



THE EUROPEAN GEOPOLITICAL FORUM

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Key Positions

- The 12 September referendum was seen as a vote of confidence for the ruling AKP, with several constitutional changes ratified by majority. However, a large opposition-voting bloc has emerged and appears to highlight the presence of a vibrant democratic atmosphere in the Republic.
- Kurdish-Turkish reconciliation has faltered in recent weeks, with large portions of the country's Kurdish areas boycotting the 12 September vote.
- Rumours of a Gulenist-AKP split did not deter cooperation between these two leading Turkish political forces in the run up to the vote. However, with criticism of the AKP increasingly evident within Gulenist circles, there are signs that all is not well in the Islamist camp in Turkey.
- Turkey and Russia's Gazprom are attempting to negotiate the sharing of burdens and profits from the Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline with Italy's ENI. The American ambassador to Turkey has endorsed the Southern Energy Corridor project, but with the caveat that no Iranian gas runs through the Nabucco gas pipeline.

The September 12 Vote

The recent vote on proposed amendments to the Republic's constitution saw a reasonably high turnout and appears to have resulted in a show of confidence in the ruling AK Party (AKP) of Turkish Prime Minister, Tayyip Erdogan, in its level of authority over the civilian and military spheres of the country.

Amongst the more significant of the changes up for debate has seen the right of choosing judges for the nation's highest courts being placed in the hands of the governing coalition. The courts, seen by Turkish conservatives as the "last bastion" of Turkish secularism, will now have their benches filled by political appointment. This has led AKP critics to accuse it of plans to fill the high courts with religious and political appointees, who could neglect to uphold the Republic's secular foundations.

The very fact that a constitutional amendment guaranteeing gender equality has been passed in Turkey strongly refutes the arguments that the country's ruling coalition equates to the mirror image of more strident versions of Islamic radicalism. If the voting has proven anything, the numbers of participants and dividing opinions on the issues show a more vibrant democracy in recent years under AKP stewardship. Indeed, though



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the amendments passed with 58% of the electorate supporting the measures, the other 42% expressed their opposition, which translates to roughly 32 million Turkish citizens who voted against the measures.

Much of this opposition came from the Aegean and Mediterranean coastal areas and Thrace, indicating strong dissent in the middle class areas that populate these regions. Meanwhile the AKP carried its traditional lower class and rural bastions throughout Anatolia's countryside. Although an overall electoral defeat for opponents of the ruling party was in evidence, the large participation of the electorate should be heartening news for those who accuse the country of abandoning its secular Kemalist roots. The electoral process was reported to have been predominantly violence free – a further positive sign in a country known for its history of military coups toppling elected governments. The AKP says its next action will be to draft a new constitution, which if ratified will alter the governmental structure that has administered Turkey since the current constitution's creation after the 1980 military coup.

Kurdish Issues

One negative aspect of the referendum vote on 12 September occurred when large portions of the Kurdish populated southeast of the country boycotted the voting at the behest of the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). This has put a damper on Prime Minister Erdogan's 'Kurdish opening' of the past year, with the recent expiration of the Ramadan ceasefire by the PKK resulting in clashes with the Turkish military (TSK) throughout the country.

Even more worrisome are the recent clashes between Kurdish youths who live in ghettos ringing large Turkish cities and nationalistic ethnic Turks in Inegol and Hatay. Seeing as almost half of Kurds now live outside the confines of south-eastern Turkey, this is an issue that will continue to confront Turkish leaders over the course of the coming years. Kurds are becoming increasingly politically active, joining the boycott called for by the BDP en masse in many areas. Some BDP critics have claimed that the party is becoming political wing of the PKK, much like Sinn Fein was to the IRA.

There are signs that show many politicians in the Kurdish majority areas of Turkey are establishing their own local governmental structures, somewhat autonomous of Ankara. Co-chairwoman of the BDP, Gultan Kisanak, has called for a more decentralized national government under the auspices of 'democratic autonomy'. Kisanak claims that the country is too diverse and fragmented to be effectively ruled directly from the capital, given that it consists of eighty-one provinces and thousands of districts.

As forthcoming as the Turkish government has recently been towards a dialogue with the Kurdish minority, the above-mentioned position taken by the head of the BDP seems to be a reflection of "a step too far" in the government's interpretation of toleration, with politicians in Kurdish districts now facing fines and imprisonment for the lightest criticism. In one case, when the mayor of Diyarbakir suggested that flying the Kurdish and Turkish flag side by side would be a positive step for national reconciliation efforts, prosecutors



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opened an investigation into his statement. It remains to be seen how open the 'Kurdish opening' will ultimately be, but it must be noted that progress is never as rapid as those who seek it actually desire it to be.

AKP-Gulenist Split?

Although these two major Turkish political forces worked together during the electoral victory in the 12 September referendum, there are signs that the AKP and Gulen movement may be finding as many reasons for disagreement as for agreement. Whilst rumours have circulated for years about Gulenist indignation at not being given enough credit for AKP success, the first public split occurred when Fethullah Gulen openly criticized Ankara's decision to allow the disastrous Gaza flotilla to proceed from Turkey. Gulenists were shocked when the AKP annulled 102 indictments against military officers accused in various coup plots prior to the 1 August meeting of the Supreme Military Council. It is thought that Gulenist sympathizers in government and military circles leaked evidence in prominent coup cases such as Sledgehammer and Ergenekon. Certainly, friends have as many reasons to disagree as enemies, but such public criticism and divisiveness are worrying signs for the AKP, which owes much of its electoral success to grassroots support from the Gulen movement.

Pipelines Updates

The Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Ministry recently announced that Ankara and Russia will begin talks with Italian energy giant, ENI, regarding possible cooperation on the planned Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline. The line, which is scheduled to start at the Turkish Black Sea port of Samsun, will run to the port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean. Ceyhan is also the final stop for the BTC pipeline, discussed earlier in these briefings. Furthermore, Russia and Turkey have worked together over the past month on the development of safe shipping regulations for Russian oil shipments passing through the Turkish Straits, and are looking to increase their cooperation via the advent of ENI's inclusion into the project.

Meanwhile, U.S. ambassador to Turkey, Richard Morningstar, recently reiterated that the Southern Gas Corridor project is of major interest to America, but reinforced that its energy supply routes shall not consider Iranian energy volumes while Tehran continued uranium enrichment in violation of U.N. Security Council sanctions. Morningstar went on to note that the Nabucco pipeline would be fully operational on the basis of Iraqi or Qatari gas supplies, in direct contradiction of critics asserting that the line will run below full capacity without Iranian gas reserves. Many in the West continue to see Iraqi gas as the best supply option for Nabucco, due to the country's vast, yet presently untapped gas reserves.

Furthermore, Russia's hand in Iraq is seen as significantly less influential compared to other widely assumed resource bases for Nabucco, including Turkmenistan and



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Azerbaijan. The project's architects have nonetheless conceded that while Nabucco is destined to carry 10 billion cubic meters of Iraqi gas, it must also use 8 billion cubic meters from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz field in order to run at viable capacity. In the long term, if for any reason energy supplies should become disrupted from either of those sources, Nabucco may be forced to consider transporting Iranian gas.

Meanwhile, German firm RWE has signed an agreement with the Kurdish administration of Northern Iraq to improve the area's gas distribution infrastructure. However, this has drawn the Kurdish authorities in the semi-autonomous region into direct conflict with the Iraqi oil ministry, which claims overall control of any energy deal in the country. Calls have gone out to Ankara to mediate the dispute, but so far it remains to be seen what action, if any, the Turkish government will take.