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New Political Parties, The Resolution Process And Potential Developments In 2020 In Turkey

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Foreword

This report was prepared for DPI by journalist Ferda Balancar. It provides analysis of the recent emergence of two new parties onto the Turkish political scene, both of which are founded by figures who were prominent within the AK Party and in government. The author provides an overview of what is known to date about these two new parties and assesses the background of their leaders, the reasons for why two rather than one party have been formed, despite both leaders coming from the same political ‘family’, and what this means for the current constellation of political alliances in Turkey. The reception of these political parties by the general public will, the author suggests, determine how the Kurdish question is handled by the ruling party in the short and medium term.

DPI wishes to thank the author for this engaging report, which details the advent of two new political parties in Turkey, potentially with important ramifications for the resolution process. The views and opinions expressed in the report remain those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of DPI.

Kerim Yildiz

INTRODUCTION

As calendars turn to 2020, debates surrounding two new political parties have become central to Turkish politics. Both parties were founded by figures formerly prominent within AK Party ranks. One of the parties were founded by Ahmet Davutoğlu, Prime Minister of Turkey between 2014 and 2016, whereas the other party is led by Ali Babacan, one of the original founders of AK Party and noted for his proficiency in economics. It is not yet entirely clear what President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and AK Party's approach towards these political parties is going to be. Considering Erdoğan's 18 years in power, it is unlikely that his, or AK Party's, approach is going to be limited to harshness, oppression and intimidation. These parties have the potential to change Turkish politics in a way which could hurt Erdoğan; and as such, it is obvious that Erdoğan is not just going to employ techniques of oppression and intimidation against them.

In this report, we are first going to look at the founding members of both political parties and the discourses they adopted during this time. Accordingly, we will analyze both parties' current discourses regarding the Kurdish problem and the resolution process while at the same time considering the backgrounds of their members. We will then look at President Erdoğan and AK Party's attitude towards these new political parties. In doing so, we will also consider the attitudes of other political actors, including MHP, with whom Erdoğan has formed alliances in the past few years, towards the new political parties. The emerging picture will provide us with clues to the possible courses that Turkish politics might take in 2020.

In concluding, we will look at how the new political parties might objectively affect the Kurdish problem and the resolution process.

THE TWO NEW POLITICAL PARTIES

IA- AHMET DAVUTOĞLU'S FUTURE PARTY

The first political party to rise out of AK Party ranks is the Future Party, officially founded on 13 December 2019 by Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as Turkey's Prime Minister between 2014 and 2016. In looking at Future Party's composition, let us first briefly consider its leader Davutoğlu's background.

Born in 1959, Ahmet Davutoğlu was an academic at Boğaziçi University, his alma mater, for some years. Even as a young academic, Davutoğlu was known for his Islamism; his interest and expertise in the Islamic world in general and in the Middle East in particular was also well-known. As well as speaking English, Davutoğlu is also highly proficient in Arabic.

A little-known fact about Davutoğlu is that during the 28 February process, between 1998 and 2002, he taught at the War Academies and the Armed Forces College, where staff officers are trained. It is particularly interesting that Davutoğlu was able to teach at the most important educational institution of the Turkish Armed Forces at the time between 1995 and 2001 when an intense campaign of oppression and intimidation was waged against the Welfare Party and the Islamic community; not least because the Armed Forces was the public face of such policies at the time. Indeed, during the same period, Davutoğlu had to resign from Boğaziçi University, where he had worked for years, because of his Islamism and start working at another university. That he was able to teach at the War Academies during the 28 February period shows that Davutoğlu has a longstanding relationship with the security bureaucracy, which is known for its secular sensibilities.

During the first term of AK Party, which rose to power in 2002, Ahmet Davutoğlu became the Prime Minister's principal consultant upon Abdullah Gül's invitation. He later received the title of ambassador. Davutoğlu served the ruling power as a consultant in the

2002 – 2009 period; he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the 2009 – 2014 period and the Prime Minister between 2014 – 2016. His relationship with President Erdoğan deteriorated after 2016, and shortly before founding the Future Party, he was expelled from AK Party. Even such an abridged biography is enough to show that Ahmet Davutoğlu was among the key figures of the resolution process of 2013 – 2015. Davutoğlu was the Foreign Minister in the early 2010s, when the foundations of the resolution process were first laid down, and he was the Prime Minister and AK Party Chairperson in late 2015 and 2016, when the resolution process was “shelved,” in President Erdoğan’s words. Although he hasn’t publicly said anything to acknowledge the fact, Davutoğlu is widely perceived to be the chief responsible party for the current state of the resolution process alongside President Erdoğan. This is the main reason why Davutoğlu’s Future Party is received with suspicion and reservation by the Kurdish public.

Let us now look at the founding members of Davutoğlu’s Future Party. Officially founded on 13 December 2019, the founding petition presented to the Constitutional Court by the Future Party was undersigned by 154 individuals, 15 of whom are women. Among these individuals, the most public figures are those who actively served in AK Party until 2016, when Davutoğlu’s run as the prime minister ended. Selçuk Özdağ and Ayhan Sefer Üstün were MPs who were expelled from AK Party at the same time as Davutoğlu. Another founding member, Selim Temurci, was AK Party’s İstanbul Provincial Chair between 2015 and 2018. A prominent figure within the party, Temurci is a former student of Davutoğlu who has been close to him since his years in the university. Spokesperson of the Future Party, Temurci is currently among its most public figures.

The founding documents of the party do not contain a new or different discourse or suggestion regarding the Kurdish problem and the resolution process that might set it apart from the other parties. In looking at the potential developments regarding the resolution process in 2020 below, we will also discuss why this might be the case. However, in terms of the founding members it would be accurate to say that among the ranks of the Future Party, there are no prominent Kurdish political figures known for their commitment to the resolution process, or esteemed by the Kurdish public. Among the founding members, Cuma İçten is the most well-known figure among Kurds; between 2011 and 2015 he served as AK Party’s Diyarbakır MP. Also a founding member of AK Party, İçten is known more for his Islamism than his Kurdishness. Noted for his closeness to Davutoğlu

after 2015, İten hasn't said or done anything about the Kurdish problem and the resolution process that might set him apart so far. As such, İten being a founding member of the Future Party is not particularly important for the Kurdish public. The same holds true for other Kurdish politicians in the Future Party. In other words, the Kurdish politicians among Future Party's founding members are not esteemed figures for the Kurdish public, and they will not win the Kurdish vote.

Looking at the founding process of the Future Party, we note that like almost all other parties in Turkish politics, it is a typical "leader-oriented party". Apart from Davutođlu, none of the former AK Party members in the Future Party were ever part of AK Party's A-Team through all of its 18 years. In other words, none of the important figures in AK Party who were part of the important ministries – Foreign, Interior, National Defense, Justice, Finance – came over to the Future Party. In fact, the figures who followed Davutođlu to the Future Party are part of AK Party's "B-Team".

Other members of the Future Party not from AK Party are far from being well-known public figures who might draw voters to the Party with their presence. Looking at the regional distribution of the Party's founding members, we see that next to Konya, Davutođlu's hometown, Central Anatolian cities such as Kırkkale and Kırşehir as well as Eastern Anatolian cities such as Erzurum, Erzincan and Kars are heavily represented. Considering that especially during AK Party's later years, individuals from Black Sea Region cities like Trabzon, Giresun, Samsun – but chiefly Rize, President Erdoğan's hometown – became overrepresented in both politics and bureaucracy, a fact which has drawn the attention and even the reaction of the public, the representation of Central and Eastern Anatolia in Davutođlu's party is significant. With this gesture, it appears that the Future Party wants to draw the support of the Kurdish and Central Anatolian constituencies alienated by the overrepresentation of the Black Sea Region in politics during the last few years.

IB- ALİ BABACAN'S PARTY

Babacan was noted for being among the youngest founding members of AK Party in 2001 – born in 1967, he was 34 at the time AK Party was founded. In those days, Babacan

wasn't a publicly known figure. However, Babacan occupied a number of very important positions in the 18 years of AK Party rule. He served in various ministerial positions without interruption for 13 years in all of the AK Party governments until August 2015. For most of this time, Babacan was the Minister or Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs. Between 2005 and 2008 he was the Chief Negotiator for Turkish Accession to the European Union, and between 2007 – 2009 he served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. After four years of silence, in July 2019 Ali Babacan resigned from AK Party and in announcing his resignation to the public, also said that he was in the process of forming a new political party.

Two things are publicly noted about Ali Babacan; the first of these is that he is close to Abdullah Gül, who preceded Erdoğan as the president. It is known that Babacan joined AK Party – and politics in general – upon Abdullah Gül's invitation during AK Party's founding phase; Babacan is still close to Gül. In 2017, during the transition to the presidential system of government, Babacan announced his support for the parliamentary system, as Gül did, and he continues to support this position.

Babacan is also known for his knowledge of, and command over economics as well as the great reputation he enjoys in the global market among international investors. However, this reputation might also be used against him by President Erdoğan, his political rival. Indeed, in a TV programme he joined in 5 January, Erdoğan said: “When the financial crisis of 2008 broke out, I said that it would pass us by. There are those who are now forming their own parties, and those people disagreed with me back then. That was because they received their orders from the IMF; however, I insisted on my position. They were supporters of the interest rate. I want to lower the interest rates at all times. Interest rates are the cause, inflation is the result; these are directly proportional. You lower the interest rates, you lower the inflation.” Thus, Erdoğan talked about Babacan without actually mentioning his name. The next day, on 6 January, Ali Babacan answered Erdoğan: “I am ready to reevaluate the past from any and all angles; however, we need to focus on Turkey's present conditions, and its future. Here are a few current numbers where interest rates are concerned: The interest rate paid by the central administration budget went up from 57 billion Turkish Liras in 2017 to 74 billion Turkish Liras in 2018. According to the government's programme, interest payments are 103 billion TL in 2019 and 139 billion TL in 2020. This is the important thing – the interest paid by the state to

the market, which it procures from the taxes it collects from its citizens, went from 57 billion to 139 billion TL in just three years. It increased by 144 %. Moreover, Turkey is facing huge problems such as the high cost of living and unemployment.” Of course, media and the printed press are almost totally controlled by President Erdoğan, and so Babacan’s answer was mostly shared on social media outlets.

Babacan’s political party is being criticized by Erdoğan despite not being officially founded yet; this provides us with important clues for the near future. It is suggested behind the scenes in Ankara, as well as by the public, that Babacan’s party has the potential to reach to a wider constituency compared to Davutoğlu’s Future Party, and to win over more voters; and that Erdoğan is worried by this. The statement by Erdoğan quoted above might be an expression of the concern he feels in this regard.

Babacan’s slowness in establishing his party has garnered a lot of attention. Despite announcing that they aimed to have founded the party by the end of 2019, the Babacan team has made no announcements about the date of official founding yet. However, sources close to Babacan are saying that the party will be founded at the end of February or beginning of March 2020.

The founding members of Ali Babacan’s party are not yet known, either. It is known that former ministers Beşir Atalay and Sadullah Ergin are in Babacan’s inner circle. As such, comparing the situation with the “B-Team” status of Davutoğlu’s Future Party, things are different with Babacan’s team. Beşir Atalay, clearly a companion of Babacan, has been a senior figure within AK Party ever since its establishment. He served in important ministerial positions in AK Party governments from 2002 to 2015 such as Minister of State, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior; he was one of the chief architects of the Kurdish resolution process between 2013 and 2015. Like Atalay, Sadullah Ergin was also a very important name in AK Party until the last few years. He was AK Party’s Group Deputy Chair between 2003 – 2009; and he served as the Minister of Justice between 2009 – 2013. Like Atalay, Ergin is also known by the public for being a prominent supporter of the resolution process among AK Party ranks. Between 2009 – 2013, when he served as the Minister of Justice, Ergin’s efforts to establish a legal infrastructure for the resolution process were widely noted.

Considering that Beşir Atalay and Sadullah Engin both used to be part of AK Party's "A-Team," it is possible to say that Babacan's party has the advantage over Davutoğlu's Future Party in terms of its members. Another name that bears mentioning is Haşim Kılıç, the former President of the Constitutional Court. Kılıç occupied this position between 1999 – 2015, and during this period, he often talked publicly about the need for a new constitution, democratic rule of law and judicial reforms. Kılıç was harshly critical of AK Party's indecision and hesitation regarding judicial democratization and constitutional reform; since his retirement in 2015, he hasn't been part of any political activities. He attracted some amount of attention when, in an interview dated October 2019, he said, "I would gladly support a party founded by Ali Babacan."

These three figures are certain to be part of Ali Babacan's party; also, they are all known for their support of, and courage regarding the democratic resolution of the Kurdish problem.

At the same time, Ali Babacan has never said anything positive or negative about the resolution process. This is a better position than that of Davutoğlu, who was the Prime Minister during the time the resolution process ended; however, the public, and especially the Kurds, are eagerly waiting to hear Babacan's approach to the Kurdish problem. In a TV programme on 28 December 2019, Babacan didn't say anything explicitly about the resolution of the Kurdish problem, but he did say HDP Chair Selahattin Demirtaş's pre-trial detention was a mistake, and underlined the necessity of protecting HDP's political legitimacy by noting that "the political movement lead by Demirtaş is very important for Turkish politics." The members as well as the founding documents of Babacan's party will clarify the party's attitude towards the Kurdish problem and the resolution process.

IC- WHY TWO PARTIES? THE ROLE OF ABDULLAH GÜL

Since the second half of 2019, when it became publicly known that both Ahmet Davutoğlu and Ali Babacan were going to form their own parties, the most important question on everyone's mind was, "Why are they forming two separate parties instead of working together?" A short while after, both parties announced that the decision to act separately was made by Ali Babacan. In a TV programme dated 10 December 2019,

Babacan said, “Davutoğlu wants to form a leader-oriented party in which he will be at the forefront; we want to be a team-oriented party.”

It is widely accepted that the Future Party is indeed a leader-oriented party centered around Ahmet Davutoğlu; however, the real reason behind the Babacan – Davutoğlu separation is a disagreement that occurred between Abdullah Gül and Davutoğlu 6 years ago. When his presidency ended in 2014, Abdullah Gül expected to become AK Party’s Chair and Prime Minister. However, Erdoğan was planning ahead for the presidential system, or rather, the Turkish style “executive presidential system of government” and so he prevented Gül from achieving this aim. In 2014, the distribution of power within the party didn’t favour Erdoğan as much as it does today, and so he offered Ahmet Davutoğlu the position of the Prime Minister as well as AK Party’s leadership. Davutoğlu accepted the offer. This didn’t just mean that Gül would have to say goodbye to AK Party’s leadership and the position of the Prime Minister. It also meant that the road to Erdoğan’s preferred presidential system of government would be paved. Indeed, after just two years Davutoğlu would have to step down from both positions at Erdoğan’s request. As such, the current presidential system of government, now criticized as a “one-man regime”, was achieved without much in-party resistance against Erdoğan. Looking back, had Davutoğlu refused Erdoğan’s offer in 2014 and opposed the presidential system alongside Gül, Erdoğan wouldn’t have been able to bring about the presidential system so quickly and easily. This is how Gül and Davutoğlu parted ways.

ID- ARE CHANGING ALLIANCES A POSSIBILITY?

This process might trigger a number of scenarios in 2020. Gül and Babacan are not reticent about their partnership, and they speak of their desire to return from the presidential system of government to a strengthened parliamentary system at every opportunity. “A return to the parliamentary system” as political discourse is often employed by the CHP – İYİ Party bloc in opposition to the AK Party – MHP bloc, as well. As such, it is possible that Babacan’s political party might nominate a joint candidate with the CHP – İYİ Party alliance in the next presidential election, promising a return to the parliamentary system. It is highly likely that this “joint candidate” opposing Erdoğan might be Gül.

Gül, who spoke of his support of the parliamentary system against the presidential system from the very beginning, was mentioned as a likely joint candidate for the 24 June 2018 election as well. However, IYI Party's leader Meral Akşener had opposed this idea at the time, and so Gül wasn't nominated. If Babacan's party receives widespread public support, Abdullah Gül is highly likely to become CHP's and Babacan's party's joint presidential candidate, regardless of IYI Party's wishes.

There is one more thing that needs to be noted in the context of the Babacan – Gül relationship. Babacan says that his party is going to be “team-oriented rather than leader-oriented;” the most influential figure of this new political party is going to be Abdullah Gül, even if he is not showcased. Gül's support for Babacan's party would be important not just for the party's future, but also for the future of Turkish politics.

WHAT WILL PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN AND AK PARTY DO ABOUT THE NEW POLITICAL PARTIES?

As in 2019, it appears that President Erdoğan's attitudes and choices are going to be central for Turkish politics in 2020 as well. Erdoğan's attitude will be determining not just in the context of the Kurdish problem but also for the “politics of alliances”. The “politics of alliances,” the various alliances established between a number of political parties particularly during the transition to the presidential system of government, is currently grouped around two centers: the People's Alliance between AK Party and MHP, and the Nation Alliance between CHP and IYI Party. Even though it's not part of the Nation Alliance, HDP has a degree of influence over election results through its indirect support of the Nation Alliance, as the last elections demonstrated.

The emergence of two separate parties from within AK Party might radically alter this picture in 2020. Even though it seems unrealistic at first to suppose that two parties emerging from within AK Party itself might form an alliance with AK Party, considering the changeable nature of Turkish politics and Erdoğan's pragmatic and flexible approach to politics, 2020 might bring along unexpected changes for Turkish politics.

Like Erdoğan and AK Party, the opposition parties as well as Kurdish politics – chiefly HDP – are watching out for the new political parties and their public reception. For CHP and IYI Party, the main thing is the new parties’ potential to take away from AK Party’s voters; however, the attitude of these two new parties towards their Nation Alliance is also going to be important.

For Kurdish politics, represented chiefly by HDP, it is a different story. Since the 1990s, the Kurdish movement has upheld its legal struggle in Turkish politics; however, in the last few years in particular, its legitimacy has been questioned like never before. Even the CHP – IYI Party alliance, which HDP supported in the 2019 local elections, is afraid of normalizing its relations with HDP. The “political loneliness” of HDP and the Kurdish movement might be overcome with the attitude and choices of the new political parties. Davutoğlu’s Future Party gave the first positive indication of this when Deputy Chair Ayhan Sefer Üstün gave an interview to the Mesopotamia Agency, a news agency known for its proximity to HDP, on 1 January and said, “We won’t push away any parties. We don’t mean to marginalize HDP. Not HDP, and not its supporters.” Such a statement might be thought to be quite unremarkable under normal circumstances; however, in Turkey in 2020, circumstances are far from normal and so the statement itself is not unremarkable. For the last three or four years, all political parties pay visits to one another during religious and national holidays; however, no mainstream political party visits HDP. This is one of the most striking symptoms of HDP’s “political loneliness”. As such, a visit paid by the Future Party to HDP is significant for the future, even if it’s only symbolic.

At the same time, since Babacan’s party is not yet formed and nobody involved with the party apart from Babacan has publicly spoken, it is difficult to say what this party’s attitude and policies concerning the Kurdish problem and HDP might be. We know from sources close to Babacan that in the run-up to the formation of his party, 24 different subjects were drawn up, including the Kurdish problem; that journalists, writers, academics and opinion leaders from diverse backgrounds were consulted on these subjects; and finally, that Beşir Atalay led the discussion on the Kurdish problem. We noted above that Babacan had said that the HDP leader should not be kept in pre-trial detention, and that HDP’s representation was important; this is about the extent of actual information we currently have on Babacan’s position regarding this matter. In other words, there is not enough data yet to analyze the movement’s general policies concerning

the Kurdish problem. However, the general impression we get from the backrooms of Ankara and sources close to Babacan is that for the Kurds who have given up hope for AK Party and HDP, interest in Babacan's party is higher compared to Davutoğlu's party.

IIA- TWO SCENARIOS

Considering all these developments, it looks as if Erdoğan is going to have to adopt one of two possible approaches concerning the Kurdish problem and the resolution process. In the first scenario, Erdoğan will maintain his current position, and adopt an even harsher attitude. He will try to include IYI Party in the AK Party – MHP alliance. IYI Party received 10 % of the popular vote in the last election; regarding the Kurdish problem and the resolution process, its approach is no different to that of MHP, from which IYI Party splintered. IYI Party's unwillingness was the main reason why HDP couldn't establish a closer and more open working relationship with the Nation Alliance. As such, IYI Party might well become part of a political movement that forces Erdoğan to adopt an even harsher attitude concerning the Kurdish problem. However, there are two obstacles to this happening. Firstly, MHP wouldn't want to be part of the same alliance with IYI Party. Secondly, even if both the MHP and IYI Party administrations were to be persuaded by Erdoğan, IYI Party's support base wouldn't want such an alliance. A People's Alliance including IYI Party might not be able to bring 51 % of the popular vote to Erdoğan, which he needs for the presidential elections. As such, this first scenario contains serious risks for Erdoğan.

According to the second scenario, in order to prevent his Kurdish constituency from shifting their support to the new parties, Erdoğan might have to bring back to the table the resolution process which he had shelved, or "put in the fridge," in his own words. Of course, this would signify the end of the alliance between AK Party and MHP. As a result, Erdoğan and AK Party would attempt to form a new alliance with the two new parties, as well as with CHP. Erdoğan is a pragmatist with a talent for political maneuvering; therefore, if he believes that circumstances necessitate such a scenario, he would do this. If he believes that this is the way to get the 51% of the popular vote he needs to be elected in the next presidential election, he would do anything he can to form such an alliance. In

such a context, the attitude of the other parties which might become part of the alliance would also become important.

A new alliance which aims to restart the resolution process would likely be well-received by HDP and Kurdish politics. As for the other “alliance candidate,” CHP, its leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu might be well-disposed towards the resolution process, as well as to an alliance that could bring CHP into power after such a long time. However, the anti-resolution process nationalists within CHP still have a certain power, and they would put up a serious resistance to such an idea. At the same time, sharing power after so many years and enjoying the benefits of government would certainly attract the attention of the CHP ranks. In this framework, the attitudes of the two new political parties will also be important in determining the outcome. If one or both of these two new parties refuse to be part of an alliance with Erdoğan and an AK Party that wants to restart the resolution process, some of the alienated AK Party supporters might veer towards them instead. This is a serious electoral risk for Erdoğan and AK Party. Therefore, this scenario would be realized only if a wide-ranging alliance is formed. If Erdoğan believes that an alliance with a wide support base, containing CHP and HDP as well as Davutoğlu and Babacan’s parties, would win him the elections, he might make serious concessions. For instance, he might accept certain checks and balances to limit the powers of the presidential system of government. In other words, Erdoğan might be persuaded to adopt a presidential system in which the president is held in check to some degree by the judiciary and the legislative.

Judging by their statements, Davutoğlu’s Future Party seems to indicate even now that they might be persuaded to such a solution. During an interview given on 27 December, shortly after the party was formed, Deputy Chair Selçuk Özdağ said that as a party they opposed the presidential system of government because there were no checks on the president in this system. One day after Özdağ’s statement, the spokesperson of the Future Party Selim Temurci joined a TV programme where he said, “The lack of checks and balances in the presidential system is an important problem for us.” Such statements by senior figures in the Future Party indicate that in the coming days, they might be open to negotiations concerning the presidential system of government. It’s not possible yet to say anything about the position of Babacan’s party in this matter, since it is not yet officially formed. However, in all his statements, Babacan said that they would support a “strengthened parliamentary system”. Of course, we will see what exactly is meant by

such a statement, and to what degree they are flexible on this point, once the party is officially formed.

IIB- SNAP ELECTION IN 2020?

Especially during the last years in Turkey, snap elections or the possibility of snap elections have constantly been on the agenda. The local elections of 2019 have left a considerable mark on Turkish politics. AK Party lost both İstanbul and Ankara after a very long time, and so the possibility of a snap election in 2020 arose. The main opposition party CHP hasn't demanded a snap election yet; all the same, the public is discussing whether Erdoğan and AK Party will ask for snap elections or not. Here as elsewhere, the important thing is that two new parties are emerging on the political scene.

Both Babacan's and Davutoğlu's parties are naturally going to try and address AK Party's support base first. The members and local branches of the parties will be made up of ex-AK Party individuals; similarly, they will primarily reach out to AK Party's constituency. Erdoğan and AK Party suffered heavy defeats in the 2019 local elections; the possibility that they want a surprise snap election without losing too much of their staff and constituency to these two parties is being talked about. If Erdoğan, AK Party's sole decision maker, decides to call for an election before 2021, the only thing he can do is to consolidate and expand the AK Party – MHP alliance. He can do this only through consolidating his nationalist – conservative discourse as well as his anti-resolution process stance towards the Kurdish problem. As for the alliance, he might succeed in persuading IYI Party to join the AK Party – MHP alliance. However, as we stated above, even if the IYI Party administration agrees to join the alliance, it is doubtful whether its 10 % support base, decidedly anti-Erdoğan and anti-AK Party, would vote for this alliance in a surprise election. As such, the possibility for a snap election in 2020 is low for now.

Even if there is not an election in 2020, however, the possibility of a general election before 2023 is going to be on the agenda of Turkish politics in 2020. It wouldn't be a surprise for the two new political parties to call for snap elections in 2021 after establishing their organisation across the country. Let us remember that senior figures within the Future Party are talking of a snap election even now. On a TV programme he

joined on 9 January, Deputy Chair Selçuk Özdağ said that they predicted there would be a snap election in 2021. Future Party is planning to conclude its countrywide organisation by June 2020 and hold an ordinary congress; as such, it would be politically rational for them to demand elections in 2021. So far, the Babacan front has remained silent on this matter. However, it wouldn't be a surprise for Babacan's party to also demand elections once the party is established.

As a result, snap elections will be high on the agenda for 2020 whether Erdoğan and AK Party want it or not. The two new political parties emerging from within AK Party are the most important cause behind this.

IIC- 2020: THE YEAR OF FIGHTING FOR THE AK PARTY BASE

In 2020, the struggle for AK Party's personnel and support base will be the single most important factor shaping Turkish politics. This outcome of this struggle will be very influential in determining the outcome of any snap election, or the regularly scheduled 2023 general election. The AK Party base, which has provided the party with 40 to 50 % of the popular vote since the 2010s, will be the target of Davutoğlu and Babacan's parties.

Looking at the current composition of the Future Party, we see that it includes figures from AK Party known for their religiosity and Islamism. This choice might attract the Islamic sections of society which have been alienated by AK Party's and Erdoğan's policies of the recent years. The dissatisfaction caused by the AK Party – MHP alliance will also play a role in this. This might be a particularly attractive choice for the religious Kurdish constituency.

Babacan's party, on the other hand, although it is not yet officially formed, wants to expand its base beyond AK Party's religious constituency. This is something that Babacan constantly underlines in his statements to the press and the public. Babacan's party will try to target not only AK Party's religious constituency, but also Turkey's "centre-adjacent" electorate, some of which vote for – or used to do until recently – AK Party. Babacan was the Minister of Economic Affairs at a time when AK Party's economic policies performed well, and this increases his chances. The steadily worsening outlook for Turkey's

economy at current time will be an advantage for Ali Babacan, according to the non-ideologically motivated, “centre-adjacent” electorate.

Comparing the two parties in this framework, we see that Davutoğlu’s Future Party has the potential to draw the support of religious Islamic circles, whereas Babacan’s party is likely to be supported by a wider electorate, only some of which used to support AK Party.

This two-pronged threat is a nightmare scenario for Erdoğan and AK Party. This is why Erdoğan’s first reaction to the new parties has been harsh. As we noted above, Erdoğan accused Babacan of “taking orders from IMF,” and he also sent an initial message to Davutoğlu’s Future Party. İstanbul Şehir University, a private educational institution personally established by Davutoğlu, was seized under very weak legal justification; the final and official decision was announced on 20 December, one week after Davutoğlu had established the Future Party. This was interpreted as a sign of Erdoğan and AK Party’s harsh attitude towards the new political parties that might emerge in 2020. However, such severe policies of oppression and intimidation also carry a high risk of backfiring. If the public feels that Erdoğan is undeservedly victimizing the two parties, this might cost to Erdoğan and AK Party in the next elections. Erdoğan would obviously be aware of this risk. As such, we cannot possibly believe that the coming period will consist only of policies of oppression and intimidation against the new political parties.

There is the possibility that Erdoğan might change his attitude and discourse in areas where these might be used against him by the new parties. The current state of affairs regarding the Kurdish problem is the most important among these. It is highly likely that both Davutoğlu and Babacan will have some degree of attraction to the Kurdish electorate currently supporting AK Party. As we noted above, Davutoğlu is the less attractive option for the Kurds compared to Babacan, since he was the Prime Minister between 2014 and 2016. However, Babacan’s party has considerable potential to draw AK Party’s Kurdish constituency to itself. Rather than Babacan’s rhetorical emphasis on democratization, the absence of anything either positive or negative about the Kurdish problem and the resolution process in his track record is the reason behind this. There is also the presence of Beşir Atalay, one of the prominent figures in the resolution process; as such, it wouldn’t be a surprise for Babacan’s party to be a serious attraction for the Kurdish

electorate. Considering that even in the worst of times, AK Party is able to win 30 – 35 % of the popular vote in the predominantly Kurdish provinces, this is not a good outlook for AK Party. There is also the high likelihood that the religious Kurdish constituencies in the major Western cities such as İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir and Adana will behave in a similar way.

Faced with such a negative outlook regarding the Kurdish electorate, AK Party might attempt to make peace with the Kurdish public once again. Erdoğan and AK Party will also consider taking steps towards a new resolution process while taking into consideration the developments in Iraq and Syria. Of course, such steps would constitute a serious danger for the AK Party – MHP alliance. However, Erdoğan won't hesitate to call off the alliance with MHP once he is certain that he's going to win the next election. There is also the fact that the AK Party – MHP alliance is not really winning AK Party any votes.

This is an important reason why both Davutoğlu and Babacan are measured in their statements regarding Erdoğan. As discussed above, the “politics of alliances” might totally reshape the Turkish politics of 2020. Regardless of their own intentions, the presence of the two new parties emerging from within AK Party is the biggest factor behind this potential transformation.

CONCLUSION

As 2020 begins, Turkey has a chance to end the marginalization and political loneliness of Kurdish politics as represented by HDP, which has been going on for the past four or five years. The formation of two new parties emerging from AK Party ranks at the same time will trigger important changes in Turkish politics. The prevailing opinion is that the simultaneous formation is a disadvantage for the new parties, and an advantage for AK Party. There's some degree of truth to this opinion, and yet, the situation has its advantages for the new parties as well.

Had it been only one party emerging from AK Party, Erdoğan would very likely target and relentlessly demonise it. The popular accusation of the past few years, “they are being backed by the Gülenist organization,” would be weaponised against the new party.

However, since there are two separate parties, this argument will not hold as much water. Neither Erdoğan nor any spokesperson for AK Party has implied anything like this so far, which also supports our prediction. Although there is a general overlap between the targeted bases of both parties, there are also certain differences which emerge on a closer look, and this will also give both AK Party and Erdoğan a difficult time. The Future Party is mostly oriented towards the religious-Islamist community, whereas Babacan's party will target the non-ideological centrist electorate; its focus on the economy, an attractive agenda for the "centrist electorate," will also make things difficult for AK Party. Ali Babacan's successful track record in economics, combined with the economic difficulties Turkey has been experiencing in the last few years, is likely to equal the rise of a worthy political opponent for AK Party.

Also of note is the fact that the deadlock in Turkish politics regarding the Kurdish problem is beginning to dissolve. It's very likely that in 2020, new alternatives regarding the resolution process will emerge.