



## **GURBETIN OYLARI PRELIMINARY REPORT FOR 26<sup>TH</sup> TURKISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

### **About Gurbetin Oylari:**

Gurbetin Oylari (GO - Turkish Expat Votes) is the only nonpartisan grassroots initiative that focuses on Turkish expat voters.

GO operated during both of the Turkish parliamentary elections in 2015 across a vast geographical area covering Europe, US, Asia and Australia to;

- 1- Develop pre-election voting safety public awareness programs
- 2- Observe voting process during elections
- 3- Observe the safety of the uncounted ballots during transfer to Turkey
- 4- Observe expat votes counting in Turkey at ATO
- 5- Analyze ballot box records post election

Our mission is to create a difference for a fair and transparent election by educating the voters, preventing any illegality on site with the help of our observers at the ballot box and sharing our observations, analysis and suggestions for future elections.

### **General Info:**

Turkish expats make up a little over %5 of all of the registered voters in Turkey. Almost half of the Turkish expat voters reside in Germany, followed by France, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the USA.

So far two parliamentary elections took place in Turkey in 2015. Turkish citizens listed at Turkish expat ballot registry were able participate in both elections either at the Turkish consulates in their country of residence or select custom gates in Turkey.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Turkish Parliamentary elections took place on June 7<sup>th</sup> in Turkey; and 930,928 of 2,866,971 (32,47 %) Turkish expats cast their votes between May 8<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> 2015 at 112 locations in 54 countries. Reportedly, an additional 99,730 Turkish expats cast their votes at custom gates, bringing the total of Turkish expat participation to 1,030,658, (%35,95) for the June 2015 elections. Considering only %8 of the Turkish expats had participated in the 2014 Turkish Presidential Elections, the June 2015 parliamentary election marked a remarkable improvement in terms of participation.



The 26<sup>th</sup> Turkish Parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Yet 1,160,038 out of 2,899,059 (40%) Turkish expats have already voted at 113 points between October 8<sup>th</sup> -25<sup>th</sup>; and the unopened expat ballots have been transferred to Ankara to be opened at the Ankara Trade Center on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Turkish expats are still able to vote at select customs gates until 5pm on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015. We expect a total of %45 expat participation for the 26<sup>th</sup> Turkish Parliamentary elections, a relatively slight increase from the last elections 5 months ago.

#### **Our Observations:**

- Supreme Board of Elections (SBE) have announced two last minute changes to the regulations. First, new regulation over voter identification was announced the night before the voting was to begin for the expats on October 8th, 2015. In previous elections registered expats had to present either a Turkish passport or their official Turkish Identification Card, but SBE changed the regulations so that most ID's that display the holders Turkish ID # are accepted. Also on the last week of voting, SBE announced that ballots were to remain open for 12 hours (as opposed to 9 hours as previously announced) on November 24-25th. Since no new ballot workers were appointed, this caused fatigue among the staff and volunteers.
- Although the rules and regulation clarify that only ballot workers, party observers, security forces and the press can be present at the ballot box, we observed that representatives of certain organizations such as UETD (Avrupalı Türk Demokratlar Birliği / European Turkish Democrats Union) visited with the ballot committees, presented them with their business cards and roses, against regulations.
- There's also been media reports that the UETD president Suleyman Celik has entered the secure storage space for the unopened expat votes during their transit back to Turkey, which is also against current rules and regulations. <http://www.meydangazetesi.com.tr/gundem/turkiye-ye-gelen-oylarin-bulundugu-bolume-yetkisiz-ak-partili-baskan-girdi-h41100.html>
- Unlike the previous two elections, representatives Disisleri Bakanligi Yurtdisi Turkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Baskanligi (State Department's Office for Expat Turks and Related Groups) have been visiting with ballot locations and consulates.



- The most common problems observed during the voting process included the voters photographing their ballots, trying to enter the cabins in groups and ballot committees not announcing or enforcing the rules and regulations, especially when the voting area got crowded.
- One major complaint was among the voters was that the envelopes were too thin and did not seal well.
- Like previous elections, many people who did not appear on SBE's expat voter registration or who appeared to be registered at another location were unable to vote and had to be turned away.
- Shuttle services organized by political parties and organizations were a major factor that increased voter participation.

Our final report will be published on our website [www.gurbetinoylari.com/rapor](http://www.gurbetinoylari.com/rapor)

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