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Turkey

# The breach is opened, strengthen the NO!

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### **Following the referendum over constitutional amendments which allowed Turkey's President Erdogan to obtain increased powers, the latter has declared victory**

51.3 % voting "yes" against 48.7% voting "no" was certainly not the result the regime expected. The latter had in recent months, which were marked by a state of emergency, mobilised all the resources of the state to wage incessant propaganda in favour of a "yes" vote, while criminalizing and repressing supporters of a "no" vote.

Religious discourse, nationalist rhetoric, anti-Western populism based on conspiracy theories which were brilliant in their imbecility ... everything was done to stigmatise the defenders of a "no" vote. Despite this, even according to the results declared by the regime, the vote was won by a margin of only one million three hundred thousand out of eighty million people.

It is indisputably a defeat for the Islamic-nationalist bloc guided by Erdogan. Also, it is a poor result for the alliance between the AKP and the far right MHP who, compared to the elections of November 2015, lost almost 10% of their vote in total.

But what intensifies this defeat is the "no" victory in the three biggest cities, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir; all the more so inasmuch as the first two are controlled by the AKP. In addition, traditionally conservative- Islamist circumscriptions of Istanbul manifestly opted for "no". 10% of AKP voters and 73% of MHP voters were lost to the "no" camp.

The total submission of the MHP leader - in the face of a powerful opposition - to Erdogan to save his position, did not then receive the approval of his rank and file. The latter was thus a significant element in the "no" result. This crisis will undoubtedly lead the historic party of the far right into a profound process of disintegration and restructuring.

This being said, alongside the absence of equity during the campaign period, it was above all the "official" attempt at fraud implemented by the Turkish state during the referendum which renders the results highly dubious if not illegitimate. Apart from the various irregularities to which the AKP often has recourse, this time it was the Higher Electoral Commission itself which decided – in the midst of the referendum and at the request of an AKP deputy – that ballot papers and envelopes without the official seal would be valid, so long as it was proved they did not come from abroad!

A second supplementary resolution was the acceptance of ballot papers where the choice had been marked with the stamps of previous elections which of course had no reason to be found in the hands of the managers of the polling stations. Then to render valid all "yes" votes prepared in advance –even in the absence of the new stamp – and exchanged at the last minute with those which came out of the ballot boxes.

However most ballot papers without the official seal were used in Kurdistan where massive cases of "yes" voting en bloc, from ballot boxes without any "no" votes and identical signatures for thousands of voters were indicated. According to the HDP, the left reformist party linked to the Kurdish movement, these cases would after initial observations concern 500,000 votes. The arrest of two HDP scrutineers in the days preceding the referendum and their removal from the voting offices by soldiers during the counting of votes clearly show that fraud was planned.

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Nonetheless if there was a fall of 10% in the “no” vote in Kurdistan compared with the 2015 results, before rushing to deduce that a significant number of Kurds had supported Erdogan and abandoned the Kurdish movement, we should first take into account the weight of the fraud but also should not forget that Kurdistan has over the last twenty months suffered veritable massacres, destruction of towns and the forced displacement of 500,000 persons, including 300,000 voters, who in order to vote had to overcome financial and above all psychological difficulties in returning to their decimated neighbourhoods. Also, the campaign took place in the absence of 13 HDP deputies (including its co-presidents), more than 80 mayors and thousands of activists who are behind bars.

Would it have been possible without the regime’s electoral fraud that the No vote could have exceeded the Yes vote, given the narrow gap? It’s a strong probability. According to the republican CHP and the HDP there was a manipulation of 3-4% of the votes. But in any case, these serious breaches of electoral law, beyond rendering the results dubious, render the referendum illegitimate and necessitate its cancellation.

However the régime does not seem ready to go into reverse, Erdogan from the first night said “do not tire the country with useless discussions ... do not waste your time in trying to oppose”. Faithful to the Turkish Duce, the Higher Electoral Commission thus rejected the appeals filed by the opposition parties demanding the cancellation of the ballot. Meanwhile 40 “no” activists were arrested following house or office raids for having contested the legitimacy of the “yes” vote.

Faced with electoral fraud and repression, the democratic forces of the No front, identifiable with the political composition and above all the spirit of the Gezi revolt, and specifically the youth, are in the street. The declared victory of the transition to autocracy and thus a hardening of the repressive character of the régime have not led to any discouragement or demobilization among No supporters. Very much to the contrary, there is awareness that it is the mobilization for a No vote which has contributed to the weakening of Erdogan’s hegemony and that, despite the contradictions which run through the various tendencies within it, when it strikes together, half of society has the power to open a breach in the ruling bloc, which has developed the combativeness of considerable sectors of society.

The risk of course exists that in the absence of clear orientation and tactical objectives the mobilisation will run its course. The movement must self-organise and the No meetings built during the campaign, with a great contribution from the radical left, can serve as the basis of such a restructuring.

The fight will be tough but in any case the breach is now opened. So we shout with all our strength: “NO it isn’t over, it’s only just begun!”