

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

THE FUTURE OF TURKISH DEMOCRACY:
ASSESSING LOCAL ELECTION OUTCOMES

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, April 1, 2009

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. TASPINAR: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to Brookings. I am Omer Taspinar, the Director of the Turkey Project here. The Turkey Project as you know is part of the Center on Europe and the United States. We are very happy this morning to continue a long-standing Turkey Project tradition which began I have to say in 2007 under the leadership of Ambassador Mark Parris who is now the counselor and the great eminence of the Turkey Project of organizing timely events such as this one put together in parallel and around Turkey's always very lively political calendar.

As always, let me also thank our supporters that make such timely events possible, supporters such as the Turkish Businessmen Association, TUSAID, and other institutional and private-sector supporters that have been over the years instrumental for the Turkey Project's events and independence.

As you all know, we had local elections in Turkey just last weekend and we are here essentially to analyze the results and implications of these local elections for Turkish domestic policy and Turkish foreign policy. What Mark and I did not know a couple of months ago when we decided to organize this event was that President Obama would be visiting Turkey just a week after the local elections. This

needless to say only enhances the timeliness of this event and gives us a great opportunity in addition to talking about Turkish domestic politics and local elections, to focus also on the state of Turkish-American relations.

So without further ado let me briefly introduce two familiar names to Brookings and to most of you who are no strangers to Washington, D.C. Let me start with Soli Ozel who is Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Bilgi University. Soli wears many hats. He is also an foreign policy adviser to TUSIAD. He is also a columnist for a new Turkish daily called Haberturk. But for me, Soli above all is a mentor and the best professor I ever had when I was a student across the street at CSIS. I'm not so sure if he's proud to be considered my mentor anymore, but I have to say that anyway.

MR. OZEL: Always and forever.

MR. TASPINAR: Murat Yetkin is also no stranger to most of you. He is a regular at Brookings. He is a good friend and a very perceptive and keen observer of Turkish politics. We're always happy to have his insight here. As you probably know, he is the Ankara Bureau Chief of the Turkish daily *Radikal* and a top columnist for the same daily. In the good tradition of investigative journalism, he is also a prolific writer and analyst who has published several books focusing on Turkish foreign and domestic policy.

What we'll do today is to start with Murat. Hopefully Murat will speak for no longer than 20 minutes. Then Soli, so that we have a good Q and A.

MR. YETKIN: I'll keep it short. Again I am very glad to be with you today right after the elections. I will start with our headline the next day after the elections, the headline of the newspaper *Radikal*. Perhaps some of you are familiar with our Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's outburst in the World Economic Forum that was in Davos when he was trying to protest the moderator David Ignatius because of giving more time to Shimon Peres, his 1-minute outburst. Perhaps you might remember that. Our headline was "People Said 1 Minute to Erdogan." So that was trying to explain the message and the outcome of the elections. The message of the people, I am going to get into the numbers now. The message was a clear one and saying that all right we still want to continue with you, but be careful. Our support will not be forever. So it has a limit. And the limits, it seems that Erdogan is careless on the economic crisis and its effects in Turkey because he kept saying that this will not affect Turkey and Turkish people much, we have taken enough measures so far, we don't need to take any more now, and we have a Treasury Minister, Mr. Mehmet Simsek, who said that there is no real unemployment actually. People are lazy and women started to look for work. That's why

we see this unemployment picture, but people it seems were not promised. And the results were -- before the results I have to tell you one more thing, that though this was a local election, though we went to the box in order to elect our mayors and city councils, because of again primarily Prime Minister Erdogan's setting the targets and setting the rules of the game, it was perceived as a general election. It went into the atmosphere of a general election. Because before starting the campaign he made a speech to the parliamentary group, to our party group, saying that my target is 47 percent or more. Forty-seven percent was the votes he got in 2007 general elections, parliamentary elections. So after that the other leaders, the opposition leaders also set themselves, set their agenda, they had to because the majority party was acting like that, as if it's a general election. So the election had a dual character, the perception of a general election and the physical local elections.

So let's analyze in both ways. The Prime Minister could not reach his 47 percent target. Instead he got 38.8 percent as of this morning because votes are settling. There are some complaints and judges are looking into some minor points, et cetera. It's 38.8 percent. It's below the 2007 general elections, below the 2004 local elections, which was 42 percent, to be precise, 41.7 percent, and it is a clear decline in the votes. In the other sense, in the municipality election sense, there is a

decline as well. After 2004 local elections -- party got 58 city center municipalities, 12 of them being greater municipalities like cities of more than 1 million or so. In this election, the number decreased to 45 from 58, 10 of them being greater municipalities. Erdogan lost two greater municipalities. He had set five targets. He named five districts that he wanted there. Those were the western port town and it's the third biggest city of Turkey, Izmir; Diyarbakir, mostly Kurdish populated; Kingadid, again a headache for all governments in Turkey; Chanka District of Ankara; and Karbuglar District of the Anatolian Quarter of Istanbul. Two of them, Diyarbakir and Tujere were held by the Kurdish Nationalist Democratic Society Party, and the other three were held by CHP, the Republican People's Party, the main opposition. He achieved none of these targets. More than that, he lost Adana, an important city, the fourth-biggest city in Turkey, Southern Turkey, to MHP, to the Nationalist Movement Party, mainly based on Turkish nationalism.

He couldn't get Albukur. Instead he lost another major Southeastern town Van. Van was very important for him because in the Southeast mostly Kurdish populated region, Van is the second-biggest town after Albukur and it was like a (inaudible) and he lost there. He lost Siirt. Siirt is a Southeastern town, and Seer has a symbolic importance because both he was elected as a member of parliament from Seer in

2003 and it's the hometown of Mrs. Erdogan. So he has some importance. He lost another greater municipality Antalya. Perhaps some of you have heard of Antalya. It's the major tourism center of not only Turkey but the whole region. CHP got Antalya. CHP is the hometown of Deniz Baykal, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, the main opposition party, so it has some importance there. If we look to votes and municipalities won by the other opposition parties we see such a picture. While as we have seen the votes of -- party is in a decline, let me repeat, in 2004 the general votes in 2004, 41.7, 2007, an increase, 46.6, and then in 2009, 38.8. So CHP, 2004, 18.2, 2007, 20.9, and now 23.1. A slight but continuous incline. MHP from 10.5 in 2004, 14.3 in 2007, and now 16.1 in 2009, a steeper incline. The Democratic Society Party, the Kurdish Nationalist Party, 5.2, 5.2, 5.6, a slight increase as well. Saadet Party is important. Saadet Party is representing the roots of a party actually what is called as a nationalist -- the Islamist Party we could say, where (inaudible) from within as a split. In 2004 the percentage was 4. In 2007 it declined to 2.3. Now it's 5.2. In some districts they really forced (inaudible) won slightly the district Uskudar in Istanbul. Perhaps those of you who are familiar with Istanbul, it's an important district.

What is the importance of these vote rates? It is very important because Sunday night after the results have started to appear

on TV screens, Erdogan had a press conference and said, yes, these results are not satisfactory to me. He was particularly disappointed by Antalya, by the way. I went there 28 times. I didn't deserve this, he said. Perhaps people didn't want him to come that frequently. I don't know. That's a speculation. But I'm going to make you an addition operation of votes of CHP and MHP because in the press conference he said that yet again the summation of those two meaning CHP and MHP cannot make one (inaudible) in 2 hours' time the statistics or the election results came in such a way that the picture turned vice versa.

So in 2004 the summation of CHP and MHP, the opposition parties, was 28.7. Indeed it's far below 41.7 percent of AK Party. In 2007 the summation was again increased to 35.2, yet again it's much below the 46.6 of AK Party. Now AK Party is 38.8 and the summation is 39.2. For the first time in 6 or 7 years now since the elections in 2007, the major opposition parties had the potential to form a government if it was a general election. Perhaps the distribution of seats will show us a different picture if it will be a general election, but on paper at least we have an alternative. This is very important. This was the second message of the voters to AK Party.

Another message is that imagine the map of Turkey. Now all of Thrace, all three provinces in the Thrace region, the whole of the

Aegean Coast and the Mediterranean Coast until Adana is not again AK Party but MHP, are won by CHP. Many towns in the Black Sea shore were won by either CHP or MHP. So AK Party is getting inward to Anatolian plateau from shores. And the interpretation is that especially for the Aegean and Mediterranean Coast and the modern European border, people voted for their lifestyles. They do not want to get a more conservative way of life, and especially in Izmir and Antalya they were very -- the message was very clear the difference between CHP and AK Party was a real one. Despite the fact that in Antalya the candidate of CHP. Now the mayor of Antalya was not a powerful one. He used to be the rector of the Mediterranean University in Antalya and he was condemned by the Prime Minister a number of times because of not letting headscarved students into the university campus and voted by President Gul because of that despite the fact that he had won the rector electionship (inaudible) CHP showed him as the candidate. Nobody gave any chance to him, but he won. So this is a very clear message as well -- another message related.

This was the first election of Erdogan without Abdullah Gul. It proves now it was that Abdullah Gul was before getting elected as President was the factor of moderation in the party, in the government, and we can clearly see that after Abdullah Gul being elected and went up

to Chankra Hill as President. The rhetoric of Erdogan used to get more arrogant, more sharp and less patient. The example was Davos. So Turkish voters said in summation, I think we're 20 minutes now, that okay we're giving you another credit but please know that this is not forever so behave accordingly.

MR. TASPINAR: Thank you, Murat. Soli?

MR. OZEL: Yes. Good morning all. Every election I suppose has a story and there are a couple of things that I want to say before I try to analyze this. Back in 2007 when we had our elections on the 22nd of July, I came here again to do a similar presentation and at that time as you know despite the military's intervention and the judiciary's intervention, the AKP received 47 percent of the vote and my opening line was that the Turkish democracy test is a maturity test. I will argue again that the Turkish democracy once more passed the maturity test and it appears that the Turkish democracy keeps on passing all these maturity tests, but Turkish politicians don't for some reason.

Now it is odd that here we are speaking or trying to analyze the elections and presenting to you an analysis that treats the winner of the elections as the loser because after all the AKP did get 39 percent of the vote. It still holds a majority of municipalities. But obviously there is a problem, and it's a power that had been in power for 6-1/2 years now. So

the normal wear and tear of power ought to have worked on it so we should have been more charitable I suppose. And I guess part of the reason why we're not so charitable is because the Prime Minister set the bar of success and he hasn't met either the more ambitious one of 50 percent or the less ambitious one, the more realistic one, of 42 percent.

There are in my view two quotes that really sum up. We get flown here to give you a sense of what happened and all that and there were two quotes probably by two illiterate people I think that sum up this election. One was by a woman from a shantytown district of Ankara interviewed by the interviewer of Millet Newspaper 3 weeks ago on a Monday, and she really put things so succinctly in my view. She said to the interviewer you know that to preface it, the AKP is dismantling the social welfare state but it has its own social networks that provides food, coal, books, whatever, to those in need. And this woman said to the interviewer that she really did not feel comfortable, she fell ill at ease in selling her vote for a bag of pasta but that she was scared that if these guys went away she might not be able to find that bag of pasta. Then the second quote is from the column of a journalist in Karaf Newspaper, Ulderai Or, who took a cab, and as you know the wisdom of every country is in the cabdriver's minds, and so he asked this cabdriver whom he suspects of being of Kurdish origin and says, "Who are you going to vote

for?" The guy waits a bit and says, "I'm going to vote for myself." And lo and behold, again as Murat has already made clear, we have a very fragmented picture. It's like your Blue and Red States. If you had a third party, maybe you'd have Blue, Red and Brown. I don't know. But because we have more than two parties we also have clearly identifiable divisions in Turkey whereby we have the Kurdistan region politically, we have the moderately Islamic Republic of Central Anatolia, we have staunchly secular Republic of Western and Southern Shores, and then we have the crazy quilt of the Black Sea that reflects their musical tastes as well as their temperament.

I think we can make an analysis of the elections at two different levels. The first level is of course that in the aggregate, the voters gave a message or warning to the ruling party. They did say 1 minute. And they basically protested against the arrogance of power which became so visible and in some senses so threatening for so many as was expressed in my judgment in that poor woman who talked about the pasta that she might or might not get.

The second level is really about this fragmentation, and to the extent that -- much as I think the aggregate message was an extraordinarily healthy message which showed to everyone in my judgment that Turkish democracy does indeed function in its own way

certainly through the elections, that it does indeed pass the maturity test, that it is not one man, one vote, one time, as all those very intelligent and bright people who say Islam and democracy don't match, where they got the idea I don't know. The last time I heard, Judaism and democracy or Christianity of democracy don't match either. Dogmas and choices do not necessarily match. It's the adherents of those religions that may or may not make a democracy. In that sense, the picture in Turkey is very healthy. But in another sense in the fragmented picture what we do see is of course a country whereby different constituencies have very little in common with one another. That is, the common space of Turkish politics has been shrinking and that of course it's not overcome is going to be generating a lot of problems for the country. And in my judgment, the only way for this to be overcome is for, one, the parties to have a much broader appeal, a much synthetic project, and second, for Turkey to have a viable opposition party.

One of the odd things about this election is if the AKP did indeed lose, who won? There really is no winner. And that very emptiness, that very void in the political system of not having a viable opposition party that actually has a program for the Turkey of the 21st century is also helping the polarization. Let me go point by point on what I mean. Two years ago I didn't have to wear the glasses. On bullet points,

the electorate did not give the AKP the kind of monopolistic power that it sought, and we are very grateful to it. And I can't miss this one. When we had the 2007 elections and a lot of secularists literally fooled themselves thinking that the CHP would win, I don't know where they got the idea but they did. That must be what hallucination is about. One columnist very infamously wrote the AKP was elected by those idiots who scratch their bellies and look from a -- it was really a very denigrating statement to make and I think he should have been fired summarily by the editorial board, but he wasn't. So the same guy who actually scratches his belly suddenly found in his belly I suppose the source of wisdom.

The second important matter, the second important point about these elections is that it's probably in a long, long time the one election when we did not have the long shadow of the military being cast upon the elections. This was thoroughly a civilian affair and the Turkey electorate did what it wanted to do. It wasn't reacting to anyone, nor was it following the orders of anyone, and that I think makes Turkish democracy a lot healthier than before.

The economic crisis obviously underpinned the results. One of the curious things was in several heavily industrial provinces of Turkey such as for those of you who are familiar, 65 percent of Turkish industrial production takes place around Istanbul, so the cities of Bursa where the

automotive and textile industries are, the city of Kocaeli where there's a multitude of different industries, Cholü, Gaziantep in the Southeast, Denizli in the West, in all those cities, AKP held its own but has truly lost anywhere between 10 to 14 percentage points. But such was its margin of victory back in 2007 that despite this loss it still kept the municipality but not obviously the kind of majority in the city councils.

Fourth, I think the Prime Minister underestimated the fact that Turkey is actually by and large a modern country and a modern country in the middle of a crisis the likes of which have not either ever been seen or have not been seen since for the last 80 years demands of its rulers that they take the economic crisis seriously, that they try to give them some confidence that they know what they're talking about, that they have mastered the situation and hopefully they even have a cure for the ills of the economy. So for the Prime Minister to blame everyone except his government for the ills of the economy, which he first of all denied that there were any problems with the economy, was really underestimating the intelligence of the electorate and I suppose the electorate begged to differ.

As Murat said, in many cities in different regions, the electorate voted politically and ideologically. Antalya for those of you who are familiar with Turkey is the Turkish Riviera and he went to Antalya 28

times. The government invested in Antalya, turned it into a truly metropolitan and cosmopolitan city and all that, and after all that was done, Antalya showed nothing but ingratitude and elected this rector who doesn't strike me as the most -- I don't know.

Why? Because obviously again this is again about underestimating the modernity of Turkey's politics. There was a time when right-wing parties could win power by basically providing services and patronage, limitless patronage, to the electorate and that was enough. That's obviously a necessary condition anywhere including in this country, all your earmark funds and all that, but it is no longer the sufficient condition for many parts of the country which are integrated with the global world and are filled with modern people and that's why Antalya and the entire coast reacted to the AKP on ideological and political grounds because people felt threatened.

So finally, looking at the Kurdish votes and the Southeastern region, obviously the Kurds also were not too easily bought off by bribes. One of the most interesting episodes during the election was that the government with the help of the governor who is not supposed to be in politics at all distributed white goods to the town of Tunceli. Tunceli has always been a very hard-headed city. Not only is it a Kurdish city predominantly, it's also an Alabi city, so double-dipped. And the Tunceli

people were given all these white goods and some of the people who did get the white goods did not have electricity in their villages, but never mind, they thanked the government for all that they received and ultimately elected someone from the Kurdish Nationalist Party. So obviously for the Kurds it's no longer just a matter of services, it's not just a matter of patronage, it's not even just a matter of "giving" to them a TV station in Kurdish. It is about Kurdish identity. On the one hand, Kurdish identity strengthens the Kurdish Nationalist Party in the Southeast and gives us this divided nation picture, and on the other of course it reinforces the rise of Turkish nationalism, MHP's rise. MHP only increased its percentage by 2-1/2 points, but it increased its municipalities I think by 14. MHP's rise is both a function of Kurdish nationalism that is strengthening and an anti-globalization wave that we see everywhere. I would argue the same dynamic also operated for the Saadet party, the moderate party to AKP, and actually they were twins but they were like Schwarzenegger and Devito twins. Devito has been taking hormones and growing and the other one is shrinking.

Of course we don't yet have the detailed analysis, but I think at the end of the day the corruption that always and everywhere and no matter how religious or not you are accompanies power, has also eroded

AKP's appeal and that is partially why I think the more pious electorate went back to Sadet.

All in all then we have to transcend this political fragmentation. I think what the Prime Minister and the AKP did not realize, and of course the AKP as a party is in no position to realize anything because the Prime Minister does all the thinking for everyone, what he did not realize is that the popularity of the AKP was a function of its democratizing, reforming, anti-military, anti-statist stances. When they gradually dropped all those balls, they were left for what they were, brutes, and they have been punished for it. I have no idea how the Prime Minister is going to interpret these election results. If he thinks that he should not have dropped all these balls, picks them up and tries to run with them, and of course the symbol of this is for Turkey to go back to the process of joining an E.U. that no longer exists, that will be the good choice. Or he may think that he should actually harden his line. Under those circumstances, in my estimation he would lose even bigger. Thank you.

MR. TASPINAR: Thank you, Soli. Using the prerogative of the chair, I'll ask the first question, but before that let me make a couple of remarks as well echoing mostly what Murat and Soli said, and then I will ask a question about foreign policy.

I think you're both absolutely right that Erdogan has become a victim of his own success. The reason why today we're treating this as a relative defeat for AK Party, this local election result, is basically because in 2007 in July his party received 47 percent. What we now know I think is that this 47 percent was an anomaly. It was really dependent on the extraordinary circumstances of that vote and we all know what these circumstances were. There was what came to be called a military memorandum, an e-coup as it came to be known, and the AK Party called early elections, the country was polarized and the AK Party was essentially able to play victim. It had a very strong narrative of victimization which basically portrayed itself as the only democratic movement in Turkey against the military and secularist establishment, secularist parties, who were with the military.

Now we know that that 47 percent was, in a way, a reaction vote to that political climate and I hope that the Turkish military also realizes that had they not issued that memorandum in 2007 April that 47 percent would probably never happen. Therefore what we are now at 40 percent, close to 40 percent, is probably very similar to what AK Party could get in a normal election, in a general election, and that's not bad at all if you ask me for a party that has been in power for 7-1/2 years especially if you're considering that the country is -- 6-1/2 years, 7 years,

close to 7 years, and when you think that basically it has been in charge of the municipalities we're talking about especially Istanbul and Ankara for the last almost 18 years.

MR. OZEL: Fifteen.

MR. TASPINAR: Fifteen years.

MR. OZEL: '94.

MR. TASPINAR: '94, yeah, 15 years. So you basically have a situation where for 15 years the same political party under different names has been running these municipalities and they're still winning 40 percent. Given the economic crisis, given the corruption level in Turkey, given all the crises, given the fact that the Constitutional Court just last year tried to ban this political party, it's not a bad result. The problem is that the Prime Minister, as Murat mentioned, set the bar too high and we should ask ourselves why he did set the bar so high. This is a party that feels very insecure if you ask me. They believe that they to win 50 to 60 percent of the vote to be immune from a military intervention or from a judicial coup. That's the desperation they're in with the belief that only if they have such a huge majority they will be immune and it only exacerbates the already very bad populist tendencies of the government of the AK Party. It is increasingly becoming a populist party, an increasingly insecure party, and unfortunately what we're seeing today,

the negative side of these elections if you ask me, is the rise of identity politics in Turkey. Murat is absolutely right that people have voted for their lifestyles. There is also a problem of nationalism in Turkey now. If you ask who is the victor of these elections, I would say Kurdish nationalism and Turkish nationalism. There is a growing polarization in the country despite some progress on the Kurdish question, democratic progress, despite better relations between Ankara and Erbil in Northern Iraq, there is a problem of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey and there is a problem of rising Turkish nationalism and the Islamic secular polarization if anything appears to be growing worse. So in that sense the only silver lining from this is I hope that the military will realize that judicial coups or military coups against this government will not pay off and it will be counterproductive. If you let democracy run its course in Turkey, the AK Party will probably diminish its votes just like all parties that stay in power for a long time. So here is my two cents.

But what I would like to do now is ask Murat and Soli what they think about President Obama's visit, some of the issues on Turkish-American relations, and if you care to address also the Turkey-E.U. front.

MR. YETKIN: There is nothing new on the Turkish-E.U. front to start with because I think it's up to the E.U. now to decide for its future then perhaps we will start talking again on Turkish-E.U. relations. It

is for sure despite what you have just said on the election results, President Obama is going to talk to Prime Minister Erdogan who is wounded, disappointed and angry, and also knows. Before coming here I was trying to follow the important press conference by the Prime Minister in Ankara. He was furious to a newspaper. This time not one of those newspapers he prefers to call the others or the collaborator media, collaborator -- position he says, but to Saba newspaper who is actually (inaudible) his son-in-law is in charge actually because Saba newspaper run a story saying that six cabinet ministers gave their resignations because they found themselves responsible for the election results. Actually I don't know the names of those ministers, they were not given, but if we can try to guess before getting into foreign policy issues they're all mixed up, the Education Minister is from Van. He lost a major election. The Justice Minister is from Antalya. He was real ambitious and he lost there. The former Parliamentary Speaker who is also among three founders of the AK Party together with Erdogan and Gul lost Kayseri, his hometown. The Energy Minister and Treasury Minister are both from the same Black Sea town of Ordu. They lost it. The Finance Minister and Murak Najan the head of Foreign Policy of the Parliament are from Eskisehir, they lost. So you can give many examples as such that major figures of the AK Party lost elections in their hometowns. But when Saba

ran this story, the Prime Minister this morning was furious, saying that I asked this paper to give the names of those ministers and I will fire them right now. So President Obama is going to talk to (inaudible) in this mood. So he doesn't find any (inaudible) as we can find in election results.

It will affect foreign policy. I hope that (inaudible) Prime Minister Erdogan will tone down, will calm down and follow a rather moderate line of foreign policy. I do not expect him to repeat that 1-minute outburst in foreign relations once again in the near future. President Obama is giving a very clear message to the world, to the region, to Turkey, that by including Turkey as the first and only bilateral stop in his first overseas tour because other stops, the G-20 summit is something on international matters, the financial crisis, NATO summit (inaudible) NATO and then is going to attend to a E.U. leaders' meeting in Prague, all international, only stop in Turkey is bilateral, but it's far beyond being bilateral because on many issues that American foreign policy is involved right now is somehow related with Turkey being tangential to Turkey, the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucuses, the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran. Today in Turkey the Presidents of Pakistan and Afghanistan are meeting. I believe we were talking this morning with Mark Parris that Richard Holbrooke's perhaps advice has played a role in this visit to take place. Similarly, James Strauss's advice has I believe played a role in this

visit to take place right now because I made an interview the new Turkish Ambassador in Ankara a few weeks ago -- American Ambassador in Ankara a few weeks ago and that day President Gul was in Tehran. The day before he had talked to Ahmadinejad and that day he was talking to Khamenei.

MR. OZEL: Khamenei.

MR. TASPINAR: He's the real professor here. He's correcting everyone.

MR. YETKIN: He's the mentor. Jim Jeffrey made something very interesting -- the American Ambassador in Turkey made something very interesting. He said that I believe the message that President Gul is conveying to the Iranians is as such. One, we want to talk to the Iranians on matters of Afghanistan and Iraq without any conditions. Two, in return of Iran's recognition of sensitivities on nuclear armaments and supporting terrorists, et cetera, we are ready to cooperate with them on World Trade Organization and that might escalate to full recognition of Iran. This was very interesting. I found it rather more interesting when I received the first call next morning from the Iranian Embassy asking for the transcript. I declined to give it of course, but that was a clear message to them saying that this was the message. Did you get it full to compare it? And it seems the comparison proved right so that last week in Moscow, Iranians and

Americans met in Afghanistan when the Turkish Foreign Minister was also there in Moscow.

So I think the issue is Ankara is rising on the horizon of Washington under Obama. Perhaps that's a condolence to Ankara after the humiliation the Turkish government has felt during the Iraqi crisis that there was no one to talk to on the political level and we have seen the results in Iraq.

In Hillary Clinton's first European tour there were two bilateral stops, Israel and Turkey, and of course we shouldn't forget the Turkish-Israeli talks. Turkey's role in the Lebanon crisis and the Georgian crisis, a pinch of salt in the soup but, yes, there was. And now in President Obama's tour, the only bilateral stop is Turkey. So I think there is an opportunity not to be wasted away both for the United States and for Turkey. I hope both Obama and Erdogan will be able to draw lessons out of what has been experienced and find a better way.

MR. TASPINAR: I'm sure everyone is amazed that we came so far without mentioning at all the Armenian genocide resolution issue on the 24th of April which is after all just 2 weeks after Obama's visit to Turkey.

MR. OZEL: I didn't want to be impolite, but some important news, the Higher Electoral Council just cancelled a few municipalities. April Fools.

(Laughter)

MR. TASPINAR: That was great. I declare that you're no longer my mentor anymore.

MR. OZEL: Before we get to the G word, I beg to differ from my illustrious student. The AKP didn't want 60 percent in order to feel secure because there is nothing to fear. First of all, the e-coup was not an e-coup. It was an e-coup manke. It failed. It failed. If the aim was the e-coup was to block Gul, it failed. If the aim of the e-coup was to give the Turkish electorate the message that they should not under any circumstances elect the Islamists "back to power," it failed. Maybe the probation of the court can be seen as something to be concerned about, but nothing more than just to be concerned about, not to fear. Secondly, the AKP was a party just like the Motherland Party in the 1980s that brought together all those fragments of the Turkish political scene together. As an organization it allowed a dialogue between these different constituencies. And of course the ability to allow such a mediation and such a dialogue was for it to be committed to a democratization program. So the real issue was not their concerns and their fear, but the fact that

they dropped the democratic ball and therefore all these different constituencies had nowhere to go to communicate with one another because again the bad message is the only national party, the only national party in our politics today is the AKP. The CHP does not exist to the east of Sivas. The MHP does not exist in the east or in the south. The DTP has no presence in central, southern or western Anatolia. So that leaves you with the AKP as the only viable organization that can actually transcend the current polarization and it's their choice of continuing with the polarization rather than overcoming it that got them in my judgment where they are. On the Armenian genocide issue.

MR. TASPINAR: (inaudible)

MR. OZEL: I think it would be a pity. First of all, as a matter of principle, I am dead set against legislating history or passing political judgments on historical matters no matter what the matter is. Therefore I am against any legislator to pass any law or resolution on the topic one way or another. Therefore I also would not want the president to actually come up with a statement that presidents always do and then mention that what happened in 1915 constituted a genocide. This is not meant to deny the great tragedy of 1915. By the way, I can be when I return to Turkey sued or tried along with 27,000 other people because we all signed a petition about what had happened in 1915 -- personal apology and all that.

So I think in this day and age when the world is in deep trouble and as Murat said on quite a number of issues of prime strategic importance for the United States, when the United States would benefit from cooperating with Turkey on many of these issues and so would the world in my judgment, to break these relations over what ultimately is a domestic politics matter would be a pity. And of course, as Tip O'Neill said, "All politics is local," and domestic politics may very well trump the august national interests of the United States, I have no way to judge, but it would be for the Armenians as well to the extent that it is important that the Republic of Armenia prosper not being isolated, not be in the grip of Russia forever, it is important that Turkey and Armenia establish diplomatic relations, that the border be open, that there be trade and all that, and all those things will go down to waste as well because Turkey will inevitably rightly or wrongly depending on your viewpoint react and the reaction especially under those circumstances when the Prime Minister just got a beating in the elections is just going to be fierce. It would be a pity. That's all I can say.

Otherwise, there are also of course a number of issues on which Turkish and American coincide, but their way of dealing with these issues may not necessarily do so but will lead us to questions, and of course I have particularly the Middle East peace process in mind.

MR. TASPINAR: We have about 30 minutes for Q and A.
Could you wait for the micro and identify yourself, please?

MS. ALAF: My name is Alaf and I have one question. First of all, as far as the election goes I didn't do an analysis myself yet, but I think it depends on what the turnout was because a drop in numbers is --

MR. OZEL: Eighty-four percent.

MS. ALAF: I'm sorry?

MR. OZEL: Eighty-four percent.

MS. ALAF: Compared to the general election.

MR. OZEL: Seventy-eight.

MS. ALAF: Seventy-eight; eight-four. I'll have to do a little bit of thinking about that. So on the one hand I'm not sure what that exact -- I'm sorry. I lost my train of thought. First of all, what I wanted to ask is actually isn't it time in Turkey maybe like redefine secularization, the way the details are defined for the country? Because I feel like of course like I'm not into religious people imposing their will on people like myself, but on the other hand, I think Turkey is one of the most secularized countries. Of course it's more secularized than the United States especially in Bush times. But if you think about it, why does it always have to be exclusive? Secularization is the separation between politics and religion, but that doesn't exclude people being religious who get elected or their wives, et

cetera. So why does it have to be so exclusive? I understand given the history and background of Turkey, I think during when Ataturk started this whole thing, it was a wonderful thing, I think it probably was different at the time, but Turkey is a mature country now, a mature democracy. I feel like it's time maybe loosen it up a little bit and say we can coexist, Islamists can, because IKP from what I'm hearing it sounds like only these people who are poor and are given programs --

MR. TASPINAR: Your specific question is about why Turkey is so secularized?

MS. ALAF: Isn't it time to like just change it a little bit?

MR. TASPINAR: Which one?

MS. ALAF: I think either one, whoever.

MR. TASPINAR: Professor?

MR. OZEL: First of all, nothing is ever as it appears and one or -- recall that it was from the secular camp that the first demands for liberalizing our understanding of secularism came. So on the ground in my judgment there is a much better coexistence between more pious and less pious people, but to the extent that there is political capital to be gained from polarizing or politicizing the matter, it became an impossible issue and I think the issue of religion which was -- by the way, one of the more interesting things about this election was religion or secularism was

not an issue. That was not part of the campaign rhetoric of any party. And in my judgment then we are on the ground moving away but there are concerns on people who feel their lifestyles are being threatened and they react to it. It's a matter of the political process to basically find a new -- by the way, we don't really have a definition of secularism, but you are right, there is a need to redefine Turkish secularism, to change its practices, and whether or not our political system will be able to come up with it remains to be seen.

A funny story, and this is not an April Fool's joke either, I just read in the paper today, that in one little village or in one little township the AKP lost to the Felicity Party and the candidate of the Felicity Party is a woman who wears a head scarf and the AKP objected to the results saying that she was wearing a head scarf and she was not eligible.

MR. TASPINAR: Very pragmatic.

MR. OZEL: So the secularism issue is as much an ideological issue as it is also a question of the symbolism of power distribution in the country. Don't just take it as a cultural -- of course it has profound ideological and cultural attributes, but it is not just about that. It is also about redistribution of political power.

MR. TASPINAR: Murat, do you have something to add?

MR. YETKIN: Nothing to add.

MR. TASPINAR: Ambassador Parris?

AMBASSADOR PARRIS: Thank you. Mark Parris. All of you in one way or another have emphasized the importance of Erdogan's personal role in all of this. You could almost say that he managed to do something that none of his opponents have been able to do which is to defeat AKP. My question is to the extent that his personality and the way he's been running the country in terms of style affected some of the key elements of the coalition that Soli described that he was able to put together in 2007 and which makes AKP a national party at least in theory. To what extent if he learns the right lessons from this election can he get them back? And to what extent will the economy be a factor in that? In other words, if the economy continues to be a problem in 3 years when Turkey must go to the polls again even if he's learned a lesson, will it be enough?

MR. TASPINAR: Murat, do you want to take the first crack?

MR. YELTKIN: If he can learn the lesson, that will help him to protect his position because the magic is not there anymore. And from now on it will be much more difficult for him to make the curve go up again, but he can maintain the position because the economic situation is something very serious to be dealt with because we wasted so many months, so many precious months that went away without making any

serious movement to repair the damage. So the bill will be much higher. That's why perhaps Deniz Baykal said yesterday that one could expect from Deniz Baykal to call for an immediate early election after this result. On the contrary, when he was asked by journalists, he said, no, no, we are going to wait for a few more years and see then getting more corroded, and I think he's right. I think Erdogan has a very difficult 2 years until the next general elections, a very difficult 2 years ahead, and if he can draw lessons he can perhaps maintain this position, but I'm not that sure because the curve is going down now and it will be more difficult to make it up.

MR. OZEL: The words the magic is broken is correct because quite amazingly in my view what the Prime Minister did do after 2007 was forget the fact that what gave him 47 percent was a grand coalition. Obviously the party has its hardcore supporters, but then there are all these supporting circles of population that gave them support. Again in 2007 when I came here to present the election results, one of the most important in my judgment figures that I gave was that the post-polling data showed that 75 percent of those who voted for the AKP voted for the AKP because of its management of the economy. It was for economic reasons. We could go on and say it was due to circumstances -- it didn't matter. People thought that this was a competent team that managed the

economy well, gave us about 7 percent growth rate on average for 5 years and people felt more prosperous. The number of people that traveled by air increased from 8 million to 27 million. Overall Turkey was moving upward. And to miss the meaning of the 2007 elections in my judgment was a great fault in addition to reformation and all that. And those economic circumstances are not going to come back, and he has shown, one that he can be very careless about people's fears, again justified or unjustified about lifestyle issues, and much more importantly, he has shown that he doesn't understand that today an economy needs careful management. In that sense he lost the trust. That trust is broken.

But you know these very answers also show you what the real problem in the country is. The real problem in the country is not the AKP. The real problem in the country is the lack of a viable opposition that can take over. Because as Omer said, here is a party that's been in power for 6-1/2 years. It will have the wear and tear of being in power. It will naturally lose some of the support that it had. But there is nothing there to replace them on a national basis. That is a critical, critical, critical point, and if we cannot overcome it, our politics is going to be in trouble in my view.

MR. TASPINAR: There can always be a CHP/MHP coalition, but one would think that the MHP -- a political party like MHP would be more inclined to have a coalition with the Amarti first.

MR. OZEL: But CHP/MHP coalition if there is one then does have no legitimacy whatsoever to the east of the country. You can't run a country that way.

MR. YELTKIN: That's right. What we are talking about, that for the first time since 2002 there's a potential alternative on paper at least. So far we didn't have it. That's something else. Whether it's sustainable, whether it's constructible. It's something else, but on paper there's a potential there.

MR. TASPINAR: It would be certainly interesting to see how AK Party acts in opposition because they have never been in opposition and whether they survive in opposition. Carol?

SPEAKER: Thank you. To pick up on your last point about the opposition, AK has benefited from its own strengths and the weaknesses of its opposition. In the running of this campaign and in the election, do you see any potential at all in any lessons learned by the opposition parties from AK of how to run an election, how to organize grassroots, how to be political parties, how to choose candidates? And do

you see anything in their choice of candidates that holds any hope for the future?

MR. OZEL: Again we need the detailed analysis, but there are two cities that are presenting certainly that we need to analyze carefully. One is my hometown. My hometown, the most Westernized and in common parlance the infidel city of Izmir for which I am very proud gave its rather colorless mayor 57 percent. That's remarkable. Whether this was class-based or just identity-based I don't know. Probably more identity than class-based, but it was important. More interesting and intriguing is of course Istanbul because in Istanbul you had a very different type of CHP local leader who actually managed to bring the CHP back to industrial zones, to shantytown districts, to finally get the CHP to meet the "real people" which is precisely of course how the networking of AKP managed to give them the support.

Now if Baykal can keep his jealousy and support these guys in that kind of politics, CHP can still have some juice left in it to revitalize itself. But if the politburo -- I swear to you I was alive when Brezhnev was and like Brezhnev, Gromyko, Chernenko, Andropov, that's what the CHP top brass is like. They are all septuagenarians.

MR. YELTKIN: They are component as Chernenko.

MR. OZEL: And they're as competent as the Soviet politburo of the 1980s. If these guys can be swept away by the wind of what had happened in Istanbul and in Izmir and to a certain extent perhaps in Ankara, then there is a chance that the CHP may revitalize. Let's not forget that the first report on the Kurdish issue with radical recommendations was indeed written by SHP at the time which of course one of the constituent parties of CHP. It may be too much to hope for, but let's pray that it might happen.

MR. TASPINAR: Any hope for glasnost or perestroika for CHP?

MR. YELTKIN: I think opposition parties had started to draw some lessons from their mistakes before the elections. Both CHP and MHP made their directions toward the center votes, the centrist votes. They left their strong positions, CHP, on secularist positions and MHP on this ethnic (inaudible) position. They did some concessions. They have chosen most of their candidates as rather moderate and among people as Soli said who can be in real contact with real people, and they harvested the result. I know Deniz Baykal personally and for the first time ever, and I've been following Ankara politics for quarter or more than a quarter of a century now, for the first time I heard Deniz Baykal criticizing himself after this election saying that we made some mistakes and we have to review

our organization. I never heard that before, I promise. That's the first time I hear it.

So I believe not only Erdogan but opposition leaders will draw further lessons out of this. There is some hope, some hope.

MR. TASPINAR: There's a question back there. Larry Jacobs.

SPEAKER: The economy was clearly an issue. One assumes or most of us believe that now that the election is passed the government will have to come with a deal with the IMF. Do you agree with that, that they will make a deal with the IMF? And it's going to be at least we believe pretty strong medicine for Turkey. What effect will that have, although there are on elections immediately, on the popular support for the AK Party?

MR. YELTKIN: There will be an IMF agreement pretty soon after Erdogan will come back from the G-20 and NATO and other meetings meeting President Obama. I believe very soon there will be an agreement with the IMF. There will be, yes, bitter medicine for the Turkish people and that's why opposition leaders do not want any early election. They want Erdogan to taste that medicine first.

MS. OZYURT: Thank you. Ahu Ozyurt from CNN Turkey. I have a question about the Kurdish voters' voting trends. We see them

voting differently in bigger cities like in Izmir or Istanbul going with the bigger trend, whereas in the Kurdish areas they would rather stick with the DTP. Does it say anything about the future of DTP or CHP if they can make up the losses that they say they saw in this election?

MR. OZEL: Again one of the notable quotes from the campaign period was a Kurd from I think Istanbul he was who said, "If I were in the Southeast I would have voted DTP, but here I'm going to vote for a different party," which party I don't know. So that explains how western Kurds have a different voting pattern than eastern Kurds.

Again what I'm saying is more either hypothetical or speculative, but let me play it out with you. Turkey's Kurdish problem cannot be separated from Turkey's relations with Iraq and obviously with the Iraqi Kurds and what we've seen over the course of the last 2 years is a drastic change in Turkey's policy vis-à-vis transborder Kurds. The President did or did not say Kurdish regional government. It doesn't matter. We take it as if he has even if he hasn't.

MR. YELTKIN: He said it. I was there. He said it.

MR. OZEL: I believe your master Hassan Jamad who said he -- I'm kidding.

MR. YELTKIN: He's the only one who didn't hear that.

MR. OZEL: He obviously said it. I cannot object to what the President has said.

MR. YELTKIN: Sure.

MR. OZEL: So he met with Barzani in Baghdad. If said if security allowed he would have visited Basra, Mosul, Irbil. Those are things that we never ever before talked about. And now there is expectation that there is going to be a Kurdish summit. Again the general view is the PKK is an organization that well outlasted its welcome and it should disappear and the question is what are the modalities for its disappearance. So I consider what did not take place during the Newroz Celebrations in Turkey for the first time in a long, long time this year that there were no fights, there were no provocations, there was no police brutality related to the conference as I relate the voting pattern of the Kurds in the southeast again to the conference. You don't?

MR. YELTKIN: Perhaps because of the Ergenekon. Maybe some of the people are inside now to provoke.

MR. OZEL: Maybe.

MR. TASPINAR: You have to explain what Ergenekon is.

MR. OZEL: The Ergenekon case is the dismantling of an illicit organization with Turkey's security forces that have committed quite a number of atrocities as well and also based on the second indictment on

the case there were plenty of generals who tried to stage coups and these were stopped cold thankfully by the then Chief of Staff of the military, Hilmi Ozkok, a transplant from another planet. So if I'm correct then we can probably try to read Turkey's domestic Kurdish dynamics and the dynamics of Iraqi Kurds and those relations together, I really cannot give you a full account of it, but I think this is how we ought to look at it, and the critical issue today is of course in Turkey how do we get the PKK out of the mountains. In all but name we're probably going to have an amnesty in order to get the fighters, the militants, the terrorists, whatever, down from the mountains, and we'll have to find a way for the leadership to go to different countries. Then we will be faced with the big enchilada, what do you do with Erjalan afterwards? Again these are not easy questions. Again these are not easy questions, these are not easy matters, and there is no political party that actually prepared the public for that. And the moment this is going to become a pressing issue, the tensions are going to rise. I really don't know how we're going to be managing it. But again I think we ought to see it in that larger context.

MR. YELTKIN: Can I add one sentence? I believe the strategic question Ankara has to find an answer now is not what if Iraqi Kurds will claim independence, but what if they want to join Turkey. This is the strategic question waiting for an answer.

MR. TASPINAR: And just one more point about eastern versus western Kurds. According to Turkish military statistics, the recruitment pattern of the PKK has significantly increased in Istanbul, so the PKK is increasingly becoming an urban phenomenon as well in terms of its recruitment. So this is no longer just a mountain guerrilla movement, but there is a phenomenon of PKK in urban areas of Turkey which is quite alarming and proves that there is this element of Turkish nationalism versus Kurdish nationalism feeding into each other.

MS. SMITH: Rachel Smith from Middle East Progress. I was wondering in the future what kind of role do you see Turkey playing in the Arab-Israeli peace conflict and resolution? And what do you think the prospects are for increased U.S.-Turkey collaboration on this front?

MR. OZEL: I am among them, but I believe most Turks believe that Turkey can play a very constructive role certainly on the Israeli-Syrian front and even on the Israeli-Palestinian front of which we have never been a part. Of course, you always have a wakeup call when you come to Washington because the way Washington looks at the conflict and the way everybody else I think in the world looks at the conflict are miles apart. For most of the world, Israel is the big destabilizer in the region and that it is the one that needs to be tamed. For Israelis and the Americans, it is Hamas that is the source of all evil. Therefore it has to

cave in, beg forgiveness, do this, do that and the other, and of course we never get anywhere with this. Whether or not these outlooks can change I don't know, and that's the big thing. You cannot defy the United States forever on this. I think there is plenty of common ground to work on, but whether it will be possible or not really remains to be seen.

For the sake of the region and I think for the sake of the country as well, I think we need to have a big opening on the Israeli-Palestinian front and if the Americans have a convincing project for it, I think the Turks will do whatever is required of them in good faith and I suppose we will not have the theatrics of Davos getting in the way either this time around.

MR. YELTKIN: I think Israeli domestic politics play a major role in that. With such a hawkish competition between the fragmented Israeli politics, the coalition formation difficulties and fragile politics in general, it's difficult.

MR. TASPINAR: We have 5 more minutes. Maybe time for two more questions that we'll take. Maybe here and then we'll take your question, sir.

MS. GIZAM: Thank you so much. My name is Gizam. I have a quick question. You've been saying that AKP is the only viable option for voters it looks like it.

MR. OZEL: For who?

MR. TASPINAR: Voters.

MS. GIZAM: However, do you think it's because AKP has been blocking some movements such as the new party under the leadership of Tuncay Ozkan who is a really respected journalist, however he is under arrest right now because of Ergenekon allegations? I've been to their headquarters in Ankara. There are so many followers. They also have dialogues with different types of voters. Of course it's not as big as other opposition parties. However, it's a growing movement. So I would like to hear your comment on that.

MR. TASPINAR: Maybe we'll get one more question and then wrap up.

MR. ANDREW: Walt Andrew with Think Tank for National Self-Determination. My question is directed to you. You mentioned that the Turks would do just about anything to try to solve this Arab-Israeli situation, so my question deals with this, why would there not be some movement toward separating Mecca from Jerusalem, Arabia from the Israeli area? Why not allow Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean countries to join Europe in some way and strengthen the South Central Asian Muslim area so that there are separate regions and separate

identities that could work out? Is there any possibility of this evolving in any way?

MR. TASPINAR: Soli and Murat, let's use this in addition to answering questions as concluding remarks.

MR. OZEL: Tuncay Ozkan and respectable are not two words that I usually put together I'm awfully sorry to say. I don't believe there is a movement there. Tuncay Ozkan is a very ambitious person. He may actually be very intelligent. I'm not sure that he's very wise. And he has been I think involved in activities that he should not have been as a journalist involved. Therefore I don't think the AKP is scared of Tuncay Ozkan that they tried to protect themselves by putting him in jail. In or out of jail, Tuncay Ozkan is nothing in Turkey's politics as far as I can see. We did not say that the AKP was the only viable option, we just said that the opposition was not presenting itself as a viable option. Those are two different propositions.

As for Eastern Mediterranean Union joining the European Union, it's music to my ears but it's not likely to happen. I didn't really think of it. It's music to the Lebanese ears I'm sure. Some Syrians, yes. Israelis and the Palestinians at least some of them, yes, but I don't think it is likely to happen.

A final point. Again I personally obviously think the Obama visit in Turkey is going to be very important. I happen to think that the relations between Turkey and the United States are important not just for the two countries involved, but certainly regionally and perhaps even globally. And I really wish again this is besides what had happened to the Armenians and what it ought to be called, I hope that the Armenian genocide issue does not get in the way of reconstructing Turkish-American relations because it will not be just the two countries, but I think regionally and globally a lot of others that are going to suffer the negative consequences.

MR. TASPINAR: Any chance of opening the border before the 24th?

MR. OZEL: I wish they did, but unless Turkey has iron-clad guarantees from the President that he is not going to mention on the 24th of April or he is not going to use the word genocide speaking of what happened to the Armenians, I doubt that they would do so, and if it is not of course, then I think it's a shoo-in. Again it will be wonderful. The city of Kars which is on the border with Armenia is run by Turkish nationalists and they before anyone else want the border to be opened which is one of the nice ironies of politics, and I really hope that we get to that point.

MR. TASPINAR: Nixon to China.

MR. YELTKIN: I don't think the AK Party is the only viable option. I never said anything like that. On the contrary, I tried to say that there are real viable sustainable options now and for the first time since 2002 there is a potential of alternatives. To talk on Tuncay Ozkan is a waste of time and I agree with what he said. He is not a political factor. That's an illusion.

A few weeks ago we were exchanging messages with Mark Parris on the coming elections and we were both expecting not dramatic change from the existing picture, but I was wrong on my part. So Turkish voters are always full of surprises. So no Turkish leader should take the power as granted for himself or herself. And the region is very dynamic. Turkish is very dynamic. It's a very good move for President Obama to give value to Turkey again. I think 2009 will be a very critical year for Turkey, for Turkish-American relations, for the region, and I would think all goes fine if leaders will draw lessons out of it.

MR. TASPINAR: If you have additional questions or comments, Soli and Murat will be here for probably another half an hour. But let me thank you, Soli and Murat, and please join me in a big round of applause.

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