

**ST 5 / Sociologie du vote à distance**  
**ST 5 / Sociology of External Voting**

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**How does expatriates' enfranchisement reconfigure transnational politics?  
Analysing the recent external voting experience of Turkey and its diaspora(s)**

***Introduction***

Whether affected by shifting norms or changing dynamics of electoral games engendered by democratisation, or envisaged as part of diaspora embracement strategies of home-states, enfranchisement of non-resident citizens has been an internationally diffused phenomenon particularly since the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> While legislation enabling expatriates to vote through one modality or another has been spread to almost 80 per cent of all states,<sup>2</sup> the specific ways in which external voting is actually implemented and the implications of these specificities for the effective enjoyment of this right by expatriates show considerable variation.<sup>3</sup> Although external voter turnout tends to remain limited, the enfranchisement of expatriates and their practical incorporation into the homeland polity as a constituency adds a novel dimension to the transnational political space, and contributes to the transnationalisation of homeland politics. The actual inflow or the mere prospect of 'political remittances' have implications for transnational political dynamics beyond electoral statistics, as they shape discourses and actions of homeland political actors, expatriates, and even the host-state authorities, and reconfigure the interactions among all these involved parties.<sup>4</sup>

Turkey, as a "sending-state" now for more than five decades, enfranchised its expatriates in a rather limited way in 1986. Even though Turkish citizens abroad had been voicing demands and putting pressure on political authorities in Turkey for the introduction of out-of country voting since the 1990s, the introduction of the set of legislative and administrative measures effectively enabling external voting had to wait until 2012. Expatriates were given the option of voting from their countries of

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<sup>1</sup> Lafleur, J.-M. (2013). *Transnational Politics and the State. The External Voting Rights of Diasporas*. New York and London: Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Collyer, M., and Z. Vathi (2007). "Patterns of Extraterritorial Voting", Working Paper No.22, Sussex Centre for Migration Research.

<sup>3</sup> Lafleur, J.-M. (2015). "The enfranchisement of citizens abroad: variations and explanations", *Democratization*, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2014.979163.

<sup>4</sup> P. Boccagni, J.-M.Lafleur, and P. Levitt (2015). "Transnational Politics as Cultural Circulation: Toward a Conceptual Understanding of Migrant Political Participation on the Move", *Mobilities*, DOI: 10.1080/17450101.2014.1000023.

residence for the first time in the August 2014 presidential election. The prospects of the first-ever absentee vote experience attracted close media attention in Turkey, whereas the candidates extended their campaigning activities beyond borders. Even though the external voter turnout remained at 8,25 %, against a background in which highly critical legislative elections are scheduled for 7 June 2015, expatriates' electoral participation remains considerably high in the homeland political agenda, shapes transnational political dynamics, and contributes to further transnationalisation of politics not only in the electoral sense.

In the light of these developments, this paper has two main objectives: First, it aims at shedding light on the ways in which contextual specificities of external voting legislation and its actual implementation impact expatriates' effective political inclusion and their electoral choices on the one hand, and political standing and strategies of various homeland political actors on the other. Second, the paper attempts to demonstrate how, regardless of turnout rates and actual electoral difference made by expatriates, the enfranchisement of non-resident citizens impacts the conduct of homeland politics and leads to its further transnationalisation.

After visiting scholarship focusing on factors underlying the widely diffusing phenomenon of states' enfranchisement of their expatriates and studies analysing how actual implementation of external voting impact on the effective exercise of this right in the first section, a brief background on Turkey and its diaspora(s) is provided. The third section examines the political dynamics behind Turkey's external voting legislation, and analyses the implications of the particularities of the legislation and its interaction with the domestic electoral system for external voters as well as for various homeland political actors. Then, through an examination of the 2014 presidential elections, the paper tackles the questions of: (i) how actual implementation of external voting shaped expatriates' effective enjoyment of their recently acquired right, (ii) how practically implemented external voting contributed to the transnational conduct of politics. Finally, through examining developments at the eve of the legislative elections in June 2015, the fifth section analyses changes in the implementation of external voting based on the lessons learnt from the presidential election experience, and the ways in which dynamics particular to the forthcoming elections have made external votes politically more salient and led to further transnationalisation of politics.

### ***1. Drivers and outcomes of external voting: Democratisation, diaspora politics, and transnationalisation of politics***

Tolerating multiple citizenships has become an increasingly accepted international norm, explained by a general trend of liberalisation of citizenship laws and their adoption to international migration.<sup>5</sup> States on the "sending" side have been even more eager on tolerating multiple citizenships aiming to legally institutionalise their incorporation of expatriates to their conception of nation.<sup>6</sup> External voting rights and practical facilitation of voting by non-resident citizens have also become widespread,

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<sup>5</sup> T. A. Aleinikoff, and D. Klusmeyer (eds.) (2002). *Citizenship policies for an age of migration*. Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute.

<sup>6</sup> Faist, T. & P. Kivisto (eds.) (2007). *Dual Citizenship in Global Perspective: From Unitary to Multiple Citizenship*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

featuring not exclusively, but predominantly, migrant sending-states. Legislation allowing for external voting rights through various methods of voting -by mail, electronic, at the diplomatic representation, by proxy, at the borders by the voter herself- exists in a total of hundred and fifteen countries,<sup>7</sup> corresponding to 80 per cent of states from which scholars were able to obtain data.<sup>8</sup> The issue of enfranchisement of non-resident citizens has been initially explored and discussed by normative political theorists. The debate centred on ‘how norms of inclusion and equality [in the polity of origin] should apply to’ non-resident citizens,<sup>9</sup> and to what extent the latter’s enfranchisement was compatible with normative criteria determining inclusion in/exclusion from the demos.<sup>10</sup>

Tackling the question of why there has been an increase in the number of states extending political rights to their citizens abroad, a branch in the literature found the answer in the overall trend towards democratisation and the accompanying normative shift leading to adopting more inclusive citizenship regimes and providing a broader set of rights to citizens.<sup>11</sup> From this normative shift approach aiming to explain the quantitative increase and geographic spread of external voting, democratisation is seen as somewhat automatically leading to democratic inclusion of hitherto excluded societal sections, including expatriates.

However, closer inspection of the specific timing and particularities of provision of external voting rights in different cases and regime types suggests that we need to be more cautious in drawing a generalizable direct line between democratisation leading to political incorporation of expatriates.<sup>12</sup> The discourse of providing a fuller set of rights to all citizens has been definitely widely used as justification among states, including those with authoritarian regimes. However, behind such discourses, Brand found out purposes such as rallying additional support for leaders whose legitimacy has been on shaky grounds, ‘increasing sovereignty over expatriates with resources to be tapped’, and ‘reinforcing security’ through a different means of monitoring’ in her examination of Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria.<sup>13</sup> In addition, such generalised causal arrow from democratisation to expatriate incorporation and embracement is problematic also because democracy and democratisation in different contexts often mean quite different things. In some contexts, democracy is understood primarily as ‘competition between different elites’ and ‘it is mainly a procedural matter; people’s participation is limited to elections in which candidates representing different elites

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<sup>7</sup> Braun, N. and M. Gratschew, M. (2007). “Introduction”, In *Voting from Abroad. The International IDEA Handbook*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance / Instituto Federal Electoral Mexico, pp. 1-8.

<sup>8</sup> Collyer, M., and Z. Vathi (2007), p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Bauböck, R. (2007). Stakeholder Citizenship and Transnational Political Participation: A Normative Evaluation of External Voting, *Fordham Law Review*, 75 (5), 2393-2447, p. 2394.

<sup>10</sup> López-Guerra, C. (2005). “Should Expatriates Vote?” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 13 (2), 216-234; and Owen, D. (2010). “Resident Aliens, Non-resident Citizens and Voting Rights” in Calder, G. et.al (eds.) *Citizenship Acquisition and National Belonging*. London, Palgrave: 52-73.

<sup>11</sup> Rhodes, S., and A. Harutyunyan (2010). “Extending Citizenship to Emigrants: Democratic Contestation and a New Global Norm”, *International Political Science Review* 31 (4), 470-493.

<sup>12</sup> Brand, L. A. (2014). “Arab uprisings and the changing frontiers of transnational citizenship: voting from abroad in political transitions”, *Political Geography*, 41, 54-63.

<sup>13</sup> Brand, L. A. (2010). “Authoritarian States and Voting From Abroad: North African Experiences”, *Comparative Politics*, 43 (1), 81-99.

are chosen'.<sup>14</sup> Hence, such “procedural democratisation” might lead to inclusion of broader sections of voters –including non-resident ones– into the register, while the driving force behind enfranchisement could be limited to these ‘different elites’ interests in consolidating their political standing.

Focusing not on normative changes engendered by democratisation, but on the latter’s impact on the search of new financial, political, and electoral resources by home-state political actors facing intensified political competition, relative liberalisation of former authoritarian regimes,<sup>15</sup> and the replacement of single-party hegemonies by competitive party politics were shown as reasons behind expatriates’ incorporation into the homeland democratic competition.<sup>16</sup> In some cases like Mexico, the fact that the PRI’s legitimacy had been largely undermined in the 1990s and its decades-long single party position was lost at the end of the decade played a major role in the passing of the 2005 legislation allowing for absentee voting in presidential elections.<sup>17</sup> In other cases like Italy, independent from a democratic transition process, that the homeland political elite aimed at consolidating its political power and expected advantageous electoral returns from a potential overseas constituency was decisive in the enfranchisement of expatriates. The Italian case also illustrated that the expatriate vote might decisively impact homeland electoral balances. Contrary to Berlusconi’s expectations, external votes cast in the 2006 general elections were decisive in Berlusconi’s defeat against Prodi.<sup>18</sup>

The observation that democratizing states as well as consolidating democracies, “poor” states of the global South as well as those in the affluent North have been incorporating their expatriates to the home-polity led some scholars to think of external voting as part of the broader ‘diaspora building and engagement’ deployed by an increasing number and wider range of home-states since the 1980s.<sup>19</sup> From such perspective, granting the right to cast the absentee vote aims at giving diaspora members a feeling of attachment and a sense of belonging that remind them that they are still part of the political processes of a country where they call ‘home’ even if they do not currently reside there.<sup>20</sup>

Accounts that have been sensitive to case-specific provisions regulating the actual

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<sup>14</sup> Nun, J. (2003) *Democracy: Government of the People or Government of the Politicians?*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, paraphrased in Itzigsohn, J. and D. Villacrés (2008). “Migrant political transnationalism and the practice of democracy: Dominican external voting rights and Salvadoran home town associations”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31 (4), 664-686, p. 665.

<sup>15</sup> Brand, L. A. (2006). *Citizens abroad: emigration and the state in the Middle East and North Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Itzigsohn, J. (2000). “Immigration and the boundaries of citizenship: The Institutions of Immigrants’ Political Transnationalism”, *International Migration Review*, 34 (4), 1126-1154.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, R. C. (2003). “Migrant membership as an instituted process: Transnationalization, the state and the extra-territorial conduct of Mexican politics”, *International Migration Review*, 37 (3), 297-343; Ibid. (2008). “Contradictions of diasporic institutionalization in Mexican politics: The 2006 migrant vote and other forms of inclusion and control”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31 (4), 708-741.

<sup>18</sup> Pogonyi, S. (2014). “Four Patterns of Non-resident Voting Rights”, *Ethnopolitics: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 13 (2), 122-140.

<sup>19</sup> Gamlen, A. (2006). “Diaspora Engagement Policies: What are they, and what kinds of states use them?”, Working Paper No. 32. Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), University of Oxford.

<sup>20</sup> Lainer-Vos, D. (2010). “Diaspora-Homeland Relations as a Framework to Examine Nation-Building Processes”, *Sociology Compass*, 4 (10), 894-908.

implementation of external voting, largely conditioning effective exercisability of this right by expatriates, highlighted the use of expatriate enfranchisement by some states as a largely symbolic gesture demonstrating that diasporas are part of the homeland nation also in political sense of the term, without necessarily intending to actually include the entire scope of expatriates into decision-making processes.<sup>21</sup> For instance, through his analysis of the 2006 Mexican Presidential elections and the particular conduct of external voting regulated by the state, Smith showed how the enfranchisement at the presidential level, while being presented as a milestone in the home-state's diaspora embracement, remained as a 'symbolic right'.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, in many cases, the mere fact that states amend their legislation as to enfranchise expatriates does not directly translate into the latter's effective political incorporation, as state-specific provisions complicating voter registration and practicalities of the act of voting, and cumbersome administrative requirements demanded by the home-state constitute 'barriers' to practical enjoyment of the right.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, looking beyond the legislation and examining the actual implementation of external voting gives a clearer idea on the extent to which home-governments practically facilitate the effective exercise of this right.<sup>24</sup> In addition, paying attention to actors and motivations behind specific provisions regulating external voting, how these provisions interact with home-country electoral system and political context, and how external voting was designed to work out in practice shed light on the ways in which these specificities condition political choices and actions of different sections among expatriates and those of various homeland political actors. In short, through offering a more nuanced analytical lens, such an approach allows one to go beyond somewhat path-dependent linear democratization-inclusion arguments that tend to be insensitive to contingent and complex political dynamics underlying enfranchisement of expatriates both on paper and in practice.

The issue of motivations and purposes driving homeland political actors to enact laws granting voting rights to expatriates and to implement these laws in particular ways is closely related to the issue of the actual impact of diaspora enfranchisement on homeland politics. As the external turnout rates tend to remain relatively low, the capacity of external voters to make a considerable difference in home-country electoral balances has been limited, which has been a factor contributing to the relative neglect of external voting and of the voting behavior of non-resident citizens in the literature.<sup>25</sup> Scholar interest has been relatively recently directed at the "transformative" effects of external voting on home-country politics in general and on democratization in particular,<sup>26</sup> and on emigrants' subjectivities in relation to the homeland and sense of belonging to the home-nation.<sup>27</sup> These studies confirm that whether or not majority of expatriates actually vote for home-country elections and have a decisive effect on the overall outcome of electoral politics, external voting has

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<sup>21</sup> Lafleur (2015), *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Smith (2008), *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> Lafleur (2015), *op. cit.*, pp. 10-13.

<sup>24</sup> Lafleur (2015), *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Lafleur (2013), *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Itzigsohn and Villacrés (2008), *op. cit.*; Smith (2008), *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Boccagni, P. and J. Ramírez (2013). "Building Democracy or Reproducing 'Ecuadoreaness'? A Transnational Exploration of Ecuadorean Migrants' External Voting", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 45, 721-750.

broader implications for the transnational political space and all involved parties making up and maneuvering within this space.

As the case of Turkey illustrates, even though expatriates are enfranchised mainly due to certain political actors' expectations for consolidating their own electoral standing and legitimacy and/or as part of diaspora-making and engagement strategies as part of broader foreign political and economic objectives, the transformation of expatriates into a novel constituency shapes the full range of homeland political actors, contributes to the reconfiguration of political dynamics, and leads to further transnationalisation of politics overall. Summarizing all the abovementioned points, and going beyond a limited understanding of "impact" as actual statistical-electoral impact, it has been aptly suggested that 'the impact of political remittances, in the form of external votes, extends beyond their mere impact on electoral results'.<sup>28</sup>

## **2. Diaspora(s) from Turkey and Turkey's Diaspora Policy**

### **2.1. Turkey's diaspora(s) in Europe**

What made Turkey a migrant sending state was its involvement in the post-war temporary labour export schemes through signing bilateral agreements with mainly Western European countries.<sup>29</sup> Large numbers of Turkish citizens -including Kurds with Turkish citizenship- migrated to Western Europe as "guest workers." A majority of them were placed in West Germany. After European countries unilaterally halted labour recruitment in the mid-1970s, family reunification became the main modality migration, which changed the demographic structure as to include spouses and children.<sup>30</sup> The period following the 1980 military coup witnessed tremendous increase in political asylum applications to Western European countries. Political refugees in the immediate aftermath of the coup were mostly composed of leftist activists, trade unionists, and both activists and ordinary citizens that were Kurds, Alevis, and Assyrians.<sup>31</sup> The number further increased in the 1990s, while this time those seeking asylum were mostly composed of Kurds, due to the exacerbation of the armed conflict between the military and the PKK and severe human rights violations perpetrated by the state. The number of Turkish citizens seeking asylum in Western Europe over the period between 1980 and 1995 exceeded 400,000.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Boccagni, Lafleur, and Levitt (2015), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Turkey signed the first bilateral agreement with Germany in 1961, and concluded similar agreements with the Netherlands, Austria, and Belgium in 1964, with France in 1965, and with Sweden and Australia in 1967. Additional agreements were signed with the United Kingdom in 1961, with Switzerland in 1971, with Denmark in 1973 and with Norway in 1981, İçduygu A. (2009), "International Migration and Human Development in Turkey", United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Research Paper No. 2009/52, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Abadan-Unat, N. (1993). "Turkey: Late Entrant into Europe's Workforce", in Daniel Kubat (ed.), *The politics of migration policies: settlement and integration: the first world into the 1990s*, 2nd ed. New York: Center for Migration Studies.

<sup>31</sup> Adaman, F. and A. Kaya. (2012). "Social Impact of Emigration and Rural-Urban Migration in Central and Eastern Europe - Final Country Report: Turkey", European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion; Lucassen, L. (2005). *The immigrant threat: The integration of old and new migrants in western Europe since 1850*. Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, particularly, Chapter-6, pp. 144-170.

<sup>32</sup> İçduygu (2009), *op. cit.*, Appendix, Table 2.

In short, the expatriate population with origins in Turkey composed of “guest-workers” that stayed permanently in their countries of residence, their family members, those that left (or had to leave) Turkey for political reasons, and the descendants of all these groups in Europe is estimated to be over 3 million.<sup>33</sup> This population is characterised by heterogeneity along ethnic, religious, ideological, and class lines, which is reflected in a myriad of political mobilisation projects, initially as carbon copies of existing movements in Turkey, and later acquiring their own dynamics, discourses, and actions, while remaining connected with homeland politics.<sup>34</sup> While it is beyond the limits of this paper to explain the whole range and historical developments of the various movements and mobilisation projects among the diaspora(s) of Turkey, in an oversimplified way, it can be said that the leftist-rightist cleavage as the primary dividing line in the 1970s had been replaced by cleavages along a multitude of axes, what can be robustly labelled as laicist-Islamist, official Turkish nationalist-Kurdish nationalist, and Sunni majoritarian-pro-Alevi stances.<sup>35</sup>

At this point, it is important to note that the stances of these different movements towards the home-state and their forms of relationship with it show variation between groups but also over time depending on homeland political developments. Diaspora nationalism is often seen as a result of oppression in the host or home country, however studies show that groups that do not suffer from marginalization can also get involved in dense diasporic activities.<sup>36</sup> Senay<sup>37</sup> has described this diasporic behaviour as ‘seeing for the state’ and made an extensive research on groups that try to perpetuate the established social order within the confines of their hostland. All diaspora groups from Turkey form alliances, establish strategies, and address each other in similar ways to what happens in the homeland. For instance, as a stateless diaspora, Kurds use strategies that require more cooperation with the hostland political actors and they use all kinds of repertoires of protest in order to make their voice heard<sup>38</sup>, while some groups within the Turkish diaspora as a state-linked community establish ties with the Turkish consulate and the Turkish state in order to strengthen its hand as well as import official discourses to the transnational space to use as a leverage point in this discursive battle.<sup>39</sup> The transnational space becomes a place where diaspora groups strive to get the attention of hostland policy makers as well as competing for material and non-material resources and political and discursive opportunities in the hostland as well as

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<sup>33</sup> İçduygu, A. Z. G., Göker, L. B. Tokuzlu, S. Paçacı Elitok (2013), Migration Policy Centre – Migration Profile: Turkey, European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Migration Policy Centre, [http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/migration\\_profiles/Turkey.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/migration_profiles/Turkey.pdf), Last access 23 May 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Baser, B. (2015). ‘*Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts*’. Farnham: Ashgate Publishers.

<sup>35</sup> For detailed accounts of organisation among emigrants in Germany along homeland agendas, see, Østergaard-Nielsen, E. (2003a). *Transnational politics: Turks and Kurds in Germany*. London: Routledge, pp. 46-64; and Ögelman, N. (2003). “Documenting and Explaining the Persistence of Homeland Politics among Germany's Turks”, *International Migration Review*, 37 (1), 163-193.

<sup>36</sup> Biswas, B. (2004). Nationalism by Proxy: A Comparison of Social Movements among Diaspora Sikhs and Hindus, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 10, 269-295.

<sup>37</sup> Senay, B. (2013). Seeing for the state: Kemalist long-distance nationalism in Australia. *Nations and Nationalism*, 19 (2), 376-394.

<sup>38</sup> Baser, B. and Swain, A. (2011). Stateless Diaspora Groups and Their Repertoires of Nationalist Activism in Host Countries. *Journal of International Relations*, 8, 1, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Baser, B. (2014). The Awakening of a Latent Diaspora: The Political Mobilization of First and Second Generation Turkish Migrants in Sweden, *Ethnopolitics*, DOI: [10.1080/17449057.2014.894175](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2014.894175).

in the homeland.<sup>40</sup> The occasion of elections in Turkey marks one of those times where tensions are heightened and fragments within the diasporas from Turkey are the most apparent.

Solely looking at migrant organisations is not enough to understand the complex dynamic of diaspora politics but it might give an idea about the dominant perceptions among different groups within the diaspora. Each group has a different approach towards the developments related to Turkish-Kurdish politics. Even critical junctures such as the Gezi protests<sup>41</sup> cannot unite all groups, instead helping to reveal the fragmentations among them. Each group is ‘seeing for the state’<sup>42</sup> or in the case of Alevi and Kurdish diasporas ‘seeing for their ethnic or religious group’ in their own way with their own agenda in mind. Therefore, the Turkish diaspora should not be treated as a unified body or as pawns of the state without a critical angle.

Government changes and shifts in balance of power in the homeland also reflect on the asymmetrical relationship of the Turkish diaspora groups within a given host country. For example, the rise of the AKP after 2002 extremely undermined the Kemalist associations’ power over the diaspora public spheres and caused the emergence of a new elite that is considered as the representative of the ‘Turks’ in different countries. The discursive power of representativeness changed hands. As a result of this development, dormant members of the Kemalist diaspora groups started mobilising as a response to the rise of the AKP. Looking at the Gezi Events we also see that the nationalist Workers’ Party (*İşçi Partisi*), which now calls itself Patriotic Party (*Vatan Partisi*) and its youth association is gaining ground as a combination of these factors. An example to these newly emerging organisations is the UETD (Union of European Turkish Democrats), which has close links to AKP. They formed associations all around Europe including Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands and Britain and they organise lobby activities in the name of the state. The presidential elections were and the forthcoming general elections are happening in an environment which experienced energized diaspora mobilisation after the 2013 Gezi protests. New alliances have been formed and the already existing ones have been strengthened. Therefore, the election campaigns outside Turkish borders help us reveal the political engagements of diasporas as well as better understand the transnational conduct of Turkish politics abroad.

## **2.2. Homeland Calling: Turkey is reaching to its diaspora**

In the initial period of temporary labour export, Turkish governments attempted to incorporate expatriates to the homeland mainly through economic means such as remittances, skill transfers and the encouragement of return. Hence at this stage, the policy vis-à-vis expatriates was geared towards benefiting from labour emigration for the economic development of Turkey.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Baser, B. (2015), ‘Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts’, Farnham: Ashgate Publishers.

<sup>41</sup> For more information on Gezi protests see Baser, B. (2015), ‘Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts’, Farnham: Ashgate Publishers.

<sup>42</sup> Senay (2013).

<sup>43</sup> Abadan-Unat (1993), *op. cit.*; and Martin. P. L. (1991). *The unfinished story: Turkish labour migration to Western Europe with special reference to the Federal Republic of Germany*. Geneva: International Labour Office.



In line with the domestic developments in Turkey preceding and following the 1980 military coup, and the increasing number of political refugees that were seen as dissidents of the regime, the population abroad was divided into strongly polarised opposing sub-categories of ‘enemy emigrants’ and ‘friendly communities’,<sup>44</sup> and approached each category accordingly. The Kemalist state elite spearheaded by the military adhered to and imposed what Bora labelled as the ‘official nationalist doctrine’, the two constitutive pillars of which have been ‘the state's indivisible identity with the country and the nation’, and secularism in its strict sense.<sup>45</sup> Hence, the state has relied heavily on “separatist” and “reactionary” threats within and abroad. It tried to hamper ‘enemy emigrants’ effective organisation abroad, limit their room to manoeuvre, and to contain the spread of their influence among wider sections of expatriates and vis-à-vis host-states. The “friends” needed to be protected from potential corrosive effects of the former, kept within boundaries of official nationalism, and transformed into a force negating the “foes”.<sup>46</sup>

While keeping intact these sharply-edged demarcations, demonstrations of Turkey’s increased interest and willingness to embrace its expatriates also became visible in the 1990s. These efforts of rapprochement were partly caused by the realisation of permanence of “temporary” emigrants; partly driven by the foreign policy expectations from potential national voting blocs and lobbies of Turks in Europe; partly envisaged as part of the strategy of attracting investment and integrating neoliberalising Turkish economy with European markets; and partly aimed at enhancing the state’s allure for directing expatriates sympathy and loyalty to the state instead of Kurdish and Islamist movements that the Kemalist elite saw as “separatist” and “reactionary” forces respectively.

The AKP’s coming to power in 2002 and particularly the period starting from its second term in government marked substantial changes in the Turkish state’s discourse, attitude, and policy repertoire towards expatriates. First of all, the power shift from the Kemalist-official nationalist elite to the AKP, had a major impact on the state’s attitude towards various groups, particularly affecting the statuses, legitimacy, and stances towards the home-states of Kemalist-nationalist sections, and (Sunni) religious organisations.

Second, the AKP, in its capacity as a homeland political party took an active stance in organising in Europe. Already in 2003, the party was reported to be preparing for organising among Turks abroad through forming conservative democratic unions to ‘engage in lobbying activities for Turkey abroad’ and to ‘disseminate our [the AKP’s] views among the Turks’.<sup>47</sup> The UETD was established in 2004 and seems to serve this function, while publicly denying organic links with the AKP. It has taken up the

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<sup>44</sup> Ragazzi, F. (2009). “Governing diasporas”, *International Political Sociology*, 3, 378-397, p. 386.

<sup>45</sup> Bora, T. (2011). “Nationalist Discourses in Turkey”, in Kadioğlu, A. and F. Keyman (eds.) *Symbiotic antagonisms: competing nationalisms in Turkey*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 57-82, pp. 64-65.

<sup>46</sup> For Turkey’s efforts of monitoring, surveillance, and curbing dissidence abroad, particularly vis-à-vis Kurdish mobilisation see, Østergaard-Nielsen, E. (2003b), “Turkey and the ‘Euro Turks’: Overseas nationals as an ambiguous asset”, in E. Østergaard (ed.), *International migration and sending countries: perceptions, policies and transnational relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 77-98.

<sup>47</sup> The AKP’s then-group deputy chairman Eyüp Fatsa, quoted in *Milliyet*, 20 April 2003, “AKP Milli Görüş'e alternatif arıyor...”

responsibility of organising the “sports-hall” rallies of Erdoğan, which have become one of the trademarks of the home-government’s diaspora strategy. Resembling campaigning rallies, images and stories telling that thousands of expatriates come from all over Europe in a frenetic support to Erdoğan, have become increasingly visible in the Turkish media outlets and their European editions as well as in host-country media. These rallies have been conveying messages centred on the theme of “a politically and economically more powerful Turkey standing firmly behind its expatriates” as opposed to previously weaker, poorer, and disinterested Turkey. They have acquired an important domestic political purpose, aiming to show that Erdoğan and his project of “new Turkey” receive mass popular support from expatriates.

Third, a renewed interest in and a reconfigured approach towards expatriates, which can be summarised as the state’s launching of a rhetorical and practical ‘diaspora-making and engagement’ strategy with several dimensions gained pace.<sup>48</sup> An important dimension of this strategy has been the efforts to construct and sustain a diaspora of “entrepreneurial-professional” global Turks that are seen essential allies of the home-economy in achieving high economic growth, boosting trade volume, and achieving its deeper integration with global capital, which have been posited as top priorities by the AKP government and the closely related business community in Turkey. The World Turkish Business Council (*Dünya Türk İş Konseyi*, DTIK) was established in 2007 in order to bring these global Turks together with these motivations in mind.<sup>49</sup> Another dimension of the diaspora-making and engagement strategy has been demonstrating the AKP-led Turkey’s genuine willingness and material ability to embrace and empower its expatriates, and to strengthen their ties to the homeland. The other side of the coin is that such socioeconomically and politically empowered Turkish diaspora would contribute to the realisation of Ankara’s agendas. Already by 2003, it was stated as a top priority to establish a single bureaucracy that would coordinate the expatriate-related state bureaucracies, develop strategies to solve their problems and to benefit from their socioeconomic and political potential, and to coordinate expatriate NGOs in forming an effective Turkish lobby.<sup>50</sup>

In 2010, the Overseas Turks and Kin Communities Agency (*T.C. Başbakanlık Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*, YTB) under the Prime Ministry was established to perform all these tasks.<sup>51</sup> The YTB’s objective was stated by its first chairman as turning expatriates from ‘a mere “crowd of Turkish people” into a diaspora’, i.e., ‘an organized force capable of defending its rights, while working at the same time to influence decision-making processes in politics in the countries they

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<sup>48</sup> For Turkey’s recent diaspora strategy, also see, Aksel (2014) “Kins, Distant Workers, Diasporas: Constructing Turkey’s Transnational Members Abroad”, *Turkish Studies*, 15 (2), 195-219. Baser, Bahar (2015), ‘Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts’, Farnham: Ashgate Publishers.

<sup>49</sup> See the brochure of the WTBC “*Dünya Türk İş Konseyi: World Turkish Business Council*”, available online at: <http://www.dtik.org.tr/DC/Files/FB/4ad04c0e0c354fc79c763bb1e21756f2.pdf>, Last access 12 April 2015.

<sup>50</sup> The Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2003). “Yurtdışında yaşayan vatandaşlarımızın sorunlarının araştırılarak alınması gereken önlemlerin belirlenmesi amacıyla kurulan (10/8, 48) esas numaralı Meclis Araştırma Komisyonu Raporu” (*The report (10/8, 48) of the Parliamentary Research Commission tasked by investigating the problems of our citizens abroad and identifying necessary measures*), Term 22, Legislative Year 2, No: 335, 17 December, p. 146.

<sup>51</sup> Law No. 5978 on the organisation and duties of the Overseas Turks and Kin Communities Agency. *Official Gazette*, No: 27554, 06 April 2010.

live in'.<sup>52</sup> Not only due to its symbolic importance but also with the financial resources it has been allocated, the establishment of the YTB has constituted one of the major dimensions of demonstrating the home-state's transformed approach. The Agency has also assumed responsibility regarding expatriates' Turkey-based rights, and statuses. It took up an active role in the preparation of the 2012 external voting legislation.

While formal discourses reiterate that the Turkish state and the YTB is at an equal distance to all citizens and former citizens, and the only criterion to be part of the "citizen diaspora" is the current or former bond of citizenship, the YTB's scope and identification criteria, starting from its name "Overseas Turks" have been contested by Kurds and other minorities from the very beginning.<sup>53</sup> Lumping expatriates, transborder co-ethnic and kin populations, and fully-funded international students predominantly coming from the broader "kin space" within the scope of the YTB, Turkey's expansive diaspora increasingly reflects the Turko-Ottoman-Sunni-Islamic identity that the AKP government has been using both in its efforts to redefine the national narrative to be deployed in domestic politics and in formulating its foreign policy. Not remaining limited to definition and rhetoric, diaspora formation is being actively pursued. There are workshops organized all around Europe, there are attempts to merge Turkish and Azeri Diaspora organisations under umbrella federations,<sup>54</sup> there are ever-frequent official visits to Turkish associations in European countries. The diaspora groups, which are contesting state sovereignty over their ethnic or religious identity such as the Alevites and Kurds and their actions are not in line with the state policy, instead their aim is to convert it. Kurds, Alevites, Assyrians and Turkish Leftists or secularists are very much segregated and isolated from this new diaspora formation discourse. In short, the rhetoric and practice of diaspora imagined and disseminated by home-state elites undermines the multicultural/ethnic setting in within and beyond the borders of Turkey.

### **3. Politics of external voting in Turkey**

A rather limited version of expatriate enfranchisement was introduced in 1986. While Turkish citizens registered as living abroad for a period longer than six months gained the right to vote in general elections and referenda, the method of voting was limited to casting votes at the polling stations set up at the borders.<sup>55</sup> The right gained a constitutional basis through the amendments in 1995.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, considering the

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<sup>52</sup> Then-YTB Chairman Kemal Yurtnaç, quoted in *Today's Zaman*, 30 April 2013, 'Turkey works to transform overseas Turks into diaspora', available online, at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=314090](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=314090), Last access 24 May 2014.

<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, the objections by deputies from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party to the exclusionary and homogenising nature of the name "Overseas Turks" in the face of ethnic and cultural diversity of citizens abroad, in The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, (2010), *Minutes*, Term: 23, Legislative Year: 4, Session: 77, vol. 64, pp. 540-602, 24 March, particularly, pp. 546-547.

<sup>54</sup> See for example: 'European Azerbaijani Congress and Coordination Council of Azerbaijani-Turkish Diaspora Organizations hold joint meeting in Frankfurt' <<http://www.armeniandiaspora.com/showthread.php?198876-BAKU-Council-of-Azerbaijani-Turkish-Diaspora-Organisations-jt-meet>> Last Access 20 May 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Law no. 3270, dating 28.03.1986, *Official Gazette*, 15.04.1986, No: 19079, and Law no. 3377, dating 23.05.1987, *Official Gazette*, 03.06.1987, No: 19476.

<sup>56</sup> Law No. 4121, dating 23.7.1995, *Official Gazette*, 26.7.1995, No: 22355.

secular establishment's accelerated efforts to undermine political Islam in the late 1990s, and the widespread presumption that expatriates tend to support religious or nationalist parties,<sup>57</sup> it would not be far fetched to argue that the overall willingness to overcome the obstacles before enabling out-of-country-voting had remained rather low. Hence, homeland political actors' efforts to juggle with the aspiration to selectively court and incorporate the citizenry, their reluctance to actually grant full electoral power to certain sections, and the legal unjustifiability of such partial incorporation resulted in an ambiguous outcome: While all overseas citizens were incorporated in the polity *formally*, taking steps that would enable *actual* political incorporation of overseas citizens were delayed. As a result, the turnout rate remained under 5 % in the six elections since 1987.

This was changed –on paper- in March 2008, when the AKP brought a draft bill to the parliament introducing alternative methods of voting by mail, electronic voting, and out-of-country voting in addition to the existing border ballots method. The practical extension of the franchise was presented as 'a very good example of the participatory democracy leg of AKP-initiated democratisation process'.<sup>58</sup> The AKP had expected overall positive returns for itself and disadvantageous results particularly for the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) from overseas votes, presumed to be predominantly conservative. This conviction is not only held by the AKP but also by the media.<sup>59</sup> In the case of Western European countries, the AKP's electoral advantage seems to be confirmed also by public opinion surveys.<sup>60</sup> The distribution of border ballots in the general elections has also pointed to an AKP lead (See Table-1).<sup>61</sup> An additional motivation for Erdoğan to expand "his" potential constituency, which also helps explaining the timing of the 2008 draft bill, was the outcome of the 2007 referendum, giving consent to constitutional amendments including the election of the president by popular vote starting from the end of then-president Gül's term in 2014.

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<sup>57</sup> Østergaard-Nielsen (2003b), *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>58</sup> The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, (2008b), *Minutes*, Term: 23, Legislative Year: 2, Session: 77, vol. 16, pp. 444-511, 13 March, p. 450.

<sup>59</sup> For example, an article in the *Spiegel Online International*, claims that 'Erdoğan ... became the first to recognize the potential value of these votes. He knew that many of these foreign Turks would vote for him. ... Erdoğan supporters are in the majority -in Germany as well as in Turkey'. Elger, K. and Ö. Gezer (2014). "For Erdoğan, or Against Him: Turks in Germany Get the Vote", *Spiegel Online International*, 6 August, available online, at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/turks-in-germany-allowed-to-vote-for-first-time-a-984624.html#ref=plista>, last access 24 May 2014.

<sup>60</sup> A 2007 survey found out that 31 % of Turkish citizens in the EU-15 opted for the AKP and 18% for the CHP. *Hürriyet*, 1 April 2007, "Gurbetçinin Tercihi AKP", available online, at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/6246444.asp>, last access 24 May 2015. According to a survey conducted by Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Centre (HUGO) with 2634 Turkish citizens in ten Western European countries, 44% said they would vote AKP, 14% were undecided, 12% would vote CHP, 8% would vote none, while 4% would vote MHP, and 2% would vote BDP. HUGO (2013). Avrupa Kamuoyu Araştırmaları Euro-Turks-Barometre - Özet (Euro-Turks Barometer - Summary), available online, at: [http://www.hugo.hacettepe.edu.tr/ETB\\_rapor.pdf](http://www.hugo.hacettepe.edu.tr/ETB_rapor.pdf), last access 24 May 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Obviously, the sample is far from being random. However, the increasing support to the AKP and the fact that it has been attracting votes from the "other" category and from the MHP is telling.

**Table-1 Distribution of border votes in the general elections (2002-2011)**

<b>Election Year</b>	<b>AKP</b>	<b>CHP</b>	<b>MHP</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>2002</b>	37,525 33%	26,232 23%	11,368 10%	38,910 34%
<b>2007</b>	128,694 56,75%	40,255 17,75%	33,417 14,74%	24,418 10,76%
<b>2011</b>	78,875 61,69%	33,552 26,24%	10,503 8,21%	4937 3,86%

Compiled from the Republic of Turkey Supreme Election Board's official election results statistics webpage: <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/GenelSecimler.html>

While the AKP had strong electoral incentives to incorporate external voters, other parties' positions differed. The CHP spokesperson claimed that mail or electronic voting would render voters vulnerable to social pressure by family members, neighbourhood communities, religious orders, and 'organisations aspiring to abolish constitutionally ingrained fundamental principles of our Republic', which have been influential among expatriates in Europe. He then reminded that all Turkish citizens, resident or non-resident, were obliged not to challenge and to embrace the non-negotiable principles of the Republic, i.e., laicism, social welfare, rule of law, and the 'indivisible unity and integrity' of the state.<sup>62</sup> The Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) had similar doubts because in unmonitored methods of voting 'criminal and terrorist organisations' abroad that 'pestered the European Turkdom' could put pressure on external voters.<sup>63</sup>

The third set of objections came from the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP), the pro-Kurdish party that was closed down in 2009 and was replaced by the Party of Peace and Democracy (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP). DTP's objections deserve particular attention as they questioned the AKP's claim that its draft bill on external voting was driven by its desire to improve the inclusiveness and quality of participatory democracy in Turkey as part of the AKP-initiated democratisation process. To better understand the DTP's criticism and the AKP's questionable claim, one should first take into account that in 1983, post-coup lawmakers introduced a 10 per cent national-level threshold justified on the basis of political stability, which still remains intact. This has implied that votes of political parties below the threshold have been translated as seats in the parliament for those that are above, in direct proportion with parties' votes. This has constituted a major problem for minor or geographically concentrated parties, and mainly for pro-Kurdish parties. In order to circumvent the threshold, these parties entered the last two elections with independent candidates and formed their parliamentary party groups once in the parliament. Through that way, the DTP managed to form its group with 21 deputies at the 2007 elections, and the BDP had 29 deputies after the 2011 elections.

In close relation with these intricacies, the provision in the external voting draft bill allowing overseas citizens to vote only for political parties –and not for independent candidates– was interpreted by the DTP as a measure directly targeting itself and its potential voters abroad. Thus, DTP deputies claimed that considering the AKP's

<sup>62</sup> The Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2008b), *op. cit.*, pp. 475-476.

<sup>63</sup> The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, (2008a), *Minutes*, Term: 23, Legislative Year: 2, Session: 70, vol. 15, pp.446-455, 27 February, p. 453.

insistence on preserving the representationally problematic threshold, the external voting legislation, rather than aspiring for broader democratic inclusion, aimed at electorally favouring the AKP and the above-threshold parties, while disadvantaging the DTP and excluding its external voters.<sup>64</sup>

Despite objections from opposition parties, the 2008 amendments on the law on elections and voter registration passed thanks to the AKP's numerical majority.<sup>65</sup> Immediately after, the CHP applied to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of the mail voting clause arguing that it breaches with the constitutionally inscribed 'voting in privacy' principle, and the latter revoked the clause.<sup>66</sup> Before the 2011 general elections, the decision of the Supreme Election Board (*Yüksek Seçim Kurulu*, YSK) ruled out the possibility of out-of-country-voting justified on the basis of insufficient infrastructural preparation.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, an amendment to the law on elections in May 2012 regulated methods of external voting (taking out the mail voting option) and the compilation of an overseas voters' registry, and defined the tasks of the YSK and the diplomatic representations in the organisation and management of elections abroad.<sup>68</sup> Neither the 10 % threshold nor the restriction put on external voters to opt for an independent candidate was changed in this final version. It should be noted that while the BDP objected to the combination of both measures aiming to exclude rather than include voters, the above-threshold opposition parties remained completely silent on the issue.<sup>69</sup> The government spokesperson left the independent candidate issue without answer, while stating that the AKP considers the threshold to be useful for political stability and strong governments, and had no plans of reducing it.<sup>70</sup>

#### 4. 2014 Presidential Elections

##### 4.1. Implementation of External Voting During Presidential Elections

2,798,726 Turkish citizens who reside outside Turkey's borders had the right to vote in the August 2014 presidential elections.<sup>71</sup> This number constitutes almost 5% of the electorate. In places where the number of potential voters is large, such as Germany, the government negotiated with host states in order to set up stadiums, schools or other convention rooms in order to distribute ballot stations. There are reportedly 1.5 million Turkish citizens eligible to vote in Germany and 85,000 in the US. France comes in second with more than 600,000 Turks, the Netherlands third with more than

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<sup>64</sup> The Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2008b), *op. cit.*, pp. 455-457.

<sup>65</sup> Law No. 5749/2008 amending the Law No. 298/1961 on Elections and Voter Registration.

<sup>66</sup> Constitutional Court Decision No: E.2008/13, K.2008113, dating 29.05.2008, *Official Gazette*, 05.07.2008, No: 26927.

<sup>67</sup> Republic of Turkey Supreme Election Board (*T.C. Yüksek Seçim Kurulu Başkanlığı*), Decision No: 120, dating 26.2.2011.

<sup>68</sup> Law No. 6304, dating 9.5.2012, *Official Gazette*, 18.5.2012, No: 28296.

<sup>69</sup> The Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2012), *Minutes*, Term: 24, Legislative Year: 2, Session: 104, vol. 20, pp. 875-880; 881-882; 883-896; 900-912; 913-917; 918-932; 963-972, 9 May.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 877.

<sup>71</sup> See the official YSK website for further details:

[http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/content/conn/YSKUCM/path/Contribution%20Folders/HaberDosya/2014C-B-Kesin-GumrukYurdisi-Grafik.pdf?\\_afriLoop=22656611625189210](http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/content/conn/YSKUCM/path/Contribution%20Folders/HaberDosya/2014C-B-Kesin-GumrukYurdisi-Grafik.pdf?_afriLoop=22656611625189210). Last access 11 September 2014.

450,000, Austria fourth with around 270,000, and Belgium fifth with nearly 200,000.<sup>72</sup> According to YSK statistics, the number of registered voters in these countries was as follows: 1, 383,042 in Germany, 298,839 in France, 240,315 in the Netherlands, 127,517 in Belgium, and 105,479 in Austria.<sup>73</sup>

For the presidential elections, the YSK has set up ballot boxes at 103 ballot stations in 54 countries, where more than 500 Turkish citizens live.<sup>74</sup> The absentee votes were cast between July 31 and August 3, 2014 and they were sent to Turkey through diplomatic courier system to be counted all together with the other votes that are cast inside Turkey. This procedure attracted a lot of criticism for its proneness to election fraud, especially among the anti-AKP media outlets in the diaspora.

The total number of votes cast abroad as well as at customs was 530,116 (526,541 of them were valid votes), which meant that the rate of participation was 18.94%.<sup>75</sup> The results were disappointing in terms of participation but this is certainly not a Turkey-specific result, as the participation rate of the external voters is usually low across the board.<sup>76</sup> At the end of rather withered elections, the YSK announced that Erdoğan received 329,340 votes, İhsanoğlu received 153,523 votes and Demirtaş received 43,678 votes (See Table-2).

**Table-2: Results taken at overseas, border, and domestic ballot boxes in the 10 August 2014 presidential election**

Candidates	Overseas Ballots	Border Ballots	External votes aggregate	Domestic ballots
<b>R. T. Erdoğan</b>	62,3 %	62,73 %	62,55 %	51,65 %
<b>S. Demirtaş</b>	9,78 %	7,14 %	8,30 %	9,78 %
<b>E.M. İhsanoğlu</b>	27,92 %	30,13%	29,16 %	38,57 %

Source: YSK Decision No: 3719 and its appendices 416/A-B-C-D, dating 15.08.2014, Official Gazette, 28.08.2014, No: 29102.

#### 4.2. Transnationalization of Election Campaigns

<sup>72</sup>For more info see: ‘PM as candidate for president may receive half of overseas vote’, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-350260-pm-as-candidate-for-president-may-receive-half-of-overseas-vote.html>. Last access 11 September 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Official YSK statistics on the number of votes candidates got at the overseas polling stations, available online, at: [http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/faces/Anasayfa?\\_afrcLoop=176593059803175&\\_afrcWindowMode=0&\\_afrcWindowId=null#%40%3F\\_afrcWindowId%3Dnull%26\\_afrcLoop%3D176593059803175%26\\_afrcWindowMode%3D0%26\\_adf.ctrl-state%3D1b6ty5k7i1\\_4](http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/faces/Anasayfa?_afrcLoop=176593059803175&_afrcWindowMode=0&_afrcWindowId=null#%40%3F_afrcWindowId%3Dnull%26_afrcLoop%3D176593059803175%26_afrcWindowMode%3D0%26_adf.ctrl-state%3D1b6ty5k7i1_4), last access 17 September 2014.

<sup>74</sup> See, ‘Cumhurbaşkanı Seçiminde Sandık Kurulacak Dış Temsilcilikler’, available online, at: <http://ysk.gov.tr/ysk/content/conn/YSKUCM/path/Contribution%20Folders/Resources/docs/YD-SandikKurulacakUlkeler.pdf>, last access 18 May 2015.

<sup>75</sup> For more details, the official website is: [http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/content/conn/YSKUCM/path/Contribution%20Folders/HaberDosya/2014C-B-Kesin-GumrukYurdisi-Grafik.pdf?\\_afrcLoop=22656611625189210](http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/content/conn/YSKUCM/path/Contribution%20Folders/HaberDosya/2014C-B-Kesin-GumrukYurdisi-Grafik.pdf?_afrcLoop=22656611625189210). Last access 11 September 2014.

<sup>76</sup> See Lafleur, J. and Sanchez-Dominguez, M. (2014). “The political choices of emigrants voting in home country elections: A socio-political analysis of the electoral behaviour of Bolivian external voters”, *Migration Studies*, 1-27.

Turkey's politics have long been transnationalised by the Turkish and Kurdish migrants and asylum seekers who carried their 'struggle' outside Turkish borders, by political movements in Turkey which established satellite institutions abroad or by the Turkish state itself through its official mechanisms which were established to facilitate and monitor its citizens life abroad.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, there is nothing surprising to see that the election campaigns and the rhetoric that they created also diffused to Europe. Especially countries, such as Germany, became the heart of transnational election campaigns. It was clear to see that the simmering tensions in Turkey during the last decade -which surely has its roots way back-, were also reflected on the migrant groups from Turkey.

First sign of that was Erdoğan's visit to Germany in May 2014, which caused uproar among the diaspora members who opposed the AKP and Erdoğan's authoritarian rule in Turkey. Several German newspapers commented on the issue and some institutions even expressed their expectation that he would cancel his visit. When he visited Cologne on May 24, 2014, the political divisions were very much visible in German soil where left leaning, Alevite and Kurdish groups were protesting on the one side and on the other Erdoğan's supporters were laying rose petals on his way. It is said that 45.000 to 50.000 people protested Erdoğan's visit while 15.000 people were welcoming his presence with a refulgent demonstration.<sup>78</sup> What was interesting to see was that the anti-Erdoğan protest was not solely organized by the diaspora in Germany but supporters came from all over Europe, including the United Kingdom, by using all means of transport just to show their solidarity. Some TV channels in Turkey broadcasted the whole protest event live. The synchronization of the campaigning mechanisms at home and abroad was one of the most spectacular events during the presidential election campaigns.

CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu also visited Essen, in Germany in early June, right after Erdoğan's visit. His move was welcomed by many German media outlets and caused less controversy compared to Erdoğan's visit. During his speech addressing CHP supporters in Germany, he constantly referred to Soma mine incident and the Gezi protests in order to give the message that CHP condemns the current policies of the government and the veer to a more authoritarian Turkey. He visited Germany again, at the end of June, after the declaration of İhsanoğlu's candidacy in order to present CHP and MHP's joint-candidate to the Turks and political circles abroad. As enthusiastic as its program sounds, CHP leader's speeches could not convince many traditional CHP-voters to vote for the joint-candidate. For instance, many Alevites in Germany, who are seen as the CHP's secular voter base abroad, opted for not voting for the CHP's candidate, partly because his close relations with the Sunni Gulf monarchies raised suspicions of a sectarian bias in his worldview.

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<sup>77</sup> Baser (2012). "Inherited Conflicts: Spaces of Contention between the Turkish and Kurdish Second-Generation Diasporas in Sweden and Germany", European University Institute, Unpublished PhD Thesis.

<sup>78</sup> Topcu, H. (2014). 'Koln'de Onbinlerce Kisi Erdoğan'I Protesto Etti', *BBC Turkce*, 25 May 2014. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/05/140524\\_koln\\_yuruyus.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/05/140524_koln_yuruyus.shtml). Last access 11 September 2014.



Demirtaş was also another leader who recognized the importance of the diaspora vote and its potential impact on the election results.<sup>79</sup> He organized an election campaign in Europe and he visited cities where a considerable Turkish and Kurdish population reside. In his speeches in the diaspora, he followed the exact same style that he pursued in Turkey: he talked about minority rights, further democratization in Turkey, creating possibilities for peace negotiations and finally he underlined the importance of Gezi protests and the demand for certain reforms regarding human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of press. What was interesting to observe was that he was not solely stressing Kurds or Kurdish rights but he had a much more over-arching approach.

#### ***4.3. Insights from the first external voting experience: Low turnout, political preferences, variation based on host-country and emigration trajectory***

Ayhan Kaya, who has written extensively about the Turkish diaspora in Europe estimated that at least the 40% of the diaspora members support Erdoğan or sympathize with the AKP in general. His research on the Turkish immigrants also suggests that the diaspora members who tended to keep their Turkish citizenship were the ones who had conservative leanings.<sup>80</sup> The results point out a higher support level for Erdoğan outside Turkish borders, as Erdoğan received %10 more votes abroad compared to the percentage that he received in Turkey. Surely the general results include countries that are outside Europe, but the distribution of votes in Europe, where most Turkish migrants live, reveals how popular Erdoğan is among the diaspora members. One reason for his popularity is that since 2002, the AKP has considered mobilizing abroad as important as mobilizing within the country. New civil society organizations, networks, businessmen associations and migrant organizations mushroomed quite extensively within the last decade. Moreover, the AKP managed to attract conservative-leaning votes from a larger segment of the Turkish migrant community. Erdoğan's frequent visits to Germany, in which he called for the diaspora members not to assimilate into German society and made constant remarks on Turkish rights within Germany and Europe at large surely found a response from Turkish migrants who feel discriminated against or not well integrated into their host communities. Many also felt neglected by other political parties for so many years that they appreciated the AKP's interest in formulating policy about the diaspora.

Certainly each host country has its specific diaspora population with varying political behaviour, integration levels and mobilization patterns (See Figure-1).<sup>81</sup>

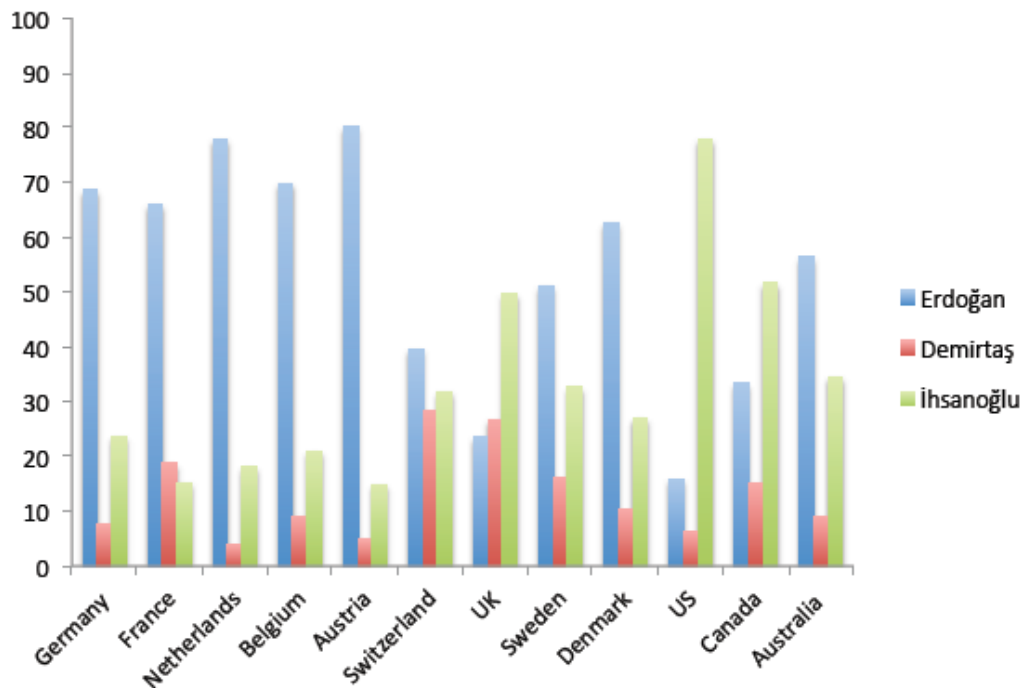
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<sup>79</sup> Diaspora members also opened websites where they informed people about voting procedures abroad. See for example: <http://Demirtaşlondon.wordpress.com/>

<sup>80</sup>For more info see: 'PM as candidate for president may receive half of overseas vote'.

<sup>81</sup> Odmalm, P. (2009). "Turkish Organizations in Europe: How National Contexts Provide Different Avenues for Participation?", Turkish Studies, Vol.10, no.2, 149-163.

**Figure-1: Distribution of votes cast in major host-countries (%) - 2014 presidential election**



Source: Compiled by the authors based on YSK official election statistics

In Germany, Erdoğan received 76,817 votes while İhsanoğlu received 26,578 and Demirtaş 8,538. In the USA, we see a different picture. İhsanoğlu received 8,081 votes while Erdoğan received 1,651 and Demirtaş received 644.<sup>82</sup> İhsanoğlu also received majority of the votes in London: İhsanoğlu received 2,525, Demirtaş 1,358 and Erdoğan 1,195.<sup>83</sup> In Sweden, instead, Erdoğan was the winner of elections (with the following vote distribution: Erdoğan 736, Demirtaş 234 and İhsanoğlu 470) and in France he had solid victory (Erdoğan 16,329, Demirtaş 4,634 and İhsanoğlu 3,774).

This clearly shows that Erdoğan was the most popular candidate for most, but not all, diasporas. The results also reveal that the profile of migrants in the diaspora determine their voting behaviour. For instance, majority of the migrants from Turkey living in the UK are estimated to be Alevis and this might be an explaining factor for the results of the ballot box in London. Another important observation is that İhsanoğlu himself did not organize visits to the diaspora populations and did not run a proactive campaign. It was the CHP leadership that bore the public relations part of his presidential campaign in Germany and elsewhere. Diaspora voters did not know İhsanoğlu before and they did not have the chance to witness his own vision apart from watching his speeches on Turkish TV channels. This could also explain the low participation of CHP and MHP voters.

<sup>82</sup> The official website is: <https://sonuc.ysk.gov.tr/module/sspsCumhurbaskani.jsf>. Last access 11 September 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Although many groups organized joint protests and actions against the AKP rule in Turkey, such as the above-mentioned anti-Erdoğan protests in Germany, when it came to casting votes there was no unity within the opposition. It was hardly there in Turkey and almost non-existent in the diaspora. What was also striking about the diaspora votes was that a higher percentage of votes were expected for Demirtaş. Especially in countries such as Germany, the Kurdish diaspora is very strong and mobilized. After each and every significant political event in Turkey, Kurds show their reaction by organizing large protests and demonstrations. The election results definitely do not reflect the strength of the Kurdish diaspora, especially in Europe. However why the Kurdish diaspora did not go to the ballot box is a subject for another systematic study.

The reasons for low turn out can be summarized in a nutshell as the following: In certain cases, such as the United Kingdom or Sweden, the ballot boxes were located only in capital cities and many diaspora members could not afford to travel long distances to cast their vote. Also the information related to voting procedures was not distributed extensively and many diaspora members complained that they did not know anything about the appointment system or other procedures. Political parties did not run a campaign abroad in order to encourage registration for participation at the elections. Many diaspora members did not have any idea how to register to vote and how to arrange appointments. Timing of elections was also another factor as in summer times many migrants return to Turkey or go on holiday. Finally, the type of the election and the widespread perception by voters within and outside Turkey that Erdoğan would most probably come out as the winner presumably negatively affected the voters' belief in making a difference by voting arguably contributed to external voters' degree of willingness to overcome hurdles. The perception that the outcome of the election was cut and dried also contributed to lower than average turnout also within Turkey.<sup>84</sup>

Still, a significant result of the first external voting experience at the 2014 presidential election that was closely related to the abovementioned threshold-independent candidate debate was the near-to-10 per cent vote Selahattin Demirtaş received within and outside Turkey. The presidential election served as a test case for the BDP's project of transforming itself from an ethnically and regionally Kurdish party to the Democratic Party of the Peoples (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP); defining itself as a progressive and pro-diversity party on the left addressing entire Turkey. The fact that HDP candidate Demirtaş increased the BDP's votes up to 3-4 per cent and the requirement of entering the election as a political party to candidate for external votes have arguably played a role in the HDP's decision to enter the June 2015 general elections with a party list. The HDP's high degree of activism abroad in an effort to gain its share of external votes that might make the difference in exceeding the threshold illustrates the critical importance of these votes for the party. Numerical intricacies of the election render the potential addition of close to 3 million external voters highly significant also for the remaining parties.

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<sup>84</sup> The turnout rate within Turkey was 74 %, which marked the lowest rate for elections in the last 12 years. That the turnout rate in the municipal elections of March 2014 was 89,19 % is telling about the general low levels of participation, which partially might have been affected by the perception that the outcome of the presidential election was somewhat pre-determined.

## 5. Legislative Elections 7 June 2015

Turkey is now getting prepared for another critical juncture, namely the 7<sup>th</sup> of June national elections. It is a significant election for many reasons: firstly, it is the first time that a pro-Kurdish party, HDP, is participating in the elections with a political party rather than independent candidates despite the fact that the unfortunate %10 threshold remains, secondly it will be determining the future of Turkey's political regime. It is said that if the AKP gets the absolute majority in the parliament, it might intend to change the regime of the Turkish Republic from a parliamentary to a presidential system. At this point, diaspora votes play a crucial role and mainstream political party leaders acknowledge it during their election campaigns. Diaspora votes might affect the HDP's success in reaching the %10 threshold and they might also favor AKP's aim by increasing its percentage in the parliament. Transnational election campaigns were all the more visible this time and it is worth exploring their reach and efficacy. At its current standing, the external voting system that is being implemented favors only political parties, which can pass the %10 threshold. This is clearly a sign that the newly introduced external voting procedures are not there for increasing democratic participation per se, but they are there to benefit the major political parties and isolate the disadvantaged groups once more.

### 5.1. Implementation of External Voting: Lessons Learnt from the Presidential Elections

The major findings from presidential elections in terms of how to increase participation of voters abroad was to better organize the appointment system, increase the number of polling stations, inform the voters about registration process and finally creating better campaigning strategies for the diaspora. Having experienced the presidential elections, some reforms have been conducted. For instance the number of polling stations have been extended. Turkish diplomatic representations were more active in terms of informing citizens abroad and they even used social media as a way to reach emigrants.

For the forthcoming elections, ballot boxes will be placed to countries, which have more than 500 Turkish citizens as residents. Therefore out of 2,866,652 registered voters, only 2,848,652 Turkish citizens will be able to vote abroad despite the fact that there are more diaspora members registered abroad.<sup>85</sup> There will be 112 polling places in 54 different counties.<sup>86</sup> This means the addition of 9 polling places compared to the number in August 2014. 6 out of these 9 new polling places were opened in Germany, 1 in the UK, 1 in the US, and 1 in Kazakhstan.<sup>87</sup> The online appointment system that was considered to have contributed to the low turnout has been eliminated. Now the diplomatic representations just give a specific date and Turkish citizens abroad will just go to the consulate or the designated polling place at any time between 10 am and 19 pm.

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<sup>85</sup> See 'Yurtdisinda Oy Verme Islemleri Basladi' <http://www.imctv.com.tr/86930/2015/05/yurtdisinda-oy-verme-islemi-basladi/>, Last access 24 May 2015.

<sup>86</sup>See, '25. Dönem Milletvekili Seçiminde Sandık Kurulacak Temsilcilikler, Oy Verme Tarihleri ve Seçim Yapılacak Yerlerin Adresleri', available online, at: <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/content/com/YSKUCM/path/Contribution%20Folders/SecmenIslemleri/Secimler/2015MV-SandikKurulacakUlkeler.pdf> , last access 20 May 2015.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

There is still something problematic about the external voting procedures, which is highly criticized by experts and commentators alike. In countries such as Sweden where there are around 35.000 registered voters, the voting day is determined only 1 day, which is the 31<sup>st</sup> of May. Similarly, in the UK, there are almost 80.000 registered voters, while the voting period is limited to two days. This is incredibly problematic since in many other countries the ballot boxes are open for 24 days from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of May.<sup>88</sup> In Sweden, several migrant organizations organized a petition to extend the voting dates however this attempt was unsuccessful. This is also thought provoking considering the idea behind the external voting rights after all, if it is not to increase democratic participation.

It is argued by diaspora campaigners that thousands of people registered to vote abroad after the presidential elections and a different turnout rate is expected compared to the previous elections. Migrant organizations make declarations to newspapers and social media outlets in this direction and the recent reports coming from various civil initiatives that are following the elections reveal that the voting rate will be much higher than the presidential elections.<sup>89</sup>

### ***5.2. Transnational Conduct of Turkish Politics abroad: Struggles in the homeland exceeds boundaries***

In his speech to supporters gathered to hear him in Karlsruhe in May, Erdogan said: “(You) are our power outside the country. For us you are no migrant workers, you are our strength in foreign countries.”<sup>90</sup> Despite the nature of his post, the President is on the road to gather votes for AKP from the diaspora in the upcoming elections. This behaviour also hints that Turkey’s new opening towards the diaspora is not an aim to be more inclusive and democratic but actually to enlarge a potential voting base and increase leverage in foreign countries.

As mentioned above, the diaspora is not homogenous and there are numerous groups, which support different parties within the diaspora(s) from Turkey. As a result of the opening of the political field to the expatriates, not only the AKP but also opposition parties, and particularly the HDP and the CHP have extended their organisation and campaigning efforts as to cover the overseas constituency.<sup>91</sup> The President defines the diaspora as a source and demonstration of strength in foreign countries but in this upcoming election it might prove him the opposite, because other parties are also campaigning fiercely abroad which might pose a threat to AKP’s absolute majority in the parliament.

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<sup>88</sup> For instance, around 31.000 voters in Denmark or around 40.000 voters in Australia are able vote in a 24-day period, or around 8000 voters in Norway are given a 10-day period for voting.

<sup>89</sup> See the report by the civil society organization called ‘Gurbetin Oylari’: <<http://gurbetinoylari.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/de-2.-rapor.pdf>>, Last access 24 May 2015.

<sup>90</sup> See ‘Kurds in Germany enraged over AKP phone text messages’, <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/turkey/20052015>, Last access 24 May 2015.

<sup>91</sup> The CHP has ‘CHP Unions’ in twenty-five countries abroad, and there are nine Unions only in Germany. See, the list of overseas organisations, at: [http://arsiv.chp.org.tr/?page\\_id=115373](http://arsiv.chp.org.tr/?page_id=115373), last access 12 May 2015. The HDP has a HDP-Europe legation that aims both to engage in activities at the EU level, and to coordinate the overseas organization and campaigning for the elections in Turkey. See, <http://en.hdpeurope.eu>, last access 12 May 2015.

The presidential elections were an important turning point for the diaspora and its experience with external voting. The turnout was low and the votes in the end did not have a big impact on the election results. However, the general elections are more perplex and diaspora votes are all the more crucial for the upcoming elections of 7<sup>th</sup> of June. Firstly, the leftist leaning pro-Kurdish party, HDP, is participating at the elections for the first time as a political party rather than putting forward independent candidates. That means for the first time, diaspora members will be able to vote for candidates from this political circle as it was not possible for voting for independent candidates before even at ballot boxes set up at the borders. Secondly, the %10 threshold makes these elections a priority for many who did not bother to vote before for a variety of reasons. It can be said that at the presidential elections, many thought the result was already clear. However this time there is a goal to be achieved: passing the %10 and this could cause a motivation for mobilisation among diaspora members.

The diaspora groups have been politically active for so long and each group within the diaspora supported different ideological groups in Turkey. Diffusion of Gezi protests, protests against Erdogan's visits to Germany as well as groups welcoming him chanting slogans with his name reveal that the interest for homeland politics is there. However, the voter turnout did not reflect this activism level at the presidential elections. One reason could be that political activism does not –and does not have to– transform itself in a voting behaviour. Many could be politically active and yet abstain from voting. Moreover, the presidential elections could not be the real litmus test. The upcoming elections might reveal a better pattern of diaspora's voting behaviour as this time their vote will mean contributing to the percentage of votes that their party would get which in the end affect the number of parliamentarians.

The 2014 presidential election was a first for many political parties for a dense transnational propaganda strategy however lessons were learnt from this experience to be applied to the upcoming elections. Major political parties who are participating at the elections acknowledged the importance of diaspora votes and started tailoring international election campaigns months before the elections. AKP, CHP and HDP founded diaspora organizations that are responsible for the elections. They encouraged diaspora members to register in order to be able to vote at the elections. They used social media and other means to inform the diaspora members regarding the procedures. AKP, for instance, used mass SMSs asking people to vote for AKP at the elections in Germany.<sup>92</sup> Germany, as usual, has been the hub for transnational election campaigning. HDP leader Demirtas started his election campaign in Berlin on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March and declare that the German-Turkish and German-Kurdish votes will determine the faith of the elections. CHP leader Kilicdaroglu visited Dusseldorf on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, MHP leader Bahceli visited Oberhausen on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April and AKP leader and PM Davutoglu visited Dortmund on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May.<sup>93</sup> All party leaders conceded the importance of diaspora votes from Germany as the crucial external vote however they also paid attention to other host country contexts. HDP in the Netherlands prepared posters to encourage people to register and put them all

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<sup>92</sup> See 'Kurds in Germany enraged over AKP phone text messages', at: <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/turkey/20052015>, Last access 24 May 2015.

<sup>93</sup> See 'Turkiye'deki genel secimin kaderini Almanya belirleyebilir': <http://zaman-online.de/turkiyedeki-genel-seçimin-kaderini-almanya-belirleyebilir-220162>, Last access 24 May 2015.

around Amsterdam. In Sweden both AKP and HDP supporting organizations arranged travel for diaspora members who wanted to vote in Stockholm. The HDP leader Demirtas organized visits to homes of diaspora members. It is claimed that just in France, the HDP visited around 45.000 homes.<sup>94</sup> Door to door election campaign was also carried out in other cities such as Hamburg, Frankfurt, Velbert or Marseille.<sup>95</sup>

More importantly, the alliances and joint platforms between certain sections of Alevi organisation abroad, leftist-workers- associations, and components of the Kurdish movement that have been gradually developing in the diaspora are being transformed into formal alliances within the context of the now transnational elections. Delegates of the Federation of Alevi Associations in Germany (*Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu*, AABF) voted in favour of supporting the HDP in March 2015, and the chairman of the European-level confederation AABK, Turgut Öker declared his candidacy for nomination from the HDP list.<sup>96</sup> The AABK seconded the electoral alliance with the HDP through a declaration revealing the proposals both from the CHP and the HDP asking for its electoral support.<sup>97</sup> As one of the outcomes of the alliance, and as the HDP's demonstration of the importance it gives to the incorporation of Alevi components, Turgut Öker was placed on the very top of the HDP list in one of the electoral districts in Istanbul. Former MEP Feleknas Uca, Germany-born daughter of a Yazidi family from the Kurdish province of Batman, ranks fourth in the HDP's party list in Diyarbakir, a position that would guarantee a seat in the parliament, if the HDP exceeds the threshold.<sup>98</sup>

Some of such “transfers” from abroad also have found their places in the AKP's list. Despite the very close relationship with the home-government, all seven names from prominent positions within the UETD, including its chairman Süleyman Çelik, that ran as candidates for nomination turned up empty-handed.<sup>99</sup> Mustafa Yeneroğlu, the former General Secretary of the Islamic Community Milli Görüs, ranks tenth in one of the districts of Istanbul in the AKP list. Former SPD-Green MEP Ozan Ceyhun, although to a lesser extent, also has the chance of becoming an MP in the assembly of Turkey from the fifth rank of one of the districts of Izmir. The MHP has no expatriate candidates, while the CHP nominated three names with almost no chances of being elected.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>94</sup> See ‘Gurbetci sadece secmek degil, secilmek de istiyor’, <http://haber.star.com.tr/yazar/gurbetci-sadece-secmek-degil-secilmek-de-istiyor/yazi-1027467>, Last Access 24 May 2015.

<sup>95</sup> See ‘Avrupa basariya kilitlendi’, <http://www.yeniozgurpolitika.org/index.php?rupel=nuce&id=39792>, Last access 24 May 2015.

<sup>96</sup> *T24 Online News*, 30 March 2015, “AABF yeni yöneticilerini seçti”, at: <http://t24.com.tr/haber/aabf-yeni-yoneticilerini-secti.291992>, last access 24 May 2015.

<sup>97</sup> ‘AABK'nın 7 Haziran Seçimleri ile İlgili Açıklaması’ (*The Declaration of the AABK on the 7<sup>th</sup> June Elections*) available online, at: <http://www.aleviten.com/index.php/tr/anasayfa/78-haberler/262-aabk-n-7-haziran-secimleri-ile-ilgili-ac-klamas>

<sup>98</sup> Geerdink, F. (2015). *Al-Monitor*, 5 May, ‘Yazidi candidate hopes for historic first in Turkish election’, at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/turkey-kurds-yezidi-mp-candidate-wants-to-strive-for-peace.html#>

<sup>99</sup> *Zaman Online*, 8 April 2014, “Genel Seçimler için partilerin Almanya’dan adayları beli oldu!”, at: <http://zaman-online.de/genel-seçimler-için-partilerin-almanyadan-adayları-beli-oldu-219153>, last access 12 May 2015.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Fierce competition among political parties are still going on in the diaspora until the 31<sup>st</sup> of May which is the declared last date for external voting. The results will be declared with the rest of the results after the 7th of June. In the meantime, diaspora voters are worried that their votes are not safe. According to the regulations, the votes are kept in safe rooms at the diplomatic representation and then they are sent to Turkey with secure measures. Non-AKP voters are sceptical about this process and they are worried about election fraud.<sup>101</sup> Reports from volunteers who observe the voting process and civil society organizations that are involved in monitoring reveal numerous fraud cases already before the votes are sent to Turkey to be counted.<sup>102</sup> The result of the elections will also engender discussions related to the safety of the votes and the general impact of diaspora votes on the elections.

### ***Conclusions***

External voting is one of the many mechanisms that home states implement in order to keep the diaspora keen on homeland politics. The extension of citizenship to the members of diaspora and the right to cast the absentee vote give diaspora members a feeling of attachment and a sense of belonging. As shown in this paper, in some countries, the scope of the external voting is limited due to the small size of the emigrants and in some others it might play a key role. Because voter turnout is usually low and not impactful in many cases, external voting has been a neglected subject in the literature for so long however, as we tried to demonstrate in this paper, absentee voting has much to say more than the turnout rates. It reveals the diffusion of homeland politics beyond a country's borders and it shows how the diaspora(s) become a constituency on their own in political struggles of the homeland. By looking at the transnational election campaigns, one can better understand the mechanisms of transnational conduct of homeland politics, alliance building efforts and more importantly how the citizens abroad are incorporated to the 'home-polity'.

Turkey's diaspora is no exception to this. Turkish citizens abroad have been putting pressure on political authorities in Turkey for the introduction of out-of country voting since the 1990s. Migrant organization leaders put forward the demand for external voting for decades and many migrants from Turkey showed clear interest in satellite organizations of political movements in Turkey. In addition to that, since the AKP came to power, there is a transformation in how the Turkish state perceived its own diaspora. The right to vote from abroad was one of the major changes in this new period. The first experience was with the Presidential elections of August 2014. The voter turnout was lower than expected and the diaspora vote did not create much impact. The general election of 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2015 reveals a different picture and makes us observe the interplay of homeland political struggles in diaspora spaces.

Analysing the current state of external voting mechanisms which are formed by the Turkish state, it can be said that the idea behind introducing this right was not a pure intention to be more inclusive towards the citizens abroad in order to increase

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<sup>101</sup> See 'Yurtdisi oylarin guvenligi saglaniyor mu?', [http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2015/05/150518\\_yurtdisi\\_secim\\_guvenlik\\_denetim](http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2015/05/150518_yurtdisi_secim_guvenlik_denetim) >, Last access 23 May 2015.

<sup>102</sup> See the report by the civil society organization called 'Gurbetin Oylari': <http://gurbetinoylari.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/de-2.-rapor.pdf>>, Last access 24 May 2015.



democratic inclusion but it was to strengthen already existing asymmetries of power between the major political parties and other groups that remain below the anti-democratic %10 threshold. The current mechanism reveal that the mainstream parties tend to sustain more legitimacy and electoral support via external votes while the parties who cannot pass the threshold remain disadvantaged once more. This paper also demonstrated that the reasons behind the low turnout rate for the presidential elections could be due to a variety of reasons and type of elections also matter in terms of mobilizing citizens abroad to use their democratic right to vote. An already existing higher turnout rate for the 7<sup>th</sup> of June elections is an indicator of how type of election and its criticality for homeland politics matter. Finally, we find that studying external voting mechanisms matter immensely not solely for understanding the homeland's calling to the diaspora but also to understand how elections and transnational election campaigns energize diaspora mobilization and rekindle interest in homeland politics. Voter turnout is an important phenomenon but it is not telling when we try to explain diaspora-homeland politics nexus, therefore we need to look at how and why the home state introduced this right at the first place, how this right is implemented and finally how this whole process became part of a larger transnational field of homeland politics which entail struggles, cooperation and other types of engagements.