Turkey on the Verge of Change

A few days ago, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan officially announced that the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey no longer reflects the country's needs and should be replaced with a new one. Judging by the ensuing reactions from a string of Turkish and foreign media, this news triggered visibly heightened interest, although for many it was completely unsurprising.

Recently, revealing intentions of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to create a new presidential system of government, Turkish media have begun to increasingly often write about plans to transform the Government structure of the Republic of Turkey. These plans began to be more openly voiced after the Presidential elections, which took place in Turkey on August 14, 2014, when the former Foreign Affairs Minister and current Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu stated that in the interest of the nation's future democracy, a new Constitution was necessary. This same idea had earlier been voiced by the Turkish Minister of Justice, Bekir Bozdag, who noted that “although our current national Constitution has undergone over 100 alterations, it has not become any more democratic.”

In order to change the Constitution without referendum, the current party in power, AKP, needs the support of 2/3 of parliament's votes, or 367 members. For this reason, the upcoming Parliamentary elections in Turkey of June 7, 2015 take on a special importance for Erdogan, as well as his associates, who in order to implement their plans intend to fight for a majority of seats in parliament.

However, the upcoming elections will be the first in which AKP, while maintaining its status as a favorite, will participate without Erdogan, since Turkish law prohibits the country's President to be part of a party. He is no longer considered an official party member. Therefore, ensuring a sure victory at the 2015 elections is the main task faced by the current head of the AKP - active Prime Minister, Ahmed Davutoglu. However, this does not mean that Erdogan's connection to the party is completely severed, since he continues to lead the political force de facto, the success of which depends on the future stability of the President's position.

It is crystal clear that a victory at the upcoming elections will allow Erdogan and AKP to continue their policy of moderate Islamization, increasing the role and sway held by Islam throughout the Country. In order to implement the hoped for changes, the President has surrounded himself with influential advisers actively involved in the planned reforms and policies assumed by Erdogan. However, for victory in the upcoming elections and the forming of a party core that will head up the electoral struggle, the President was forced to give up some of his closest advisers, putting them forward as candidates at the upcoming elections. This step is due to the fact that, according to Turkish law, persons participating in parliamentary elections must leave their former governmental positions until February 10.

For this reason, early in February of this year, it was revealed that the Presidential adviser, Unal Aydin and the Chief of Turkish Intelligence (MIT), Hakan Fidan, who appear to be, for the near future, the main promoters of Erdogan's policies in the Parliamentary battles, will resign. Hakan Fidan will definitely play a special role in the elections.
Hakan Fidan, born 1968, began his career in 1986 as a noncommissioned officer. In 2007, he was appointed the Deputy Assistant Secretary in Erdogan's government and took part in the first secret talks in Oslo with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

In 2009 he was transferred to work in the Turkish intelligence branch, MIT, of which he became director on May 25, 2010. At the head of this service, Fidan continued the negotiations he began earlier with the PKK, however, in 2012 he was put in a difficult position before Turkish courts due to PKK's participation in the murder of 13 Turkish soldiers near Diyarbakir. He was suspected to have overstepped his rights in negotiations with the PKK which in Turkey is considered a terrorist organization, and local law prohibits any contact with it. Erdogan personally helped him out of the increasingly difficult situation.

It should be noted that Erdogan once again came to the Turkish Intelligence Director rescue in 2013, when an American journalist, David Ignatius, accused him of intentionally disclosing to Iran the names of ten Mossad agents in the country.

After these events, Fidan and the Turkish intelligence branch headed by him became some of the main tools in the domestic political struggle for influence between Erdogan and the Islamic activist living in the U.S., Fethullah Gulen. More specifically, members of MIT discovered hidden listening devices planted by Gulen's men in the homes and offices of Prime Minister, President, and many politicians in Ankara, which allowed Erdogan to do some clean up amongst the Turkish bureaucracy and, most of all, among politicians, members of the police force and judiciary powers, who succumbed to Gulen's influence.

Against this background, Fidan and the Turkish intelligence branch headed by him strengthen their authority not only domestically, but more so, in Erdogan's eyes. This is why the incident on the Syrian border of January 2, 2014 concerning the detainment by Turkish Gendarmerie of a few MIT officers with a truck of weapons clearly meant for Syrian rebels, was quickly localized, with no discussion among Turkish judicial services or by the media. A factor in strengthening Fidan and MIT's authority was their successful operation in September 2014, “to liberate” 46 Turks taken hostages by ISIS in the Turkish Consulate in Iraqi Mosul, in exchange for ransom and the Islamic State members held prisoners in Turkish hospitals near the Syrian border.

Under these circumstances, it seems that Fidan will offer increased attention to issues so important to Erdogan during the campaign, such as battling terrorism, ISIS, the Kurdish problem. The economic aspects and, in particular, the implementation of the Turkish Stream project, will be the responsibility of another former adviser, Unal Aydin.

As for the reaction from the West to the Turkish plans for change, no initiative counteraction should be expected from Erdogan, since he still needs Turkey to effectively battle ISIS and productively coagulate with an immense portion of the Greater Middle East. It seems that Erdogan understands this perfectly well and seeks to use the evolving situation in his interests and to strengthen his own power as the President of Turkey.

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