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Turkey

Coalition falls apart

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A general election in Turkey seems likely in November, against a background of political and economic crisis. IV's correspondent in Turkey, Erdal Tan, spoke to Masis Kürkçügil, a member of the leadership of the A–DP [1] on the origins of this crisis.

Q What is the background to the current situation?

A The current government, a coalition of the nationalist and populist left in the DSP, the fascists of the MHP and the liberals of the ANAP, has run out of steam, undermined by economic crisis and divergences over the process of joining the European Union (EU).

With the economic crisis of February 2001, per capita income fell. The government survived only in the absence of a credible alternative and had to 'import' a saviour from outside, Kemal Dervis, deputy director of the World Bank. His programme for recovery, supported by the IMF and the bourgeoisie, has stopped the haemorrhage but increased unemployment, inequality and the foreign debt.

The government parties then fell back on politicians' rhetoric to seek a margin of manoeuvre and defend their identity. Anap took up the cause of democratic reforms for EU membership; in reaction, the MHP dropped its 'moderate' profile (adopted to please the bourgeoisie and the army) and returned to its classic ultra nationalist discourse. Suddenly, the DSP was in the very uncomfortable position of holding the balance. This continued to the spring, but collapsed when it became clear that the state of health of Prime Minister Ecevit (78 years old and suffering from Parkinson's disease) rendered him incapable of continuing in the role of arbiter.

The subsequent political paralysis led the bourgeoisie, concerned to convince the EU to open negotiations for entry from next year to try to obtain, with the support of the media and the army, a change of Prime Minister and the departure of the MHP from the coalition; the latter is opposed to joining the EU.

Q Why was this not possible?

A Even sick and totally isolated, Bülent Ecevit refused to give up power and has total control of his party. The troika, made up of Cem (ex-foreign minister), A–zkan (former right hand man of Ecevit) and Dervis (economic bigwig) tried to convince Ecevit to give up, but in vain. Threatened with being eliminated by Ecevit, they preferred to form a new social democratic party, The New Turkey Party, bringing with them half the parliamentary group. The government has thus lost its majority and what little political legitimacy it had.

Seeing that it was a manoeuvre to eliminate them from the government, the MHP called for elections. This was supported by the opposition, Parliament has been recalled for an extraordinary meeting and the electoral process now seems irreversible.

Q And now?

A With the parties divided and split on left and right and the current electoral law, more than half the electorate could be deprived of parliamentary representation and a single party could grab effective control with hardly 20% of the votes... so it's likely to be a mess!

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[1] The Party of Freedom and Solidarity, a political regroupment in which the Turkish section of the Fourth International participates.