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## What does a partisan president mean for Turkey?

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In a press conference before taking off for Pakistan on Nov. 16, Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan said he was for a system where the president could keep his (or her) position as the leader – or at least as a member of his or her party.

The partisan president is not in Turkey's constitution now; it suggests that the president should be non-partisan. That is why the party memberships of former presidents like Turgut Özal, Süleyman Demirel and Abdullah Gül were automatically dissolved the day that they were elected as president, regardless of whether they were elected by the parliament or the people.

Erdoğan sees the current system as an obstacle slowing down the executive branch. He says that with a partisan presidential system, the leader will have full influence over the governing party, which would make the legislative work in the parliament become much quicker.

That explanation could have certain risks. It assumes that the current situation of President Erdoğan also being the natural leader of the Justice and Development Party's (AK Parti) government, which itself has a majority status in the parliament, will go on forever. In the event the president and government (also the parliamentary majority) are not from the same party, the partisan presidential system designed to accelerate the executive but leave less space for the

checks-and-balances role of parliament could turn the other way around. In such a case, if the president is the leader or a member of the opposition party, it could lock the system. Erdoğan assumes that voters would never want to separate the presidency from the majority group in the parliament.

That is why the executive presidential system, or the partisan presidency system that Erdoğan and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım's AK Parti government are aiming for has to be designed together with a new electoral system. There are press reports that the AK Parti is actually for a single constituency system, like in Britain. Turkey tried that before in the 1950s, before the first military coup in 1960, but it failed terribly. Plus, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which is seemingly cooperating with the AK Parti on the executive presidential system, would object to that, since it could make it further shrink in parliament.

Another election system could be a hybrid system which is called a "reduced constituency" model, where there would be constituencies again but consisting of a number of deputies, not just one.

In past years there were a couple of models proposed for such a system aiming at better representation without damaging political stability.

For example, there were the models proposed by Deniz Baykal, the former chairman of the Republican People's Party (CHP), and Sedat Aloglu, a former MP from the business world who wrote a thesis on restructuring the state administration in Turkey for Istanbul University. In his dissertation, he also suggests that in a parliament of 600, 500 seats would be determined by the local delegates of the parties to take their place on the candidate lists and that 100 names, preferably intellectuals, academics and the like would be named by the headquarters of the parties. He also suggested a two-phase election in order to consolidate political stability in parliament.

Such debates are taking place on the political backstage but there is still a few key points.

The first is that both the AK Parti and the MHP want the CHP to be part of the work of the new constitution – MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli made that call almost on behalf of the ruling party on Nov. 15. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP leader, says they will not let Turkey be "dragged into a dictatorship" by putting too much power in the hands of one person, the president, but also said their "doors are open" and that he wanted to see the AK Parti proposal in written form.

Despite a flood of media reports about the constitutional work, no public text has yet been revealed about the exact wording of such a draft. But it is getting there at full speed; we might see it in a few weeks' time.