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Turkish elections: Far-right candidate demands Erdoğan, Kılıçdaroğlu expel refugees

A runoff will take place in the Turkish presidential elections on May 28, as preliminary results from the Supreme Election Board show incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received 49.5 percent of the vote, while Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu came in second with 44.88 percent.

The NATO-Russia war played a central role in the election. Kılıçdaroğlu promised to be a better ally to NATO than Erdoğan. He enjoys the support of Western capitals, while the Kremlin sees it as critical that Erdoğan remains in power as he seeks to maneuver between NATO and Russia in the war in Ukraine.

Sinan Oğan, the far-right Ata Alliance candidate who received a surprise 5.2 percent of the vote in the first round, is expected to play a key role in the second.



Sinan Ogan, presidential candidate from ATA (Ataturk) alliance, formed of nationalist political parties, is surrounded by supporters in Ankara, Turkey, Thursday, May 4, 2023. [AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici]

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Before the first round, he stated that he would demand a ministry as a conditions for supporting a candidate in the second round. However, in interviews after May 14 election, he made clear his conditions for supporting Erdoğan, or Kılıçdaroğlu. Erdoğan is the candidate of the People Alliance led by the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Kılıçdaroğlu is running for the Nation Alliance led by the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Good Party, a MHP split-off. Speaking to BBC Turkish on Monday, Oğan said he would “complete consultations within one or two days” and announce who he will support in the second round. He said, “We have certain conditions such as fighting terrorism, distancing ourselves from political parties supported by terrorist organizations and sending back refugees.”

Oğan reiterated these two conditions in a later interview with CNN International. Asked about forceful deportation of refugees in Turkey, he proposed to take a cue from Washington's brutal anti-immigrant policies, stating: “We will do what the American police do when they catch a Turkish illegal immigrant. What the American police do is as democratic as ours.”

Oğan added, “As the United States did with Mexicans to send them back, we will do with Syrians, Afghans, Pakistanis and others. There will be no volunteering, they must be sent back for sure.”

Oğan stated that he will not support any of the candidates in the second round if they do not commit to these issues.

In an interview last night with TV100, Oğan said their first demand was an “uninterrupted fight against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ), [Kurdish Islamist] Hezbollah and all kinds of terrorist organizations.” He also demanded a timetable for the deportation of refugees and declared that no ministry should be given to the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which backs Kılıçdaroğlu, or the Kurdish-Islamist Hüda Par, which supports Erdoğan.

Turkish nationalist parties from both the People Alliance and the Nation Alliance accuse the HDP of being a “political extension” of the PKK. The Hüda Par, which entered parliament on AKP lists in Sunday's elections, was founded by supporters of the Kurdish Islamist paramilitary group Hezbollah, which the Turkish state has declared a “terrorist organization.”

Oğan has long-standing ties with both the People Alliance and the Nation Alliance. Elected as an MHP deputy in 2011, Oğan announced in 2015 that he would run for the chairmanship against party leader Devlet Bahçeli. He was later expelled from the party.

During the 2017 constitutional referendum, he campaigned for a “No” vote along with Meral Akşener within the MHP, which supported Erdoğan in a “Yes” campaign. Akşener later founded the Good party, forming an alliance with Kılıçdaroğlu.

Both Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu want to win the election in the second round with Oğan’s support.

In an interview after the election, Erdoğan's spokesperson İbrahim Kalın said: “When you look at the political tradition Mr. Sinan comes from, I know his position is closer to the People's Alliance... He had a good campaign. He expressed his own theses. Like the fight against terrorism and refugees... I think he clearly showed who we should be against when it comes to Turkey's national interests.”

The Erdoğan government is deporting Syrian refugees fleeing NATO’s war for regime change back to Syria, as part of a plan to prevent the emergence of a Kurdish state in northern Syria led by the US-backed People’s Protection Units (YPG). Ankara has been building housing in areas of Syria illegally occupied by the Turkish army and its Islamist proxies, planning to resettle Syrian Arabs to outnumber the Kurds. At the same time, it is trying to re-improve relations with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Shortly before the election, Erdoğan said: “We have built over 100,000 houses in northern Syria and voluntary returns to these areas have begun. It is not in line with our humanitarian, conscientious and civilizational values to force people who seek refuge with us to the door. But we will of course take the necessary action against those who misbehave.”

Last year, Erdoğan announced plans to return 1 million Syrians and signaled a new military operation against the YPG. The plan was shelved after failing to get the green light from the United States or Russia.

Kılıçdaroğlu, backed by the HDP and the pseudo-left parties such as the Stalinist Workers Party of Turkey (TİP) as a “progressive” alternative to Erdoğan, has been criticizing Erdogan from the right for years, demanding the deportation of refugees. If elected, Kılıçdaroğlu pledged to reach an agreement with the European Union to send the refugees back within two years. His Kurdish nationalist or pseudo-left allies ignored this reactionary campaign.

Engin Özkoç, a CHP leader, said Kılıçdaroğlu had a phone call with Sinan Oğan on the night of the election. “The call was very positive. Our leader congratulated [Oğan],” he said.

Özkoç expressed how close his right-wing party was to making an agreement with a xenophobic fascist with these words: “I don’t think there is a difference in our thoughts about the expectations of our nation. And I don’t think we have a difference in our national stance.”

This dirty bargaining based on ignoring the right of nearly five million people who voted for the HDP-backed Green Left Party in Sunday’s elections and forcibly deporting millions of refugees reveals that the Nation Alliance, the HDP and the pseudo-left forces behind it are completely incapable of defending basic democratic rights.

No matter which candidate Oğan backs, the NATO-Russia war and the right-wing parties’ ties with imperialism are at the center of the presidential election.

The US and European media did not hide their disappointment at Kılıçdaroğlu’s failure to win against Erdoğan. The *Guardian* editorial bluntly wrote: “For Europe and the US, which had hoped an opposition victory would see Turkey turn more towards the west, five more years of Mr Erdoğan would be a highly unwelcome development—particularly ahead of a decisive period in Ukraine.”

A commentary in the pro-Kremlin newspaper *Vzglyad* explained why Erdoğan, maneuvering between NATO and Russia, was preferred by Moscow: “In terms of personalities, most Russian experts were rooting for Erdoğan... there were serious reasons to suppose that in case Kılıçdaroğlu wins, Turkey will join Western policy of blockading Russia.”

It continued: “That is, simply put, it would abandon Erdoğan’s ‘both ours and yours’ line, after which it would rigidly enforce anti-Russian sanctions, supply more weapons to Ukraine and foment the Russian periphery.”

Far from opposing both the interventions of NATO and Russia in Ukraine, the HDP and the TİP have become part of the war. They refused to oppose Finland’s NATO membership in the Turkish parliamentary vote, even though Finland’s joining NATO represented a significant escalation in the war against Russia.

The way to oppose imperialist war and defend basic democratic rights, is to build a movement in the working class politically independent from all the forces backing either of the right-wing, pro-imperialist candidates in the Turkish presidential elections. This is the perspective for which the Sosyalist Eşitlik Grubu, the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, fights.

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