



**Statement on the organisation of early presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey  
adopted by the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly on 24 April 2018**

The Monitoring Committee expresses its deepest concern at the announcement, on 18 April 2018, of the holding of early presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey on 24 June 2018, one and a half years ahead of schedule.

- The Committee notes that the amendments to the electoral law were adopted by the parliament only one month prior to calling these snap elections. These amendments substantially change the rules for elections and the election campaign. They include the possibility to form pre-election alliances which was not possible until now. The extremely short period between the adoption of these new rules and the upcoming elections leaves too little time for political parties to adjust and complete their preparations for the elections. Changing the election rules three months before Election Day is contrary to the recommendations of the Venice Commission. At the same time, the Assembly notes, with regret, that the 10% electoral threshold – the highest in Europe - was not lowered in the amended law, as called for by the international community, including the Assembly. This very high threshold will further undermine political pluralism by side-lining single political parties.
- The Committee deplores that, on the same day the elections were announced, the parliament approved the 7<sup>th</sup> extension of the state of emergency put in place after the failed July 2016 coup. Echoing the Venice Commission concerns, the Committee reiterates that it is impossible to hold genuinely democratic elections under the state of emergency and on-going security operations in southeast Turkey.
- The state of emergency has, since July 2016, led to disproportional measures and unacceptable restrictions of fundamental freedoms - in particular freedom of expression, media, and assembly. It has affected negatively and disproportionately oppositional and critical voices, as highlighted by the Assembly in its Resolution 2156 (2017). The Committee regrets that no progress was achieved since then. A significant number of parliamentarians from the opposition (10), journalists (about 150) and human rights defenders remain in detention, while many other face legal cases on terror-related charges. Many NGOs were closed down. Numerous media have also been closed down or bought up by pro-government businessmen. A newly adopted law has tightened the control of online broadcasting. This has further narrowed down the space for democratic debate necessary in election times which requires access to full and accurate information so as to ensure the voters' ability to make informed choices between candidates.
- In addition, several provisions of the new electoral system raise serious questions about election security and transparency and possible interference of the executive in the election administration. The Committee is notably worried by the possible presence of police forces in polling stations, which could have a deterrent effect on voters. It is also concerned that the decision to accept non-stamped ballot papers invalidates the use of stamped ballot papers as a major security measure. In addition The Committee also regrets that previous and repeated recommendations made by the Parliamentary Assembly, the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the OSCE/ODIHR related to media coverage and funding of electoral campaigns and political parties have remained unaddressed. The Monitoring Committee has therefore decided to seize the Venice Commission for an opinion on the electoral law, as revised in March 2018, and connected legislation.

The Monitoring Committee is deeply concerned that this adverse context will impede the conduct and organisation of genuinely democratic elections, and confirms that, at the end of the process, the overall legitimacy of these elections is at stake. The Monitoring Committee recalls that Turkey should abide by the fundamental values of the Council of Europe, including the holding of free and fair elections. It also recalls that these elections will be crucial; this will be the final step for the shift to an executive presidential system, which will grant extensive powers to the President of the Republic while limiting checks and balances. All these factors combined seriously challenge the democratic nature of the elections. The Committee thus recommends the Turkish authorities to postpone the elections.