



TURKEY: GOVERNMENT UPDATE

May 6, 2016

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU TO RESIGN AS PRIME MINISTER

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) announced this week that it will hold an extraordinary party congress on May 22 to select a new party leader after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu failed to bridge their differences. The announcement came just days after Davutoğlu was stripped of his powers to appoint local party leaders and after a prominent journalist close to Erdoğan called for the removal of the Prime Minister (PM).

WHAT THIS MEANS

- **The government's agenda and stance toward foreign investors will remain unchanged.** All of the candidates rumored to be in consideration for the PM post are pro-West and pro-FDI, and are not expected to change the government's open stance toward foreign investors.
- **Erdoğan is in total control of the AKP and the government.** Davutoğlu's announced resignation confirms that Erdoğan will not tolerate any dissent within the party, even from his closest allies and officials he handpicked. It also confirms that Turkey is on a path to end parliamentary democracy and shift toward a presidential system, a process begun formally when direct, popular elections for the President were held in 2014.
- **There will be a fresh round of political reshuffling.** The new PM will likely purge the cabinet of Davutoğlu followers, including Deputy Prime Minister Lufti Elvan, the leader of the government's reform efforts and the main counterpoint for foreign investors in the cabinet. Most experts believe that the next prime minister will effectively act as head of a caretaker government. President Erdoğan has spoken of elections in 2019, at which point he will hope to establish a presidential system with changes to the current constitution.
- **The PM's announced resignation is unlikely to jeopardize the EU migrant deal.** Davutoğlu was the primary Turkish official responsible for negotiating the arrangement. The arrangement remains important to Turkey and the EU. The EU's vote on visa liberalization for Turkey, due in late June, should go forward unless relations worsen.
- **The AKP will now have a clear path to strip the immunity of Kurdish MPs.** Davutoğlu's announced resignation removes a final roadblock to the Grand Assembly voting on and passing a bill that strips Kurdish deputies of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) of their immunity. This puts into question 50 of the 54 seats held by the HDP. If these members are found guilty by the judiciary,

fresh regional elections will be held for those 50 seats, which will likely tilt in favor of the AKP given the current political environment.

- **Violence is likely to increase in the short-term.** The Kurdish PKK is expected to step up attacks against the government as retaliation to the sidelining of Kurdish MPs. Social media reactions have been mixed but emotional, with general concern with the erosion of democracy and the tightening control of Erdoğan, and opponents calling Davutoğlu's resignation a "palace coup."

THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER?

Davutoğlu has stated that he will not contest the AKP elections, which will open the door for Erdoğan to hand-pick a PM that poses little threat to his vision to shift Turkey to a presidential system. Bekir Bozdağ, the Minister of Justice, is thought to be the favorite for the PM's post.

Others who are mentioned as potential candidates include Berat Albayrak, the Minister of Energy and Erdoğan's son-in-law, Binali Yıldırım; the Minister of Transport, Maritime and Communication; Numan Kurtulmuş, a Deputy Prime Minister and government spokesperson; Mustafa Şentop, the Head of the Constitutional Commission in the Grand Assembly; Mehmet Müezzinoğlu, the Minister of Health; and Yalçın Akdoğan, a Deputy Prime Minister.

