



# THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE AHEAD OF THE MAY 14, 2023 ELECTIONS

HAMİT EMRAH BERİŞ

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ELECTIONS**



## HAMİT EMRAH BERİŞ

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Hamit Emrah Beriş



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SIYASET, EKONOMİ VE TOPLUM ARAŞTIRMALARI VAKFI  
FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH  
مركز الدراسات السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية



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# ABSTRACT

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- Forming electoral alliances is one of several methods that political parties use in countries with proportional representation systems and national thresholds to maximize the number of parliamentary seats. Political parties formed electoral alliances in Türkiye in previous years, but the adoption of the ‘presidency’ system of government created a legal framework for such arrangements.
- Perpetrated by Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ) affiliates, the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye represented a turning point for the political system’s restoration. In 2017, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) Chairman Devlet Bahçeli called for the adoption of presidentialism – which made it possible for the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the MHP to reach an agreement on constitutional reform and jointly introduce a constitutional amendment bill.
- Following the transition to presidentialism, Türkiye put in place several mechanisms to allow political parties to collaborate – especially concerning elections. That arrangement resulted in the formation of several electoral alliances. Accordingly, the AK Party and the MHP built on their already strong relations, which dated back to the immediate aftermath of the failed coup, to form the People’s Alliance.
- Both parties endorsed Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s presidential bid in 2018 yet decided to contest the parliamentary election separately. The following year,



they made a specific arrangement for the municipal elections whereby one of the two parties withdrew from mayoral races to create an advantage for the other.

- The AK Party and the MHP have worked together harmoniously under the 'presidency' system of government. From 2018 onward, the People's Alliance's members have reached a total agreement on several issues including counterterrorism measures. Accordingly, the MHP wholeheartedly supported President Erdoğan's policies, and the AK Party was careful to receive the MHP's blessing at every turn. In this sense, the movement notified its partners before introducing draft laws at the Parliament or entering into negotiations with them.
- It is possible to argue that the idea of 'national and native' best summarizes the People's Alliance's general approach. Those concepts relate to promoting domestic industrial production as well as pursuing an independent foreign policy.
- At this time, the People's Alliance has enough potential votes to secure a first-round victory for its presidential candidate. In this regard, President Erdoğan may be re-elected in the first round as the alliance's candidate. In contrast, it appears that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the Nation Alliance's presidential candidate, does not find himself in a similar situation. Accordingly, one might argue that the opposition's strategy rests on denying Erdoğan a first-round victory and winning over voters that supported Muharrem İnce or Sinan Oğan in the first round. Ironically, it is indisputable that the incumbent would have an advantage over his opponent in the second round.
- It is possible to predict that the People's Alliance's members will continue to work together after the 2023 elections. The political faultlines in Türkiye as well as their agreement on various policy areas and a shared vision for the future suggest that the alliance will remain intact after 2023.

# INTRODUCTION

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Electoral alliances have been part and parcel of political life for a long time. Throughout history, political parties have been inclined to form alliances and contest elections together at different points in time and different countries.<sup>1</sup> Alliances may be intended to clear electoral thresholds or broaden one's popular base. Especially in countries with proportional representation systems, political parties tend to collaborate to maximize the number of their parliamentarians – since parliamentary seats are allocated according to certain mathematical calculations. It is a well-known fact that political parties in Türkiye have traditionally formed alliances to prepare for popular elections. However, such partnerships have historically taken advantage of loopholes due to the absence of a legal framework for electoral alliances. Following the 2017 transition to the 'presidency' system of government, the country created a legal framework for such partnerships. Accordingly, the ruling parties formed the People's Alliance and the opposition united under the Nation Alliance.

In truth, it is possible to trace the origins of the People's Alliance to the immediate aftermath of the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye. The Spirit of Yenikapı, which emerged after the failed coup, had no lasting impact on the Republican People's Party (CHP). In other words, the main opposition party refused to adopt a clear policy regarding the fight against the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ).

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<sup>1</sup> Nebi Miş and Hazal Duran, *Seçim İttifakları* [Electoral Alliances]. SETA Analiz, No: 232, Ankara, 2018.

In contrast, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) reached agreements in many different areas, including the need to combat the terrorist group. Another factor that contributed to that agreement was the termination of the Reconciliation Process and the renewed commitment to counterterrorism operations after the June 2015 parliamentary elections. That Meral Akşener and her allies decided to leave the MHP after unsuccessfully challenging Devlet Bahçeli, the party's long-time chairman, also facilitated the formation of the People's Alliance. Indeed, Akşener's newly formed Good Party (İP) proceeded to join forces with the CHP and became a member of the Nation Alliance.

As a matter of fact, experts have long posited that the AK Party and the MHP have similar popular bases. In this sense, both parties have traditionally enabled the periphery to penetrate the center. Indeed, the AK Party operated within the system for a long time without hesitating to criticize it, hence the defining role of the fight against tutelage in Erdoğan's brand of politics. In other words, the movement identified its main target as a group of powerholders embedded in the system aiming to prevent the population's will from shaping policy – as opposed to the Turkish state itself. Meanwhile, the government placed more emphasis on the state's survival (*devletin bekası*) against the backdrop of security operations that started in 2015 and gained further momentum after the July 15 coup attempt. It is noteworthy that the AK Party and the MHP crossed paths at that time. Specifically, those two movements adopted a more clearly anti-FETÖ stance that guided their cooperation. Furthermore, the MHP endorsed the AK Party government's steps to combat terrorist organizations.

It is possible to argue that one of the most significant 'concept pairs' that brought together the AK Party and the MHP was being 'national' and 'native.' That idea originated in one of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's campaign speeches ahead of the November 2015 parliamentary elections: "I expect you to send 550 native-national parliamentarians [to the Parliament] who shall work for this country with their bodies and hearts."<sup>2</sup> It gained popularity over time. Specifically, the aforementioned concepts made a direct reference to government policy serving Türkiye's and the Turkish people's interests. Furthermore, the international community's muted response to the July 15 coup attempt fueled outrage among Turks against foreign governments. The same goes for the popular perception in

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<sup>2</sup> This issue came up in President Erdoğan's speech at a campaign event in Istanbul on September 20, 2015. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/meclis-e-550-yerli-ve-milli-vekil-gonderin-2120514>

Türkiye that the country's counterterrorism operations do not receive adequate support from the international community. As such, the Turkish people's outrage over the West's opposition to the AK Party government (since the Gezi Park riots and the December 2013 judicial coup attempt) became more and more visible in the wake of the July 15 coup attempt. At the same time, tensions with the European Union (EU) and the increasingly obvious fact that Türkiye's membership bid had reached a dead end facilitated that backlash. It is important to note that Türkiye successfully promoted closer relations with the Turkic world during that period, renaming the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States as the Organization of Turkic States in 2021.<sup>3</sup>

The emergence of that attitude was closely linked to the rise of Islamophobia and xenophobia in Western countries over the last two decades. Accordingly, the West's hostile attitude toward foreigners and refugees, starting with Muslims, created a polarizing political climate.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the aforementioned approach was not limited to certain marginalized groups – which had been the case historically. Instead, centrist politicians increasingly endorsed such views, making it easier for the general population to embrace xenophobia. Populist political movements in different parts of the world resort to a discourse that calls for serious restrictions on the rights and liberties of religious or ethnic minorities within their country's borders. Such demands affect Muslim communities disproportionately. Moreover, the association of Islam with terrorist attacks in various countries has gradually fueled prejudice toward the followers of the faith and resulted in their exclusion. The de facto criminalization of Muslims by Western politicians, together with the association of deepening economic problems and rising unemployment with foreigners, naturally elicited a strong response from the Islamic world and, by extension, gave rise to anti-Westernism. Accordingly, such developments in the relevant countries and the changing political platforms of mainstream parties had a direct impact on Erdoğan's use of stronger language regarding the West.

At the same time, the AK Party and the MHP – the main components of the People's Alliance – have ostensibly agreed on a version of nationalism that promotes a synthesis of Türkiye's national and religious identities and treats that syn-

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.turkicstates.org/tr/turk-konseyi-hakkinda>

<sup>4</sup> Hamit Emrah Beriş, "Demokrasiye Neler Oluyor? Popülizm ve Otoriterleşme Tartışmalarına Bir Bakış" [What is up with democracy? An Analysis of the Populism and Authoritarianism Debates], *Liberal Düşünce*, (Vol. 24, No. 96, 2019).

thesis as an extension of its strategic, historical, economic, and cultural attributes.<sup>5</sup> In truth, the idea of 'national and native' that Erdoğan regularly highlights effectively summarizes this approach to nationalism. Specifically, this concept makes a clear reference to the culture of Turkish society. The People's Alliance adopted an approach to nationalism that was notably inclusive toward Muslim countries and communities, including the Turkic world – which created more common ground among its main components. It is possible to link that fact to the increasingly frequent use of certain concepts like *Kızılma* in Türkiye.

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<sup>5</sup> Burhanettin Duran, "Understanding the AK Party's Identity Politics: A Civilizational Discourse and its Limitations", *Insight Turkey* Vol. 15 / No 1 / 2013, pp. 91- 109, p. 94.

# THE 'PRESIDENCY' SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE

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Addressing the Nationalist Movement Party's parliamentary caucus on October 11, 2016, Bahçeli called for the adoption of presidentialism, citing "Türkiye's need for a new social contract."<sup>6</sup> In that speech, he argued that the introduction of popular presidential elections entailed a contradiction vis-a-vis the exercise of executive powers. The MHP leader thus asked the AK Party to introduce a set of constitutional amendments to create the legal framework for parliamentarism and address the aforementioned problem. He added that Alparslan Türkeş, his party's founder, had endorsed the presidential system of government<sup>7</sup> – meaning that the MHP had always favored presidentialism. To be clear, it is possible to argue that all stakeholders, including the AK Party, were surprised by Bahçeli's remarks. After all, President Erdoğan had previously and repeatedly raised that issue to no avail due to the lack of a parliamentary majority strong enough to amend the Constitution.

The AK Party immediately welcomed the MHP chairman's call for the adoption of presidentialism. On October 12, then-Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım accepted Bahçeli's offer in an address to the AK Party's provincial heads yet insisted on holding a constitutional referendum regardless of the

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<sup>6</sup> "Bahçeli'den Başkanlık Sistemi Çıkışı" [Bahçeli on the Presidential System], [https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/bahceliden-baskanlik-sistemi-cikisi,c1WeUw7SfUaRhJHd\\_4gJAQ#](https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/bahceliden-baskanlik-sistemi-cikisi,c1WeUw7SfUaRhJHd_4gJAQ#)

<sup>7</sup> Alparslan Türkeş, *Milli Doktrin Dokuz Işık* [Nine Lights: The National Doctrine], Kutluğ Publishing, İstanbul, 1976.

parliamentary majority's strength.<sup>8</sup> Technical deliberations on a constitutional amendment package for the adoption of presidentialism thus began. On March 16, 2017, 316 parliamentarians from the AK Party and the MHP jointly introduced a 21-point constitutional amendment bill to the Parliament's speaker.<sup>9</sup> Three proposed articles were removed from the original bill by the Parliamentary Commission on Constitutional Affairs, bringing down the total number of proposed changes to 18. The most striking aspect of the constitutional amendment bill was the proposed abolishment of the Prime Ministry and the popularly elected president serving as the country's chief executive legally and practically. In other words, the reform package laid the legal groundwork for the transition to the so-called presidential system *a la turca*. Furthermore, the constitutional amendment bill addressed various details related to the nomination of presidential candidates and the rules of presidential elections as well as the president's duties and mandate and legal accountability. At the same time, it reshaped the framework for the relations between the executive and legislative branches in line with the presidential system's requirements. Accordingly, the reform package prevented the legislature from 'checking' the executive branch with a vote of no confidence.<sup>10</sup>

Following deliberations, the Turkish Parliament's General Assembly adopted the constitutional amendment bill on January 20, 2017, with the support of 339 parliamentarians. Yet a constitutional referendum was required due to the lack of a qualified majority. In the end, 51.41 percent of the electorate voted in favor of constitutional reform on April 16, 2017,<sup>11</sup> to replace the parliamentary system with presidentialism. Under the new system, Türkiye ended the executive branch's duality and transferred all executive authority to the elected president. Accordingly, the president was tasked with appointing and dismissing Cabinet ministers, who became accountable to the president directly. It was also decided that the transition would be completed after the next elections – which were scheduled to take place in November 2019.

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8 "Başkanlık Teklifini Meclise Getireceğiz" [We will introduce the presidentialism bill at the Parliament], <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/baskanlik-teklifini-meclise-getirecegiz-2546528>

9 "Referandum ile Değişecek Anayasa Maddeleri" [The articles of the Constitution that shall be amended through the referendum], <https://www.ntv.com.tr/galeri/turkiye/referandum-ile-degisecek-anayasa-maddeleri-21-maddenin-tamami,oc7bS2xYZ0KeBEN94ml-NA/9odrxfdUP0uVGNTKgpnc9A>

10 For legal changes made during this process, see Nebi Miş and Burhanettin Duran (eds.) *Türkiye'de Siyasal Sistemin Dönüşümü ve Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sistemi* [The Transformation of the Political System in Türkiye and the Presidency System]. İstanbul, SETA Publishing, 2017.

11 <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/tr/16-nisan-2017-anayasa-degisikligi-halkoylamasi/5002>

The arguably least anticipated outcome of the presidential system's adoption was the emergence of electoral alliances among Türkiye's political parties. Since any presidential candidate was required to receive at least 50 percent of the popular vote, political parties were inclined to join forces. As mentioned above, the partnership between the AK Party and the MHP originated in the July 15 coup attempt's immediate aftermath. Yet, those movements did not form an alliance until February 20, 2018. On that day, the AK Party and the MHP announced that they were going to form the People's Alliance – which was named by the latter's chairman. The Great Union Party (BBP) subsequently joined the alliance, increasing the number of its members to three. On May 4, 2018, the official protocol of the People's Alliance was submitted to the Supreme Election Council (YSK) by the leaders of the AK Party and the MHP. Accordingly, the alliance they effectively formed on February 20 became official on that day.<sup>12</sup>

Against the backdrop of the alliance's emergence, Bahçeli called for early elections in an address to his party's parliamentary caucus on April 17, 2018. He argued that there were ongoing attempts to bog Türkiye down in a debate over the political system and warned that it would be difficult to maintain stability and balance until November 3, 2019 – the original date of the next elections:

It is not necessary to further postpone this matter. It is necessary to foil the plans of those trying to incite chaos. The time has come to end the tug-of-war and disagreements over [the timing of the next election]. We hereby make the following genuine offer to our political counterparts and our great nation – which, we hope, they shall debate: It would be most reasonable, most logical, most rational, and most democratic for the Turkish nation to cast their votes in a presidential and parliamentary election on August 26, 2018, the anniversary of the Victory at Manzikert and the Great Offensive, with the spirit of renewed triumph to teach the enemies of Turks and Türkiye the lesson they deserve.<sup>13</sup>

Erdoğan and Bahçeli met the following day and announced their decision to hold early elections on June 24, 2018 – even earlier than the MHP chairman's original proposal.

Meanwhile, the CHP, the Good Party, the Felicity Party (SP), and the Democratic Party (DP) announced on May 5, 2018, that they were going to contest

<sup>12</sup> Ali Aslan, *31 Mart 2019 Yerel Seçimlerinde Cumhuriyet İttifakı'nın Siyasal İletişim Stratejisi* [The People's Alliance's Political Communication Strategy in the March 31, 2019 Municipal Elections], SETA Analiz, Ankara, 2019, p.12.

<sup>13</sup> "Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi Genel Başkanı Sayın Devlet Bahçeli'nin TBMM Grup Toplantısında yapmış oldukları konuşma metni. 17 Nisan 2018" [The text of the address of Devlet Bahçeli, the Nationalist Movement Party chairman, to the parliamentary caucus. 17 April 2018." [https://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/mhp/4405/mhp/Milliyetci\\_Hareket\\_Partisi\\_Genel\\_Baskani\\_Sayin\\_Devlet\\_BAHCELI\\_nin\\_TBMM\\_Grup\\_Toplantisinde\\_yapmis\\_ olduklari\\_konusma\\_metni\\_17.html](https://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/mhp/4405/mhp/Milliyetci_Hareket_Partisi_Genel_Baskani_Sayin_Devlet_BAHCELI_nin_TBMM_Grup_Toplantisinde_yapmis_ olduklari_konusma_metni_17.html)



the following elections as the Nation Alliance. Yet, there was limited cooperation among the alliance's members in the 2018 elections. For example, the CHP, the Good Party, and the SP nominated their own presidential candidates. In contrast, they gained some ground with their alliance in the parliamentary races, as a small number of SP and DP members claimed parliamentary seats by running on the CHP ticket. Furthermore, the pooling of votes under the new electoral system made it possible for the CHP and the Good Party to win parliamentary races in certain provinces where they had previously failed to claim any seats. Specifically, the extra votes from the Good Party enabled the main opposition to claim parliamentary seats in Adıyaman, Elazığ, Karaman, Kırıkkale, Kırşehir, Kastamonu, Kütahya, Nevşehir, Şanlıurfa and Yozgat – where it had not won any parliamentary races before. Moreover, the party was able to claim an additional seat in Konya.

It is possible to argue that the Nation Alliance's first notable success came in the 2019 municipal elections since the alliance jointly endorsed mayoral candidates in many provinces to claim metropolitan districts like Istanbul, Ankara, Mersin, Adana, and Antalya. Although CHP members won each of those mayoral races, the Good Party was able to participate in decision-making processes thanks to a quota for its candidates in municipal councils. Likewise, some individuals, whom the Good Party supported, were appointed to bureaucratic posts at the relevant municipalities or various positions at municipality-owned enterprises.

The experience accumulated over the previous two election cycles encouraged the Nation Alliance to collaborate in the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections. Furthermore, Ahmet Davutoğlu and Ali Babacan, former AK Party members that respectively formed the DEVA and the Future Party (GP) following their resignations, also joined that alliance. The six members of the enlarged Nation Alliance proceeded to hold regular meetings to create a framework for cooperation and select a joint presidential candidate. In the end, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu received that alliance's endorsement. In exchange, several members of the four fringe parties were able to contest the parliamentary election on the CHP ticket. It is possible to say that approximately 20 politicians were assigned slots with a good chance of winning. Moreover, the Good Party was able to send some of its candidates to the CHP in certain electoral districts where it also participated in local races.

# THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE BEFORE THE 2018 ELECTIONS

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Following the 2017 adoption of the 'presidency' system of government, the frequency of contact between the AK Party and the MHP notably increased. The Turkish government's adoption of a security-oriented approach and renewed focus on counterterrorism operations after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt played an important role in that process. Ahead of the 2018 elections, both parties decided to participate in parliamentary races with their own candidates. Mustafa Destici, the chairman of the Great Union Party (BBP), in turn, contested the election on the AK Party ticket in Ankara. It is important to note that the AK Party and the MHP campaigned separately yet they treated each other with notable courtesy. In this regard, the executives and candidates of both parties refrained from taking contrary steps against each other at the grassroots level.

Ahead of the 2018 elections, the MHP published a booklet titled "The People's Alliance: The Nation's Reason" to explain the purpose and scope of its alliance with the AK Party.<sup>14</sup> The text criticized the 1982 Constitution over its tendency to trigger democratic crises and embodiment of "the spirit of the coup." The MHP's booklet identified 27 objectives for the People's Alliance. That list notably covered many different areas from national security, the economy, and foreign policy to the protection of national and spiritual values, citing those reasons to explain why

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14 Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, *Cumhur İttifakı Millet Aklı: Cumhurbaşkanlığı Hükümet Sistemi ve Cumhur İttifakı* [The People's Alliance, the Nation's Reason: The Presidency System of Government and the People's Alliance], [https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr\\_img/\\_mhp2007/kitaplar/cumhur\\_ittifaki\\_blumu\\_web.pdf](https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/_mhp2007/kitaplar/cumhur_ittifaki_blumu_web.pdf)

the MHP had joined that alliance. Furthermore, the movement made a special reference to the People's Alliance in its electoral documents.<sup>15</sup>

In turn, the People's Alliance collectively asked voters to support Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the incumbent and the AK Party's chairman, in the presidential race. A closer look at the outcome of the 2018 elections reveals that the political parties that formed the People's Alliance received 53.7 percent of the vote. The AK Party accounted for 42.6 percent, and the MHP contributed 11 percent. Altogether, the People's Alliance claimed 344 parliamentary seats (295 for the AK Party, 49 for the MHP). Meanwhile, President Erdoğan was re-elected with 52.6 percent. As such, it is possible to conclude that the incumbent received the vast majority of the alliance's votes. Whereas the turnout rate in the parliamentary and presidential elections was effectively the same, Erdoğan received approximately 1 percentage point less than the People's Alliance. In other words, a fraction of the alliance's supporters did not vote for Erdoğan – yet did not support any of his opponents either. It is important to recall that some observers speculated at the time that some MHP voters might be unwilling to support Erdoğan – which, they said, would take a toll on the presidential candidate's popularity. In the end, it became clear that such claims were misleading and the gap between the parliamentary election and the presidential race was extremely narrow.

Muharrem İnce, the runner-up, finished the 2018 presidential race with 30.6 percent of the vote. The remaining candidates, Selahattin Demirtaş and Meral Akşener performed worse than their respective political parties. One might argue that the relevant voters ended up supporting İnce, who outperformed the main opposition party by 8 points, attracting those voters. In this context, it is possible to say that the CHP candidate received the Nation Alliance's de facto endorsement despite the lack of an official announcement to that effect. Notwithstanding, CHP chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu made little effort to persuade his counterparts within the alliance to support İnce in 2018. As a matter of fact, İnce later accused his party of having failed to support him during the presidential race.<sup>16</sup> In the end, he resigned from the CHP over heartbreaks and differences of opinion to form the Homeland Party (MP).<sup>17</sup>

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15 Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, *Milli Diriliş Kutlu Yükseliş: 24 Haziran 2018 Milletvekili Genel Seçimi Seçim Beyannamesi* [National Revival, Blessed Rise: Election Manifesto for the June 24, 2018 Parliamentary Elections], Ankara, 2018.

16 "Muharrem İnce'den CHP'ye sert sözler: Sırtımdan hançerlediler" [Muharrem İnce's strong critique of CHP: They stabbed me in the back], <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/muharrem-ince-den-chp-ye-sert-sozler-sirtimdan-hancerlediler-41958819>

17 Metin Özkan, "Muhalefete Muhalefet: Memleket Partisi" [Opposing the Opposition: the Homeland Party], *Kriter*, October 2022, Vol. 7, No. 72.

Presidential Election Results (Including Voters Abroad and Votes Cast at Border Crossings) <sup>18</sup>	
Registered voters	59,367,469
Voters who participated	51,197,959
Valid votes	50,068,627
Invalid votes	1,129,332
Turnout rate	86.24%

Candidate	Domestic Voters	Overseas Voters	Border Crossings	Total	Share
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	25,436,238	807,974	86,611	26,330,823	52.59%
Muharrem İnce	14,951,788	328,934	59,599	15,340,321	30.64%
Selahattin Demirtaş	4,039,390	157,111	9,293	4,205,794	8.40%
Meral Akşener	3,603,858	36,896	8,276	3,649,030	7.29%
Temel Karamollaoğlu	434,882	7,730	1,092	443,704	0.89%
Doğu Perinçek	95,928	2,573	454	98,955	0.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,562,084</b>	<b>1,341,218</b>	<b>165,325</b>	<b>50,068,627</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Parliamentary Election Results (Including Overseas Voters and Border Crossings)	
Registered voters	59,367,469
Participating voters	51,189,444
Valid votes	50,137,175
Invalid votes	1,052,269
Turnout rate	86.22%

Party	Domestic Votes	Overseas Votes	Total	Share	Parliamentarians
AK Party	20,559,732	778,961	21,338,693	42.56%	295
MHP	5,444,728	120,603	5,565,331	11.10%	49
<b>People's Alliance</b>	<b>26,004,460</b>	<b>899,564</b>	<b>26,904,024</b>	<b>53.66%</b>	<b>344</b>
CHP	11,086,897	267,293	11,354,190	22.65%	146
Felicity Party	660,749	11,390	672,139	1.34%	0
Good Party	4,932,510	60,969	4,993,479	9.96%	43
<b>Nation Alliance</b>	<b>16,140,156</b>	<b>339,652</b>	<b>16,479,808</b>	<b>33.95%</b>	<b>189</b>
Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)	5,606,622	260,680	5,867,302	11.70%	67
Free Cause Party (HÜDA-PAR)	153,649	1,890	155,539	0.31%	0
Motherland Party	110,849	4,023	114,872	0.23%	0
Independents	75,630	75,630		0.15%	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,631,366</b>	<b>1,505,809</b>	<b>50,137,175</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>600</b>

18 <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/tr/24-haziran-2018-secimleri/77536>



## THE PROTOCOL OF THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE FOR THE 2018 GENERAL ELECTION<sup>19</sup>

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) have decided to participate in the June 24, 2018, parliamentary election as the People's Alliance in accordance with Article 12a of Law No. 2839 and the hereby protocol.

The People's Alliance aims for the consolidation of the 'presidency' system of government, together with all its institutions and rules, within the next five years and the strengthening and stability of Parliament by subscribing to an approach that places Türkiye's independence and future above all else. Supporting the People's Alliance with the same approach, the Great Union Party (BBP) is another part of this alliance.

The AK Party and the MHP, which answered the nation's call to reach an agreement and crown that agreement with the People's Alliance, shall contest the election as the People's Alliance whilst preserving their identities as separate political parties and submitting separate parliamentary candidate lists per the Law on the Election of Parliamentarians and other laws.

### II

H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will be the People's Alliance's joint candidate in the presidential election to be held on June 24. The People's Alliance shall strive for H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's election as president under the new system of government with vast popular support.

### III

Essentially, the People's Alliance emerged in the wake of the coup and occupation that FETÖ attempted to perpetrate on July 15, 2016, as the natural outcome of the native and national stand against attacks targeting Türkiye.

After all, July 15, 2016, represented a turning point and a fresh start for our country in every sense of the word. The 'national consensus' that manifested itself in Yenikapı on August 7, 2016, was reinforced with the adoption of the new system of government by the people in the April 16, 2017 referendum to become a 'national consciousness' and this 'moral and political agreement' that puts national survival first became tangible with the formation of the People's Alliance ahead of the June 24, 2018 elections.

<sup>19</sup>"Cumhur İttifakı Protokolü'nün tam metni" [Full text of the protocol of the People's Alliance], <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/cumhur-ittifaki-protokolu-nun-tam-metni-2662293>



The People's Alliance is not just an electoral alliance but a national and moral stand against all hostile attempts, homegrown and foreign alike, targeting Türkiye and a historic union that shall remain intact within that framework.

#### IV

The People's Alliance embodies the commitment to meeting the target of "exceeding the level of contemporary civilization" – which was set by Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, our Republic's founder – and the will to ensure the survival of the Republic of Türkiye, a national and unitary state, and the Turkish nation forever. The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) thus took action with the spirit of national revival at Yenikapı and established a strong system of government with a constitutional amendment that reinforced the state and the national will. Accordingly, a new political process has started in Türkiye and there shall be no return.

The People's Alliance remains committed to taking a common stand against attacks targeting Türkiye, disregarding party interests and everyday political calculations, and all sorts of activities intended to weaken Türkiye and make it vulnerable in the face of international operations.

With that determination and cooperation, our alliance shall not only meet the 2023 targets to make Türkiye a regional power and leading country but also transform Türkiye – which has been the safeguard of world peace and justice for the sake of Allah's words and the sole source of hope for the Islamic and all oppressed nations – into a global power and lay the groundwork for the 2053 and 2071 visions.

The presidential and parliamentary elections that will take place on June 24 bear vital importance for Türkiye. The June 24 elections will enable voters to deliver a strong response to the systematic attacks targeting Türkiye as well as liberate our country from all yokes, as the new system of government, which shall permanently stop such assaults and carry Türkiye into a bright future, shall enter into force completely. We believe that our nation will side with the People's Alliance – which aims to build a great and powerful Türkiye with transparent, independent, and sincere intentions devoid of corrupted calculations – on June 24.

The People's Alliance's path is clear and Türkiye's horizon is bright. It is us that will make an effort and Allah that shall reward it.



# THE 2019 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

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It is important to stress that minor crises erupted within the People's Alliance at different points in time. The initial crisis occurred before the 2019 municipal elections over the AK Party's refusal to grant a general amnesty at the MHP's request. In the end, that problem effectively resolved itself as many detainees and convicts were temporarily released from prison during the coronavirus pandemic.

The second crisis erupted over the Council of State canceling an administrative measure pertaining to the recitation of the student oath at elementary schools. Whereas the AK Party and Erdoğan accused the council of exceeding its mandate, the MHP leadership celebrated the decision. Despite experiencing some tensions at the time, the two parties found common ground against the backdrop of the HDP's decision to support the Nation Alliance in the municipal elections.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, they agreed to support each other's candidates in electoral districts where one of them would not contest the election.

However, the cooperation among the People's Alliance members in the 2019 municipal elections was largely limited to a handful of metropolitan districts. Whereas the MHP did not join mayoral races in Ankara, Istanbul, İzmir, and Antalya, the AK Party decided not to field candidates in the MHP-controlled provinces of Adana, Mersin, and Manisa. The two movements also joined forces in

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20 Nebi Miş et al., *2018'de Siyaset* [Politics in 2018], SETA Publishing, Ankara, 2018, <https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2018/12/Siyaset.pdf>, p.15.



certain counties within the relevant metropolitan areas by agreeing to support each other in some districts. In contrast, they fielded candidates individually in provinces that did not fall into the category of metropolitan areas and competed against each other. According to the election results, the municipalities of Çankırı, Erzincan, Bayburt, Amasya, Kastamonu, Karaman, and Kütahya moved from the AK Party to the MHP.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, there was a notable increase in the number of the latter's mayors. Meanwhile, the CHP proved successful in Adana and Mersin – southern provinces previously controlled by the MHP, which nominated the incumbent mayor, Hüseyin Sözlü, in Adana and fielded a new candidate in Mersin. Yet the HDP and the Good Party endorsed the CHP candidate in both provinces to hand them over to the main opposition party. In contrast, the MHP maintained control of the Manisa metropolitan municipality.

An important point is that competing against each other did not fuel tensions between the two members of the People's Alliance. In this regard, there was no escalation over the loss of municipalities to each other or opposition parties. Furthermore, members of the People's Alliance did not allow any politicians to transfer from one party to the other during or after the local elections. There was no transfer of mayoral candidates or incumbents either. That is how the People's Alliance prevented the potential push to control a few more municipalities from creating discord within its ranks.

Mayoral Election Results <sup>22</sup>	
Registered voters	53,169,212
Participating voters	44,860,777
Valid votes	43,164,371
Invalid votes	84.37%
Number of mayors elected	1,355

21 Nebi Miş and Hazal Duran, "İttifaktan Blok Siyasetine 31 Mart Yerel Seçimleri" [The March 31 Municipal Elections: From Alliances to Bloc Politics], *Adam Akademi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 9 (2), pp.363-393, p.381.

22 <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/2019MahalliIdareler/KesinSecimSonuclari/2019Mahalli-Liste-3.pdf>

Party	Valid Votes		Mayoral Races Won	
	Number	Share (%)	Number	Share (%)
AK Party	18,368,421	42.55	742	54.76
MHP	3,211,038	7.44	233	17.20
BBP	685,793	1.59	10	0.74
<b>People's Alliance</b>	<b>22,265,252</b>	<b>51.58</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>72.46</b>
CHP	12,868,053	29.81	240	17.71
Good Party	3,351,438	37.76	24	1.77
Felicity Party	1,256,235	2.91	21	1.55
<b>Nation Alliance</b>	<b>17,478,726</b>	<b>39.67</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>21.03</b>
HDP	1,951,185	14.52	57	4.21

\* The remaining political parties and candidates have been deliberately disregarded.



# THE PEOPLE’S ALLIANCE UNDER THE ‘PRESIDENCY’ SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

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The 2018 presidential election marked the beginning of a new era in Türkiye, as the ‘presidency’ system of government, which was adopted in 2017, became activated. Over time, that development encouraged closer cooperation among the People’s Alliance members. In other words, tensions between AK Party and MHP politicians, which were rooted in past disagreements, gradually de-escalated and the two movements built stronger relations nationwide and at the grassroots level.

In 2018, the Parliament passed new legislation<sup>23</sup> to make it legal for political parties to form electoral alliances. At the same time, it was established that politicians, whose political parties did not contest a given election, would be eligible to run for office on another party’s ticket. It is important to recall that political parties used to take advantage of various loopholes to join forces despite the Parliamentary Election Law imposing a ban on electoral alliances. Accordingly, the 2018 legislation created a legal framework for alliances to collaborate in elections. As a matter of fact, contesting elections as part of an alliance ended up creating certain advantages for the relevant parties. For example, it became possible to transfer votes among alliance members while calculating the number of parliamentarians in a given electoral district. In this sense, the ‘leftover

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23 “Seçimlerin Temel Hükümleri ve Seçmen Kütükleri Hakkında Kanun ile Bazı Kanunlarda Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Kanun” [The Law on the Amendment of the Law on the Fundamental Rules of Elections and Voters Registries and Some Laws] Law No. 7102, Adopted: March 13, 2018, Published in the Official Gazette: March 16, 2018, No 30362.

vote' system enabled parties that had joined an alliance to snatch the final parliamentary seat (typically) that they would not have been able to claim under the original rules.

It is possible to argue that President Erdoğan's policies have rested on two axes since 2018. Primarily, his administration attempted to take advantage of new technological opportunities to boost domestic and indigenous production. After coming to power in late 2002, the AK Party devoted most of its energy to addressing Türkiye's basic infrastructural problems for a long time. Accordingly, successive governments invested in highways, expressways, high-speed trains, and energy production facilities. Megaprojects like the Yavuz Sultan Selim, Osmaniye, and 1915 Çanakkale bridges and Istanbul Airport largely solved infrastructure-related issues. During that period, economic growth relied on major public investments and, particularly, by relying on the construction industry. The Turkish government, however, has attached greater importance to unmanned aerial vehicles, the indigenous automobile project, and defense products since 2018. Furthermore, the country has been actively searching for energy reserves in an attempt to curb its energy imports – the main source of its current account deficit. It took decisive steps to exploit natural gas reserves in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean as well as petroleum reserves in Türkiye's southeastern provinces. As such, there were attempts to diversify investments and job creation in an attempt to avoid the middle-income trap. The government complemented that process with the 'national-native' discourse. It is important to appreciate the political and economic aspects of that term – which refers to promoting domestic production in key areas from an economic standpoint and an independent posture in the international arena within the political context.

Meanwhile, one might argue that global developments indirectly supported the People's Alliance's policies. The resurgence of terrorism, irregular migration, and cross-border crimes worldwide encouraged states to pursue more security-oriented policies compared to the recent past. Furthermore, Russia's attempts to expand by invading Crimea and, more recently, attacking Ukraine raised questions about the reliability of international cooperation mechanisms, including the United Nations (UN) and NATO. Having sealed their borders during the coronavirus pandemic in an attempt to shelter their citizens, states effectively stopped cooperating on a global scale – including the delivery of humanitarian aid in the initial days and weeks of the pandemic. Accordingly, Türkiye's emphasis on the importance of 'national' and 'native' was notably in sync with global trends.

Under the post-2018 circumstances, the People's Alliance's members began to work even more closely. Although President Erdoğan did not appoint any MHP members to the Cabinet, Bahçeli ostensibly made no such request. As a matter of fact, the MHP chairman reportedly turned down several offers to appoint his party's members as ministers. That point is particularly striking since the Nation Alliance's members engaged in lengthy negotiations over the allocation of parliamentary seats ahead of the 2023 elections in Türkiye. It is possible to argue that the MHP leader refrained from holding talks regarding the appointment of MHP-affiliated ministers because he worried that such negotiations might hurt their alliance's reputation. One might add that Bahçeli's attitude made it more difficult for the opposition to criticize the People's Alliance. In other words, the MHP thwarted any attempt by the opposition to tarnish its reputation by making no requests in exchange for its support to the AK Party. Accordingly, critics have instead accused the AK Party of having aligned itself with the MHP's values.



# THE POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS OF ELECTORAL ALLIANCES

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The politics of alliances appear to give voters certain advantages by enabling them to move between different political parties. Accordingly, one might argue that it has become easier for any given voter to support another member of an electoral alliance due to their unhappiness with their original party's policies or local candidates. In this sense, alliances enable voters to 'punish' their party's leadership without having to reject their identity or ideology altogether. It is possible to argue that such changes occur more frequently in municipal elections – where there are countless examples of voters distancing themselves from their top choice and even their political views. The introduction of electoral alliances ostensibly facilitates such changes.

It is necessary to appreciate that the majority of electoral alliances promote reconciliation as opposed to polarization – despite what many seem to believe. Specifically, alliances offer voters more alternatives and the emergence of additional options tends to enable the electorate to create different combinations in simultaneous elections. In other words, any given voter may find an alternative to their original party, with which they may be frustrated for various reasons, without having to drift too far away from their political views. Another advantage that this new situation entailed was that Parliament became more representative of Turkish society. Indeed, many fringe parties, which would have been unable to claim any parliamentary seats due to the national threshold, gained



opportunities to send their representatives to the National Assembly by joining electoral alliances.<sup>24</sup>

That the 'presidency' system of government entailed the requirement for any presidential candidate to receive at least 50 percent of the popular vote made electoral alliances effectively mandatory. In truth, one might argue that this development had a positive impact on the country's democratic culture. It is important to stress that there is a significant difference between electoral alliances and coalition governments under the parliamentary system. Specifically, political parties form coalitions to address the perfectly concrete problem of forming a government. In contrast, alliances emerge out of a commitment by multiple parties, which agree on a set of values, to work together as part of their preparations for an election. The People's Alliance perfectly embodies that situation. However, the Nation Alliance brings together many different parties with no common ground and merely aims to remove President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from power. Accordingly, the alliance's members are compelled to drift away from their founding principles.

It is possible to observe that electoral alliances tend to influence voter mobilization and the turnout rate positively around the world. However, one could argue that some voters might not participate in a given election due to their frustration with their preferred party's decision to join a certain alliance. Needless to say, the turnout rate in Türkiye has traditionally been higher than in many countries worldwide. Since the introduction of the electoral alliances, the turnout rate remained consistently above 85 percent. There is reason to believe that the turnout rate might exceed the 2018 levels in 2023.

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24 Nebi Miş, "Yeni Siyasal Sistemin İlk Seçimleri ve Sonuçlarının Karşılaştırmalı Analizi" [A Comparative Analysis of the First Election Under the New System and its Results], *Muhafazakâr Düşünce*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 2018, p.330.

# THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE'S FEATURES

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The defining feature of the People's Alliance is its ability to refrain from limiting its perspective to elections. Unlike the Nation Alliance, it did not attempt to maximize its number of mayors or parliamentarians by collaborating in elections. Notwithstanding their partial cooperation in the 2019 municipal elections, the People's Alliance's members have tended to contest elections separately – including municipal council races, and it did not produce a common list of parliamentary candidates in 2023 either. Indeed, its election-related collaborations have been limited to endorsing Erdoğan's presidential bid. The same goes for the BBP and the New Welfare Party (YRP), although the AK Party did assign the leaders of the Democratic Left Party (DSP) and HÜDA-PAR to 'safe' slots in its candidate lists. Within the context of the alliance's general practice, however, that move represented an exception as its two main components, the AK Party and the MHP, decided to field their own candidates. For the record, the two movements remained committed to that principle despite mathematical calculations. Specifically, experts had been speculating whether the AK Party and the MHP could win more parliamentary seats by endorsing the same group of candidates in certain provinces; yet, Bahçeli, clearly ruled out the possibility of such collaborations from the very beginning.

The People's Alliance has identified the state's survival and national unity as its main tenets. In this regard, the fight against terrorist organizations and other national security matters have been prominent items on its agenda – which

promoted some level of consistency and singularity in its political discourse. It is possible to observe that counterterrorism operations made their mark on Türkiye's national security policy in recent years. The aforementioned process has not been exclusively related to domestic operations either. Instead, the PKK's Syrian branch and its armed wing, PYD and YPG, have been attempting to exploit the power vacuum in northern Syria to carve out an autonomous zone for themselves. Accordingly, a large number of PKK militants in northern Iraq and Türkiye were deployed to Syria to support the PYD/YPG fighters. Hence Türkiye's need to carry out cross-border security operations within Syria's borders to ensure its own safety. Whereas the AK Party and the MHP have been in complete agreement regarding that mission, the Nation Alliance has kept notably silent.

Another area in which the alliance's members remain in complete agreement has been foreign policy. In their view, Türkiye should pursue an independent policy, without engaging with any major power, by taking strategically significant steps. It is possible to argue that this policy consists of multiple components. First of all, the development of an independent policy requires the country to become a regional and, subsequently, global player. Türkiye has taken the initiative in many fields, including the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine war, in recent years and transformed itself into a prominent stakeholder in longstanding power relations. It goes without saying that such diplomatic moves must be complemented with military might. In other words, soft power clearly carves out some room for states in the diplomatic arena. In the absence of other types of power to complement it, however, strategic steps would arguably become ineffective. It is possible to observe that Türkiye's military deterrent stems from its overseas operations as well as the rapid progress of its defense industry. Certainly, the country has been focusing on high-tech weapons and equipment in recent years – after developing its indigenous rifle, military transport vehicles, and tanks. Among others, the progress that Baykar, Türkiye's national brand in the unmanned aerial vehicles field, made over time as well as the increasing share of indigenous components in the country's warplanes and vessels have clearly consolidated its diplomatic ambitions. Indeed, Türkiye has already ceased to be dependent on foreign suppliers in many areas of the defense industry – with President Erdoğan announcing that the country's defense production was approximately 80 percent indigenous. Those developments positively influenced Ankara's relations with the Turkic world, starting with Azerbaijan. Specifically, Türkiye's technological capabilities played a significant role in Azerbaijan's military operation to reclaim the occupied Karabakh region.

Indeed, the strengthening relations between the two countries gradually generated meaningful content to back up the famous motto: “One nation, two states.” It was possible to observe that this foreign policy approach encouraged the MHP to strengthen its commitment to the People’s Alliance.

At the same time, the People’s Alliance did not act like a coalition and the MHP leadership made no demands (such as Cabinet-level appointments) in exchange for supporting President Erdoğan almost across the board. By contrast, the Nation Alliance has been negotiating terms for the allocation of Cabinet seats before winning the election. It is possible to say that the MHP’s attitude represented an advantage for itself and the AK Party government. Accordingly, the AK Party had a lot of room for maneuvering and was able to make decisions in line with its policy preferences – as opposed to bargaining. Obviously, the AK Party was largely careful not to offend the MHP in the process. Its statements and actions did not contradict the MHP’s views and shared information with its alliance partner. Still, it was always Erdoğan that made the final decisions. One might argue that this arrangement represented an advantage for the MHP leadership as well since that movement did not have to bear direct responsibility for the AK Party government’s actions. Nonetheless, it did not act pragmatically and refrained from strongly criticizing the government’s policies, despite the possibility of scoring political points, to make constructive statements instead. Meanwhile, the AK Party took into consideration the MHP’s priorities in decision-making processes. In other words, the governing party largely refrained from making statements or taking steps that might frustrate the MHP leadership. In certain cases, in turn, the AK Party was careful to brief Bahçeli in advance. The almost weekly meetings between Erdoğan and Bahçeli –especially as the election approached – arguably represented an important component of that process. They allowed the alliance members to show the public that they were in complete agreement on fundamental issues. The alliance also prevented any disagreements at the level of parliamentary commissions or the General Assembly as the AK Party consulted the MHP before introducing bills.

The People’s Alliance rested on Erdoğan’s presidential bid for the duration of his time in office. There was already no debate on that issue within the AK Party; however, the MHP leadership adopted a clear stance toward Erdoğan’s candidacy. As a matter of fact, the MHP endorsed him early on with the following motto: “The candidate has been determined and the choice is clear.” At the same time, MHP politicians have strongly criticized the opposition’s approach to the coun-

try's pressing problems – which might allow one to conclude that they agreed with the government's domestic and foreign policies and even viewed themselves as part of the implementation process. In other words, the movement did not treat any temporary issues as an opportunity to expand its popular base. Quite the contrary, Bahçeli expressed his total support for Erdoğan at critical junctions, stopping any potential disagreement from his party's ranks immediately.

Whereas the Nation Alliance's members could not develop a common discourse regarding Türkiye's pressing problems, the People's Alliance had a shared vision – a significant advantage. Truly, the former refrained from adopting a clear stance regarding many issues, including the Syrian civil war, the refugee problem, counterterrorism operations, and relations with Muslim nations and the West, due to disagreements among its components. In contrast, the People's Alliance displayed unity in all relevant policy areas. As a matter of fact, the MHP's chairman threw his weight behind the president even in the most controversial areas. For example, Bahçeli promptly endorsed Erdoğan's uncompromising opposition to interest rate hikes amid the fight against inflation and currency shocks: "Türkiye must liberate itself from the yoke of interest. Our country has the highest interest rates in Europe. From our perspective, the government's interest policy is correct."<sup>25</sup> The opposition had hoped that such issues would drive a wedge among the People's Alliance members, but Bahçeli reiterated his support for the government's economic policy ahead of the 2023 elections.<sup>26</sup>

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25 "Bahçeli: Hükümetin izlediği ekonomi politikası doğrudur" [Bahçeli: The government is implementing the right economic policy], <https://www.dha.com.tr/politika/bahceli-hukümetin-izlediği-ekonomi-politikasi-dogrudur-1861816>. For the full text of the relevant speech, see [https://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/mhp/4912/mhp/Milliyetci\\_Hareket\\_Partisi\\_Genel\\_Baskani\\_Sayin\\_Devlet\\_BAHCELI\\_nin\\_TBMM\\_Grup\\_Toplantisinda\\_yapmis\\_ olduklari\\_konusma\\_metni\\_23.html](https://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/mhp/4912/mhp/Milliyetci_Hareket_Partisi_Genel_Baskani_Sayin_Devlet_BAHCELI_nin_TBMM_Grup_Toplantisinda_yapmis_ olduklari_konusma_metni_23.html)

26 "Hiç kimse merak etmesin, enflasyon çıktığı gibi inecektir, hayat pahalılığı son bulacaktır. Tek çare Cumhur İttifakı'dır. Çağrımız birliğe ve kardeşliğedir" [Let there be no worries: the inflation rate shall decrease as it increased. The cost of living will come down. The People's Alliance is the only solution. We call for unity and fraternity.], <https://www.mynet.com/bahceli-den-enflasyon-ve-hayat-pahaliligi-aciklamasi-110107118449>

# THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE AHEAD OF THE 2023 ELECTIONS

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With the 2023 elections approaching, it was a well-known fact that the People's Alliance would continue to work together. Still, there were some discussions over the scope of the cooperation between the relevant political parties. On the table were two options: the AK Party and the MHP fielding a single group of candidates jointly, or both parties contesting parliamentary races separately. Furthermore, it was possible to use both methods by producing a joint candidate list in select electoral districts. It is important to note that legal changes adopted in 2022 had largely eliminated the benefits of joining an electoral alliance – with the notable exception of clearing the national threshold more easily. The abolishment of the practice of combining votes effectively encouraged alliance partners to treat each other as competitors in individual districts. As such, nominating candidates jointly would have ruled out that type of competition. Bahçeli, however, promptly rejected such plans and announced that his party would contest the parliamentary election individually.

Since the very beginning, the AK Party, the MHP, and the BBP have reiterated their intention to work together in the 2023 elections. With the elections approaching, other political parties expressed their interest in joining that alliance. The ultimate decision was reached shortly before the submission of candidate lists to the Supreme Election Council to admit the New Welfare Party and the Democratic Left Party. Under that agreement, the former movement's chairman, Fatih Erbakan, withdrew from the presidential race and endorsed

Erdoğan.<sup>27</sup> The New Welfare Party's decision to join the People's Alliance made it possible for that alliance to receive the full support of the National Outlook base and become more appealing to conservative voters.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the New Welfare Party benefited from joining that alliance by giving that movement an advantage over the Felicity Party, which lost touch with its traditional base by joining the Nation Alliance.

Observers argued, especially shortly before the candidate list submission deadline, that the AK Party and the MHP would be able to claim more parliamentary seats by contesting the parliamentary election with a joint candidate list. As a matter of fact, some media outlets reported that the AK Party approached the MHP with a proposal along those lines.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the CHP and the Good Party jointly endorsed parliamentary candidates in some provinces despite contesting the parliamentary election separately on the national level. In the end, the AK Party and the MHP decided to participate in parliamentary races individually. Furthermore, they decided not to field candidates jointly in some districts where they have traditionally been able to win fewer parliamentary races. Two remaining members of the People's Alliance, the BBP, and the New Welfare Party, also opted for that plan. Meanwhile, the Democratic Left Party's chairman, Önder Akşakal, and two other DSP politicians were included in the AK Party's candidate lists.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, a few members of HÜDA-PAR, which endorsed Erdoğan's presidential bid without joining the People's Alliance, were also nominated by the AK Party.<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that the MHP's reservations about HÜDA-PAR resulted in that party not becoming an official member of the ruling alliance. In this regard, the alliance notably omitted HÜDA-PAR in the official protocol submitted to the Supreme Election Council.

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27 "Yeniden Refah Partisi Cumhur İttifakı'nda (Fatih Erbakan adaylıktan çekildi)" [The New Welfare Party Joins the People's Alliance (Fatih Erbakan forfeits presidential race)], <https://www.ntv.com.tr/2023-secim/yeniden-refah-partisi-cumhur-ittifakinda-fatih-erbakan-adayliktan-cekildi,QhBhwU3Bck6t10DGxnADMg>

28 Burhanettin Duran, "İttifakların Hâli ve Geleceği," [The State and Future of Alliances] *Sabah*, 28 March 2023.

29 "Nefes nefes ortak liste diplomasisi" [The breathtaking diplomacy for common candidate lists], *Hürriyet*, 7 April 2023.

30 "Son dakika sürprizi! Yeniden Refah da Cumhur İttifakı'nda" [Last-minute surprise! New Welfare Joins the People's Alliance], <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/son-dakika-surprizi-yeniden-refah-da-cumhur-ittifakinda-42239999>

31 "HÜDA PAR'lı 4 isim AK Parti milletvekili listesinde yer aldı" [Four Hüdapar members included in the AK Party's parliamentary candidate list], <https://www.yenisafak.com/huda-parli-isimler-nereden-aday-gosterildi-h-4522053>



## PROTOCOL OF THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE<sup>32</sup>

### FORMATION, PRINCIPLES AND VISION

The People's Alliance emerged in the wake of FETÖ's coup and occupation attempt on July 15, 2016, as the natural outcome of the native and national stance against attacks targeting Türkiye. July 15, 2016, was a turning point and a fresh start for our country in every sense of the word. The 'national consensus' that emerged in Yenikapı on August 7, 2016, was consolidated by the adoption of a new system of government by our nation in the April 16, 2017 referendum to transform into 'national consciousness' and become tangible with the 'moral and political agreement' based on national survival with the formation of the People's Alliance ahead of the June 24, 2018 elections.

### POSITIVE HISTORIC STEPS

The June 24, 2018, election ended with the People's Alliance's victory, and the era of the 'presidency' system of government began practically and officially on July 9, 2018, as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took the oath of office at the Grand National Assembly.

The People's Alliance collectively delivered important services to our country and nation during the Parliament's 27<sup>th</sup> term, as Türkiye became one of the countries that positively distinguished themselves despite global problems and the ring of fire around us.

The People's Alliance collectively took historic and long-anticipated steps like reopening the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque to worshippers, liberating Karabakh from Armenia's occupation, and reopening the closed city of Maraş in Cyprus.

### Ensuring the State's Survival and the Nation's Wellbeing

Major transportation and energy projects, which shall make significant contributions to Türkiye's riches, have been completed and natural gas, which was discovered in the Black Sea, is about to be delivered to our nation. We dealt with the coronavirus pandemic in a way that the entire world envied, as Türkiye became the center of diplomacy and made history in the defense industry and counterterrorism. Policies have been implemented to ensure the state's survival and the na-

<sup>32</sup> "YSK'ya sunulan Cumhur İttifakı protokolü" [The People's Alliance's protocol as submitted to the Election Authority], <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/yskya-sunulan-cumhur-ittifaki-protokolu-755860.html>



tion's wellbeing and many structural changes have been made that various social groups had been expecting.

#### Our Priority Is to Heal the Wounds of the Earthquake

Türkiye experienced one of the world's most devastating earthquakes on February 6, 2023. The Kahramanmaraş-based earthquakes, dubbed the 'disaster of the century,' resulted in thousands of deaths and caused devastation in a vast area covering 11 provinces.

Our state has been in the disaster zone with all its institutions since the earthquake. All needs are being addressed. The construction of permanent homes, the most important necessity, has started and residences will be delivered to the relevant citizens within one year.

As the People's Alliance, our priority ahead of this election is to heal the wounds of the earthquake and to complete the process of rebuilding and restoration.

At the same time, we are determined to take all necessary precautions against all disasters with regard to risk management and disaster management and, in this context, address the shortcomings of regulations and increase our technological, human, and institutional capacity.

The People's Alliance shall remain the safeguard of the righteous and side with what is right, and safeguard the flawless exercise of fundamental rights and liberties, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

#### Building Türkiye as the Leading Country

The People's Alliance is not just an electoral alliance but a national and moral stand against hostile homegrown and foreign initiatives against Türkiye and, in this context, a historic union.

The People's Alliance represents our will to meet the target of "exceeding the level of contemporary civilization" that Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, our Republic's founder, set and our commitment to ensure the survival of the Republic of Türkiye, a national and unitary state, and the Turkish nation forever.

The People's Alliance aims to establish a strong and stable parliament with an approach that places Türkiye's independence and future above all else and to ensure the consolidation of the 'presidency' system of government with all its institutions and rules, starting with the drafting of a new constitution and primarily

striving to facilitate Türkiye's emergence as a global power and 'leading country' by continuing its rise.

#### The 2053 and 2071 Visions

Our alliance shall transform Türkiye – the safeguard of world peace and justice and the sole source of hope for the Islamic world and all oppressed nations – into a global power and lay the groundwork for the 2053 and 2071 visions.

The People's Alliance charts the course toward Türkiye as a powerful and influential nation defining the global balance of power in the Republic's new century. Our vision of 'the Century of Türkiye' represents the foundation of the promotion of all values that shall create a societywide consensus with the following maxim: "Let people live that the state may survive."

#### Türkiye: The Power of the Century

We are confident that our nation will opt for the resumption of steps taken to facilitate Türkiye's rise, human-centered policies, and the will to transform our country into a global power and this century into the 'Century of Türkiye' on May 14. It will continue to support the People's Alliance, which was formed with true feelings to build Türkiye, the leading country, with national policies.

The People's Alliance derives its power, tenacity, and determination from our great nation. The People's Alliance's path is clear, and Türkiye's horizon is bright. Inshallah, this century shall belong to Türkiye and Türkiye shall be the power of this century. We believe in our nation's common sense and trust its acumen.

It is us that will make the effort and Allah that shall reward it.

It would seem that the People's Alliance submitted an official protocol, which embodied a vision for the future, to the Supreme Election Council. It was noteworthy that the document referred to the 'Century of Türkiye' – a project that the AK Party unveiled at a public event in Ankara on October 28, 2022. In this context, that protocol stressed the importance of Türkiye becoming a leading nation by adopting 'national' policies. At the same time, each member of the People's Alliance released their own election statements and campaigned separately. Yet several meetings and campaign events brought together the leaders of the relevant political parties. Among other events, those politicians were invited to and addressed various mass opening ceremonies that President Erdoğan at-



tended across the country. In this regard, the People's Alliance managed to work together – as opposed to the Nation Alliance, which lacked a common position in many areas.

# CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE

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The People's Alliance's senior members, the AK Party and the MHP, have worked together seamlessly since the very beginning. They did not allow crises to erupt ahead of the 2023 elections either. In this sense, the People's Alliance demonstrated unity – whereas the Nation Alliance was bogged down in internal strife. It is possible to argue that the ruling alliance could signal unity mainly due to its perception by the electorate as a sincere and straightforward group. Specifically, the People's Alliance did not pursue short-term interests or signal its intention to change its course when it could negotiate from a position of strength. Another contributing factor was the complete agreement between the AK Party and the MHP on the 'presidency' system of government. Whereas the Nation Alliance pledged to adopt an 'augmented' parliamentary system, Erdoğan and Bahçeli insisted that Türkiye must not drift away from its current political system. Accordingly, one might argue that the People's Alliance shall remain intact unless one of those two movements changes its mind about the presidential system. That is obviously not the only factor, yet there is reason to believe that the AK Party and the MHP will continue to collaborate as long as the former's policies and vision for the future appeal to the partner.

It is possible to project that the electorate's support for the People's Alliance members on May 14 shall influence the presidential race. In this regard, there is reason to believe that President Erdoğan's popular support will be approximately the same as the number of voters supporting the ruling alliance's members in the

parliamentary election. One might also expect an increase in Erdoğan's popular support if the presidential race does not end in the first round. Specifically, there may be People's Alliance supporters not participating in the first round or supporting Erdoğan for various reasons who would be more likely to cast their votes for the incumbent in the potential second round. Nonetheless, it remains possible for Erdoğan to clinch re-election in the first round. The Nation Alliance's lack of harmony, dubious approach to counterterrorism operations, and unclear guidelines for governing Türkiye are likely to encourage many voters to go with Erdoğan.

In the case of President Erdoğan's re-election, the partnership among the People's Alliance members is likely to grow stronger. It is possible to argue that Türkiye's international ambitions and global developments make it more likely for that alliance to adopt a stronger framework. As security-oriented policies become more popular worldwide and Türkiye attaches greater importance to the state's future survival, the People's Alliance shall presumably consolidate its position. Accordingly, the alliance will remain influential in Turkish politics as the Republic enters its second century.

# THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE AHEAD OF THE MAY 14, 2023 ELECTIONS

HAMİT EMRAH BERİŞ

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