

## **TIMING OF THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS AND DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE RESULTS**

With approaching legal timing for general elections, the timing and possible results of the next general elections of Turkey became a matter of discussion among Turkish intelligensia. In this short paper, I will discuss possible timing of the general elections, results of these general elections depending on both political and economic factors, developments before this elections and possible governments.

### **TIMING of the NEXT ELECTIONS**

According to the Turkish constitution, general elections have to be held with a period of five year. However, during last 20 years of the third Turkish republic, none of parliaments finished their five-year tenures and every general election became early election. Consequently, it is possible to expect an early election by April 2002, after the 36<sup>th</sup> month of the current coalition governments. Other political and economic factors to be discussed in the following parts of the paper, may affect this timing.

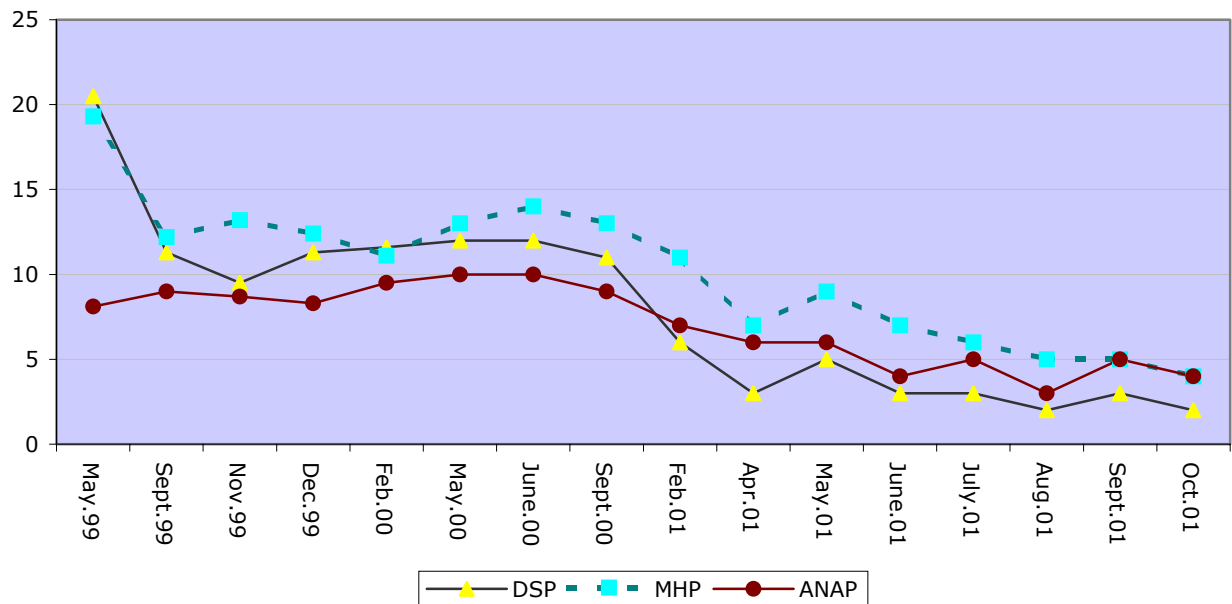
Another significant factor affecting timing of general elections independent of conjectural factors, is seasonal effect. Following the transition to democracy in 1950, majority of Turkish governments preferred autumn for general elections. The sole exception is the last general elections, which held in April 1999. It is a result of the agreement between the governing parties and their out-of-government supporter, the CHP; which provisioned general elections would be held within 18 months after July

1997. Reasons behind this seasonal choice are numerous nevertheless most significant ones are: that governments want to be benefited from advantages of summer months in which inflation rates are relatively small and relatively higher rates of economic growth occur as a result of abundance of agricultural products. On the other hand, governments try to escape from disadvantages of winter, stemming from infra-structural weaknesses of urban areas and relatively higher rates of inflation. Another important factor affecting this seasonal choice of governments is dependent on the fact that manipulative tools of governments such as agricultural support prices are easier to use during spring and summer months.

Considering this seasonal bias of governments, it is possible to expect general elections to be held in October 2003. Depending on other economic and political factors, this date may shift to October 2002.

The most important factor affecting this shift is the manipulative capability of governments. Empirical works showed that governments push economic growth before general elections, especially during the last three months in order to assure a certain level of electoral support. The critical question here is whether the current government has such a capability or not?

## OVERALL TIME TREND



Above table presents overall change in support of the electorate for competing political parties and the government. When the ruling coalition of the DSP, the MHP and the ANAP was established following the 1999 general elections; it achieved mobilizing a significant public support for a while. Total votes for this coalition was almost more than 40 percent, and they also obtained the support of electoral bases of other parties. Despite the earthquakes of 1999, which created significant public discontent about efficiency of the government, this support continued until the end of 2000, accompanied with relatively successful stabilization program and significant external support. Nevertheless, economic crises of November 2000 and February 2001 eroded public support for the government. Coupled with criticisms of being corrupted and internal discussion of government members, these rates of support continuously declined and reached to its lowest levels, ever observed since 1994.

An important point here is the fact that declining public support is valid for all of governing parties, while the DLP is the major loser. This situation prevents governing parties to use their legislative power to dissolve the government and playing the role of the advocate of losers and transferring it to electoral support. Under these conditions, optimum strategy for coalition partners is to cooperate until one of them gains the advantage of dissolving the coalition.

### **ECONOMICS versus POLITICS**

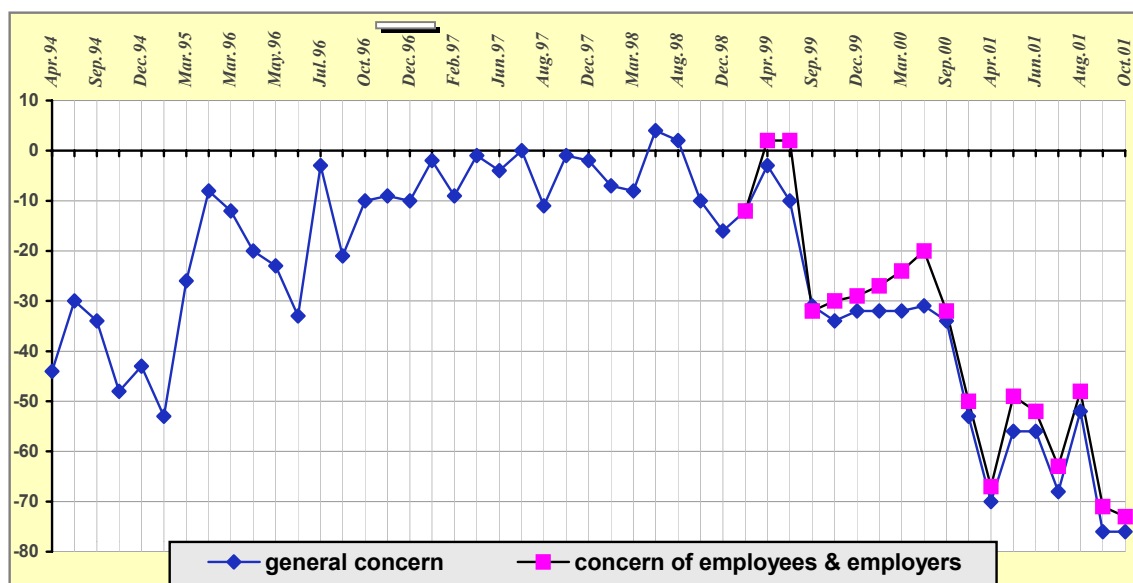
Following economic crises of November'00 and February'01, economy became the most important issue in the public agenda. Since Turkey never experienced lower rates of inflation after 1980, economic problems dominated the public agenda and alternating governments failed to respond public expectations. This failure is accepted as the most important reason of party system crisis. Below graph shows public opinion about expectation about future of the economy verbalized in fear of being unemployed or losing jobs. It is clearly observable that personal economic insecurity increased significantly following the crisis, and there is significant correlation between declining public support for the government and personal economic insecurity of the electorate.

Most important factor, which will affect the fate of the current government, is the economic situation of the country. The government has to succeed in assuring a certain level of economic prosperity, at least promote positive expectations about the future of the country. Thus, the

ongoing economic stabilization program is crucial for the government, in the case of failure of the program, responsibility will be attributed them; and according to public opinion polls, economic crisis is already attributed to incapability of the government. If the economic program fails, this will be a dead end for the government.

The success of the economic program is also critical for the government, because it will create funds necessitated for promoting economic growth before general elections, which is an ordinary practice of Turkish political economy. The government may prefer to abandon the economic program and stimulate economic growth through unorthodox economic policies such as higher agricultural economic prices and significant increases in real wages. However this scenario is not realistic, as a result of above explained attribution of responsibility fact, and the support of international economic agencies.

Consequently, rational strategy for the government is to support economic program and guarantee accumulation of international funds to the country, and after assuring a minimum level of economic stability promoting economic growth which will help them stimulating political support accompanied with benefits of victory against the economic crisis. Thus, two factors determine the most suitable time for general elections: time needed to assure economic stability and time needed to promote economic growth through public finance.



If the government wants to make elections in October 2002, it has to push to launch economic growth in July or August of this year. Meaning that the government has 5-6 months to assure economic stability and transfer this success to political support. Even that the government succeeds in stabilizing economy to hanks excelled accumulation of foreign funds, remaining time is not sufficient to use this success as a political issue and transfer it to electoral support. Consequently, under normal conditions, this alternative is not realistic.

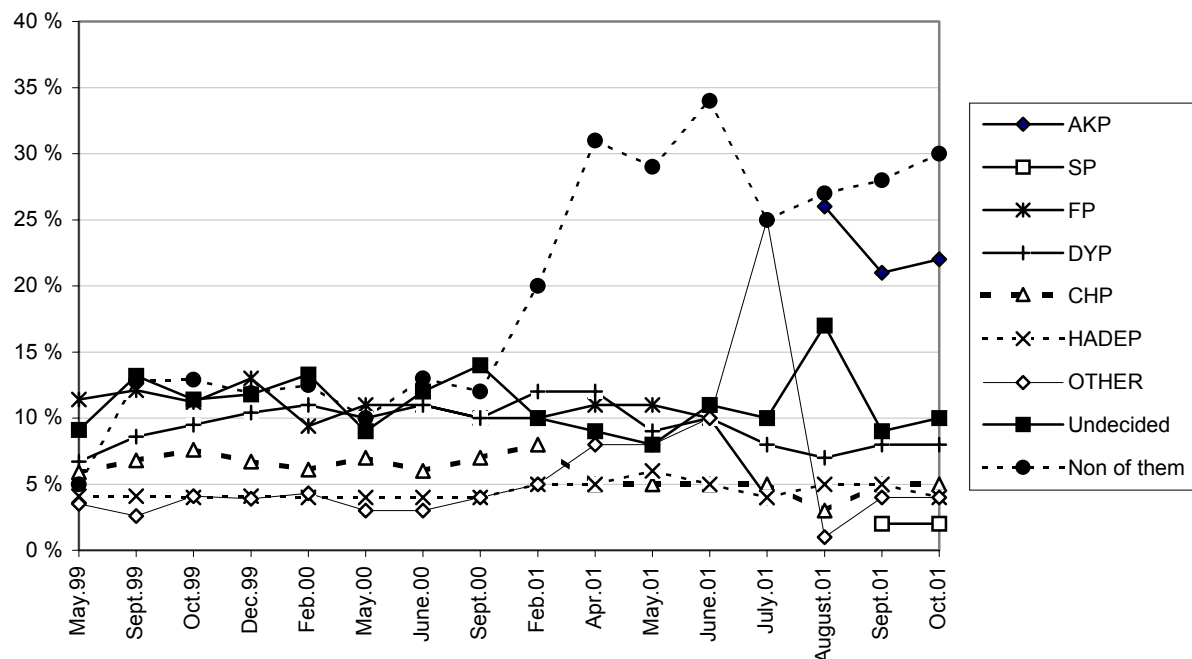
Second alternative of timing of general elections to be held in October 2003 is much more realistic since it gives sufficient time to the government first assuring economic stability and second stimulating economic growth.

Although the economic sphere is full of difficulties for the government, the political sphere provides wider avenues of political support. The most important defect of the government is its failure in the struggle with corruption. By 1990s, corruption is one of the most significant issue

occupying the public agenda and subsequent governments failed to fight with corruption. During last general elections, the DSP and the MHP were identified with being un-corrupted and honesty. Nevertheless, during their reign they also failed to sustain this support and conduct a systematic fight against corruption. Moreover, two prominent personality of the war against corruption, Sadettin Tantan and Zekeriya Temizel had to resign then criticisms against the government in corruption issue gained significant symbols.

Apart from this weakness of corruption, the government has some advantages: First of all, the fight against terrorism became successful and two leading parties of the government identified with nationalism benefited and are still benefiting of this success. Secondly, the current government identified itself with the European Union and every step towards participation of Turkey is an asset for this government. Thirdly, this government is also identified with secular preferences of the Turkish establishment. During the electoral campaigns, they may easily use their clear position against rising pro-islamist political parties and stimulate a significant pro-secular electoral support. Nevertheless, it seems that economics dominate politics, and the government has to be successful in stabilizing economy before these political issues.

## OPPOSITION PARTIES and NEWLY EMERGING ACTORS



Political turbulence emerged with economic crises created significant avenues of political change. Declining political support for governing parties naturally pushed opposition parties to position themselves against the government's economic program and try to attract votes escaping from the government. On the other hand, closing down of the Virtue Party (FP) created a very attractive electoral heritage for both existing and newly emerging political parties.

Nevertheless, existing political parties failed to capture votes escaping from the government. None of political parties presented a significant increase observed in public opinion polls. Following the crisis, "none of them" responses rapidly increased to 30 percents and they are still more than 30 percent. Such a situation should not lead to conclusion that there is abundant environment for anti-systemic movements. Empirical works



showed that “none of them” responses are always relatively higher in public opinion polls and towards the election day, these responses shift to the least undesirable choice. Consequently, it has to be expected that these “none of above” and “undecided” responses will play the significant role in the election day.

Closing down of the Virtue Party had a more significant impact. The Virtue Party is the fourth closed party of the pro-Islamist movement. Traditionally, newly established party inherits the electoral basis of the previous one with almost insignificant electoral losses. However, the pro-Islamist movement experienced a divorce between relatively moderate wing and traditionalists. The moderate wing established its own party, the AKP and according to public opinion polls, it gathered a significant public support around 20 percents. The party of traditionalist wing, the SP only gets 2 percent of votes and it means a clear defeat of them.

Since the current political turbulence is also characterized with the demise of the Left, some leftist groups are also trying to be organized. The second party of the left, the CHP failed to receive popular support despite their declarations. However, none of these leftist groups seems to be attractive for the electorate, considering pro-rightist tendency of the Turkish electorate.

On the other hand, some political groups from the right of the political spectrum also seek for new political entities. The most prominent of these groups is led by the mayor of Ankara, Melih Gökçek. Another group composed by ex-members of the DYP is also looking for a new party in the

right of the spectrum, and they underline the implicit support of the ex-president Demirel. However, none of these groups are yet organized and their success is a matter of question.

When the potential of these newly emerging political actors is discussed, it has to be considered a fact of the Turkish political tradition. During 50 years old democratic practice, newly established political parties rarely succeeded to survive. The *Demokrat Parti* of 1950s, the *Adalet Partisi* of 1960s and 1970s and the *Anavatan Partisi* of 1980s are three examples of successful newly emerged parties. Many other political movements ended with disappointment. Then, it has to be careful about expectation about potentials of these new movements. The AKP heavily borrows its potential to its linkage with the pro-Islamist movement, however other candidates don't have such linkages.

### **POSSIBLE ELECTION RESULTS and GOVERNMENTS**

It is so far argued that next general elections will take place in October 2002 or October 2003 and the second one has much more probability as a result of political rationality of the government. However, what the timing of election is, the parliament after the general elections will be very different than today's parliament. First of all, it is clear that election results will be different than today's public opinion polls as a result of above discussed tendencies of the Turkish electorate. Moreover, as it is argued above, the government has the opportunity to promote a certain level of electoral support through economic policies. Considering these facts, possible election results are as follows:

- First of all, the AKP seems to be winner of general elections, if the Constitutional Court won't close it down. A possible exclusion of Tayyip Erdoğan from political life may decrease the power of the AKP, however it doesn't lead to a huge decline in electoral support.
- Votes of "undecided" and "exitist" will be significant in determining the electoral outcome. The political party, which succeeds in attracting these segments of the electorate will be another winner of elections.
- Successes of governing parties are dependent on results of the economic stabilization program and structural reforms. If these reforms will be successful, governing parties will be benefited from popular support. However, these gains will not be distributed evenly. I believe that even that the government succeeds in the economic stabilization program and stimulating economic growth, it won't be sufficient to bring them back to the government. Most optimistically, one of them will be second or third party of the next parliament.
- Current economic and political turbulence also does not open significant opportunity space for opposition parties. The DYP failed to attract the electoral base of the government parties, most probably as a result of its negative reputation. The CHP suffers of same negative reputation. The HADEP always responds its ethnicity-based electorate's demands, and never attempts to have a nationally accepted political identity. The SP of traditional wing of

the ex-FP failed to get the heritage of the FP. Most optimistically, they will even fail to reach 7 percent traditional electoral base of the MSP-FP line.

- Newly emerging political entities from left of the spectrum does not seem promising. First of all, these groups are composed of ex-members of the SHP-CHP, whose reputations are negative on the eye of voter. Secondly, they fail to be grouped around a significant figure as the leader of the party.
- Among these newly emerging political entities, only one which has a good reputation, prominent leadership and a significant agenda about problems of the country may be successful. Almost none of existing attempts, has these characteristics.
- According to me, there is a possibility of success of a newly emerging political party: A political party, led by ex-president Demirel will be able to gather people from the center right of the spectrum and challenge the AKP. Moreover, if this political party succeeds to include some reputable figures such as Sadettin Tanttan, Zekeriya Temizel, Kemal Derviş to its ranks, it will have a significant credit on the eye of the electorate. On the other hand, this party will also include unhappy segments of the DYP and the ANAP and have the capacity to underline the concept of the "Unity of Turkey" and mobilize a significant electoral base. Also, this political party will also take the support of the Turkish establishment, which is strongly opposing to pro-Islamist position of the AKP.

- The major question is about whether above scenario is realistic or not. It is known that Süleyman Demirel has some political contacts with newly emerging political entities, especially led by İlhan Kesici. Reputation of Demirel is still a matter of discussion, however he proved his capacity of mobilizing masses during the general elections of 1991.
- Considering these facts, government possibilities after the general election according to present situation are:

|    |                 |                    |                         |                             |  |
|----|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
|    |                 |                    |                         |                             | Outcome  |
| 1A | AKP Closed Down |                    | Grand Unity Scenario    | Successful Economic Program | Grand Unity single party government, the new-AKP opposition party                            |
| 1B | AKP Closed Down |                    | No Grand Unity Scenario | Successful Economic Program | Coalition Party, led by the new-AKP, possible partners are MHP, DYP                          |
| 1C | AKP Closed Down |                    | Grand Unity Scenario    | Failure of Economic Program | Grand Unity single party government, the new-AKP opposition, CHP is the third party          |
| 1D | AKP Closed Down |                    | No Grand Unity Scenario | Failure of Economic Program | The new-AKP coalition government, potential partner is DYP                                   |
| 2A | AKP Open        | Erdoğan Banned     | Grand Unity Scenario    | Successful Economic Program | Grand Unity single party government, the AKP in the opposition                               |
| 2B | AKP Open        | Erdoğan Banned     | No Grand Unity Scenario | Successful Economic Program | AKP single party or coalition government, potential partner is DYP                           |
| 2C | AKP Open        | Erdoğan Not Banned | Grand Unity Scenario    | Successful Economic Program | Grand Unity single party government, the AKP in opposition                                   |
| 2D | AKP Open        | Erdoğan Not Banned | No Grand Unity Scenario | Successful Economic Program | AKP single party government, if coalition, potential partners are MHP and DYP, ANAP          |
| 2E | AKP Open        | Erdoğan Banned     | Grand Unity Scenario    | Failure of Economic Program | An intense competition between Grand Unity and AKP, most probably the Grand Unity government |
| 2F | AKP Open        | Erdoğan Banned     | No Grand Unity Scenario | Failure of Economic Program | The AKP single party government, the DYP and the CHP are opposition parties                  |
| 2G | AKP Open        | Erdoğan Not Banned | Grand Unity Scenario    | Failure of Economic Program | The AKP single party after an intense competition with the Grand Unity                       |
| 2H | AKP Open        | Erdoğan Not Banned | No Grand Unity Scenario | Failure of Economic Program | The AKP single party government, the DYP, the CHP are opposition parties                     |