

# PERSPECTIVES

Political analysis and commentary from Turkey



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Trade unions and deunionization during ten years of AKP rule

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## Heinrich Böll Stiftung – Turkey Representation

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Editor: **Yücel Göktürk** Translation: **Barış Yıldırım, Defne Orhun, Forum Çeviri, Hülya Osmanağaoğlu** Print Production: **Farika Tasarım** Date: **December 2012** Printing House: **Portakal Baskı** it.ih.san ve tic a.ş. Huzur Mh. Tomurcuk Sk No 5/1 4. Levent - Şişli / İstanbul, Tel: **+90-212 332 28 01**

**Perspectives – Political analyses and commentary from Turkey will appear quarterly and distributed for free. For subscription please send your request by email to info@tr.boell.org** The magazine and each article can be downloaded from our webpage **www.tr.boell.org**

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## Editor's note

**W**e have designated this issue's cover subject as the "The Turkish question", so as to look into the Kurdish question by asking not "What do Kurds want?" but rather "What do Turks want?", thus pointing at the need to upend the dominant perspective to achieve a peaceful resolution. The expression "Kurdish question" centers on Kurds and turns them into the problem. In fact, as indicated by Ahmet Insel in his article in this issue, at the core of the problem lies not Kurds and their demands, but rather the failure to fulfill these demands. This, in turn, stems from the official ideology which is founded on the "Turkish identity", as emphasized by Doğu Ergil in his piece. Accordingly, the gist of the matter is the refusal of the dominant "Turkish" majority to grant equal rights to one fifth of the society.

In discussions on the Kurdish question the distinction "us" (Turks) and "them" (Kurds) comes up frequently: This distinction and the resulting viewpoint stand at the very heart of the problem. Thus we have decided to turn these stereotypes inside out and ask "What do Turks want?", "Why do Turks deny the legitimacy of Kurdish demands for equality?", in short, to direct our attention to the "Turkish question". Setting out from such a concern, the articles forming the cover subject focus on various "Turkish mindsets" and "conceptions of Turkishness" which underly the problem.

In this way, we can start to reflect on how the majority's perspective lies at the heart of the problem, and steer away from memorized stereotypes. While preparing the cover subject, we as a team had a hard time distancing ourselves

from prevalent thinking habits and realized that we had indeed internalized the dominant perspective. "What do Turks want?" is a question which meets with resistance and triggers knee-jerk reactions: "Why do you ask us this question?", "We don't demand anything; ask it to them". We believe, however, that such questions deviate us from the essence of the problem, and we should instead question why the Turkish majority cannot or does not accept the precondition for living in peace with other social groups –namely, equal rights.

When you reformulate the question as such, it becomes inevitable to abandon the dominant perspective. In other words, the question "What do Kurds want?" suggests a relationship of power and hierarchy, tantamount to a well-experienced, shrewd father weighing whether he should grant his ill-behaved son a wish, in view of his correct upbringing. Once the question is reversed, however, "Turks" become the mischievous kids and the demand is directed towards the other party.

These articles highlight various aspects of the political position based on the dominant perspective. If the society wants to live in peace, it is necessary to go beyond the dominant perspective and accordingly shed a critical light on various dimensions of the matter at hand.

Finally, we refuse to close this editorial with the regular cliché which goes "of course, Kurds for their part should behave in such and such fashion", which is in fact a covert apology. Rather, we insist on inviting our readers to reflect on the "Turkish question".

On behalf of the  
Perspectives team

Cover: *The citizenship definition in the constitution of The Republic of Turkey.*



# Turkey's Turkish identity question

**T**he seeds of the “Turkish question” were sown in the process of nation-building that the leadership adopted with a view to construct a nation-state from the remnants of the Ottoman empire. This was a leadership that had seen the empire slip through its fingers and vanish in the misty recesses of history.

This leadership opted, in a nutshell, for a “small nation” concept on the basis of the ethnic lineage and faith identity of a group (the majority) of its citizens rather than a “great nation” that would include all those living on the political geography called the “fatherland”. In other words, this was an attempt to create a nation on the basis not of what is, but what ought to be. The state itself was conceived and later functioned as an apparatus of domination of the nation that ought to be (of the “Turk”).

The attitude of the state to those “other” citizens was either to get rid of them (i.e. send them abroad), to transform them (i.e. assimilation), or to marginalise them in order to subject them to surveillance. These choices led to establishing an authoritarian centralism based on the domination of the majority rather than a voluntary political union of the different groups (of varying ethnic and cultural affiliation) living in the country. However, this domination at times took the shape of a setup that required recourse to coercion rather than being based on a peaceful form of unity. The logic of the policy pursued as reflected in the official discourse makes the situation indisputably clear:

On 16 March 1923, at a tea party organised by the Small Merchants’ Association of the Adana Turkish Hearth (Türk Ocağı), Mustafa Kemal addressed the small merchants of Adana:

“The other elements dominated our Adana, this or that element, the Armenians for instance, occupied our craft centres and put themselves in the position of owning this country. There can certainly be no greater injustice and arrogance. The Armenians have no rights over this fertile land. This country belongs to you, it is the land of Turks. This country was, historically speaking, Turkish; hence it is Turkish and will forever remain Turkish.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus the highest authority declared that the Republic would not pursue a policy of political unity based on the complex population structure of the Ottoman state, but a monist policy based

on ethnic or racial similarity. The evidence for this policy was in the making.

In June 1923, Jewish, Greek, and Armenian civil servants were dismissed and replaced by Muslims. Freedom of movement was restricted for non-Muslims throughout Anatolia. The decision was taken so hastily that many people were not able to return to their hometown and remained stranded wherever they had travelled. To make matters worse, the migration of Jewish citizens to Palestine was prohibited.

In September 1923, a decree banned the return to their homes of Armenians who had emigrated from Cilicia (the region around Adana) and from Eastern Anatolia.

In December 1923, a community of Jews living in Çorlu, Thrace, were ordered to leave the city within 48 hours. The decision was put off as a result of the plea of the Chief Rabbinate, but a similar decision was taken for Çatalca and immediately enforced.

The Pharmacists Law of 24 January 1924 made opening a pharmacy a prerogative for “Turks”.

In pursue of the Attorneys Law adopted on 3 April 1924, 960 attorneys were assessed for “good morals” and 460 were disbarred. Hence 57 per cent of Jewish lawyers were deprived of their profession, as well as three Greeks and Armenians out of four.

In the wake of the adoption of the Civil Code on 17 February 1926, the Armenian, Jewish, and Greek communities were successively forced to declare that they would forgo the exercise of minority rights granted to them by the Lausanne Peace Treaty.

On 1 August 1926, it was declared that the government was entitled to confiscate all properties appropriated by non-Muslims before 23 August 1924, the date when the Lausanne Peace Treaty had come into force.

On 13 January 1928, as a result of a decision made by a group of students of Darülfünun (Istanbul University) Faculty of Law for purposes of currying favour with the regime, signs were posted in means of public transportation such as ferries and trams reading “Citizen, speak Turkish!”. From then on, many non-Muslims were prosecuted for “defamation of Turkness” on the grounds that they did not comply with the requirements of the campaign. The fact that such court cases are still filed demonstrates that the official definition of



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the Turkish identity has difficulty in making itself accepted.

The Law on the Method of Practice of the Medical Profession and its Disciplines, promulgated on 11 April 1928, stipulated that “being a Turk” was required in order to practice the medical profession. Thus non-Muslims were also barred from the medical profession.

Within 18 months in the years 1929 and 1930, 6,373 Armenians of Turkey were forced to migrate to Syria.

On 18 September 1930, Mahmut Esad Bozkurt, then Minister of Justice, enunciated his renowned aphorism: “It is my opinion, my belief that this country in its inner self is Turkish. Whoever is not authentically Turkish has only one single right in the land of Turks and that is to be a servant, a slave.”<sup>2</sup>

This kind of practice was to be seen in the following years as well. For instance, the assassination of Hrant Dink in İstanbul and of three Christians (Tilman Ekkehart Geske, Necati Aydın, and Uğur Yüksel), accused of conducting missionary activities (no such offence is defined in the legislation) were neither isolated cases, nor were they the product of the brutality of a handful of rogue elements. As the investigation revealed, it is undeniable that there were not only official connections but a mass psychology approving these murders as well.

As in the case of Mahmut Esad Bozkurt, if a Minister of Justice of a country expresses official policy in such a discriminatory language, if he reduces the state, the citizen (and the nation) he represents to a specific ethnic group and a specific faith, then it was unthinkable that a style of politics in contradiction with the plural reality of the country should not inevitably arise. In short, the emergence of the “Turkish question” took place in the early republican period and, having gone through diverse stages, has remained alive up to now.

## Two spheres of identity

The choice of creating a nation through Turkification (and giving priority to Sunni Islam) flung those who are not members of this ethnic lineage and this faith outside the nation and deprived them of citizens’ rights. Non-Muslims overwhelmingly felt the need to leave the country, and those remained were kept under constant pressure and surveillance. Muslims who are not Sunni or Turkish, such as the Alawis and Kurds, were tolerated because they possessed merely a half of the official identity and they have always been subjected to restrictions regarding the recognition of their respective identities and the acceptance of their cultural rights.

In this style of politics, two different spheres of identity were formed: 1. The official identity. Being Turkish and Sunni (and preferably belonging to the Hanafi school of the Sunni denomination). 2. Unofficial identity.

The official identity is something the state offers its citizen, through which the citizen is entitled to rights. It is monistic and excludes other

identities. It is thus authoritarian and exclusive. The sphere of unofficial identity is a space open to cultural pluralism and conducive to cohabitation, where democracy can flourish. The two spheres of identity—i.e. the political and the cultural spheres—have always clashed and resulted in the formation of profound fault lines in the country. That an identity politically adopted and cultivated has assumed a function so deeply in contradiction to its aim is a misfortune for Turkey. The existence of endless frictions along the breaches secular vs. religious, Alawi vs. Sunni, Muslim vs. non-Muslim, Turkish vs. Kurdish, majority vs. minority, and

On 16 March 1923, Mustafa Kemal addressed the small merchants of Adana: “This country belongs to you, it is the land of Turks. This country was, historically speaking, Turkish; hence it is Turkish and will forever remain Turkish.” Thus the highest authority declared that the Republic would not pursue a policy of political unity based on the complex population structure of the Ottoman state, but a monist policy based on ethnic or racial similarity.

the cross-border nature of some of these, e.g. the frictions with the Kurds and the Armenians, has ceaselessly exhausted Turkey’s energy and had adverse effects on its foreign relations.

## The “others” and three objections

There is another noteworthy aspect concerning the relations between identities: each empire leaves enclaves of populations behind it as it ebbs and withdraws. In effect, many enclaves of populations that used to live in the Balkans or the Middle East or the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus that fled Russian oppression in the 19th century, once having taken refuge in Turkey, adopted the choice offered to them by their new host country and became subject to Turkification. The autochthonous populations chose to sustain their previous identities for the simple reason that they were already a part of this country. That is why the history of the Turkish republic has at the same time been a history of conflict between the Turk and the Kurd. The Kurds may be said to have made the first objection to the narrow conception of the republic regarding the definition of the nation.

The faith identity, Islam, which was silently but officially condoned alongside the Turkish identity offered by the state and celebrated aloud, was able to penetrate the public sphere on one condition: in a transparent form or, in other words, invisibly. This state of things continued as long as the founding bureaucracy and its ideological successors ruled over the state apparatus.

The restrictions imposed by the state on cultural pluralism, political participation, freedom



of expression, and individual enterprise in the name of “state security” (it is of utmost significance that the courts charged with overseeing these areas are dubbed not “National Security” but “State Security Courts”) slowed down the development of the nation and the democratisation of the regime. It forced the state to spend all its energy on bringing under control the “others”, forever converted into enemies and characterised as a source of threat.

The second objection to this kind of conception of the nation kept under absolute discipline (and custody) came from the left. However, since civil society, trade unions and industry was not advanced, organised working class was limited; hence the left could not set up a democratic front

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to break up the hegemony of the state.

The third objection came from the so-called “National Viewpoint” (Millî Görüş). The concept “national” here stood for a traditionalist perspective of society which, as against the conception of the citizen the state wished to impose on the whole society, i.e. a citizen who is Turkish, Muslim, secular, nationalist, westernised, and obedient to his state, was based on an identity that rejected being a westernised, was religious, questioned secularism as a state religion, and countered a conception of the state that was aloof to its citizens. According to the partisans of this viewpoint, there was a nation, but this nation was different from the one the state described and pretended was the nation. It had a history, a culture and a spirit (Geist) of its own. One only had to peel away the thick skin of the state and unchain these. This current, beginning with the National Order Party (Millî Nizam Partisi) and progressively passing through the National Salvation Party (Millî Selamet Partisi), the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi), the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi), and the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), revised the thesis of the “Turkish nation”. The specific weight of Turkishness and Islam changed and a “pious” conception of the nation became prominent. This conception had no problem with Turkness. But the Turk had to be Muslim. And the Muslim had to be devout.

## An increasing social distance

Outside the element of westernised and the fading (statist) secularism, the elements of Turkness, Islam, nationalism and obedience to the state sustain their presence and weight as components of the new formation of the official identity. Within this framework, the door is more open to other ethnic lineage groups as long as they are Muslim, but not to non-Muslims. There is no shift in the emphasis of nationalism on the ethnic origin of the Turk. This is in contradiction with, for instance, Kurdish nationalism. There is no let up in the exigency of “absolute deference to the state”, regardless with the character of the government in power.

What, then, has changed? New social categories, which today are most clearly represented by the Justice and Development Party, have come to power through legitimate, i.e. electoral channels, and wrested the state away from the unaccountable, unquestionable bureaucracy. Even this is an important feat because it will make possible for the other groups so far excluded to make their presence felt (and recognised) in the cultural sphere and to fight for their rights. This process may be labelled “the return to the public sphere”. To the extent that this becomes a reality the quest for identities and the fight for rights can be conducted pacifically.

We have seen the first few hints of this process. A rereading of history from a different point of view regarding the Armenian question, the handling of policies concerning the minorities with a critical outlook, the conversion of the Kurdish rebellion from that of armed groups into a civil society movement with broad civic initiative developing on the Turkish as well as, or even more, on the Kurdish side raise the prospect of unofficial politics to generate solutions through methods of its own.

This does not come easily or painlessly, though. The more Kurdish civil society intervenes in the Kurdish question, the more Turkish civil society responds with a defensive reflex rather than viewing it with a sigh of relief that recognizes that “an interlocutor that can be negotiated with is emerging”. That is because the Workers’ Party of Kurdistan (PKK) leading the Kurdish political movement uses violence as its fundamental political instrument. As violence assumed over time a function of sharing power or carving out a sphere of power for oneself, beyond fighting for one’s rights, a deepening rift was born between the Turk and the Kurd. As the Kurds started to respond with violence to the policy of denial, repression, and violence of so many decades, the Turks felt that their own original identity, identical twins with the official one, and their dominant status came under threat. In short, today we are facing another aspect of the “Turkish question”. For the first time ever, the Turks feel victimised. As every group that derives its justification from victimisation and deprivation, they deem all methods to be used in their own defence reasonable and legitimate. Between the two groups a social distance is opening up.



## Indications of two studies

There are two studies providing data on this issue. According to the “Report on Social Perceptions in the Struggle against Terrorism” prepared by the Wise Man Strategic Centre (BILGESAM), the level of the desire expressed by the Turks and the Kurds on “cohabitation” (i.e. becoming relatives or neighbours) shows how far the estrangement of the Turks from the Kurds has advanced, whereas in the past their reaction to the Kurds was confined to discrimination. The ratio of Turks who wish to live together with the Kurds is 24 percent, while the converse ratio for the Kurds is 78 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Another indication may be found in chapter four of the study titled “Research on the Political Situation in Turkey”, conducted by the social research establishment Metropoll in September 2012. 67 percent of the people approve of the prospect of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) being shut down. Those who would like to see the immunity of the members of parliament belonging to this party reaches 77 percent.<sup>4</sup>

The decoupling expressed by these figures demonstrates that Turkish nationalism and its illegitimate child Kurdish nationalism, by fanning each other reciprocally, have reached a stage where they are sabotaging the “great nation” project. This is a result of the choice made in favour of the “small nation” and these conflictual ideologies make establishing a political nation/union in Turkey that comprehends both the Turks and the Kurds (and, of course, all the other ethnic and cultural groups) quite difficult.

## From discrimination to dispersion

A unifying factor that could have prevented this decoupling could have been Turkey’s accession to the EU. In effect, the Kurds have always been keener on EU membership than the Turks. The belief that membership will alleviate violations of human rights and boost democratic rights may be said to be a factor that puts a brake on Kurdish separatism. But the reluctance of the state and political leaders to act swiftly and to carry out the requisite democratic and legal reforms has created disillusionment among the Kurds and prepared the ground for radical (power-seeking) Kurdish demands.

If one of the factors that pose a challenge to national unity in Turkey is the official minorities policy, a second one is the incapacity to provide a political and legal solution to the Kurdish objection,

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which then has grown into a violent struggle. It is this the very incapacity that has converted the Kurdish question and the Turkish question into processes mutually feeding upon each other.

Another significant factor is the fragmentation of Turkish identity, its decomposition into sectarian and ideological (political) communities and its dispersion. The formation of spheres of micro-identities such as the secular vs. the pious, the Sunni vs. the Alawi, the classical nationalist vs. the neo-nationalist, the traditionalist vs. the modern has atomised the Turkish identity and made it more difficult than ever to establish a shared national identity or a politically shared space. Even the national holiday commemorating the foundation of the republic, the Republic Day, is now being celebrated in different forms and with differing content by different groups of Turks. People wave the national flag at each other like a weapon, trying to prove that they are the more “authentic” Turks.

Whereas the aim was to create a single comprehensive Turkish political/national identity, the method of nation building adopted led not only to the exclusion of the non-Turk; it also divided the Turks among themselves. The members of the nation have come to distrust each other. According to the findings of the study “Atlas of Values for Turkey 2012” conducted by Professor Yılmaz Esmer, who teaches at Bahçeşehir University, 90 percent of the people of Turkey do not trust their fellow citizens.<sup>5</sup>

So this is where the Turkish question has arrived. The Turkish identity, erected in opposition to the non-Turk, has now been converted into a division between “different Turks”. This derives from its non-embracing character.

## Footnotes

1. Atatürk’s Speech and Statements (Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri), Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayını, 2006, s. 519-521.)
2. The source for the chronology: Ayşe Hür, “Tarih Defteri”,

- Taraf, 22.01.2012.
3. BILGESAM Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi, [www.bilgesam.com.tr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view](http://www.bilgesam.com.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view)
4. <http://www.metropoll.com.tr/category/show/8>
5. [http://www.bahcesehir.edu.tr/etkinlik/turkiye\\_degerler\\_atlasi\\_2012](http://www.bahcesehir.edu.tr/etkinlik/turkiye_degerler_atlasi_2012)



# Well, what do Turks want?



## Ahmet Insel

Born in İstanbul in 1955, Ahmet Insel completed his undergraduate and doctoral studies at Pantheon-Sorbonne University in Paris. At the same university, he took office as dean of the Faculty of Economics and vice rector. Since 2002, he is a faculty member at Galatasaray University. Ahmet Insel sits on the editorial boards of the journal *Birikim* and the publishing house İletişim Yayınları, and pens columns at the daily *Radikal*. His books published in Turkish are *Neo-liberalizm, Hegemonyanın Yeni Dili; Türkiye Toplumunun Bunalımı; Solu Yeniden Tanımlamak; İktisat İdeolojisinin Eleştirisi; Düzen ve Kalkınma Kısıcında Türkiye; Sosyalizm, Esasa, Ufka ve Bugüne Dair Söyleşiler; Ergenekon'a Gelmeden, Türkiye'de Devlet Zihniyeti* (with Ümit Kıvanç); *Ermeni Tabusu Üzerine Diyalog* (with Michel Marian). He also co-edited two books with Ali Bayramoğlu: *Türkiye'de Ordu: Bir Zümre, Bir Parti; Güvenlik Sektöründe Demokratik Denetim*. Almanak 2008.

In struggles centered around ethnic or religious identity, those who demand rights are frequently confronted with the question, “What do you want?” Unless the explicit objective of the struggle is political independence and separate statehood, the response to this question usually consists of two demands. The first is equality, because the group that struggles for the recognition of its identity generally demands equal recognition and equal rights against the privileges of the dominant group and the discriminatory practices it is subjected to. The dominant identity is frequently the identity of the majority, and therefore the demand for rights is expressed as a minority right. In rarer cases when the dominant identity is that of a minority, the majority finds itself in a victim position, and demands those rights enjoyed by the dominant identity but denied to the majority. The concept of equality here is in collective rather than individual terms –equal recognition and rights for different identities.

The second group of demands concerns the freedom to live one's ethnic or religious identity freely. This concept of freedom is a political expression of demands for observing the requirements of a religious identity without restriction, and utilizing various expressions of an ethnic identity in daily life. Here, too, the demand for freedom does not exclude individual freedom but goes beyond it, and concerns a collective, disenfranchised subject.

In response to minority demands for equality and freedom, the nation-state model highlights the principle of equality centered on individual freedom and abstract civic identity. From one perspective, the defense of individual rather than collective rights can be said to express a supposedly more progressive conception of freedom which liberates the individual from religious and ethnic group identities, and thus emphasizes individual freedom. However, in the eyes of those who want to live in line with their religious and ethnic identities, the definition of these rights as individuals' rights is unsatisfactory. Only when they are utilized as a community, do such rights materialize and become the pillars of concrete social relations. Thus the principle of equality, reduced by the nation-state to an abstract civic identity, usually turns into a hollow principle, barely in touch with social reality.

The dominant ethnic or religious identity on which the nation-state is founded strives to meet other identities' demands for equality and freedom

on the basis of individual rights. In cases such as Turkey, where the nation-state identity corresponds to a group identity complete with language, religion and concrete ethnic/historical symbols, the ethnic content of the official civic identity is disavowed or taken as granted. The Turkish identity, which enjoys the status of dominant identity in Turkey, blends these two conditions; it expresses both an abstract civic identity free of ethnic and religious belonging, and a universal ethnic belonging (Turkish speakers) and a religious identity (Muslims), obviously not limited to Turkey.

In today's Turkey, the Kurdish problem stems from the issue of ethnic identity based essentially on not religious but linguistic difference. Although the Kurdish problem naturally cannot be reduced to the Kurdish language, it is centered around the Kurdish language. Kurds make up about 15-20% of the overall population of Turkey, and they see Kurdishness as the central component of their identity, and live in geographically homogenous settlements. Of this total, around 2,5 million Kurdish electors support a political movement based on the Kurdish identity, demanding the free use of Kurdish in all walks of life. Naturally, here language serves as the pillar of a demand for identity recognition. Language also functions as an instrument expressing Kurdish demands to live as Kurds within Turkey, and to govern themselves in their region. The Kurds have been voicing these demands explicitly for long years. Occasionally, more radical demands such as an independent Kurdish state, or the unification of Kurds in four or five countries under a joint Kurdish state were added to this; however, the main demand of Kurds has always concerned the Kurdish language.

## Asking the question to the Turks

In Turkey, those demanding the recognition of the Kurdish identity are confronted with the question “What do you want?” in a shrill tone, which hardly suppresses the tension lying underneath. Generally it implies “You have every right, what more do you want?” Many times this is not even implied but expressed aloud. One frequent question goes “Kurds can become everything in Turkey, including the president; what else do they want?” Although not totally wrong, it omits the fact that Kurds have every right though not as Kurds but Turks.

A majority member, who puts forth this question as if it were her/his most natural right, also believes to have the right to accept or deny whatever is



demanding. By posing such a question, she/he assumes the authority of accepting or denying the demands of the Kurds, in whole or in part, or of postponing these on the claim that “it is not the right time”. Today, the most positive response given by the representatives of the majority –whether in government or in opposition– to Kurdish demands for education in mother tongue is “it is not the right time”. It is also the most common response to any exposure, definition or criticism of the widespread ethnic cleansing against Ottoman Armenians in 1915. The answer “it is not the right time!” reveals that the Kurdish and Armenian problems indeed stem from a “Turkish problem”.

The majority’s question “What do the Kurds want?” indicate that the key dimension of the Kurdish problem is the act of demanding. To demand means to position oneself as an independent social subject. This, in turn, is a threat for the constitutive ideology which imagines the Turkish society as a monolithic whole and strives to cover the entire social space with the dominant identity. While this threat is branded “separatism” in the imagination of the dominant identity, in the new dominant discourse it is coined “sowing discord among us”, with a more religious tone. Yet when Armenians, not viewed as part of the national body politic, express their demands for the recognition of their sufferings, and the designation of the 1915 deportation as genocide by the international community as well as the Turkish state, it is considered not as separatism but as a hostile attack, since they are seen as foreigners.

In order to grasp the real source of the problem laid bare by the question “What do the Kurds want?”, one needs to redirect it to Turks. Then the question serves as a litmus test not just for Turks, but all majority identities. What do whites want when confronted with black demands for equality? What do Christians think about Muslim demands for equality? What do Arabs say about Berber demands for equal civic identity? What do Turks, Sunnites or Muslims want when confronted respectively with Kurdish, Alawi or non-Muslim demands for equality in Turkey? The word “Turks” should here be taken as not just an ethnicity but the social majority, which embraces the prevailing identity within the Turkish state. The members of this majority can be Turkish, but also Bosnian, Circassian, Albanian, Laz, Arab or Kurdish. In this sense, the dominant Turkish identity corresponds both to the Muslim millet [confessional community] of the Ottoman millet system, and to a defensive identity, which due to the trauma of the Ottoman break-up, views the protection of this last state structure as the sole means to continue the dominant national imagination.

### **“Against nature” and “painstaking efforts”**

According to the official reasoning why Turks deny Kurdish demands for equality, accepting such demands would eventually lead to separate statehood and the dismemberment of Turkey. This is the politically correct answer. Once we dig a little deeper into the real motivations behind this stance based on “Sevres Treaty Syndrome”, we find that

Turks are unwilling or fearful of living under equal terms with different ethnic/religious groups. An opinion prevalent among the Turkish majority is that, in case of a Kurdish autonomy which will allow Kurds to use Kurdish as a language of education and administration, and to elect their governors, Kurds living in western Turkey must also pack up and “go home”.

According to this perspective which views non-Muslim citizens as foreigners, equality is another word for all Muslims being equally Turkish. Non-Muslims are at best seen as “guest neighbors” to be

In Turkey, those demanding the recognition of the Kurdish identity are confronted with the question “What do you want?” in a shrill tone, which hardly suppresses the tension lying underneath. Generally it implies “You have every right, what more do you want?” Many times this is not even implied but expressed aloud. One frequent question goes “Kurds can become everything in Turkey, including the president; what else do they want?” Although not totally wrong, it omits the fact that Kurds have every right though not as Kurds but Turks.

tolerated until they return to their “fatherland”. One prominent characteristic of the “Turkish mindset” is the belief that cosmopolitanism and humanism are alien –in other words, Western– ideas, which are separatist and “destructive” in nature, thereby detrimental to national unity. Turkish nationalism is the expression of these beliefs in the form of an elaborate ideology and doctrine.

Turkish nationalism is based on the belief that Turks have gained their sovereignty with blood, sweat and tears, or in seemingly more innocent terms, with painstaking efforts; which in turn supposedly grants them the right to deny the demands of other ethnic identities. This is expressed without scruple. Such Turkish mindsets, which form a much more prevalent, less conscious and almost spontaneous ideology, incorporate the idea that Turkey’s version of Turkism is not racist but unifying in character, not based on a specific ethnic identity but representative of civilization, and thereby a progressive instrument for reaching out to the universal.

In his recent remarks against Kurdish demands for education in mother tongue, the writer Ataol Behramoğlu provides a synthesis between conscious, doctrinaire Turkish nationalism and widespread, spontaneous “Turkish mindset”: “In my opinion, in Turkey Turkishness is a realistic concept which unifies the nation. It couldn’t be farther from racism. If it is language which unifies a nation, the Turkish language or Turkey’s Turkish has gained this right through painstaking efforts, and universalized



itself as the national language. The imposition of a second language to this nation is against nature, unscientific; in the final instance, it will pave the way for the dismemberment of the nation, and benefit no one but imperialism.”<sup>1</sup>

### **“That is going too far!” – How far is too far?**

According to this state of mind, recognition of equal rights for Kurds in particular, but indeed for all ethnic and religious minorities in general, is but the first step on the road to national dismemberment and fragmentation. Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan puts this as “We have made Kurdish an elective subject in schools, yet they are still unsatisfied. Now they want it to be a required subject. Sorry, but that is going too far.” What is “going too far”? In other words, what is acceptable according to the Turkish mindset? It is partially correct that the armed struggle waged by some Kurds has raised a barrier before the resolution of the Kurdish problem. Nonetheless, the Turkish mindset which underlies the cry “That is going too far!”, firmly believes itself to be the sole authority to decide on which rights Kurds can enjoy to what extent, under the form and timing that it considers appropriate; because, it has established this authority by “painstaking efforts”, that is by the sword.

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How far, then, if not that far? That is the gist of the matter. What does the majority want, we must ask, since it is the self-styled arbitrator of “what is to be granted.” That all the Kurds head for the mountains? Or, as suggested explicitly by Mümtaz Soysal, a prominent political figure who served as the minister of foreign affairs in the early 1990s, a forced population exchange between Kurds demanding regional autonomy and education in mother tongue, and Iraqi Turkmens?<sup>2</sup> Or as implied by Gündüz Aktan, an influential academician, a voluntary self-deportation of Kurds to Northern Iraq?<sup>3</sup> Or, as in true “white” Turkish İzmir style, “give it away and get rid of them?”<sup>4</sup> Do the Turks want Turkey to be populated exclusively by Turks, or the entire world to become Turkish? As in the Kemalist secularist attitude towards religion, do they want the Kurdish identity be restricted to the private sphere, and be invisible in public space? Why do they cry “That is going too far!” against Kurdish demands, even as they take for granted equal civic rights

and education in mother tongue for ethnic Turks in Bulgaria? Why does a Turkish resident of Edirne roar “That is going too far!” against the demand for the establishment of a Kurdish/Turkish primary school in Hakkâri? Today, “What do the Turks want?” is the primary question to be posed with respect to the Kurdish problem. What and how much do Turks mean when they say “we will give away this much, and nothing more”?

### **The Turkish mindset**

This question brings us to the “Turkish problem”. Underlying this problem is not only the definition of Turkishness, but also the Turkish mindset, which is a behavioral and intellectual whole, a prevailing assumption.<sup>5</sup> Inside this assumption, Turkishness is first of all defined by the Turkish language. Then comes religion. However, the behavioral pattern dubbed Turkish mindset refrains from actually thinking about these two. Not thinking on the privileges enjoyed by Muslim, native Turkish speakers in Turkey is possible by not thinking on the Turkishness of Turkey’s Turks.<sup>6</sup> This not-thinking attitude provides the basis for the belief that Turkishness is simply a civic bond, and thereby universalist, inclusive and integrating.

Particularly in the imagination of the secular middle classes, there are two conceptions of Turkishness. The first, which is the official line, corresponds to a civic identity supposedly free of any ethnic undertones. The second is the personal opinion, which is an ethnic identity complete with linguistic, religious, historical and geographic references. The backbone of the “contract of domination” in force since the first years of the Turkish Republic is a blend of these two definitions of Turkishness, either of which comes to the fore according to the necessities of the day. The republic, and its national unity is supposedly founded on what Barış Ünlü has coined “The Contract of Turkishness”. The first version of this constitutive contract was in effect during the period of 1913-1924, and involved the cleansing of non-Muslims from the area that would eventually form Turkey, and looting their property, wealth, investment and fields of vocations. After 1924, this previous contract remained in effect to the measure that it was embraced by the Kurds. However, as the emphasis of this contract shifted from religion to ethnicity, the early Republican period saw consecutive Kurdish revolts.

This implicit constitutive contract is a multidimensional contract of Turkishness, featuring not only cultural and ideological, but also economic and political aspects. It is more robust and enduring than constitutions. Although this contract harbors strong motives inspired by the essentialist content of both racial nationalist theses, and religious and ethnic nationalist/spiritualist theses, it is more comprehensive than the sum of these two. The contract of Turkishness is first of all a contract of oblivion, of deliberate forgetting, or of refusing to talk on any recollection.

This contract of domination sets forth the potential unity of all Muslim elements. As such, it is above all based on a common interest, a coalition



against non-Muslims. Non-Muslims cannot be assimilated into the dominant identity, since one of the two pillars of this identity is religious in nature. Accordingly, non-Muslim citizens in Turkey are viewed as “local foreigners”, “alien citizens”. They are regarded as a residue which will eventually leave Turkey, since they cannot be dissolved in the dominant identity. The mere question “What do Armenians, Greeks or Jews want in Turkey?” is in breach of the contract of domination. They cannot demand anything, let alone pronounce the word equality. Since Kurds, however, can be assimilated into the dominant identity (just like Bosnians, Circassians, Albanians, Abkhazians, Arabs), in their case, the question “What do they want?” is an implicit accusation of ingratitude.

### “Turkey belongs to Turks”

The question “What do Turks want?” is an irritating one for Turks who want to avoid any reflection upon Turkishness, any discussion about Turkishness and its imagination, founding myths and fabricated history. In other words, Turks don’t think about their Turkishness and don’t like others doing so. By not thinking upon it, by not questioning the Turkish imagination, they strive to preserve the fiction that Turkishness has qualities such as universalism, equality, and fraternity. In fact, they already believe that this fiction is intact and can be kept so. That is why, Turkish nationalism of the Turkist variant remained a relatively marginal movement even in its heydays. Turkish nationalism is just one among a number of subcomponents of the Turkish mindset.

The explicitly nationalist perspective of “blood for blood, eye for eye”, or the racist-nationalist stance which goes “Kurds are not suffering from assimilation, oppression or exploitation; it is the Turks who are losing their language and being assimilated. As such we have before us not the Kurdish problem, but the Turkish problem”<sup>7</sup> is for the time being only an extreme case of the pathology called the Turkish mindset. Nevertheless, the prime minister’s cry of “that is going too far!” reveals a certain boundary, shared by not just himself and the AKP constituency, but indeed the entire Turkish majority, although he doesn’t uphold an extremist position. This boundary is not clear-cut. It changes with time and circumstances, yet it does have a solid essence. This essence is the belief that the nation is

a homogenous mass with a specific language, history and cultural identity. The slogan “one language, one state, one flag, one country, one nation” very frequently voiced by Tayyip Erdoğan is never criticized by official nationalist movements nor the nationalist left. The Turkish mindset implicitly adds “one religion” to this equation. This Turkishness with its national religion and history is embraced by the majority as the guarantee of a unitary national texture. This widespread assumption is nurtured by

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a profound reaction against any political structure which deemphasizes Turkishness or pushes it to the background. Underneath this reaction lies the sentiment that the Turkish state is the last stand, the last fatherland. This also corresponds to a fear of extinction, which is excreted by the constitutive ideology of the republic and inscribed on Turks’ subconscious through decades of national education policy. In this context, the sense of victimization plays a founding, constitutive role.

The slogan “Turkey belongs to Turks” summarizes the two dimensions of the Turkish mindset. This slogan either covers every citizen of the Turkish Republic, in which case it would be a totally irrelevant tautology; or it expresses an ideal marked with a sense of victimization, a fear of losing the fatherland, and the ethnic cleansing of the last century. In any case, it reveals that the real problem in Turkey today is the Turkish problem.

### Footnotes

1. Ataol Behramoğlu, *Cumhuriyet*, 18.8.2012, (emphasis added).
2. “As for the southeast, we categorically refuse regional autonomy, and education in any language other than the official language, since these are in conflict with the nation-state principle. We defend game-changing, planned economic and social development; and propose a population exchange of those who refuse these principles against Iraqi Turkmens.” Mümtaz Soysal, “Kesin Çözüm”, *Cumhuriyet*, 17.8.2009.
3. Gündüz Aktan, *Radikal*, 10.1.2006.
4. “Now, there are thirty thousand and counting deaths separating Turks from Kurds. Kurds bring to the cities their clans, honor killings, pickpocket boys, parking-lot mafias. They make us pay for their power and water theft, leave their kids on the street to become criminals, then chant slogans for Apo

- and pillage shops. Unaware, the state is trying to increase the number of ‘loyal’ Kurds against PKK. They tax us to provide ‘social assistance’ to ignorants who have ten to twenty kids from two or three wives, 20 to 50 liras per child... Now when the president of an association from this cohort, with medieval thoughts on women’s rights, talks about democracy and says ‘The Turkish Republic is an invader in the southeast, I recognize the Barzani government, Atatürk was for the British mandate’... Turks naturally want to shake off this burden, stop funding their offspring, get rid of their clans, traditions, ignorance, in short this burden, and even refuse living together.” Mine Kırkkanat, “Asalak Kardeşlik”, *Vatan*, 7.12.2005.
5. On Turkish mindsets see Birikim, no.: 274, February 2012, articles in the section “Olayımız Türklük!”.
  6. “The most important common feature of Turkish mindsets is not thinking upon Turkishness, and the privileges of Turks”, Barış Ünlü, “Türklüğün Kısa Tarihi”, *Birikim*, no.: 274, February 2012.
  7. Yunus Yılmaz, *Türk Solu*, no.: 165, 2007.



# AKP's approach to the Kurdish problem: One step forward, one step backward

**T**urkey's 1990s, as frequently mentioned in current debates, went down in the collective memory as an epoch dominated by the Kurdish problem. Back then, the Kurdish issue was perceived in terms of "separatism", and accordingly its resolution was totally delegated to military authorities. In turn, the militarization of the issue was directly related to its aggravation. In fact, during the 1980s when PKK organized its first strikes, both civilian and military authorities first viewed the issue as troubles triggered by a handful of bandits, and that it could easily be eradicated through a few measures. According to the military and civilian authorities, Turkey would always face a terror problem and the Turkish state was sufficiently experienced to deal with it.

However, in the 1990s it emerged that the problem was not as simple as initially thought. PKK, which was branded "a handful of terrorists" by the state elite in the 1980s, had gained power and come to stem the state's clout and control in the region, by the end of the decade. Accordingly, this development drastically changed the Turkish Armed Forces' prior self-confidence, and condescension towards its enemy in the 1990s. The overhaul brought along a vast number of technical and strategic rearrangements, and its most crucial consequence was extensive and drastic human rights violations, and a further extension of the military's already far-reaching authority. These two developments would jointly make the 1990s a shameful period for Turkish democracy.

In the early 2000s, however, change was in the air as regards the Kurdish issue, and the pessimism of the previous decade started to dissipate. The main reason for this change was undoubtedly the sentiment of "the military victory" which swept through the ranks of the Turkish military and political elite after the capture of the Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. This sentiment would dampen the army's perception of "interior threat" and eventually allow the political authority to bring the military authority to account. Yet, an even more crucial development was the surge of AKP (Justice and Development Party) as a political force founded by the victims of the military memorandum of February 28th, 1997. AKP would produce a landslide at the 2002 elections and obtain 65% of all parliamentary seats, and eventually form the first single party Turkish government in eleven years. In addition, in its first years in government,

AKP displayed a willingness to achieve what no government could since the Ankara Treaty of 1963 and join the EU. Thus negotiation and harmonization with the EU would shadow "domestic issues", and set in motion a process of democratization.

## One step forward: Civilian rule

Having experienced the February 28th memorandum firsthand, AKP leaders were aware that democracy was not the name of the game in the Turkish political scene. To continue its success at the ballot box and establish a robust political administration, AKP would have to reach beyond its core constituency and also bring the military authority to account. Starting from its first electoral victory, AKP based its demilitarization efforts on two axes. The first was the limitation of the army's authority in the framework of a wide-scale democratization drive and integration with the EU. Participation in the EU project boosted AKP's political clout both vis-a-vis the military elite and in the international arena.<sup>1</sup> In this process, AKP first revised the composition and authority of the National Security Council (MGK). It transformed this organ, which casted a long shadow over civilian politics in the 1990s, into an advisory council rather than a decision-making body.<sup>2</sup>

Another development which enabled AKP to hold the military accountable was the demilitarization of the Kurdish problem, and the first steps towards its resolution within the framework of civilian politics. Undoubtedly, in this first period, the desire to restrict the military authority was not the government's unique motivation in taking steps towards the political resolution of the Kurdish issue. All the same, AKP was well aware that the demilitarization of the Kurdish problem would ultimately stem the army's clout in civilian politics. Indeed, in the first years of AKP rule, the main public debate between the AKP elites and military authority turned around the government's "softness" on the Kurdish problem. Although AKP had no comprehensive plan to solve the Kurdish issue, it did strive to formulate a political solution through limited gradual measures. In the relatively peaceful period of 2002-2003, modest yet important steps were taken with respect to human rights and Kurdish political demands.<sup>3</sup> The AKP elites were fully aware that the remilitarization of the problem would reassign the army the leading role in civilian politics, which in turn would restrict their own political power.<sup>4</sup> In brief, in this initial period, AKP's political perspective on the EU project not only



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allowed it to directly restrict the military authority through a program of “demilitarization”, but also to relocate the Kurdish problem -which was used by the army to legitimize the expansion of its sphere of authority- to the civilian political arena and thus limit the army’s political clout indirectly.

In 2005, after three years of AKP rule, this sanguine outlook started to get bleaker. The rejection of the Annan Plan in Cyprus, and the resulting weakening of Turkey’s hopes to join the EU were one reason for this pessimistic mood, with the other being the explosion of Kurdish problem onto the streets and cities. News of the burning of a Turkish flag in Mersin would lead to street protests and an immense wave of hatred towards Kurds. The year 2005 saw an unprecedented hike in lynch attempts towards the Kurdish population and a bookstore in Şemdinli was bombed by individuals who later were revealed to be military personnel.

In this period, all political camps grew aware that the consolidation of AKP’s political rule was contingent on the normalization of the Kurdish issue and the demilitarization of politics. Both proponents and opponents of AKP started to view democratization as the ground for “strategic” trench warfare. Whereas both the military authority and the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) approached democracy through the lens of “secularism”, AKP interpreted democracy through the lens of “civilian rule”. The following period would be dominated by a conflict between these two perceptions of democracy. In fact, neither side had a comprehensive program of democracy; both expressed a strategic demand for fragmented democracy in order to consolidate its own power. Neither side would refrain from recourse to non-democratic methods whenever this strategic demand for democracy failed to yield the desired results.

The period of 2005-2007 can be seen as the pinnacle of the tug-of-war between the military elite and AKP. The diaries of Deniz Örneş, a previous Commander of Naval Forces were published by the news magazine *Nokta* in 2007, revealing that the military elite, disgruntled with the political consolidation of AKP, planned a number of military coups, but failed to bring these to fruition due to a number of reasons.<sup>5</sup> In the same year, when the presidential elections came to a deadlock due to the army’s pressure, AKP went to early elections and reached an even more decisive victory at the ballot. The AKP’s triumph ushered in a new epoch. In the period after 2007, Turkish soldiers were brought to justice for charges of attempted military coup. The Ergenekon trials, which started in 2008, could be viewed as the starter’s gun for this transformation.

### **One step forward, one step back: The Kurdish opening**

By 2009, the Turkish government had made significant headway in terms of “demilitarization”. Precisely for this reason, AKP was finally free to follow a new political strategy to solve the Kurdish problem. In fact, as argued above, the AKP elites were cognizant that any remilitarization of the Kurdish issue would lead to the failure of attempts

to hold the military to account. Accordingly, AKP considered that it had to wait until placing the military under civilian control, before tackling the Kurdish problem as a political agent. Nonetheless, in the final instance, this led the AKP to viewing itself as the sole force capable of resolving the matter at hand. As a result, AKP was very much unwilling to recognize the political agency of Kurdish political forces, which had fought up until then to establish themselves as political actors before different governments.

In parallel with this overall approach, following the launch of its Kurdish opening in 2009, AKP neither consulted prominent Kurdish political actors on the issue nor started a public debate on the main components of its reform program. The full details of the plan were never disclosed to the public, yet it is known that one key issue is the repatriation of and amnesty for PKK militants who did not participate in military operations. Nonetheless, since the plan’s details remained unknown and the public had not been consulted beforehand, it backfired as soon as it was rolled out. When a cohort of PKK fighters entered Turkey through the Habur border gate in the

At the elections of June 12th, 2011, AKP displayed a very inflexible position on the Kurdish issue, which completely dissipated the optimism of the previous decade. The problem was now rebranded as one of terror, not democracy; of violence, not rights. Capitalizing on this tougher stance, AKP significantly increased its votes to 49.9%.

immediate wake of the opening, there was immense public outrage owing to the inflation of nationalist reflexes since long years. A large Kurdish population hailed the fighters with chants of “victory”; however, the tide soon turned due to rampant nationalism and AKP immediately brought the opening to a screeching halt, afraid of losing nationalist votes in the next elections. As a result, the Kurdish problem was once again locked up behind closed doors.<sup>6</sup>

In the following period, there emerged two seemingly conflictual developments which in fact were in strategic harmony with AKP’s political objectives and populist policies. The first one was the Oslo talks involving representatives from Turkey’s National Intelligence Organization (MİT) and PKK. This process showed that, in the final instance, AKP cannot afford to totally forgo the political option for the resolution of the Kurdish problem. On the other hand, however, AKP does not view the legal Kurdish party BDP as a legitimate interlocutor, and does not integrate them into the negotiations through some mechanism. Actually, this outcome is closely related to the fact that AKP considers itself as the only legitimate agent capable of resolving the problem in the eyes of the electorate, and that it refrains from



designating any other actor as legitimate. AKP seems to say, "If the Kurdish problem is to be resolved, only we can do that." It is utterly reluctant to share with its political rival BDP any possible political spoils of an eventual denouement.

A second critical development in this period is the lawsuit filed by the state against KCK, or Kurdistan Communities Union. This lawsuit turned a new leaf in the Turkish political agenda. At the first glance, the lawsuit against KCK may seem to be in accordance with AKP's maxim "to solve the problem through democracy, without recourse to violence". At the same time, this maxim also gives the Turkish public -rendered even more defensive by the Kurdish opening- the message that the state still

The first component of the new Kurdish strategy was to construct and operationalize an efficient judiciary mechanism to control dissidents; and the second, falling back on military methods. According to the government, this military strategy was different because it was undertaken by civilians. In other words, a military strategy conducted by civilians was said to be unprecedented in Turkey.

views oppression as an option and complete detente is out of question, so as to cajole the electorate. Nevertheless, this lawsuit has ultimately led to the creation of a new regime of oppression via judiciary means. True, this new regime does not resort to forced evacuations of Kurdish villages nor to killings under police custody, yet elected Kurdish officials are denied their right to become politically active via legal parties and active Kurdish politicians are branded terrorists by the judiciary. These "terrorists involved in illegitimate politics" are jailed during litigation on suspicion that they might obfuscate the evidence, and are subjected to long proceedings without being fully informed of the evidence against them.

This exclusionary and oppressive approach ended in the rechristening of the Kurdish opening as the National Unity and Fraternity Project and the opening was closed down even before it properly took off. Besides, this paved the way for PKK to remilitarize the Kurdish movement.<sup>7</sup> The tense political environment deteriorated further when AKP won a landslide victory at a referendum held on September 12th, 2010, concerning amendments to the Constitution. The society's overwhelming support for constitutional amendments meant to restructure the judiciary apparatus seen as the last stand of the "old Kemalist block", enhanced AKP's resolve (and capacity) to solve through judiciary means both the Kurdish issue and the military custody over civilian politics. Without doubt, the main reason for the remilitarization of the Kurdish problem was the failure in 2011 of the Oslo negotiations, whose details have yet to be revealed to the public.

Following the failure of the talks and the elimination of legal political interlocutors via judiciary means, both sides changed course from negotiation to "oppression" and "violence". The resulting agitation in the political arena and in the language of political actors urged many observers to ask the question "are we back in the 1990s?"

### One step backward: The new strategy

At the elections of June 12th, 2011, AKP displayed a very inflexible position on the Kurdish issue, which completely dissipated the optimism of the previous decade. The problem was now rebranded as one of terror, not democracy; of violence, not rights. In this new period, AKP elites declared that the Kurdish problem is already resolved, they will soon rout PKK forces, and that they are unwilling to enter further negotiations. Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan declared that they will meet with only legal and legitimate Kurdish representatives, and suggested that BDP is not a proper interlocutor since it does not act "independently and autonomously". Capitalizing on this tougher stance, AKP significantly increased its votes to 49.9%.

Following consecutive victories at general elections and the referendum, the so-called Kurdish opening ceded its place to a new Kurdish strategy. One crucial component of this strategy was the expansion of the KCK lawsuit via state courts and police force to cover academics, writers, journalists, lawyers -in short, all social sectors with a dissident opinion on the Kurdish issue. Long detention periods and recourse to confidential evidence aggravated further in qualitative and quantitative terms.

The first component of the new Kurdish strategy was to construct and put into operation an efficient judiciary mechanism to control dissidents; and the second was falling back on military methods to solve the Kurdish problem. According to the government, this military strategy was different because it was undertaken by civilians. In other words, a military strategy conducted by civilians was said to be unprecedented in Turkey. Precisely for this reason, the government was confident that the military could not come to dominate the political sphere via the Kurdish problem as it did in the 1990s. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the general elections, on July 30th, 2011, the government not only thwarted the military's attempts to control civilians but directly intervened in the inner workings of the army, at the Higher Military Council (YAŞ) summit. This development was seen as the clear evidence of a power shift towards civilians. The Chief of Staff and various senior generals resigned after the government refused to approve their decision to dismiss a number of officials.

The AKP government undoubtedly became even keener on the military solution after bringing the army under control. The ongoing tug-of-war between AKP and the army during the first eight years of AKP rule was one important reason of the detente in the Kurdish problem. Today, the resolution of this conflict in favor of civilians has paved the way for a military conflict under civilian supervision. The first steps of this new security strategy were



taken in the year 2011 when a governorship system vested with special powers was brought up. Such a system would be tantamount to a normalization and institutionalization of the state of emergency. Besides, in parallel with the abolition of obligatory military service across the world, AKP declared that anti-terror units would be exclusively composed of professional soldiers. The government stated that 30 to 60 thousand contractual soldiers were to be recruited to fight against terror in southeastern provinces. On the other hand, the special operations police force would expand, teams would be provided heavy weaponry and police would take more initiative in the fight against terror in the region. Governors with special powers would have the authority to resolve any coordination problems among the police, contractual soldiers and gendarmerie. As such, AKP's new Kurdish strategy was a comprehensive transformation geared towards coordination, demilitarization, localization and professionalization.

### Fantasy of absolute power

While AKP's political elites grappled with military authorities in their first years in power, they used democracy, democratic institutions and processes as trump cards. AKP strengthened its hand through an emphasis on democracy and conservatism, and gained national and international support, thus eventually winning its power struggle against the military. It was precisely this victory which allowed AKP to declare itself as the unique political force in control of the state. Naturally, the civilian administration should be the unique political decision maker in any democratic society. Therefore the problem is not the demilitarization process itself, but AKP's current stance which can be dubbed "we are the power and the opposition". AKP's new Kurdish strategy is a reflection of this approach. Unlike in previous periods, this new strategy does not involve the resolution of the problem with legitimate political interlocutors. On the contrary, it is based on the elimination of the Kurdish movement and singling out of AKP as the unique political actor and interlocutor.

In fact the approach "we are the power and the

opposition" is part of the basic political utopia of all conservative populist movements. This political utopia is based on a fantasy of absolute power which can "solve problems in one swoop". This power fantasy does not have space for dialogue, debate, criticism or difference; on the contrary, all these are but barriers to the swift resolution of problems. Such populist movements recognize the independence of an issue only when they face problems such as "hunger strikes" which cannot be resolved by their supposedly absolute power. However, even such a recognition is only temporary. For instance, in the framework of this political utopia, the Prime Minister's words in defense of a return to capital punishment should be seen not just as a simple

The problem is not the demilitarization process itself, but AKP's current stance which can be dubbed "we are the power and the opposition". AKP's new Kurdish strategy is a reflection of this approach. This new strategy does not involve the resolution of the problem with legitimate political interlocutors. On the contrary, it is based on the elimination of the Kurdish movement and singling out of AKP as the unique political actor and interlocutor.

attempt at changing the political agenda, but the expression of a political fantasy along the lines "we would have become the sole interlocutor if we had killed Öcalan".

The history of democracy teaches us that democracy is never the result of well-meaning efforts by political actors, let alone political elites. Only when democracy is read as the strategic outcome of a situation in which no class/group can completely get its way, can we get a better understanding of why this perception of absolute power constitutes the biggest stumbling block before the institutionalization of Turkish democracy.

### Footnotes

1. For further information, see Ali Resul Usul (2008), "The Justice and Development Party and the European Union: From Euro-skepticism to Euro-enthusiasm and Euro-fatigue," Ümit Cizre (ed.) *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey. The Making of the Justice and Development Party*. London and New York: Routledge, pp: 175–97; Erhan Doğan (2005), "The Historical and Discursive Roots of the Justice and Development Party's EU Stance," *Turkish Studies* 6(3): 421–37.
2. Linda Michaud-Emin (2007), "The Restructuring of the Military High Command in the Seventh Harmonization Package and its Ramifications for Civil-Military Relations in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 8(1): 25–42.
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7. Aliza Marcus (2010), "Troubles in Turkey's Backyard," *Foreign Policy*, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/07/09/troubles\\_in\\_turkey\\_s\\_backyard?obref=obinsite](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/07/09/troubles_in_turkey_s_backyard?obref=obinsite)



# The Turkish state's GAP hocus-pocus

**T**he Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) goes back many years. However, it was only in the 1980s that it started to materialize. Former president Süleyman Demirel laid claim to it, saying “They can’t snatch it away from me” with reference to the then prime minister Turgut Özal. The GAP project was presented as the panacea for the long-neglected southeastern region of Turkey, the world champion in regional inequality. Even more importantly, GAP was supposed to serve as a levee against the rising tide of the Kurdish movement, as the locals would no longer support “a bunch of bandits”, once they had jobs and food.

Likened to a “charming bride”, GAP was meant to generate electricity from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and provide irrigation to arid swathes of land. This was an urgent concern for Turkish capitalism, heavily dependent on foreign providers of electricity. Besides, irrigation would boost the growth of agricultural capitalism and support a thriving food industry, which would bring civilization to these backward lands.

In practice, however, energy projects were prioritized while irrigation was given a back seat. From the 1980s until the 2000s, GAP accounted for around 7% of total Turkish public investment. GAP was purportedly a regional development project, however, consecutive governments shaped it according to their own interests. They gave top priority to dam construction and hydroelectric power, which would not benefit the region directly in the short run. The energy generated by GAP dams came to provide 7% of the total electricity generated in Turkey; however, irrigation projects advanced very slowly and just 15% of the total was completed by the end of 2007.

## GAP Action Plan and its results

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government announced its “Kurdish opening” in 2009 with great fanfare, yet this grand initiative bit the dust in no time. One component of this failed attempt was the GAP Action Plan. The “opening” has been a failure as far as GAP is concerned. Only the half of total funds required to meet the targets were provided. As a result, in the period of 2008-2012, only slightly more than half of the total investment target was reached.

GAP’s total financial cost had been calculated

as TL 41.2 billion in 2008 prices. Nonetheless only TL 26 billion was spent by the end of 2007, which corresponded to 62.2%. What would follow?

It was back in 2008 that the government had launched the GAP Action Plan, also described it as “the economic component of the Kurdish opening”. A planned TL 27 billion would be spent from 2008 till 2012 to achieve the targets set.

Some of the funding was to be generated from outside the general budget. Even as the public asked “from where?”, AKP tapped into Unemployment Insurance Fund and took out TL 10 billion TL from the funds supposed to be allocated to the unemployed, from 2008 till 2012. The Ministry of Development states that total funds spent on the Action Plan amount to TL 20 billion as of end-2012. Half of this total comes from the central budget, and the other half from Unemployment Fund. Accordingly, over one quarter of the TL 27 billion of spending envisaged in the Action Plan has yet to materialize. The financial overview of the second Action Plan in preparation phase has not been revealed; however, additional costs are expected and the state might reach into Unemployment Fund a second time.

What were the targets of the failed plan? GAP Action Plan allocated to irrigation 43% of its TL 27 billion in total investments. Energy investments again took an important share with 12%. Education accounted for only 11%, and health for less than 4%.

There were setbacks in irrigation projects, described as follows in the 2013 Program: “In the latest five-year period from 2007 till 2011, an annual average of 69 thousand hectares of land was without irrigation due to insufficient water supply, which points at the need for efficiency in water use. Besides, the climate change requires us to revise our plans in irrigation to prevent water scarcity.”

The plans are being revised so as to complete in the period of 2013-2017 all those actions left incomplete in the GAP Action Plan 2008-2012.

Although touted as a regional development project, GAP always prioritized energy projects rather than regional requirements. Even if the irrigation system is completed in the future, any advance in irrigated farming will mainly benefit large landowners owing to the immense inequality in land ownership. The very limited investment underway in other social areas, left



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Financial Overview of the GAP Action Plan (TL thousand)					
Action	Total Funding Required	Funds Earmarked at the Present (*)	Additional Funding Needed at the End of Action Plan	Funding Outside the Central Budget	Planned Additional Funding from Central Budget 2008-2012
<b>I. Economic development</b>	<b>1.344.213</b>	<b>247.377</b>	<b>1.096.836</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.096.836</b>
Centers of attraction	265.000	0	265.000	0	265.000
Incentive policies	0	0	0	0	265.000
SME support and clustering	110.000	50.000	60.000	0	60.000
Technoparks	6.000	0	6.000	0	6.000
Culture and tourism	192.024	62.170	129.854	0	129.854
Natural resources and renewable energy	79.039	33.207	45.832	0	45.832
Agriculture	692.150	102.000	590.150	0	590.150
<b>II. Social development</b>	<b>5.114.770</b>	<b>2.416.618</b>	<b>2.698.152</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2.698.152</b>
Education	3.014.622	1.955.472	1.059.150	0	1.059.150
Employment	347.819	8.490	339.329	0	339.329
Health	999.190	412.000	587.190	0	587.190
Social services and assistance	345.839	11.756	334.083	0	334.083
Culture, arts, sports	407.300	28.900	378.400	0	378.400
<b>III. Infrastructure</b>	<b>20.099.067</b>	<b>4.622.808</b>	<b>15.476.259</b>	<b>4.882.046</b>	<b>10.594.213</b>
Irrigation	11.323.949	600.000	10.723.949	1.939.398	8.784.551
Energy	3.279.579	1.710.931	1.568.648	1.568.648	0
Transport	1.977.550	610.108	1.367.442	0	1.367.442
Social physical infrastructure	3.517.989	1.701.769	1.816.220	1.374.000	442.220
<b>IV. Institutional capacity building</b>	<b>121.125</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>120.925</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>120.925</b>
Local governments and regional institutions	121.125	200	120.925	0	120.925
GAP regional development	0	0	0	0	0
Additional reserves	22.890	0	22.890	0	22.890
<b>Sum Total</b>	<b>26.702.065</b>	<b>7.287.003</b>	<b>19.415.062</b>	<b>4.882.046</b>	<b>14.533.016</b>
(*) The ordinary requirement for reserves calculated previously according to the total project inventory, without taking the Action Plan into account.					

Source: Ministry of Development

incomplete due to a supposed lack of funds, cannot give a boost to social welfare.

Anything besides energy and irrigation?

Does the GAP project feature anything other than energy and irrigation? A number of other schemes were added to the project later on, such as the Social Support Program (SODES). The progress in this direction is outlined in the 2013 Program as follows:

“Launched by the Ministry of Development in 2008 in 9 provinces of GAP so as to support human capital and social cohesion, Social Support Program (SODES) is geared toward further integrating disadvantaged social groups into social and economic life; and to enable local youth and women to better express themselves through culture, arts and sports. The program gives support to projects in social inclusion, culture and arts, sports, as well as employment, and was extended in 2010 to cover 16 other provinces under the Eastern Anatolia Project (DAP) 2010 and again in 2011 to include Adana, Mersin, Hatay, Osmaniye and Kahramanmaraş

as a pilot scheme, bringing the total number of provinces to 30. In the period of 2008-2012, a total of TL 674 million was allocated to 5,792 SODES projects developed locally under the coordination of governorships.”

TL 674 million for five years amounts to throwing the locals a bone –a matter of keeping up the appearances.

Yet another such program for show concerns animal husbandry. In Turkey, the price of red meat is on the rise due to the shortage of supply. The government opted for suppressing domestic prices via importation of livestock and meat, rather than supporting livestock breeding. As a result, during the year 2011 and the first eight months of 2012, roughly 500 thousand cattle, 1,7 million sheep, and 132 thousand tons of red meat were imported. However, Turkey must expand its domestic livestock, in particular sheep, in order to increase red meat production, and animal husbandry must be supported especially in Southeastern and Eastern Turkey.



## Does GAP actually exist?

Does the Southeastern Anatolia Project really correspond to anything on the ground? In fact there isn't really a plan entitled GAP, and GAP Administration can hardly be said to have any clout.

Whenever the word GAP is mentioned, one tends to think that there is actually a plan and an

GAP is presented as the “key” to ending underdevelopment and inequality, even to stopping the bloodshed and bringing peace; in fact, it is a means of deception. It serves the purpose of dissuading the locals from revolting.

accompanying budget covering the nine provinces, under the supervision of the GAP Administration. It is thought that the TL 35 billion spent until now was part of an overreaching GAP plan, supervised by GAP Administration. It couldn't be further from truth! Yes, there are large dams and power plants which account for 6 to 7% of the total national electricity generation. There are indeed irrigation channels in construction and other projects inching along, eventually meant to supply water to thousands of hectares of land. However, these projects are not carried out under some GAP plan or agency. GAP Administration is nothing but a screen; yet one with a 250-strong workforce and an annual budget of TL 50 million. All public investment destined for the southeastern provinces are determined by the central government, just like in other provinces, and funded by relevant public agencies. State Hydraulic Works (DSİ) is in charge of all investment in dams and channels, General Directorate of Highways (KGM) in highways, Ministry of National Education in schools, etc.

So, what purpose does GAP Administration serve? It is so to speak the “pretender” in an orchestra formed by investment agencies such as DSİ and KGM under the baton of the Council of Ministers. GAP Administration appears on stage and pretends to sing, but does not really play any role. Its true purpose is to enable the government to present all projects in the southeastern provinces as an investment drive for regional development. Investments to individual provinces are gathered under a single umbrella on paper and showcased as an overarching project to help an underdeveloped region flourish. This is an illusion. That is because, there is no regional plan, regional development concept, nor an instance of investment fully in charge. Even if the GAP Administration were to vanish into thin air overnight, all projects in the southeastern provinces would continue uninterrupted. However its absence would spoil the desired illusion.

GAP is presented as the “key” to ending underdevelopment and inequality, even to stopping the bloodshed and bringing peace; in fact, it is a means

of deception. It serves the purpose of dissuading the locals from revolting. It is a magic mantra supposed to convince the masses. GAP is supposed to be indisputable. A case in point: As mentioned above, the AKP government tapped into Unemployment Insurance Fund and took out a total of TL 9 billion. “GAP investments” provided a perfect excuse for confiscation of funds for the unemployed. Most of us, unaware of the inner workings of the state, and even numerous parliamentarians thought that these funds were really allocated to some “GAP budget”. Well, there is no such budget. The confiscated funds were added to the central budget pool. Thus, the name “GAP” was simply used as an excuse to avoid any criticism, and the AKP government could decrease the budget deficit thanks to the GAP illusion. Otherwise, the government would have to allocate money to GAP projects, and thus inflate the deficit.

Even as all investments to the southeastern provinces are presented as “regional GAP investments” through this hocus-pocus, their true purpose is to meet the energy demand of well-established capitalist production in the west. Irrigation projects, an urgent need for regional farming, take but a tiny share from the total and they are only 15% complete. At the final act of this vaudeville, which will continue with years of consolation meant to leave the local population grateful to the central government, irrigation projects will benefit mainly large landowners, and poor Kurds will simply become the salaried slaves of rich Kurds.

The actors of true regional development must be local, not central. Regional objectives must be set with the participation of local actors, municipalities, and organizations, executed by local bodies, and controlled jointly by central and local agencies. GAP never was a regional plan, it never served regional development

The immense inequality of land ownership		
	Number of Farms	Share of Total Land (Decare %)
Turkey	3076650	184348232
Families without land	1.8	0
Small landowners	32.2	5.3
Medium landowners	64.7	83.3
Large landowners	1.3	11.3
Diyarbakır	50743	4201714
Families without land	13.6	0
Small landowners	28.6	4.1
Medium landowners	54.5	54.7
Large landowners	3.3	41.2
Şanlıurfa	51747	9821677
Families without land	0.6	0
Small landowners	26.4	3.6
Medium landowners	71.5	71.3
Large landowners	1.5	28.7

Source: TÜİK, 2001 Agricultural Survey Database



and will never do so. It always excluded local actors, and refused to meet local needs. Nonetheless there is and will continue to be demands for locally-based democratic development in the southeast and other Turkish regions. We need to ponder much more on participative, democratic and egalitarian models of growth focused on the local, without being deceived by the GAP illusion.

### **GAP lands and inequality**

Land ownership and agricultural production relations form the essence of the political economy of the Kurdish problem. That is because agriculture plays a key role in the regional economy, and despite massive migration from rural to urban areas, agriculture and relevant industries seem set to dominate the region for years to come.

Southeastern Turkey boasts vast swathes of land with a high potential. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) Agricultural Survey of 2001, these lands have rich water sources above and under the ground, and account for 10% of the national landmass. Economically irrigable lands, on the other hand, constitute 20% of the national total. GAP covers a total of 3.2 million hectares of arable land. Of this total, 1,7 million hectares are irrigable, whereas the remainder is used for dryland farming. The GAP Action Plan for 2008-2012 set the objective of irrigating a total of 1 million 60 thousand hectares of land and the construction of 1232 kilometers of irrigation channels. However, construction is underway in just one half of the total.

What about land ownership? In the region, Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa are the champions of inequality in land ownership. According to the agricultural survey by TÜİK, landless families and those with little land (22 thousand families) account for 42% of the total in Diyarbakır. These own just 4% of the entire land area. However, just 3% of Diyarbakır families control 41% of the total land. In a similar vein, in Şanlıurfa, too, just 1.5% of families control close to 30% of the entire land of 10 million decares.

The high land concentration visible in Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa is the legacy of feudal land ownership dating back centuries. Land reform has been a burning issue throughout republican history. No government could dare launch a land reform that would arouse the ire of rich landowners, or "agha". Despite the

occasional fragmentation of land due to inheritance issues and the transformation of large landowners into an urban bourgeoisie, the yawning disparity in land ownership still necessitates a land reform in the southeast. Who can carry it out? The AKP government strives to form an alliance with Kurdish large landowners, rather than struggle against them, especially since Kurdish feudal lords are expected to

Even as all investments to the southeastern provinces are presented as "regional GAP investments" through this hocus-pocus, their true purpose is to meet the energy demand of well-established capitalist production in the west.

become agricultural capitalists after the completion of the irrigation network.

The Kurdish political movement, which initially had an anti-feudal discourse and was based on the poor peasantry, became increasingly "nationalist" in time, refrained from settling accounts with Kurdish lords, and pushed the provision of land to poor peasants towards the very bottom of its political program.

The Kurdish population is of rural origins. Most of them have fled their villages due to war and famine, and huddled in cities as unemployed masses. Yet still 45% of the southeastern population lives in rural areas and most with little or no land.

The key to decreasing unemployment in the region, which officially stands above 15%, is a return to agriculture. An effective land reform will entail the distribution to peasants of two million hectares of land zoned by the state, and land confiscated from large landowners. Then peasants will be able to come together under democratic cooperatives and manage production and marketing, and take loans.

Then there is the mined terrain of the region. These normally productive lands cover 13,600 hectares. These, too, can be distributed to landless peasants once they are cleared of mines. The de-mining operation has been left to the Turkish Armed Forces, and is supposed to be funded from the central budget. However, as of end-2012, no concrete action was taken.



# Village guards: A “temporary” system ongoing for 26 years

“I hereby declare and approve that, because of the admirable services they will offer for our great county, Mustafa and Ömer aghas who are the sons of deceased İbrahim, living in our province and the leaders of Raman tribe, are enfranchised for their behaviors which were out of order and outlawed in the past unless they continue to commit crimes.”

“These attached forces were the members of the bands commanded by Salih and Abdi messieurs who were rewarded with war of independence medal. The judicial proceedings on some of the criminal and convicted band members have been stopped by an act. Thus they were rewarded.”

“One of the leaders of this tribe was the murderer of a soldier. But under the circumstances of those days we need to get them on our side instead of being on opposite sides. We neglected some mistakes. In this type of struggle you need to evaluate the plus and minus. We did so in the Southeast.”

Respectively, Diyarbakır governor's declaration<sup>1</sup> on the assignation of the Raman tribe members for the Armenian deportation, the declaration of local governors<sup>2</sup> (on duty then) about the Necmioğulları of Derik who fought against French around Viranşehir in 1918, and in 1985 the declaration of Korkut Eken<sup>3</sup> on the Jirki tribe as the first step of the village guard system, are the manifestations of the “consistent” official view and the practices of the government's relations with the Kurds from the last years of the Ottomans until today. In the last years of the Ottomans and in the first years of the republic, some of the Kurdish tribes' members had been armed against non-Muslim groups and foreigners but during village guards system many Kurds in the age of military service in the eastern and southeastern cities were armed against PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party; it began armed struggle in 1984) which is also composed of Kurdish youth.

The alliances of the Ottomans with the Kurdish tribes were not only for organizing the relations between the tribes but also controlling the non-Muslim settled population –such as Nestorians, Armenians and Assyrians– of the region. Therefore, there have been both pro-government and anti-government tribes for a longtime. However, it is important to note that the policies of the tribes have never been consistent. Furthermore, in its relationships and alliances, the government also had not been consistent. There are many instances of pragmatism on the side of the government.

The first official alliance of the government and Kurdish tribes had been made in 1891 with the foundation of the Hamidiye Cavalry.<sup>4</sup> The Hamidiye Cavalry, was established to counteract the nationalist Armenian movement. Its foundation had also been the important turning point for the permanency of the divergence between Kurdish tribes.

We can just look over the period of 1920-1938 in order to see that the alliance which began with the Hamidiye Cavalry and continued until the establishment of the republic had not lasted long. It is a fact that, the Kurds had a really notable power in the establishment of the republic but they began to be considered as the biggest “problem” while establishing a homogeneous nation state.

Despite the Kurdish political movement aroused at the end of 1970s parallel with the socialist movement of Turkey, we cannot mention an armed Kurdish movement during the period of 1930-1984 until PKK came into being. However, this doesn't mean that there were no problems in the region during the mentioned period. The socio-economic problems went on relentlessly.

The period of armed clashes began when the militants of PKK attacked the gendarmerie stations in Erüh and Şemdinli on 15th of August 1984. Besides the fall of thousands of civilians and soldiers, there were thousands of unsolved murders and thousands of people were obliged to leave their villages in course of time.

One of the important phenomenon of these years is the temporary village guard system and also the main subject of this research, which has always been in the news and discussed with its negative effects.

The village guards are an armed power incorporating more than 50 thousand paid “temporary village guards” and nearly 30 thousand unpaid volunteers carrying registered weapons which makes a total of approximately 90 thousand people. All these armed people are Kurdish. The only exception is the Ulupamirler village in Erciş, Van. Its residents had been employed as temporary village guards because they migrated from Afghanistan and had no other income. When the families of the guards are also taken into account the total population becomes nearly 500 thousand. It is a fact that –maybe on purpose and voluntarily or because of their task requires so– many people were aggrieved by the behaviors of the village guards. However, the village guards and their families also have been aggrieved by this system with social,



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economic, cultural and political reasons. Not only because they have been seen as the reason and the essential factor of the division of the social structure and being excluded but also being a part of an “inexplicit” system without any status also indicates an important problem. Thus, by all means, village guard system is a complicated, multidimensional social problem that concerns the whole of Turkey.

### The establishment of the village guards

The Hamidiye Cavalry is the first that comes to mind when the system of village guards is mentioned. However, making use of Kurdish tribes and groups as paramilitary forces besides the army has been utilized before the Hamidiye Cavalry. Until the establishment of the temporary village guards in 1985, –especially between 1920/38– the system continued in different fashions. Certainly that period was not extensive, regular and semiofficial as the temporary village guards and the Hamidiye Cavalry.

The Hamidiye Cavalry had been established against the Armenians, the other small scaled forms were against the other Kurdish tribes and their revolts but the temporary village guard system was established directly against PKK militants. The main attractive aspect of both the Hamidiye Cavalry and the temporary village guard system has always been the economic dimension. Furthermore, having a privileged position on making use of the state facilities was one of the important reasons for taking on the task.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in Turkey the citizenship relations of the Kurds with the state have never been directly but usually through various individuals holding office and institutions.

The first step of the current temporary village guard system was the contact with Jirkis of Beytüşşebap. In May 1985, the day after the meeting made in the Aşağıdere village mukhtar's (elected head of a village) house on the Çeman-Beytüşşebap road by the state officials and the leaders of the Jirki tribe, the leaders of Jirki Tribe, Tahir Adıyaman, Hacı Öter, Abubekir Aydemir and Kökel Özdemir were brought to Diyarbakır 7th Corps Command headquarters by military helicopter. There they accepted to be village guards after the negotiation with the Corps Commander Kaya Yazgan. The Corps Commander Yazgan made the Jirki leaders swear on Quran for remaining faithful to the state.<sup>6</sup>

The village guard system was based on the 442 numbered Village Law acted in 1924. On 26th of 1985 with the amendment made on the 74th article of 442 numbered Village Law, the current village guards were charged on duty. The volunteers could be employed with the mukhtar's proposal and kaimakam's (district governor) acceptance and the salaried guards were employed with the governor's proposal and interior minister's confirmation. The volunteer and temporary village guards, who are sometimes more than 80 thousand of armed people, are under the command of mukhtar on administrative basis and gendarmerie captain on professional basis. On 1st of July 2000 a Village Guard Code, issuing the procedure for the employment of village guards, the definition of tasks and responsibility areas, their training, dismissal and employee rights was put into

effect. Then the last codification on village guard system was made on 27th of May 2007 with 5,673 numbered “Act on the Amendments of Some Codes and Village Law”. With this last amendment the salaries, pensions and employment of new guards took shape.

The current village guard system has two components: temporary village guards and volunteer village guards. The temporary village guards take registered weapons and monthly salaries in exchange for participating in the operations and serving as sentry. The volunteer guards are not paid but take registered weapons. Volunteers are not obliged to be in operations or guard duty. The most of the volunteer

Village guards are an armed power incorporating more than 50 thousand paid “temporary village guards” and nearly 30 thousand unpaid volunteers carrying registered weapons which makes a total of approximately 90 thousand people. According to the Interior Ministry, in 21 years from 1985 to 2006, 2,402 guards involved in crimes of terror, and there had been transactions for 936 guards for crimes on property, 1,234 guards for crimes on individuals, and 428 guards for crimes of trafficking.

village guards are “aghas” and rich landowners.

The hierarchy system begins with village guard leader, and then comes the platoon commander and in the lowest position there are village guards. The leader of the village guards are usually the mukhtars but the number of leaders change according to the number of guards. Besides the village guard groups like “timê xenöerê” (poniard team) in Şırnak region, there were groups like “Flash Battalion” containing more than five thousand of guards in Van. In this battalion, other than the battalion commander there are also guards calling themselves as troop commander.

Although village guards system includes only the males, in different regions there are 35-40 female temporary village guards. The female guards are employed and given registered weapons when their village guard husbands die. However the other guards in the village undertake their tasks and the women do not go on sentry duty nor take part in the operations. Furthermore, the wives of village guards are paid in place of their husbands with the approval of civil and military officials.

### The social consequences

Certainly this temporary system going on for 26 years is not free of problems both for the village guards and the people of the region. Other than the events reported by the locals, we also see no encouraging news when we look at the events covered in the media. According to The Report of Commission for



the Investigation of Unsolved Political Murders,<sup>7</sup> the village guards had been involved in many crimes with their guard identity including not only arms and drugs traffic but also aiding and abating PKK. The village guards who were summoned by court decision for the crimes they were held responsible, could not be arrested although they had taken their salaries

The village guard system is one of the barriers to the implementation of the “Returns to Villages” policy. Although that policy has been on the agenda since 1994, a noteworthy achievement is not observed. The social divisions caused by the system, many deaths from both sides, the settlement of the village guards in the abandoned villages, make the home coming more difficult.

each month. Village guards began to act in tune with the commands of the tribe “aghas” because of the powerful tribe system of the region and bullying those who were not on their side. Many locals were accused of being “PKK members” by the village guards. According to the above mentioned report, along with the village guard system launched in 1985, 23,817 temporary village guards were dismissed until 1997. It was also said that the crimes of 20,319 guards were breach of duty. According to the statistics of the Interior Ministry, in 21 years from 1985 to 2006, 2,402 guards were involved in crimes of terror, and there had been transactions for 936 guards for crimes on property, 1,234 guards for crimes on individuals, and 428 guards for crimes of trafficking.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly it is not plausible to accuse all the village guards who are more than 80 thousand including the volunteers, but both the official facts and also the reports of NGOs indicate that this system caused significant social problems.

Also the report of Human Rights Association (İHD) prepared referring to applications, is a very significant resource for indicating the prevalence of the events in question. The statements of İHD's report on years 1990-2007 were as such: “The data in this report refers to the appeals made to İHD and the events covered in media. The cases mentioned in the report provide only a few instances of the violations of the village guards. Because of the

limited data and the aggravated circumstances of those days, many cases could not be reported and conveyed to the public”.<sup>9</sup> Besides, even if only a few of the facts mentioned in the book Dağın Ardındaki Gerçekler<sup>10</sup> (The Truth Behind the Mountain), written by a village guard, are true, it can easily be seen that the case is very acute.

### Cause of migration, barrier for returns

There seems no substantial gain on neutralizing PKK by the help of people who know the region well although this was one of the main targets of village guard system. Also the serious losses and grievances caused by this system cannot be neglected. The village guard system also caused social, economic and psychological damages and traumas both on themselves and on their families.

As a result, although the village guard system was established temporarily it has been going on for almost 26 years. However this temporary circumstance still sustain its “ambiguity”. Nearly 50 thousand armed people are under these conditions but have no reliable information for their future. Besides, it is known that in 1990s there had been a serious migration from the villages of the region to the cities nearly in any part of Turkey. There are many evidence and news items indicating that the village guards had an important effect on these migrations. The village guard system is one of the barriers to the implementation of the government's “Return to Villages” policy. Although that policy has been on the agenda since 1994, a noteworthy achievement is not observed. The social divisions caused by the system, many deaths from both sides, the settlement of the village guards in the abandoned villages, make the home coming more difficult.

It is generally accepted that the Kurdish question is the most vicious problem of Turkey. This problem is searing the whole country evermore. It's true that there have been efforts in to find a solution, yet its success is another question. The village guard system is one of the main elements of the Kurdish problem, and although it has not been disbanded it has lost its appeal and the number of new recruits has decreased. It is a widespread opinion that this system should be dismantled or at least transformed one way or the other. But it is still an immense problem to decide on where, how and with what status thousands of armed people can be employed. This is the problem of not only the Kurds but of everyone living in Turkey.

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# “Turkishness contract” and Turkish left

Involvement of the Turkish left in the Kurdish issue has a long history stretching from 1920s to present. And this history is not one to be ashamed of. In fact, some periods and people in that history can be admired. While either a complete chauvinist attitude or at best a thick silence prevailed towards the Kurdish issue during other ideological phases of Turkish politics and intellectual realms such as Kemalism, Pan-Islamism, Center-Right, the Turkish left was able to display emancipatory and radical efforts at both an individual and collective level. On the individual level, the ones that first come to mind are Hikmet Kivilcimlı's statement in 1930s that “colonial methods [were] being used in Kurdistan”, works of İsmail Beşikçi, a young Turkish academic, on the Kurdish issue, which he started in the 1960s and continued in the following decades despite all the pressure, and İbrahim Kaypakkaya's, one of the radical youth leaders in the 1970s, detachment from Kemalism and efforts to defend all usurped rights of the Kurdish people, including the right to determine their destiny.

In the context of a political movement, public demonstrations organised by the Turkish Labour Party in the Eastern provinces in 1967 are very significant for the Kurdish people. The issue's ethnic dimension was brought up explicitly for the first time in the political field during those demonstrations (Twenty years later, Süleyman Demirel, the prime minister during the period 1965-1970 would say “those demonstrations created huge problems for Turkey”). The Liberation (Kurtuluş), which was one of the most radical left movements in the 1970s, supported the thesis put forth by the Kurds and Beşikçi that “Kurdistan [was] a colony”. Even the Social Democrat People's Party's (SHP) alliance with the Kurdish movement which only lasted for a couple of years in the early 1990s, can be cited as a history of democracy and an example of such alternative policies arising from the center left.

The cost of such individual and collective stances, some of which I mentioned herein, and the sides chosen, has been high. People were killed, alienated, seen as traitors and spent a significant part of their lives in prison; political parties were banned and political movements were criminalised. What I want to emphasize is that the history of the Turkish left, which is being subject to much justified and unjustified criticisms today, is in part a history of political and intellectual

courage. To voice and do similar things is easier and less costly in a more democratic country, such as the USA or France. Such acts, however, bear great risks in a country like Turkey, which is oppressively right-wing, conservative and statist. In such an atmosphere, the Turkish left was able to bring about people and movements it should be proud of. There exists no other ideological-political movement in Turkey with a similar history.

Yet, the history of the Turkish left's relationship with the Kurdish issue is also full of mistakes, shortcomings, blindness, deafness and distortions, which should be criticised. The instances I have mentioned above, which are positive examples in my view, remained as exceptions at the individual as well as the collective level. From 1920s until 1990s, the majority of the Turkish left organisations remained quiet in respect of the Kurdish issue. Some of them adapted a chauvinist attitude and some placed themselves on the side of the state. The left academy, on the other hand, wrote almost nothing about the Kurdish issue until 1990s, failed to support its few members, who indeed wrote about the Kurdish issue, and even sometimes had them silenced.<sup>1</sup> Why has a significant portion of the Turkish left been indifferent, statist and sometimes openly chauvinist towards the Kurdish issue? This article will fundamentally seek answers to these questions. The use of the phrase Turkish left hereinafter instead of Turkey's left is a conscious choice. The subject of criticism is the Turkish left, which has been unable to become Turkey's left.

## Kemalism, Marxism and the Kurdish issue

Having had a significant impact on the Turkish left on an ideological level and, more or less, pierced into vast majority of Turkish leftists, Kemalism is one the primary reasons. The Turkish left supported Kemalism's modernising, centralist, nation-state and secularism project to a great extent and found Kemalism progressive, anti-imperialist and at times even anti-feudal. In that respect, for example, the tradition of Turkish Communist Party (TKP) and the left academy characterised the Şeyh (Sheikh) Said and Ağrı rebellions against the Republic of Turkey as reactionary, feudal and imperialist plots, and supported the state, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly.

Dersim incidents, which are called a rebellion but in fact are genocide, have been condemned to



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the same fate as well. Naturally, the Turkish left, which sided with the state during the critical and bloody phase of the Kurdish issue corresponding to the initial decades of the republican regime, was also involved in the historiography of these phases and, as a result, contributed to the enormous lack of knowledge and apathy prevailing in the Turkish public opinion. Turkish left has played an important part in relation to the effect and influence of the official ideology on the Turkish public opinion. To summarise, for the Turkish left, official Kemalist ideology has been a fetter, and to get rid of it is difficult and time consuming.

Marxism, the principal source of radical left, is another ideological influence, which has had negative effects on the Kurdish issue. Having placed the proletarian revolution as its actual political objective in the modern world, Marxism was not sufficiently interested in ethnic matters and nationalism of oppressed nations. Proletarian revolution depended on progress, modernisation,

Having placed the proletarian revolution as its actual political objective, Marxism was not sufficiently interested in ethnic matters and nationalism of oppressed nations. Proletarian revolution depended on industrialisation and destruction of feudal relics. For a long time, the Turkish Marxists perceived Kurdish rebellions as relics of feudalism and tribal culture. At a time when a socialist revolution was expected or strived at, Kurdish issue emerged as a hindrance.

industrialisation and destruction of feudal relics. In this respect, for a long time, the Turkish Marxists perceived Kurdish rebellions as relics of feudalism, rusticity and tribal culture. At a time when a socialist revolution was expected or strived at, Kurdish issue emerged as a hindrance. As criticized in the 1980s by Hatice Yaşar, a notable figure of the Kurdish movement, "International solidarity would have demanded that these days not be so much delayed; however, under the official version, where socialism was interpreted as the advancement of productive forces, it was difficult for a communist to avoid the trap of sovereign state nationalism. Unfortunately, it was inevitable for Turkish socialists, who accepted official socialism as the ideology that would liberate the proletariat, to fall into the very same trap..."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Marxism possessed a unique orientalism, which it, however, received from the age it was born into and internalised. It is known that Marx viewed the British dominion in India as a positive element for the destruction of old structures that resisted change. A similar approach can also be observed in the orientalism of the Turkish Marxists' view of Kurdistan. Turkish modernisation may have pursued ruthless methods

in Kurdistan; however, feudal and reactionary relics could not have been demolished otherwise. This was the idea.

Marxism and Kemalism – two ideologies that influenced the Turkish left deeply – almost cooperated and were complimentary in shaping of approaches to the Kurdish issue. It must be related to the blindness caused by Kemalism and Marxism that there was almost no mention of Kurds in revolution strategies propounded by the Turkish socialists in 1960s and the social structure analysis built thereon. In conclusion, the revolutionary potential in Kurdistan was mainly disregarded.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the skewed perceptions and blindness that these two ideological effects revealed, the close relations between the Republic of Turkey and the USSR, the two countries that embodied Kemalism and Marxism as official ideologies, respectively, were also important and made a negative impact on the Kurdish issue. The USSR, which was in close relations with Turkey from time to time, almost always perceived Turkey as a strategic neighbour that should not be mistreated, supported Turkey against the Kurds. This support directly reflected on the tradition of TKP as one of the major institutions of the Turkish left. As long as the USSR supported the Turkish state, TKP supported the Turkish state as well. Or at least it was not able to take the stance it should have taken.

Had the USSR sided with the Kurds, probably TKP would have done the same. Besides the above criticisms of Marxism, the Lenin-led nations' right to determine their own destiny in particular and the notion of nationalism of oppressed nations within Marxism required such an attitude. However, as I have emphasized, the positions taken by the USSR may have caused Turkish leftists to adopt the weaker and controversial aspects of Marxism.

Different attitudes adopted by so called socialist countries, in general, and by the USSR, in particular, towards ethnic/racial issues in different countries were so significant that this situation caused completely opposite communist traditions to emerge. In that respect, it may be instructive to compare the communist traditions in Turkey and South Africa briefly. During the 1920s, when the USSR decided to support Turkish government against the Kurds, it also decided to support the black population and the movements against the white dominance in South Africa, and it infused this attitude into the South African Communist Party (SACP). As a result, from 1950s until 1994, the SACP, founded by white people, and the African National Congress (ANC) fought against apartheid and faced the consequences together as allies.<sup>4</sup> From 1994 to date, their partnership in the government has continued under a coalition.

Why did the USSR take two different positions in two countries? The first reason was the significance of Turkey for the USSR. The USSR did not wish to antagonize a country which is so close and powerful. Such a strategic reason did not exist in relation to the southernmost part of the African continent. The second reason was



the fact that black population was the majority in South Africa, whereas the Kurds were a minority in Turkey. The majority would be expected to come into power sooner or later. Thus supporting the majority is pragmatic; whereas supporting the minority is not because their fate is uncertain. Whatever the underlying reason may be, these two different positions taken by the USSR contributed to the formation of two very different communist traditions in Turkey and South Africa in relation to oppressed nation nationalism and racism. For this reason, in the beginning of 1990s, when the Soviet Bloc collapsed, TKP had a low-prestige in Turkey and the world, whereas SACP's prestige was very high.

Today, in 2012, the majority of the Turkish left is severing and attempting to sever its ties with Kemalism. The effect of major blows to the official ideology suffered in recent years has played a big part in this. As a system of thought, Marxism has freed itself from the hindrance created by socialism (as practiced in the twentieth century), in other words, having the status of being the official ideology of socialist states, that has prevented it from developing and liberalising. Therefore, today, Marxism is much more emancipatory, much less statist and orientalist and much more sensitive to ethnic issues. In parallel with these developments, today the Turkish left is able to approach to the Kurdish issue in a more emancipatory and egalitarian manner.

However, the Turkish left's problematic history with respect to the Kurdish issue is not only related to Kemalism, Marxism and state socialism. Today a major part of the problem is constituted by the bundle of privileges, ideas, reflexes and emotions, which are never questioned by the Turks and which is what I call "Turkishness". In Turkey, the left was born Turkish because of its Turkishness. It remained as the Turkish left and was not able to become Turkey's left or just left. In Turkey, social sciences were born as Turkish social sciences and remained as such. In the remainder of the article, I will try to expand on what I mean by Turkishness and how Turkishness has shaped the Turkish left and left academy a Turkish problem.

### **Turkishness and the Turkish issue<sup>5</sup>**

Turkish leftists do not see and wish to see themselves as Turkish. They see and wish to see themselves as internationalist, socialist and Marxist. When ethnicity and identity politics are mentioned, they think of Kurds and other minorities. They cannot see that they themselves fall under an ethnicity, they are a part of the majority and, by virtue of this affiliation, how privileged they are, how limited and distorted their knowledge is and how impoverished and monotonous their feelings are. In other words, they cannot relativise their knowledge, feelings and privileges; deconstruct them and decipher their relations to their own Turkishness. To the extent they cannot realise their Turkishness, they cannot properly perceive and feel the Kurdishness of others. As long as they cannot see the privileges of

being Turkish, they cannot properly understand the numerous disadvantages of being Kurdish. They cannot genuinely empathise with Kurdish people. Due to their failure to recognise their identity, they criticise others for pursuing identity politics. Turkish leftists have been a part of the Turkish issue to the extent they have been unable to realise their Turkishness and sufficiently contribute to the resolution of the Kurdish problem.

Turkishness of a Turkish leftist is, undoubtedly, not the same as the Turkishness of a Turkish

The Republic of Turkey was founded on the Turkishness contract. The first condition of the contract was to be Turkish and/or become Turkish. The second condition was not to speak of or write about the purge of non-Muslims from Anatolia and seizure of their wealth. The third condition was not to write and pursue politics with regard to other Muslim groups, who could resist against Turkification. These were the principal articles of Turkey's unwritten constitution.

nationalist or Islamist. However, this does not mean that leftists do not have Turkishness. While the rigid Turkishness of a Turkish nationalist can be easily discerned and is palpable, Turkishness of a Turkish leftist is like vapour: it is hard to discern and grab. Turkishness has taken on unique forms within the left. However, although Turkishness of the left and the right has taken on different forms, these two separate states of Turkishness share the same origin.

The Republic of Turkey was founded on a metaphorical contract I call "Turkishness contract". According to this contract, those who have Turkish as their first language and been subject to Turkification (Circassian, Laz, Kurdish, Arab, Bosnian people etc.) would benefit from this agreement and potentially would be able to climb the ladder in politics, business, bureaucracy, academics and art. The first condition of the contract was to be Turkish and/or become Turkish. The second condition was not to speak of or write about the purge of non-Muslims –on whom the contract rose– from Anatolia and seizure of their wealth. The third condition was not to write and pursue politics with regard to other Muslim groups, who could resist against Turkification. These were the principal articles of Turkey's unwritten constitution, and any proposal for amending them was out of the question.

Each and every Turk and Turkified individual may not have actively signed this metaphorical contract. However, as per the contract, every individual can benefit from it even if he/she is not a signatory.<sup>6</sup> The critical point was not to resist and breach the contract. Those who were in breach were to be severely sanctioned. Sanction could take the



form of killing, torture, dismissal, unemployment and exclusion. On the other hand, those who actively supported and/or passively accepted the contract would be the actual or potential beneficiaries of various opportunities. They could be, and have become, bourgeois, judges, teachers, professors, ministers, workers, governors, musicians etc. The material basis of Turkishness was constituted by this metaphoric contract and the set of privileges offered to the contracting parties.

Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, the Kurds resisted to this contract. Naturally, Kurds, who rejected Turkification, and the handful of Turks who supported the Kurds, were sanctioned severely in various forms. Majority of the leftists, whom one would expect to support these groups in their cause, turned their backs or directly supported the state's policies. Most of the time they asserted this attitude was a requirement of

Turkish and Kurdish leftists live in two different emotional worlds. There are significant differences between the emotions of a typical Turkish leftist and a Kurdish leftist towards, for instance, Atatürk, Independence War, Sheik Said, Kurdish guerrillas, Abdullah Öcalan etc. For Turks, empathising with a Palestinian child throwing a stone is easier than empathising with a Kurdish child doing the same. He does not know what to feel against the Kurdish guerrilla, who fights against his own state, while he feels sympathy towards a guerrilla, who fights against a state far away.

Marxism, internationalism and progressivism, because identity struggles were diversions from the socialist goal. The Kurdish issue was not important; it was an imperialist plot, a reactionist movement, which divided the proletariat into ethnic groups. While they were saying this or, as is usually the case, saying nothing relating to the issue, they actually perceived themselves as internationalists and progressives.

They convinced themselves to believe this, because they had to believe it. If they did not believe it and resisted against the Turkishness contract and supported the Kurdish resistance, they knew, as per the Turkishness contract, the severity of the sanctions in return for such support. They could lose their lives, be dismissed from their jobs and/or ostracised by their close friends and relatives including their families. To avoid being subject to such sanctions and retain their privileges, they found theoretical justifications and dodged certain truths. However, their denial was not a conscious, but an unconscious one. The conscious denier should face his cowardice. For denial to be real, it must leave behind a feeling of shame. For this reason, it is imperative to realise the denial

unconsciously. And at that point Marxism and internationalism were used as avoidance tools.

Instead of embarking on a concrete internationalism in connection with Kurds, an abstract internationalism has always been the safer choice. Organizing (pure) Turkish literature events, criticising those who speak Kurdish in courts and parliament for nationalism, writing about the plots of American imperialism in Turkey, while all kinds of cruelty is being endured in Kurdistan; asserting justifications such as "Marxists are against the state, why should we support foundation of a new state, what good will this do anyway, it will also become USA's toy"... These were not only Turkish leftists. For a long time, Kurdish leftists did not speak Kurdish in and out of courts or give Kurdish names to their children. They explained their behaviour with justifications such as "we are not nationalists, we are internationalists". Either Turkish or Kurdish, in this way they escaped from the truth as well as deceiving themselves and others. Turkishness and the Turkishness contract, Turkified a significant portion of the left in this way: by inducing them to deny the requirements of the Kurdish issue.

Turkishness is a set of knowledge as much as it is a bundle of privileges. Until recent years, it was not possible to find any serious piece of knowledge in the Turkish left's sphere of knowledge in relation to the Kurdish issue. To test the veracity of this assertion, one may check the number of serious works undertaken and published by Turkish leftists in relation to the Kurdish issue. They did not just fail to undertake such works, but also failed to take seriously or ignored those who actually undertook such works. It is also possible to verify this assertion by checking the writings and speeches of all significant Turkish social scientists, in particular those who had completed their progress prior to the late 1990s.

However, this lack of knowledge is not passive as put forth in studies on whites in the USA in relation to white intellectuals.<sup>7</sup> The state of unknowing did not come about due to the lack of knowledge but failure to inform oneself. Because knowledge confers responsibility on the individual in relation to the thing he/she knows. If you know, you have to carry out what is required by that knowledge, which in turn has a price. To avoid this, one should not know and should ignore the knowledge and not take the creators of knowledge seriously. However, when you do this, you must do it without compromising your self-respect. At that point, mechanisms pushed out of the consciousness come into play. When determining the areas he would like to gain knowledge on, the leftist individual does not find the events occurring in Kurdistan significant. Topics such as squatting, phases of capitalism, Turkey's half-colonial condition and different aspects and thinkers of Marxism are on top of the leftist's list. The most devastating issue of the country, which caused the deaths of ten thousands of people for hundred years, was not able to enter the knowledge repertoire or sphere of interest of either leftist



academics, or Turkish leftists in general, for a long time. Turkishness and the Turkishness contract determined the knowledge repertoire of the Turkish left.

Along with the bundle of privileges and knowledge repertoire comes the emotional repertoire. Emotions develop and change through socialising and knowledge. Emotions can be taught and learned. In that respect, Turkish and Kurdish leftists live in two different emotional worlds. There are significant differences between the emotions of a typical Turkish leftist and a Kurdish leftist towards, for instance, Atatürk, Independence War, Sheik Said, Kurdish guerrillas, Abdullah Öcalan etc. They approach the same notion from different perspectives and with different emotions. Turkish leftists find it very hard to empathise with their Kurdish equals with regard to problems and emotions of Kurdish people, the things they like and do not like. For Turks, empathising with a Palestinian child throwing a stone is easier than empathising with a Kurdish child doing the same. He does not know what to feel against the Kurdish guerrilla, who fights against his own state in a nearby territory, while he feels sympathy towards a guerrilla, who fights against a state far away. Another measure of Turkishness is what is in and what is not in the emotional repertoire.

In fact, there is nothing surprising in all of this. Protection of the bundle of privileges may be seen as natural and indicate to the poorness and weakness of the emotional repertoire. For decades, the state, school, military, media, family, vocational communities that the individual is related to impose various information and emotions on Turks and those who have been subject to Turkification. When the individual attempts to act beyond the contract, he loses his privileges and is ostracised. The surprising thing is that the Turkish leftist does not reflect on why he/she feels this way and not that way, why he/she knows this and not know that, why he/she is interested in this issue and not that issue. The interesting thing is that Turkish Marxists have the idea that their thoughts on one issue relate solely to Marxism and that it has not occurred to them that their thoughts and emotions may have been clouded by Turkishness. What calls for criticism is the failure to see that instead of being a part of the bundle of privileges, knowledge universe and emotional world pertaining to Turkishness, they

Marxism's liberation from the formality of socialism in the last twenty years and the fact that Kemalism is collapsing as an official ideology, liberalised the Turkish left and academy significantly. Now, the Turkish left approaches the Kurdish issue with more knowledge and emotion. However, collapse of Kemalism and the existing forms of socialism does not mean that Turkishness, internalised by the Turkish left, will automatically vanish.

have been a part and occasionally the re-creator of that world. And this, I think, is a major reason behind the lack of creativity in Turkey's intellectual sphere. Turkishness continues its existence as an invisible wall on the path of free thought and emotional richness.

As I emphasized in the first part of this article, Marxism's liberation from the formality of socialism (as practiced in the pre-1989 era) in the last twenty years and the fact that Kemalism is collapsing as an official ideology, liberalised the Turkish left and academy significantly. Now, the Turkish left approaches the Kurdish issue with more knowledge and emotion. However, collapse of Kemalism and the existing forms of socialism does not mean that Turkishness, internalised by the Turkish left, will automatically vanish. This is because Turkishness is to a great extent a subconscious existence form. It is the certain states of seeing, hearing, feeling, knowing and not seeing, not hearing, not feeling and not knowing. Turkishness keeps itself alive with seemingly passive apathy, lack of emotion, knowledge and action. Realising the notion of Turkishness requires recognising the subconscious or semi-conscious mechanisms underlying the lack of knowledge and emotion, apathy and inaction, determining which thoughts are real and which ones are just reflexes and deciphering this entire structure. Only when these are accomplished, may the Turkish left cease to be Turkish and become Turkey's left or just left. And, in the same way, the educated may become intellectual, the Turkish academy may become university in the genuine sense.

## Footnotes

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# Feminists in the furnace of nationalism

Ideologies which appeared at a time when worldviews based on the divine took a severe drubbing during processes of industrialization and modernization, sometimes serve as instruments for making sense of the change taking place, sometimes as instruments of shaping change, and sometimes as instruments of reining change. What makes ideologies politically effective is their capacity to reach out to the masses. In this sense, nationalism has always enjoyed a strong position vis-a-vis other ideologies despite (in fact precisely because of) its theoretical shallowness and incoherence. At a period in which “discontinuity” and “changeability” have become the main features of life, the society seeks continuity in thought so as to protect itself against uncertainty, rupture and atomization imposed by the changing world; in a sense, it carries on the tradition. In fact the key characteristic of nationalist discourse is its presentation of ongoing change as the continuation of tradition. By diving into the deepest roots of the nation and turning its historical events into symbols, nationalism constructs the past as a harbinger of the present and future. It lays out an indisputable map before the individual surrounded with uncertainties; it portrays ambiguous social situations as unambiguous. Its explicit and comprehensible discourse allows it to be more effective among the people.<sup>1</sup> Due to these characteristics, nationalism becomes a key reference point on which various political powers found their legitimacy.

As political units organized around the principle of nationality, nation-states were described by the nationalist discourse as the symbol of spiritual and corporeal unity. Friedrich Jahn, a prominent German Romanticist pundit, put this as “a state without a volk is nothing; it is a body without spirit”<sup>2</sup> and “a volk without a state is nothing, it is but a ghost, devoid of body”.<sup>3</sup> As this perspective rapidly gained foothold across Europe, nations started being viewed as the natural mode of existence for societies, and other social and political units lost their chance of survival.<sup>4</sup> From then on, ideologies such as liberalism, socialism and conservatism would thrive inside the nation-state. As such, it would not be an exaggeration to say that nationalism provided the soil on which other ideologies flourished.

The feminist movement and ideology, too, were born while nationalist projects gained ground. The “first wave” of feminism, which was centered on women’s struggle for property, education and suffrage rights, made its first gains during the nationalist and militarist atmosphere of the post-

World War I era. Yet, the relation between feminism and nationalism cannot be taken for granted. The feminist discourse upholds the unity of all women against male oppression and exploitation; as such, it is potentially inclusive of all women. Nationalism, on the other hand, excludes other nations and non-nationalist demands. The resolution of this tension depended on a key characteristic of “the female subject vested with rights”: Motherhood. Everywhere, women obtained their rights as “the mothers of the nation”. The nationalist emphasis on motherhood was embraced by feminists for many years. As women’s politicization turned them into active advocates of the nationalist project, feminist struggle lost its internationalist character to become a subcomponent of the nationalist struggle.

## Women of the nationalist Turkist discourse

In Turkey, the history of feminist struggle is open to different interpretations, as in any other history. Until the establishment of feminism as an independent movement in the 1980s, the history of feminist struggle in this country remained unknown. Women were one of the main victims of official historiography which made them invisible and mute. The official line, which held that women owed their rights to “republican reforms and Atatürk”, was internalized by well-educated, middle class, professional women. As a result of the attribution of such a significance to women by the Kemalist project of modernization and nation-building, women would become the most partisan militants in the political struggle which pitted secularism against religiosity in the 1990s, and their bodies and clothing would turn into key symbols in this clash.

At a speech in 1923, Mustafa Kemal stated that “Today mothers can no longer bring up their children in elementary fashion, like their ancestors did. Now mothers need to be equipped with many distinguished qualities to be able to raise children with the right traits. As such, our women have to be even more enlightened, bright and acknowledged than men”.<sup>5</sup> His words were a typical expression of the new regime’s instrumentalist perspective of women. Women gained public importance as mothers who bring up the men needed by the modernization drive. Vested with rights, they were portrayed as “the modernizing mothers of the nation”. During parliamentary discussions on women’s rights, İsmet İnönü suggested that “Casting women to the background like pieces of ornament, like creatures ignorant of national matters, goes against the grain



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of Turkish custom and thinking; this was among the worst catastrophes which devastated the Turkish society for centuries. (...) Female participation in politics is indisputably a Turkish tradition,"<sup>6</sup> so as to present women's rights as a requirement of the nationalist project, as a "return to the true tradition". Ahmed Ağaoğlu wrote in his column that those well-read in history would not be shocked by the fact Turkish women obtained their rights before their European sisters: "Nations are divided into two: Those most violent against women (Hindus, Latins, Arabs) and those soft on women since ancient times (Turks, Germans, Scandinavians, Anglo-Saxons, Greeks). Turks' attitude towards women in the Oriental and Islamic world should not come as a surprise. (...) Turks are the only nation which has granted women their rights since primitive ages."<sup>7</sup>

Here the "new" and "modern" are presented as "tradition", rupture and discontinuity as continuity. This is precisely why nationalism can reach out to the masses. In the nationalist discourse, modern designs are conceived as the rebirth of tradition. As suggested by Deniz Kandiyoti, "'modern' is legitimized as 'authentic'."<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, the nationalist Turkist discourse legitimizes women's rights in the eyes of masses, on the other hand, this myth of Turkish women's historical rights goes a long way in creating a Turkish identity independent of religion. The well-educated, professional "new woman" vested with civic and political rights becomes the key symbol of the new republic and the modern state.

### The second wave and consciousness raising

One had to wait until the "second wave" of Turkish feminist movement of the 1980s to see a critical perspective on the place of women's rights in nation-building.<sup>9</sup> During the dissolution of Turkish Women's Association in 1935, its president Latife Bekir had stated that "The Turkish woman now follows the path designated by Atatürk, and thus no longer has any further rights or ideals to demand or pursue. The continued presence of such an organization in Turkey would create a wrong impression both domestically and overseas. We have to dissolve it to show the entire world that Turkey no longer has a women's question."<sup>10</sup> It was only half a century later that the feminist movement could declare the existence of a women's question, with increasingly diverse political demands. Along the motto "The private is political", a number of issues previously locked up and depoliticized inside the private sphere (domestic violence, abuse, virginity) gained public visibility. Only then could feminists put a distance between themselves and the republican project's gender regime, which transformed patriarchy to some extent, but left it intact in the private sphere.<sup>11</sup> The second wave also shed light on the first one. The discovery of women's associations and magazines of the Tanzimat period (1839-1856) and Second Constitutional Era (1908-1914) provided insight on a generation of feminist grandmothers, later covered up by official historiography. With the exception of conservative/religious thought, the feminist movement was the first to direct strong criticisms towards Kemalism. Nevertheless, even this is not enough

to make feminist studies immune to the nationalist hegemony. Most studies on the "Ottoman Women's Movement" view the empire through the lens of the nation-state. They tell the story of Turkish and Muslim women. Women from other religious and ethnic communities in the Ottoman society (Armenian, Greek, Kurdish or Circassian women), and their magazines and associations are nowhere to be seen in these narratives. The unintentional character of this omission makes the problem even worse.<sup>12</sup>

The continuity established by feminist historians between the empire and the republic could be read

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as a challenge against the official ideology; however, based on an "oblivion" of the multi-lingual and multi-national nature of the empire, it risks Turkifying feminist history. A women's history which omits the ruptures between the empire and the republic, and the changes in the ethnic and class composition of the population through wars, massacres and population exchanges, is tantamount to imagining women the way the nationalist narrative imagines the nation -as a continuous and unchanging actor throughout history. This would strengthen the nationalist imagination, independent of intentions.<sup>13</sup>

The second wave of feminism was born out of (avant la lettre) "consciousness raising groups", where women from the pre-1980 leftist movement discussed their personal and political experiences and history during the apolitical atmosphere of the 1980s. The actors of the second feminist wave hailed from the left, like their sisters in other countries. Because, even in leftist organizations fighting for equality, women had been cast to the background, oppressed and belittled by their male peers. This experience helped women realize that patriarchy is a system articulated with, yet independent of capitalism, and accordingly, that anti-capitalist struggle does not automatically amount to feminist struggle. During a period in which the political and social opposition was muzzled, and the public space was reduced to the state, the rise of the feminist movement was possible only through their mobilization of the "private sphere", which they knew very well. They gathered in homes in small groups. They turned a new leaf in politics with the issues they placed on the public agenda, and their way of doing so.

Bringing together the feminists of İstanbul and



Ankara, the First Feminist Weekend held in 1989 was a hub for debates on feminist organization and struggle methods. That same year, the first edition of the Women's Convention was organized by non-feminist, socialist women; however, it brought to the fore the tensions between feminist and socialist movements from the beginning, and eventually feminists abandoned the convention. Meant to help the movement reach out to wider masses, these initiatives instead exhausted its energy and caused the street movement to lose vibrancy. The 1990s were a period in which the feminist movement established a number of institutions specializing in various fields, most importantly "domestic violence".<sup>14</sup>

### Muslim and Kurdish women's movement

During the 1990s, the feminist movement became more widespread and diversified in geographic, ideological and cultural terms. Feminist organizations mushroomed in numerous cities such as Diyarbakır, as well as Antalya, Adana, Mersin, Gaziantep, Eskişehir. Muslim and Kurdish women who were not part of the movement in the 1980s voiced their own demands with their associations and magazines.<sup>15</sup> Centered around the "headscarf" controversy, the Muslim women's agenda was excoriated by republican/pro-Atatürk women committed to the modernization paradigm; however, feminists viewed the matter in terms of women's freedom. Nevertheless, although feminists supported university students' struggle against the headscarf ban, their relations with Muslim

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women failed to go beyond the headscarf issue to become more profound.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas the politicization of Muslim women laid bare the sexist perspective of the "statist secularism" upheld by the Turkish modernization project, the politicization of the Kurdish movement raised a challenge against the nationalism/Turkishness of this project. The politically committed women inside the Kurdish movement initiated a debate on the Turkishness of the feminist movement in Turkey. Women publishing the Kurdish women's magazine *Roza* suggest that it was their problems with the Turkish women's movement and their position in the Kurdish movement which urged them to create an independent Kurdish women's magazine. With respect to the Turkish women's movement they state that "our experience of womanhood is very different from theirs. Our national identity changes the tone of our womanhood. We have

different demands and objectives, yet they try to co-opt us in the name of the universal female identity, or ignore and overlook us". As for their position inside the Kurdish movement, they observe that "while we fought for our Kurdish identity, our womanhood was denied. Even the expression 'sexist pressure' sounds too gentle to describe what we suffer."<sup>17</sup> Stating that Kurdish feminism strives to hold the state, the Kurdish national movement and the Turkish feminist movement to account, they say that their agenda differs from that of the Turkish feminists: "The top priority item on our agenda was state policies. Women being raped under police custody or in villages, racist oppression, aggression... For instance, although we are all aware of it and talk about it occasionally, domestic violence has never been a primary issue in our campaigns."<sup>18</sup>

Jujin, another independent Kurdish feminist magazine, features numerous critical articles pointing at the nationalist underpinnings of feminism in Turkey. Its writers claim that Turkish women adopt a discriminatory and racist attitude towards Kurdish women, in the name of anti-nationalism, anti-racism, feminism and internationalism. In response to Turkish women's claims that Kurdish women's prominent national identity is in conflict with the universal nature of the women's question, a Jujin writer says that "somehow they tend to forget that we receive education in an alien language, do not speak a word of Turkish until elementary school, are bought and sold by betrothal in the cradle, by bride exchange, or for dowry, are despised and ostracized in large cities, belittled for our clothing and accent, vehemently discriminated against by Turkish nationalists and cruelly forced to migrate".<sup>19</sup>

### Differences and equality

The feminist movement, which set out with the slogan "Together with all our differences", considers that women from all classes, religions and ethnicities share a common suffering. Although it failed to incarnate such a unity, it is still the movement which pays the most attention to criticism and strives to transform itself. In 1989, at the International Women's Day march, Fatma Kayhan went up to the rostrum with a piece of scotch tape on her mouth to protest the ban on Kurdish. In 1993, after Kurdish parliamentarians were arrested, a group of feminists launched the campaign "Don't Touch My Friend". In the same period, while individuals were arrested randomly according to the location of birth on their ID cards, feminist women placed a newspaper ad which read "We are ashamed of our ID cards" and became members of the Kurdish party DEP, in solidarity. In 1997, the March 8 rally brought together feminists with Kurdish women from HADEP (DEP's successor), after many years.<sup>20</sup> In 1998, however, this unity was damaged when the women of HADEP demonstrated in Taksim (the main square of İstanbul) and feminist women in Şişli (a district not far from Taksim). While the feminists held celebrations, Kurdish women (and men) were attacked by the police.<sup>21</sup>

Another important hub for the feminist movement has been the Shelters Convention held regularly since 1998. Organized by Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation to bring together women's organizations struggling against gender-based violence, the



convention hosts women's organizations from the Kurdish region, municipal counseling centers, and other regions of Turkey. It is hard to say that the feminist principles of the convention are fully embraced by all of its participants.<sup>22</sup> It provides ground for discussions and shared experiences, as well as rupture and disunity.

Despite all its problems, the feminist movement in Turkey has the potential to implement policies based on difference and equality. In order to bring to life

the key feminist demand of being equal and different inside the movement itself, it must strengthen its political stance. For this purpose the feminist movement has to understand the "holy alliance" between patriarchy on the one hand, and nationalist and militarist movements on the other.<sup>23</sup> Nationalism and sexism root from similar sources. However, it is not easy to identify this connection in a country where the anti-militarist discourse is still centered around a discourse of "motherhood".

## Footnotes

- While explaining why and how the gap left by the dissolution of the divine was filled with nationalist imagination, Eric Hobsbawm suggests that nationalism capitalized on traditional sentiments of collective belonging harbored by the society. These elements, which he dubs "pre-national", are language, religion, ethnicity, sacred icons and the sense of belonging to a political entity. However, none of these are the elements of the nation, as emphasized numerous times by Hobsbawm. Nationalism tries to utilize and transform these elements and harmonize them with its boundaries – to no avail. See J. Hobsbawm, Eric (1993): *Millîyetler ve Milliyetçilik*, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, pp. 64-101.
- "Volk" is a concept utilized by 19th century German Romanticists to describe the authentic cultural community which in particular shared a common language. The English word "folk" or the Turkish "halk" fail to deliver its meaning, since "volk" has a direct relation with German nationalism. Based on claims of an authentic culture and language, German nationalism aimed at creating the political framework for this culture. Viewing culture as a mystical entity, a spirit, a character shaped by the tendencies of consecutive generations; German Romanticism utilized "volk" as "volksgeist" so as to underline this spiritual aspect.
- Cited in Kohn, Hans (1965): *The Mind of Germany*, London: Macmillan, Chapter 4.
- It must be stated that nations are indeed states. One obvious indication is the fact that League of Nations, established after WWI, and United Nations, established after WWII, are composed of not nations but states. The naturalization and dehistoricization of the nation continued right up to the 1950s. It's due to such a mentality, that the concepts "society" and "nation" were used interchangeably by social scientists up until that period.
- Cited in Doğramacı, Emel (1992): *Türkiye'de Kadının Dünyu ve Bugünü*, Ankara: İş Bankası Yayınları, pp.129-130.
- Cited in Caporal, Bernard (1982): *Kemalizmde ve Kemalizm Sonrasında Türk Kadını*, Ankara: İş Bankası Yayınları, pp.704-5.
- Ağaoğlu, Ahmet (1935), *Kongre Münasebetiyle*, Cumhuriyet, April 20th-21st.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz (1996) *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar*, İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, pp.153.
- i.e. the awareness that civic and political rights granted in this framework failed to provide women with rights as individuals or social group, nor to eradicate the gender bias in society. This period, when the state implemented its policies supposedly to serve "public benefit", is dubbed by some feminist academics as "state feminism" to better describe its tensions and paradoxes. In the nation-building process, not only were women's rights brought up with an instrumentalist motivation, more importantly, this corporatist attempt successfully dissimulated the conflict between the sexes, and thus hampered the development of feminist awareness and movements.
- Cumhuriyet, May 7th, 1935.
- In this article, "feminist movement" is used to denote those groups describing themselves as part of the independent feminist movement. It excludes "pro-Atatürk groups and organizations" which could be seen as part of the "women's movement", and which collaborate with the feminist movement in various platforms (the CEDAW petition; or platforms concerning amendments in the Civic Law and Turkish Penal Code); these see their main concern not as gender inequality, but the preservation of secularism. This definition excludes other groups, too. The main difference between the feminist movement and the women's movement could be designated as the difference between "we, the women" and "for women". Feminist politics do not aim to inject consciousness into "other women"; but rather become the political movement of all women.
- It is not an intentional but practical result, which boils down to language. Most researchers who learn Ottoman Turkish cannot read magazines in Armenian and Greek. Naturally, the availability of these magazines in archives is yet another concern. About this so-called "diaspora of resources" please see Ekmekçiöğlu, Lerna (2006): *Bir Yokluğun Anatomisi*, Ekmekçiöğlu ve Bilal (ed): *Bir Adalet Feryadı*, Osmanlı'dan Türkiye'ye Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar, İstanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, s. 332-3.
- Due to lack of space, I cannot review individual studies here and prefer to delineate the overall trend. Most female researchers who undertake these studies certainly do not define themselves as nationalist, nor do they uphold nationalist policies. However, nationalism has such a strong hegemony that its world of perception penetrates into the concepts utilized by each of us. Yet another matter is the fact that most anti-nationalist stances are against one specific nationalism, rather than all nationalisms in principle, and thus pave the way to another version of nationalism.
- This period is characterized as "the period of institutionalization". Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation in İstanbul, and Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı (Foundation for Women's Solidarity) in Ankara were born out of the feminist movement; master's programs in women's studies were established in universities; and General Directorate for Women's Problems and Status was founded –all of which attested to the translation of the feminist movement into formal institutions. Institutionalization had a double effect on the feminist movement: On the one hand, its gains became well-established; however, on the other, this impeded the politicization of the feminist movement and tended to tame its voice, through a process also described as the "NGO-ization" of the feminist movement. In the 2000s, the movement built around NGOs would be criticized by some as "project feminism", and there arose tensions between project-based activism and feminist principles. For a comprehensive review of the feminist movement in the 1990s, see : Bora, Aksu and Günel Asena (2002): *90'larda Türkiye'de Feminizm*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları. Also see Özkan Keresteciöğlu, İnci (2004): *The Women's Movement in 1990's: Demand for Democracy and Equality*, Berkay, Fatmagül (ed.) *The Position of Women in Turkey and in European Union: Achievements, Problems, Prospects*, İstanbul: KA-DER's.75-97.
- Muslim and Kurdish women did participate in the feminist movement before; the difference here was that they now became a part of the movement with their Muslim and Kurdish identities. The rise of these movements urged feminism to have a more radical reckoning with Turkish modernization policies. As such, the alliance formed by feminists and republican women in the 1980s lost its foundation. In the face of perceived threats such as "sharia" and "separatism", "republican women" decided to stay clear of feminism.
- In the beginning there were a limited number of women who described themselves as "Muslim feminists". They were harshly criticized in Muslim circles, and hardly accepted among the feminists. See Eraslan, Sibel (2002), "Üçütlüler... Siluetler", in Aksu Bora-Asena Günel (ed), *ibid.*, p.253
- Roza, no1, March-April 1996, p.4..
- Ibid.*, p.4.
- Canan, "Sınırlar Ötesinde Kürt Kadını da Vardı", *Jujin*, no 1, December 1996, p.8.
- The arrival of HADEP women to the rally together with men drew the criticism of feminists. Kurdish women were motivated mainly by their Kurdish identity to come to their meeting. By March 8th, 2007, however, this initially tense relation had grown significantly stronger: Socialist women marched together with their men in Kadıköy; whereas Kurdish women and feminists held their demonstration in Çağlayan. I owe this information to Filiz Karakuş who is a veritable source of oral history with her impressive memory.
- There also was a third axis. A group of feminist women travelled to Diyarbakır to celebrate March 8, whereas Kurdish women from the magazine Roza joined the feminist rally in Şişli. I consider these interactions to be important, even though they are small groups.
- The principles of the convention were meant to counter the problems experienced during the process: Not dissimulating differences, avoiding all discriminatory behavior, condemning nationalist and militarist discourses, and keeping all debates free of violence. These principles were a reflection of the problems that arose during the convention and the keenness to overcome these. See. [www.siginaksizbirdunya.org](http://www.siginaksizbirdunya.org)
- This is an urgent necessity not just for the feminist movement, but also for the Kurdish movement. Despite having made significant headway, Kurdish feminists have yet to build a political line totally independent of nationalist discourse. The final declaration of the Kurdish Women's Conference organized by the Democratic Free Women's Movement in 2010 read "Women should play a pioneering role in the pursuit for freedom, justice and equality, not just as a class or sex, but as a component of the nation". This is an indication of how women's liberation is still closely associated with the nationalist discourse. See. <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/121585-kurt-kadin-konferansindan-baris-icin-dayanisma-cagrisi-cikti>



# Seasonal farm workers: Pitiful victims or Kurdish laborers demanding equality? (I)

There are two basic ways of phrasing employed when producing rhetoric about seasonal farm workers in Turkey: I will call the first of these two phrasings “the language of mercy” and the second “the language of state’s negligence.” My goal in the first part of this essay is to focus on what kind of information these two ways of phrasings produce, what rhetoric they render legitimate and mentionable and what worthless and unmentionable, and what possibilities they open up to us and what possibilities they block off in viewing not only the practice of seasonal farm workers but also the “Turkish problem” which is the file topic in this issue. In the second part of the essay, setting out from my experience during my ethnographic field studies in Manisa and Giresun, I will seek a way of phrasing that will allow hearing the demands for justice and the calls for equality of the workers I met concerning the practice of seasonal farm labor and the Turkish problem, a phrasing that will not link its legitimacy to the compassion of the state or the mercy of public opinion.

## Sensitive public opinion and/or the compassion of the state

Of the two basic phrasings, the first portrays seasonal workers as disaster victims rather than the agents of a particular form of labor. “They are hauled by the crammed truckload like potato sacks. They live under inhuman conditions in unhygienic plastic tents. They are forced to toil twelve hours a day for a less-than-meager wage – children, elderly, and women alike.” In this way of phrasing, seasonal workers are depicted as pitiful creatures in the throes of poverty, deprivation, and loss. There is a human drama at hand and one must make a plea to sensitive consciences and mobilize public opinion. I will refer to this phrasing as “the language of mercy.”

The second way of phrasing is the categorical and neutral language of social sciences that puts distance between itself and its object. This way of phrasing calls out not to consciences but to the authorities and invites the state to come up with technical interventions in this problem area it has hitherto “neglected.” I will refer to this way of phrasing as “the language of state’s negligence.”

These two ways of phrasing are generally employed in conjunction in most texts although one or the other may be given greater weight depending on the tone of the text. The explanation, offered

from inside the same phrasing, for the reasons bringing these two ways of phrasing together is that those calling out to the sensitive conscience of the public need the support of the state and those calling out to the state need the support of the sensitive public. But when we look into what kind of ground these zones of commonality open up for generating legitimate and harmless rhetoric, we can see that what makes these two phrasings so attractive is the “non-political” coding of the zone of social responsibility/sensitivity. To see this, it is necessary to look into the rhetoric these two phrasings render mentionable along with that which they render impossible to mention.

## The unspeakable difference: Ethno-political identity

In the essays about seasonal farm workers written in the language of “state’s negligence”, seasonal farm work is qualified in two different categories of labor practice: 1) Itinerant work where, in the beginning of the harvest season, a worker goes somewhere far from his home and from there to somewhere else until he returns home at the end of the harvest season; and, 2) Temporary work where a worker goes to a field near his home in the morning and returns home in the evening. Although never mentioned in these essays, the basic difference between these two categories is that the temporary workers are mostly Turks living nearby; and the itinerant workers, i.e., those who have to spend not only work time but also their whole life in an unfamiliar locality when they stay away from home for two to eight months, are Kurds, Romani, and Arabs.

The ethnic dimension of the matter becomes all the more evident when Turks go to other places as itinerant workers in which case a house is rented out to them from inside the village or unmarried Turkish workers stay in a room in the back of the local tea house whereas the Kurdish, Romani, and Arab workers stay in tents outside the village. This difference does not only make the working and living conditions of the Turks far better than those of the other ethnic groups but also introduces ethnic segregation to the village space.<sup>1</sup>

Seasonal farm workers are paid in two ways: 1) Daily wages 2) Piece work. The daily wage is the money paid to a worker for work done during specific hours in a day. Piece work is when each worker gets paid for producing a specific amount of work. Some types of labor do not lend themselves to piece work. But most of the jobs may be paid



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for both in daily wages and as piece work. When I looked at which remuneration system was applied to a given job during my research in Manisa, I noticed that the Turks were often paid daily wages while the Kurdish, Romani, and Arab workers got paid piece work. When the Kurdish, Romani, and Arab workers were employed for daily wages, they were supervised and watched much more strictly than their Turkish counterparts to make sure they did their job right. The Turkish bosses' explanation for this difference was, "If you give them (the Kurdish, Romani, and Arab workers) daily wages and they won't work, they'll loaf around."

My purpose in using the language I criticized earlier for drawing such a frozen picture of public space was to show that if there existed a boundary dividing the practice of labor into structural categories, it had to stem not from abstract conceptual differences such as the workers being "temporary" or "itinerant" but from a structural equality with an ethnic basis. Before I break up the static nature of this space with an ethnographic phrasing in the second part of this essay and move on to explain how the categories "we" and "they" came into being, I must clarify furthermore the reason for my assertion that this inequality is ethnic-based although all workers are the citizens of Turkey.

Our starting point ought to be this: Why do I use two categories: Turkish and non-Turkish? When we take a collective look at spatial segregation, ID checks by the gendarme, and remuneration practices, can we be sure that the differing applications occur between Turks and non-Turks? Is it not possible that this differentiation is caused by the fact that the Turkish and non-Turkish workers come from different geographies, have different cultures, or belong to different socio-economic positions? Most important of all, when we consider the categories denoted by geographical place names such as those in the epithets "laborer of Mardin," "Southeasterner," and "Easterner" as opposed to "local worker" that bosses use in reference to workers, could it be a difference in which geography, culture, and socio-economic position are combined rather than ethnicity that separates these workers and the practices they are subjected to from each other?

My first objection to the geography argument is empirical: this argument proves false when we look at the places the Romani workers come from. The Romani have always worked in their home provinces or nearby but they have never been referred to as "local workers." They receive lower wages than their Turkish neighbors and are supervised more strictly like the Arabs and the Kurds. Well, is it not possible that the difference between the Romani and the Turks is socio-economic and cultural rather than geographical and the difference between the Arabs and Kurds and the Turks is geographical?

This question leads us to my second objection to this argument concerning the utilization of geography to naturalize ethnic and political issues. We must not overlook the fact that geography is by no means a politically neutral space and that

terms like East/West must always be considered together with their political meanings and effects. For example, Morocco is located much farther west than Italy in terms of geographical coordinates but everyone knows that the category in which Morocco belongs would be the East while that of Italy would be the West. It would not be wrong to claim that the terms East and West (or Orient and Occident) being political indicators bearing a certain history rather than the geographical coordinates of a place is commonly accepted in social sciences now.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, those who claim that the difference between the Turkish seasonal workers

The ILO (report, the most comprehensive research on seasonal workers, says the following about the seasonal workers most of whom come from Turkey's eastern and southeastern regions which the state has neglected: "The group observed was seen to have turned poverty into a culture, a life style. Turning poverty into a culture was made possible by means of a life style perpetuating the same living conditions for past and future generations."

and their Kurdish or Arab counterparts is rooted in the difference between the east and the west are not talking about a geography that is stripped off its history. But what their discourse effectively serves in this area is to push history outside the realm of politics. There are a great many ways to do this and the most common way used in reference to seasonal workers is to state that the east has become more "undeveloped" than the west for whatever reason and to allow this to hide the ethnic basis of the structural inequalities in society.<sup>3</sup>

### **"The state has neglected them"**

This claim moves forward like this: Seasonal farm work is a branch of labor that is undeclared, devoid of social security, and practiced in the most adverse conditions. Why? Because the state has neglected to include this space in declared labor. There are "itinerant" workers and "temporary" workers in this space and the temporary workers are better off than the itinerant workers. Why? Because their homes are nearby and they get to stay at home in the evenings. The itinerant workers mostly come from Turkey's eastern and southeastern regions. Why? Because eastern and southeastern provinces are underdeveloped and poor. Turkey's western provinces, on the other hand, have developed and started providing employment not only to themselves but to other regions too while the southeast and the east were getting nowhere. Besides, the young population in Turkey's western regions migrated from the rural areas to the cities as of the 1950s and found jobs other than in agricultural production.



These jobs were not available to the easterners and southeasterners so they turned to farming which provided them a means of subsistence. Why, then, did Turkey's eastern and southeastern regions remain underdeveloped? Because the state neglected these regions; it failed to develop these regions as it developed the western ones, it could not provide

One of the authors of the ILO report once went so far as to say this during a meeting: "Their homes are not much different than tents, anyway!" That is to say, they are accustomed to these inhuman/primitive conditions; that is to say, they do not need decent houses; that is to say, they are not like the people we know: poverty, ignorance, and primitiveness have infiltrated their very being!

them with the amenities of modern living, it could not open factories, it could not educate people, it failed to make qualified workers of them, it was unable to save them from poverty, the state wanted to do a lot of things but somehow failed. So the inhabitants of Turkey's eastern and southeastern regions could not free themselves from the throes of ignorance, poverty, and traditionalism; gave birth to dozens of children, did not send them to school, and doomed both their children and themselves to these farm jobs that required no skill at all and were done under very severe conditions.

The geographical position thus attains a state where it also encompasses socio-economic status (poverty) and an essentialist understanding of culture stripped off its history and context (traditionalism, too many children, etc.). The ILO (International Labor Organization) report, the most comprehensive research on seasonal workers, says the following about the seasonal workers most of whom come from Turkey's eastern and southeastern regions which the state has neglected: "The group observed was seen to have turned poverty into a culture, a life style. Turning poverty into a culture was made possible by means of a life style perpetuating the same living conditions for past and future generations."<sup>4</sup> In other words, this pit of social depression called the east is a hotbed of misery with its geography, socio-economic conditions, culture, and traditions in the true sense of the word.

One of the authors of this report once went so far as to say the following during a meeting: "Their homes are not much different than tents, anyway!" That is to say, they are accustomed to these inhuman/primitive conditions; that is to say, they do not need decent houses; that is to say, they are not like the people we know: poverty, ignorance, and primitiveness have infiltrated their very being! That is to say, the inhabitants of "that region" cannot live decent lives not only because

the conditions do not permit it but also because they lack the knowledge and experience modern life requires and because they are attached –even addicted– to their shortcomings. They cannot, for example, take good care of their children. "They do not show the slightest effort to own household goods that would change their habits like vacuum cleaners, dishwashers, irons or even tables and bedsteads" that would create a hygienic environment because they do not realize that they need to change their habits."<sup>5</sup>

However addicted these people may be to their shortcomings, however stubborn they may be in resisting modern life and sluggish about changing their habits, there is never any faith lost in this resistance being overcome by means of a few technical and social interventions and these people getting free from their primitiveness and becoming modern. Therefore, a definition of these problems is immediately followed by the question, "What is to be done, then?" The answer to this question is more or less the same in most texts. Let us take a look, for example at the solutions offered in the Republican People Party's (CHP) parliamentary question about seasonal workers. "Urgent action must be taken in order to remedy the primitive conditions forced upon seasonal farm workers. Employment and production opportunities must be created in their localities in the long term. They must be provided with social security and their working and accommodation conditions must be improved in the short term. They must also have easy access to fresh potable water. Educational units for their children must be set up in the places they stay with their families."<sup>6</sup> The recommendations in the ILO report are not much different: "This group that is in distress and particularly vulnerable due to its dependence on the economic life of the society must be rescued from their quandary by means of the provision of social security and social harmony and the presence and assistance of the public and the state."<sup>7</sup>

Who can object to these recommendations? But a couple of questions must be asked at this point: 1) Does this language consist only of the recommendations it offers? Is it not of any consequence in life other than the solutions it recommends? 2) Do such problems and this kind of solutions persist because no one has thought of them before?

### **What does a victimizing idiom actually do?**

Now let us go back to the very beginning and look at the effects of this language from outside in an effort to understand what kind of space it creates by pushing a certain geography and the history of this geography outside the realm of politics and what discourses it renders unmentionable and worthless in this space. Let us start with definitions. What is seasonal labor? The said texts focus on seasonal labor's being an area of social and human problems rather than a form of labor. When these workers are not described as inexpensive manpower positioned in a class relationship integrated with the capitalist system, it does not matter as much that their labor helps the survival of small farmers who are



the bosses of the surplus value they produce and serves to boost the profits of bigger farm owners or the food processing industry. Not only does this language make this class relationship invisible or insignificant, it also redefines it.

When we consider the class question in conjunction with the geography question, we can come up with another question about how political history causes class inequality and ethnic inequality: What is the origin of this socio-economic difference between the East and the West? Although this essay is not the place to explain the history of this difference, it must be mentioned that the history of the East becoming dispossessed is directly related to the ethno-political structure of both the state of Turkey and these regions. The systematic violence the state perpetrated against this region is one of the main reasons for dispossession and an ethno-political kind of violence.<sup>8</sup> The regions referred as East and Southeast not only have a very large portion of their population consisting of Kurds<sup>9</sup> but they are Kurdish regions historically and politically and are called Kurdistan. Considering that the philosophical and actual history of the founding of the Republic of Turkey was fraught with dreams of a homogenous society, it should not be surprising that ethno-political problems occur with the Kurds, the only Muslim ethnic group that accounts for 15 to 20 percent of the population and totally refuses to get assimilated into Turkishness despite all the violence and discrimination perpetrated by the state.

As Dicle Koğacioğlu argues by quoting Çağlar Keyder, the central state has historically monopolized the control and distribution of financial resources in Turkey and various regions have had different degrees of access to these resources. Noting that relationships of political patronage were instrumental in the distribution of these resources, Koğacioğlu claims that the central state's perception of the degree of loyalty of a region was of key importance in these relationships.<sup>10</sup> In his book entitled *Müstakbel Türk'ten Sözde Vatandaşa* (From Future Turk to Ordinary Citizen), Mesut Yeğen says that this loyalty factor is an outcome of Kurdishness being pushed out of politics. The nebulousness of the relationship between the Kurds and Turkishness stems from both the indefiniteness of the political status of the Kurds and the vague meaning and definition<sup>11</sup> of the notion of Turkishness. Yeğen goes on to say, however, that the space opened up by this vagueness is quite a productive one and that it is precisely this nebulous space that allows the state to implement its assimilation and discrimination policies.

### What to do about “non-recognizing recognition”?

Koğacioğlu dubs this way of recognizing the Kurds non-recognizing recognition which he explains as, “appraising the other totally according to the priorities of the state without admitting it.” The outcome of this practice is the Kurds' confinement to the nebulous space Yeğen mentions: they are neither recognized as an ethno-political group nor is their existence fully denied. Koğacioğlu explains

this as follows: “When the inequality the ‘other’ is subjected to and the suffering he endures are not recognized as an outcome of his relationship with the state and capitalist structures, this inequality and suffering are attributed to the identity of the ‘other’.” What I claim those texts are doing which generate rhetoric about seasonal farm workers in the manners I named “the language of mercy” and “the language of state's negligence” is appraising the seasonal workers most of whom are Kurds and the geography they come from which is called the East according to the priorities of the state by making them recognizable only in terms of certain deficiencies. The condition for doing this is to desist from declaring the ranking of the “other” according to the priorities of the state by denying the class relationships which are the *raison d'être* of seasonal labor, the relationships of sovereignty between the Turks and the Kurds,<sup>12</sup> and the state's presence in this space. It is precisely due to this language

What is seasonal labor? When these workers are not described as inexpensive manpower positioned in a class relationship integrated with the capitalist system, it does not matter as much that their labor helps the survival of small farmers who are the bosses of the surplus value they produce and serves to boost the profits of bigger farm owners or the food processing industry. Not only does this language make this class relationship invisible or insignificant, it also redefines it.

that the state and the violence it perpetrates can maintain a low-profile presence in this space by creating the illusion that the state's only fault is negligence.

There is, however, a problem here. The moment we draw these structural boundaries, we end up with a picture in which the actors, their class statuses, the boundaries of the process and the space, and the relationships among them are defined in terms of ethnic structures. This moment when the picture freezes and the social space is blocked off to all other possibilities is precisely the moment when we should start growing skeptical of the picture. Since the dynamism of social space can never be completely filled up by such structures, the move we must make now should be to set this general and structural picture in motion. To be able to do this, we first need to break apart the categories that freeze this picture. How are these boundaries violated? How do they get rebuilt after every time they are violated? Who stays outside these categories? Or, more specifically, are all the employers in this sector ethnically Turkish and all



laborers Kurds, Romani, and Arabs? Are all of the people in this business other than the employers and the workers such as the agents, supervisors, and local village folk ethnically Turkish? Take a worker who describes himself sometimes as a Turkish citizen

The rhetoric about seasonal farm workers in the manners I named “the language of mercy” and “the language of state’s negligence” is this: to desist from declaring the ranking of the “other” according to the priorities of the state by denying the class relationships which are the *raison d’être* of seasonal labor, the relationships of sovereignty between the Turks and the Kurds. It is precisely due to this language that the state and the violence it perpetrates can maintain a low-profile presence by creating the illusion that the state’s only fault is negligence.

and sometimes as a Romani and whose employer describes him as a Romani; should he be counted in the Romani category or as a citizen of Turkey? Or if

a supervisor who describes himself as an immigrant from Bulgaria switches to a description of himself as a Turk when speaking about the Kurdish problem, what category should we put him in?

The second move we must make to break up this picture is to show that those who are recognized without recognition are not victims who patiently wait for the state to recognize them. What kind of a demand for justice and equality can those who are recognized without recognition produce by reappraising every day and every hour the inequalities they are subjected to, the suffering they endure, their labor-weary bodies, their land which is synonymous with deprivation; and the social, economic, and political relationships eating away at them; and how can we lend an ear to what they are saying? I will turn to ethnography in the second part of this essay in search of an answer to this. My purpose will be to show the difference between the utterances “Filthy, ignorant, and poor victims neglected by the state – the objects of inhuman sights unbecoming to 21st century Turkey” and “Is it human to condemn us to live in such miserable conditions?” and to make audible and visible the demand for equality and justice which is hidden in the first utterance under a language that calls out to the state and sensitive public opinion to accord their compassion to the “other” and can only emerge in the second in a radical fashion.

## Footnotes

1. While this segregation may vary depending on the specific conditions of the location, the desire and the practice of keeping different ethnic groups separate from the local Turks is quite common. The separation between the inside and the outside of the village is based on the analysis of a practice I observed during my field study in Manisa. For example, in the Black Sea region where such a rigid separation is not spatially feasible, the Kurdish workers usually stay in the ground floor of the employer’s house that used to serve as a barn. It is plausible to perceive this as a way of keeping the workers under constant supervision by accommodating them as near their employer as possible rather than putting them at a distance. On the other hand, we may also think that this kind of spatial separation occurs along a vertical axis rather than horizontal.
2. Said, Edward (2012): *Orientalism: The West’s Conceptions of the Orient*. İstanbul: Metis.
3. I am not arguing, of course, that the terms East and West are the prerogative of the proponents of this claim. My purpose here is to probe into the effects of the East/West duality and the meanings attributed to it in the generation of rhetoric about seasonal workers. It must be realized that the usage of the concepts “East” and “Easterner” and the meanings attributed to them are not monopolized by the state and those who speak through the words of the state; and that the spheres opened up by these words may differ greatly from the effects of the usages I mentioned above when they acquire new meanings and are used in different discourses and contexts. See Azat Zana Gündoğan (2011): *Space, State-Making and Contentious Kurdish Politics in the East of Turkey: The Case of Eastern Meetings*. 1967, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 13:4. pp. 389-416; Zülal Nazan Üstündağ (2005): *Belonging to the Modern: Women’s Suffering and Subjectivities in Urban Turkey*. PhD dissertation, Department of Sociology, Indiana University.
4. Nurettin Yıldırak, Bülent Gülçubuk, Sema Gün, Emine Olhan, and Mehmet Kılıç (2002): *Türkiye’de Gezici ve Geçici Kadın Tarım İşçilerinin Çalışma ve Yaşam Koşulları ve Sorunları* (The Working and Living Conditions and Problems of Itinerant and Temporary Women Farm Workers in Turkey). Labor Report, Ankara: The Turkey Office of the International Labor Organization. pp.28-29.
5. Sare Sahil and Şule Özbekmezci (2004) “Mevsimlik Tarım İşçilerinin Sosyal, Ekonomik Ve Barınma Sorunlarının Analizi” (An Analysis of the Social, Economic and Accommodation Problems of Seasonal Farm Workers). *The Journal of the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture of Gazi University*, Volume 19, No: 3. p.272.
6. “CHP’s Parliamentary Question on Seasonal Farm Workers.” All newspapers. 28 April 2008. <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=2790465>.
7. Nurettin Yıldırak, Bülent Gülçubuk, Sema Gün, Emine Olhan, and Mehmet Kılıç (2002): *Türkiye’de Gezici ve Geçici Kadın Tarım İşçilerinin Çalışma ve Yaşam Koşulları ve Sorunları* (The Working and Living Conditions and Problems of Itinerant and Temporary Women Farm Workers in Turkey). Labor Report, Ankara: The Turkey Office of the International Labor Organization. p. 29.
8. Meltem Ahıska et al., 1988, *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi* (Encyclopedia of Socialism and Social Struggles), Volume 7, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları; Hamit Bozarslan, 1992, *Political Aspects of the Kurdish Problem*. Contemporary Turkey Kurds: A Contemporary Review, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl. New York: Routledge; Bilgin Ayata and Deniz Yüksek, 2005, *A belated awakening: National and international responses to the internal displacement of Kurds in Turkey*. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 32: 5-42.
9. Although ethnicity-based demographics are not available in Turkey, most surveys estimate the proportion of Kurds to the total population to be smaller than 15 to 20 percent and that of Arabs and Romani smaller than 1 percent each. It is not possible, of course, to make a statistical deduction about the ethnic identities of seasonal workers from these figures; however, based on my observations and what I have read, I do not think it would be incorrect to argue that a very large majority of the seasonal workers are Kurds.
10. Dicle Koğacıoğlu (2011): *Knowledge, Practice, and Political Community: The Making of the “Custom” in Turkey*. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. pp. 172-228.
11. Since Turkishness denotes both the citizenship of the Republic of Turkey and an ethnic group, its usage is usually prone to ambiguity.
12. To see the transformation of these relationships of sovereignty, it would be helpful to look into the process what Mesut Yeğen terms the Turks’ transition from primary constituent to ruling nation.



# Urban transformation and law on disaster prevention: A pretext for lucrative investment

Nowadays, in parallel with the increasing weight of the construction sector in the Turkish economy, a large portion of print and visual ads promote real estate developers' theme housing, residence and mall projects. Hundreds of such projects, large or small, not only promise urban "consumers" a new home, office and lifestyle complete with various attractions, but also market urban spaces as "investment opportunities" and "lucrative assets". One important component of this economic growth model centered around construction is the "urban transformation" under the supervision of public agencies.

One such commercial film expresses in a direct and caricature-like manner the construction sector's appetite for urban development, which gained momentum after Law on Disaster Prevention (Afet Yasası). The ad is by Bulut Construction and features Temel and Fadime, protagonists of traditional humorous tales. It markets urban transformation as if it were a product. Speaking in the Black Sea region dialect and clad in traditional clothes, Fadime calls out to his husband Temel, who is building a house right in the middle of the highway:

*Fadime: Temel, what are you doing over there?*

*Temel: Building a house. I will sell it to Bulut Construction.*

*Fadime: How come?*

*Temel: I am into urban transformation; we are set to urbanize.*

*Fadime: Come on Temel, I won't quit my tea and hazel nut groves!*

*Temel: I will buy you the best nuts and tea.*

*Fadime: That's unthinkable!*

*Temel: I am going to urban-transform you!*

*Right at this point we hear the voice-over, speaking with a "modern", "urban" and convincing tone: "Urban Transformation by Bulut Construction! All over Turkey, we purchase your old condos in return for a new residence. You simply pay back the difference in five years."*

*Looking convinced, Fadime asks Temel:*

*Fadime: Tell me Temel, when will we urbanize?*

*Temel: We are, right now!*<sup>1</sup>

The commercial indeed correctly emphasizes that urban transformation dialectically changes the individual and the society; however, it also upholds in the most banal and coarse fashion the dominant paradigm on urban transformation, and particularly the construction drive following the Law on Disaster Prevention.

GYODER, the trade association of the largest

Turkish real estate developers, is presided by Işık Gökkaya, who unscrupulously says that they view the Law on Disaster Prevention as an "investment opportunity":

"The real estate sector is the driving force of the Turkish economy. We are about to enter a historical epoch, as signaled by urban transformation, legislation allowing foreigners to purchase real estate, and the Law on Disaster Prevention. Thanks to recent political and economical stability, Turkey stands out as a secure and appealing destination in contrast with crisis-stricken nations, and presents immense opportunities in real estate. In addition to present opportunities, the Law on Disaster Prevention is expected to bring about the replacement of 5.3 million houses, corresponding to USD 400 billion."<sup>2</sup>

## Urban transformation: For whom?

It must be stated that the "urban transformation" debate is afflicted with a serious problem of definition. Referring to a reproduction of the space, the term "urban transformation" indeed covers a range of diverse concepts and practices such as "urban revival", "sanitization", "preservation", "retrofitting" and "urban renewal". Besides, it carries different professional meanings for various actors such as planners, architects and investors. Very roughly, we can refer to two historical practices on the extremes, for definition purposes. One is the "cleansing" and redevelopment of an urban space generally defined as a tumor. It involves wholesale demolition and redevelopment. Here, the most critical question is, whom this transformation benefits: the locals, other social classes, or investors? Another key question is, how the cost and funding is provided. In Turkey, the "demolish and redevelop" model is implemented across the board without any regard for the specifics of a given space.

One case in point is the transformation of plots falling under the scope of the Law No. 5366 on Renewal of Urban Areas,<sup>3</sup> shantytowns, and areas under high disaster risk, by the coalition of Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ), municipalities and developers. As far as working class neighborhoods are concerned, this practice can be summarized with the formula "forced evacuation – demolition – relocation of locals to TOKİ projects in the urban periphery."<sup>4</sup> It is a significant threat for a number of neighborhoods in the urban center and periphery, owing to rent-seeking.

The second practice, which can be coined "the attentive transformation of living space", consists of the improvement of the built environment and social



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life with the participation of locals and without recourse to “unnecessary” demolition. In fact, such a model has yet to be properly implemented in Turkey, because improving an urban area in line with the locals’ demands and needs, without depriving them of their location, neighbors, and community and thus granting legality to urban space is not as lucrative as the “demolish and redevelop” model of the construction sector, which prioritizes economic growth above all else.

The urban transformation currently underway in Istanbul’s historical Fener and Balat districts is a great case to see these two models at work. The local government and GAP Construction<sup>5</sup> implement the “demolish and redevelop” model in these neighborhoods falling under the scope of Law No. 5366; however, prior to the latest transformation craze, the area had successfully undergone renewal in early 2000s, in line with the “attentive transformation of living space” approach with support from the European Union. The previous project had taken great pains not to turn the locals including tenants into victims of gentrification while renewing the historical urban texture. However, the same cannot be said for the current urban transformation project which instead opts for summary confiscation of real estate, demolition of certified historical buildings and their replacement by new structures with a “historical look”.<sup>6</sup>

Here, the most critical question is, whom this transformation benefits: the locals, other social classes, or investors? Another key question is, how the cost and funding is provided. In Turkey, the “demolish and redevelop” model is implemented across the board without any regard for the specifics of a given space.

This immense appetite for urban transformation can be explained in part through the disparity between the use value and exchange value of urban space:<sup>7</sup> In the neoliberal paradigm, the importance of a city or space does not arise from its use value as shelter and living space, a healthy environment, an infrastructure for production and commerce, an area of public interaction, etc. In today’s capitalism, the city increasingly becomes a commodity bought and sold; an instrument of profit maximization and speculation. Capitalism itself is based on capital accumulation, concentration and centralization, and neoliberal urbanization accordingly views urban land as a means of capital accumulation. This in turn leads to the privatization of public space, construction of malls on empty lots including post-disaster concentration areas, and the buying and selling of whole neighborhoods with high economic value (shantytowns and zoned areas alike, as if they were vacant plots) under urban transformation schemes.

The urban planner Associate Dr. Murat Cemal Yalçınan summarizes the period from the early 2000s until the Law on Catastrophes in Istanbul as such:

“Urban transformation and renewal practices mainly

amount to an approach geared towards rent-seeking and real estate confiscation, indifferent to disaster prevention bar on paper, and negligent of poverty, and social and economic relations; accordingly they bring about nothing but the relocation of rent-seeking and poverty.”<sup>8</sup> Discussions during the Law on Disaster Prevention and after, were inevitably based on the discursive and practical foundations of this first period of urban transformation with palpable results.

### **Law on Disaster Prevention: Is the glass half empty or half full?**

The Law No. 6306 on Disaster Prevention and Transformation of High Risk Areas which came into effect on May 31st, 2012 upon publication in the Official Gazette has the objective of “determining the principles and methods of improvement, liquidation and renewal geared towards the constitution of healthy and safe living spaces in line with scientific and esthetic norms and standards in areas under disaster risk and in any high risk development”. The law defines “high risk areas” which could engender loss of lives and property, and similarly “risky buildings” inside or outside the abovementioned areas, as “reserve development areas” where new residential buildings will be constructed. The law outlines the methods for the identification of such high risk areas and structures, evacuation and demolition processes, and development of projects after demolition. The law also lists the duties and responsibilities of public agencies.

The signing into law of disaster legislation in an earthquake-prone country, the political leadership’s resolve, attempts to minimize risk via mobilization, and formulation of solutions to other urban matters while eradicating disaster risk can all be hailed as positive. No one would object to such an approach at least in principle. Why then is the Law on Disaster Prevention heavily criticized, despite a general consensus on the earthquake risk? Can such objections be explained by the “intransigence” of political groups? As mentioned above, many consider that the relation between urban transformation and the Law on Disaster Prevention is problem-prone in essence. In a nutshell, critics state that disaster risk is used as an “excuse” to legitimize and gear up urban transformation projects which create suffering (forced evacuation, gentrification, violation of property rights). The dissident position can be summarized as “the disaster risk does exist, yet current urban transformation practices are no panacea”. An analysis of the law indeed reveals that demolition is defined in extreme detail, priority is given to the “demolish and redevelop” method, and the emphasis on “improvement” (retrofitting) disappears after the first article.

Immediately after the signing into law of Law on Disaster Prevention, numerous NGOs, trade chambers, community associations and civic initiatives issued a joint declaration which read “the urban transformation law itself is the looming disaster set to devastate our living space”.<sup>9</sup> The declaration claims that the said law violates the “right to housing” stipulated in the Article 56 of the Constitution, and that “it is a far cry from the urgently needed legislation which will shield cities against disasters, with due consideration of issues such as local transformation, tenants’ condition,



the temporary housing problem, funding, financial models based on social justice and equality, and the participation of all stakeholders". A press release issued by the Chamber of Urban Planners (under TMMOB), too, lists the law's contradictions with basic human rights and the Constitution. These points deserve being discussed to better grasp the concerns underlying the criticism:

- The law penalizes any objection to an imposed agreement on disaster prevention.
- Risk-free buildings can be brought under the scope of law for the sake of "practical coherence".
- The statement "Buildings in high risk areas are not to be provided power, water or natural gas, and all such services will be discontinued" is a clear violation of basic rights.
- Obliging local residents to cover all infrastructure costs (including the cost of identification and demolition of high risk buildings) will increase the debt burden of these already impoverished populations.
- The authorization of the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning further enhances centralization.
- The few plots remaining in the public sector could be privatized.
- Real estate owned by public agencies outside of the Treasury (schools, hospitals and public housing) could be transferred to the Ministry, whether prone to disasters or not.
- Laws protecting natural and historical riches are made null and void, defined as "inapplicable legislation".
- Development of grazing land is made easier.
- The temporary ban on all zoning and construction in reserve building areas constitutes a violation of property rights.
- The authority to impose "special" standards on planning resolutions could make the renewed areas unlivable.

Aside from these arguments, it is suggested in some circles that high risk areas will be identified arbitrarily. Also, the Law on Disaster Prevention does not take into account any disaster other than earthquakes. The condition of tenants is not given due consideration, and no mechanism is designed for their protection, except for a one-off rent allowance. Besides, there are no price-control measures to prevent impoverished residents from running into repayment problems or being obliged to sell their property for immediate gain, and thus be uprooted from their communities. The participation of local stakeholders was envisaged neither during the drafting of the law nor in the aftermath – aside from bearing its costs.

Finally, the law in question centered on demolition does not approach transformation comprehensively, in the light of healthy urban development, ecological

sustainability and social justice – the indisputable principles of urban planning. Criticisms get only stronger once you add the fact that previous transformation projects were far from exemplary in many aspects not least design, and that market players focus on profit maximization and give a back seat to public interest.

### What kind of a disaster law?

It is not possible to answer the question "is the glass half full or half empty?" through an analysis of this law alone. It is factors like the run-up to the law, its general framework, and social struggles which fill or empty the glass. Even as opportunists have started to hawk urban transformation following the law's approval, the administration must make its utmost to avoid the repetition of the widespread injustices / inequalities

In a nutshell, critics state that disaster risk is used as an "excuse" to legitimize and gear up urban transformation projects which create suffering (forced evacuation, gentrification, violation of property rights).

created by the first wave of urban transformation, and the characterless designs associated with TOKİ and luxury housing estates.

First of all, the state must reach an agreement with citizens and NGOs as regards the principles of urban transformation. Such a consensus must avoid a speculative urban growth strategy which would trigger urban rent-seeking and consequently aggravate urban problems, and instead focus on public interest. It must counter the looming earthquake risk agreed upon by all, without actually inflicting a disaster on people's lives. It must stick to the principle of not evicting anybody unless it is absolutely necessary. Poor and low-income citizens must not be forced to bear the economic brunt of the urban transformation process. Citizens must be able to participate collectively and directly in transformation decisions concerning their homes and communities. The legislation and content of the Law on Disaster Prevention, and the possibilities and risks it harbors are closely related to Turkey's democratic maturity level. Naturally, the struggle to protect cities against disasters will from now on be an integral part of the struggle for democracy, and the actors of this struggle will have to fill up the glass.

### Footnotes

1. Commercial film by Bulut İnşaat <http://www.bulutinsaatyapi.com/>
2. <http://t24.com.tr/ajans/3939kentsel-donusum-400-milyar-dolari-harekete-gececekk3939---gyoder-baskani-isik-gokkaya---3939afet-yasasi-kapsaminda-degistirilecek-yaklasik-53-milyon-konut---400-milyar-dolarlik-bir-finansal-hareketlilik-gerektirecek3/41293>
3. Full Turkish name: Yıpranan Tarihî ve Kültürel Taşınmaz Varlıkların Yenilenerek Korunması ve Yaşatılarak Kullanılması Hakkında Kanun
4. Zorla Tahliye Haritası (2009), <http://mutlukent.wordpress.com/>

5. <http://www.fatihhaber.com/fener-balat-ayvansaray-AVA.htm>
6. For detailed information: Korhan Gümüş, 21.02.2010, Fener-Balat'ta hukuk imtihanı <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=981459&CategoryID=42>
7. Lefebvre, Henri, The Production of Space, 1991, Blackwell.
8. <http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/137646-afet-yasasinin-gizli-gundemi>
9. <http://mutlukent.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/afet-yasasc4b1na-karc59fc4b1-ortak-deklarasyon.pdf>



# Urban transformation policies and the irrepressible rise of TOKİ

Since 1920s, political character is on the forefront of the young Republic of Turkey in its attempt to create a nation-state. The deterministic acceptance this approach includes is that the individual attitudes change with the environment according to its necessities.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, the Republican leadership dealt with urbanization with an approach of “urban renewal” as a nation-state. Ebru Gürlü,<sup>2</sup> points out that, in the urban landscapes from 1930 to 1970 methods, expropriation, changes in the land use and reconstruction after demolition were fundamental tools in the process of urban transformation. İlhan Tekeli also writes that the declaration of Ankara as the capital city, the strategy to “knit the country with railways” and the preference of small Anatolian cities on the railway route as factory locations after the Great Depression in 1929 are all a follow-up of the same policies.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Tarık Şengül maintains that the “modern city project” is interrupted as a result of the migration of the poor into the cities at the end of the World War II.<sup>4</sup>

## The era between 1950-1980

In the era between 1950-1980, the political conflicts and economic development model which focused on liberalization during the multi-party system has produced the urbanization of the labour force in Turkey. However, as it was stated by Hatice Kurtuluş, the informal economy emerged because of the insufficiency of the industrial growth rate at the end of the war and the absorption of the migrant workforce in the industry.<sup>5</sup>

Turkey did not take part in the World War II, nevertheless, as a result of the threat of war, capital accumulated excessively through the application of a rigorous austerity policy during these years.

During this period, urban transformation was realized by creating new socio-spatial scales resulting from transparent or confidential political economic decisions. As emphasized by Hatice Kurtuluş, even though the *gecekondu* (slum / shanty) areas, in which all the residential costs are provided by the migrants and which are built on public lands without infrastructure where the most obvious transformation is carried out, are “illegal” and “unplanned”, the fact that they were disregarded by the local and central political authorities is related to the clandestine political economy of the *gecekondu*. In the coercive setting, constituted also by the political conjuncture of the era, the first *gecekondu* pardon was granted in 1966 for the *gecekondu* areas spreading rapidly since 1960.

Another development of the era is the construction of new residential areas for the middle class around the outskirts of urban neighbourhoods, by segmenting

and opening up the rural lands for construction in the metropolitan periphery and on the summer resorts and commuter train line through subdivision. It is much easier to read the political economy of the urban transformation through these policies especially if the ruling power of the Democratic Party (1950-1960) is taken into account in conjunction with the large-scale reconstruction activities embarked in İstanbul.

While the urban periphery encountered such a transformation, the urban center rapidly began to feel the impacts of the modernization. Beginning with the rise in population, the transformation from single storey, detached houses into apartment buildings was experienced with the system described as the “a flat in return for land” and the “Law of Property Ownership” of 1950s. With the enactment of this law many in a short span of time many of the historical buildings were replaced with the multi-storey apartment buildings. In this rapid.

## The post- 1980 era

Since the 1970s, in relation to the crisis, while the era of “globalization” began during which production and spatial construction were radically rescaled and restructured all around the world, the reconstruction of the urban city centers, which became wreckage zones by losing their attraction due to suburbanization, constituted one of the dimensions of the new urban transformation phase.<sup>6</sup>

In post-1980 period, the economic policy of import substitution was replaced primarily with neoliberal policies while populist politics gave its place to nepotist relationships, and the city and urban land move beyond witnessing the accumulation of capital and were evolved into being actual actors of this process. Urban investments, which introduced the global consumption culture to the new middle class, grown swiftly rich due to the nepotist relationships, emerged as projects reprioritizing historical places in a wrecked state, especially in İstanbul, confined luxurious accommodation complexes, luxurious entertainment and recreation places, sports and congress centers.

After the urban transformations in the previous periods –which were described as “unnamed” by Mucella Yapıcı-, the introduction of the current use of the urban transformation as a concept into the local administrative literature took place in the year of 1999 when the Marmara earthquake occurred.<sup>7</sup> With the intensification of discussions around the earthquake threat in the beginning of 2000s, “urban transformation” was presented as an obligation and an unavoidable process. While the state shrank and withdrew from the fields of production and social services (social accommodation, health, education, and etc...), capital was rescaled bureaucratically in



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order to do the amendments which would accelerate the global flow of property and services. While the required legal foundation was prepared for the reproduction of the space as a part of the reproduction extended in the urban areas, media support was applied as an efficient strategy to imprint people's minds with discourses of the neoliberal politicians legalizing the transformation –such as clearance of the wreckage zones, cleansing the city from crime, and putting safety forefront as the crucial urban problem. Through the employment of this concept, embraced firmly as a “savior” both by the central administration and the local administrations, a very rapid process was initiated by the enactment of laws in Ankara, the day-by-day strengthening of TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of Turkey), and the local administrations' declarations of the sites, which they wanted to intervene but could not, as sites of urban transformation/renewal one after another.

The most critical dilemma in the reorganization of capitalism by structuring the urban space through urban reconstructions arose out of the change in the settled relationship of the social classes with the city. These processes resulted in the destruction of the space in line with the economic targets. At the same time, as the poor and the destitute do not have an ongoing economical power that can meet the emergent change value, each time projects shifted to a different dimension as a result of the general development dynamics determined by a higher scale.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, urban transformation was formed through the new urban land nexus that came into being by the use of an unjust power in terms of urban social classes and urban rights. At the focal point of these new urban land nexus, especially in İstanbul, resides TOKİ.

### New urban land nexus and the role of TOKİ

Since the 2000s TOKİ, which has acted both as an official “institution” shaping the urbanization policies with the application of its projects and a “company” with its partnerships has become a monopoly in the urban practices through the enactment of legal regulations. In order to understand the current “housing policy” of TOKİ, which has forgotten its founding principle of providing housing for the low-income group, it is useful to evaluate some information<sup>9</sup> in the scale of İstanbul and Turkey.

When the ongoing practice of TOKİ in all around Turkey is analyzed, the number reaches to almost 282 thousand residential houses. It is observed that only about 20 thousand of this number targets the poor/low income group. When the two data is compared, it is understood that almost 7% of the ongoing TOKİ projects is for the poor/low income group. In addition, when the leaflets of these social housing estates are analyzed, it is obvious that the prices are not affordable even for the middle class. This is the first sign of TOKİ's deflection from its founding principle.

The result is more serious when İstanbul is analyzed as an example of the way in which those projects are distributed. From the ongoing housing projects totalling to almost 64 thousand, only 850 of them, that is about 1.3% is built for the poor/low income group. When the names of these housing projects presented in İstanbul are taken into account, it is seen that they are the “new residential zone” projects that often appear in the media. The names given to the projects give sufficient idea about the contents of the project, the class it addresses, and its facilities. Moreover,

the phrases used for these projects, such as “residential area”, “satellite town”, “intelligent building” are signs of an intention to erase the concept of neighbourhood that stands for the traditional cooperation.

Upon detailed analysis, it is seen that Başakşehir, Bahçeşehir, Ataşehir and Halkalı are/will be intense housing estates. It is not surprising that these are the areas where the acknowledged beneficiaries from the declared urban transformation/renewal areas are sent to.

From this perspective, even though it seems that there will not be anybody left who does not own of a house in İstanbul, thousands of people displaced from the sites of urban transformation/renewal are in the position of making use of residential houses only built for the low-income group. A striking point here is that there isn't any housing

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project continuing or at the bidding phase in İstanbul that targets the low-income group. For that reason, it is actually not surprising at all to see those people, evacuated from the urban transformation/renewal sites and placed in the housing estates without any “drawings or casting lots”, “do not want to live in the housings given to them”, as TOKİ's Chairman Erdoğan Bayraktar put it, and soon leave their houses in these areas and move back to the urban periphery or wreckage zones in the center.

### The tools of TOKİ's irrepressible rise

Legal regulations enacted due to its affinity to the central administration constitute the basis of TOKİ's takeover, especially in big cities with its above-mentioned housing projects. Before scanning the legal regulations that strengthened TOKİ day by day since the beginning of 2000s, it will be useful to have a brief look at how the urban transformation after 1980 as the only tool of urban intervention gained currency before the law.

In the urbanization policies the mindset opting for project designing instead of planning, first appeared in the Article 73 of the Municipality Law No. 5393, which was enacted in 2005. Under the title “Urban Transformation and Development Area”, local administrations were authorized for “Urban Transformation and Development Projects” with extremely ambiguous criteria.

The second step was Law No. 5366 on “Protection and Renewal of Damaged Historical and Cultural Real Property and their Usage to Keep Them Alive”, which was also enacted in 2005. This law functions almost as a guideline for how to demolish and rebuild buildings in protected zones, how to send the inhabitants living in these areas to the social housing estates in the peripheries of the city through TOKİ and how to welcome the capital with



“grandiose” projects.

In July 2008, Law No. 5793 Making Amendments in Some Laws and Statutory Degrees was enacted as a bill consisting of many elements most of which unrelated with one another. This amendment focusing on extending the authority of the TOKİ officials was severely criticized by many trade associations. Chamber of Architects and Chamber of Civil Engineers (TMOBB), in the report they prepared about this subject, has explicitly announced to the public the negative effects of this regulation on the urban space and the real intention beneath it.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, with Law No. 6306 on The Transformation of Areas Under the Catastrophe Risk, issued in May 2012 after many heated discussions, the destruction and rebuilding of not only the urban zones but also all other areas from forests to military areas which are declared to be “under catastrophe risk” is at stake.<sup>11</sup>

After having a brief look at the regulations that pave the way for urban transformation projects, it is meaningful to scrutinize the Housing Development Law No. 2985, amended and renewed in 2004 with the Law No. 5162, which explains the foundation purpose of TOKİ.

In the Law No. 5162, the Article 1 entitled “Purpose and Implementation” states: “Meeting housing needs, regulation of the procedures and principles to be followed

**TOKİ is entitled to carry out and even approve projects on its own account in all private and public urban properties with exemption from all kinds of expense and control through these regulations paving the way for urban transformation projects. Local administrative units are deactivated a little more with each regulation.**

by those constructing houses, industrial construction techniques as well as development of tools and equipment that are suitable for the land conditions and materials, and state subsidies are subject to the provisions of this law.” The conversion of the Housing Development Law and the central government’s embracement of urban renewal/transformation as an issue could be regarded as a positive development in the first place; since with the aforementioned law, TOKİ has actually been authorized in terms of urban renewal applications within the context of urban transformation. However, the attitude of the central government is summarized clearly in the text of Article 4, which explains this authority as “the elimination of gecekondu areas”. It is remarkable that in the aforementioned item and the law there are no detailed provisions about “recycling by improvement” of the said areas.

As it can be understood from Article 2, in which the urban transformation applications is explained as well as the institution’s income and expenditures and their inspections, TOKİ is responsible and authorized for not only in public housing constructions but also giving loans for the renewal of villages and urban structures with specific characteristics, creating jobs and employment and providing loans with the purpose of encouragement and development of these employees.

TOKİ, which has acquired more authority with the Law No. 5162, enacted in 2004, “Expropriation and Making Development Plan in Gecekondu (Slum) Transformation Applications”, has extended its power with the Law No. 5366 enacted in 2005. All the authorizations of the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement in the gecekondu areas are transferred to TOKİ by an amendment in the Gecekondu Law No. 775 and the Law No. 5069 enacted in 2007; in addition, TOKİ has been authorized with the take-over of the land owned by the Treasury for free with the proposal of Minister of Finance and the approval of the Prime Minister.<sup>12</sup> With this regulation, “(...) TOKİ’s intervention area has extended and determination of the gecekondu prevention areas” has been added to its duties. Türkün and Yapıcı (2009) maintain that, with this law, the authority for approval is granted to TOKİ for the boundaries of gecekondu rehabilitation zones, gecekondu refinement areas and gecekondu prevention areas within the limits of the local administrations; and even though plans for development and rehabilitation zones (under TOKİ’s inspection) are prepared by the local administrations, only TOKİ is authorized to reject or approve the plan proposals and it has been made obligatory to obtain a permission from TOKİ in the land sales of the local administrations.

Following this general perspective, a chronological analysis of the amendments in the Housing Development Law display how the process proceeded. New financial resources were created for TOKİ and it was made exempt from all economical inspection mechanisms with the regulations carried out in 1990, and TOKİ gained authority to obtain loans without depending on almost any other institutions with the regulations made in 2001,<sup>13</sup> and TOKİ’s autonomous identity was strengthened with the regulations enacted by means of the Law No. 4966 in 2003.

In 2004, through regulations within the Laws No. 5162 and 5273, TOKİ, as a public institution, is entitled to set up a company and form partnerships with the already established companies just like any other company. In addition, it is also entitled to do development plans of all sizes and scales, have them done and amend them, promulgate them ex-officio and expropriate lands and parcels belonging to natural and legal persons and every kind of buildings and attachments in their boundaries or on them within the framework of its tasks in the law. With this arrangement, district municipalities are positioned as notaries that have to approve the development plan of TOKİ in any area within three months. The limits of TOKİ’s rights on the gecekondu areas are extended through regulations disregarding the right to property and individuals from making changes on their own property with their own initiatives. Moreover, it implicitly expresses that right holders and the values of their houses are to be determined by TOKİ and that they are to be driven off from where they live.

Again, with two different regulations in the Laws No. 5273 and 5162, provided that the authentication of an area has its own ownership and it is not contrary to the function of development plan, TOKİ is made to gain authority for performing application without any legal obstacles (!).

In 2006, through the Law No. 5492, TOKİ has become exempted from almost all expenses, but accepted to be sufficient to perform an application only with a certificate of provisional acceptance of the tender, and



flexibility is provided to fill in their shortcomings later. That is, another step is taken towards abolishing all the obstacles for application before TOKİ.

With the Law No. 5793, enacted in 2008, as in previous regulations, TOKİ is entitled to carry out projects in any field without indicating any criteria about the transformation projects in relation to an earthquake.

When the articles are examined one by one, the situation becomes clear without the need for any further comment. TOKİ is entitled to carry out and even approve projects on its own account in all private and public urban properties with exemption from all kinds of expense and control through these regulations paving the way for urban transformation projects. Local administrative units are deactivated a little more with each regulation.

However, this is how TOKİ describes itself:<sup>14</sup>

- Discipline the housing market by realizing innovative and alternative practices in the housing production within the framework of a particular model;
- Prevent speculative formations by paying attention to issues such as quality, durability, and affordability; TOKİ continues its activities all around Turkey with determination and perseverance with its main objective to help the distribution of the national population evenly across the country. (...) In the coming years, in cities such as İstanbul, İzmir, Ankara, Diyarbakır and Adana, there will be more concentration on the largest cities with a significant migration from rural backgrounds.
- At present, service is provided with an understanding that covers all aspects of modern urbanization, and our goals are strengthening the concept of social state, reduction of obstacles before the wheels of production, serving the poor citizens, the formation of a state structure with justice and understanding for them where the confidence of law-abiding citizens to the state is consolidated.
- Considering the dire need of the low-income group who do not have the possibility of obtaining a housing in the current market conditions and the necessity of an urban transformation, we are going to continue producing housing with all our strength as part of being a "social state".

In fact, TOKİ really continues to produce housing "with all its strength". However, the manufactured housings are not "social" but "prestigious". TOKİ, which has totally drained the concepts of public use and social state, keeps on producing housing for the new middle class with the mindset of a profit-oriented company.

## Class tension and urban exile

Under the hegemony of neoliberal policies and instrumentalized instrumental laws, TOKİ, as the chief actor, loosens the urban networks in the process of urban transformation, which is deemed "inevitable", to the extent that they cannot be set up again. Even though all these projects, presented with exciting themes, find supporters in various parts of the society, during the application process, the destructive nature of the projects unfolds. Both the wreckage zones in the city center and gecekondu areas, which integrated with the center as a result of their exchange value, change at a dizzying pace together with their current inhabitants. In these areas, considered

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as the home for "all kinds of filth, crime and unplanned urbanization", "zero tolerance" policies are performed against the struggle and resistance that remind the events of 1970s increase the urban class tension.

Through this approach that considers the right to property sacred while ignoring the right to housing, those who have settled in the gecekondu areas and wreckage zones out of economic reasons and who are not considered "beneficiaries" because of the lack of proprietorship certificate before the law or those who do not have a regular economic income to participate in these new prestigious projects are driven out to the peripheries of the city. What needs to be done here is, first of all, prevention of the housing monopolization by stopping the marginalization and urban exile; developing processes that center on social and economic improvement by leaving the preceding approach that prioritized the improvement of physical space, taking the proprietorship/renter ratios into account, developing methods not only for the "holders of proprietorship certificate" but also for the renters, and realizing the cooperation between public-private sector and civil society and social housing approaches.

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## Footnotes

1. All the information is taken from the website [www.TOKI.gov.tr](http://www.TOKI.gov.tr) (November 2012)
2. [http://www.tmmob.org.tr/genel/bizden\\_detay.php?kod=5088&tipi=9](http://www.tmmob.org.tr/genel/bizden_detay.php?kod=5088&tipi=9) and [www.mo.org.tr/belgedocs/TOKI-rapor-2.pdf](http://www.mo.org.tr/belgedocs/TOKI-rapor-2.pdf).
3. See. [http://www.spo.org.tr/genel/bizden\\_detay.php?kod=3941&tipi=4&sube=0](http://www.spo.org.tr/genel/bizden_detay.php?kod=3941&tipi=4&sube=0).
4. See. TMOBB Chamber of Civil Engineers TOKİ Report, 2008.
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# Trade unions and deunionization during ten years of AKP rule

Any discussion of trade union organization, union rights and problems of the working class in Turkey inevitably paints a bleak, gloomy picture. Union rights and freedoms have always been at the very bottom of the rights and freedoms agenda in the Turkish Republic –not just for the last ten years but during its entire history. The collective rights of workers (unionization, collective bargaining, and collective action including strikes) were at certain periods completely outlawed, and at others recognized on paper yet very restricted in actual practice. With the exception of the period from 1960-1980, it would be accurate to say that union rights were systematically disregarded or violated throughout the 90 years of republican history.<sup>1</sup>

How did trade union rights fare in the last ten years (2002-2012) during which Justice and Development Party (AKP) have been holding the reins of power with discourses of and claims to “democratization”, “civilian rule” and “harmonization with the EU”? How did trade union density and collective bargaining coverage evolve? What were the key developments in the legislation and practice of union rights and freedoms?

In the post-2002 period of single party rule by AKP, trade union rights were seen to suffer a considerable meltdown. The results of this development are striking in both qualitative (legislation, practices, social-political impact) and quantitative (unionization, collective bargaining coverage) terms. Currently the trade union density in Turkey is much lower than they were in the decade following the military coup of September 12th, 1980.

## Trade union density: the worst in the OECD

It is evident that there is immense disparity between the official figures and the actual state of affairs as regards Turkish unionization rates. Trade union data is released by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (ÇSGB). However, the unionization rates featured in the statistics released by the ministry are very controversial.<sup>2</sup>

According to the trade union statistics released by the ministry from January 1984 till July 2009, the Turkish unionization rate varied between 51% and 69%. According to the July 2009 data, the latest made available by the ministry, there are 5.4 million workers covered by social security, as well as 3.2 million unionized workers, which in turn corresponds to an overall unionization rate of 59.9%. These figures, which are way higher than the EU average and almost all EU countries except Scandinavian nations, do not

accurately represent the reality on the ground.

The unconvincingness of the trade union statistics published by the ministry necessitates recourse to other means to determine unionization rates. One such method is calculating the ratio of workers under collective bargaining coverage to the total workforce. This method is used by ILO in its international statistics on unionization, as well as in the general literature on industrial relations.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Collective Bargaining Coverage and Actual Unionization Rates, 1998-2010**

Year	Total Number of Workers (thousand)	Collective Bargaining Coverage (thousand) (*)	Actual Trade Union Density %
1988	7.170	1.590	22,2
1990	7.224	1.433	19,8
1995	8.551	1.257	14,7
2000	10.485	1.049	10,0
2005	11.436	899	7,8
2010	13.762	786	5.7

(\*) The four-year average of workers covered by collective bargaining schemes

Source: Calculated from Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) Household Workforce Database and Ministry of Labor and Social Security's Labor Statistics.

We reach the following results once we include all salaried workers earning salary, wage or allowance, in line with the method proposed by ILO: The number of workers covered by collective bargaining schemes, which stood at 1.6 million in 1988, has been falling ever since to reach 750-800 thousand in 2010. In parallel, the trade union density was seen to drop from the order of 22% to 6% in the same period (Table 1). In the 2000s, unionization rate has thus fallen from 10% to below 6%. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that the picture is even gloomier for private sector workers. According to the ministry's statistics for the year 2011, only 370 thousand private sector workers enjoy collective bargaining coverage.<sup>4</sup> The unionization rate in the private sector is estimated at 3.5%, which represents an incredibly low level.<sup>5</sup> The Turkish unionization rate in the 2000s is thus lower than it was back in the post-coup period of the 1980s, or during the union-bashing backlash of the 1950s. Basically, Turkey's unionization rate has hit its lowest level in the entire multi-party era.

Due to the reasons mentioned above, OECD



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considers Turkey's official unionization statistics unreliable. OECD has opted for the method presented by Çelik and Lordoğlu (2006) to calculate the unionization rate for 2010 at 5.9%.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 2: Trade Union Density in OECD Countries, 2002-2011 (%)**

	2002	2010/2011	Değişim
Turkey	9.5	5.9	-38
USA	12.8	11.3	-11
Mexico	13.9	13.2	-5
Chile	13.3	15.0	12
Spain	16.0	15.9	-1
Netherlands	21.0	18.2	-13
Germany	23.5	18.5	-21
Japan	20.3	19.0	-6
New Zealand	22.2	20.8	-6
UK	29.3	25.8	-12
Austria	35.2	28.1	-20
Canada	30.3	28.8	-5
Italy	33.8	35.1	4
Ireland	36.1	35.6	-2
Belgium	50.9	52.0	2
Norway	54.5	54.6	0
Sweden	77.3	67.7	-12
Denmark	73.2	68.8	-6
Finland	73.5	70.0	-5
OECD Average	19.6	17.5	-11

Source: OECD.Stat (3 November 2012)

According to the OECD statistics presented in Table 2, Turkey is the OECD nation with the lowest unionization rate, at 5.9%, and the Turkish unionization rate fell by 38% between 2002 and 2011. In other words, Turkey not only also holds the last place in unionization rates among OECD countries, but it is also the OECD's deunionization champion.

This drop in unionization stands in stark contrast with the rapid growth of the material and demographic base of trade unions in Turkey. Both the aggregate salaried workforce and the number of workers with social security have grown rapidly in the last ten years. The number of salaried workers (eligible for union membership) went up from 10.5 million in 2000 to 14.9 million in 2011. The demographic base of unionization thus expanded by 42%. Despite this expansion, however, the unionization rate slipped from 10% to below 6%. In the industrial relations and social policy literature, this phenomenon is unscrupulously qualified as "deunionization". Deunionization in Turkey increases in systematic fashion, as a result of which the number of employees covered by unions and collective bargaining schemes falls rapidly.

### Anti-union legislation and deunionization

How to explain this rampant deunionization? Does it suffice to say that unionization rates fall across the world, and that Turkey is simply taking its share? Would such a reasoning satisfactorily explain the dramatic

deunionization in Turkey? It is indeed correct that unionization rates display a downward trend all over the world. Nonetheless the rate of deunionization in Turkey is more than thrice the OECD average. In the last ten years, whereas OECD countries witnessed a fall of 11% in their unionization rates, Turkey saw its rate drop by 38%. OECD has an average unionization rate of 17.5% against Turkey's less than 6%. This worrisome drop cannot be explained away simply with reference to the worldwide trend. In Turkey, there are additional negative factors at play which further accelerate the deunionization process.

Undoubtedly, owing to the economic and social policy overhaul, and rise of neoliberalism from the early 1970s onwards, the contraction of the public sector, privatizations, increasing share of the service sector in total employment, out-sourcing of numerous business processes by large companies, downsizing firms, expansion of flexible/unregulated and non-standard types of work have translated into deunionization in Turkey, just like across the world. In addition to the abovementioned factors, however, there are also conditions specific to Turkey which push deunionization to alarming levels and tend to create a virtually union-free system of industrial relations.

The Turkish labor relations legislation (in particular the legislation on collective labor relations) is one of the foremost reasons underlying deunionization. The industrial relations provisions of the 1982 Constitution, a brainchild of the September 12th military coup, and the Law on Trade Unions (No. 2821) and the Law on Collective Bargaining (No. 2822) legislated directly by the military junta were pretty much in line with the demands of the Turkish Confederation of Employers' Associations (TİSK). One of the most striking aspects of trade union regulations in the post-1980 era is the wholesale restriction of union activities. Even as trade unions voiced their protest against such measures by the September 12th regime, employers' associations could hardly conceal their contentment.<sup>7</sup>

Since long years, various supervisory bodies of the ILO have been emphasizing that the Laws No. 2821 and No. 2822 violate international norms as well as two ILO conventions concerning organizing and collective union rights (ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection the Right to Organise and ILO Convention No. 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining). In its various reports, ILO Committee of Experts stated that the current unionization rights in Turkey are in contradiction with ILO norms on various points, and urged the government to take immediate action. Similar criticisms were voiced by the European Union in its Turkey Progress Reports for many years.

The trade union legislation created in the wake of the military coup raises huge barriers to organization. Workers are obliged to register with a public notary before becoming a trade union member; trade unions have to overcome a 10% threshold in the given economic activity (sector) and a 50%+1 threshold in enterprises so as to be eligible for collective bargaining; and the system of authorization for collective bargaining is on the whole anti-democratic – all of which are factors that effectively block organizing. On the other hand, owing to the absence of an efficient job security scheme against layoffs related to union



membership, the dismissal of union members is a widespread practice.

The most critical regulation concerning unionization is the system of union authorization for collective bargaining.<sup>8</sup> It is the Ministry of Labor and Social Security which decides whether a trade union passes the said thresholds for economic activity (sector) and enterprise. In this context, the ministry tends to make partisan choices and favors trade unions close to the government. However, an even more critical issue is that, once the employer or a rival trade union files an objection against the pre-authorization approved by the ministry, the entire collective bargaining process comes to a grinding halt. Lawsuits on bargaining authorization tend to last for years on end, and the trade union cannot take any action in the concerned enterprise during the lawsuit. The employers thus utilize such lawsuits as a measure against unionization, and dismiss union

According to the OECD statistics, Turkey is the OECD nation with the lowest trade union density, at 5.9%, and the Turkish unionization rate fell by 38% between 2002 and 2011. In other words, Turkey is the OECD's deunionization champion.

members or oblige them to resign. This authorization system, which raises a huge barrier before trade union organization, was maintained in the new Law on Trade Unions and Collective Bargaining (STİSK) signed into law by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on October 18th, 2012.

The Turkish labor legislation does not provide effective protection, or job security against layoffs related to union membership. Lawsuits tend to last very long, and the law does not oblige the employer to reemploy dismissed workers. Besides, the monetary compensation against layoffs related to union membership is far from dissuasive. In other words, an employer keen on stemming unionization can get his way by simply paying the price. On the other hand, the recently approved Law on Trade Unions and Collective Bargaining abolishes the compensation for layoffs related to unionization in enterprises with less than 30 workers and for workers with less than six months of seniority, which correspond to roughly 50% of the entire workforce.

### Diversification of union-busting strategies

While unionization fell sharply during AKP rule, Turkish employers continued to enhance their union-busting techniques. The top reason behind the weakening of trade unions is diverse anti-union strategies deployed by Turkish employers. A report brings together such 41 union-busting strategies utilized more and more frequently in recent years. The most prominent ones among these strategies are the following:<sup>9</sup>

- Laying off union members and employing new workers to deprive the trade union of its collective bargaining authorization
- Planting informants among the workforce to monitor and stem unionization activities

- Urging imams of the mosques frequented by the workers to preach against trade unions
- Capitalizing on relations of kinship and townsmanship to drive home the message that union membership is tantamount to betrayal to the employer, and thus oppressing the workforce
- Rekindling conflicts of political ideology, religion, ethnicity etc. among workers to divide them
- Offering non-salary payments and assistance to workers in order to prevent them from unionizing
- Obliging workers to sign documents which read "I shall not become a union member" or to sign promissory notes serving the same purpose
- Making use of informal employment or sub-contractor companies to completely eradicate any chance of organizing
- Using methods such as physical violence, gunpoint threat and kidnapping towards leading workers and union organizers
- Bringing public notaries to the workplace or taking workers to public notaries by bus to oblige them to quit union membership
- Intimidating union members by changing their work post or assigning them to harder tasks
- Filing an application to change the official economic activity (sector) of the enterprise or an application against union authorization to cause lags in union organization.
- Changing the company's trade name or replacing the current enterprise with another on paper to prevent the trade union from obtaining authorization
- Obliging workers to resign from their current union and to become members of employer-dominated trade unions
- Breaking the resistance of workers struggling for union membership by deploying police, gendarmerie, or thugs
- Refusing to reinstall union members who return to the workplace after winning a reemployment lawsuit
- Applying pressure on unionized women via their husbands or families to oblige them to resign from the trade union; obliging unionized pregnant workers and mothers to work overtime to dissuade them from unionization; physically or verbally harassing unionized women workers
- Creating blacklists of unionized workers to prevent them from finding a job in the future

The spread of sub-contractors in both the public and private sector and the rise of precarious and flexible work are yet other drivers of deunionization. It is well-documented that precarious and flexible work hampers organizing efforts. Faruk Çelik, the Minister of Labor and Social Security, states that recourse to sub-contractors practically makes it impossible for workers to unionize. According to data released by his ministry, Turkish sub-contractor companies employ 586 thousand workers in the public sector and 419 thousand workers in the private sector, totaling over one million. The same data indicates that sub-contractors are most prevalent in the public sanitation services sector (417 thousand workers) and the private construction sector (318 thousand workers). The top public agencies that benefit from the services of sub-contractors are municipalities (36%) state economic enterprises (14%) and higher education institutions (4%). It is also indicated that a total of 4.5 million



workers are employed in the 27 EU member nations.<sup>10</sup> The immense scope of the Turkish sub-contracting sector is striking, as revealed by this data.

### What kind of unions does AKP have in mind?

In the period from 2002 onwards, AKP produced landslides in elections and established single-party governments. In terms of economic policy, AKP governments stuck to the neoliberal approach of previous governments, and established a firm hegemony in various sectors of social and political life. This hegemony can be observed in industrial relations and trade union organization, too. A large part of the trade union movement came under the influence of the party in power, similar to the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>11</sup> It becomes easier to account for this influence once we take into account that public sector employees (workers and public employees) still make up a large majority of union members.

Most large-scale strike actions were postponed during AKP rule. Other types of resistance and action, on the other hand, were vehemently criticised by the prime minister himself. Public employees were denied their right to strike; far from it, the government strived to expand the scope of strike bans. In the face of the power and prominence that AKP reached in all echelons of the state mechanism, the trade union movement suffered a serious loss of self-confidence. During its ten years in government, AKP succeeded in establishing a forced harmony in industrial relations. The absence of a political dynamic which could unite the union movement under its umbrella was another factor leading to cowering by trade unions.

It must be emphasized that not just a new political regime but also a whole new work regime has been installed during AKP rule. Although AKP basically continues neoliberal policies initiated by previous governments, the party demonstrates much stronger resolve in their implementation. Precarious and flexible work started during Motherland Party (ANAP) rule (1983-1991), and started to become institutionalized in the 2000s. In previous periods, governments had contented themselves with rendering the labour legislation more flexible; in the 2000s, however, governments started to legislate laws legalizing precarious and flexible work. Accordingly, the first decade of 2000s represents a significant rupture with previous work regimes. The old work regime which was initiated with the Constitution of 1961 and the Laws No. 274 and No. 275 was dealt a huge blow with the coup d'état of 1980; however, its all-out liquidation has been undertaken in the 2000s.

AKP governments are keen on bringing back government-controlled or “symbiotic” unionism which has numerous examples in Turkish history. There are various present day cases in point, the most striking of which can be seen among the unions of public employee. One direct intervention to the internal functioning of public employee unions is the payment of union membership fees by the state. Although this practice, which dates from 2005, was overruled by the Constitutional Court, it continues under the name “collective bargaining premium”. Yet another noteworthy development is the sharp rise in membership of a public employee confederation close to the government.

**Table 3: Public Employees' Miraculous Unionization Drive 2002-2012 (thousand)**

	2002	2012	Change %
<b>Memur-Sen</b>	42	650	1448
<b>Kamu-Sen</b>	329	418	27
<b>KESK</b>	262	240	-8
<b>Total</b>	633	1308	107

Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Security

As shown in Table 3, the total number of unionized public employees rose by 107% from 2002 till 2012. The trade union confederation Memur-Sen, which stands close to the government, expanded its membership by 1450% in ten years; in other words, the organization

The number of workers (eligible to become trade union members) went up from 10.5 million in 2000 to 14.9 million in 2011. The demographic base of unionization expanded by 42%. Despite this expansion, however, the union density slipped from 10% to below 6%. In the industrial relations and social policy literature, this phenomenon is unscrupulously qualified as “deunionization”.

achieved a 15-fold increase in membership. Kamu-Sen, a pro-nationalist confederation, increased its members by just 27%, whereas pro-left KESK's membership base diminished by 8%. These figures paint a picture rarely seen in trade union history. Despite the meltdown suffered by unions across the board, one particular confederation has miraculously (!) managed to boost its membership base.

How to explain the 15-fold growth of the membership base of a union close to the government, even as other unions fighting for the rights of public employees continue to lose clout? How can Memur-Sen create such a recruitment drive and still not be accepted as a member by ITUC nor ETUC? In fact, there is no veritable organizing success nor unionization drive behind this development. The key to Memur-Sen's success is symbiotic or government-controlled trade unionism. Memur-Sen's expansion depends on the mutual support between the confederation and the government. That is precisely the main explanation for its 15-fold growth under AKP rule.

Government-controlled and symbiotic trade unions are also prevalent among workers' trade unions. Workers are forced to resign from their current unions and become members of a confederation close to the government. Workers at Çay-Kur (the public tea processing company), Ministry of Forestry or the public news agency Anadolu Ajansı are brought under pressure to quit their unions and join those under the umbrella of the confederation Hak-İş. At Anadolu Ajansı, a number of employees resigned from Turkish Trade Union of Journalists (TGS) to establish Medya-İş, and later paid a visit to the Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, who is also their official



employer. During this visit Arınç made statements which laid bare the government's ideas about trade unions. Emphasizing that employees should refrain from ideology-based trade unionism, the Deputy Prime Minister stated:

The trade union confederation Memur-Sen, which stands close to the government in power, expanded its membership by 1450% in ten years; in other words, the organization achieved a 15-fold increase in membership. Kamu-Sen increased its members by just 27%, whereas KESK's membership base diminished by 8%. These figures paint a picture rarely seen in trade union history. Despite the meltdown suffered by unions across the board, one particular confederation has miraculously (!) managed to boost its membership base.

"We shall be extremely pleased to sign the next collective agreement towards better employee rights with Medya-İş, God willing. Trade unions should not be based on ideologies."<sup>12</sup> A cabinet member (and employer) lecturing trade unionists from a public news agency under his control on organizing goes a long way to demonstrate the current state of trade unions in Turkey.

The new Law on Trade Unions and Collective Bargaining was yet another indication of the type of trade unionism approved by the AKP government.<sup>13</sup> The law cannot be said to rest on a consensus among social parties. While the confederation Türk-İş objects to certain provisions, DİSK directs an all-out criticism to the entire text. In the same vein, the Trade Union Coalition Platform, a dissident body inside Türk-İş, voices strong objections to the basic premises of the law. In fact, Türk-İş and DİSK asked the President to veto the law. Likewise, ITUC and ETUC, which count Türk-İş, DİSK and Hak-İş among their member unions, also demanded the President to use his veto power.

The draft of the new law was heavily criticized by ILO, which emphasized that the text was far from meeting the requirements of ILO conventions (in particular ILO Conventions No. 87 and No. 98). Despite all these criticisms, the draft has not been revised by the Grand Assembly; in fact, even further restrictions were added to it. Large employers' associations (TOBB -Turkish Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges- and TUSKON -Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists- among others) put their stamp on the drafting and approval phases.

The new Turkish trade union code not only maintains numerous restrictions on organizing introduced by the September 12th military coup and the Laws No. 2821 and No. 2822 in effect since 1983, but goes even further in raising barriers to trade unionism. The unionization thresholds practically prevent the practice of free trade unionism. The law discriminates among different unions. The biggest problem in the code is its continuation of the current collective bargaining authorization system. On the other hand, the code violates international norms since it stipulates numerous limitations to the right to strike action and grants the government the authority to postpone strikes. The new law stands in sharp contrast to the ILO Conventions No. 87 and 98, decisions of ILO supervisory organs, and the revised European Social Charter.

### Between deunionization and symbiotic trade unionism

Turkey's ten years under AKP rule correspond to a drive of deunionization rather than unionization. Trade union density have dropped to its lowest level in Turkish history, and trade unions have seen their social and political influence and activity diminish significantly. The neoliberal economic policies and conservative social values embraced by the AKP government, and the anti-union sentiment of the emerging business groups which create its social base, are the main factors underlying AKP's animosity towards trade unions rights and freedoms. Nonetheless, it must be stated that AKP opts for a strategy of co-optation of unions into government-controlled and symbiotic organizations, rather than one of total exclusion. Although reluctant to see a growth in union activity, AKP strives to bring present and potential union organization under its own hegemony.

### Footnotes

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2. Çelik, Aziz and Kuvvet Lordoğlu (2006), "Türkiye'de Resmi Sendikalaşma İstatistiklerinin Sorunları", Çalışma ve Toplum Dergisi, 9:11-30.
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4. ÇSGB, 2011 Çalışma Hayatı İstatistikleri, [http://www.csgeb.gov.tr/csgbPortal/csgb.portal?page=resmi\\_katki](http://www.csgeb.gov.tr/csgbPortal/csgb.portal?page=resmi_katki), October 30th, 2012.
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# The right to resist against the poverty and oppression

*"The fact that there is poverty all around led me to believe that God is not rich. He will likely prove himself but I guess he is having financial difficulties."*  
(Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*)

If we analyze the last twenty-five years in terms of the intensification of antagonistic interclass conflicts and its reflection in the division of assets and revenues, as well as the centralization or distribution of the government power, the ensuing result will probably be the increase in poverty on the one hand and the rise in the injustice of oppressive regimes on the other. While the neo-liberal policies augment the sovereignty of the global capital, the poverty is intensified in parallel with the policies for impoverishment, and aside from the development and enrichment of the material and spiritual integrity of the human existence, even its preservation is under critical risk. On the other hand, in parallel to these developments, there are deviations from the bourgeois legal order through the laws to fight terrorism, which are considered to be the constitution of the global state of emergency, extending the scope of oppression through the practice of "law of war against the enemy" implemented on the resistant poor and the resistant "other". It is a world of poverty and oppression and in this world for the hungry, the poor, and those claiming their rights justice seems to be a daydream.

In philosophical terms, nothingness, having no existential value, reflects the non-existence, as the opposite of existence in general, and those existing individually in specific. Poverty is understood to be not as a subject but an object / passive / determined, who do not determine their own lives, who cannot have a say in their lives and decide of their own volition, and who are deprived of the necessary equipment and tools for this purpose.

## Startling statistics

Poverty, in general, expresses the deprivation of material resources, and frequently cultural resources, accumulations of aesthetic existence that are necessary for the cerebral development and expansion of one's horizon. Therefore, it is wrong to perceive poverty only as hunger or an inability to access sufficient food for nutrition. Human being is a being with needs, first of all nutrition and many others, such as clothing, accommodation, education, health, infrastructure, culture, common life, self-procreation, reproduction and what not. However, as a result of the impoverishment strategies of the global neo-liberal policies poverty reached a formidable level in the last

twenty-five years and has become the crucial problem of today's world.

Every year almost 18 million people die at an early age due to reasons related to poverty. This statistic equals to one third of the total number of human deaths. Every day 50 thousand people, of whom 34 thousand are children below the age of five, die out of reasons related to poverty. Poverty has acquired a universal dimension as a global problem as it does not make a distinction between developed or poorly developed countries. In today's world 10 percent of the world's population gets more than 70 percent of the total world income. According to the 2003 World Bank Report, while the income of the 20 most rich countries was 18 times more than the income of the poorest 20 countries in 1960, the rate doubled itself to 37 times in the year 2000. Moreover, in the last 30 years, the 20 percent of the population who got the highest share of the world's income has increased from 70 percent to 85 percent while the share of the 20 percent of the population has decreased from 2,3 percent to 1,4 percent.

Turkey, occupying an awful rank in the international comparisons in terms of poverty scales, has its place among countries where the revenues are distributed in an extremely inequitable manner. In short, poverty is one of the crucial problems of Turkey. According to the results of the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) research on poverty, 381 thousand people were at the starvation threshold whereas 13 million 108 thousand people could not afford the expenditures of food and non-food in 2007. Almost 10 million 186 thousand people have the potential to consume under the relative starvation threshold.

Despite the growth rate realized after the year 2001 in Turkey, no significant improvement in the income inequality and poverty has clearly put forth the incapacity to solve these problems automatically through the growth in the market system. Another important factor in the maintenance of the problems of income inequity and poverty in Turkey lies under the government's persistent avoidance from social policies constitutes inasmuch as the awry capitalist system's laws of political economy.

## How is poverty defined?

The phenomenon of consumption is grounded in the definition of poverty imposed by dominant global institutions, notably the World Bank, and also parallel institutions in Turkey. This approach, attempting to overlook it as a deficiency in the system, or more precisely trying to ignore it, is predicated upon



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defining poverty in the reverse order, or defining the social status of individuals in their given communities by evaluating the results. Therefore, in order to resist the prevalence of this illusion, it is more apt to use the concept of impoverishment, instead of the concept of poverty, which expresses that the individual in poverty is transformed into a passive object and place it in the center of the problem for a better understanding. When the concept of impoverishment is placed in the center, it necessitates the evaluation of the historical development of the social structure concerning a specific society, and its production, distribution, and consumption relationships. All the definitions based on consumption are purely consumption centered understandings cloud how the system functions.

In order to understand the reasons for poverty, it is necessary to analyze the current sovereign production, distribution and consumption relationships and their active reflections in the pattern of law, and all these networks' conflict with human rights. It is here that we are faced with the contradiction between rights and the law. The World Bank and its parallel institutions mask the system's impoverishment policies by composing an artificial literature on poverty and contribute to the mechanisms, which reproduce the current ones in a repetitive manner. They are attempting to cover up the presence of the dilemma between the law of the global capital and global demand for rights. On the one hand, they monopolize every kind of information and the production of information concerning poverty and on the other hand they try to prevent the understanding of the real causes of poverty. Briefly, they exert themselves in order to cloud the truth that the real cause of poverty is the product of the inner turmoil of capitalism. The World Bank confronts the distributive, participative and socialist justice projects with the references of social paternalism, social liberalism, social corporatism and social radicalism, however, their real purpose is laid under these guises, which are opportunity, safety and authorization policies. When the safety is positioned as the opposite of freedom, oppressive laws against demanding for rights, furthermore, the "law to fight the enemy" comes to the fore.

### People's right to become a subject

The right "to resist poverty and oppression" is a fundamental right and it is of great significance in terms of the human rights struggle. Actually, human beings are well accustomed to this right in the daily life struggle throughout centuries. It has been incorporated by some constitutions. As it was in the first American constitution, the aforementioned right is enunciated today in some South American countries (Brazil, Paraguay and Columbia) and some European countries (Portugal and Germany) as a constitutional norm. In the realm of social existence, the human being is a "being as a subject". From this point of view, "human rights" should have the function of rebelling against all the traps to prevent and hamper people from becoming a subject. Today anti-poverty and anti-freedom safety policies stand as a hindrance in truly making people subjects. It should not be forgotten that human rights must not be perceived as a completed list of rights. On the basis of the right to become a subject, all the conditions hindering people to become subjects

should be struggled with and considered in a dynamic perspective. In today's Turkey, which is in the process of constructing a new constitution, the "right to resist poverty and oppression" should assume a normative position as a constitutional right. The importance of this right is more crucial today than ever. Against the dominance of property, instead of the right to property, concepts such as the "right to exist", and the "right to develop one's existence" should be annotated.

The very definition of the concept of human rights is directed to the source of being an individual. Legal rights use the law while rights based on a contract use the contract as their reference point respectively. Human rights, on the other hand, use humanity and the human nature openly as the reference point. These rights are needed not only for life, but also for the respectability of life and human dignity. Human rights are far beyond the existing conditions. More than what the humanity has achieved so far, it determines the evolution of the demand of rights concerning how people should live. Today poverty does not only constitute an impediment for the life quality but also for the respectability of human life and dignity.

Since the phenomenon of sovereignty has first stepped onto the stage of history, people's resistance against the sovereign power for their rights and the sovereign power's tendency to draw up rights with technical games by grinding and emptying them have always indicated to a tragic state of conflict. The extreme point that the predisposition to demand rights has reached, rightfully and inevitably, constitutes revolutions and insurrections whereas the extreme point the sovereign powers' inclination for suppression has arrived is to comprise oppressive regimes and produce the law of war against the enemy as a poison that infiltrates into the bourgeois legal order today. This is, in a sense, insanity of the Hegelian understanding of state. In the present state of things, Marx has proven himself to be right once again: "Every kind of state is a rejection of freedom."<sup>1</sup>

As a result, "people are going to be subjects either as a result of their own achievements or it will never and ever be realized."<sup>2</sup> People will be able to constitute themselves as subjects only through downgrading the external determination of their "selves" as living beings fused completely with the natural reality. That is, people can constitute themselves as subjects as long as they reduce their position as objects. In other words, the more human beings change themselves from being objects, the more they will recover from being passive and externally determined and become the rightful subject.

Wall Street demonstrations and those in Spain, who once revolted against the Franco regime, come out to the streets again today is a proof of the fact that the right to resist against poverty and oppression is the only way out in terms of becoming subjects. In short, it is the global insurrection against the state of emergency of global capital.

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### Footnotes

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# Turkey-EU relations: What does Turkey want?

“What does Turkey want?” is a question one comes across frequently in discussions with foreign politicians and experts on Turkey-EU relations: Namely, “Does Turkey want to become a EU member or not?” Until a couple of years ago, we generally strived to answer this question by bringing up the history of Turkey-EU relations, the disillusionment following the negotiations, the Cyprus question and the Annan Plan, and finally the indecisiveness of the EU. In this article, however, I will go off the beaten track and try to draw your attention to other dimensions of the problem, in line with the question “Kurdish problem or Turkish problem?” which forms the cover subject of this issue of Perspectives.

First of all, when foreigners pose the question “What does Turkey want?”, it gives the impression that there is a clear answer to the question “What does the EU want?” It is common knowledge that this is far from the case. Although it is known that the EU wants a close relationship with Turkey, it is debated since the beginning of talks whether the EU wants to grant Turkey full membership. It is well known that, since the very start of negotiations, Germany has tried to keep the process open-ended as regards membership status, and continues to do so. Hesitation rather than enthusiasm has marked this common journey from its very beginning.

Various groups in Turkey, too, voiced their reservations and doubts in the same period; however, when the “dominant” side of such an unequal relationship expressed its hesitation, the Turkish side felt humiliated and belittled, which triggered reactions of anger and disillusionment. This feeling of humiliation weakened the public enthusiasm for joining the EU, and likewise, the motives underlying Turkey’s EU bid were given a back seat.

Even though EU membership negotiations have created various hopes and expectations in diverse sectors of Turkey and although it remains unclear whether the public in general is for an eventual EU membership or not, the hesitations of the “dominant” side have resulted in a counter reaction. In other words, taking into consideration the current power balance, the reservations voiced by Turkey and the hesitations expressed by the EU about Turkey’s membership do not have the same weight.

## From “Brussels criteria” to “Ankara criteria”

In reaction to this perceived humiliation and the EU’s attitude which could be summarized as “if you want the membership, you must internalize our values and standards”, the Turkish government started to talk about “Ankara criteria”. The aim was to convey to the society the message that “Turkey wants to democratize and to continue these negotiations, not because of EU pressure, but out of its own will”, so as to portray Turkey-EU relations as more balanced. As such, at least in discourse, the government replaced “Brussels criteria” with “Ankara criteria”. Meanwhile, we must question the weak progress towards meeting these “Ankara criteria”, owing to Turkey’s defiant attitude. The beginning of the talks and the buzz around “Ankara criteria” had created a certain enthusiasm and hope for democratization, and specific expectations in the public of Turkey. However, as EU had second thoughts on Turkey’s membership and Turkey’s “Ankara criteria” remained on paper, the democratic reform process lost steam and eventually came to a deadlock. It should be noted that, right from the beginning, it was not very realistic to expect that the EU would drive the establishment of a democratic political system in Turkey. The wavering of powerful EU member countries weakened Turkish demands for EU membership.

## “Strong Turkey”, weak democracy

As the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government and its political base gained more power, the ongoing transformation of the society of Turkey gained further momentum. The society of Turkey seems to be at the crossroads of two different social viewpoints or models. There is a fierce ideological and social struggle between these viewpoints as to who is more modern and reformist. The AKP government claims to represent the new generation, the new epoch, and a strong and self-confident Turkey in its relations with the world. It strives to portray the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) as a historical relic which cannot represent the future of the Turkey. On the other hand, those against the AKP’s conservative stance seem to be less and less tolerant. Even now, it is evident that AKP’s “Strong Turkey” motto is on a collision course with the concept of democratic plurality in the long run. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that



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the democratic reforms discussed in the first AKP government (2002-2007) are a thing of the past. Instead AKP presents “strong leader (or leadership) for strong Turkey” as a most natural necessity. As a result, the public of Turkey witnesses a struggle for hegemony. The AKP government, which used to represent a reform drive, has now become a stumbling block on the path to a democratic society and rights.

This situation has a direct effect on the government’s foreign policy and naturally on its EU relations. The Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu’s policy of “zero problems” with neighbors and wish to shape Turkey’s foreign relations according to its interests, gain importance in this context. Whereas

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the “Strong Turkey” discourse was initially aimed at domestic policy, the Turkish government has started to believe that it applies to foreign policy, too. Due to the fact that Turkey came out of the international economic crisis relatively unscathed and preserved its stability whereas the EU nations have been in crisis, the AKP government came to believe its “Strong Turkey” slogan wholeheartedly.

Nonetheless, owing to the Arab spring of reforms and the resulting uncertainty in the Middle East, Turkey has once again gained importance in the eyes of the USA and the EU. American foreign policy experts have repeatedly told us in our various

meetings that they are well aware of Turkey’s crisis of democracy, however, due to strategic reasons, it is not the right time for them to insist on democratic reforms. The EU, for its part, cannot muster enough strength to demand democratic reforms from Turkey, which now feels stronger. The European Commission’s 2012 Progress Report, which emphasized Turkey’s significant democratic deficit, was largely ignored by the Turkish government. Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Egemen Bağış’s reaction to the Progress Report was succinct: “Turkey will take into account its own year-end report”.

### Turkey’s road map

In this context the AKP congress, which reverberated abroad, did not come as a surprise. In his speech longer than two hours, Prime Minister Erdoğan did not even mention the EU. This caught the attention of the European public opinion, and lead to questions such as “Does Turkey renounce on its EU bid? Does it intend to head for the East?”

I believe that in today’s “Strong Turkey” discourse, the EU does not enjoy the privileged place it used to. One does not have to draw the conclusion that Turkey has renounced on its EU membership project. The Turkish government strives to increase its influence in the Middle East and the region. Nevertheless, it has also realized that numerous factors independent of Turkey play a role in this effort, as a result of recent developments in Arab countries, particularly Syria. Accordingly, the AKP government is aware that it is at least not the right time to abandon its EU bid and seems to have shelved the issue. Turkey is pleased to see the EU toothless, and in this conjuncture, the government – just like the EU in fact– chooses to postpone critical decisions and continue mutual relations at a lower level, rather than disrupt them. Coming back to the question “What does Turkey want?”, in this period, Turkey sees no risk in continuing relations with an EU which wields no political power in terms of reform demands, and in domestic politics capitalizes on this occasion to rebuild the image of a “Strong Turkey”.



# Cultural policies on urban level: İstanbul model

On October 1, 2012 at the beginning of the third legislative year of the twenty-fourth period of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM), President Abdullah Gül in his inaugural speech indicated that the due date for the new constitution was this very term. He also emphasized that making the new constitution was the only way to prove that the TBMM was the sole ground for representing all the colors and tendencies of politics.<sup>1</sup> In the following days the negotiations focused on local governments under two headlines: bringing forward the local elections from March 2014 to autumn 2013 and the recently prepared Metropolitan Law Draft. We ought to discuss why the local governments and metropolitans are so important in such a heavy agenda including the writing of new constitution which still maintains its urgency. Thus this article aims to discuss the changing metropolitan municipality conception and its effect on the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) policies by looking at the practices of İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB) from a cultural perspective.

## Why metropolitans are so important?

The role of local governments, which is crucial for democratization, has always been reduced to providing services because of being caught between centrality/locality and unitarity/locality dualities along the history of Turkey. In course of time their responsibilities have begun to include the areas such as health, culture, social relief and environmental problems. The first legislation, related to the municipalities was enacted in 1930 under Republican rule.<sup>2</sup> After the 1980 military coup d'état when the economical, administrative and resource problems of the metropolitans intensified, the creation of metropolitan municipalities were recommended.<sup>3</sup> Then with 1984 dated and 3030 numbered Act of Metropolitan Municipality, firstly İstanbul and then Ankara and İzmir were declared as "metropolitans". In 2004 the number of metropolitan municipalities amounted to 16. With the newly proposed act, 13 more metropolitan municipalities are planned to be created.

AKP attempted to make a series of public administration reforms after winning the 2002 general elections. The municipalities, particularly, the metropolitan municipalities that have become wealthier with the aid of new acts and resources, had an entrepreneurial and competitive identity compared with the past as a consequence of these acts.

The new draft being debated on is planning to increase the authorities of metropolitans, and abolish the special provincial administrations and community

municipalities.<sup>4</sup> However, the problems defined in the beginning have not been solved on the part of democratization yet. Thus the local governments are still dependent on central governments for the delegation of authorities and utilizable budget.

## Why İstanbul?

First of all, in Turkey metropolitan government means a powerful mayor. The analysis performed by Sema Erder and Nihal İncioğlu on İBB for the period of 1984-2004 indicates that mayors are at the top the power structure of the metropolitan municipalities and also predominant in decision making process.<sup>5</sup> Thus the personality and charisma of the mayor candidates are crucial both before and after the elections.

While we discuss Turkey's being dubbed as "Erdoğan's country" in the international community.<sup>6</sup> We should reflect on the process that Tayyip Erdoğan began to build his leadership and visibility with the help of his mayor identity after winning the İstanbul municipality elections in 1994. The ongoing consistency under the rule of Welfare Party (RP, 1994-1998) – Virtue Party (FP, 1999-2004) – Justice and Development Party (AKP, 2002...), is dependent on following the municipality approach and vision of Erdoğan. Therefore, it is important to analyze İBB step by step since it is always been given as an example indicating the municipality conception and repertoire of AKP in current debates on local governments.

## Social municipal work (1994-1998)

The unexpected victory of RP in 1994 by winning the local elections in many cities has been explained as the success of broad based organization of the party in localities. The origin of this approach named as "social municipal work" afterwards, depends on the experience of National Salvation Party who had won the mayor elections in the cities like Konya, Sivas and Van in 1989. The experience known as "Islamist municipality model" in the Turkish public opinion has the objective of empowering the municipalities in terms of their authority and –usually through market relations– increasing the resources.

RP almost acting "like a social relief and solidarity organization" received support particularly from ghettos and the poor in the city centers. RP extended its base with an effective grassroots politics and gained the support of the voters through the campaigns carried "face to face". Despite the leader focused media campaigns of other political parties, the ongoing performance to meet the needs for food, coal, medicine and funeral services extending beyond election periods



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were the effective factors of the triumph.<sup>7</sup>

In this period most of the cultural and educational services were performed by the Culture and Welfare Department of the municipality and İstanbul Cultural and Artistic Products Corporation, which has been called as Culture Corp in short. In 1996 when a unit with the mission of education was added to the Department of Human Resources, it began to be named as Department of Human Resources and Education. Obligations of this unit were giving grants to support education, supplying stationery to all primary and secondary schools in İstanbul, laying out school gardens and etc. Also İBB Arts and Vocational Training Courses (İSMEK) has been established. It has been observed that nationalist-conservative ideological construct had been dominating

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the policies of battling poverty, welfare program for poor, and educational and cultural services. In that period the necessary fund for the welfare program had been supplied by the help of the close relations the municipality constituted with certain foundations and institutions.<sup>8</sup>

In 1998 the mayor Erdoğan had to withdraw from duty before fulfilling his term because he had been sentenced. In one of his speeches Erdoğan explained his concept of local government and said “we began to work with a human focused serving concept, I succeeded to become the mayor of all.”<sup>9</sup> In another speech he said that in their term all belief and opinion groups had been served without any discrimination and implied “there is culture wherever human beings live, to impose only one culture as ‘an only possible culture’ is disregarding humanity”.<sup>10</sup> It can be remembered that in those years this type of multicultural democratization emphasis had an important role in AKP’s winning the general elections in 2002.

However, neither İstanbul nor its culture could take enough interest from this emphasis on democratization. In the book, *The Golden Years of İstanbul*, published by İBB, narrating the term of Erdoğan, the role of the culture was described as “to constitute İstanbul with its cultural and historical structure is to promote its multi-religious and multi-cultural life”. Erdoğan’s wishes and dreams were projected in his speeches as “The administration of the municipalities should be carried out with a function of state within a state”<sup>11</sup> is in fact the background of his determination he often

emphasized when he was the mayor of İstanbul. He had also emphasized the same idea with the phrase “İstanbul was here before the Turkey had been established”.<sup>12</sup>

### The mega transformation (1998-2004)

In the period of 1998-2004, in a sort of transition period, till the term of Kadir Topbaş, Ali Müfit Gürtuna, the deputy mayor when Erdoğan had been dismissed, became the mayor of İstanbul. He mainly carried out the projects outlined in the previous term. The first planning of visionary projects called as “İstanbul 2023” (the 100th year of the Republic) and “mega transformation projects” were designed in this term. Culturally the most easily remembered investment of this term was the construction and the opening of Miniature Turkey Park (Miniaturk). Many new activities (festivals for the conquest of İstanbul, International Tuning Pin Festival, Turkish World Modern Literature Days, Turkish World Stars, İstanbul-Tehran Miniature Meeting, Eurasia Conferences, The Light of the East-Tulip Documentary<sup>13</sup>) dominated by the approach of “awareness of being a native of İstanbul and city culture” and the Turk-Islam synthesis, were performed in this term.

### Global local governance (2004...)

The AKP-İBB alliance which was established when AKP came to power in 2002 and consolidated with the growing success in 2004 local elections, is still in place on. On the other hand, this has both prevented the occurrence of problems between the central and local governments in previous terms and also “enabled the elites of İstanbul and the bourgeoisie to make an urban alliance with the political elites” as economist Çağlar Keyder has emphasized.<sup>14</sup> Since the alliance has expanded, it is evident that the objectives determined in İBB in 1994 are still effective, and the local government concept of AKP has been settled. This case legalizes the expansion of municipalities’ scope of duties. Ever after, the similar legal arrangements made by the government to smooth the path for the private sector were also made in favor of metropolitan and town municipalities. To make a reform on Turkey’s administration structure which has been claimed to be stagnant, 03.07.2005 dated 5393 numbered Municipality Act and 10.07.2004 dated 5216 numbered Metropolitan Municipality Act were put into force. With these acts, differing from the past, municipalities were authorized on new subjects like urban economy, expanding trade and urban transformation. In defense of these authorizations, they now advocated “not the effective administration of the institution but the empowerment of the institution to enable the effective administration of the cities”.<sup>15</sup> Thereby, the local governments like that of İstanbul, have always had the vision of being a global city but could not estimate how to do it and seeking new resources, were encouraged for entrepreneurship and competition.

### Enterprising mayor

Globalization offers new opportunities –to participate on the international arena and establish different collaborations– to the local governments.

It is noteworthy that Topbaş, the co-chairman of UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) since



2008, became the chairman by common consent as an unopposed candidate in November 2011. Topbaş said “İstanbul is one of the most popular cities on the international arena in recent years” to explain his election victory, and in some of his other speeches he emphasized that grand congresses, organizations and championships were being arranged in İstanbul. By asserting that “the performance and active diplomacy of our government and prime minister also increased and empowered Turkey’s perception on the international arena”, Topbaş emphasizes that they had the support of the prime minister.<sup>16</sup> He both tries to designate İstanbul as a global city and also links his success to the support of the government. This entrepreneur jargon which is nurtured by the literature on new ways of public administration and governance, and which never fails to pay respect for the relationships within the country and abroad, constitutes its relation with democracy in different publications of İBB by underlining “accessible, participant, and transparent management approach”.<sup>17</sup> However, we know that beyond only mentioning democracy, opening the channels and incorporating the nonparticipating is needed.

### Competitive city

The performance of the cities in competition determines which city with which characteristics would be global. Recently İBB, virtually the image promoter of İstanbul, sometimes calls İstanbul as a finance, congress and culture city. İBB leads to make İstanbul the center of attraction with the power gained by the help of the alliance on new legal arrangements and urban rent.

However, instead of certain priority or a target depending on city’s characteristics, various prescriptions with no perspective are being set forth. For example, İstanbul, European Capital of Culture (ECC) initiative, launched by 2010 Initiative Group, is noticing that İstanbul will be faced with basic structural changes as a result of privatization and comprehensive urban transformation projects. As a solution, they were recommending to provide the city inhabitants with culture and arts, and also use the participatory and actual cultural heritage to enrich the vision and lives of natives of İstanbul.<sup>18</sup> However, İstanbul, after being elected as ECC, centralization began and only in two years government and İBB began to lead the process. The role and vision of the civil initiative were constrained.

The ECC process not only provided local and international visibility to the rulers of İstanbul but also legitimized the plans and projects that would bring İstanbul on the agenda. Therefore, the first target of the İBB was to make İstanbul an “international congress center”. While the debates on Atatürk Cultural Center were going on, by the arrangements made on the actual infrastructure of İstanbul, two polemical congress centers were built. The area, where Lutfi Kırdar Exhibition Center, Cemal Reşit Rey Concert Hall and Muhsin Ertuğrul Stage are located as a part of Harbiye Valley, has been arranged as İstanbul Congress Center. It was opened in 2009, hosted the IMF and World Bank meeting. In this meeting, Erdoğan expressed his dream of making İstanbul a “financial center”, and informed that they would make a reconstruction by relocating not

only public and private financial institutions but also the other auditing institutions and foundations.<sup>19</sup>

Sütlüce Congress and Cultural Center renovation which had been gotten out to tender in Erdoğan’s mayoral term, was completed for the opening of İstanbul 2010 ECC. Erdoğan noted that the name of the Center was changed as Haliç (Golden Horn) Congress and Cultural Center and added: “İstanbul is in top twenty cities for congress tourism.”<sup>20</sup> It can be understood that the target is to attract more tourists. İBB is still supporting İstanbul’s touristic infrastructure by developing new attractive areas and serving for transportation and accommodation. Town municipalities, almost in a competition among themselves, are following the İBB which accepted and began to follow the leadership of central government.<sup>21</sup> As such, Fatih municipality pushes the limits in Balat after taking the leadership in the transformation of Sulukule, and Beyoğlu and have also become one of leaders with Tarlabaşı transformation project, and have Okmeydanı next in the list. All these projects and entrepreneurship competitions indicates economic aim.<sup>22</sup>

### What about the local government values?

The overall understanding that determines the relationship between the historical process and local governments are generally called “the basic values” of a local government. Freedom and autonomy, democracy and participation, equality and welfare, are the reference points that the politicians and social scientists use to measure the success, legitimacy and competence of the local governments.<sup>23</sup> The local governments are a composition of different areas such

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as; managerial –with the cost and trouble of being active in the boundaries where the central government also serves–, social –the effectiveness of local governments on social and economic development–, political– activating the democratic mechanisms and ensuring the people’s participation in administration. However, by imposing enterprising and competition mentioned above, the “efficiency” value becomes the sole aim.

Today, public administration proposes “new public management” in which the business administration approach is dominant, together with concept of “functional efficiency” instead of efficiency. The functional efficiency, described as “achieving the aims in the shortest time span, identifying the correct aims and priorities, resolving the problems on time” means “the capacity of meeting the expectations of political institutions, individuals and



groups in the political system".<sup>24</sup>

### Redistribution instead of equality and welfare

Local governments have the power of constituting an alternative to the central government, balance the increasing inequality and decreasing welfare, and to eliminate these problems organizing the production, distribution and consumption of the public services democratically. However, they seem to interpret redistribution which now means "to reallocate the money and economic resources in different ways", according to their priorities. The resources, which can be used for boosting employment, providing services to brush off poverty, producing social housing, are wasted for social

It should be reminded that the democratic contribution of decentralization means better access to the local government and the possibility to provide effective service by reaching an ideal balance between demands and resources.

reliefs that cause sustainable poverty.

The "social municipality" approach of the RP-FP-AKP municipalities which successively followed each other's footsteps since 1994 has been called as "redistribution". Putting forth redistribution instead of equality and welfare is to reestablish the equilibrium from the scratch. This discourse that brought AKP to power only favors its own electorate and alliances. A populist perspective viewing the locals only as voters or clients (functional efficiency!) falls short of an inclusive, culture-sensitive and pluralistic approach.

In such a context, discussing cultural policies may seem to be pointless. The debate, first on city theaters and then state theatres has been reduced to management and efficiency issues. The rights and needs for space and visibility of the artists have been ignored, censorship claims have been denied, and artists-as a productive sector of the society- have been reflected as trouble makers that fail to be effective and self-sacrificing. However, in nearly 100 metropolitan and town municipalities the contract and construction processes, the usage of open centers and their occupancy-emptiness rates, the cultural variety of their programs, are not questioned. There is no effort to enhance performance or efficiency in this sense. A management which is equipped with extended authority in the realm of advancing economy, trade and urban transformation, focuses on boosting economic capital production, instead of providing services. Unfortunately, the ongoing projects are "encouraging and deepening social diversity" instead of establishing the ideal balance between demands and resources.<sup>25</sup>

However, today several municipalities and most notably the metropolitan ones have been provided with relatively more authority and resources compared with the past, so as to supply them with swiftness and convenience while serving the inhabitants. Nevertheless, they should be urged to contribute to the social and economic development with the methods and resources they have developed for the production of these services. It should be reminded that the democratic contribution of decentralization means better access to the local government and the possibility to provide effective service by reaching an ideal balance between demands and resources.<sup>26</sup> This approach enables preserving local values and cultural pluralism because giving a little support for cultural production will be the primary contribution to perpetuate the urban culture.

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# Turkey's frailty of freedom of expression

**T**urkey has had serious systemic problems in human rights and basic liberties originating from the authoritarian and at times totalitarian nature of the legal and political system.

Most of these problems still persist despite the legal reforms following the European Union's declaration of Turkey a candidate country at the Helsinki Summit on 10 December 1999.

The processes of EU candidacy (1999) and commencement of the accession talks (3 October 2005) were indeed a powerful influence in carrying out the legal reforms in Turkey. In fact, far-ranging amendments were made to the Constitution in various years (thirty five articles in 2001, ten articles in 2004, and twenty six articles by the referendum in 2010) after the Helsinki Summit.

Also, some seventy new laws were passed and hundreds of articles on basic rights and liberties were amended in nearly seventy laws in about ten reform attempts known to the public as the "harmonization package." However, prominent shortcomings were present in all of these legal reforms. Some of them can be cited as follows:

- A failure to take a holistic view of human rights
- The absence of a systematic approach to the amendments made
- A piecemeal, selective, and incomplete approach to amendments despite the presence of provisions contradictory to human rights in a great many laws concerning the same rights – such as amending some and keeping others
- Some of the amendments being counterproductive to the elimination of the violations
- The spreading of the amendments over a prolonged time frame
- Problems regarding the tenets of adequate clarity, explicitness, predictability, and the supremacy of law

In addition to such deficiencies in the legal arrangements, there are also very grave problems caused by law enforcement (particularly in the spheres of the police and the judiciary).

There is a large number of problematic laws in the field of freedom of expression in Turkey. The report entitled "Freedom of Expression in Turkey: Observations On Legislation and the Judiciary"<sup>1</sup> prepared by the Human Rights Joint Platform (İHOP) draws attention to 17 of them as causing significant problems in practice.

The developments that have taken place in the field of freedom of expression since July 2012 are as follows:

The Third Judiciary Package submitted to Parliament by the Government was passed on 2 July 2012 under law number 6352. It was approved by the

President and entered into effect upon its publication in the Official Gazette on 5 July 2012.

Law No: 6352 rescinded Article 19 of the Press Law entitled "Influencing the Judiciary" and Paragraph 6/5 of the Antiterrorism Law which allowed the prohibition for a specific period of publications not yet published, a paragraph that had been criticized by the ECHR in its ruling on Ürper et al. / Turkey (20 October 2009, final decision 20 January 2010).

Provisional Article 1 of Law No: 6352 provided for the deferment of the judicial fines for crimes involving the expression of ideas through the press, media or otherwise and of the execution of court sentences, including those that had become final, calling for investigation and prosecution for crimes punishable by no more than five years of imprisonment committed prior to 31 December 2011.

Article 285 of Turkish Penal Code No: 5237 concerning the confidentiality of investigation and Article 288 on the crime of attempting to influence fair trial have been rewritten with respect to the definition of the crimes, the amounts of punishment, and whether the punishment will be a fine or imprisonment. It must be pointed out that the Third Judiciary Package, albeit positive, remains inadequate.

Certain problems have been experienced during the last three months in the enforcement of Law No: 6352. An example is the request made by the Ankara Police Department to the Public Prosecutor of Ankara for the banning of 453 books and 645 newspapers and magazines. Just how many banning decisions exist against newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and banners throughout Turkey is unknown or has not been publicly disclosed.

The "Media Observation and Freedom of Expression Report" prepared by the Independent Communication Network<sup>2</sup> shows that investigations and lawsuits related to freedom of expression continued in July, August and September.

Problems persist on the Internet as well. engelliweb.com reports that 22,536 websites were blocked as of 28 October 2012.<sup>3</sup>

In the light of the preparations for a new judiciary package, we can hope that the government can no longer remain indifferent to the laws and practices that are problematic from a freedom of expression viewpoint.

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3. [engelliweb.com](http://engelliweb.com).



## Hüsnü Öndül

A graduate of Ankara University's Faculty of Law, Hüsnü Öndül has been practicing law since 1980. Among the founders of the Human Rights Association (İHD, 1986), The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (1990), and the Association of Modern Lawyers (1990), he served as the chairman general at the İHD. He received human rights awards from the German Union of Judges in 1995, Mazlum Der in 2001, and the Diyarbakır Chamber of Doctors in 2005. He has been writing a weekly column for the newspaper Evrensel since 2001.



## Human Landscape

# Civil death

I had not turned 17 yet when I got on a white minibus from Diyarbakır to Lice. In order to have the best future my family can provide me with, I went to a boarding school when I was only 14, and became a civil servant at 17 as a veterinary health technician. Instead of happiness, I felt great fear. An environment I did not know at all, a language I could not understand, and even my brother, whom relatives from our mother's side teased by calling him "Kurd" because of his resemblance to my father... But what I actually feared was that I had to become an adult at the age of 17.

I started the article with this recollection for I still have the same fear inside me. It is as if I am living in a crossing threshold between an infinite adolescence and adulthood. Some say it is the curse of this country.

From the beginning of 1995 until 2000, I spent on and off three years in Lice and in 2001 I declared my conscientious objection. There is, of course, no single reason underlying this action, but I suppose having had witnessed the war pushed me towards a direction other than becoming a party to the war. Perhaps, because I was gay, I found it increasingly hard to suppress the feeling of not being able to belong anywhere.

When I declared my objection in 2001, I had resigned from my civil servant duty and moved to Ankara and after a while to İstanbul. On one side I was working with LGBT organizations, and on the other side I was trying to contribute to anti-military activities. As I was naturally a "deserter-outlaw", I was working in variety of non-permanent jobs, ranging from being an editor at a publishing house to a waiter. It went on along those lines until I was arrested in 2005.

In April 2005, I was taken into custody in İzmir while I was there to represent the publishing house I worked for at a book fair. During the eleven months I was detained at the Sivas Military Prison, I was subjected to many violations including physical and psychological torture as well as isolation. Due to absence of any regulation in the Turkish legislation regarding conscientious objection, I was charged under article 88 of the Military Criminal Law, in other words, "insubordination in front of assembled privates" and two cases were filed against me. Those two cases were later joined and I was sentenced to two years of imprisonment in each file, making a total of four years of imprisonment. The court sentence, which rendered the severest punishment for conscientious objection until that day, put forth my refusal to undergo physical examination despite I was gay, as the reason for refraining from the minimum sentence. Under Turkish Armed Forces Health Competence Regulation, homosexuality is considered an illness, and to determine it, photographs or videos taken during intercourse demonstrating penetration may be

requested. Even if such visuals may not be requested in each instance, methods such as rectal examination are used to determine homosexuality. As much as I was a part of the movement against such inhumane procedures, I refused any kind of examination because I did not want this trial process to focus on my sexual orientation, which instead should have been conducted with regard to conscientious objection. Besides, homosexuality is neither an illness nor a subject that can be determined by any kind of examination. Following reversal of my four-year prison sentence by the Military Court of Appeals on the ground of "the medical examination requirement", and upon insistence of the local court on its own initial decision thereafter, the Plenary Session of the Military Court of Appeals examined my case and decided for my release. The twenty five-month prison sentence rendered by the local court upon re-examination of the case is currently before the Military Court of Appeals. Furthermore, I am sought by the police as a fugitive on the ground that I did not join the military service upon my release.

In July 2012, the European Court of Human Rights sentenced the Republic of Turkey due to violations I had been subjected to. Although Turkey accepted that its position and actions were not defensible by not objecting to this decision, just like the previous decisions with regard to conscientious objectors, it insists on not passing a regulation with respect to conscientious objectors. I still try to continue my life without any identity, without being able to go to a hospital when I am sick and without even being able to open a bank account in my name, let alone taking up employment which can provide me with social security. The European Court of Human Rights defines this situation as "civil death", which in practice means living with the risk of being imprisoned for the remainder of my life inside a vicious cycle between military courts and prisons, in the absence of legal regulations.

During the entire trial process, the issue had been who I was. The Military Court, hence the State, claimed that I was infantryman Mehmet Tarhan, and tried me under the Military Criminal Court as a soldier. Whereas I claimed that I was a conscientious objector, and therefore not a soldier, and the Military Court had not jurisdiction to try me.

As a matter of fact, this is how it is to live in Turkey: the State constantly tells you who you are and despite whatever you say or whoever you are it does whatever it has in mind. If you are not the woman, man, journalist, politician that the State desires you to be, it does not hesitate to walk over you. It even begrudges crocodile tears for your hunger, if you are not the prisoner that it desires you to be.



Mehmet Tarhan

He was born in Gaziantep in 1978. Upon completing secondary education, he worked in Diyarbakır-Lice as a veterinary health technician until 2000. In 2001 he declared his conscientious objection. During 2005-2006, he was tried by the Military Court and spent 11 months at the Sivas Military Prison. His trial is still pending. From 2002 onwards, he carries out voluntary activities at the Lambdaİstanbul LGBT Solidarity Association in the violation of rights and legal support areas.



## Perceptions on the resolution of the Kurdish problem, actors and the current process

While current attempts towards the political resolution of the Kurdish problem face strong headwinds, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Turkey Representation and Diyarbakır Institute for Political and Social Research (DİSA) jointly organized a two-day conference entitled “Perceptions on the Resolution of the Kurdish Problem, Actors and the Current Process.” The participants emphasized the widening perception gap and rupture between the Kurdish and Turkish public opinions. The discussion turned around such topics as the roles and responsibilities of actors active in resolution efforts, particularly politicians, as well as the prerequisites for resolution, ways to end the conflict, and negotiation and dialogue methods.

At the panel entitled “Life and Perceptions”, Özlem Öztürk of Association for Social Awareness (Toplumsal Duyarlılık Derneği) brought up the issue of mined areas, and stated that many people currently live in such areas unaware of the hazards they face. Indicating that the government has yet to prepare a map of mines and unexploded devices, Öztürk emphasized that this situation puts civilians at great risk and depicted the problem as one of not security but human rights.

The writer Rojin Canan Akın claimed that violence has become “the state’s daily routine”, which in turn causes youngster to feel estranged from it: “The Roboski massacre has been the tipping point for Kurds. The youth experienced a rupture when the Western Turkish public branded the deaths as ‘the killing of terrorists’.”

Zozan Özgökçe, a member of Van Women’s Association (VAKAD), stated that the Kurdish viewpoint underwent transformation in the wake of the Van earthquake. Özgökçe suggested that after the earthquake, “the sect, supported by the state” organized religious debates with a view to detaching “women from their universal rights.” She pointed out that women are the foremost victims of wars and of all war-related social and economic problems. She indicated that the government prevented a truck full of bread from entering Yüksekova in the aftermath of the earthquake and that the locals went hungry for five days; she depicted this as an attempt to “tame the Kurds through famine.”

At the session entitled “The Kurdish Problem and Solution Perspectives”, Orhan Atalay, an MP for Ardahan (Justice and Development Party - AK Party), indicated that the Kurdish problem boils down to the issue of language, and that the mother tongue

issue must be resolved firstly. Pointing at the need to resolve problems caused by the official ideology, Atalay depicted the resolution of the Kurdish problem as the foremost responsibility of the government. He suggested that the resolution must be built with “non-violent methods”: “Failure to provide a solution will lead to catastrophe. The government cannot solve the problem singlehandedly. The government has failed to take certain steps, because it has been abandoned by other actors.” Atalay said that all political means must be mobilized to reach a solution. Atilla Kart, an MP for Konya (Republican People’s Party - CHP) underlined the failure of previous Turkish governments in fulfilling popular demands for democratization and added: “The people then expressed their criticism of the overarching national identity, in religious, ethnic, social and class terms. The nation-state had established an overarching identity, which crushed all local identities across the country. Demands for basic rights were perceived by the state as treason and separatism, which in turn lead to numerous issues which we continue to haunt us today. By branding Kurdish demands as treason and separatism, Turkish governments paved the way for a more accentuated Kurdish identity in the 1990s.” Atilla Kart suggested that the state must now accept that it cannot assimilate Kurdish citizens, and should instead opt for their integration. Kart also indicated that CHP is for the education of mother tongue, rather than education in mother tongue.

At the same session, an İstanbul MP of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), Sırrı Süreyya Önder indicated that the current government and previous ones have treated Kurds as if they were “orangutans”, thinking “if we provide them with food and help develop the region, they will renounce their struggle for rights and remain quiet.” Önder suggested that even as various political groups uphold the fraternity between the two nations, police brutality towards Kurdish funerals have killed such fraternal sentiments: “Hopes had disappeared after what happened in Pozantı. The Roboski massacre closed the door halfway. Now, police intervention in the funerals has shut the door firmly. From now on, it is up to you to open this door.” As regards the government’s attempt to annul the parliamentary immunity of nine BDP MPs and an independent MP, Önder indicated that BDP MPs have already spent a total of 118 years in jail and claimed that they could not be deterred by prison sentences: “Kurds are about to abandon the system totally; because, first, they fear nothing anymore; second, they have abandoned their hopes and feel free.” Another significant remark by Önder was that “Turkey’s Islamists do not act like Muslims when it comes to the Kurdish question.”



At the session entitled “Establishing Social Justice and Peace”, the researcher Nesrin Uçarlar emphasized the importance of forgiving in transitional justice. Drawing on the works of Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida, she suggested that certain crimes cannot be punished and forgiveness comes into play in such cases. Paraphrasing Derrida, Uçarlar noted that “this precisely corresponds to forgiving the unforgivable.” With respect to the reestablishment of justice, she pointed out the emergence of “mothers for peace” and “mothers of martyred soldiers” as distinct groups, and emphasized the need to create ties between them. Uçarlar closed her speech with the remarks “forgiveness is an indispensable process; not just for living together, but for building social justice even if nations decide to separate.”

Özgür Sevgi Göral, a founding member of the Center for Truth, Justice and Memory (HAH) noted that Turkey has to come to terms with such events as the Armenian Genocide, the Dersim massacre, events of September 6-7, 1955 and the military coup of 1980, and that memory is thus key in building social justice. She emphasized the need to place on the public agenda the stories of those alternative “heroes” who fought against the “repertoire of oppression” imposed upon the Kurds (torture, forced disappearances, unsolved murders, forced evictions of villages etc.). Göral indicated that social phenomena are remembered differently by different social actors, and that non-mainstream discourses are usually eliminated by saying “let us not speak of victimization”; she claimed, however, that stories of victimhood must be made public, to fight this mentality which obliges victims to prove their suffering. Göral also indicated that the Kurds’ emphasis on peace must be seen as a demand for equal citizenship.

Prof. Dr. Ayşe Betül Çelik of Sabancı University initiated a debate on how the Turkish public perceives Kurds and the Kurdish problem in the aftermath of the government’s Kurdish “opening” and how civil society actors can act given these perceptions. Drawing on her studies from 2011 and 2012, she noted the significant difference between Kurdish and Turkish perceptions as to the reasons underlying the problem. Whereas Turks attribute the issue mainly to regional underdevelopment and to manipulations by foreign powers, Kurds associate it with the weakness of Turkish democracy, and the denial of their cultural rights. As for NGOs, Çelik said that their actions lacked a full comprehension of the nature of the problem, keenness to bring the sides together, and a due calculation of the possible results of their actions.

The final session was on Conflict Resolution and Negotiation. Didem Akyel Collinsworth of International Crisis Group indicated that since 2011 they have been penning reports on the Kurdish problem and proposing a two-pronged negotiation process. Collinsworth stated that on the one hand, the government cannot achieve results in the Oslo talks without progress in the four main areas of what they call “road reforms” geared towards equality (education in mother tongue and its free use in public space, local government, increased political representation, elimination of ethnic discrimination from the Constitution and all other laws); and, on the other hand, she suggested that the government has to continue to negotiate. Pointing at the current bleak situation, Collinsworth said that 880 people were killed since July 2011, that Iran and Syria no longer cooperate with

Turkey, and that the government has failed to prepare the public to the reforms and needs to be bolder in the reform process. Besides, she also suggested that the Kurdish movement must articulate its demands more clearly, and that concepts such as “democratic autonomy” fuel paranoia.

Prof. Dr. Angela Mickley from University of Potsdam explained the peace and negotiation process in the case of IRA. Highlighting the importance of transition from armed conflict to peaceful negotiation, she indicated that not only the militants but also paramilitary forces must renounce arms in a peace process. Mickley indicated that peace-building passes through a trigonal method founded on culture, economics and politics. She suggested that the first task is to eradicate acute violence and stop deaths; then comes a process of therapy and cicatrization, and finally preventive methods, namely a wholesale transformation of social behavior.

Şahisml Bedirhanoglu of Group for Contact and Dialogue (Temas ve Diyalog Grubu) indicated that the Kurdish problem is an international and multi-actor process; and that events such as the KCK lawsuit and the ensuing arrests, military operations, Uludere, and the Gaziantep bombing have damaged the two communities’ capability of cohabitation. Bedirhanoglu said that they have formed the Group for Contact and Dialogue in such turbulent times so as to meet with political actors like BDP, CHP and AK Party, and to support efforts for dialogue and resolution inside the Turkish parliament. He added that they will soon get together with business leaders and various NGOs, too. Bedirhanoglu pointed at the difficulty of making headway in the Kurdish problem owing to the prevailing mistrust between the camps, and said that any positive step from one side risks being perceived as political maneuvering by the other. Stating that a majority of the Kurdish community agrees on such demands as education in mother tongue, stronger local government and just laws, he noted that the government refuses to take any step before the PKK renounces arms, thus effectively blocking the process, and that historically disarmament has not been a precondition in any similar negotiation processes.

Semahat Sevim & Dilan Bozgan

## Alternative and new approaches to rural development

The association Development Center (Kalkınma Merkezi), Trace of Seed (Tohum İzi) and Heinrich Böll Stiftung jointly organized a conference entitled “Alternative and New Approaches to Rural Development” on November 16th and 17th, 2012 at Kadir Has University, inspired from the homonymous book published in 2011 by Development Center in Turkish and Kurdish. Participants shared their studies and opinions on food, demographics, gender, rural life, rural development and policies. Almost all of the speakers pointed at the detrimental effects of neoliberal policies on rural areas.

One of the speakers at the first session entitled “Peasantry” was Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, currently holding the chair of Transition Processes at Wageningen University, renowned for his opinions on agriculture and peasantry, and his “new peasantry” thesis which aroused



much interest. At the panel, Ploeg suggested that the peasantry is not disappearing but rather recreating itself, and that it has played a key role in the international crisis. Discussing the European, Chinese and Brazilian experiences, he added, "Although these societies harbor many differences in cultural, historical and economic terms, they have many similarities as regards rural development policies. We can see that the general agricultural market fails to protect biodiversity and the environment, and to ensure the provision of quality food. Rather, the capitalist market threatens these and wreaks havoc in rural areas. Present markets do not allow for the struggle against poverty and for equality, which is an integral part of rural development policies; on the contrary, they cause more damage and thus more inequality." According to Ploeg, newly formed peasant markets offer consumers an opportunity in price and quality terms. Besides, they not only create significant value added, but also preserve the environment and biodiversity.

The session continued with a presentation entitled "New Rural Groups and Transformation of Rural Groups" by Murat Öztürk, who is a faculty member at Kadir Has University and holds a PhD on Economic Development and International Economics, inspired from his recently completed report "Agricultural and Rural Transformation Dynamics in Post-1980 Turkey"; as well as a presentation entitled "Beyond the Rural-Urban Divide: A New Space for Development" by Assistant Professor Joost Jongerden of the Netherlands' Wageningen University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Development.

At the session on "Food", Paul Nicholson from the European Coordination of La Via Campesina, which boasts 250 million small farmer members across the world, defined food sovereignty as food production and access to food and opined that food sovereignty must be regarded as a citizenship right. Also a member of Basque Farmers' Union, Nicholson said that, "Farmers were used to be seen as a problem, viewed as old-fashioned and dispensable. The solution was said to lie in industrial farming and modernization. However, nowadays the benefits of farmer agriculture are acknowledged." Nicholson noted that, in the face of failed neoliberal policies, food sovereignty introduces a new perspective and provides a significant opportunity to protect local economies and identities against the food crisis, global warming and rural unemployment. There were also discussions on alternative food supply chains from Turkey, such as Boğaziçi Consumers' Cooperative.

At the session entitled "Rural Development and Gender", Prof. Dr. Ayşe Gündüz Hoşgör of Middle East Technical University stated that, "Although the concept of rural development has an economic basis, the alternative rural development approach is ideologically tilted towards equality. Indeed such a development strives for an ideological change." Noting that this ideology is not monolithic, Hoşgör added that feminism has influenced many such efforts and will continue to do so in the future. Another speech was by Gülbahar Örmek, vice mayor of the Sur Municipality, who stated that during their first days in office in 2009, scores of women applied to them for financial assistance, food aid and free coal – a legacy of previous assistance and charity policies by state agencies such as province and district governorships. Against this perspective which creates a stumbling block in the way of the struggle against poverty, they launched

a "twig-broom manufacturing project" with itinerant and seasonal female agricultural workers living in the district, reached out to numerous women in a short space of time, and changed the previous viewpoint.

The conference drew attendance from people and institutions all over Turkey, including Pervin Çoban Savran, the president of Sarıkeçililer Association representing Turkey's last nomads, the organic farmer Bedros Kehye of the Vakıflı village in Hatay, and members of rural development initiatives. The second day of the conference was devoted to workshops on the issues discussed at the panels of the opening day.

Yonca Verdioğlu

## Green mobility in the cities

The third Green Economy Conference organized by Heinrich Böll Stiftung Turkey Representation was centered around the pursuit of a solution to the urban transportation problem. Held in the İstanbul Technical University's Maçka campus, the conference featured numerous discussions on such issues as public transport, bicycles, pedestrian lanes and fuel efficiency.

The opening speech of the conference was given by Prof. Dr. H. Murat Çelik of İzmir Institute of Technology. Çelik stated that over 50 percent of global fossil fuels is consumed by the transport industry and highlighted that transportation accounts for around 25 percent of energy industry's carbon dioxide emissions. Pointing at the rapid rise in the number of vehicles, Çelik indicated that the number of vehicles will climb to 2-3 billion in 2050, from its current level of 800 million. Adding that 1 million 270 thousand people are killed in worldwide traffic accidents annually, Çelik opined that an allocation of 0.16 percent of global income to public transport would help slash the number of vehicles by one third, and that a fraction of the financial costs of traffic accidents would suffice to boost means of public transport.

Associate Dr. Ela Babalık Sutcliffe of Middle East Technical University's Urban and Regional Planning Department delivered a presentation entitled "Rail Systems in Inter-City Transport", underscoring that rail systems must be established in the right location, through the right practices. Indicating that passenger transport automobiles spend five times more energy than public transport, Sutcliffe also highlighted that, per passenger, automobiles generate 125 times more air pollution than buses per passenger every kilometer. Sutcliffe stated that in order to transport 40 thousand people across a bridge, a rail system would need two lanes and buses four lanes, whereas automobiles would require 12 lanes. Refuting the idea that rail systems would lead to an immediate drop in automobile use, Sutcliffe underscored the need for additional disincentives, and for support to public transport.

In her presentation, Eda Beyazıt, a research assistant at İstanbul Technical University's Department of Urban and Regional Planning, focused on the socio-economic benefits of investments in transport, and the social exclusion related to transportation. Highlighting the fact that transportation is a key factor in individuals' participation in social life, Beyazıt drew from a study conducted in İstanbul, which showed that out of a group of İstanbulites aged between 0-6 and 23-49 who never use means of transport, 60% are women, 30% are



illiterate and 74% are unemployed. In the same session, Önder Algedik, a consultant on climate and energy, explained the connection between climate change and transportation through remarkable statistics.

In the afternoon session, the bicycle road projects of the Antalya Metropolitan and Yalova municipalities were brought up. Yalova's Director for Transport Services, Mehmet Nuray Tozlu stated that Yalova has established 22 kilometers of separate, continuous bicycle lanes, planned to reach 44 kilometers. Sevcin Atalay of Antalya Metropolitan Municipality's Department of Planning and Rail Systems provided information on their plans for bicycle lanes integrated with public transport, and highlighted key practical issues. Prof. Dr. Ridvan Yurtseven, the Coordinator of Cittaslow's Turkey Advisory Board, talked about the "piedibus" project set to start in slow cities in Turkey.

In the session "Transport and People in Cities", transport was debated through the lens of gender. Problems experienced by women, LGBT individuals and the disabled in public transport were discussed, with a special emphasis on the challenges posed by pavements and public vehicles to handicapped individuals, and the difficulties experienced by transsexual individuals in public transport. In this session, Associate Dr. Nilgün Camkesen of Bahçeşehir University delivered a presentation on access to public transport by the disabled, Tuğba Özyay Baki of İstanbul Feminist Collective on gender and transportation rights, and the bicycle researcher and designer Aydan Çelik on cycling. Embarq Turkey's Sibel Bülay presented their pedestrian zone project for the historical peninsula of İstanbul.

The final session of the conference was devoted to technology-based solutions. UNIDO-ICHET's Dr. Fazıl Serincan talked on the role of hydrogen energy in inter-city transport. Jonas Ericson from Clean Vehicles in Stockholm explained how they launched the city's "Clean Vehicle Campaign." Whereas Serincan focused on fuel battery technology and stated that falling costs will lead to an increase in the number of clean vehicles running on hydrogen by 2020, Ericson indicated that 170 thousand vehicles in Stockholm (17% of the total) now run on cleaner fuel and explained how they managed to succeed. Stating that change in Stockholm started from municipal vehicles, Ericson underlined that municipalities can employ numerous means to change the preferences of vehicle producers and drivers. He suggested that vehicles running on ethanol and similar fuels should be exempt from parking fees, and taxis with alternative fuels could be given priority in serving clients.

The conference ended with the screening of the documentary film "Son Kumsal" (The Last Beach) by Rüya Arzu Köksal, on the coastal road in the Black Sea region of Turkey.

Özgür Gürbüz

## Dink Award to Beşikçi and Memorial

The International Hrant Dink Award is presented annually since 2009 by the Hrant Dink Foundation on Hrant Dink's birthday, September 15th, to individuals, organizations or groups that work for a world free of discrimination, racism, and violence, take personal risks for their ideals, use the language of peace and by doing so, inspire and encourage others.

With this award, the Hrant Dink Foundation aims to remind to all those who struggle for these ideals that their voices are heard, their works are visible and that they are not alone, and also to encourage everyone to fight for their ideals.

The International Hrant Dink Award was presented for the fourth time on September 15, 2012, with a ceremony held at the Cemal Reşit Rey Concert Hall in İstanbul. The award was presented to laureates İsmail Beşikçi from Turkey and to Alexander Cherkasov, the chairman of the Memorial Human Rights Center, on behalf of the International "Memorial" Society from Russia. Beşikçi received the award for his tireless efforts towards a social and political solution of the Kurdish Issue, refusing to be silenced despite being subjected to threats and maltreatment throughout his life. Beşikçi has continued to carry out research, write books and by sustaining his struggle he has allowed society to confront its problems, and made real transformation possible. "Memorial", since the 1990s when it was established, has been working on confronting the past. Memorial received the award for their systematic effort to form an archive of state terrorism, and to reveal human rights violations.

At the award ceremony, Inspirations, a group of people and institutions from Turkey and from all corners of the world who multiply hope for the future with the steps they take, were saluted with a film acknowledging their achievements. "The Inspirations of 2012" included the resistance of villagers of Bil'in, a Palestinian village in the West Bank; the Romedia Foundation in Hungary who work for the rights of the Romani people in Romania; HOPE NOT HATE, an initiative from the UK that fights racism; PINK Armenia, an organization that works for LGBT rights in Armenia; Masa Mirkovic, director of New Generation in Bosnia Herzegovina, an organization that supports children who are victims of violence; Triveni Acharya, an activist and journalist from Mumbai who works to prevent human trafficking; Mark Kabbani, a Lebanese American immigrant, who works towards the social integration of immigrant children; Dr. Benjamin LaBrot from the United States who develops healthcare projects for remote parts of the world; James Kityo from Uganda, who develops innovative public health and shelter projects; the Initiative for Solidarity with Arrested Students in Turkey; the "My Body, My Decision" campaign of Bianet, an independent news portal from Turkey; the solidarity organization Families of LGBT from İstanbul; the "Van, You Are Not Alone" Campaign, organized in the aftermath of the Van earthquake; and The Mad Waves Outside initiative from Turkey that sends books and stationery to political prisoners.


Alper Görmüş, Amira Hass, Conscientious Objection Movement in Turkey, Baltasar Garzón, Ahmet Altan and Lydia Cacho were the awardees of the International Hrant Dink Award of the previous years.

One can nominate names for the International Hrant Dink Award which will be presented for the fifth time on September 15th, 2013, from October 15th 2012 to April 15th 2013 either by filling in the nomination form on the website [www.hrantdinkaward.org](http://www.hrantdinkaward.org) or by sending an e-mail to [award@hrantdink.org](mailto:award@hrantdink.org).

Detailed information on the awardees and the jury members is available on the website [www.hrantdinkaward.org](http://www.hrantdinkaward.org).

Nora Mildanoğlu





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