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## A COMFORTABLE VICTORY FOR ERDOGAN, BUT NO CARTE BLANCHE

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The results of the June 12 elections in Turkey have solved the unknown factor around which the electoral campaign revolved: Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party will not enjoy the two-thirds super-majority he was seeking and which would have allowed him to approve a constitution without holding a referendum. Neither did he reach the 330 deputies (he ended up with 326, 15 fewer than in 2007) that would have allowed him to initiate the parliamentary procedures prior to calling a referendum. There is broad consensus among political forces on the need to replace the present constitution, approved in 1982 under a military regime. Where there is no agreement is in the form and the direction a new constitution should take. The citizens of Turkey have sent a clear message: they continue to trust the AKP to hold the reins of the country for the next four years, but not to the extent of giving it *carte blanche* on such a transcendent issue for the country's future.

The citizens have rewarded Erdogan's charismatic leadership, a stable, strong, and cohesive government, a foreign policy that has strengthened the role of Turkey in the international arena, an economic dynamism that has led Turkey to grow at an average rate of 6% since 2002, and a visible development in Anatolian cities such as Kayseri or Gaziantep. But they have opposed the constitution, and hence of the State, from becoming the property of a single ideological, social, or religious group. A particularly important issue in a society like the Turkish, crossed by deep fault lines of politics and identity, which has not healed the wounds of the past, and in which concerns persist about intolerant behavior and restrictions on the freedom of the press.

The AKP will have some consensus-building to do if it wishes to approve a Magna Carta that will break with the confrontation between the "two Turkeys": the secularist Turkey and the religious, the prosperous western provinces of Turkey and the eastern interior provinces, the Turkey that supports a strong military and the Turkey that has been the victim of military repression. And to build these areas of consensus the AKP will have to be particularly sensitive to the apprehensions of those who do not share Erdogan's project. The AKP will have to show comprehension with those who fear a traditionalist and religious shift that could restrict their individual liberties, be attentive to those who mistrust the accumulation of power and the authoritarian drift that could result

from the imposition of a strong presidential system, and be sensitive as well to the Kurdish question and the underdevelopment of the southeast provinces.

The fact is, to understand the message of the Turkish citizenry, it is not sufficient to read the results of the winning party. The extremely high 87% voter turnout indicates a high level of political mobilization in the face of the unparalleled challenges of the coming legislature, and the plurality of the other 50% of voters who have not given their vote to the AKP must be taken into account.

With 26% of the vote and 135 deputies (5 points higher and 23 deputies more than in 2007), the CHP, the Republican People's Party, has been consolidated as the main reference point of the opposition. Under the new leadership of Kemal Kiliçdaroglu, who in a year as the head of the party has managed to shed the more authoritarian character of his predecessor, Deniz Baykal, has put himself forth as a social-democratic alternative, combining its traditional defense of modernity and secularism of his party with the defense of a more social and inclusive economic model.

With almost 13% of the vote and 53 deputies (18 fewer than in 2007), the Party of Nationalist Action (MHP) continues to be the third political force. These results indicate that the revelation of the sexual scandals of its leaders and the resignations that came about a short time before the elections, have had a limited effect among a loyal electorate, identified with a more radical discourse that has earned it labels along the lines of "ultra-nationalistic" and "extreme right-wing."

On the other extreme can be found the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which represents the Kurdish nationalists and which, having put forth candidates with a strong territorial identification, has managed to go from 22 to 36 deputies (6 of whom are in prison) by presenting themselves as independents to get around the barrier of 10% of the votes which Turkish electoral law requires of parties. Its success indicates, above all, that the reforms of the last decade that have broadened language and cultural rights have clearly not been enough for the Kurdish population, and that despite a more open discourse on the part of the AKP, Kurdish nationalism continues to enjoy broad popular support.

Erdogan will have no need to reach accords with any of these parties during his term of office in order to govern the country, but he will need them to carry out in-depth reforms that require more than an absolute majority in parliament. The most simple thing would be to reach an agreement with the MHP, but this option entails the risk of articulating a conservative, nationalist project that excludes a good portion of society. Imagine, for example, the tension that would be caused by a constitution that, in a referendum, met with widespread rejection in provinces with a Kurdish majority or in the Aegean region. In contrast, a grand State pact on constitutional matters with the CHP, in combination with a policy of outreach showing generosity toward the demands of Kurdish nationalism, represents a path that is politically more complex but would show a clear sign of maturity and democratic consolidation. The world, particularly Europe and a Middle East at full boil, will be watching what happens in Turkey to find out whether the new constitution, subjected to referendum, responds to a shared project or to the triumph of one group over the others, which would be a disaster not only for Turkish democracy but also for the democratic future of the entire region.