

Menderes Özel  
Young Turkish Journalists, Dec 2004  
30 March 2006  
Jerusalem, *Milliyet*

## **Big Bang in Israel**

*In the past Knesset elections, four-month old Kadima won the most votes while well-established, rightist Likud took a huge defeat. The elections not only changed the Israeli political scene, but also that of the Middle East.*

In the fifty-eight years of the state of Israel's history, the Knesset elections that took place the other day are deemed to be one of the events that will influence the future of Israeli politics the most. These elections will lead the way to great change in the Middle East as they have already transformed the whole political scene in Israel.

Up until now, there was a political space with two heavyweights, one on the right and one on the left, but in these elections, one heavyweight, Likud, lost twenty seven seats and experienced a major defeat. For the first time in its history, Likud became the fifth party in the Knesset with a paltry eleven seats. The other heavyweight, Labor, which in the past had led many coalitions, was barely standing this time with the twenty seats it won. The 4.5 million voters chose the Ehud Olmert-led Kadima which was formed a mere four months ago. Kadima won twenty eight seats in the Knesset, the largest portion of any, and now has the mandate to form a government. The electorate gave Kadima the mission to create the circumstances necessary to co-exist with the Palestinians. Thanks to the electorate, smaller parties became politically stronger as well.

In addition to the newly colored political landscape, Kadima's leader Ehud Olmert has presented his plans to define Israel's final borders which will effectively alter the map of the country. Olmert stated that he would dismantle the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, being that former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had already done so in Gaza. Seventy thousand Israelis will move back so that Israel's borders will align with the security fence by 2010.

The new coalition government will most likely be comprised of parties that support co-existence with Palestinians either through peace negotiations or unilateral action taken by Israel. The coalition's major partners include Kadima (twenty eight seats), Labor (twenty seats), Pensioners List (seven seats), and Israel Baitenu (twelve seats). The Israeli media reflected this revolution in the Knesset dramatically; the largest newspaper applied the moniker, the 'Big Bang'.

The Israeli Head of State Moshe Katsav stated that the negotiations to form the coalition will start next week. Katsav expects a stable coalition to form and will take a primary leadership role in building it.

### *The Four Surprises of the Elections*

#### *1. Kadima did not get as many votes as expected*

Kadima, formed by Sharon who left Likud, was expected to win 35-40 seats. However, since Sharon went into a coma in January, the party's appeal has declined and Kadima only won 28 seats.

#### *2. Likud took fifth place*

Up until the other day, the Benjamin Netanyahu-led Likud was a strong candidate along with Labor. However, Likud won 11 seats, taking the fifth largest plurality. Another reason for the defeat of the Sharon-deserted Likud is Netanyahu's performance as Finance Minister.

### *3. Gil (Pensioners List) made huge headways*

Formed recently by the 79-year-old former Mossad Agent Rafi Eitan, Gil, won seven seats. Gil underscored the discrimination retired people face regarding security, pensions and insurance. Gil wanted to improve these conditions.

### *4. Shas took third place*

Another surprise of the elections came from Shas, the party of Orthodox Jews. Pre-elections polls predicted 9-10 seats for Shas; however, Shas came out with 13. Shas is now the third party in the Knesset. The party won votes from the religious protesters and the residents of the former Gaza settlements who were forced to evacuate their homes by the government.