



AK Party looking for ways to prevent defection of 73 deputies

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As the presidential election scheduled for Aug. 10 looms, the government is looking for a formula to keep the 73 deputies who now cannot run for re-election in next year's parliamentary elections from defecting from the party and establishing an alternative political movement to challenge the ruling party.

Among several alternatives, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) is reportedly considering assigning some deputies who, by virtue of the party's limit of three consecutive terms, cannot be re-elected in the 2015 general election, as foreign ambassadors. Senior deputies are thought to potentially be positioned in top posts in the AK Party, such as a party executive, in order to eliminate any threat of those deputies developing a possible opposition movement prior to the presidential election.

Another option being discussed is establishing a wise men committee that will support the ruling party's younger cadres in the government for the veteran figures who must stay out of public office for a term before they then have chance to return to active politics.

Speaking to Sunday's Zaman, former AK Party deputy **Işın Bal** noted that all the decisions in Turkish politics are being made according to the whims of the leader and that the AK Party bylaw that limits deputies to three consecutive terms in public office was not removed because Prime Minister **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** has apparently decided to run for the presidency.

He stressed that Erdoğan cares most about his own political career and is not concerned about the 73 other deputies who will not be able to serve another term as a result of not amending the bylaw. Bal said: "The three-term rule was shaped in line with Erdoğan's political priorities and future plans. If Erdoğan was not considering being a candidate for president, he would have removed the three-term limit in the bylaws and would have continued his political life as the prime minister, thus, proving that all the political plans are being shaped in accordance with the leader's wishes and instructions."

Complaining about the uninstitutionalized nature of politics in Turkey, Bal pointed out that the AK Party and Erdoğan had previously intended to establish a presidential or semi-presidential system in Turkey, a move that potentially might damage the system of political checks and balances, adding: "The intention was not to create a more efficient Parliament or to solve the problems that the parliamentary system faces. The only focus was Erdoğan's political future. As we can see, all the solution-seeking was focused on realizing Erdoğan's political aspirations."

Another point that Bal emphasized was Erdoğan's attempts to avoid a judicial process after the Dec. 17 corruption scandal exploded, implicating several of his Cabinet ministers, their sons and others of Erdoğan's inner circle. According to Bal, Erdoğan's stance of not allowing those ministers to be investigated properly is a sign that Erdoğan also has fears about a legal process that could include him, as well. That explains why several alternatives such as the presidential system, his candidacy for presidency and potentially removing the three-term serving rule were brought up for discussion. But none of these protect the interests of the country or the Turkish people; rather, they favor a limited group's interests, according to Bal.

When asked about the 73 deputies who will not be able to run for re-election in the 2015 parliamentary elections due to the three-term rule, Bal responded that as long as the AK Party remains the priority for those deputies, they may not mind, since they have no choice and must wait for one term before returning to office, adding: "Some might have been promised an important position in the AK Party at a different level, such as member of the party executive board or other positions," he said.

The Taraf daily claimed that, among other alternatives, the AK Party is considering establishing a "shadow Cabinet" for those who have been in the AK Party ranks since the establishment of the party. According to the daily, a new body could be created, composed of 20 veteran ministers and deputies to act like a big brother to the official Cabinet.

Common opposition candidate might create nightmare for AK Party

Bal noted that recent signals coming from the opposition parties indicating that they may agree on a common candidate for the August presidential race in the hope of defeating the AK Party candidate might change the balances within the AK Party.

According to Bal, if a strong and mutually agreed upon candidate put forward by the opposition parties is able to beat the AK Party candidate in the election, it could stimulate

some commotion among those who are dissatisfied, particularly those that cannot run in 2015. "They might feel that if the ship (the AK Party) is taking on water due to such a defeat by the opposition, these deputies could be the first to leave the ship. At this stage, it is hard to believe they would not react to a situation that will not allow them to be in Parliament after the 2015 elections. They would even be willing to make the most severe criticism of Erdoğan and the AK Party, if chaos looms following the presidential elections," Bal said.

Bal also drew attention to the possible vote percentages that the AK Party candidate and a common opposition candidate might secure in the upcoming presidential election, emphasizing the graft allegations leveled against Erdoğan. He said: "Some 50 or 51 percent of the voters are against him, which gives the opposition candidate a chance to take advantage."

With regard to the qualifications of a possible candidate for the opposition, Bal stressed that the candidate should be willing to embrace others' moral values and give priority to democratic principles and the rule of law.

Recalling that Turkey will, for the first time, elect a president by popular vote, Bal also noted that a common candidate should emphasize universal values such human rights and fundamental freedoms, adding, "Even if the common candidate receives 50 percent of the total votes and becomes the next president, he/she should not forget that he/she represents the whole society."

Former Culture and Tourism Minister **Erdoğan Günay** considers the AK Party's decision not to amend the three-term limit party bylaw a tactical move in order to create a foundation for Erdoğan's candidacy for the presidency rather than President Abdullah Gül.

"The move is absolutely thought to be one that creates a means for Erdoğan to convince Gül not to be a candidate in the presidential race. No one should view it as a principled decision. If Erdoğan becomes the candidate and is not elected, then the party bylaw will be amended to lift the third-term limit rule. Just before the general elections, the AK Party might take a step on this issue," Günay noted.

When asked whether Gül was being sacrificed in the process leading up to the presidential election, Günay replied, "When Erdoğan was compared to Gül, societal support for Erdoğan diminished because of the graft allegations. That is why Erdoğan is seeking a formula that Gül will also consent to. But apparently, Gül will not put his support behind Erdoğan."

Common opposition candidate proposal a must

Addressing the growing cry to select a common candidate, Günay stressed that a move toward determining a joint candidate is a must if the opposition parties really want to block Erdoğan from being elected president.

"I am sure that there are certain names who are respectful of modern, democratic, conservative, secular values who could be chosen as candidate and who will embrace all segments of society. If these requirements are met, then that possible candidate would turn into the entire society's candidate, rather than just the opposition's. The chances of such a candidate being elected are quite high. It is obvious that there are some segments of the AK Party electorate who still care about basic human rights, democratization and harmony in society. Turkey is in need of a candidate who will create the necessary conditions to pave the way for the removal of polarization and uniting people around peace," Günay added.

The current AK Party deputies who will not be able to run for re-election in the general elections:

Cabinet: **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**, **Bülent Arınç**, **Besir Atalay**, **Bekir Bozdağ**, **Ali Babacan**, **Sadullah Ergin**, **Nihat Ergün**, **Binalli Yıldırım**, **Mehdi Ekici**, **Hayati Yazıcı**, **Taner Yıldız**, **Faruk Çelik**, **Egemen Bağış**, **Suat Kılıç**, **Fatma Şahin**, **Omer Çelik**.

Party administration: **Abdulkadir Aksu**, **Hüseyin Çelik**, **Salih Kapusuz**, **Bülent Gedikli**, **Reha Demireç**, **Hüseyin Tanrıverdi**, **Edip Uğur**, **Nüket Horat**, **Haluk İpek**.

Deputies: **Özcan Çelik**, **Recep Akdoğan**, **Işın Bal**, **Nurullah Çavuş**, **Mustafa Ellas**, **Burhan Kuzu**, **Nimet Bas**, **Necati Cetinkaya**, **Sadık Yakut**, **Vecdi Gönül**, **Naif Özak**, **Mehmet Ali Şahin**, **A.Şefar Üstün**, **Cevdet Erdöl**, **Mustafa Atas**, **Halide İncekara**, **Sait Acba**, **Rühi Açıkgöz**, **A. Rıza Alaboyun**, **Mevlüt Cavusoglu**, **Fahrettin Poyraz**, **Vahit Kiler**, **Bayram Özelci**, **Ali Küçükaydın**, **Mehmet Danis**, **Ünal Kacar**, **Erver Yılmaz**, **Nezzat Pakkılı**, **Hakkı Köylü**, **Muzaffer Bastopcu**, **Fehmi Kınay**, **Mehmet Katsal**, **Nusret Bayraktar**, **Saban Dişli**, **Yılmaz Demir**, **Mustafa Demir**, **Ahmet Yeni**, **Afif Demirkan**, **Yahya Akman**, **Şükrü Ayala**, **Zeyit Aslan**, **Köksal Toptan**, **Ziyaettin Akbulut**, **Mehmet Sarı**, **Kerim Özkul**, **Harun Tüfekci**, **Hasan Ali Çelik**, **Murat Yıldırım**.