

Middle East Report by Nancy Coker

Election upset in Turkey

Turgut Ozal's landslide victory has opened up a new era in Turkish politics.

Nearly 20 million Turkish citizens took to the polls this past Nov. 6 in the first general election since the military took power three years ago.

Early that rainy Sunday, just as the initial votes were being cast, I wound up a six-week visit to Turkey, my first in 10 years.

By the end of that day, the results of the voting were clear: Turgut Ozal, head of the Motherland Party, had won an overwhelming victory—45 percent of the vote—trouncing the military-backed Nationalist Democracy Party of retired general Turgut Sunalp, who received a mere 23 percent. The nominally social democratic Populist Party of Necdet Calp came in second with 30 percent of the vote.

The election of Ozal—an embarrassing setback for the Turkish military—was greeted warmly in the Western press. Ozal, formerly Turkey's finance minister and deputy prime minister in charge of economic affairs, has long been a favorite of the International Monetary Fund and related New York and London banking circles, ever since he single-handedly imposed a series of IMF austerity measures several years ago.

"Ozal is a tool of the IMF," I was told repeatedly by Turkish journalists and other observers in Ankara and Istanbul. Ozal, a monetarist, is indeed a strong supporter of free enterprise and the privatization of Turkey's large state sector.

When the generals came to power in 1980, they kept Ozal on as Turkey's economics czar, according him near

absolute power to implement the IMF's austerity demands. In time, however, the generals began to fear that Ozal's strict adherence to the IMF line would undermine the very basis of the Turkish economy and nation-state. In 1982, enraged over Ozal's continuous jacking up of interest rates and his role in the Kastelli banking scandal, which bankrupted thousands of businesses and individual savers, the generals forced Ozal to resign.

Now, one year after his ouster from power, Turgut Ozal is now Turkey's new prime minister. How? And why?

The answer lies not merely in the support and encouragement received by Ozal from the IMF and related agencies in the West. According to intelligence sources, the IMF is none too comfortable with the nationalism and increasing signs of economic independence shown by the Turkish military. The reinstatement of Ozal is aimed at blunting the state-oriented "Kemalist" tendencies in the military, as outlined by the founding father of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Ataturk.

The answer also lies in the lackluster election campaign waged by the generals. "The generals totally miscalculated," one of Turkey's leading publishers told me. "They had no idea how bad Sunalp [their candidate for prime minister] would be. They also had no idea how powerful a campaigner Ozal would be."

Ozal was indeed the front-runner right from the start. He cleverly took advantage of the widespread resentment and cynicism in Turkey toward

continued military rule. Although pleased with the military's success in finally stopping the anarchy and terrorism that characterized Turkey's domestic situation for several years, the Turkish population, in general, has tired of military rule.

In his public appearances, the bumbling Sunalp "repeatedly put not one, but both, feet in his mouth," one Turkish political analyst told me. The situation was so bad that in a series of television speeches by the three party leaders, Sunalp was deliberately kept off the air, replaced by lower-level party functionaries who appeared in his place.

Two nights before the election, a desperate Turkish President Gen. Kenan Evren went so far as to appear on television to tell the nation to vote for Sunalp, not for Ozal.

Despite Ozal's long-standing IMF loyalties, Turkey's future is by no means sewn up. In at least one of his televised talks, Ozal clearly assumed positions contrary to those held by the IMF. He stated that in the year 2000 Turkey's population will have grown to 70,000,000—"a figure that no one should be scared of." He also endorsed continued urbanization. IMF reports have frequently cited, with concern, the high growth rate of Turkey's population.

Turkish sources concur that now that the election is over, the "synthetic" parties of Sunalp and Calp will be swept away. Ozal, as a political force, they think, is here to stay. However, the door is now open, these sources report, for the emergence of a new Kemalist-nationalist party, potentially much stronger than Ozal's party and enjoying the support of the old Ataturkist factions inside the military who value rapid, state-sponsored economic development as one of Turkey's paramount goals.