

### ***CSIS Turkey Project Meeting: A Survey of Turkey's Political Landscape***

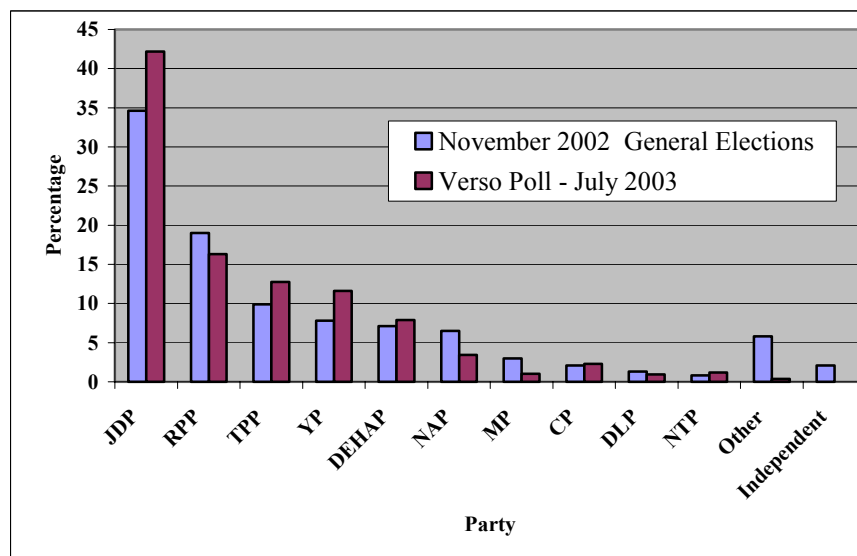
Erhan Goksel – Chairman of Verso, Ankara

Summary of Remarks - August 29, 2003

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On August 29, the CSIS Turkey Project hosted one of Turkey's leading pollsters, Dr. Erhan Goksel. Goksel reviewed his latest polling data and offered his analysis of the Turkish political scene.

The poll was conducted during the final weeks of July and analyzed in early August. It sampled approximately 8,800 people in 7 regions, 20 provinces and 24 electoral districts throughout Turkey. Goksel explained that the poll clearly showed that the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) had actually enhanced its popular support. According to the poll, the JDP enjoyed a 7.59 percent increase in popularity since the November 2002 general elections. At the same time, the leading opposition party, the Republican People's Party (RPP) lost 2.69 percent support. The Youth Party (YP), recently touted as a possible alternative to the JDP, had also lost support as YP Chairman Cem Uzan's companies confronted legal problems in Turkey. While the True Path Party (TPP) had increased its support by 2.85 percent, with the declining support for the RPP and the difficulties facing the YP, Goksel predicted that the JDP would receive 50 percent of the votes in the nationwide local elections in April 2004.



Note: The poll figures reflect percentages after redistributing 'N/A,' 'no vote,' 'no answer,' and 'undecided.'

Goksel said that the poll highlighted a period of "great political change in Turkey" and claimed that this would probably lead to the demise of a number of parties, including those who have governed for decades, after the local elections. However, he argued that neither the United States, nor Turkey's civilian and military establishment have adequately comprehended the magnitude of the changes in the new Turkish political landscape. Nevertheless, Goksel claimed that as they reviewed the poll, which indicated that there was "no political alternative to the JDP," they would inevitably reach the conclusion that "the JDP could not be defeated politically."

According to Goksel, 51.4 percent of respondents found Prime Minister and Chairman of the JDP, Recep Tayyip Erdogan successful. In fact, Erdogan's personal support rating was almost ten percent higher than that of his party (42.19 percent). He said that this was similar to the Ozal era in the 1980's when Prime Minister Turgut Ozal also enjoyed a higher support rating than that of his Motherland Party. Goksel said that the main reasons behind Erdogan's personal success were "charisma" and the ability to identify with the lower income voters. Goksel said "the people see themselves in Erdogan and that is what charisma is."

Goksel explained that the respondents were worried about the economy and unemployment "as the greatest problems Turkey has to contend with." There was also "an overall feeling of antipathy towards the IMF" which Goksel suggested was a product of the two major devaluations after December 1999 during Turkey's long relationship with the IMF. Nevertheless, while only 37.4 percent responded positively when asked whether the next year would be good for Turkey, 43.9 percent were happy with the performance of the JDP government. However, Goksel noted that the JDP also ranked highest among the parties that the respondents would "never vote for," confirming the polarization of the Turkish electorate.

Goksel also discussed his findings on current US-Turkish relations. He explained that 60.3 percent believed that US-Turkish relations had deteriorated since the March 1 Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) decision against allowing the opening of a northern front against Iraq. 94.0 percent believed that the relations had deteriorated further after the July 4 incident in which US forces detained eleven Turkish soldiers in northern Iraq. Strikingly, Goksel said that 37.0 percent of those polled regarded the US as a "foe," the highest figure in recent years. Despite these negative numbers, 63.7 percent of the Turkish population still believed that relations with the United States were important and the percentage that considered the US as an ally or friend was 57.5.

The poll showed that 63.9 percent of the respondents were opposed to sending troops to Iraq. Goksel commented, "Erdogan must reflect the political base of his party. The JDP base looks unfavorably on the United States and its policy in Iraq. Erdogan has the power to change this but he has to find some kind of leverage." He cautioned that a further deterioration of relations with the US on the troop issue "could spark an economic crisis." However, he also warned that Turkish casualties in Iraq could lead to defections from the JDP.

Goksel also examined the political implications of the current legal action relating to the pro-Kurdish Democratic People's Party (DEHAP). Goksel claimed that DEHAP had been found guilty of not establishing the stipulated national political organization prior to the November 2002 elections and should have been barred from running. The Higher Electoral Board (HEB) was due to render a decision on the fate of DEHAP after September 11, 2003. According to Goksel, the HEB could only decide in one of three ways. They could allow the situation to remain as it stands despite the DEHAP verdict, they could redistribute DEHAP's votes amongst the other parties, or they could go so far as to cancel the elections entirely. If the HEB were to decide to redistribute the DEHAP

votes, “the political landscape in the TGNA would change drastically” with the TPP led by Mehmet Agar gaining 66 seats in parliament. Under this scenario, Goksel elaborated, the ruling JDP would lose 42 seats and therefore its current two-thirds majority while the RPP would lose 24 seats. Goksel argued that legally the HEB could not cancel the elections since it had allowed DEHAP to run in the first place. However, he claimed that the redistribution of DEHAP’s votes would lead to the cancellation of the March 9 Siirt by-elections which had brought Erdogan into the TGNA, and thus force his resignation as Prime Minister. Goksel claimed that the HEB decision would “not be legal but political.”

In conclusion, Goksel said that while the polls indicated the continuing strength of the JDP, much could change in the coming months. The economy remained fragile and a very difficult decision on sending troops to Iraq loomed ahead.