

US, EU hail election of Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu

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The victory of Republican People's Party (CHP) candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu, in the June 23 re-run in Istanbul of the March 31 municipal elections has provoked an enthusiastic response from imperialist foreign policy circles and newspapers in America and Europe. Echoing the CHP's own election rhetoric, they all present this outcome as a powerful blow for democracy against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP).

There is little doubt that İmamoğlu was the beneficiary of growing social discontent, amid a serious economic crisis in Turkey and new US war threats in the region, particularly against Iran. İmamoğlu beat AKP candidate Binali Yıldırım by 800,000 votes, after leading by only 13,000 on March 31. However, the wave of support for İmamoğlu from the powers that have been waging imperialist wars in the Middle East for decades, and that tacitly backed a failed coup in Turkey itself targeting Erdoğan in July 2016, should be taken as a warning.

İmamoğlu is not a progressive or left-wing alternative to the AKP. The parties backing him—the far-right Good Party, the Kurdish-nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and countless pseudo-left groups—are orienting not to social opposition among workers, towards which the CHP is bitterly hostile, but to the Turkish bourgeoisie and its maneuvers with imperialism.

After the election, the US embassy in Turkey wrote on Twitter: "In an impressive display of participatory democracy, Istanbul residents went to their voting stations to cast ballots and make their voices heard. We wish Ekrem İmamoğlu the best as he leads Europe's biggest city."

The *New York Times*, a mouthpiece for CIA operations including the recent, failed US-orchestrated regime change operation in Venezuela, again hailed the Istanbul election result, after publishing an editorial endorsing the CHP as the "democratic" opposition in the March 31

elections.

It cited Soner Cagaptay, the head of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The vote, Cagaptay said, "shows democracy is resilient and elections still matter. ... Imamoglu won with a landslide—a 10-point lead—even though Erdogan mobilized all the state resources in this election." He added, "Nothing sticks to İmamoğlu. He became the new Erdoğan."

The *Washington Post* published an article titled "A mayoral election provides a glimmer of hope for Turkey" and advised Erdoğan: "The Istanbul election gives Turkey's president a chance to pick a different route."

The European imperialists shared Washington's enthusiasm. European Parliament Rapporteur to Turkey Kati Piri tweeted: "Landslide victory for mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu—great news for Istanbul & for Turkey's democracy. Tebrikler!!!"

German government spokesman Steffen Seibert stated Berlin's "satisfaction" with the result, calling it a "good signal for Turkey." The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) published a statement, signed by more than 50 SPD politicians, hailing the "candidate of our sister party, the CHP." European Affairs Minister Michael Roth (SPD) tweeted: "How encouraging sign for Turkey, where democracy is alive. It is important that the EU and Germany turn to the Turks more strongly."

The German press also hailed the results. "The period of Erdoğan is ending," *Die Welt* headlined its comment, while state broadcaster Deutsche Welle commented: "Turkish democracy is still alive."

In fact, the CHP is the party of the traditional Kemalist bourgeois elite that dominated the Turkish Republic till the beginning of this century. Historically, the CHP is complicit in all its crimes: repeated military coups, the violent suppression of the working class, and the oppression of the Kurdish minority. In these elections, it

formed the so-called “Nation Alliance” with the Good Party, a recent split-off from the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), whose leader Meral Akşener, presided over savage repression of the Kurds as Interior Minister in the 1990s.

TÜSİAD, Turkey’s leading big business federation, issued a statement on June 24 hailing Erdoğan’s victory and declaring, “The success of Turkey’s biggest city is the success of Turkey.” It also called for the “normalization” of Turkish political life and a reconciliation between the AKP government and the Erdoğan administration in Istanbul, Turkey’s economic capital.

Erdoğan heard his marching orders from big business loud and clear. Immediately after the June 23 election, he addressed Erdoğan, saying: “Mr. President, I am ready to work in harmony with you.” His party called for focusing on a “main agenda” until the next elections in 2023.

Despite mounting allegations of corruption and favoritism under the previous, AKP-led Istanbul municipal governments, such as funding pro-AKP charitable foundations, Erdoğan indicated he would not press his advantage against Erdoğan. He told CNN that he did not think the allegations referred to “Erdoğan as an individual.” He added, “Extending the hand of peace [to Erdoğan] would be to the benefit of the country.”

The CHP is keenly aware of the explosive social anger in the population and is making demagogic statements to try to keep this anger under control. Addressing his supporters in Istanbul last week, Erdoğan declared: “We are equal. The rich and the poor, we are equal.”

But that is easy for Erdoğan to say, because he is a millionaire, according to his official financial statement. He also has close relations with the Koç Group, Turkey’s largest corporate conglomerate and the most influential part of TÜSİAD.

Erdoğan is reportedly considering appointing his advisor, Yavuz Erkut, to be the general secretary of the Istanbul municipality, i.e. the second man in the city’s administration. Erkut was the CEO of TUPRAŞ, Turkey’s biggest and strategic industrial company, which operates four oil refineries in the country. The AKP privatized the company, selling it off to the Koç Group for a price equivalent to the profits it has achieved over several years.

In the meantime, pro-opposition media organs like the daily *Sözcü* have tried to blacken the struggle of about 4,300 TUPRAŞ workers in Kocaeli, Aliağa, Kırkkale and Batman who occupied their refineries to protest their

contracts, defying repeated intimidation from police.

Erdoğan has lost no time in signaling the utterly reactionary and anti-working class character of the CHP. In the beginning of April, he sent out a tweet honoring the NATO-trained army officer, Colonel Alparslan Türkeş, who founded the far-right MHP and was at the center of planning coups and fascistic violence against the left and the working class in the 1970s.

Erdoğan’s praise for virulent enemies of the working class is not limited to Türkeş. Almost four years ago, on December 31, 2015, he honored Hasan Karakaya, a radical Islamist columnist of the notorious daily *Yeni Akit*, after his death. Karakaya had congratulated an AKP official who attacked protesters after the mining disaster in Soma killed 301 miners in 2014.

The supposedly secular CHP’s Erdoğan competed with the AKP on Islamist propaganda during the campaign. He went to break his fast during Ramadan in front of the media, like his rival Yıldırım, and boasted about establishing alcohol-free recreational facilities and gender-segregated swimming pools in his previous term as mayor of a district of Istanbul. Erdoğan began his term in office last week with public prayers.

The CHP-led opposition and Erdoğan are not a progressive alternative to the AKP, but the favored representatives of influential sections of the Turkish bourgeoisie closely linked to imperialism. They are trying to set a new trap for workers and youth, aiming to direct opposition into safe channels controlled by the ruling establishment. Whatever hopes workers and youth are encouraged to place in Erdoğan and his allies will be rapidly disappointed.



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