
ERDOGAN CALLS FOR 'FAIR' ELECTION IN BULGARIA

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President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called on Bulgaria to hold a fair and transparent general election on Sunday.

A largely ethnic-Turkish coalition called DOST is also campaigning.

Speaking at an address to the representatives of NGOs from Balkan countries at the presidential complex in Ankara, Erdogan said Turkey was deeply saddened by news of pressure being exerted on Bulgarian Turks ahead of Sunday's vote.

"You [Bulgaria] speak of democracy but also put pressure on the Turks living there; it is incredible," Erdogan said.

Bulgarian citizens will vote on March 26 in the country's third parliamentary election since 2013.

According to the Central Election Commission of Bulgaria, there are 6.5 million voters in the country.

As a former Ottoman territory, Bulgaria has a large Turkish minority of about 10 percent, according to official census figures.

Bulgarian citizens will be able to vote in 400 centers abroad. Thirty-five ballot boxes will also be set up in Turkey for an estimated 500,000 expat residents.

However, tensions between Bulgaria and Turkey have recently escalated over claims that Ankara is interfering in the election by favoring the Democrats for Responsibility, Freedom and Tolerance (DOST) coalition.

Turkey is our neighbor, friend and partner and we insist on developing good relations, Bulgarian President Rumen Radev said in a television interview last week.

But Turkey's interference in our elections is a fact, and this interference is inadmissible," he added.

DOST, which means close friend in Turkish, generally has ethnic Turks or Muslims among its members.

By Ilkay Guder

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