

# K?l?çdarolu denounces Russia as rival candidate withdraws on eve of Turkish elections

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Three days before the May 14 presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey, Muharrem ?nce, one of the presidential candidates, announced his withdrawal from the race after purported sex tapes of ?nce leaked online. ?nce did not endorse any candidate as he withdrew.

In the 2018 election, ?nce was the Republican People's Party (CHP) candidate against President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an, and lost the election with around 30 percent of the vote. He has been under pressure from the Nation Alliance led by Kemal K?l?çdarolu's CHP and the pro-opposition media to "withdraw" from the race. ?nce ran as a candidate of criticizing the entry of former prime minister Ahmet Davuto?lu, and former economy minister Ali Babacan into the Nation Alliance, both of whom served under Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP).

?nce's withdrawal could lead to K?l?çdarolu winning the election in the first round. Borsa Istanbul reacted positively to this possibility, jumping 6 percent. Last week, ?nce said he would support K?l?çdarolu if Davuto?lu and Babacan withdrew from the alliance.

The elections in Turkey, which occupies a critical position in the Middle East and Black Sea region, are of great international importance as the US-led NATO powers escalate the war against Russia in Ukraine. As it moves towards direct military confrontation with Russia, NATO needs a reliable ally in Ankara. The elections are also being held after the February 6 earthquake disaster that has officially caused over 50,000 deaths, and as rising living costs impoverish masses of workers in Turkey.

Most recent opinion polls have shown that while K?l?çdarolu is ahead, it would be a tight race and the

presidential election could go to a second round. According to a Konda poll conducted on May 6-7, K?l?çdarolu would receive 49.3 percent of the vote, Erdo?an 43.7 percent, Sinan O?an, the candidate of the far-right Ata Alliance, 4.8 percent and ?nce 2.2 percent.

Yesterday, K?l?çdarolu launched an unprecedented attack Russia on Twitter after ?nce's withdrawal, blaming Moscow for the conspiracy to interfere in the election. He wrote: "Dear Russian Friends, you are behind the montages, conspiracies, Deep Fake content, tapes that were revealed in this country yesterday. If you want our friendship to continue after May 15, take your hands off the Turkish state. We are still in favor of cooperation and friendship."

This wholly unsubstantiated statement is absurd. To ascertain who is most likely behind ?nce's withdrawal, one must ask, "Cui bono? Who benefits?"

Clearly, ?nce's withdrawal favors K?l?çdarolu, not Erdo?an. According to the latest polls, ?nce's vote share ranged between 1 and 3 percent. According to the Metropoll Research survey, 49.3 percent of his voters said they would support K?l?çdarolu and 22 percent said they would support Erdo?an if ?nce withdrew from the race.

K?l?çdarolu is committed to serving NATO better than Erdo?an, and Washington and Berlin have made it clear that they prefer him to Erdo?an. Already in 2019, during the US presidential election campaign, Biden said that "we support opposition leadership" in Turkey. The German political establishment, which plays a central role in the NATO war against Russia, is almost unanimously backing K?l?çdarolu in the election.

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* on May 10, K?l?çdarolu again pledged to implement a more

compatible policy with NATO if he became president, saying, “Turkey is a member of the Western alliance and NATO and Putin also knows this well. Turkey must comply with decisions taken by NATO.”

Erdo?an, who tries to mediate between NATO-backed Ukraine and Russia, recently sought to demonstrate his alignment with his imperialist allies by withdrawing his veto on Finland’s NATO membership. But he lost the trust of his allies a long time ago as he sought to maneuver between the US and Russia over multiple geopolitical conflicts.

These tensions erupted in 2016 with a NATO-backed military coup attempt targeting Erdo?an. Ankara claimed that Fethullah Gülen, a longtime CIA asset and Islamist preacher living in the United States, was behind the coup. Until 2013, Gülen was a close ally of Erdo?an and had a substantial organization within the state’s military, judiciary and police apparatus.

When ?nce left the CHP in 2021 to found his Homeland Party, he referred to these events. He said: “Who am I parting ways with? I am parting ways with those who beg for democracy from the US. ... I am parting ways with those who protect [Gülen’s] FETÖ members and pro-Soros people.”

In his statement yesterday and in previous social media posts, ?nce claimed that Gülen was behind the plot against him, pointing to Washington. Shortly before his decision to withdraw, a Twitter account allegedly used by a pro-Gülen asset published what it alleged were sexual photos of ?nce. ?nce said the photos were a montage and slander.

?nce’s vote share, which initially appeared to be 10 percent, declined due to intense political and media pressure on him to withdraw in favor of K?l?çdaro?lu. This campaign backed by the pseudo-left was accompanied by smears that ?nce was Erdo?an’s “man” and that he received money from businesspeople close to Erdo?an.

In his statement yesterday, ?nce said: “I am not afraid of these conspiracies, these montages, these fake bank receipts, these jeeps that don’t exist. I resisted for 45 days. At the last point, there are those who ask, ‘He [?nce] cannot withdraw, he received money from the [presidential] palace. Will he return the money? I am withdrawing my candidacy. I am doing this for my homeland.”

?nce continued by promoting his own bankrupt

nationalist politics, stating: “I offered a third option to Turkey. I said, ‘Neither the People Alliance nor the Nation Alliance; the only way forward is the Homeland. I said, ‘Neither from the right nor from the left, but from the path of Atatürk.”

Erdo?an said he regretted ?nce’s withdrawal. “I wish this race would have continued like this until the end,” he said, adding, “Mr. Kemal came with a tape. Now he has eliminated one of the presidential candidates. How did he do it? I guess that will be revealed tomorrow or the day after tomorrow,” implying that K?l?çdaro?lu was behind the conspiracy.

K?l?çdaro?lu was elected the CHP leader in 2010 after former party leader Deniz Baykal was forced to resign in a sex scandal.

After ?nce withdrew as a candidate, K?l?çdaro?lu has called on him to join the Nation Alliance.



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