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A POLITICAL *DEPREM*? THE IMPACT OF THE EARTHQUAKE ON TÜRKIYE'S DOMESTIC POLITICS

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Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

2023 marks the centennial of the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, when the Turkish Grand National Assembly led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk proclaimed the establishment of the republic and the abolishment of the Caliphate that ruled Ottoman Turks for six centuries. For decades, the Kemalists and military-backed governments ruled Türkiye with a secular iron hand. It wasn't until 2002, when the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power that Kemalists' monopoly on power was challenged, ending decades of unstable coalition governments.

AKP's early years were relatively peaceful, as the country experienced fast economic growth and continued openness to the West. However, as the authorities began facing domestic and regional challenges, illiberal democracy started to consolidate itself in Türkiye. In 2013, protests erupted in opposition to building a shopping mall in Istanbul's Gezi Park. The government violently cracked down on the movement and began limiting civil liberties and curtailing press freedoms. Moreover, a failed coup attempt in 2016 consolidated authoritarianism in the country. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government imprisoned thousands of activists, reporters, and bureaucrats accusing them of joining the Gulenist movement.¹ As a result, he replaced state bureaucrats with people loyal to the AKP party or his own family members.²

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political allegiances. In the years following the municipality elections, the government has engaged in military operations in neighboring countries (Syria and Iraq) to mobilize conservatives and nationalists for domestic purposes.

Starting in 2018, Türkiye's economy was hit by a financial crisis due to ill monetary restructuring and regulations.³ This, in addition to other socio-economic and political factors, brought opposition parties together against the government. The 2019 municipality elections and AKP's loss in Ankara and Istanbul signaled a change in people's

Adding fuel to fire, on February 6, 2023, two earthquakes – 7.8 and 7.5 on the Richter scale – hit near the Syrian-Turkish border, the deadliest in Türkiye's history. Thousands of buildings

¹ The Gulen or Hizmet Movement is led by religious preacher Fethullah Gulen, once an AKP ally turned staunch rival, and eventually accused of attempting a coup. The movement was designated as a terrorist organization by Türkiye.

² Adam Samson and Laura Pitel, “Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Turkey's president confronts disaster,” *Financial Times*, February 10, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/c10b3f24-1671-4514-83f7-f6f90d87ea5a>, last accessed 5/3/2023.

³ Joshua Askew, “Soaring inflation and a collapsing currency: Why is Turkey's economy in such a mess?” *Euronews*, December 21, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/11/09/everything-is-overheating-why-is-turkeys-economy-in-such-a-mess>, last accessed 5/3/2023.

collapsed and at least 45,000 people were killed in Türkiye.⁴ The fallout of the catastrophic earthquake came as President Erdoğan faces his toughest re-election campaign yet. Despite speculations that Erdoğan may postpone the elections, he declared that elections will be held on the agreed date of May 14, 2023.⁵

Türkiye is a central power in the Middle East, and any political shift in the domestic balance of power will have an impact on the political landscape of the region. During the last two decades, Erdoğan has frequently harnessed past crises and turned them to his advantage. Whether he will be able to manage this crisis and also turn it to his advantage is yet unknown. The paper will analyze the impact of the earthquake on Türkiye's domestic politics amid the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. It will also look at the internal dynamics in the opposition that are crucial indicators to shape the outcome of the elections, as Türkiye prepares to celebrate its 100th anniversary in October.

FROM NATURAL *DEPREM* TO POLITICAL EARTHQUAKE

In 1999, an earthquake hit Türkiye killing nearly 19,000 people and exposing the limitations of the social contract between citizens and their paternalistic state. According to Soner Cagaptay, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the author of "A Sultan in Autumn" on Erdoğan's rise in Türkiye, "the natural disaster, coupled with an ensuing economic crisis, stoked deep dissatisfaction and spurred the toppling of the secular and often illiberal regimes that had prevailed since the country emerged from the wreck of the Ottoman Empire, in 1922."⁶ Out of the rubbles of the *deprem*⁷, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Islamist AKP took advantage of the mismanagement and the failed crisis response of the government and scored victories in the municipal and parliamentary elections. Cagaptay argues that the most recent February 6 earthquake could have had the same effect as the one nearly 25 years ago.

⁴ "Turkey's earthquake death toll rose to 45,968 -interior minister," *Reuters*, March 4, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-earthquake-death-toll-rose-45968-interior-minister-2023-03-04/>, last accessed 7/3/2023.

⁵ Nazlan Ertan, "Erdoğan rules out postponing Turkey's elections after earthquakes," *al-Monitor*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/03/erdogan-rules-out-postponing-turkeys-elections-after-earthquakes#ixzz7v08Mj8zp>, last accessed 5/3/2023.

⁶ Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's Disaster—and Erdoğan's," *Foreign Affairs*, March 1, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/turkey/turkeys-disaster-and-erdogans?check_logged_in=1&utm_medium=promo_email&utm_source=lo_flows&utm_campaign=registered_user_welcome&utm_term=email_1&utm_content=20230304, accessed 5/3/2023.

⁷ Turkish for earthquake.

Hence, a *deprem* that brought Erdoğan and his party to power, could now weaken his party and oust him instead.⁸

The February 6 earthquake hit an area inhabited by the poor, mostly conservatives, a mixed population with Sunnis, Alevis, and Kurds that may further reduce support for AKP due to an ill crisis mechanism.⁹

While commemorating the anniversary of the 1999 earthquake last year, Erdoğan hailed his government's "urban transformation projects" that would shield people from future earthquakes. "As humans, it is not in our hands to prevent disasters; yet, it is in our hands to take measures against their destructive impacts," he said.¹⁰ Those words are now coming to haunt, with thousands of Turks complaining that the government was late in sending humanitarian aid to the damaged zones. Moreover, academic research shows that earthquakes kill more people in countries affected by widespread corruption.¹¹ According to the Financial Times, AKP loosened tender rules and built a web of business and political relations that awarded profitable public tenders for people close to the president's family and the AKP in exchange for certain social services.¹² These activities encouraged illegal construction projects and careless building practices. Erdoğan's government passed several such exceptions, ahead of the 2018 general elections. Back then, the opposition backed the move, because it was popular with voters.

Many also questioned the role of the army after the earthquakes. There was public anger directed towards the army for failing to mobilize and be deployed in the devastated cities to engage in post-earthquake search and rescue operations. Responding to this criticism Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said: "Who is going to protect the borders? Who is going to stay in Syria? Are we going to evacuate Syria, are we going to evacuate Iraq?"¹³ The Turkish army, which was on the scene to carry out search and rescue efforts in the 1999 earthquake, has been weakened and politicized under Erdoğan after the 2016 failed coup. Under Erdoğan's rule, according to observers, the army didn't have the mechanism to react to such disasters without any instructions.¹⁴

⁸ Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's Disaster—and Erdogan's," *Foreign Affairs*, March 1, 2023,

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/turkey/turkeys-disaster-and-erdogans?check_logged_in=1&utm_medium=promo_email&utm_source=lo_flows&utm_campaign=registered_user_welcome&utm_term=email_1&utm_content=20230304, accessed 5/3/2023.

⁹ "Turkey's earthquakes show the deadly extent of construction scams," *The Economist*, February 12, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/02/12/turkeys-earthquakes-show-the-deadly-extent-of-construction-scams>, last accessed 5/3/2023.

¹⁰ Adam Samson and Laura Pitel, "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Turkey's president confronts disaster," *Financial Times*, February 10, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/c10b3f24-1671-4514-83f7-f6f90d87ea5a>, last accessed 5/3/2023.

¹¹ Jake Amatruđa, "Corruption Kills: Earthquake Death Tolls and the Role of Corruption," *The Yale Globalist*, Haze, Fall 2022, Volume 23, Issue I March 22, 2011, <https://globalist.yale.edu/onlinecontent/blogs/corruption-kills-earthquake-death-tolls-and-the-role-of-corruption/>, last accessed 6/3/2022.

¹² <https://www.ft.com/content/c10b3f24-1671-4514-83f7-f6f90d87ea5a>, last accessed 6/3/2023.

¹³ "On army's absence from quake response, Turkish Defense Minister says soldiers needed in Syria, Iraq," *Duvar English*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/on-armys-absence-from-quake-response-turkish-defense-minister-akar-says-soldiers-needed-in-syria-iraq-news-61944>, last accessed 4/3/2023.

¹⁴ Gonul Tol, "How Corruption and Misrule Made Turkey's Earthquake Deadlier," *Foreign Policy*, February 10, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/10/turkey-earthquake-erdogan-government-response-corruption-construction/>, last accessed 6/3/2023.

Economically speaking, it will take some time for Türkiye to recover amid the ongoing financial crisis. Dr. Mustafa Murat Kubilay an independent financial advisor on the Turkish economy and a non-resident scholar with the Middle East Institute's Türkiye Program argued that the total cost of the destruction caused by the February 6 earthquake is still unclear, but it will not be less than USD 10 billion and as much as USD 84 billion, according to one estimate from Turkish business group *Turkonfed*, or around 10% of GDP.¹⁵ So far, the Turkish government has allocated an initial USD 5.3 billion in disaster relief.¹⁶ The government bets that more financial support will arrive from Qatar and Saudi Arabia.¹⁷ There are no negotiations with the IMF either and any international relief will only cover the basic needs of people in the region affected by the earthquakes.¹⁸ The question is whether the opposition can effectively organize its ranks and take advantage of Erdoğan's vulnerabilities.

THE ROAD TOWARDS PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

In 2018, the Turkish opposition parties formed the "Nation Alliance" (later joined by two AKP breakaway factions) aiming to oust the AKP. However, its inability to find a common ground with the Kurds gave an advantage to the "Peoples' Alliance" formed by AKP and the far-right MHP.¹⁹ On February 28, 2022, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the Kemalist Peoples' Republican Party (CHP), and his long-standing ally Meral Aksener, leader of the center-right Good Party (Iyi)²⁰, were joined by Ali Babacan (former AKP and Foreign Minister) of the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA), Ahmet Davutoglu (former AKP Prime Minister and Foreign Minister), of the Future Party, Gultekin Uysal of the Democrat Party and Temel Karamollaoglu, leader of the Saadet Party, in signing the interparty agreement.²¹ Despite clear ideological incompatibilities and differences

¹⁵ M. Murat Kubilay, "Already vulnerable, Turkey's economy now faces massive earthquake recovery costs," *Middle East Institute*, February 13, 2023, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/already-vulnerable-turkeys-economy-now-faces-massive-earthquake-recovery-costs>, last accessed 6/3/2023.

¹⁶ Beril Akman and Asli Kandemir, "Turkish Business Group Sees Quakes' Economic Toll at \$84 Billion," *Yahoo News*, https://news.yahoo.com/turkish-business-group-sees-quakes-122456492.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubWVpLmVkdS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAITwGzJuDvPlxAbUxalB03ZwnNqviVusyVC2tBu8EbjEF3sZz3QhCCmH0VW8EYT00GtwZIE4-jAEGZtacvcTXByQSx41lvA0zhOlfgrsaURI-rCOood_j4N7UA-uf819M3LtrLaLDI59JXL6mQDikB-iFJq1deID7mEKzSnZ-2l, February 12, 2023.

¹⁷ "Saudi Arabia deposits \$5 billion in Turkey's central bank," *Deutsche Welle*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/saudi-arabia-deposits-5-billion-in-turkeys-central-bank/a-64896666>, last accessed 7/3/2023.

¹⁸ M. Murat Kubilay, "Already vulnerable, Turkey's economy now faces massive earthquake recovery costs," *Middle East Institute*, February 13, 2023, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/already-vulnerable-turkeys-economy-now-faces-massive-earthquake-recovery-costs>, last accessed 6/3/2023.

¹⁹ MHP stands for Nationalist Movement Party founded in 1969 based on Pan-Turkic ideology.

²⁰ Iyi Party defected from the MHP in 2017 due to interparty tensions and MHP's alliance with AKP.

²¹ "Six-way opposition alliance outlines main principles, objectives," *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/six-way-opposition-alliance-outlines-main-principles-objectives-174187>, last accessed 7/3/2023.

on issues such as secularism, LGBT rights, and the Kurdish issue, the so-called “Table of Six” confronted AKP’s rule. The country’s third-largest political party, the left-wing and pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) was noticeably absent from the joint declaration, as Iyi opposed any coordination with the Kurds.²²

In their joint announcement, the “Table of Six” proposed a constitutional package for restoring democracy, the rule of law, and a parliamentary system in case of an election victory in 2023. “We are committed to implementing our ‘Strengthened Parliamentary System Constitutional Amendment Proposal’ with the hope that it will bring peace and tranquility to all our nation and future generations,” the joint declaration stated.²³

The proposed constitutional package comprises of 167 articles and primarily aims to abolish the 2017 controversial referendum in which Erdoğan moved the country from a parliamentary to a presidential system. Hence, the opposition aims to restore the parliamentary system, create a strong checks and balances system and turn the presidency into a symbolic position. Such an initiative, according to them, will encourage political pluralism, democracy, and rule of law.²⁴

People in Türkiye have a different political culture compared to other Middle Eastern countries. For example, voters who voted for a candidate in a presidential election may not necessarily vote for the same candidate’s party in the parliamentary or municipality elections. Hence, based on the results of the municipality or parliamentary elections, one cannot guess who could be the next president.

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Two key factors will determine peoples’ voting behavior in Türkiye.

The first factor is the frustration of the middle class with Erdoğan’s economic mismanagement. A growing number of disgruntled middle-class AKP voters, who have been the backbone of the party for the last two decades, may cast their vote for other parties. This middle class originated from the cities – the Anatolian Tigers – that were affected by the earthquakes (including Malatya,

²² Nazlan Ertan, “Turkey’s opposition unites in advance of 2023 elections,” *al-Monitor*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/03/turkeys-opposition-unites-advance-2023-elections>, last accessed 5/3/2023.

²³ Hamdi Firat Buyuk, “Turkish Opposition Unveils ‘Post-Erdogan’ Constitutional Package,” November 28, 2022, *Balkan Insight*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/11/28/turkish-opposition-unveils-post-erdogan-constitutional-package/>, last accessed 7/3/2023.

²⁴ Hamdi Firat Buyuk, “Turkish Opposition Unveils ‘Post-Erdogan’ Constitutional Package,” November 28, 2022, *Balkan Insight*, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/11/28/turkish-opposition-unveils-post-erdogan-constitutional-package/>, last accessed 7/3/2023.

Gaziantep, and Kahramanmaraş), which have displayed impressive growth records since the 1980s and its middle class owns important small and medium-sized enterprises in the country.²⁵

Foreign policy is another crucial factor, as the Syrian crisis and the Kurdish issue may determine the votes of the Alevis and the Kurds. The CHP, which usually enjoys the support of the secular Alevis (the leader of the party is an Alevi himself) started its electoral campaign by vowing to send Türkiye-born Syrian children back to their country of origin.²⁶ The CHP also calls for the restoration of diplomatic relations with Syria's Bashar al-Assad government.²⁷ Some Turks also have concerns about Türkiye's foreign policy orientation and its alienation from the West, while others support the country's central role in engaging a more balanced foreign policy between the West and Russia.

Last but not least are the issues of nationalism and religiosity. According to some observers, Türkiye is witnessing a significant rise in nationalism, and religion continues to play a crucial role in shaping the public sphere. Even though the younger generation is becoming more secular, the majority of the country in central Anatolia is still conservative. This is also why nationalist parties adhere to cultural nationalism, thus giving space for religious conservatives to support their political agenda.²⁸ This factor is also pushing the opposition to adopt a "softer" approach to social issues as polls showed that Türkiye's "Table of Six" opposition bloc was running neck and neck with Erdoğan's alliance.²⁹

FROM A FRACTURED TO A UNIFIED OPPOSITION

The six opposition parties met in early March to discuss their joint presidential candidate, and all except the second largest opposition party İYİ endorsed Kemal Kilinçdaroglu, the leader of the largest opposition party (CHP). Initially, Meral Akşener the leader of the İYİ Party rejected the endorsement. However, on the evening of March 6, the mayors of Istanbul and Ankara made a sudden visit to İYİ Party's leader and convinced her to come back. A few hours later, she attended the official ceremony announcing the candidacy of the CHP leader. This sent a positive shock to

²⁵ Ede Jorge Ijjasz-Vasquez, "Rise of the Anatolian Tigers: Leveraging & Managing Urbanization in Turkey," *World Bank*, October 14, 2015, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/10/14/rise-of-the-anatolian-tiger>, last accessed 4/3/2023.

²⁶ "CHP leader vows to send Türkiye-born Syrian kids back to Syria," *Hurriyet Daily News*, July 11, 2022, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chp-leader-vows-to-send-turkiye-born-syrian-kids-back-to-syria-175268>, last accessed 7/3/2023.

²⁷ Saeed Abdulrazek, "Turkey's CHP Leader Calls for Restoring Ties with Damascus, Sending Refugees Home," *Asharq al Awsat*, June 22, 2021, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3040956/turkey%E2%80%99s-chp-leader-calls-restoring-ties-damascus-sending-refugees-home>, last accessed 5/3/2023.

²⁸ "Turkey's 2023 elections: What do the polls say?" *Middle East Institute*, October 4, 2022, <https://www.mei.edu/events/turkeys-2023-elections-what-do-polls-say>, last accessed 6/3/2023.

²⁹ Turkey's 2023 elections: What do the polls say?" *Middle East Institute*, October 4, 2022, <https://www.mei.edu/events/turkeys-2023-elections-what-do-polls-say>, last accessed 6/3/2023.

those who were eager to put an end to Erdoğan's rule.³⁰ Though some observers fear that many Iyi supporters may not cast their votes for the Kemalist leader due to his sectarian background.

Fayik Yagizay, HDP's representative to the EU, mentioned that Meral Aksener's return to the "Table of Six" boosted Kilicdaroglu's position and now he may feel more comfortable engaging in dialogue with HDP. He argued that HDP has received certain signals, however, there will be no formal alliance. As HDP is preparing to form the "Labor and Freedom Alliance". The HDP representative argued that this alliance will be a "third way" and will include many leftist parties. He also added that "in return for supporting Kılıcдарoglu, in the Presidential election, (HDP) is considering negotiating within the framework of the 'Justice, Democracy and Peace declaration' announced by the party in September 2021". The main framework of this declaration was about democracy, human rights, peaceful foreign policy, and most importantly finding a democratic and peaceful resolution for the Kurdish issue.³¹ Already on March 2022, the head of the CHP gave a surprise visit to the HDP headquarters in Ankara, where the Kurdish-led political party announced that they will support the opposition candidate as there is a "historical responsibility" to win over Erdogan.³²

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS AS OUTCOME OF ELECTIONS

Predicting the outcome of the elections is difficult, given the unpredictable political situation in Türkiye, the political behavior of the people, and the regional challenges that may shape or impact the opinion of a segment of society.

Pro-government newspapers started launching attacks against the opposition arguing that "the opposition bloc's formula reflects a theoretical perspective that disregards practical realities. It rests in "liberal" assumptions incompatible with the nature of politics."³³ AKP also lost chances to act beforehand and engage in political arrangements either with Iyi or the Kurdish-led HDP. Iyi has already announced that it will support the opposition candidate, though some of its supporters may cast for Erdogan. The second option was risky for the Turkish President. If his party had approached the HDP, it would have been full of risks as it will alienate the votes of the nationalists, but win the votes of the Kurds in return. However, this door has been closed. As Fayik Yagizay

³⁰ Ruth Michaelson, "Turkish opposition settles on bookish presidential candidate after public row," *The Guardian*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/06/turkish-opposition-settles-on-bookish-presidential-candidate-after-public-row>, last accessed 7/3/2023.

³¹ Interview with Mr. Fayik Yagizay, HDP Representative to the European Institutions in Strasbourg, March 7, 2023.

³² Yeghia Tashjian, "What is the Kurdish-led HDP's position on Turkey's elections?", *Armenian Weekly*, March 29, 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/03/29/what-is-the-kurdish-led-hdps-position-on-turkeys-elections/>, last accessed 4/4/2023.

³³ Burhanettin Duran, "Turkish opposition's 'solution': Let's all be president!" *Daily Sabah*, January 9, 2023, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/turkish-oppositions-solution-lets-all-be-president>, last accessed 7/3/2023.

argued, there is no possibility of any cooperation with AKP. He mentioned that Erdoğan is in no position to provide concessions to the Kurds as he is desperate for the votes of the nationalists. On the contrary, Erdoğan may continue and escalate his policies against the Kurds to attract nationalist votes.³⁴ Some analysts also argue that Türkiye may declare a limited military operation in North Eastern Syria to reach this aim.³⁵ Meanwhile, given AKP’s weakened MHP ally, President Erdoğan may engage in some flexibility to attract new votes. For this purpose, he is already allying with small Islamist political parties.³⁶

Joint opposition presidential candidate Kilicdaroglu, who has vowed to end corruption and authoritarianism, is eager to win over the swing votes of Iyi, which is now crucial for the

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parliamentary but also presidential elections. If Kılıçdaroglu and CHP create an electoral alliance with HDP, Kurds would become the king-makers. But how would other parties in the opposition react? How would hardline Kemalists in the CHP and Iyi nationalists react? Will Kılıçdaroglu

provide any political concessions to the Kurds? Or this will be just a tactical move for electoral purposes? The Kurds have also concerns that President Erdogan may increase political pressure on them amid a government-backed ongoing court case to close down the Kurdish party. Hence, the concern over additional oppression toward the Kurds and the CHP leader’s willingness to cooperate due to voting concerns have pushed both sides to seek compromise and campaign against President Erdoğan.

CHP leader’s remarks suggest that the opposition will use the earthquake to attack Erdoğan during the electoral campaign season. Erdoğan insisted that he will organize the elections at the decided date, but some fear that he may use some autocratic measures. As his government has declared a state of emergency in the states impacted by the earthquakes, thus suspending rights and liberties in ten provinces, he is likely to extend once it expires in May. This would mean that in the ten earthquake-hit provinces – constituting over a sixth of Türkiye’s population and many

³⁴ Interview with Mr. Fayik Yagizay, HDP Representative to the European Institutions in Strasbourg, March 7, 2023.

³⁵ Ali Kucukgocmen and Ece Toksabay, Euronews, November 16, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/11/16/turkey-security-politics-analysis>, last accessed 7/3/2023.

³⁶ Andrew Wilks , “Turkey’s ruling alliance welcomes Islamist parties with misogynist agendas “, *Al-monitor*, March 27, 2023, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/03/turkeys-ruling-alliance-welcomes-islamist-parties-misogynist-agendas>, last accessed 4/4/2023.

of its most outraged and aggrieved citizens – elections would be neither fair nor free, handing Erdoğan a competitive advantage at the polls.³⁷

What will happen if one of the alliances wins the presidency and the other side takes the majority in the Turkish National Assembly? Will we witness a shift from a presidential to a semi-presidential system? Erdoğan will do his best to keep the presidency as he may fear political persecution if he loses immunity, if his party loses the grip over the National Assembly, he may even seek power-sharing arrangements with smaller conservative and nationalist parties to preserve his rule or go for other constitutional options. In this game, the kingmakers will be the İYİ and HDP. Their swing votes may not only have an impact on the outcome of the elections, but also may shape the future government's foreign policy orientation towards the West, Russia, and the Middle East. If Erdoğan and his party score victory in both elections, on the centennial of the republic, he will record his name as the greatest leader Türkiye has ever seen besides Atatürk. If the opposition strikes and win the elections, it will create a political *deprem* where its tremors will be felt in the region. But if one side wins either the presidential or the parliamentary then Türkiye may enter into an institutional paralysis where the President may call for another snap election just as it happened in June 2015.

³⁷ Hamdi Firat Büyük, "Stung by Criticism, Turkey's Erdogan Targets Free Speech as Elections Loom," *Balkan Insight*, March 2, 2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/03/02/stung-by-criticism-turkeys-erdogan-targets-free-speech-as-elections-loom/> last accessed 4/4/2023.



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