gülenists in the state apparatus and said he would not allow the existence of parallel structures. Actually, it is reported that the number of policemen relocated after December the 17th is over 5000 . According to the Guardian, these police officers were caught up in the conflict between Erdoğan and Gülen . In addition, 166 judges and attorneys as well as the prosecutors who have worked on the Ergenekon and corruption operations were relocated . Some specially authorized courts, in which many of the aforementioned prosecutors served, were abolished on February 13 due to the AKP's "democratization" package .

Fethullah Gülen, the protagonist of the controversy, answered these accusations against him in an interview with the BBC during which he declared that he did not know the prosecutors or the police officers who had been discharged . Hüseyin Gülerce from Zaman newspaper, which is close to the Gülen movement, claimed that the community has no business with politics. However, Yıldırım Oğur, a columnist for Türkiye newspaper raised in the Gülen community, and Rasim Ozan Kütahyalı, writer for the Sabah newspaper, are now among those who support the parallel state claims.

Meanwhile, the main opposition party, the CHP, makes statements against the AKP. "The Prime Minister keeps

talking about the parallel state. If there is a parallel state, Erdoğan is the head of it," according to Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the CHP . It is said that Kılıçdaroğlu, who wiretapped the sound recordings of the corruption cases, might face legal consequences for violating privacy laws. On the other hand, another opposition party, the BDP, has criticized the fact that no legal action against the parallel state has been taken and pointed out that the peace process for the Kurdish issue should continue . Finally, the PKK leader, Öcalan, confirmed the claims about the parallel structure and lent his support to the Prime Minister.

Sabah, "Ankesörden imama rapor," (4/2/2014) <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2014/02/04/ankesorden-imama-rapor>

Hürriyet, "PM's adviser accuses Gülen movement of plotting against Turkish army, nation," (24/12/2013) <http://bit.ly/1fnCG3e>

Radikal, "Emniyetteki depremin bilançosu: 5 bin polisin yeri değişti," (24/1/2014) http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/emniyetteki_depremin_bilancosu_5_bin_polisin_yeri_degisti-1172344

Letsch, Constanze, "Turkish police caught in middle of war between Erdoğan and former ally Gülen," *The Guardian*, (9/2/2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/09/turkish-police-fethullah-gulen-network>

Gürcanl, Zeynep, "Savcı Öz ile 166 hakim ve savcının görev yeri değişti," *Hürriyet*, (11/2/2014) <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/25787060.asp>

CNN Türk, "Yeni demokratikleşme paketi komisyonda kabul edildi," (13/2/2014) <http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/turkiye/yeni-demokratikleşme-paketi-komisyonda-kabul-edildi>

Yıldız, Güney, "Fethullah Gülen BBC'ye konuştu," *BBC Türkçe*, (27/1/2014) http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/01/140126_fethullah_gulen_roportaj_guney.shtml

Oğur, Yıldray, "Nasıl 'Kafes'lendik?," *Türkiye*, (17/1/2014) <http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/yildiray-ogur/577789.aspx>

CNN Türk, "Kılıçdaroğlu'ndan Erdoğan'a paralel devlet yanıtı," (9/2/2014) <http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/turkiye/kilicdaroglundan-erdogana-paralel-devlet-yaniti>

CNN Türk, "Demirtaş: 'Suç değilse herkes paralel devlet kursun bu ülkede'," (11/2/2014) <http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/turkiye/demirtas-suc-degilse-herkes-paralel-devlet-kursun-bu-ulkede>

Mynet, "Öcalan'dan Başbakan'a 'paralel devlet' uyarısı," (14/1/2014) <http://www.mynet.com/haber/guncel/ocalandan-basbakana-paralel-devlet-uyarisi-946814-1>