



Ruling AK party wins Turkey polls

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Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's prime minister, has pledged to work for national unity and press ahead with membership of the EU after his party won a majority of parliamentary seats in elections.

Unofficial results gave his ruling Justice and Development (AK) party 47 per cent, up 13 points from 2002.

But a more united opposition means it will get only 339 out of 550 seats, slightly fewer than now.

"This is the first time in 52 years that a party in power has increased its votes for a second term," Erdogan told thousands of supporters outside his party's headquarters in the capital Ankara.

"We will continue to work with determination to achieve our European Union goal," he said.

The move would come despite a growing disillusionment in Turkey towards joining the European bloc.

EU agenda

Erdogan said: "I understand the message you have sent through the election."

"We will support and protect what our nation has entrusted us with. We will work to undertake the duty you have given us."

He promised to respect the "basic principles" of a "secular social and democratic republic".

"We will never compromise the basic principles of our republic. These principles are needed for a strong and wealthy Turkey," he said.

He stressed the importance of plurality of "political voices" and said his party would continue "in the same way as before" with its free-market policies and Turkey's stalled ambition for EU membership.

Nigar Goksel, the editor of a Turkish political magazine, told Al Jazeera: "The EU has been off the agenda for a while ... however, now it looks like the prime minister has put it back, high up on his agenda."

Moral triumph

Two secularist parties also crossed the 10 per cent threshold to enter parliament, the Republican People's party (CHP) with about 20 per cent and the National Movement party (MHP) with 13 per cent.

No other party passed the threshold but 24 independent Kurdish candidates also won seats.

The CHP, which was set up by Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish republic, has become more inward looking over the years and is hostile to the idea of Turkey's membership of the European Union.

Cengiz Aktar, a political analyst, told Al Jazeera: "If Attaturk were alive today ... he wouldn't be very happy with the performance of his followers [in the CHP party]. His path was clearly a European path."

"He was clearly pro-European," he said.

The contest was viewed as pivotal in determining the balance between Islam and secularism in this nation of more than 70 million.

The result is a moral triumph for Erdogan who called early parliamentary polls after losing a battle with the establishment, which includes army generals, who did not want his ex-Islamist ally, Abdullah Gul, as head of state.

The army views itself as the ultimate guarantor of Turkey's secular state and has removed four cabinets from power in 50 years, most recently an Islamist-minded predecessor of the AK Party in 1997.