

A new prime minister in Turkey

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On 29th May the Turkish parliament passed a vote of confidence for the new government formed by Binali Yildirim who had earlier been chosen as the leader of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Yildirim has replaced the former prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu who announced his resignation from the party leadership at the beginning of May and in consequence also resigned from his position as prime minister. The new prime minister has been an AKP member since the party's establishment in 2001. Yildirim used to be a transport, maritime and communications minister.

Commentary

- Davutoglu stepped down due to the long-term mounting tension between him and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In spite of holding a ceremonial function as president, Erdogan enjoys unquestioned authority in the AKP and in fact informally rules the state. Davutoglu, Turkey's second most popular politician, was dissatisfied with Erdogan's constant meddling in the government's work. He tried to build his own support base in the AKP as this would grant him political emancipation and would at least partially neutralise the president's influence on the state. However, Davutoglu's resignation has confirmed the unchallenged domination of Erdogan who considered Davutoglu to be insufficiently loyal and viewed him as a potential threat.
- The AKP has been putting forward the image of Binali Yildirim as an effective administrator and the public face of infrastructure projects he implemented as a former transport minister. Yildirim has been consistently building his reputation as a technocrat; he is also believed to be one of Erdogan's most trusted and loyal allies. He has been an active politician since the beginning of the AKP, even though the president has succeeded in removing other AKP founding members from politics. An additional factor which may have led to Yildirim's election as prime minister is his Kurdish descent. This will be emphasised in relations with Kurds, and the AKP will use it in order to regain Kurdish support while the fight against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), regarded as a terrorist organization, is continued. The prime minister confirmed this on 28th May during his meeting with voters in the largest Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in south east Turkey.
- The new prime minister's term in office will probably contribute to an acceleration of the consolidation of power in the president's hands. The most important task for the new government will now be to change the constitution and to establish a presidential regime which will institutionalise Erdogan's informal power. The president was not satisfied with

the pace with which this plan was being implemented. Yildirim, as an efficient administrator, will execute it. As the head of government he will limit his activity to executing Erdogan's plan and to being a politician focused more on effective management rather than building his own position and will not thus pose a threat to Erdogan. The policy towards the EU will not be substantially altered. Turkey's position in relations with the EU was strong even under the Davutoglu government. Unlike his predecessor Yildirim will not temper the president's strong rhetoric aimed at Brussels.