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ELECTIONS IN TURKEY

Historical Background

Republic of Turkey, a democratic, secular, unitary and constitutional republic, was established following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after WWI. Turkish Revolutionaries, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938) rejected the Treaty of Sèvres, which ended WWI for the Ottoman Empire and partitioned the Empire between Britain, Italy, France, Greece, Armenia and a Kurdish State, leaving only a small portion of mid-Anatolian Peninsula for Turks. This resistance led to the formation of Grand National Assembly (April 23, 1920), which mobilized the Turkish forces. After the military campaigns against the aforementioned forces, the Turkish War of Independence ended with victory for Turks and the Treaty of Lausanne (July 24, 1923). The new Turkish Republic was established on October 29, 1923 in Ankara, the capital city. Atatürk became the first President.

ELECTIONS

Presidential Elections

The head of the state and the commander-in-chief is the President. Prior to the 2007 referendum, the President was selected by the Grand National Assembly to serve for seven years. According to the 2007 amendment, the succeeding presidents will be elected by the public and any Turkish citizen, who is over forty years old, who has a higher education diploma and is eligible for being elected to the Grand National Assembly can become President, to serve for 5 years, not to exceed two terms¹.

General (Parliamentary) Elections

To form the Grand National Assembly, citizens will vote for a legislature of 550 members every four years (five years, prior to 2007 referendum). Any Turkish citizen over 25 years old, with a clean slate and at least an elementary school diploma can be a member of the parliament (for details see [4]). Traditionally, the leader of the party which gets most of the votes is given the right by the president to establish the government. If successful, the leader becomes the Prime Minister, who is the head of the government.

Local Elections

Every five years, citizens vote for the local elections to select the mayors as the head of the municipalities.

SOME DETAILS...

+ Turkish women have had the right to vote since 1930 and get elected to the parliament since 1934; one of the earliest in Europe. To put things into perspective, British and German women had the same right in 1918 and French women in 1944

+ Left-of-center and secular CHP (Republican People's Party), founded by Atatürk, was the ruling party from 1923 until 1946, which was the year of first elections, with a landslide victory for CHP.

+ Turkey has been a multi-party democracy since 1946. DP (Democratic Party) won the second elections in 1950 and since then conservative right-wing parties dominated the parliament.

+ The three military interventions: On May 27, 1960, a military coup d'état ended the DP government, which was becoming increasingly oppressive against the opposition party and the media, and abrogating

¹ See Turkish Constitution, item 101 for additional details. The official site is tbmm.gov.tr/Anayasa.htm.

the constitution. This coup was followed by 1961 elections, won by CHP. The other military intervention in 1971 and coup d'état in 1980 were followed by the general elections in 1973 and 1983 respectively.

+ The Turkish Constitution grants the Armed Forces the authority to protect the country against domestic threats. The Armed Forces have based the military interventions on this very authority. Despite the common-held belief that the interventions in 1971 and 1980 have created extremely dire consequences for the country, the Turkish intelligentsia have not been able to reach a consensus on the 1960 intervention. Some do not discriminate it, stating that “an intervention is bad, no matter what” whereas some, albeit their opposition to military interventions, think that it was inevitable and the consequences have been very positive. The most democratic constitution was prepared by the then parliament, the Constitutional Court was found and judicial independence as well as rights to establish trade unions, have collective bargaining and go on strikes have been initiated in the Turkish life.

+ Several countries utilize thresholds to forestall coalitions formed by too many parties -hence facilitate stability- or to prevent disintegration of parties into smaller ones. Some examples are Denmark (2%), Greece and Spain (3%) and Germany (5%) ([2]). This threshold is 10 percent in Turkey and is heavily criticized: Even though a party gets all votes in a given region, if total number of votes for that party is less than 10 percent of the national total, that party will not be represented in the parliament.

+ As of February 2007, there are 51 active political parties in Turkey ([3]).

REFERENCES

[1] Lambert, C., *French Women in Politics: The Long Road to Parity*, The Brookings Institution (2001) last accessed on October 20, 2008 at brookings.edu/articles/2001/05france_lambert.aspx

[2] Uzeltürk, S. T., Türk Anayasa Mahkemesi Kararlarında Seçim Sistemleri (Election Systems in the Decrees of the Turkish Constitutional Court), *Anayasa Yargısı*, **23**, (2006)

[3] http://www.belgenet.com/parti/sp_faal.html

[4] <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/docs/Kanunlar/2839.htm>