

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

TURKEY'S SNAP ELECTIONS: RESUSCITATION OR RELAPSE?

Washington, D.C.

Monday, November 2, 2015

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. KIRIŞCI: We seem to have lost the panelist that is most experienced with politics. He should be arriving any minute, Honorable Robert Wexler. In the meantime, let me get started. I wouldn't want to hold you up any longer.

I'm sure many of you are well aware that there's been an eventful Sunday yesterday in Turkey. What has made it eventful is that the Governing Justice and Development Party, AKP, or AK Party, has won the elections in a very resounding, decisive victory. And the second aspect of the eventfulness of yesterday was that it came as a surprise that all the pundits and the pollsters got it absolutely wrong including, I have to confess, myself too.

But then, I can put some of the blame on the pollsters, and what is interesting is that polling companies getting results wrong, did not occur for the first time in Turkey yesterday, but that there has been a trend preceding it, that we saw, we saw it in Britain, we saw it very recently in Greece, we also saw it in Argentina. I have a very good friend who specializes in this area, and I asked him whether they will need to go back and start questioning the methodology with which they've been working for some time, although he does say that the problem does not seem to be with their methodology.

I would like to, before I introduce to you the Panel; I would like to take you very quickly through the election results, as long as the PowerPoint does project itself on the screen. The results are striking in the sense when you look at the Turkish map, you are going to see how the navy-blue part of Turkey has expanded significantly. It has expanded significantly in Eastern parts of Turkey, where the Kurdish Political Party, HDP, under Selahattin Demirtas leadership had done quite well in the June elections.

AKP is estimated to have brought over about a million -- a little more than a million Kurdish votes to its ranks that had fled to HDP during the June election.

Symbolically, a second area where they were very successful is captured by that little province there, just above the Mediterranean, the corner of the Mediterranean there, Osmaniye, which is normally a solid castle of MHP, the Turkish Nationalist Party there.

Again, analysts estimate that 2, maybe even 2.5 million voters from MHP switched to the governing political party in bringing this conclusion. Furthermore, although CHP, the main Opposition Party, did marginally well, but marginally less of course 1 percent well, did lose some of the provinces to the governing political party there. This is very quickly, to give you an idea of how the percentages have shifted. The AKP has come up with a performance close to the one in 2011, and is now placing into the parliament more seats that it had in 2011.

I'm a little bit confused with the numbers; they keep changing, so I think the Panelists will probably correct me if the figures here are actually correct. It keeps fluctuating between 315 and 317, as the nitty-gritty of the votes are actually being calculated. Now, these results a string of questions; first that comes to one's mind is that, why these results? How come these results? And what do they mean in terms of a string of challenges that are awaiting Turkey, ranging from Turkey's economic performance, to social, political issues, but of course to the very issue that dragged Turkey into a long period of violence during the course of the summer and earlier in the fall, the Kurdish problem.

There is also the question of how is this result going to impact Turkey's foreign policy, and with these questions in mind, I would like to introduce to you, the authoritative Panel that is, hopefully, going to address these questions.

I have Ömer Taşpınar, from National Defense University, and also he is a Nonresident Scholar here at Brookings. We were together here when we discussed the elections back in June. Kadir Üstün is the Executive Director of a Turkish Think

Tank, SETA, Washington, D.C. Office. He, too, was with us in June. There is Gönül Tol, who is from the Middle East Institute, and she will be focusing particularly on the Kurdish issue and Syria. And finally, we have the Honorable Robert Wexler, Former Congressman, and currently the Director of the Center of Middle Eastern Studies. Robert Wexler, the Congressman, was also with us, but at an earlier election back in August 2014. And I'm Kemal Kirişçi, the TÜSİAD Senior Fellow here at Brookings, directing the Turkey Project.

So, as I sit down, I think we are going to start with Ömer. I listened to Ömer actually at an event, pre-election event that Kadir hosted last week and, there, he presented to us a well-structured argument on how Turkish politics was being driven by polarization and personalization of politics. He hasn't told me what his prediction was, but I think he's ready to reflect on how we got here from the time when you presented to us that particular analysis.

Ömer, I think we should go for 10, 12 minutes -- 10 minutes. What I am actually hoping to do, at the very advice of our Congressman, is that to try to keep our remarks as short as possible, and engage you, on the assumption that you will, indeed, be as puzzled as we are with the election's results and will have lots of questions to raise. Ömer?

MR. TAŞPINAR: Thank you, Kemal. I guess you can count me among those experts who were not able to predict this result in Turkey. I was really surprised, and in many ways, with the benefit of hindsight now, one can think about many reasons why AKP received almost 50 percent. But I guess, what I'll try to do, is to talk about why this happened, and what may happen now based on Erdoğan's way of thinking, what will Erdoğan do next. How he will capitalize on this major victory that probably himself also did not expect it to that level. I think the most optimistic opinion polls that we have seen

put AKP around 45 percent, so this is about 5 percent more than that.

I said, with the benefit of hindsight, one can understand why the AKP managed to win this election with a larger margin because one can ask -- one can see that the party that has really lost this election is MHP, the Ultra-Nationalist Party of Devlet Bahçeli, and the voters who voted for the MHP, which were very frustrated with Devlet Bahçeli's performance in the post June 7 environment when he refused to enter coalition talks, when he became, basically, Mr. No, saying no to any kind of coalition scenarios with the AKP.

He didn't want to even talk to the Kurdish Party, HDP, and the hope was that some of the MHP voters who may be -- who are disappointed with Bahçeli, could go to CHP, that there was maybe a sense of fluidity between the MHP voters and the CHP voters, that this few percentages could have gone to CHP, but that did not happen. And I think in time we will see more analysis, but most of the MHP voters, disappointed with their party, ended up voting for AKP, and this shows that there is really a very strong connection between the kind of conservatism, nationalist conservatism of the MHP, and the kind of nationalist conservatism of AKP. So when MHP voters are not satisfied with their party they naturally turn to AKP.

And this is exactly what Erdoğan calculated, I believe, after the elections, because he realized, I think, starting with 2012, or '13, that he was losing some ground within the party, with the nationalists getting disappointed with his Kurdish peace process. Erdoğan wanted, at one point, to really pursue a peace process with the PKK, and that cost him votes with the Nationalist base of the AKP.

So, starting with 2013, '14, he turned very populist and nationalist, and the peace process was really turning into a kind of cosmetic affair, not really of substance in terms of the reforms that Turkey had to engage in. And he, on June 7th, realized that

he not only lost the nationalist vote when the party received only 40.9 percent on June 7th, not only did he lose the Nationalists, but he also lost the courage. So it was the worst of both worlds. He was unable to connect with the nationalist voters, because of the coalition initiative, and he was unable to connect with the Kurds because he had turned increasingly nationalist in his effort to win back the nationalists' vote.

So what happened in the last four months is that the peace process totally collapsed, and Erdoğan, basically decided to wage a strategy of what can be called controlled chaos. Controlled chaos in the sense that basically a war strategy with the PKK, and to let basically the economy and political instability take its course; the economic decline, the depreciation of the currency, and major, a sense of almost panic in the markets that Turkey is unable to establish a stable government.

Showed the alternative to voters that if the AKP is losing and if there is no coalition government, we have basically instability, and the kind of worse instability with terrorist attacks, both coming from ISIL, and a war with the PKK, the economic decline, major instability, and no leadership coming from any one of the parties that is able to establish a coalition, and in that environment I think Erdoğan's gamble worked.

He wanted early elections with the hope that people would reward the AKP once again with the majority, because when you are looking at Turkish political scene, if you want to go back to the days of protocol stability, and economic growth, the only party that you can look at is the AKP, because there is no other political party that voters can relate in terms of their quest for stability, and prosperity. We may complain about the political situation in Turkey, we may complain about the lack of democratic freedoms, liberalism, et cetera, but for the majority of the Turkish population when they look at the last 13 years, what they see as political stability and respectable levels of growth. At the time when the world went through a major financial crisis, Turkey had a

stable government and respectable economic performance.

Therefore, when they faced this strategy of controlled chaos that I think Erdoğan wanted to put -- wanted to display, voters decided that they want to go back to the decade of stability, 2003-2013, that was the decade of stability. And just in case we forget, the decade before that, before AKP, the 1990s, for those of you who remember the 1990s in Turkey, was the decade of coalitions, chronic inflation, major political and economic crisis and instability.

In fact, most political scientists called the 1990s, the Lost Decade. So when you juxtapose the 1990s with the AKP decade, you realize that things, despite as I said, in the deterioration on the democracy front over the last three years -- two years, mainly since 2013; overall this is a political party that appeals to people.

Now, very briefly, were these elections free and fair? We were just talking with my friend Andrew Finkel this morning, I think a catchy way of answering this question would be to say that these elections were free, but they were definitely not fair. In the sense that, for an election to be fair, citizens of that country need to have access to information, they need to have access to unbiased, objective information, and the ability of the average Turkish citizen to access unbiased information is increasingly curtailed in today's Turkey, and this partly the reason why these elections, at the end of the day, were not fair.

The governing party was able to monopolize, really, the state media, and there is increasing presence of cronies of the government in the media and dissenting voices, opposition voices are unable to make themselves heard. So in such an environment there is a long cast of shadow, really, over the legitimacy of what's going on in the country. The country is extremely polarized, there are increasing number of people who think that we are heading in the wrong direction as far as democracy is concerned in

Turkey; so this is why Erdoğan now, has to pursue a strategy that, in my opinion, will have to address some of these problems.

Let me conclude with some notes of optimism. The optimist in me says that this election result may bring some good things to Turkey. The reason is simple. First of all, we are very lucky that the HDP managed to pass the 10 percent threshold. I'm sure my colleagues will talk about the HDP, but had the HDP failed to pass the 10 percent threshold, polarization would have been much worse today in the country. I don't want to use the term civil war, because I think it's overused, but there is an environment in Turkey where people are really at the brink of a breakdown as far as the Kurdish question especially, and overall polarization is concerned.

And in the scenario where the HDP had received 9.8 percent and stood under 10 percent not only the AKP would have won probably a super majority, close enough to change the Constitution without a referendum, but the Kurds would have no presentation in the parliament. So we are lucky that the Kurds passed the 10 percent ration.

And we are lucky that Erdoğan now has a level of majority in the parliament that, in a way, revitalizes his dream of a presidential regime in Turkey. We are back in this, I think, environment where people try to push -- to make it one more push for the presidential regime, we can hope to achieve that given the parliamentary arithmetic in the country -- in the parliament.

We are lucky, I say that, because a presidential regime can only happen through a referendum, because you will have to change the Constitution, the AKP will have to change the Constitution, and it remains to be seen whether all AKP parliamentarians will be in favor of a presidential regime, but let's suppose that they all are, Turkey will still have to go through a referendum in one or two years for a

presidential regime. And for Erdoğan to win a referendum on the presidential regime he will have to deliver. He will have to deliver on a number of fronts.

The first one is the Kurdish question. The country cannot continue the dynamic of war for the next two years, and hope to have a functioning economy. All political risk and analysts are now looking at Turkey and they are saying the country is not safe for foreign direct investment, for even portfolio investments. So there is the sense that the country is at war; this has to stop, and I think deep down Erdoğan knows that he has to stop the war, that he has to bring back the negotiation dynamics, and in my opinion, he has the HDP just where he wants it.

The HDP has lost momentum, so the HDP, if they come to the negotiation table, they will come with a weaker hand at the time when the AKP, and Erdoğan have the upper hand. So, Erdoğan can negotiate from a position of strength. He needs to find a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question, which will require democratization, democratic reforms, that will also help the economy. Only in a country where there is law and order, stability on the Kurdish front, and some economic growth, Erdoğan can hope that people will vote in favor of a presidential regime.

Because as you well know, people in referendums don't vote on the issue that they presented, they vote whether they are happy about the government or not. And if they are happy in two years with Erdoğan, they will probably -- they may probably vote for a presidential regime, but the price for the presidential regime will be peace on the Kurdish front, economic growth, some democratic reforms, and if we are lucky, maybe improved relations with the European Union.

I will conclude by saying that things are going surprisingly well with the European Union these days, because the EU has rediscovered Turkey's strategic importance because of the refugee crisis. So, now Turkey has some leverage with the

EU, the fact that the German Chancellor visited Turkey just before elections was very telling. There is economic aid coming to Turkey, and maybe I'm too optimistic, but this may give Erdoğan an incentive, an anchor to engage in reforms.

He needs to depolarize the country at this point. Again, it's the optimist in me speaking. I'm not sure that he will do all these things, but if he wants the presidential regime, I'm pretty convinced that he wants the presidential regime, he believes that he deserves one because he is the first popularly elected President of the country. He will have to depolarize the country, and he can be magnanimous in victory, in extending now, an olive branch to the Kurds, to try to solve the Kurdish problem with negotiations again, now that he has won this election.

He can improve the economic conditions by doing so, and he can engage in democratic reforms in the next couple of years. That's the only condition under which I believe the Turkish electorate would vote for a presidential regime, which, at the end of the day may not be a good thing for Turkey, because what Turkey needs is not a presidential regime, in my opinion, instead what we need is a more decentralized regime with strong checks and balances, but Erdoğan seems determined to push for a presidential regime, and now he has the political capital to pursue that.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks, Ömer. I have a quick couple of questions, but I would like to plead with you to be magnanimous with your time, and don't go into 15, 20 minutes like (inaudible). Great presentation, great analysis Ömer, but Kadir, the question I have, a couple of very quick questions, one, do you really think that Erdoğan, for Erdoğan the result was a surprise? And secondly, you may already have noticed like the audience and other panelists here, that we have not yet pronounced the name of the Turkish Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, who won the elections, and I listened to his talk in Konya, the one from the balcony in Ankara.

He seems to be moving or preparing ground for Erdoğan to become a (inaudible) -- He did talk about reconciliation, (inaudible) to the whole population of Turkey, whether they voted for AK or not. But what was missing in the speech in office was any reference to consensus building. Even the analysis that Ömer has just given now, how do you see the coming months unfolding in terms of overcoming the polarization that he made reference to, as well as meeting the challenges that could give Erdoğan the opportunity to go for a referendum?

MR. ÜSTÜN: First, starting with the -- excuse me -- Thank you to Kemal for reminding me. For the consensus-building question I think he made that point very clearly, and just today the spokesperson for the government talked about how they are not going to be out there for revenge and they'll seek common ground to push for a new constitution. So I think that will is there.

I don't think -- One of the pollsters, just last week said, 47.2 percent. My own prediction was about 44, and I told someone I wouldn't be surprised if it was 45, but, yes, it exceeded all expectations. And that shows you, I think President Erdoğan, I'm sure has much better poll results in front of him, so I don't think he's surprised too much because, you know, he also talked about respecting the election results.

But that gives us a bit of -- you know, as you've said, we talk about Davutoğlu, maybe it's not the realities of the country, the political realities of the country, but our own perception. We would like to really obsess with President Erdoğan in this town. Erdoğan's party, Erdoğan is not even Prime Minister, he did not go to elections. He is the most powerful political figure in the country and he's able to move mountains, if you will, on that political terrain. However, there are election rallies, there are many things that are being done by the party and that party has a Chairman.

So maybe looking a bit, giving up this obsession would help, and some

of the debate has been all about how Erdoğan wanted this, Erdoğan didn't want the peace process, he wanted to -- it's like Turkish political realities, it's as if they are like switches, you can turn them on and off by one person like that. We are talking 4.5 million votes in five months switching sides, this is not about media, this is not about a single person that was a big C-change in the minds of the Turkish electoral electorate.

And we, almost all of us failed to see it. I did write that stability would be the key issue, but I didn't foresee that it could create such weight. But at the end of the day, the electorate in Turkey does not see anybody else capable, other than AK Party in power that can deliver. It's not an AK Party propaganda, it's the facts. The numbers are telling us that. The electorate, if they saw any other potential party that could actually govern and take care of the ISIS and PKK problem, and economic problems, I'm sure they would vote for that.

And that happened, to some extent, in June. They sought an alternative, but they've seen the opposition parties' utter failure in offering anything substantive other than anti-Erdoğan platform. With this election we've seen that platform collapse because President Erdoğan was not out there campaigning anymore. He pulled himself back, and we saw that the opposition parties did not have a positive agenda. To some extent CHP tried that at the rhetorical level, reconciliation, economic issues et cetera, but they also wobbled in terms of what to do with President Erdoğan's office.

They had promised that they would never go to the palace, now they were switching on that, so there many mixed signals, but at the end, when you ask the voters they did not see an alternative in delivering what they wanted. If I'm going to talk - I just want to talk about the parties specifically. AK Party received back its Kurdish vote, it's generally talked about as a conservative vote, but it's, I think, more than that.

HDP lost 1 million votes overall, throughout the country. They are

retaining their core nationalist vote, but all those votes that came to HDP on the promise that HDP would become a party of Turkey that could become a serious alternative an opposition party that, during these five months, that promise also has collapsed. The restarting of the fight with PKK was crucial, but PKK's strategy was to make the Kurds in the southeast especially rise up against the state. That didn't happen, that was a failure on the part of PKK, and people in the region, even a lot of the voters for HDP they are not -- they don't want chaos, they want peace process to come to fruition -- come to a resolution.

So, they are actually punishing HDP indirectly especially for this, for the breakdown of the process. So it's not that Tayyip Erdoğan decided to end the process to be able to get MHP votes, which AK Party did, but AK Party also got HDP votes, so this is much more than simply garnering Turkish nationalist votes. But what HDP failed to do is to distance itself from PKK, and live up to that promise of being a party, a civilian party of Turkey.

And I think that was the crucial thing, and they had many statements about PYD, PKK appearing as supportive or they can't distinguish themselves from them, so that really hurt them, not only in the southeast but also in the western and the big cities also. In every single city they lost votes. And they largely went to AK Party, they didn't go to any other party.

With regard to MHP, like Ömer said, it became a party of no, and it appeared -- I don't want to make two answers, but I'll just finish up quickly. It appeared that voters for MHP didn't feel like they knew what the party wanted, so that was a leadership crisis in many ways, and they didn't seem to know what they wanted, the party leadership.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Kadir, Sorry to interrupt you. I have a sense that maybe it

might be more interesting to go beyond the voting analysis.

MR. ÜSTÜN: Okay.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Focus on the future; because Ömer made a fascinating remark when trying to explain why the surprise result occurred. He compared the Lost Decade with the AKP decade.

MR. ÜSTÜN: Yes.

MR. KIRIŞCI: But he emphasized that in the AKP decade what played an important role behind that success was that AKP was able to bring Turkey closest to pluralist democracy that it has probably ever come in its history. Do you see that being replicated in the coming days, in the hands of either Davutoğlu or Erdoğan before the referendum actually occurs?

MR. ÜSTÜN: I'm not entirely clear. Do you mean -- you seem to be assuming pluralistic promise of AK Party breakdown, but that's what I'm saying; they were able to, in this election, attract votes from all parties; all the ethnic backgrounds (crosstalk).

MR. KIRIŞCI: But that's not pluralism.

MR. ÜSTÜN: I'm talking about the appeal of the party, in terms of promise of bringing together all the sides. What is it that ultra-nationalists of tribe zone, you know, and a Kurdish voter in the city of Diyarbakır, they share in common, that's being able to govern and promising stability of course, but by pluralism, of course we are talking about bringing together different segments of the society to be able to forge a new future.

Yes, that's AK Party's challenge, and I think with the emphasis on a new constitution, and the emphasis on, you are not going to be a party that will simply get revenge about the past, I think those were signs, but we have to wait and see if they will

be able to get there. The polarization in the past two years holds itself to two major -- at least two major political crisis, (inaudible) and December operations, and then three major elections, the fourth one. Now that we have four years without elections, the regional dynamics will continue to, I think, polarize Turkey to some extent.

But AK Party leadership in June elections, if they are interpreting it that way, that they have adjusted and they got reward in the elections but they have to build upon this, and sort of construct a constitution that's pluralistic and democratic in the truest sense, not this current one, we have the military-made one. But let me stop there if you want, we'll continue.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks, Kadir. Gönül, there's already been quite a bit of discussion on the centrality of the Kurdish issue. Before we transition to the Congressman, and ask him to look at the U.S. perspective on this and foreign policy, I wanted you to address two aspects of it. One, how are the Kurds looking at this result themselves? Kadir paid some attention to it, but would you go a little bit more into the details of it? And then, secondly, how will that reflect on Turkey's handling of the Kurds in Syria, and kind of ease us into foreign policy a bit.

MS. TOL: Thank you, Kemal. And thank you, Ömer for covering everything that I wanted to cover on the Kurdish issue. I want to start with saying that, I think, for me, the biggest surprise of the election results was the Kurds returning to the AKP at a time when the government reverted back to the ultra-nationalist rhetoric when there were civilian casualties, where there were kids, women were getting killed in the Kurdish region, and when there was the war, the PKK and the State resumed the fight.

So this was a big surprise for me, because many of us thought that after Kobani the AKP lost the Kurdish vote. In Kobani we -- the HDP got 13 percent in June elections mainly, they got votes from the CHP, they got votes from the Liberals, but

mostly I think the conservative Kurdish votes were the decisive votes there. So the people in the region saw the historical trend in Turkey as being almost 50/50, 50 percent of Turkish Kurds have voted for center-right parties in Turkey, and the remaining 50 voted for nationalists, the Kurdish nationalist parties.

So, we thought that that trend was finally broken in June elections, because almost 75 percent of Kurdish voters voted for the pro-Kurdish, HDP. And me, also thought that this was a good thing, because now, the Kurds have become a bigger and more important electoral force. On the other hand, some thought that this could in fact be a bad thing for the resolution of the Kurdish question, now that we have -- we have an ethnic, we have only one voice for the Kurds.

But for the HDP, got the votes of the conservative Kurds, so if we look at the election results, Sunday's election results, now the picture is changed. But let me say that this is still -- yes, the HDP lost almost 3 percent, 1 million of its votes yesterday, but I still think that this was a major victory for the Kurds, for the HDP, considering the context -- the pre-election context that they had to operate in. The government did everything to marginalize the HDP and linked it to the PKK, and the PKK helped Erdoğan's strategy in a way by resuming the fight.

And it switched to this urban warfare which really alienated the people in the region, and HDP offices were burned down, there were many civilian casualties, so this was a very difficult environment, political environment for the HDP, and yet it passed the national threshold. So I think it's still a big victory, but at the end of the day they lost many votes.

So why did the HDP lose these votes? I think it's the security situation. The fight between the PKK and the State was the defining factor. The second one is AKP's local Kurdish electoral strategy was very, very powerful. I think very successful.

And the third one was, those conservative Kurds, they were very disappointed by the HDP's performance after June elections.

They thought that the HDP's 13 percent did not really translate into a resolution or stability in the region. So, I think these were the three main factors. So, the PKK, it switched to urban warfare, it established its -- it consolidated its power in region using the ceasefire, so it became very active and influential in the region. So when the ceasefire broke down in July, after the Suruç incident, I think the people, the local people suffered the most.

Again, we have seen more than, I think, 200 civilians killed in clashes between the PKK and the State. And if we look at those towns that the HDP lost the most, they are Kurdish towns; Bingöl, Bitlis, Erzurum, and Kars. And these are very interesting towns, in the sense that they are very conservative towns. Religiosity is very high, and these were the towns that really switched their support to the HDP in June elections from the AKP.

So these voters simply returned to the AKP, and I think another factor is the AKP pursued the very, very effective strategy in the region. For instance, Beşir Atalay was leading the HDP in this -- in Van, and Beşir Atalay is a very influential figure and he was involved with the Kurdish peace process. So if you look at other names, big shots from the AKP, there was Cevdet Yılmaz, for instance, he was the former Minister of Development, he was from Bingöl,, he was leading the AKP in Bingöl, and there are other names who were very influential figures, big families, Kurdish families who had invested a lot in those towns.

So, the AKP pursued a strategy, an election campaign in the Kurdish region that mostly focused on stability, security and economic development. So I think this was the conservative Kurds' way of punishing the PKK, and their -- showing their

disappointment with the HDP.

And what is next? I think it all depends on what the government is going to do. I think that, as Ömer just mentioned, the situation, the current security situation is not sustainable. At some point the government has to do something, move forward on the Kurdish question. And the first signs, coming from government officials after the election is positive, many of them said that yes, we really would like to move forward on the Kurdish question.

And I think they -- at some point they will have to tackle it, but on the other hand, I don't think that the government will back down on its military campaign against the PKK. Just today, Turkish jets were bombing PKK targets in Northern Iraq, and one day after the elections, I think it just shows a strong signal, that the government is intent on its fight against the PKK, which brings me to Turkey-Syria strategy, because this is closely related to Turkish-Syria strategy.

I think the election results will not really alter Turkey's Syria strategy because it's the facts on the ground that are imposing and dictating Turkey-Syria policy; Russia's involvement in Syria, for instance, and the incompetence of the Syrian opposition that is supported -- backed by Ankara. And the changing international mood, vis-à-vis the Assad regime, so these were all the factors that really factored in Turkey's recent change in its policy.

For a long time Turkey said that Assad had no place in any transition, but recently Turkey said, well, maybe Assad could play a role for six months. So, this is a big change for a country that refused to recalibrate its Syria policy since the uprising started in March 2011. So I think the facts on the ground are dictating a change on Turkey-Syria policy, but there's a complicating factor, and that is the Kurdish question.

For a long time we know that Turkey and the U.S. did not really see eye-

to-eye on Syria. They had different priorities, so they had different visions for Syria, but the relationship become particularly tense when the United States decided to air-drop weapons to the PYD, in Kobanî, and now Turkey opened Incirlik Air Base in the hopes that it could work closely with the United States, but that did not bring a change to the U.S.-Syria policy.

Americans were clear that they wanted to work with the Syrian Kurds. They are the most effective fighting force against the Islamic State, and they have become de facto ground troops of the entire coalition forces. And now the Russians are in the picture. Russians are also engaging the Syrian Kurds. They keep saying that, we want to work with the PYD, and even, I think, just a few weeks ago, PYD was considering opening an office in Russia.

And all these things make Turkey very nervous. And at some point, and maybe a couple of months ago, people in D.C. were hopeful that Davutoğlu almost signaled that, you know, as long as the PYD does not attack us, we are fine with them. So, many people thought that, can Turkey do the same thing as the United States did? Differentiate the PKK and the PYD and say PKK might be a terrorist organization, but the PYD is not?

Is that possible for Turkey? Some people in D.C. thought it could be possible after Davutoğlu's remarks, but I think as long as there is Turkey's fighting against the PKK domestically, it's going to be very difficult for the Turkish Government to pursue a different strategy with the PYD in Syria, and I think that's going to complicate Turkey-U.S. relations in Syria even further.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Okay. Gönül, thanks. This is a question that we very much wanted to address to you Congressman. How do you see the results coming out of the elections impacting on what Gönül just said? But also we know you have known

Erdoğan for a long time throughout your career. How do you think these results will reflect on what happens on The Hill, but also maybe in the Executive Branch?

MR. WEXLER: Sure. The Panel is more knowledgeable than I and far more sophisticated. My simple, political analysis starts with this. The election earlier in the year was Erdoğan versus Erdoğan and Erdoğan lost. The election yesterday was Erdoğan versus Erdoğan, and Erdoğan won. Okay.

So what does that mean? What I think it means, and I think it's -- I'm not contrary to anything the Panel has said, but I do think maybe different, in that after the first round of protests in 2013, I had a chance to speak, and my view was that then Prime Minister Erdoğan had the opportunity to become one of the most consequential leaders of our time, in terms of how he reacted to the protest. And the question was, was he confident enough as a transformational leader?

And, whether you like Erdoğan's politics or dislike his politics, or you like personality, or dislike his personality, the economic miracle of Turkey is undeniable. My first visit Turkey was in 1997, and it was an inflation-ridden country then. I remember meeting with a group of some of the most impressive, young adults in Istanbul, with all kinds of degrees, all kinds of entrepreneur spirit, and not a single one of them, man or young woman, had any confidence in their country or their government.

Now, today people have all kinds of issues with media freedom, and, is the government becoming too restrictive or too Islamist, but it's undeniable, even considering the setbacks of the last two years, that the economic achievements of Prime Minister, now President Erdoğan's administrations have transformed Turkey.

Even today, you visit Ankara, and as I said before my first visit was in 1997, it's an entirely different-looking city today. It is a major metropolitan, vibrant city. In 1997 it wasn't. Istanbul is an extraordinarily vibrant, leading metropolitan area in the

world. So my point is this. The Prime Minister then, now President Erdoğan failed, in my humble estimation, in his chance to become a consequential leader of historic heights, after the protest, he wasn't a gracious winner.

He has that chance again. Whether he will repeat his deficiencies or failures remains to be seen. I'm cautiously optimistic, cautiously optimistic because I don't think that the failure of the previous election is lost on Erdoğan, and certainly is not lost on Prime Minister Davutoğlu. And while, yes, it may be forgotten quickly with this victory, I don't think the sting of that defeat will be too far from their collective memories, and equally important, the foreign policy issues and related to American relationship have changed a bit.

And where Turkey, at least from an American perspective, came up woefully short in the past, as has been intimated previously, there has been some beginning of moderation from the Turkish Administration to correct or minimize those differences. But to a certain degree, the gamble is going to become a bigger.

Let's talk about Syria for a second, from the completely American perspective. President Obama announced, of course, immediately the introduction of 50 American new service men and women. I think we all understand 50 is just the beginning. And over the next six months, 12 months, more likely that 50 will grow to a significantly larger number, and Turkey's role, will no longer be such that they can easily be adverse to America's position.

Once Obama introduces American troops into Syria, then the question of who we give ammunition to, in terms of the people on the ground, the longer is an academic question for America. Now it's a question of, essentially, who are we giving the ammunition and the weapons that have embedded with them American troops? We will not engage in a discussion with a close ally on whether or not we are going to give the

best, and the strongest, and the most opportunistic weapons when we now have a growing presence on the ground.

And I think that President Erdoğan, and Prime Minister Davutoğlu are shrewd enough to understand that when America was not on the ground in Syria, then Turkey could present, with full weight, its interest, rightfully so. But once America has legs on the ground, no, that's not going to be tolerated to that degree. That doesn't mean that Turkey doesn't have legitimate interests, but the equation changes dramatically, and I believe that President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Davutoğlu are sufficiently shrewd to understand that.

With respect to American relations, things have changed but certain things have not. What has also not been mentioned yet today, are Turkey's relations with Egypt, and Turkey relations with Israel. If President Erdoğan, if the occasion occurs is a hysterical President regarding Israel, relations with America will not get better. Relations -- Turkish-Israeli relations has an outsized impact on American-Turkish relations, particularly on Capitol Hill.

If President Erdoğan continues to voice opinions that are perceived -- I happen to think correctly so -- as utterly outrageous, in his demonization of Israel at times, things won't get better. However, there are actually opportunities, hopefully, that will be taken advantage of in the near-term future where Israel and Turkey, if not returning to its glory days, like when Ambassador Tom was in charge, but to a much more successful set of relations, then there is a very significant opportunity for a warming of Turkish-American relations.

I'll stop with this. I started along with Congressman Ed Whitfield at the time, the Turkish Caucus, in the House of Representatives. This is how bad a Congressman I was, I did so, it was 1997 I believe, I did so because at that time I was in

my freshman year, first term in Congress. And I looked around the world, and I said to myself where is it that the interaction of the Congress with important allies seems to be most lacking; not reflecting the importance of the relationship?

And it was clear to me, that it was Turkey, given all of the interactive importance. And I went ahead with Congressman Whitfield, started this Turkey Caucus, and many people said, what, are you crazy Wexler? Why would you do that? The American-Greek community is not going to be particularly pleased with you. The Cypriot community is not going to be pleased with you, the Armenian community is going to be particular upset. And I mentioned, to show you how bad of a Congressman I was, I didn't know until I did it that the largest church in my district was actually an Armenian Church. I learn very quickly.

My point is this though, for going through this protracted story. At that time and the district I represented on being a bit cavalier, was the district that had the largest population of Jewish-Americans, and at that point in time, in the American political dynamic, Jewish-Americans were strong supporters of the American-Turkish relationship, extremely active, strong supporters; Today that's not the case.

So you have the traditional allies, or opponents on Capitol Hill that have essential stayed the same. But one large group, impactful group has changed. Now President Erdoğan has the opportunity not to make it like used to be, that's not going to happen, but it can reverse things. And I'm hopeful that he'll be shrewd enough to do so. And one last quick thing, if I may?

MR. KIRIŞCI: Of course.

MR. WEXLER: The relationship between President Obama and President Erdoğan went from really strong to not so good at all. And there's and opportunity now, not to get again back to hype of the beginning, but a really healthy

medium, and that I think is something that President Obama would very much look forward to, but the cards are really with President Erdoğan, and he can do so by just being rational. If he is rational American-Turkish relations will work very well. If he is less than rational there won't be a counterparty.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Many thanks, Congressman. I knew you had advised me to allow a lot of time to the participants. I would like to turn to you, but before doing that, just as football, soccer fans watched TV and check the results at the end of the weekend, I have become hooked on these balcony speeches, and I compared the one from 2007, to the one that was made yesterday, and the earlier one.

I'm not sure what one can deduce from it, but what struck me is that the last two speeches do not send any *selamlar*, any good words, to anybody in the West. It only goes as far as Sarajevo, (inaudible), Bosnia, it goes to Baku, it goes to Gaza, it goes to a lot of other places in the region, which I appreciate very much.

But what I had liked about the speech in 2007, is that it did expand beyond that immediate neighborhood that I thought, reflected very much the spirit of zero policy with neighbors. Congressman, I agree very much with the observation you have made, but the speech, so far, is not very promising, and I'm really looking forward to being disproven on that. We need a mic?

SPEAKER: Hi. Can you hear me? My name is Dr. Donwell, I'm a Mathematician Economist here in Washington. Are we thinking --

MR. KIRIŞCI: That's (crosstalk) mathematician, I never did well, so.

SPEAKER: That's all right. I have my PhD in Economics from St. Petersburg State Polytechnic Institute in Russia. So (Speaking in foreign language). I'm wondering, are we thinking that the plan is to target Kurds on and off indefinitely. Is that what Erdoğan has in mind? Thank you.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thank you. Let's take two more questions. Yes, sir.

SPEAKER: Thank you. I'm John Routh, with the InterAction of Alliance of U.S. NGOs. As we all know Turkey is hosting the G20 Summit in about two weeks, and one of the huge issues is the Syrian crisis. It's not yet been officially put on the agenda, it's not yet officially in the communiqué, and given, I would assume that President Erdoğan feels more secure and has more base now that this election is over. I'm wondering you think he has control, if he has a huge amount of control over the agenda. I understand Russia doesn't want it on, China may not want it on. Is there any way that you think it might get on the agenda because it needs to be addressed?

MR. KIRIŞCI: What was it that you asked then?

SPEAKER: The Syrian crisis.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yes. Okay. Thanks.

MR. ROSE: Herb Rose. Forty-one years ago I traveled for the first time -- 44 years ago, I traveled for the first time to Turkey, and I was impressed by the limited history that I got from speaking with Turks about Ataturk, and seeing a country that was first secular, and second, their primary inhabitants -- most inhabitants were Muslim. Today I see a country that has gone in the direction of becoming an Islamist country where -- which happens to be, secondarily, a secular country.

So I'm wondering from the people who spoke today, other than the Congressman who alluded to this to some degree, whether the issue between secularism and Islam took any place in either the June election, or the election that occurred over the weekend.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thank you. I'll turn to the Panel, but then I'll come for a second round from the back of the auditorium. How shall we go about this -- maybe the last question, Kadir, and then we'll work our way back to G20. And then also the

question on Kurds; Gönül, and maybe Ömer, and Kadir can take the last question, and Ömer and Gönül, the Kurds. I feel like a soccer --

MR. ÜSTÜN: A soccer manager.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Two for two.

MR. ÜSTÜN: While Turkey has a secular system, the country people might be, becoming more conservative or not. There are polls on that, there are studies, some say actually it's becoming more secular among the people. I think that debate was not crucially important in Turkey in these elections.

With regards to Kurds I'm going to say, targeting Kurds is the correct -- There is now in the media, we've seen this emergence of this category called Kurds, and we just discussed how AK Party got so many millions of Kurdish votes. So if AK Party is seen as attacking Kurds, the picture would have been different. So we have to start seriously distinguishing between various Kurdish groups. Like, Turkey has great relationship with Barzani, some other Kurds inside Turkey.

But PKK fighting is not perceived by the Kurds as Turkey attacking the Kurds. So, I think that's a mischaracterization and the reason, actually, HDP lost a lot of votes was the fact that it couldn't distinguish itself from PKK, and it seem to have to sort of served the PKK agenda. It couldn't distinguish itself and a civilian actor.

And I want to say one thing about Syria. Syria, what's happening in Northern Syria is a serious risk for U.S.-Turkey relations. There is still not an overall agreement on what needs to happen. I think part of it is because U.S. is focusing exclusively on ISIS and is sort of happy to ignore the political aims of PYD, while Turkey is much more concerned about the political ambitions of those groups, and they are trying to draw lines that they don't want PYD to cross.

And I think they are seeking common ground with the United States, it's

very important. But I think both countries will have to work better at that, how do we make sure that ISIS doesn't go, you know, across Turkey, doesn't create more problems, while, also basically not empowering PKK's, you know, legitimacy quest in the international arena, because it's being supported by European countries, and it's been given some ammunition by the U.S.

But I think that's a serious concern for Turkey and that has a potential to derail the U.S.-Turkey relations. At the technical levels, we've seen signs that they are working on that, but as long as there is this big divergence on how we should handle the conflict in Syria that's right for various disagreements and risks in U.S.-Turkey relationship. Because, you know, for Turkey it's a serious concern that PYD arms and ammunition end up in the hands of PKK on the other side of the border.

I have something about -- Just two sentences about Israel. I think Israel is always being -- the fact that if there is movement on peace process on the Israeli-Palestinian Front, Turkey feels easier to have better relations with Israel. I don't see it being fixed quickly anytime soon, but we can -- I think we will see a revisiting of the foreign policy overall, starting with Syria. Once, especially if there's some stability on the Syrian front, we'll see improvements in other areas.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Congressman, as Kadir seem to be addressing you, can we hear your perspectives on some of this? But especially the question that was raised about Turkey's secularism, and whether there is a relationship there, but also Turkey's relations with Israel.

MR. WEXLER: I don't think there's a relationship between the issue of secularism, and the relationship with Israel, and also I think there's a romanticist view of the past. I don't think Turkey was quite secular as people now say it was. And to the extent that it was more secular, in part, that was because, I think, people felt that the

political environment suggested that it should be more secular, and ironically -- and I'm not arguing for less secular Turkey. Don't get me wrong. I'm all for secular Turkey, but ironically, with freedom, comes the ability to choose one's religious observance, and with freedom a woman can decide whether or not to wear a headscarf or not, and yet to a certain degree there is a negative connotation attached to this greater expression of freedom.

I'm not suggesting that this gentleman, or any of us are in that camp, but it's a confusing issue for Americans, is my point. We stand for universal religious freedom, but yet when people express their religious freedom and they happen to be in a Muslim-majority country, and people become more religious, whoa, they are not as secular, and we should be very worried about it.

The flip side of this, too, with all due respect, with the media freedom; I'm a little confused, and I think Americans get confused. On the one hand we are told, there is far less media freedom in Turkey which seems to be demonstrated. On the other hand, we are told, and no doubt correctly so, that when President -- then Prime Minister Erdoğan pursued a policy that was designed to achieve a peaceful Kurdish resolution, he suffered politically. The nationalists deserted them, the Kurds deserted them, but you really can't have that both ways.

If there is freedom of media, that paralyzed Erdoğan when he was pursuing a positive policy, that seems to work okay, and everybody applauds at, but the converse is, when there are election results, or things seem to be more authoritarian, of things of that nature, then we conclude that people really don't know what they are voting for, they went out at 80 percent -- 87 percent turnout, fairly remarkable, and they are voting against what really are their interest, because there isn't media freedom.

I don't buy that, I don't buy that. I have more confidence in people to

decide, they may be right, they may be wrong, but they decide what's in their self-interest, and this time around a whole lot of Kurdish-Turkish citizens decided their best interest was with Erdoğan, and I don't think they decided that because of this newspaper, or that newspaper. They instinctively understand with respect to security and economy their lot was better that way. They could be right, they could be wrong.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Gönül, I think some of this was directed to you.

MR. WEXLER: Oh, wait. One more thing --

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yes, go ahead.

MR. WEXLER: -- because I didn't respond on the peace process issue.

I don't buy that one bit, for this reason. I would buy it if Prime Minister, now President Erdoğan, was major supportive of Fatah and President Abbas. After all they are the -- in theory pro-peace division of the Palestinian operation. But he is not. He is a little more supportive than most Americans would like, of the Hamas wing of the Palestinian operation.

So it's hard to say, oh, if only the peace process gets better then the Turkish Government will feel more comfortable engaging with the Israeli Government. Well, if that's the case, bolster up the moderate Palestinians; don't bolster up the part of the Palestinian operation that says no to peace process. I mean, come on.

MR. KIRIŞCI: All right. I think Ömer would like to enjoy the right to reply which I will give to him, but first it was Gönül.

MS. TOL: Yes. I'll answer the question on the Kurdish issue.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Yes, please.

MS. TOL: So, tackling the Kurdish problem --

SPEAKER: I believe there's (inaudible) --

MR. KIRIŞCI: That's very mathematical, you know, (inaudible) one.

SPEAKER: I don't believe (inaudible).

MS. TOL: Well I don't think many of us do. But tackling on the Kurdish question has always been electorally very costly, in a country where there is a strong Turkish nationalist current. So that's why I think it takes a very strong party that's not vulnerable electorally to show the political will to serve the Kurdish question, and that's one of the reasons why it was -- Erdoğan had been the bravest, one of the bravest Turkish leaders.

He launched the Kurdish peace process in 2009, because he was -- it was the AKP -- there was a majority government. It's difficult to do that with a coalition, it's difficult to do when you are electorally vulnerable. So, AKP is strong again, and again, that could be good news, because Erdoğan now is not feeling vulnerable. He has almost 50 percent of the votes, so he even wants more power, so that means he could do something on the Kurdish question, but this is -- the current AKP's dilemma, they could be able to get stronger with the nationalist votes, who are completely against the Kurdish peace process.

So that is a dilemma that the AKP is facing right now, but again, the status quo with the Kurds is not sustainable, because considering what's happening in the region, and even domestically. Yes, the HDP lost some conservative votes, and the APK gained some, might think that I finally have the backing of the Kurds; that's really not the case. We still have a very strong -- just the fact that the HDP got 10 percent -- was it 7, 10 percent, 7?

SPEAKER: It's 10.7.

MS. TOL: That's a huge victory, and I think the Kurds are now very self-confident, their ethnic consciousness is very strong, and they really think that this is a historic moment for them. And even the Kurds of the region too. Just a few months ago,

we would see the PKK female fighters on the front pages of Western media outlets, so their image has changed internationally, so really, the Kurds were not really settled down for cosmetic changes.

So that's why -- and that will put more pressure on the government. So that's why I think, if the government wants stability, if the government -- it might have won, but if it wants to govern, it will be very important for the AKP to take the necessary steps. But again, it will be electorally challenging.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thank you. Ömer, you wanted to --

MR. TASPINAR: Just on the question of media freedoms. It's not just an opinion that the state of the media in Turkey has gone from bad to worse, so just because some of the voters that used to vote for the AKP decided to desert the party on June 7th, and voted for the MHP, does not mean that they did so because they had access to information. Critical voices in Turkey, on the Kurdish Front, on the Left-Wing Front, on the Liberal Front, have an increasingly difficult time to make themselves present on TV stations.

Their voices are being silenced, and this is about the fairness of the election. Myself said that elections were free. People are free to go to vote for any party that they want. And of course they can -- they are free to desert Erdoğan, but they are not deserting Erdoğan, because all of a sudden they discover something on TV sets. The access to information in Turkey, according to *Freedom House*, according to *Committee to Protect Journalists*, according all major newspapers, has become a major problem.

This is not a country that can qualify for EU membership, this is not a country that can have -- can become a good, strategic partner for the United States. We have to be honest in our criticism of Turkish democracy, and Turkish media now, is

probably suffering its worst situation since the end of the Cold War. Even under the Military Rule, there were more opportunities for critical people to voice their presence, because now you have hegemony party that is able to successfully silence dissenting voices.

There are names that are unable to appear on the media. Right now I think there are few outlets that are gaining ground, finding that maybe because of the 41 percent Erdoğan would not interfere so much on June 7th. Now the big fear is that with 49 percent they may -- he may, again, interfere more. My hope is that he will try to depolarize the situation, but unfortunately there are very important names in the Turkish media that have lost their jobs, unable to make themselves heard, and we have to find consolation in the Internet, in social media.

But even on social media we are dealing with a government that has no qualms about shutting down Twitter. This is not the country that you want to deal with when it comes to freedoms.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Ömer, I don't want to violate your freedom of expression but I promised a couple of questions from the back. I'll take two for there, and two from the back there. Yes, Alan, and then -- Yes. Okay, next Alan Makowski, yes. Go ahead.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Dr. Kirişci.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Let's keep it short so that we are fair to the others too.

SPEAKER: Sure. Sure. My question is, do you anticipate Gezi-style upheaval in the newer future, concerning that they won't have elections, you know, coming for years, and the media is tightly controlled by the government? Thank you.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thank you. Alan?

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Mine is also a G20 question. I guess it's basically for Robert, but maybe anyone else. At some point during the G20, I assume

there will be a bilateral between President Obama and President Erdoğan. I'm not so interested in the private part of it. Publicly, how do you think -- what sort of stance should President Obama take, taking everything into account, the tensions in our relationship with Turkey over Syria, the press freedom issue, which maybe you don't fully subscribe to, but I think it's very real; But also (inaudible) and his great election victory.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks, Alan.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Brian Carlo. Congressman Wexler, how do you see yesterday's elections affecting the TTIP negotiations between U.S., EU, and Turkey's inclusion into the TTIP arrangement? To the rest of Panel, and sort of piggy-backing on the point that Kemal made; how do you see yesterday's AKP victory which came under Prime Minister Davutoğlu's watch AKP's best general election performance so far, and in a way that happened by Davutoğlu basically telling President Erdoğan to take a step back, for him holding rallies and what not more. How do you think that's going to affect the relations between the two leaders? Thank you very much.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thank you. I think there was a question from you. Yes. And then we'll turn to the Panel; one last question here.

SPEAKER: Stanley Kober. On October 30th, the U.S. Army Europe issued a travel restriction for Turkey, for all service members. "Effective immediately U.S. Army Europe is implementing travel restrictions to Turkey for Department of Defense personnel." This is quite striking to me. I just want to give that matter -- I've never seen any thing like this for a NATO member. We've be talking about political stability, somebody in the Defense Department is saying, the situation is very unstable, this is for the whole country not just the border area. Travel restrictions for the whole country, I'm wondering how the Panel responds to that in terms of the assessment of Turkey's political stability.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Okay. Thank you. We just have about 7, 8 minutes. Let's start with the Congressman, and then we'll work our way back to Ömer. Yes.

MR. WEXLER: First, apparently I have not been clear, so let me try again. If this was a Panel about media freedom in Turkey I would agree with you 100 percent, I would have said nothing. But it's not a Panel about media freedom in Turkey, it's a Panel about the election and the ramifications -- or at least my part of it -- the ramifications in terms of Turkish-American relations.

And my only point is, while media freedom is absolutely one of the issues or criteria or factors to be considered, I don't think -- In fact, I think we would make a big mistake if we overstated the impact of a lack of media freedom, and then equated that in a way, where we, as American policymakers or opinion makers then say, we take this position. No. As important if not more, it would suggest to me is, let's be honest, two of the three opposition parties have leadership that is completely ineffectual.

They offer no inspiring messages. That's why they did so poorly, yes, media freedom or a lack of it is a factor, that no doubt benefits President Erdoğan. But even with that lack of media freedom, I suspect the other parties would have done better had they had a more compelling message, or a more compelling set of candidates. I don't want to be cast, God forbid, as somebody who is callous to lack of media freedom. That's not the case.

But I can tell you also my own political experience as a Democrat, when the Democrats get slaughtered in elections, we always try to find reasons why, and the last place we usually look, is our own candidates and our own message, but usually that is the case. Now I'm not comparing America to Turkey, I don't want to do that either. Okay.

The gentleman's question on trade; Turkey I think enhanced its position,

and that's a good thing, because Turkey deserves -- to the extent that there is an Atlantic Treaty, Turkey should be treated from an American perspective, in my view, as if it's already in the EU, and that would do a great deal to give confidence to the Turkish Government and to also pressure, rightfully, our European allies to get moving on the EU accession process in a way that they had been quite faulty in the last couple of years. Did I forget anything?

MR. KIRIŞCI: The travel restrictions.

MR. WEXLER: The travel restrictions. That's news to me. I don't know. And it's shocking if it includes anything but the border areas, but it wouldn't be the first time that the American Government issued broad-based travel restrictions not just in Turkey, in some other countries, in an abundance of caution. And I suspect if that's what the case was, there will be wiser minds that come in and target the areas where the restrictions should be, because surely that shouldn't be the case in terms of the whole country.

MR. KIRIŞCI: There was last question from the corner about the head of G20, or what Obama should be --

MR. WEXLER: All right. Alan, that's right, yes.

SPEAKER: The embrace (inaudible) to perform really.

MR. WEXLER: Well, it's absolutely correct, that Turkey has its own set of interest in terms of the Kurdish question, and America must, absolutely, be sensitive to that. Let's be realistic, from a political perspective in America, nobody knows the Kurdish question, everybody is worried about ISIS.

So, when President Obama goes and speaks with President Erdoğan, and they have their public presentation as Alan described, President Obama should talk about what they just agreed upon in terms of ISIS, and how the American-Turkish

Alliance is going to promote the fight against ISIS. And of course President Obama should be sensitive to the interest of Turkey, but he is going to promote the interest of America, which in this day is ISIS, defeating ISIS.

That's what he's going to do in private. He should make every allowance possible to allow American policy to assist the Turkish policy, but in public it's about defeating ISIS, and that's what Americans want to hear, and quite frankly that's what our allies want to hear as well. I mean our allies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, in Israel to a lesser extent, and that will affect positioning in the region in a very significant way. The Kurdish question, while essential I don't think takes that dimension.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks. Gönül, in a-minute-and-a-half, addressing all this list of questions?

MS. TOL: Oh, sure. Very shortly; there was a question on whether there would be a type of these protests because of lack of media freedom. I don't think so. I mean we've just seen the results. The physical -- there were physical attacks against a journalist recently, and even in our inner circle, there are tens of people, journalists who got fired. So, there's a major problem there and the ruling party increase its votes by 9 percent. So I don't think that's an issue for the electorate, people vote on bread and butter issues, and security concerns. So I don't think there is another way of these protest because of lack of freedom of expression in Turkey.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks. Ömer, Kadir, we have two minutes left. But pick your choice, you are welcome to address them all, too, but do it in a-minute-and-a-half.

MR. ÜSTÜN: I concur with the Congressman on the impact of media freedom on the elections.

SPEAKER: That says it all.

MR. ÜSTÜN: But you just compared the situation in terms of medium

freedom today in Turkey to military coup --

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) from the times.

MR. ÜSTÜN: -- and any kind of observer of Turkey would know, you know, the military would simply hand papers to be published at that time. We didn't live to, you know, see that time, luckily, but there is just no comparison. When you add up the opposition papers, how many they sell in Turkey, you can't say that there is no critical voice in the media.

There is a lot of pressure on the media, it's not from all sides, it's a highly polarized environment, and basically papers are fighting each other in a political fight. And we are not getting enough media freedom there, but if you make it sound like there is no access to information for Turkey people, and that's why they switched their votes within five months, 4.5 million votes, that does doesn't sound -- that's why I said people are looking at the situation and blaming the instability on somebody other than AK Party, obviously, for them to go vote for that party. That's why I said I concur with the Congressman.

In terms of the Davutoğlu-Erdoğan relationship, I think their vision, and sort of where they want to go is the same. How they'll get there? I think there will be definitely disagreements; we've seen that in the past. They were able to work through them, they might or they may not, but for years people expected political chances are of Erdoğan dynamic, and it never came through, and which is why I was saying at the beginning, the opposition has to have an agenda that speaks to the electorate and have to, you know, not rely on this kind of hooded (inaudible), between, you know, AK Party leadership. And it's important that in the aftermath of a major leadership shape, from Erdoğan to Davutoğlu, this victory of course ensures that Davutoğlu is the next generation of leaders for the AK Party.

MR. TASPINAR: I will just conclude with a very brief remark. Turkey is witnessing an unbelievable amount of polarization, and this is why the media is important. The media is driving this polarization. There is an unbelievable amount of personalization of politics under the presidency of Erdoğan, I wish we had the opportunity to talk about institutions, but we cannot talk about institutions when politics is so personalized by one man.

This is the fact of what we are dealing with, and media, and the hegemony of the AKP over even critical sources of media, is such that a very charismatic leader like, Selahattin Demirtas. Congressman you mentioned very charismatic leader, Selahattin Demirtas is as charismatic as it gets. I ask you, how much access did Selahattin Demirtas have to media in the last four months?

MS. TOL: Fifteen minutes on State media.

MR. TASPINAR: Fifteen minutes, maybe 0.2 percent of air time. This is the reality we are in. Here is a charismatic leader who could really move mountains in Turkey. If he was the leader of the CHP, the CHP, I believe, could reach 30, 35 percent, yet he's not allowed on TV. He is not allowed on TV, why? Because of capitalism, not just ideology, in the past, yes, under the Military Rule, we had ideological reasons for stranglehold over the media. There was a Kemalist system that basically blocked the media.

Today, we have a different system, there's capitalism, there's the stranglehold of the hegemony presence of one man which controls the media. I know it because I work for a media organization that was close to the government. I got fired one week after I appeared on Stephen Colbert, because --

MR. WEXLER: I almost did too.

MR. TASPINAR: So you know -- I got fired -- you got fired --

MR. WEXLER: No. No. I'm joking, I'm sorry.

MR. TASPINAR: When you are criticizing this government you are getting fired. And this is not about capitalism, it's just about ideology. The stranglehold of capitalism, the fact that the media owners have this crony relationship with the government, and the fact that the government is able to control so much of the economy is a systemic problem. If we are not talking about freedom, we cannot talk about democracy in Turkey. This is why it's not just about the media, it's about societal polarization and media is driving this polarization.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks, Ömer. One thing we can say is that here at Brookings we do give a voice -- a say to all voices and point of view. Thanks. But let's see what time will show, and whether the challenges that we have talked about in this Panel facing Turkey will indeed be overcome in the course of the couple of years ahead of us. The next elections will now actually be 2019, so I will not have to hold an election panel here, and hopefully we'll have other issues that will be able to address here at Brookings. So, thank you very much for joining us this afternoon.

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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