

LEADERSHIP THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL STRETCH: RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN'S PRESIDENCY IN TURKEY*

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Abstract: This article scrutinizes the leadership performance of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the office of the Turkish presidency from the first direct presidential elections of August 2014 to 2017 constitutional referendum which introduced an executive presidential system. It examines the new processes and practices becoming embedded in the executive politics of Turkey paying due regard to the political contexts. It aims to contribute to the literature by locating president Erdoğan's practices into the institutional stretch arguments. The article provides meaningful indicators tailored to the Turkish case for the manifestation of institutional stretch. The main argument of the article is that Erdoğan has stretched the presidential office institutionally, politically, symbolically and financially. This institutional stretching culminated in a constitutional executive presidency which will enter into force in 2018.

Keywords: Erdoğan's Presidency, Institutional Stretch, Executive Leadership, Personal Power Resources, Justice and Development Party.

KURUMSAL GENİŞLEME YOLUYLA LİDERLİK: TÜRKİYE'DE RECEP TAYYİP ERDOĞAN'IN CUMHURBAŞKANLIĞI

Öz: Bu çalışma Cumhurbaşkanının ilk defa doğrudan halk tarafından seçildiği Ağustos 2014'ten yürütme organı açısından Cumhurbaşkanlığı hükümet sistemini getiren 2017 yılındaki anayasa değişikliği referandumuna kadar Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı makamındaki liderlik performansını irdelemektedir. Siyasal bağlamlarına da dikkat ederek, çalışma yeni süreçlerin ve uygulamaların yürütme organına nasıl yerleştirildiğini incelemektedir. Çalışmada, Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ın uygulamaları kurumsal genişleme çerçevesine yerleştirilmeye çalışılarak literatüre katkı sağlanması hedeflenmektedir. Makale Türkiye örneğine uygun olarak kurumsal genişlemenin tezahürlerine dair anlamlı göstergeler önermektedir. Çalışmanın temel iddiası Erdoğan'ın Cumhurbaşkanlığı makamını kurumsal, siyasal, sembolik ve finansal olarak genişlettiğidir. Bu kurumsal genişleme süreci 2018'de yürürlüğe girecek olan anayasal olarak cumhurbaşkanlığı sistemi ile doruğa ulaşmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erdoğan'ın Cumhurbaşkanlığı, Kurumsal Genişleme, Kişisel İktidar Kaynakları, Yürütme Liderliği, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi.

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I.Introduction

In 2012, Turkey had faced the row between the then-president Abdullah Gül and then-prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan over the handling of a banned Republican Day rally in Ankara. Erdoğan ‘expressed irritation at police failure’ to prevent thousands of protesters marching in the rally. Meanwhile, it became clear that it was the president Gül who ‘asked officials that the Republican Day be celebrated throughout the country in a decent way’. Having been informed by the statements of then-president Gül, Erdoğan clearly implied that the president had exceeded his authority and stated that: ‘we did not get this country to where it is today with double-headed government and this country will go nowhere in the future with double-headed government’ (Reuters 2012). However, since August 2014 things have slightly changed in Erdoğan’s mind considering the rights of the presidency of Turkey.

In line with the 2007 constitutional amendment which stated that the next President of the Turkish Republic would be elected by popular vote, then-prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2003-2014) became the first directly elected president of Turkey in August 2014 presidential elections. Although the office of the presidency has been mainly considered as the less powerful wing of the executive in the Turkish parliamentary regime, the then-prime minister Erdoğan and officials from the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) government argued that the popular election for the office would provide the incumbent with greater political powers and direct legitimacy. This legitimacy, combined with the personality of Erdoğan, was considered to be significant in order to move the office to the heart of executive power in Turkish political system.

According to the Turkish 1982 constitution, the president has important powers theoretically but up to 2014 the incumbents of the office are, to a certain extent, reluctant to use them. Erdoğan and his supporters directed attention to the constitutional authorities of the president and highlighted that if elected Erdoğan would use all the powers granted to him. This had opened up a debate whether the potential practice of president’s rights would force the system to transform.

The aim of this article is to study the leadership practices of president Erdoğan at the office of the Turkish presidency between 2014 and 2017. Although Erdoğan’s presidency is an ongoing process, it seems to be very instructive in showing the dynamic interplay among the institutional and personal power resources available to an executive office holder in a certain context and political situation. Upon assuming the presidency, Erdoğan has restructured the office in many ways. He has added new directorate-generals to the organizational basis of the office with the aim of better coordinating the macro-politics. The office has been provided with discretionary fund for the first time in the Turkish history. The president has started to be chairing cabinet

meetings. The traditional presidential palace was moved to a new building to give the impression of the rupture with the past. Additionally, Erdoğan has started to regularly convene Turkish *mukhtars* (local governors) at the presidency. While addressing Turkish mukhtars, broadcasting live by Turkish TV channels, Erdoğan has attempted at setting certain topics at the top of the agenda. Considering these developments, it is my claim in this article that Erdoğan's three year presidency has been an attempt at "institutional stretching" by him and his close aides to make the office of the presidency a more potent platform in imposing its incumbents ambitions.

It should be claimed that the direct election of the president for the first time in 2014, the context of the 2015 parliamentary elections (both the June and November), his relations with his ex-party and other actors' failure and/or reluctance to counter Erdoğan's activism and the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016 have provided a certain ground for him to push the office to the lynchpin of the Turkish politics. Erdoğan has been in an attempt to merge his personal power resources thanks to his successes during his premiership with the institutional/structural resources available to him because of being the president of Turkey. Erdoğan's own words capture well the idea claimed at this point of the paper:

There is a president with de facto power in the country, not a symbolic one. The president should conduct his duties for the nation directly, but within his authority. Whether one accepts it or not, Turkey's administrative system has changed. Now, what should be done is to update this de facto situation in the legal framework of the constitution (Hürriyet Daily News 2015e).

After this brief introduction, the plan of this article is as follows: first of all, I will briefly outline the conceptual framework I intend to utilise in shaping my arguments. As the conceptual framework, I will be locating the analyses of Erdoğan's presidency within the institutional stretch arguments. Afterwards, trying to provide a brief history of the Turkish presidential office, I will focus on the presidency of Erdoğan in order to come to a conclusion whether Erdoğan's practices at the presidency is a rupture or not. While doing so, the article will contribute to the literature by way of noting some of the meaningful manifestations of institutional stretching through proposing indicators in Erdoğan's term of presidency. As a conclusion, I will argue that Erdoğan has certainly attempted at stretching the office of the presidency institutionally, financially, politically and symbolically in a very short time period.

II. The Concept of Institutional Stretch

A study on executive leadership should pay due regard to the dynamic relationships among the institutional, personal and contextual power chances of an incumbent. It is fair to argue that executive leaders mainly have certain amount of power as a result of the position they hold. However, certain contexts and personal power resources could open up a new space for incumbents to exert greater powers beyond the formal/institutional structures.

The idea of the 'institutional stretch' falls into the broader category of interactionist approaches dealing with the executive leadership. Unlike the leader-centred approaches that give priority to actors over institutions/structures and institutional approaches which consider the actor as the 'hostage of the environment' within which s/he operates; an interactionist approach argue for paying due regard to both actors and institutions. The actor, an executive leader in this article, is considered as both being able to influence their broader environments (Helms, 2005: 17-22) and as being influenced by them.

The capacity of a leader to exert power is shaped by many factors. Among them, the actor has certain amount of power thanks to the institutional structure s/he sits on. In addition to these institutional power resources, actors could carry personal power resources, such as reputation, skill and popularity, to their offices. Personal power resources could provide actors with greater powers than the formal structures s/he holds (Bennister, 2007). However, it should be highlighted that institutional and personal power resources ready for an actor are not permanent. Certain contexts and situations either could 'open up spaces for actors to implement existing rules in new ways' or to set new practices and processes (Kefford, 2014: 2) or could be acting in a way to restraint the leadership of particular agent (Strangio, 't Hart and Walter, 2013). Thus, a careful analysis on a particular leader has to take the 'institutional and contextual power chances' and 'the dynamic relationship among the leader and other actors in the system' into consideration. Leadership is always 'conditional' - as far as it needs the support of colleagues, other actors in the system and followers – and 'co-dependent' because it depends on particular historical moments and institutional conditions (Strangio, 't Hart and Walter, 2013: 2).

Generally, an institutional stretch indicates that 'the influence and authority of an incumbent is beyond the systemic'. The 'systemic' in this formulation considers the existing formal structures, traditions and customs (Bennister, 2007: 328). Thus, the term institutional stretch directs the attentions both to the 'new structures, processes and practices becoming embedded in the political system by the incumbent' (Bennister, 2007: 327) and/or to implementation of existing practices in new ways.

Heffernan (2005: 616-617) notes ‘reputation, political success, public popularity and the high standing in the party’ are the most important resources of personal power and “agenda-setting through the leadership of the cabinet, strengthening the office and agenda-setting through news media management’ for institutional power. A skilful actor could manage to enlarge his/her institutional and personal power resources. For example, ‘actors who are “resource rich” are provided with access to the resources of other actors and institutions that are “resource poor”’ (Heffernan, 2005: 608-610).

To conclude, George Jones’s analogy of ‘elastic band’, which was originally developed to imply the relations between a prime minister and the Cabinet, seems to be also relevant for the issue at hand in this paper. Under the influence of a particular agent, an institution can be stretched either toward strength or weakness. However, this stretching is always conditional and co-dependent. Following Jones who likened it to strings in the instruments, it should be claimed that ‘if the string is too tight it will snap, but if it is too loose the instrument will not play’ (cited in Hargrove, 2001: 64). After this brief theoretical remarks, the following part should be seen as the analysis of the case at hand, Erdoğan’s presidency, through the lenses of institutional stretching.

III. A Brief History of the Office of the Turkish Presidency

It is fair to argue that president Erdoğan is not the first who attempted at steering the country from the presidency (BPC, 2014). Acting under different constitutional structures and contexts, ex-presidents Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü could be seen as powerful actors, thanks to their ‘magnetic prestige’, in the determination of public policies (Earle, 1925: 87-88; Erdoğan, 2003: 55-70). Especially considering the Atatürk’s presidency, the BPC (2014: 9) concludes that the steering of the country, to a certain extent, from the presidency through the force of personality ‘left a significant imprint on Turkish politics. That is, the personality matters’.

Although the 1961 constitution took steps to ensure the prime minister as a primary actor in the Turkish politics, the position of the presidency according to the 1982 constitution is still debated. Unlike the 1961 constitution which clearly designed the office as ‘less powerful and symbolic’ wing of the executive, the 1982 constitution has tremendously increased the powers of the office. It should be argued that according to the 1982 constitution ‘the governmental system is parliamentary because the executive branch evinces a dual structure with a president who is not responsible’ (Heper and Çınar, 1996: 490). In Turkey, all presidential decrees are countersigned by the prime minister and the minister concerned, except in those cases where the president is authorised to act alone by the constitution and other laws. As the constitution does not specify the cases where the president can act alone without a signature, Özbudun concludes that ‘whenever a matter falls within the sphere of the political executive countersignature is required’ and ‘the instances in which the

Turkish president can act alone normally pertain not to his capacity as “chief executive” but to his capacity as “head of state” (cited in Heper and Çınar, 1996: 490). On the other hand, taking the powers of the president into consideration, it should also be argued that ‘a president may be significantly active over the general policy’ (Erdoğan, 2003: 208) if ‘the parliament and the prime minister are willing to go along with’ (BPC, 2014: 12).

Among the presidents operating under the 1982 constitution, Kenan Evren (1982-1989), Turgut Özal (1989-1993) and Süleyman Demirel (1993-2000) had attempted at steering the country from the presidency. However, they could not handle the issue. Evren who ‘displayed quite an activism to such matters as terrorism, the politicisation of key ministries and the revival of Islam’ had been pushed to proper sphere by the-then prime minister Özal (Heper and Çınar, 1996: 493). Özal succeeded Evren as the president in 1989. He ensured one of his followers, Yıldırım Akbulut, was elected as the prime minister. Özal thought that he would work in harmony with Akbulut and steer the country from the presidency. However, he was unable to fully control the government. In addition he faced severe opposition from his ex-party, Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi* – ANAP). In time Akbulut was unseated by Mesut Yılmaz as the leader of the party and Yılmaz declared his intentions to bring the presidency in line with the constitution (BPC, 2014: 12). After ANAP lost the government to a Demirel-led coalition, the then-prime minister Demirel marginalised Özal as president. In 1993 after the death of Özal, Demirel was elected as president. He also attempted at steering the country and his ex-party but he also could not achieve his aims.

A. The 2007 Constitutional Amendment

Until the 2007 constitutional amendments, the president is elected by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* – TBMM). As Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s presidency (2000-2007) ended in May 2007, the AKP wanted to elect a candidate from its deputies. One of the leading figures in the AKP, Abdullah Gül, was nominated as party’s candidate to the presidency. However, Gül’s ‘perceived lack of secular credentials in the eyes of state elites’, the ‘AKP’s reluctance to get the support of the opposition parties in the parliament’, ‘the military’s messages sent out to the AKP’ which stated that next president ‘would commit himself to the fundamental values of the republic, including secularism, not only in words but also in substance’ (Uran, 2010: 3) and the ‘legal discussions known as “367 decision”’ arguing that ‘the constitution and the rules of the procedure of the parliament’, was argued, ‘necessitate that unless two-thirds majority of deputies were present in the first round of balloting, the necessary quorum for the elections would not be met and election process could not start’ (Kalaycıoğlu, 2015: 159) led the AKP call an early election and initiated a legislative bill to amend the Article 101 of the constitution which mainly regulated the selection process of the president. In

time the AKP managed to put the bill into referendum in October 2007, was victorious in early elections of July 2007 and was able to elect its candidate, Abdullah Gül, as president in August 2007. Hence Gül had already been elected for a non-renewable 7-year term on 28 August 2007, it was not until August 2014 that the first popular presidential election took place.

The referendum on the constitutional amendment was held on 21 October 2007, and almost 69 per cent of the voters voted in favour of popular election of the president. The 2007 amendments stipulated that;

- ✓ The next president would be elected by popular vote rather than by the parliament,
- ✓ The term of office for the president has decreased from 7 to 5 years and allows the incumbent to stand for re-election for a second term,
- ✓ The parliament's term of office was reduced to 4 years,
- ✓ The quorum of the assembly for both sessions and elections was decided as 184 rather than 367.

The introduction of the popular election of the president into the system has triggered important debate on the Turkish parliamentary system. Whether the already deviant Turkish parliamentary system due to the 1982 constitution has transformed or not is still debated. As in line with the theoretical accumulation on the 'direct election of the president in a parliamentary system' (Tavits, 2009), it is argued that popular election would lead the president to take over the leadership of the government. This is because the elected president considers his/her direct election provide a legitimate justification to be 'more active'. However, it seems that it is not the direct election of the president but the issues of partisan forces and institutional structures within the environment presidents operate shape their chances of power (Tavits, 2009: 15-16).

It is fair to argue that the 2007 constitutional amendments were mainly a reaction of the AKP to a constitutional/political crisis rather than a well-designed 'constitutional engineering scheme' (Uran, 2010: 2-3; Köker, 2014, Gönenç, 2013). The changes brought into the system by the 2007 amendments were not merged with the constitutional, legal and institutional structures. In time, the 2007 amendments have divorced from the context within which it was emerged and have been considered as a reason behind the increasing activeness of the president and behind the proposals for passing to an executive presidential governmental system (İnsel, 2013: 9; Uran, 2010: 2).

B. The 2014 Presidential Election

In the 2014 presidential election, the AKP's candidate Erdoğan had run against Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the joint candidate of the Republican Peoples' Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – CHP*) and Nationalist Action/Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi – MHP*), and Selahattin Demirtaş, the co-leader of the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP*). As far as

Erdoğan's campaign is considered, he concentrated it mainly around his previous successes during his premiership and his leadership in providing macro-economic stability to Turkey. However, above all Erdoğan promised to create a 'New Turkey' in his possible presidency (Kalaycıoğlu, 2015: 164; Köker, 2014; BPC, 2014). Although nobody is able to reveal the contents of the New Turkey project properly, in this New Turkey Erdoğan argued that 'the office of the presidency would be supreme', 'the president would not be neutral in the sense that he would be sided with the nation' and 'the president would be active in designing and executing policies together with the prime minister and council of ministers'. It is argued that if Erdoğan is elected, the New Turkey will be built under Erdoğan's 'constitutive presidency' (Miş and Aslan, 2014; Laçiner, 2015; Mağcupyan, 2015). Erdoğan's possible presidential mission would be to set the 'founding principles' of the coming decades of Turkey in terms of society, politics and citizenship (Mağcupyan, 2015). Due to the popular mandate behind him/her, the next president would be 'the authentic representative' of the nation (AKP, 2014a; AKP, 2014b; Hakan, 2014).

As Erdoğan's candidacy for the presidential office became clear, his ambitions (bringing an executive presidential governmental system) and personality have been added to the arguments on the mission of the coming president. This time, it has been argued that the president has already important powers in the 1982 constitution. Adding the increasing legitimacy coming from popular mandate to the powers of the president, Erdoğan would use all the powers to the greatest extent. The system would be forced to transform to bring the presidency to the centre of executive politics. Thus, the mission of the elected president would be a constitutive mission which would create new customs, procedures and institutions.

Erdoğan, almost getting 52 per cent of the votes in the first round, came victorious in the election. His first message was 'without a doubt, the New Turkey... has won today' (BPC, 2014).

IV. Erdoğan's Presidency

Having become the first popularly elected president of Turkey, Erdoğan started to interpret existing customs and procedures in new ways and to provide new practices and wisdom. Upon assuming the office of the presidency, Erdoğan's first attitude, which was considered by many as paralyzing the constitutional definition of president's impartiality (Köker, 2014; Kalaycıoğlu, 2015), following the presidential election, was his participation in the AKP's 27 August 2014 congress where the new leader of the party and the prime minister was elected (Yazıcı, 2015: 106-107). Although the 1982 Constitution's Article 101/3 stipulates – 'If the President-elect is a member of a party, his/her relationship with his party shall be severed and his/her membership of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey shall cease' – Erdoğan interpreted the clause as if all his previous titles were intact until he takes the presidential oath

on 28 August rather than the official declaration of his victory by the Supreme Electoral Council/Board (*Yüksek Seçim Kurulu - YSK*) of Turkey in the Official Gazette on 15 August (Köker, 2014: 3; Kalaycıoğlu, 2015: 172).

In addition, Erdoğan after assuming the presidency had behaved as if he was still the leader of the AKP. His demand for a total of 400 MPs (Member of Parliament) (Hürriyet Daily News, 2015c), tacitly indicating the electorates to vote for his ex-party, the AKP, in order to be able to pass through a presidential system, which was later decreased to 335 (Hürriyet Daily News, 2015d), an amount enough to bring the issue into referendum, his critics directed against opposition parties before the 7 June 2015 elections and his mass opening ceremonies in which he scheduled them before the elections as if they were campaign rallies (Cumhuriyet, 2015b) were seen by many as if Erdoğan was still acting the leader of the AKP and violating the constitutional clause which stipulated the principle of the impartiality of the president (Yazıcı, 2015; Kalaycıoğlu, 2015).

As far as the relations between president Erdoğan and other political actors are considered, it seems that his relations with the handpicked prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu are of critical importance in terms of his aims of bringing the office of presidency into the centre of the Turkish politics. Since he assumed the office in August 2014, it is argued that on many controversial issues prime minister Davutoğlu has been forced to retreat by president Erdoğan (Yetkin, 2015). Out of them, the suspension of the anti-corruption transparency law, the Supreme Court elections for the ex-ministers accused by corruption, the abandonment of the candidacy of the National Intelligence Agency's chief Hakan Fidan as an MP from the lists of the governing party in the coming elections, the president's negative views on the Kurdish peace process, the reluctance of prime minister Davutoğlu on the issue of switching to a presidential system despite Erdoğan's fierce support for it and the post-7 June elections debate on the establishment of a coalition government with other political parties have indicated Erdoğan's aims of 'exerting tutelage' on the Davutoğlu's government even, to a great extent, exceeding the limits of the constitution (Küçükşahin, 2015). It is argued that these issues reveal that the system is controlled by a 'partisan president' who is controlling both the government and the governing party from the Presidential Palace (Çakır, 2015). According to Çakır (2015), this is a de facto presidential regime if not de jure. The deteriorating relations between the two leaders have ended with the resignation of prime minister Davutoğlu after 20 months in office. It was perceived "Davutoğlu had been expected to play a backseat role as prime minister as Erdoğan pushed ahead with plans to make the largely ceremonial presidency into an all-powerful executive position, but he tried to act independently on a range of issues" (Guardian, 2016).

The ‘most significant’ and ‘unprecedented’ rift between president Erdoğan and the AKP government emerged over the handling of the peace process on March 2015 (Guardian, 2015; Yazıcı, 2015: 106). President Erdoğan declared that he was considering the meeting between the government and HDP deputies to announce a call for disarmament was ‘inappropriate’ and said that he was unaware of the issue. He severely criticized government through the media. The then-deputy prime minister Bülent Arınç had gently reminded the president his constitutional powers: ‘His (Erdoğan’s) statements like “I did not like that” or “I am not happy about that” are emotional and are his views. The peace process is being carried out by the government and the government is responsible for this question’ (Guardian, 2015). Facing such a reaction from the deputy prime minister, Erdoğan went on to argue that ‘What does it mean that I make politics? Can a president remain outside the politics? Does not a president have something to say on politics? They (critics) are looking for a wall flower suitable for them. I am not a wall flower as a president’ (Xinhua, 2015). Such a row, for the first time, indicated uneasiness present in the government over the interference of the president into the politics. However Erdoğan insisted on his rights to be an active president and argued that since the 10th of August 2014, with the popular election of the president, an era in the Turkish politics has been de facto over. The following passage is worth to be quoted at length:

The parliamentarian system... has been taken to the waiting room irreversibly by the nation on the 10th of August. How long will this waiting take or until when? It will last either till providing a constitutional framework to the present practices or till substituting a new system instead of the current one. The decision on this issue will be given at the 7th of June 2015 general elections (Sabah, 2015).

In addition to president’s relations with the members of the core executive, considering the wider political system Turkey has witnessed president Erdoğan’s quarrel with the chief of Central Bank. Erdoğan attacked the Central Bank for treachery for having kept interest rates relatively high. He publicly labelled the chief of the Central Bank as “traitor” for not decreasing the interest rates (Diken, 2015a). Erdoğan’s quarrel with the Central Bank authorities had been followed by public for a certain period of time. During the debate, the value of American dollar against the Turkish lira increased just after every time Erdoğan attacked on the Central Bank. This is named as ‘Erdoğan trade’ by the Turkish media (Yıldız, 2015). It is argued that president Erdoğan has become ‘unpredictable’ and ‘source of problems and instability’ once seen as the ‘anchor of stability’ (Dombey, 2015; Yalçın, 2015).

The row between the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD) and the president on the issue of ‘the addressee of the association’ is also very instructive in terms of Erdoğan’s attempts to move his office at the centre of the broader politics. On 29 December 2014 in an interview with a newspaper, TÜSİAD’s outgoing chairman Haluk Dinçer had said that ‘TÜSİAD’s addressee is not the president but the prime minister related to our field’ (Hürriyet Daily News, 2014). Both president Erdoğan and prime minister Davutoğlu reacted to TÜSİAD’s chairman’s words saying that they would not attend TÜSİAD’s meetings anymore, adding that the association would need to find an addressee to attend its meetings (Hürriyet Daily News, 2014). Dinçer reiterated his earlier words: ‘it is not meaningful to discuss this addressee issue so much. The president is the head of the state, representing the Turkish Republic. The addressee of the TÜSİAD is, of course, the government, because it offers its policy proposals to the government and criticizes it if necessary’ (Hürriyet Daily News, 2015b).

The attitudes and activeness of the president Erdoğan in the post-July 2015 elections seems to be very instructive in terms of providing vital clues about the impact of context and political actors on the office of the Turkish presidency. Erdoğan set the 7 July 2015 elections as a referendum for his demands of switching to a presidential system. The results of the election, which put an end to 13-year uninterrupted rule of the AKP, his ex-party, did not please him. Although the AKP had secured 258 MPs out of 550, that amount was far below to realize Erdoğan’s aims. The results met with statements arguing that ‘Erdoğan was the biggest loser’. Even prime minister Davutoğlu admitted that the results could be understood as ‘No to a presidential system constitutionally’ (Cumhuriyet, 2015c) which is of Erdoğan’s dream.

The results forced political parties to form a coalition. Erdoğan, throughout his political career, had made no secret that he has not been in favour of coalitions. This time, he reiterated his well-known ideas. However, he charged the leader of the biggest party, AKP’s Davutoğlu, with a mandate to form a coalition within 45-days as it was stipulated in the 1982 constitution. The MHP had made clear that it would not be together with pro-Kurdish HDP in a coalition under any circumstances. This had changed all the possible coalition scenarios without the participation of the AKP. Because without the support of both the MHP and HDP, the main opposition party, CHP, could not be able to reach to 276, the amount necessary to get a vote of confidence in the parliament.

The AKP and CHP had negotiated for 39 days but at the end, a coalition was not possible. On the eve of the last meeting between the leaders of both party, Erdoğan while addressing the mukhtars, said that ‘the principles of the parties in coalition talks need to match’, implying that they do not. ‘Unless the principles of both sides match, forging a coalition would come to mean committing suicide’, which was interpreted as a message to Davutoğlu. The

CHP still accused Erdoğan for interfering into the coalition talks in order to block the efforts and criticized him of not charging Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the CHP, with the mandate to form a coalition for the last three days as of 20 August, which due to the political customs the former presidents had given in the Turkish history. Erdoğan implied that he would not give the mandate, considering that there was no possibility for Kılıçdaroğlu to come with a coalition.

45 days after the elections, political actors in the system could not find a way to handle the coalition issue, due to many reasons. Although the post-July 2015 context was convenient for those critical of the activeness of the president Erdoğan since his popular election in August 2014, they could not come together to act as a counter power against the president. Turkey went to a snap election on 01 November 2015, for the first time in its history through the president's call for an early election due to the time allotted in the constitution for coalition talks expired. This should also be considered that Erdoğan's presidency has the potential in many ways to be the 'presidency of the initials'.

The failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016 seemed to facilitate Turkey's transition to a presidential executive. Erdoğan considered the attempt as "trying to unseat him from the presidency" and argued for the presidential system as a seatbelt for such attempts. Under increasing threats to security as the end of 2016, a surprising move came from the MHP raising the prospect of a transition to an executive presidential system. The leader of the MHP, Devlet Bahçeli criticized President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for "overstepping his constitutional powers and acting as a de facto executive president". As a solution, Bahçeli suggested that the executive presidential system "should be put on a referendum to let the people have the final say". The MHP leader also said the MHP could support the required constitutional amendments if its "sensitivities" were respected" (Al-Monitor, 2016). Turkish people went to polls on April 16 2017 to vote on constitutional amendments that would transform the country into a presidential system. The result was in favour of Erdoğan with %51.4 lead for "Yes" votes.

A. Indicators of Institutional Stretch during Erdoğan's Presidency

The quest for providing indicators for the manifestation of the institutional stretch should address, as noted in the previous pages, both the issues of institutional and personal power resources of a certain leader. An augmentation in the institutional resources may enlarge the power chances of an incumbent but, this will inevitably depend on the personal skills of the agent to exploit these opportunities.

The following part seems to be an attempt at providing indicators for institutional stretch, inspired by Heffernan's broader categories (2005; 2012) but which is tailored to the Turkish case by this article. I limit my analysis to institutional power resources, in Heffernan's terms agenda-setting through the

leadership of Cabinet, strengthening the office, agenda-setting through news-media etc. To that end, I consider the ‘re-organization of the presidency’, ‘the practice of chairing the Cabinet meetings’, ‘the new presidential palace’ and ‘the international visibility of the president as the executive leader’ as important indicators we have been observing during Erdoğan’s presidency considering the Turkish case.

A.I. Changing Organizational Structure of the Presidency

Just four months after Erdoğan became the president; he restructured the organization of the presidency through a confidential decree which was not published in the Official Gazette. With this restructuring, the number of directorate generals at the presidential office has increased up to 13. Previously, there were only four directorate generals (administrative and financial affairs, corporate communication, information technologies and human resources) in line with the traditions. The presidencies of Domestic Security, Foreign Affairs, Economy, Defence, Energy, Social Affairs, Communication Centre and Investment Monitoring Unit have been added to the already existing directorate generals. In broader terms, these new directorate generals have been designed to develop policies, reports and strategies in their areas, to take role in coordination among state organs and to consult the government. In Erdoğan’s words, they are aimed at ‘building a better harmony between the government and presidency’ (Hürriyet Daily News, 2015a).

This restructuring of the presidency is also visible with regard to the number of personnel working for the office. The number of personnel working for the presidency has quadrupled in the period of Erdoğan compared to his predecessor Abdullah Gül. In fact, in Gül’s period there were 718 personnel working within the presidency, which was very high as compared to the ex-presidents. The secretary general of the current presidency, Fatih Kasırga while speaking the TBMM in December 2014 during the budgetary talks reported that they were going to increase the number up to 941 which means an increase of 30 per cent. It was rumoured that, in fact, on March 2015 the number of personnel working for the presidency has increased to 2,700 (Cumhuriyet, 2015a) thanks to the new directorate generals added at Erdoğan’s period. In addition, the number of advisors and key advisors has increased tremendously. Compared to 2 key advisors and 3 advisors of Ahmet Necdet Sezer and 6 key advisors and 3 advisors of Gül, it is argued that Erdoğan has 36 key advisors and in fact the number of advisors are unknown (Sever, 2017).

The increasing budget available to the president has been also considered as the steps taken by Erdoğan to keep a tight grip on the Turkish politics. The 2015 presidential budget was argued to quadruple the total amount of 7-year Gül presidency (2007-2014). T24 (2015a) reported that Gül had spent 700,000,000 Turkish liras between 2007 and 2014. Only for 2015, the budget available to Erdoğan is 2,697,000,000 Turkish liras. A critical amount

(2,300,000,000) of the total budget available to Erdoğan was composed of the “discretionary fund” which was traditionally in the use of prime ministers.

The changing organizational structure of the presidency is entirely alien to the Turkish parliamentary system. Almost all of the newly formed units within the presidency correspond to ministerial offices and their area of jurisdiction. Such a step taken by the president has been interpreted as the first step taken towards a presidential cabinet and a de facto presidential system by the opposition. The newly formed 13 directorate generals are called as ‘President’s Shadow Cabinet’ and ‘the team monitoring the government’ (Hürriyet, 2014).

In addition to the newly added directorate-generals, the Presidency Communications Centre (*Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Merkezi – CİMER*) was founded in parallel to the Prime Ministry Communications Centre (*Başbakanlık İletişim Merkezi – BİMER*) in order to collect the denunciations and complaints coming from public institutions, whether central or rural. For this purpose, every public institution is asked to charge one of its members for the task of providing necessary communication with the Presidency. The centre will operate as a unit of public relations and the ministries will be coordinated to the centre. The centre was viewed as ‘Erdoğan has been preparing the infrastructure of the presidential system’ and considered as an ‘attempt at controlling all public institutions from the presidency’. This centre seems to be detrimental to the BİMER and prime ministry’s authority (Sözcü, 2015).

Thus, the institutional and financial support structures under Erdoğan at the presidency has enhanced tremendously. As it is clear considering the newly established directorate generals, the number of personnel and the amount of the budget allocated to the president, the office of the presidency has been stretched institutionally and financially by Erdoğan to provide him deliver greater power and authority.

A.II. Chairing the Council of Ministers’ Meetings

In line with his previous statements that he will not be a ‘protocol president’, president Erdoğan’s chairing the Cabinet meeting on 19 January 2015 was seen as ‘an attempt to expand the powers of the office and transform Turkey’s political system’ (Peker, 2015). Although Article 104 of the current constitution grants the president to chair Council of Ministers meeting when deemed necessary, it is reported that since the 1960 only 5 presidents (Cemal Gürsel, Fahri Korutürk, Kenan Evren, Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel) had chaired the Cabinet 17 times (Birgün, 2015). Erdoğan’s predecessors convened the Cabinet meetings at exceptional times such as the first Gulf War, the aftermath of terrorist attacks, the response of government to economic turmoil (Peker, 2015).

The assembling of Cabinet by Erdoğan has gathered great attention by the domestic and international media. It is seen as compatible with Erdoğan's desire to transform the system towards a presidential one and considered consistent with his desire to have a stronger presidency. According to Atilla Yeşilada, Erdoğan considers that 'the constitutional framework for the power he has accumulated is so weak that his influence over the party and the government can only continue through direct means', such as cabinet meeting (cited in Peker, 2015). This however comes at the cost of weakening the prime minister's authority. Just before the meeting, then-advisor of president Erdoğan, Binali Yıldırım announced that Erdoğan would convene the Cabinet every two months, with the first one scheduled for the 5th of January. The prime minister Davutoğlu denied such a meeting and added that it had to be decided by the prime minister and the president and no other person should be involved in the process. From this statement, it seemed that the prime minister was not previously aware of such a meeting plan. The final words came from Erdoğan and he declared that he had the power to chair Cabinet and he will chair it on 19th January (Hürriyet Daily News, 2015a, Özsoy, 2015).

Interestingly enough, at the heyday of the discussions on the Erdoğan's chairing the Cabinet, the TBMM Research Centre has prepared an annotation on the 'President's chairing the council of ministers' in order to deliver to the member of the parliament. In this pamphlet, it is noted that although this is a constitutional power granted to the president, the use of it seems to be contrary to the spirit of the parliamentary system. The critical point in this case is the unaccountability of the president. The constitution foresaw that the presidents, due to their unaccountability, are expected not to interfere in the deeds necessitates accountability. The pamphlet has noted the ideas of many well-known Turkish constitutional scholars. These academics directed attentions to the conclusion that "such an inclination would reflect the spirit of a de facto presidential system or a semi-presidential one" if the PM is deferent to such an act (Birgün, 2015).

Compared to previous presidents Ahmet Necdet Sezer and Abdullah Gül whom never chaired the Cabinet meetings, Erdoğan has chaired the Council of Ministers 28 times as presidents until June 04, 2018 (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/>). Taking the historical indicators into the consideration, Erdoğan would be the record holder in this sense.

A.III. The New Presidential Palace

According to many domestic and international observers of the Turkish politics, there is nothing better represent the power of Erdoğan at the presidency than the newly created 'Beştepe Presidential Palace/Complex', known as 'Aksaray' (*White Palace*) in the Turkish media. The cost of constructing it, its number of rooms, its legal status and even its monthly utility/electric bills has been debated since the beginning of Erdoğan's term at the presidency.

The new presidential palace has been thought very crucial due to its symbolism in terms of Turkish politics that Erdoğan has been trying very hard to transform since his presidential candidacy. First of all, the new palace is thought as the symbol of ‘underscoring the break with Turkey’s past’. It is, in the minds of Erdoğan, the symbol of the ‘New Turkey’ that he declared just assuming the presidency on 2014 August: ‘we are closing the doors on one era, and we are now taking our first step to a new phase’ (BPC, 2014: 16). Considering the palace as the symbol of breaking the links with Turkey’s past, the following passage from Erdoğan is very instructive:

Turkey is no longer the old Turkey. The New Turkey should reveal itself. The office of the presidency, in the new building, was formed very differently. To that project, this humble person (himself, the author) has contributed a lot... We reflected the impressions of the modern world. The building was designed as a smart building...These are the necessities of being a great state (cited in Gürsel, 2014).

The palace is also very critical in terms of moving the seat of the presidency from the Çankaya Palace, the residence of all the past Turkish presidents since the foundation of the Republic by Atatürk. Secondly, the palace seems to be a testament to the regime Erdoğan demands (Gürsel, 2014) and/or the president Erdoğan aspires to be (BPC, 2014: 16). The debate on *Aksaray* and Erdoğan’s demands for a switch to an executive presidency appear hand in hand. As noted in the previous pages, the organizational restructuring at the presidential office has indicated that Erdoğan will not be a traditional/symbolic president in Turkish politics. Finally, the palace seems to represent Erdoğan’s perception on his unchallenged personal power. It is made public that the palace was originally intended for the prime minister. In 2011 at the time of starting to build the complex, the name of the project was the ‘Prime Ministry Service Building’ (*Başbakanlık Hizmet Binası*). As of 2014, after the election of Erdoğan as president, the complex has become the Presidential Palace. If Erdoğan could not get elected at the 2014 presidential election, the building was going to be available to the prime minister as it was intended and the new president was going to reside at Çankaya Palace in line with the customs. This is a strong sign that Erdoğan has planned the palace for himself (Gürsel, 2014). Additionally, the legal status of the palace has still been debated. It is situated on protected parklands first owned by Atatürk and later donated to the state. As sited in an environmentally protected zone, the Turkish highest court has ordered that the construction should be suspended. However, Erdoğan replied the orders of the courts as ‘Let them tear it down if they can. They ordered suspension, yet they cannot stop this building. I’ll be opening it; I’ll be moving in and using it’ (BPC, 2014: 16; Gürsel, 2014).

All in all, according to Erdoğan such great buildings are necessary for great and powerful nations. These are the symbols of national esteem and power abroad. In fact, the *Aksaray* seems to represent the amount of power Erdoğan has accumulated on behalf of nation or as ‘the president of Turkish people’. The growing power of Erdoğan, is argued to, represent the level Turkey’s power has risen.

A.IV. International Visibility as the Chief Executive of Turkey

In addition to these indicators, the 2015 G-20 (Group of Twenty) Summit, which was hosted by Turkey, made visible that the ‘president Erdoğan was presenting himself as if he was the chief executive of Turkey’. As nations are represented by their chief executives, Turkey for the first time was represented by her president rather than prime minister. President Erdoğan was the head of Turkish committee during the summit. Between 2008 and 2014, the then prime minister Erdoğan had participated in G-20 summits. In 2014, prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu represented Turkey at the summit, hosted by Australia. However, for the 2015 summit, the level of participation has changed and Turkey was represented by the president (Diken, 2015b; T24, 2015b). According to Aktar, the prime minister was the chief executive of Turkey not the president. Aktar argues that Turkey’s representation at the level of presidency created confusion. He concluded that the representation of Turkey by president Erdoğan was an important sign that Erdoğan had been paving the way for a presidential system (Diken, 2015b).

V. Concluding Remarks

The interactionist approach on the executive leadership argues that both the actor and institutions/environments within which they operate affect each other. An executive leader, thanks to personal power resources and proper contexts, may have greater powers than the formal structures he/she holds. This is especially the idea behind the institutional stretch arguments. The term institutional stretch highlights how new structures, processes and practices becoming embedded in the political system by the incumbent. These new structures and practices seem to be beyond the formal structures and existing customs. According to this study, it is fair to argue that the 2014-2017 Erdoğan’s presidency in Turkey fits into this institutional stretch arguments on the executive leadership.

This article argues that acting within proper contexts (institutional and political) thanks to the 2007 amendments and 2014 direct elections and not constrained by other actors both in the core executive and broader system, Erdoğan has been stretching the office of the presidency ‘structurally’ (as in the case of reorganizing the institutional structure), ‘financially’ (increasing budget of the presidency and making the discretionary fund available to the use of president), ‘politically’ (chairing the cabinet meetings as if the president is the legal head of the government), ‘symbolically’ (as represented by the new

presidential palace), and finally ‘internationally’ through hosting the G-20 summit at level of presidency. These are the developments almost totally alien to the Turkish system and experienced for the first time. With the help of these new procedures and practices, Erdoğan has been attempting at stretching the presidency to the centre of executive politics. After four year of presidency, he has succeeded in transforming the system into an executive presidency.

President Erdoğan may be ‘well-resourced’ institutionally and personally to stretch the office of the presidency towards the ‘centre of the centre of’ executive politics, however a certain context, like the one between the June 2015 and November 2015 elections which opened up the possibility of a coalition after 13-year of uninterrupted party government of the AKP, may not free him to further stretch the office of the president in order to interfere into the executive matters in the future. All in all, an actor at an office has to be studied paying due regard to the context and it should be admitted that he/she will always be dependent on others.

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