

WHAT CHANGES UNDER TURKEY'S NEW CONSTITUTION?

ISTANBUL: Turkey on Sunday votes in a landmark referendum on a new constitution that would grant President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expanded powers. While critics say the move is part of

a grab by Erdogan for one-man rule, supporters say it will simply put Turkey in line with France and the United States and is needed for efficient government. The current constitution was

adopted in 1982 after the 1980 military coup. Erdogan has denounced as "lies" claims by opponents that parliament would be neutralized and the judiciary would come under his political authority. What would change under the proposed 18-article constitution for the nation of 79 million people?

seven members on its own in what would be renamed the Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK). Military courts, which have convicted officers and even sentenced former Prime Minister Adnan Menderes to death following the 1960 coup, would in the future not be allowed.

and on the same day as the presidential elections. The parliament would still have power to enact, modify and remove legislation. If the president were accused or suspected of a crime, then parliament could request an investigation. The president will also have to be a Turkish citizen at least 40 years old, and can be a member of a political party. Currently the president must be impartial and without party favor, although opponents have accused Erdogan of blatantly flouting this. The change would again allow Erdogan to become leader of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) that he co-founded.



ISTANBUL: A Turkish woman supporting the 'No' vote in the upcoming constitutional referendum campaign waves a Turkish flag in front of Yeni Camii yesterday during a campaign rally for the 'yes' in Istanbul's Eminonu district. —AFP

More powers for Erdogan

Under the new constitution, the president would have strengthened executive powers to directly appoint top public officials including ministers. The president would also be able to assign one or several vice presidents. The office and position of prime minister, currently held by Binali Yildirim, would be scrapped. The changes would implement a shake-up in the judiciary, which Erdogan has accused of being influenced by supporters of his ally-turned-foe, the Pennsylvania-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen.

Gulen is blamed for the July failed coup but denies the government's accusations. The president and parliament would together be able to choose four members of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), a key judicial council that appoints and removes personnel in the judiciary. Parliament would choose

Longer state of emergency

Under the proposed constitution, a state of emergency would be imposed in the event of an "uprising against the homeland" or "acts of violence which put the nation in... danger of being divided". The president would decide whether or not to impose a state of emergency and then present it to the parliament. Initially the emergency would last six months-as opposed to three now-then it can be extended by parliament after a presidential request for four months each time. Turkey has twice extended the current state of emergency imposed after the failed July 15 coup.

Erdogan can rejoin AKP

The number of members of the Turkish parliament would rise from 550 to 600. The minimum age limit for MPs would also be lowered from 25 to 18. Legislative elections would take place once every five years-instead of four-

Erdogan in power to 2029?

The proposed constitution states that the next presidential and parliamentary elections are to be held simultaneously on November 3, 2019. The president would have a five-year term with a maximum of two mandates. Erdogan was elected president in August 2014 after over a decade as prime minister, in the first ever direct elections for a Turkish head of state. But with the clock wound back under the new system, the changes would mean that Erdogan could stay in power for another two terms until 2029. —AFP

BRUSSELS TELLS POLAND AND HUNGARY TO TAKE IN MIGRANTS OR FACE LEGAL ACTION

AUSTRIA BACK ON BOARD BUT DIVISIVE PLAN STILL STALLED

BRUSSELS: The European Union's executive stepped up pressure on Poland and Hungary yesterday to take in asylum seekers under the bloc's migration plan or risk legal action if their reluctant governments refuse. Warsaw and Budapest have stonewalled the scheme to move 160,000 people from Italy and Greece - the main ports of arrival - to elsewhere in the EU. Other mem-

The influx of some 1.6 million refugees and migrants into the EU in 2014-2016 has led to rows on how to share the burden among member states. Only about 16,340 people have been moved so far under the emergency scheme that ends in September. "If Member States do not increase their relocations soon, the Commission will not hesitate to make use of its powers ...

Italy has been in the forefront of calling for cuts to EU subsidies to Poland and Hungary over migration. Germany, Sweden, Austria and France - the most frequent final destinations - have also been stepping up pressure on the hold-outs. Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have taken in only a few asylum seekers and the European

Rare good news

In rare good news, Brussels noted that Austria has now decided to join the relocation program. Vienna was previously exempted since it had taken in some 90,000 asylum seekers in 2015 as it sits on one of the key migratory routes into Europe. Austria's interior minister said he would make preparations for the country to receive people, with the first group expected to be around 50 unaccompanied children from Italy. Some 14,000 people are currently eligible for relocation from Greece, the Commission said. It recommended that Italy speed up the necessary legal and security proceedings as it currently only has some 3,500 people waiting to be moved.

EU officials are split over whether to open legal proceedings over relocation, with some noting Poland and Hungary should be punished for undermining the bloc's solidarity. Others say that such so-called "infringements" would have to be launched against just about every EU state since so many cut corners on various agreements. Hungary has filed its own lawsuit against the relocation scheme, which assigns each EU state a specific number of asylum seekers to receive. A hearing at the EU's top European Court of Justice is due on May 10.

Poland and Hungary's disputes over migration with the bloc are just one area on which the two post-communist countries, now governed by eurosceptics, clash with Brussels and the wealthier western European states. The bloc has voiced concern over the weakening of the rule of law and undermining of democratic standards by both Budapest under Prime Minister Viktor Orban and Warsaw under the right-wing government of the Law and Justice (PiS) party. The Commission yesterday separately warned Hungary it risked being sued in court over a number of Orban's policies. —Reuters



ANKARA: Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his wife Emine wave to supporters from the balcony of the AK party headquarters. —AFP

TURKEY UNDER ERDOGAN

ISTANBUL: Turkish voters are to decide on Sunday whether to grant President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expanded powers in a referendum. Here are key dates since Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power:

AKP takes over

The Islamic-rooted AKP scores its first electoral victory on November 3, 2002 after years of political instability and an unprecedented financial crisis. The victory sets off alarm bells in the secular establishment. Its leader Erdogan becomes prime minister in March 2003.

EU accession talks

From 2002 to 2004, Ankara adopts a broad range of democratic reforms, including allowing Kurdish-language broadcasts on public television and abolishing the death penalty. On October 3, 2005, it begins accession talks with the European Union (EU). However, the EU process has since stalled.

Presidential breakthrough

On August 28, 2007, lawmakers elect foreign minister Abdullah Gul as president, the first time an Islamic-rooted candidate is named to the country's highest office. His victory is seen as one for the AKP over lay factions backed by the army, and the new government progressively brings the army to heel. But it causes shudders in the secular establishment as Gul's wife wears the Islamic headscarf.

Ankara backs Syrian rebels

In 2011, Turkey sides with majority Sunni rebels in neighboring Syria who have launched a revolt against the government of Bashar Al-Assad. Ankara has since taken in some 2.9 million Syrian refugees.

Anti-Erdogan protests

On May 31, 2013, security forces crack down on demonstrators who staged a rally against government plans to redevelop a park near Istanbul's Taksim square. The protest quickly grows into nationwide demonstrations against Erdogan but peter out after a month. Erdogan is elected president on August 10, 2014 with 52 percent of a vote held for the first time by universal suffrage. Ever

since, he has argued that the position requires reinforced powers.

Kurdish rebellion resumes

In July 2015, the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) breaks a unilateral ceasefire with the Turkish army and fighting resumes in an insurgency that has left tens of thousands dead in over three decades. Repeated attacks attributed to Kurdish militants or the Islamic State (IS) group have kept Turkey on edge ever since.

Coup attempt, then purges

Early on July 16, 2016 a failed coup by members in the army kills 249, not including the plotters. Erdogan blames the coup on exiled US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen. Since then more than 113,000 people are fired, suspended from their jobs, or detained. The government imposes control over the army whose political influence ebbs.

Making up with Moscow

Erdogan meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 9, 2016 to cement relations with one of the main backers of Assad's regime in Syria. The meeting also helps restore trust after Turkey shot down a Russian jet over the Syrian-Turkish border in late 2015. Two weeks later, Turkey launches a major military operation in northern Syria, driving Islamic State group fighters from several cities. Another key target for Turkey is Kurdish militia groups which Ankara considers allies of PKK separatists.

Tensions with EU

In March 2017, several European countries cancel rallies by Turkish ministers and bar its politicians from campaigning in favor of a 'Yes' in the April 16 referendum. A war of words ensues, with Erdogan repeatedly accusing Germany and the Netherlands in particular of behaving like "Nazis".

Support for US strikes

On April 4 Erdogan denounces a suspected chemical attack that killed at least 86 civilians in rebel-held northwestern Syria, calling Assad "a murderer". Three days later Turkey welcomes a US missile strike on a Syrian regime airbase in retaliation for the attack. —AFP



TOMPA, Hungary: Syrians carry their belongings through the forest near the Hungarian border fence at the Tompa border station transit zone as the Hungarian Interior Minister Sandor Pinter (not pictured) presented the camp to the media. —AFP

ber states have also dragged their feet, leaving the divisive plan stalled. The eurosceptic governments in Poland and Hungary have also put their media and judiciary under tighter state control, raising concerns in Brussels and other EU capitals that they are infringing on the bloc's democratic checks and balances.

for those which have not complied," the bloc's executive arm said in a statement. The Commission had proposed to fine member states for failing to take in migrants, but there has been little political backing for such a step. A court case would not resolve the issue quickly, but could add to mounting pressure for action from other EU states.

Commission also underlined their weak response to the plan. The Commission statement recalled the relocation plan was decided by EU leaders in September 2015 despite Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania voting against it. Although generally opposed to it, Poland eventually voted with majority.

GERMAN POLICE INVESTIGATE 'ISLAMIST LINK' IN EXPLOSIONS

DORTMUND: German police investigated a possible Islamist link to three explosions that rocked the Borussia Dortmund football team bus as the club vowed yesterday it won't give in to "terror". Dortmund's Spanish international Marc Bartra and a policeman were injured in the roadside blasts set off as the team headed to a Champions League game against Monaco on Tuesday night. The match was put back yesterday amid a ratcheting up of security around Dortmund and in Munich where Bayern Munich take on Real Madrid.

Extra forces were deployed around team hotels and their buses will take designated safe routes to the stadiums. UEFA said "security procedures will be enhanced accordingly wherever needed". A letter found at the scene of the attack "claims responsibility for what happened," prosecutor Sandra Luecke said late Tuesday. The "authenticity is being verified," she added. Luecke did not give details, but a copy of the letter circulated by national media showed it referring to the Berlin Christmas market attack in December that killed 12 people. The attack was claimed by the Islamic State group.

It also demanded that Germany withdraw its deployment of Tornado reconnaissance missions in the anti-IS international coalition and close the US base at the western German town of Ramstein. The assault was described by Dortmund city's police chief as a "targeted

attack" against the team. But Dortmund's chief executive Hans-Joachim Watzke vowed that his side "will not give in to terror", as Dortmund players returned to training a day after the blasts. "We will play not only for ourselves today. We will play for everyone... we want to show that terror and hate can never determine our actions," he said in a statement. Monaco's vice president Vadim Vasilyev said "football must not be taken hostage", as he pledged that the quarter final will go ahead on Wednesday.

'Shocked players'

German authorities have not called the attack organized terrorism. But the probe has been taken over by federal prosecutors, whose remit includes terror investigations. Separately, national news agency DPA said a second claim of responsibility emerged online, this time possibly linked to "anti-fascist" far-left groups. But doubts over its authenticity were raised by sources in the radical-left. Germany has been on high alert since a series of jihadist attacks last year, including the Berlin market assault.

The explosives detonated minutes after the Dortmund team bus pulled away from the squad's hotel and headed for their quarter-final, first-leg tie against Monaco. Bartra underwent surgery on a broken wrist after he was hit by flying glass, Dortmund president Reinhard Rauball told NTV news channel. The

injured policeman, who was on a motorcycle escorting the team bus, suffered trauma from the noise of the blasts. "We are assuming that they were a targeted attack against the Dortmund team," said the western German city's police chief Gregor Lange. The explosives shattered the bus windows and the vehicle was burned on one side.

"The bus turned on to the main road, when there was a huge noise—a big explosion," Dortmund's Swiss goalkeeper Roman Burki told Swiss media. "After the bang, we all crouched down in the bus. We did not know if more would come." Some players hurled themselves to the ground, he said, adding that Bartra was "hit by splinters of broken glass".

'Hard to absorb'

Germany's best-selling Bild daily quoted anonymous sources saying that investigators were hunting for a getaway car used by the attacker. The vehicle had foreign car plates, said the newspaper, which added that police believed the explosives were a particular type of pipe-bomb. The announcement that the game was postponed was only made to the stunned stadium about 15 minutes before kick-off. In a show of solidarity, some Dortmund fans took in stranded Monaco supporters for the night. Bild also put out a full-page advert in Dortmund's yellow and its BVB 09 logo, with the message: "You'll never walk alone." —AFP

TURKEY SET FOR WATERSHED POLL ON EXPANDING ERDOGAN POWERS

ISTANBUL: Turkey on Sunday votes in a tightly-contested referendum on expanding the powers of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that will shape its political system for the next generation and determine the key NATO member's future relationship with the West. A crossroads in the history of the modern republic founded amid the ashes of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, the referendum is seen as too close to call, with the country polarized between the 'Yes' and 'No' camps.

Critics fear victory in the referendum on a new constitution creating an executive presi-

dency would pave the way for one-man rule and allow Erdogan to tear up the secular principles established by Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. But supporters say that the system—which would eliminate the post of prime minister—is needed to eliminate the political crises that marred the 1980s and 1990s before the rise of Erdogan's Islamic-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP). The vote is also shadowed by the failed military coup against Erdogan in July that was rapidly followed by a state of emergency that remains in place and has seen tens of thousands of people arrested. —AFP