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SHORT COMMENTS

*A Brief Overview of the Developments Concerning the People’s
Democratic Party (HDP) in Turkey*

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A brief Overview

Of the Developments Concerning the People's Democratic Party (HDP) in Turkey

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The decision of the Turkish Government to support and attempt at the judicial ban of the People's Democratic Party (HDP), comes after a series of recurrent public attacks on said party by the leader of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli, government coalition partner. We can argue that this decision is driven by three causes.

The first is tied to potential early elections. There is a discussion among the public of a possible early election before 2023, and existing polls indicate that while AKP will probably still have the majority of votes for the Assembly, it will see a considerable decrease in electoral power. Importantly, MHP is also noted in polls as losing electoral power, and risks not meeting the 10% threshold for entry into the National Assembly. The escalation of the policy against HDP with the attempt to secure a judicial ban is seen as one way to rally disgruntled nationalist and anti-Kurdish voters, alienated due to Government economic policy, back to the governing coalition.

The second is tied to the strong polling performance of the opposition nationalist party The Good Party (IYI), a party that rose from the secession of dissidents from MHP. The escalation of the government policy against HDP can bring into conflict the anti-Kurdish base of the party with party leader Meral Akşener. This is due to the position of IYI as part of the opposition alliance with the Republican People's Party (CHP). The leadership of CHP has clearly signaled its opposition to any legal ban of HDP. Akşener has not yet made any clear statement of opposition to such a ban. Thus there may be a hope that as the issue escalates, Akşener will either have to break ranks with CHP, and thus deter Kurdish voters from voting for the opposition coalition, or face opposition from her party base that may lead some party members and voters to defect back to MHP. There is a strong inverse relationship between the polling performance of MHP and IYI party.

Finally, and as a long term goal, AKP may believe that a legal closure of HDP will lead its voters to abstain from elections, depressing thus the amount of votes of opposition parties, with perhaps some part of that voting body also voting for AKP rather than any of the parties that carry the legacy of Kemalism. However, as far as I know, CHP has been conducting a sustained, but nationally silent, regional campaign of winning over voters in the Kurdish regions, reducing the Government's possibilities to achieve this goal.

In sum the immediate goals are to rally nationalist voters to the government coalition, weaken IYI party in the run-up of possible early elections, and long term to strengthen the national position of AKP by depressing opposition votes.



Konstantinos Travlos is Assistant Professor of International Relations at Özyeğin University, Istanbul, Turkey. He has a PhD in Political Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a MA from the University of Chicago, and BA from Panteion University, Athens, Greece.

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