

perspectives

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POLITICAL ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

TURKEY

TURKISH ECONOMY ON THE EVE OF GENERAL ELECTIONS



The economy is swell, the citizen is unwell



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Heinrich Böll Stiftung - Turkey Representation

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Editorial

As we were preparing this issue of Perspectives we faced serious turmoil in Turkey, the neighboring countries and in Europe. Commentators at the daily evening news that normally refrain from emotional expressions even started to talk about a world in crisis, a world that is losing its anchor. They used terms like sinking ships when talking about the global order.

The culmination of IS cruelty was transferred into every single household via Internet, the killing of Charlie Hebdo journalists, and the extensive use of the social media for propaganda and inciting fear by IS, the rising racist, xenophobic tendencies especially in Germany as expressed by the demonstrations organized by PEGIDA and others... All these tendencies made many people worry about the future, living in peace and democracy.

While we were preparing this issue of Perspectives, we developed a new habit: before going to sleep we wanted to get the last information about the situation in Kobanê. In many senses Kobanê became a symbol: a symbol for the power of the Kurds, a symbol for Kurdish unity and solidarity, a symbol for the strong role of women inside the Kurdish movement, and finally a symbol for the struggle of the Kurds in Turkey against nationalist policies and their strength in the upcoming negotiations and parliamentary elections in Turkey. We do not even want to imagine what would have happened had Kobanê fallen.

Confronted with developments that seemed to shake the international world order, our original plan for the content of the Perspectives

in 2015 seemed, at first glance, to have fallen apart: we planned to embed the Perspectives of 2015 in the global governance circus of this year: the anniversary of the millennium development goals, the anniversary of Beijing, the climate change negotiations in Paris and –last but not the least– the G20-summit in Istanbul under the Turkish presidency. But, if we have a look at the facts behind the current threats to world peace, especially this year’s “global governance circle” might help us understand the dynamics underlying some of these threats. We therefore decided not to change the concept of this year’s Perspectives but to point to the complexity of global governance, to so-called double standards and discontent as well as opposition against this kind of a system of global governance.

Against this background, it is not astonishing that the buzz word in Turkey seems to be “perception”. Policy, convincing members of parliament about a law, convincing voters during elections campaigns or the people of a protest.... Everything is presented as a matter of “perception operation” or public relations work –as if the world is nothing more than a bubble of competing public relations campaigns. To have a look at the global governance circle of this year from a Turkey perspective will sharpen our understanding that it is mainly not about perception, it is about reality.

On behalf of the Perspectives team
Ulrike Dufner

TURKISH ECONOMY ON THE EVE OF GENERAL ELECTIONS

G20 and the Uncomfortable Truth: corruption

Oya Özarıslan

The G20, shorthand for Group 20, is considered to be one of the most significant conferences of the world leaders. Leaders of the world's largest economies come together each year to talk about how to boost the global economy and reduce the barriers to international trade and economic development.

The G20 countries overall manage 80 percent of world trade and more than 85 percent of the world economy. Two-third of the world's population lives in G20 countries and three quarters of the world trade. This group of countries is indeed small enough to make a decision but big enough to make a difference worldwide.

This year leaders in Brisbane reaffirmed their goal of improving the GDP of G20 economies and agreed to expand their economies by at least 2.1% within four years, adding \$2 trillion to global economies—a feat which could create millions of jobs. This is a very ambitious target considering the economic crisis in some of the G20 countries and slowdown in emerging markets.

How this can be achieved is an important question. It is not clear what action could be taken within G20 countries in coordination with each other. There is even talk that the countries will monitor each other's actions to ensure that there is no negative impact overall. Each country will have their own plans at the end; however, the worldwide mechanisms to be implemented include getting millions of women into the workforce, increasing trade, and implementing

an Anti-Corruption Working Plan.

It is widely agreed that there are many impediments to economic developments that prevent countries from reaching their targets. What are the leaders of these major economies actually concerned about when it comes to the growth of their economies specifically, and for the global economy at a larger scale? To name a few, inefficient education and health care systems, lack of infrastructure, ineffective tax regimes, and political instability come to mind. There are obstacles that also have a huge impact on the social development of the world population, such as poverty, climate change, women's participation in the workforce, and corruption.

Of these very crucial subjects affecting the daily lives of the people, corruption seemed to be the uncomfortable truth on the table for a long time. Corruption is not nice, of course, and it still feels awkward to raise these issues in any official conversation in many parts of the world.

Change in perspective

Our understanding of what the important factors are for creating the conditions for sustainable economic development and the role of corruption has remarkably changed in the last 20 years.

It was not so long ago that a discussion about corruption at intergovernmental platform or even at international financial institutions was considered a taboo. This issue was not a popular subject in international meetings and has not been mentioned widely in organizational policy papers. Even though it was impossible to not to notice that corruption was widespread in many parts of the world, the developmental community simply chose to see



Oya Özarıslan

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it as a side issue.

However, since the early 1990s, there has been a considerable change in thinking within the international community and at the financial institutions about the role of corruption in the developmental process and economic growth. The primary reasons for this significant change vary in different geographical areas.

The fall of central planning economies in the late 1980s and the assistance to these countries by the international community in order to make a successful transition to market economies was one of the triggering points for this change.

The enactment of the very first kind of extra-territorial laws was The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act of 1977, or FCPA, in the United States. Punishing foreign bribery was an important factor in eventual changes towards corruption. With the urging of the US government, this law opened up a way for international conventions such as OECD and UNCAC. OECD countries finally forbid the citizens of their member countries from bribing abroad and were forced to enact legislation in that regard.

Also the pace of globalization and its supporting technologies had a clear impact on the increase in transparency and people's demand for openness and greater scrutiny. Witnessing the major corruption scandals from all over the world made it obvious for people and the corruption is a fact that can no longer be swept under the rug.

Another remarkable factor was the establishment of Transparency International (TI), the global organization fighting against corruption worldwide of which I am proud to be part. With TI's well-known Corruption Perceptions Index, it was clear that some countries were able to be more successful than others in tackling it. TI's successful work on anticorruption initiatives got the attention of the public and created a discourse on the specific issues of battling corruption.

With other international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF joining TI on anti-corruption issues, the subject of corruption was finally made more visible.

How corruption could damage economic development

As the approach to dealing with corruption has changed in the last few decades, so has our perception of corruption. Corruption used to be considered as some sort of tax for doing business, accelerating transactions and easing the life of a business person.



"Corruption is your way"...
Graffiti on an ATM in
İstanbul.

Nowadays, corruption has become a legitimate concern for the development community. Countries wishing to maintain their presence in the global economy and compete in an increasingly complex world cannot succeed unless they used scarce resources effectively.

Corruption undermines government's productivity and, therefore, limits the ability of the state to invest in areas such as education, infrastructure and health. In countries where there is a widespread corruption, people will be less willing to pay taxes and thus governments' revenue will be undermined, with the end effect of damaging the public finances. In short, as more money flows into corruption, less mo-

Considering these damaging effects of corruption to the global economy, the G20 agenda on anticorruption was realized by establishing the Anti-Corruption Working Group (ACWG) in the 2010 Summit in Toronto. In 2010, the ACWG began to work on a two-year action plan.

ney is available for the people because of a lack of resources.

Where ever corruption is endemic, it hinders the investment climate, undermines development and innovation. While starting a new business, if a business has to deal with corrupt officials to obtain permits and licenses accompanied with other obstacles, they will simply take their ideas to less corrupt countries. Corruption works as a barrier to entry into the market or a factor in contributing to the early departure; in either case, economic growth is negatively affected.

With the adoption of the 2015-2016 Anti-Corruption Working Plan at the Brisbane Summit of 2014, we finally see that tackling corruption has become a much stronger issue among the G20's goal of generating inclusive growth and establishing a cleaner, safer, more sustainable economic framework

The uncertainty of an investment climate will be fostered by the corruption factor as well. As bribes are unpredictable and random, corruption cannot be built into the cost of structure of business like taxes can. Corruption will bring an additional financial burden on businesses, thereby undermining their international competitiveness.

Similar to a contagious disease, corruption also creates inequality in society. As corruption excludes poor people from public services and perpetuates poverty, it worsens the distribution of income and injustice for providing basic services such as healthcare and education.

Last but not least, corruption itself helps the spread of crime. Corruption feeds other crimes, eventually creating an environment where mafia-like organizations could flourish. Money laundering is often used for a tool for other crimes as trafficking, drug smuggling, etc. Therefore, one can conclude that a crime prone environment encourages more people to become corrupt, creating a vicious cycle that will affect the investment climate and overall economic growth.

Corruption gets on the G20 agenda

Considering these damaging effects of corruption to the global economy, the G20 agenda on anticorruption was realized by establishing the Anti-Corruption Working Group (ACWG) in the 2010 Summit in Toronto. In 2010, the ACWG began to work on a two-year

action plan. The second action plan was agreed on in 2012 for the period of 2013-2014 and addressed many of the challenges related to the issue of corruption.

With the adoption of the 2015-2016 Anti-Corruption Working Plan at the Brisbane Summit of 2014, we finally see that tackling corruption has become a much stronger issue among the G20's goal of generating inclusive growth and establishing a cleaner, safer, more sustainable economic framework. In their Communique, the leaders described corruption as "a key barrier to growth, discouraging foreign investment, with the effects of increasing the cost and risk of doing business, distorting the allocation of government resources and reducing public confidence in government institutions."

The fact that annual cost of bribery is estimated by the World Bank to be USD\$ 1 trillion is already striking. Taking into account of the cost of corruption amounts to more than 5% of global GDP (US 2.6 trillion), it is about time for the issue of corruption to be tackled at the G20 leaders' table on economic growth and international trade.

Anti-Corruption Action Plan adopted in Brisbane

The Anti-Corruption Implementation Plan is a very detailed document with concrete action items that could work as a road map for any country targeting to curtail corruption.

The most important item at 2014 Brisbane meeting was the beneficial ownership principles. Bringing countries as diverse as Australia, China, Turkey, Russia, the US, Indonesia and the UK to an agreement on an issue as sensitive as beneficial ownership and for member nations to pass laws compelling corporations to identify who owns and controls them (the "beneficial owners") is indeed a big step. Determined diplomatic efforts from some of the G8 countries and campaigning from civil society organizations were to be seen. Transparency International wrote an open letter to the leaders, stating, "We want G20 countries to publish the list of the real owners of the secret companies."

According to the 2015-2016 Anti-Corruption Working Plan, G20 countries will take concrete action to implement the G20 High-Level Principles on Beneficial Ownership Transparency. According to the World Bank in 2001, three-quarters of the companies involved in corporate fraud cases used shell companies to avoid paying tax. As the amount of the corruption sought to be concealed in these cases



was estimated as \$US 56.4 billion, the beneficial ownership issue is indeed the core of a bigger problem.

The principles states that “Countries should ensure that law enforcement, tax authorities and other competent authorities have access to information in a timely manner to follow dirty money trails.” However, as an effective mechanism, beneficial ownership principles fall short of demanding that these persons and entities be known to the public by being identified by public registers.

The Plan also highlighted what it calls “high risk sectors” where certain sectors are particularly vulnerable to some unique corruption risks and challenges. Addressing the risk of corruption in the extraction sector and other high risk areas such as customs, fisheries and primary forestry, and construction, the Plan proposes that “G20 countries commit to taking practical action... by identifying and developing international best practices and promoting collective action initiatives.”

Recognizing that bribery imposes a heavy price on both international business and society as a whole, the Plan states that “G20 countries commit to lead by example in combating bribery, including by active participation with the OECD Working Group on Bribery with a view to exploring possible adherence to the OECD Anti-bribery Convention”.

Public sector transparency and integrity has been part of the Plan from beginning. Concrete action on the issues such as public procurement, open data, whistleblower protections, immunity for public officials, and assets



declarations are required from G20 countries, as these can have a significant negative impact on economic growth and development and considered essential for cross-border trade and investment.

International cooperation is seen another important part of the Plan for combating corruption. Considering the fact that “in the globalized environment, many corrupt persons through increasingly sophisticated methods seek to exploit international borders to avoid prosecution, or to hide and enjoy the proceeds of corruption” international cooperation, including denial of entry, recovery of assets, and assistance in civil and administrative proce-

Turkish PM (now the president) Erdogan, his family and four cabinet ministers holding a rally as a response to charges of large scale corruption.

Turkey is the new leader of G20 for 2015 and responsible for implementing the 2015-2016 Anti-Corruption Working Plan. When it was first announced that Turkey's leadership would be required for the implementation of the Plan, it was quite a surprise for some people in Turkey and perceived with some irony considering the current environment.

dures appears to be some of the methods that must be used by G20 countries. Hence, there is a special focus for G20 members to approach the anti-corruption fight globally as well as within cooperation with each other.

Private sector transparency and integrity is also a focus of the G20 Plan. It has been highlighted that G20 countries cannot fight corruption alone, and partnership with the private sector is an important goal to reduce corruption. Governments are expected to set up facilities with anti-corruption education and training for business, with a particular focus on SMEs. The Plan also addresses on the private sector to adopt transparent and accountable standards of corporate behavior.

Turkey has seen the biggest fall in Transparency International's 2014 CPI, that ranks close to 180 countries according to the perceived level of corruption in each country. A sudden drop in Turkey's score of 5 points and its change in position in the 2014 CPI ranking by moving down 11 places was very dramatic. The fact is that when a country falls under 50 out of 100, it is deemed as high risk country for investment decisions, and it could have a long lasting effect on Turkey.

Very uncomfortable indeed

Succeeding Australia, Turkey is the new leader of G20 for 2015 and responsible for implementing the 2015-2016 Anti-Corruption Working Plan. When it was first announced that Turkey's leadership would be required for the implementation of the Plan, it was quite a surprise for some people in Turkey and perceived with some irony considering the current environment.

Turkey has seen the biggest fall in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perception Index, a well-known annual survey that ranks close to 180 countries according to the perceived level of corruption in each country. Since the inception of the CPI, Turkey has

always had its problems with fighting against corruption, with scores hovering around the 40s for the last 20 years. The country has made some progress during the candidacy of the European Union membership when it took some actions such as signing the international conventions of the OECD and UNCAC, and enacting laws such as The Right to Access to Information. A sudden drop in Turkey's score of 5 points and its change in position in the 2014 CPI ranking by moving down 11 places was very dramatic, especially considering the other countries following Turkey with drop of 4 points were China, Angola, Malawi and Rwanda. The fact is that when a country falls under 50 out of 100, it is deemed as high risk country for investment decisions, and it could have a long lasting effect on Turkey.

For the people witnessing Turkey's huge corruption scandals of December 17th and 25th involving politicians and senior officials for the last 1.5 years and Turkey's poor handling of the situation, this dramatic decline is not surprising at all. The country is also rapidly deteriorating on the issues of freedom of expression, human rights, freedom of media and independence of judiciary for the last two years already.

The Anti-Corruption Working Plan that Turkey is supposed to lead for implementation is actually highlighting the areas the country has been hesitant to take any action for a long time. Issues such as public procurement, asset declarations, immunities for politicians and public officials are the high risky areas which need to be worked on and waiting to be solved over the next couple of decades. These issues came up one by one on the agenda during the last year's corruption scandals.

The first question is if Turkey can effectively lead the Anti-Corruption Working Group and fulfill the action items as required by the Plan. As the technical capacity of Turkish bureaucrats is not an issue at all, the next question is if Turkey will implement any of these actions in its own land while preparing specific action points for the rest of the G20 countries.

Corruption seems to be a very uncomfortable truth once again.

TURKISH ECONOMY ON THE EVE OF GENERAL ELECTIONS

The global crisis in 2015 and the Turkish economy

Ümit Akçay

With the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in the USA on 15 September 2008, it was announced that the onset of the fourth major crisis in the history of capitalism commenced. When the crisis erupted, its causes were analyzed on three different levels: structural dynamics, institutional arrangements and certain choices with respect to political economy.¹ We need to simultaneously elaborate on these three levels in order to grasp both the origins and current advance of the global crisis.

Approaches seeking the causes of the 2008 crisis in certain structural dynamics are mostly sought out within the scope of the Marxist tradition. Accordingly, the crisis resulting from the downward trend in profits by 1970s triggered significant amendments both in state-society relations and political economy paradigm. The political package that began to be called neoliberalism was designed to restore profitability of companies. The package basically aimed at undermining the economic, political and social power of the labor movement and trade unions. Flexibility and internationalization of the organization

of production accompanied this program aspiring to weaken the labor movement and narrowing down its organizational capacities. The transformation of the state and the rise of a new right-wing politics marked the political direction of the era.

During the implementation phase of the neoliberal package, two tendencies developed in central countries: financialization and deindustrialization. Financialization referred to rapid boom in profits of companies in the finance sector, first in the USA and then in other central countries when compared to companies in industry sector. In fact, it could be seen that such companies were present in both the finance and production sectors instead of tending to be in a single sector. Nevertheless, the share of finance in overall profit of companies active in both sectors gradually increased.²

The second critical development was the intensification of competition among traditional production bases.³ Japanese and German companies aggressively entered sectors like automotive and electronics that had thus far been under unquestionable dominance of the USA. As a result of the increasing international competition, companies based in the USA started to shift their production to countries with cheap labor costs and strong infrastructure so as to reduce costs. Therefore, increasing competition and financialization, alongside with deindustrialization turned into an advancing dynamic for central countries.

It is possible to see the effects of these changes at both in the structural and institutional level. The most significant development at the institutional level was the world-wide liberalization of capital movements and the



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gradual removal of existing financial regulations. This institutional transformation was buttressed by the belief that once intervention by external elements like trade unions and states ceased, the markets would automatically reach a balance and stabilize themselves within a steadily growing economy.⁴

This belief in the fact that automatically operating markets would yield the best results for the entire society was strongest in the USA. The financial sector in the country, which was the strongest and the most powerful around the world, and the support towards consumption based on credit expansion (indebtedness) were also significant factors in the propagation of this belief. Credit expansion became a state policy because it not only triggered economic expansion but because it could also easily be converted into political support leading to the gradual removal of regulations limiting its expansion. Deregulation moves gradually implemented in the 1980s and 1990s were crowned with the removal of

Glass-Steagall law in 1999.⁵ The New Financial Architecture (NFA) constituted by the end of 1990s was based on this.

Essentially, NFA aimed at including the poor within the financial system.⁶ This financial incorporation was predominantly realized through the housing sector. Financial innovation and securitization mechanisms also had a significant role in the formation of the NFA. Debts with different terms and magnitudes were collected in a single pool and redistributed through these mechanisms, while corresponding new securities were launched. This process was accelerated through the establishment of a shadow banking system alongside the official banking system and functioning outside the regulations binding the first. One of the significant components of the NFA was credit evaluation institutions. What led asset-backed securities to be purchased by major actors, especially pension funds and institutional investors, was the assurance that they were to be trusted. The

Deputy PM Ali Babacan speaking at G20 conference.



last column of the NFA was insurance companies. Insurance companies developed new derivative products to function as assurance in case assets evaluated by credit evaluation institutions went bankrupt. Thusly, a system developed in which it was practically believed that there was no risk of bankruptcy.

The NFA was based on newly developed risk management techniques; alongside with financial innovation and securitization.⁷ Accordingly, fragmenting risks pertaining to a single financial institution so as to make each piece purchasable by other elements in the financial sector became an important application of new risk management technics. However, this was also the basis of the “systemic risk” laying the grounds for the demise of NFA itself. Lastly, another feature making the establishment of the NFA possible was the interest rate that had been kept low in the 2000s until the eruption of the crisis. At the beginning of 2000s, when FED rapidly dropped the interest rates to overcome a recession and get

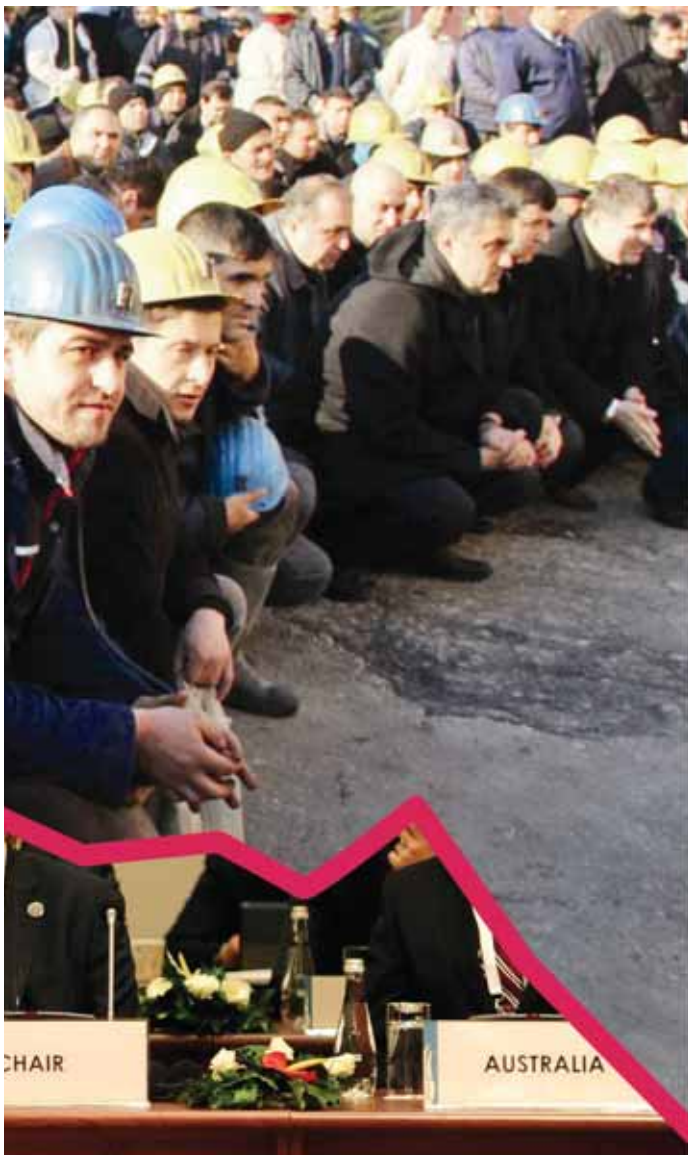
2014 saw economic growth in Europe and Japan almost reach the level of recession. In addition the economic growth rate declined in developing countries. Apart from the decline of the growth rate, two more developments marked 2014. The first of them is the finalization of the quantitative expansion policy of the FED going hand in hand with the moderate recovery in the USA, while the second is the acute drop in oil prices.

over the economic tremor caused by September 11, the ground was laid for the NFA, which had been formed in the 1990s, to blossom.

It did not take too long for the original US crisis to reach Europe, as the NFA had already gained international propagation in 1990s. However, with the increasing international financial integration, a problem occurring at one point in the system easily spread to other points. Firstly, European banks having invested in the USA and European companies directing institutional investments as pension funds were affected by the deflating financial system. Nevertheless, states intervened to prevent these companies trigger an overall deflation of the financial system and their debts were undertaken by the states as public debts. When the crisis reached Europe, its scale expanded and company bankruptcies started to give way to state bankruptcies. Iceland was first, but Greece was the one to take the lead in the European crisis.

Intensification of the global crisis and the turning point in 2014

By 2014, with the countries defined as “rising markets” having fallen into the grip of the crisis, the geographical expansion period of the crisis that had debuted in 2008 was finalized. 2014 was also the year when signals towards the intensification of the global crisis were also amplified. The most significant indicator of the intensification of the global crisis was the slowdown of the economic expansion trend in significant world-wide production bases. The economic growth of China that had continued since 2010 was slowing down and it was clear by 2014 that his slowdown would continue. Similarly, economic growth in Germany, another significant production base, has been continually decreasing since 2010.⁸ 2014 saw economic growth in Europe and Japan almost reach the level of recession. In addition, the economic growth rate declined in developing countries. Apart from the decli-



ne in the growth rate, two more developments marked 2014. The first is the finalization of the quantitative expansion policy of FED going hand in hand with the moderate recovery in the USA, while the second is the acute drop in oil prices.

FED decisions

With the moderate recovery of the US economy and unemployment returning to pre-crisis rates, the FED took steps towards gradually finalizing the quantitative expansion programs during 2014. One of the main features of the recovery of the US markets was the further flexibilization of labor markets, which

Developments after the FED announcement in January 2014 can be enlightening for the second half of 2015 when FED will implement an interest-rate hike. As of January 2014, a significant amount of money flowed from countries like Turkey, Brazil, India and the Republic of South Africa and international funds entered US markets. Although this process affected individual countries differently, the common trend was towards the simultaneous rise of inflation and interest rates resulting in a major blow to economic growth.

were already very flexible. Consequently, wealthy people benefited from the economic revitalization attained, while workers could not compensate for real salary losses. The decline of the unemployment rate was among the most important indicators of the growing economic activity. Nevertheless, this decline was accompanied by the drop of participation in the labor market.

The most significant feature of the growth in the USA is the fact that it is based on an increase in credit. Similar to the beginning of the 2000s, low interest rates were warning signs for the NFA, which has become even stronger in overcoming the crisis; credit expansion, meaning increased indebtedness, became the main feature of the economic recovery in the USA. However, further flexibilization of labor markets or growth based on indebtedness does not mean anything for indicators such as the unemployment rate or economic growth calculating qualitative trends. Having operated according to such indicators, the FED gradually finalized its quantitative expansion program as of 2008 and announced that it could initiate an interest rate hike in 2015.

Developments after the FED announcement in January 2014 can shed light on the second half of 2015, when the FED is expected to implement an interest rate hike. The FED had announced that it would start declining its asset purchases realized within the scope of quantitative expansion strategy by 10 million dollars as of January 2014. As a result of this announcement, a significant amount of money flowed from countries like Turkey, Brazil, India and the Republic of South Africa and international funds entered US markets. Although this process played out differently in each country, the common trend was the simultaneous rise in inflation and interest rates, resulting in a major blow to economic growth.

Oil prices

The second important event that has marked the turn of the global crisis in 2014 is the abrupt fall in oil prices. Oil prices declined by around 50 percent from July to August 2014. The IMF announced that this decline in oil prices could contribute to global economic growth by 0.3 to 0.7 and claimed that it was "good news" that might accelerate the overall economic revitalization of world markets.⁹ However, this fall in oil prices, if it is an indicator of the deterioration of the global crisis, can only be read as "bad news," contrary to what the IMF claims. Additionally, although the decline in oil prices is positive for countries importing oil, this might have other implications. For instance, as in the case of the USA, when the loss of energy companies become so great as to complicate the financial system, an unexpected panic could be set off. These signals have already started to be seen at the beginning of January 2015.¹⁰

What is more intriguing about oil prices is that there is no decline in demand parallel to this decline in demand. To be more precise, we can see deepening global crisis reflected in the decreased demand for oil. OPEC countries were expected to reduce their oil production in response to shrinking demand. Nevertheless, contrary to expectations, no decision was taken in the meeting held last October regarding a possible reduction in oil supply. Oil production in Russia and Iraq even reached historical levels.¹¹

In line with the above data, we need to see the decline in oil prices as not merely an economic activity, but a result of different strategies adopted by various actors. When it comes to the strategies of the actors, the first thing that comes to mind and that which is mostly

discussed is that the USA lowers oil prices as part of an initiative developed to penalize countries it sees as a threat.¹² Although this approach seems to be appropriate when we consider its possible consequences, it is difficult to assume that the policies adopted by the USA alone would cause such a significant movement. The fact that Saudi Arabia, one of the significant actors of the process, is in a position to sustain its profits even with significantly lower prices shows that the decline in oil prices would not have the same impact for all oil producing countries.

Local crises of 2014

Lastly, it is noteworthy to indicate that economies in four countries had tremors with various dimensions in 2014. By the end of June 2014, panic erupted with the bankruptcy of the fourth biggest bank in the Bulgarian financial system, which could only be stopped by 2.3 billion Euros of support from the European Commission. Although the technocrats in Brussels claimed that the situation in Bulgaria was an “isolated” event, concerns about a possible crisis were raised due to the fundamental structure of the financial system.¹³ At a time when the tremor in Bulgaria was still reverberating, stock exchange operations of the biggest bank in Portugal were halted and the central bank was obliged to intervene. What is odd in this situation is that the banking system and the economy in general in Portugal have been de facto under the control of IMF programs since 2011. The crisis in Portugal clearly reveals the fact that austerity policies implemented around Europe had failed by 2014.¹⁴

In August 2014, when the debt restructuring negotiations of the Argentinian government with hedge fund managers yielded no tangible results, the government declared that it could not pay a part of its debt.¹⁵ Lastly, capital movements resulting in a sharp drop in the value of the Russian ruble in December 2014 were signs that the Russian economy was in great distress. For a country covering half of its public expenditure and one-third of its exports through oil and gas sales, the biggest cause of the economic turmoil was undoubtedly the fall in oil prices. Investments on the side of the Western world due to the distress in Ukraine had already started to pressure Russia. However, in an atmosphere when the economic growth substantially slowed down, the decline in oil prices contributed to expectations towards a shrinking economy

and capital outflows further deteriorated the situation.¹⁶

Problems to be resolved in 2015

Considering the estimates of international institutions regarding 2015, it can be foreseen that the main trends visible at the turn of 2014 will continue--meaning that the adverse

Considering the estimates of international institutions regarding 2015, it can be foreseen that the main trends visible at the turn of 2014 will continue. This means that the adverse impacts of the deepening global crisis will persist. Despite the statement of the Central Bank of the EU that all available means would be mobilized to resolve the crisis, 2015 does not look so promising for European markets that are already at the edge of deflation and recession.

impacts of the deepening global crisis will continue. Despite the statement of the Central Bank of the EU that all available means would be mobilized to resolve the crisis,¹⁷ 2015 does not look very promising for European markets that are already at the edge of deflation and recession. Moreover, the victory of Syriza, the radical leftist party with anti-austerity policies, might cause a new rupture in the course of the crisis in Europe.¹⁸

In addition to European markets being at the edge of economic recession due to austerity policies formulated by the ruling parties led by the German capital, news from China also reveal the fact that 2015 will not be that brilliant. China, whose steady growth came to a halt in 2007 and which entered a gradual decline in 2010, expects around 7 percent economic growth in 2015.¹⁹ Estimates regarding Japan are similar to those of Europe. Lastly, contrary to other geographies, the USA is expected to sustain its economic growth. However, this does not mean that adverse impacts of 2008 crisis have been completely resolved. As pointed above, the biggest risk for the US economy is whether the NFA operating through low interest rates would adapt to increasing interest rates.

A gradual slowdown in the economic growth of countries has been obliged to increase interest rates following international outflow of funds marked in 2014. Hence, what has happened in January 2014 indicates what might be the results of a possible decision on

the side of the FED to increase interest rates in 2015. The most significant impact is that funds seeking high income to increase their global value will start to return to the USA and the economic growth will thusly further decline in countries witnessing cash outflow. Consequently, events that have taken place in 2014 point towards areas that will be particularly affected by the crisis, especially towards the second half of 2015.

It remains to be seen in 2015 whether China would consider repeating its recovery package offer to Russia to other countries as well.²⁰ This offer was indeed not a simple foreign exchange swap; it was a move capable of substituting the functions of IMF, which is the ultimate lending authority in the world.²¹ China had a similar arrangement with countries like Argentina and Venezuela. In the case that Russia, a country rich in energy resources, overcomes its economic distress with the help of China, the share of world economy

sion achieved through declining interest rates was the motor of economic expansion after the crisis.

Nevertheless, this policy was dogged by two problems. It was possible to reduce interest rates in times of abundant capital flow due to the expansion policy of the FED adopted to resolve the crisis, but the increasing credit expansion caused by low interest rates threatened the financial stability in return. Macro-prudential measures were implemented to overcome this risk, aspiring to take retarding measures in regard to cash flow so as to restrain the increasing current deficit and shrink credit expansion. However, the indirect result of macro-prudential measures was the slowdown of economic expansion.

The second fundamental problem is that declining interest rates are substantially dependent on the fall of borrowing costs in the international finance system, i.e. FED's quantitative expansion policy. Therefore, as of May 2013 witnessing a change in FED policy, it has become exceedingly difficult for the CBT to keep interests low. Indeed, the necessary intervention of the CBT in January 2014 showed that insisting on keeping the interest rates low in times of capital outflows would cause a rapid appreciation of foreign currency. By September 2014, the January decisions of the CBT regarding foreign exchange rate were underwhelmed, followed by a lower growth and higher unemployment rate.

The main problem of economic administration in 2015 is that the borrowing cost in international markets will not be as cheap as in previous years. However, this problem is not unique to Turkey. The meaning of the FED's crisis resolution strategy for countries like Turkey is, in the worst scenario, a transfer of the crisis to these countries and, in the best scenario, the onset of a low growth period. Circles close to the government are planning to balance this adverse pressure via the decline in oil prices and quantitative expansion announced by the European Central Bank.

With respect to the general elections to be held in June 2015, it can be predicted that the economic administration is easing off until the elections due to various reasons. First, the closest OPEC meeting to resolve the excess supply obviously contributing to the fall in oil prices is in June 2015. Second, signals pointing to the face that the FED will not rush to increase interest rates are getting stronger. Contrary to the last meeting, it is expected in the June OPEC meeting that oil production will be reduced. If the estimates are well grounded, this might coincide with the FED de-

The meaning of the FED's crisis resolution strategy for countries like Turkey is, in the worst scenario, a transfer of the crisis to these countries and, in the best scenario, the onset of a low growth period. Circles close to the government are planning to balance this adverse pressure via the decline in oil prices and quantitative expansion announced to be implemented by the European Central Bank.

not governed by the dollar would expand, while at the same, the tokens of an alternative financial system to Bretton Woods established as of 1945 under the leadership of the USA would gain more ground.²² It is not realistic to anticipate that the US hegemony will recede in 2015, but signals from China show that the cracks in the US hegemony will be slightly enlarged.

Turkish economy in 2015: AKP still fortunate!

Following the record-breaking growth figures in the Turkish economy due to foreign capital flow in the aftermath of 2008 crisis, the growth trend started to stall as of 2012. The program adopted after the crisis was based on the construction and energy sectors aiming at making more expansive use of the opportunities of the inner market. The macro-economic framework making this program possible was based on cutting interest rates. Credit expan-

cision to increase interest rates. In that case, it might be more difficult to sustain economic growth for oil importing countries like Brazil, Turkey or South African Republic. However, it is noteworthy to keep in mind that these two developments will occur in the second half 2015, after the general elections in June.

Another advantage of the economy administration in terms of the general elections is the expectation of a possible fall in inflation in the first half of 2015 due to both oil prices and base effect. This might give the government a chance to reduce the interest rate before the elections. This will in return rapidly trigger credit expansion and the growth in the construction sector and prevent economy from becoming a problematic area for the government.

Nevertheless, what is common to all these aforementioned factors that might ease the hand of the economy administration until the elections is that neither of them is under the control of the government. To be more precise, the fact that the economy seems to be manageable in the first six months is not the result of a successful economic policy. It is only made possible through external factors as oil prices, FED decisions, quantitative expansion in Europe and base effect. Hence, the government might be fortunate once more, at least in terms of economic administration, in the forthcoming elections. However, it would not be a surprise to see that the Turkish economy will once more be economically troubled as of the second half of 2015.

With respect to the general elections to be held in June 2015, it is aptly predictable that the economy administration is at ease until the elections due to various reasons. Firstly, the closest OPEC meeting to resolve the excess supply obviously contributing to the fall in oil prices is in June 2015. Secondly, signals pointing that FED will not rush to increase interest rates get stronger. Hence, the government can once more be fortunate, at least in terms of economy administration, in the forthcoming elections.

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DEMOCRACY

Kurdish organizations outside of PKK are displeased with the process

İrfan Aktan

The so-called “settlement process” which began with PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) leader Abdullah Öcalan's letter dated March 21, 2013 triggered debates in Kurdish organizations other than PKK. Kurdish movements small or big, which are a distant to PKK, initially approached Öcalan's letter “with a prudent optimism”.

In my interviews with various Kurdish groups outside PKK and BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) published in the independent news web site Bianet before Öcalan's letter was disclosed, on March 14, 2013, it was evident that this relative optimism was based on the possibility of an end to the conflict, rather than a resolution of the Kurdish question. (<http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/145079-kurtgutleri-birlik-konferansi-istiyor>)

For instance, president of the Freedom and Socialism Party's (ÖSP) Diyarbakır branch, Nusrettin Maçın said the following: “Those friends [meaning PKK members] started to lay down their arms of their own will. It is their most natural right. However, we shall not remain silent as regards the settlement process and negotiations concerning the Kurdish question.”

General President of KADEP (Participative Democracy Party) Lütfi Bakı, too, left the door open, saying “We are observing the process. We do not support a solution which excludes the expressions ‘Kurd’ and ‘Kurdistan.’ Nevertheless, we think that the process

should begin one way or the other; the rest will follow.”

Of the other leaders we met at the time, Bayram Bozyel, Vice President of Hak-Par (Party for Rights and Freedoms), Sıdkı Zilan, a co-founder of the Islamist movement Azadi Initiative, and İmam Taşçier, the General President of DDKD (Revolutionary Democratic Kurdish Association) also said that, although they had a positive opinion about the ending of the conflict, the process was not designed to resolve the Kurdish question.

In the two years that followed those interviews, we saw the relative optimism of the Kurdish organizations except for that of the BDP (which has now become DBP -Democratic Regions Party) disappear, ceding place to harsher criticisms towards PKK. For the Perspectives magazine, we met with officials from ÖSP, PAK (Kurdistan Freedom Party), the Azadi Initiative, Hak-Par, KADEP and Hüda-Par (The Free Cause Party), who all complain that they are not included in the process as interlocutors. Besides, these officials state—almost without exception—that the ongoing process is about the solution of not the “Kurdish question,” but the “PKK question.” In regard to ‘a single voice,’ it should be known that the groups except Hak-Par and Hüda-Par are indeed holding talks among themselves and testing the water for a possible dialogue with the government excluding PKK as regards the current process and the solution of the Kurdish question. This search for a common ground is based on the idea that the government's talks with Öcalan do not include the solution of the structural aspects of the Kurdish question, such as collective rights.



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No solution without the recognition of collective rights

The President of ÖSP's Diyarbakır branch, Nusrettin Maçın believes that there is a yawning gap between the settlement of the Kurdish question and the ongoing talks with Öcalan: "What we had said back in 2013, when Mr. Öcalan's letter was disclosed to the public, still holds today: The ongoing process is not geared to the solution of the Kurdish question; it concerns only the disarmament of the PKK and the democratization of Turkey. Time will tell how much progress they will make in this path. However, we do not expect this process to bring about recognition of the collective rights of the Kurdish people. For a solution to be reached, certain key measures should be taken. First of all, the existence of Kurds must be recognized in the constitution. Then comes education in mother tongue. Kurdish should become a language of education from primary school to university, and the second official language of the country. Thirdly, Kurds should be given legal status, that is the right to govern themselves. Unless these three rights are recognized, what they call the settlement process will remain limited to taking care of the problems and wounds created by the armed conflict. But the question itself will not be resolved."

"The PKK must lay down arms"

Hak-Par's General President Fehmi Demir agrees with Maçın as to the content of the process.

Demir indicated that they find Öcalan's words "guns should be silenced and politics should do the talking" in his letter to be very important, but that these words were not followed by action: "When Öcalan's letter was disclosed in 2013, we had our doubts. We took Öcalan's and the PKK's declarations with a grain of salt. However, we did support the idea of silencing the guns. From the very beginning, we have disapproved of armed struggle, and instead believed that the problem should be settled through politics, through democratic means. They said that they would take the guns back to Kandil. We said back then, 'Why take the guns to Kandil?' If you are serious about laying down arms, do it here. The government can lay the legal groundwork, and armed militants can put down weapons and return home. Neither the government took such measures, nor did the PKK disarm and pull back to Kandil. The process has been drawn out longer and longer."

According to Demir, no progress is made because the sides are focused on the elections: "The tension rose and fell according to the elections. That is, the electoral schedule set the tone. Besides, we view this not as a settlement process, but as a disarmament process. We think that weapons should be laid down. Set-

Apo, the short form of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's name, is written on the snow, at a rally denouncing the air strike which resulted in the killing of 34 people, mostly children, of the village Roboski in eastern Turkey.

tlement or peace is another issue, in our view. Settlement or peace can be attained only when the rights of the Kurdish people are recognized. In such a process, Öcalan, the PKK and others cannot be the sole interlocutors. All Kurdish organizations and the entire Kurdish people should be included.”

“The PKK should not disarm”

Although the Azadi Initiative is part of the talks for a common ground among organizations other than the PKK-DBP, its cofounder Sıdkı Zilan has a very different opinion about disarmament. After stating that they aspire for peace in Kurdistan and that the people also want peace, Zilan adds that it must be an “honorable” peace: “I would consider the PKK’s disarmament as treason. That is because, the means now controlled by the PKK—the young militants, weapons—belong not to the PKK or Öcalan, but to the people of Kurdistan. They are the result of 40 years of hard work. The PKK should turn into a national army and abandon its pro-Apo [nick name for Abdullah Öcalan] stance. It should become the Northern Kurdistan National Army. We must hold a Northern Kurdistan Congress, and there select an assembly which will govern the PKK and us. That is, we should have a government.” We remind Zilan that the PKK is a socialist organization, and whether he would be concerned with the fact that the government he proposes could be socialist. Here is his response:

“The problem is not leftism, socialism nor Islamism. What counts is becoming national. Whether leftist or Islamist, you should be democratic. For us to hold a good position in the civilized world, we need to stick to civilized principles. We must embrace pluralist and participatory politics.”

“It is up to the PKK to decide on disarmament”

The President of PAK’s İstanbul branch, Ali Fikri Işık, responded very harshly to Zilan’s description of any PKK disarmament as treason: “Sıdkı Zilan’s suggestion that the PKK should not lay down weapons is very childish. It is up to the PKK to decide on disarmament and no one else can have a say. PAK thinks that the PKK should manage its relations with the state as it sees fit. Only the PKK can be held responsible for any positive or negative outcomes. When they decided to take up arms, they did not ask for our opinion. They do not have to do so if they decide to end armed struggle now.”

“Kurds and Turks cannot live together”

KADEP’s General President Lütfi Bakşi, on the other hand, underscores the disparity between the compromises by the Kurdish movement and the issues on the table. He



agrees with Işık as to whether the PKK should continue to wage armed struggle or not. Baksi says “Öcalan is entitled to negotiate with the state on his own behalf or on behalf of his organization; they can make peace and put down arms,” but adds that he cannot negotiate on behalf of the entire Kurdish people: “So much blood has been spilled, and such a fierce struggle has been waged – all for this? First of all, the Kurdish question cannot be resolved unless the state recognizes the Kurdish people and language in both ethnic and geographical terms. The PKK may go away, but another actor will follow suit. The PKK is not a reason but a consequence. A historical opportunity has appeared; this issue should be settled in a radical fashion. The experience of the past 90 years shows that Kurds and Turks cannot live together. This is the twenty-ninth rebellion. The best option is living side to side, that is within a federal system... Kurds should govern themselves.”

Baksi says that he was filled with hope upon listening to Öcalan’s 2013 letter, but that he has eventually lost all that hope. According to him, had the PKK created serious public pressure on the state after Öcalan’s letter, the state would have stepped back. Baksi considers that 25 million Kurds should be taken as the true interlocutor in the settlement of the issue. For this purpose, he believes that a commission or assembly of all Kurds should be created. He thinks that an imprisoned leader such as Öcalan simply cannot hold talks with the state, and that is why Kurdish organizations outside of the PKK-DBP are striving to create a common ground. Baksi suggests that it would strengthen the PKK’s hand if all organizations from Kurdistan became interlocutors. Baksi summarizes the efforts towards a common ground as follows: “Socialists, Islamists and liberal democrats can agree among each other. The result may be a front of sorts. There are plans, we shall see...”

“We have been left out”

Suggesting that “In the last hundred years, the Kurds were always beaten not in war, but at the table,” Baksi believes that history is now repeating itself. Baksi made a reference to the “Conference on the Kurdistan in Turkey” held in September 2011 in Diyarbakır, and said that: “In his message to the conference, Öcalan had indicated that he did not represent the Kurds. We nevertheless have been left out; we have not been provided with any information. All the



other organizations are likewise left out. The negotiations are carried out only by the PKK and its supporters. I guess that the state is pleased with this. The goal here is Turkey-ification, to be followed by Turkification. At the Diyarbakır conference, four items were agreed upon: The recognition of the status of Kurds, education in mother tongue, the right to get organized under the name of Kurdistan and the recognition of the Kurdistan geography. However, Erdoğan continues to say ‘There is no Kurdish question.’ There is much talk about social and economic rights, but nothing about political ones.”

“Serious ruptures may follow”

The President of PAK’s Istanbul branch, Ali Fikri Işık, has bold claims about the future of the process. In his opinion, Newroz 2015 could be a historical turning point: “The PKK or KCK will put an end to its presence in Northern Kurdistan and pull back its military units to Rojava [Syrian Kurdistan]. In 2015, Mr. Öcalan will finalize this historical process. That is, henceforth Kurds will make further gains only through a political struggle based on their identity, by winning over the Turkish and Kurdish public opinions. This is not the settlement of the Kurdistan question. This is the settlement of the problem between the state and KCK, or indeed of the KCK question. Is this a bad thing? Not at all. We support the settlement of the PKK question, but this cannot be seen as equivalent to the settlement of the Kurdish question. That is

HDP MPs Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Pervin Buldan and İdris Baluken having exchanges with deputy PM Yalçın Akdoğan (second from the left) after one of their regular meetings with Öcalan on Imrali island where the PKK leader is imprisoned.

Officials from ÖSP, PAK, Azadi Initiative, Hak-Par, KADEP and Hüda-Par, all complain that they are not included in the process as interlocutors. Besides, these officials state—almost without exception—that the ongoing process is not about the solution of the “Kurdish question,” but specifically the “PKK question.”

because the latter question still exists with all its ontological presence, its objective structure and continues to beg for a solution.”

According to Işık, it will be a problem to convince Kurds that the “settlement of the KCK question” is tantamount to the “settlement of the Kurdish question.” Furthermore, Işık adds that the reaction of Kurds to such an attempt cannot be known beforehand and that serious ruptures may follow: “I think the Kurdish movement has decided to take the risk of such a rupture. They view themselves as the biggest force. They see themselves as the end product, but we know better. The state will of course offer economic incentives. They will try to lead the Kurdish people astray. KCK will claim that the path to autonomy is finally open. We shall see how this will limit the power and impact of the Kurdish discourse which has been demanding the right to exist for the last five thousand years.”

Azadi Initiative’s cofounder Sıdkı Zilan: “I would consider the PKK’s disarmament as treason, because the means now controlled by PKK—the young militants, weapons—belong not to the PKK or Öcalan, but to the people of Kurdistan.

They are the result of 40 years of hard work. The PKK should turn into a national army and abandon its pro-Apo [nick name for Abdullah Öcalan] stance and become the Northern Kurdistan National Army.

Clash between Hûda-Par and YDG-H

A breaking point in the process came on October 6, 2014, when demos in solidarity with Kobanê spread across Kurdistan. On September 15, 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant attempted to invade Kobanê, a canton in Rojava, which pushed the Kurdish movement to assume a new position against the AKP (Justice and Development Party). That is because the the AKP overtly demanded the international community to tolerate ISIL attacks on Kobanê. In the first days of the ISIL campaign, Tayyip Erdoğan claimed that “Kobanê is about to fall”, and the people of Kobanê started to cross the border and enter Northern Kurdistan en masse. All AKP officials seemed to be rather pleased with this flux. They expected that Kobanê would soon fall to ISIL, YPG (People’s Defense Units, PYD’s armed wing) and the canton system in Rojava would take a heavy blow, and the AKP would become stronger vis-a-vis the Kurds. However, in late September, Kurds started to gather along the frontier between Kobanê and Suruç in solidarity demos, which were violently attacked by the

Turkish military and police for days. Even as ISIL made rapid progress in Kobanê, on September 20 Turkey took back 49 employees of its Mosul Consulate who had been kidnapped by ISIL. On the same day, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu arrived in Ankara together with the hostages and stated that September 20 was a day of celebration. However, even as he spoke, the people of Kobanê were fleeing to Northern Kurdistan to escape from ISIL’s barbarism and YPG was waging an all-out struggle. The situation in Kobanê created among the Kurds of the north an immense grief and a palpable anger towards the AKP. This grief and anger translated into mass demos in the first days of October. The demos for solidarity with Kobanê started on October 6 and reached proportions unseen in recent years. In many cities, especially Diyarbakır, there were news of clashes between Hûda-Par and YDG-H (Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement) formed by the Kurdish youth. The fighting went on for days and 40 people lost their lives, killed by the police or in the fighting between YDG-H and Hûda-Par. These clashes put on the agenda a new aspect of the problem: Hûda-Par.

Well-known for his close contact with Hûda-Par and having served as the defense lawyer of Hizbullah, the precursor of Hûda-Par, Sıdkı Zilan explains the roots of this conflict as follows: “A committee which included representatives of many organizations as well as NGOs and opinion leaders from Kurdistan, got together with DTK’s (Democratic Society Congress) co-President Hatip Dicle and Hûda-Par’s Vice President Hüseyin Yılmaz. Such talks are also held in Europe between Hizbullah and PKK. I also heard that there is correspondence between the two sides. Some kind of a mechanism seems to be in place.” Where does the problem lie then? According to Zilan, “Hûda-Par thinks it has a legitimate right to exist in Kurdistan. The PKK, however, never saw them as a legitimate movement of Kurdistan. PKK demands that they should apologize from the people of Kurdistan. Hûda-Par, however, claims that it has already apologized in its manifesto. I encouraged the creation of Hûda-Par. I think that it is positive for Hizbullah to go legal and put down its weapons. Hûda-Par may turn into a movement of Kurdistan; its body already belongs to Kurdistan, though its soul has yet to follow suit. Due to their mutual antagonism, Hizbullah and the PKK are blind to certain facts: ‘If the status of the Kurds is recognized, PKK will become predominant...’ We believe that the Turkish system of domination should be pulled back from Kurdistan. Some, however, may believe that the PKK is the main issue.

In his answers to our questions, Hûda-Par’s Abdurrahman Caner seems to approve of Zilan’s

observations: “From its legal party officials to its leaders in Kandil, PKK must finally accept that the organizations which think differently are not necessarily the state’s puppets or counter-guerillas...”

Hüda-Par’s solution proposals

Caner reiterates the criticism by other Kurdish organizations as regards the issue of interlocutors. He, too, thinks that organizations other than PKK should become interlocutors in the process. Caner summarizes Hüda-Par’s solution proposals for the Kurdish question as follows:

The Kurds must be viewed as one of Turkey’s two constituent peoples. Kurdish must become the second official language. Schools, barracks, avenues, streets, etc. which bear the names of perpetrators of oppression and discrimination should be renamed immediately. The ostracizing and discriminating Turkist discourse which dominates the definition of citizenship, the rest of the constitution and the official language should be abandoned. The original names of settlements whose names were changed must be restituted. The village guard system which leads to multiple problems must be immediately dissolved, albeit without putting the current guards in a dire situation. The cases of disappearances and unsolved murders, which number in the thousands, should be solved in rigorous investigations and the perpetrators must be held accountable. Likewise for burnt villages and forced migration. The past illegal activities in the region by organizations such as Ergenekon, JITEM, etc. must be analyzed in-depth. It must be officially recognized that Kurdish scholars, especially Sheikh Said, were persecuted and the state must apologize from their relatives and the entire Kurdish people. The locations of the graves of Said-i Nursi, Sheikh Said and Seyyid Rıza among others must be disclosed. The archives of the courts called İstiklal Mahkemeleri must be opened immediately. The madrasahs must be ameliorated and returned to their original function. The permits given to the madrasahs must enjoy official status. An investment drive must be started to ensure that the region, left behind for a long period, attains the economic welfare of western provinces. The region must enjoy affirmative action in this sense. In demands for naturalization, Kurds from overseas must be offered the same assistance and priority provided to Turks from Western Thrace and other regions. A political amnesty must be declared to allow those who had to flee abroad for political persecution

or prison sentences to return to the country, and to enable political prisoners to return to social life. The rigid centralist system must be ended, local governments must be strengthened and all local officials must be elected by the people.

CHP’s proposals

Hüda-Par’s propositions point to a surprising convergence with the CHP, the Republican People’s Party. The CHP’s suggestions concerning the Kurdish question focus on similar points. Let us take a look at some proposals in the draft law presented by the CHP to the Parliament in regard to the settlement of the Kurdish question: Lowering the electoral threshold to 3%, abolishing bans on using other languages in political propaganda, dissolving the village guard system, declaring Newroz as an official holiday, turning the Diyarbakır Prison into a museum, assisting people who want to return to their villages, cleaning mines from large plots of land and handing these over to poor peasants, lifting time limits in cases of unsolved murders, eradicating all limitations on public demos, erasing all personal data acquired by the state through illegal means, lowering by half the statute of limitation in sentences by the DGM or State Security Courts, transferring various powers to local government... The CHP also demands the settlement process to be managed by the Parliament.

The President of ÖSP’s Diyarbakır branch, Nusrettin Maçin: “The ongoing process is not geared to the solution of the Kurdish question; it concerns only the disarmament of PKK and the democratization of Turkey. Time will tell how much progress they will make in this path. However, we do not expect this process to bring about recognition of the collective rights of the Kurdish people.”

It is clear that organizations outside of the PKK and the DBP reach an interesting convergence regarding their solution proposals for the Kurdish question and opinions about the talks with Öcalan. Notably, Sırrı Süreyya Önder’s claim that “We are closer to peace than ever before”, is not shared at all by these organizations. In case Öcalan pens a new letter for the upcoming Newroz celebrations and organizations of Kurdistan outside the PKK and the DBP create a common platform, the terms of the debate shall become clearer than ever.

DEMOCRACY

2015: An opportunity for healing

Fethiye Çetin

We started the year 2015 with the civil society's struggle for democracy and rights on the one hand, and tensions created by an increasingly authoritarian government and regional upheaval and conflict on the other. A hundred years have passed since 1915.



Fethiye Çetin

Born in Maden, Elazığ in 1950, Fethiye Çetin graduated from Ankara University, Faculty of Law. She served as board member at Istanbul Bar Association's Human Rights Center, and founded the monitoring group named History for Peace, which aims to change the racist and discriminatory content of textbooks. Çetin's book "My Grandmother" (2004) was translated to 10 languages including Eastern and Western Armenian. Her book "The Grandchildren" (2009) co-written with Ayşe Gül Altınay was translated to French and English. Her book on the Hrant Dink murder, entitled "Utanç Duyuyorum" (I Feel Shame) was released in September 2013. She was Hrant Dink's lawyer, and is now the lawyer for the Dink family and the Hrant Dink Foundation.

A hundred years ago in this land, the state killed a group of its subjects with brutal, horrific methods. The state not only physically annihilated its subjects, but also confiscated the properties and wealth they had created, imposed a policy of denial and oblivion, erased traces of their existence, and developed a discourse of animosity and hate towards the group it annihilated.

Those studying the concept of genocide indicate that genocide is not limited to killing individuals, that is, physical annihilation. It is generally accepted that genocide includes other crimes such as the denial of what has been done, policies of forgetting, expropriation, assimilation, deleting evidence, increased oppression and bans on memorializing. Furthermore, the impunity of these crimes opens the door wide for new crimes.

Cynthia Enloe suggests that it is hard to decide when a period of genocide starts and ends.

In other words, the Armenian genocide did not start and end in 1915, a hundred years ago. This is a process which includes a number of coordinated actions for demolishing the main pillars of Armenian existence and erasing their traces, and this process continues today. The destruction and trauma caused by genocide is

reproduced, new human groups are designated as dispensable, and violence continues to rule over our lives in every field. The brutal and absurd have become systematic.¹

According to Raphael Lemkin,² the genocide has two phases: The first is the destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the second, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor.³

As such, genocides are not only destructive, but in a sense, creative, constitutive processes: They create nations, states, identities and riches.

The supposedly "new" state founded in the aftermath of 1915 was also built on this basis of genocide. The system was devised accordingly; administrative and legal means were designed to justify the genocide, Armenians' properties were confiscated and pillaging became ordinary and legitimate. A new identity was imposed, and minds were shaped in this environment.

One hundred years of silence

In order to establish the myths designed to legitimize the new order, it was necessary to ensure that the horrible crimes and appalling sins committed during the founding of the republic were forgotten. The new myths were thus cemented together with denial and oblivion.⁴

The politics of denial and oblivion succeeded for such a long time mainly because the society, which participated in or remained silent regarding the crimes, also chose to forget. We are talking about one hundred years of silence here. Why did people remain silent for so many years and why are they starting to talk about it now?

The first reasons for silence that spring to mind may be fear and oppression, and that may



The rally held in Istanbul on December 19, the eighth anniversary of the assassination of Hrant Dink.

be right. However, fear and oppression do not suffice in explaining the silence that reigned outside public spaces, for instance, in private spheres. Aside from fear and oppression, shame and guilt have also played a huge role. The atrocities of 1915 took place in front of everyone. One does not need to be a perpetrator of this heinous crime to feel shame and guilt. Would not the shame and guilt of having witnessed yet remaining silent to what happened poison people's lives? Furthermore, didn't a section of the society partake in the pillage of Armenians' riches even if they did not kill Armenians themselves; did not everyone, to an extent large or small, confiscate a house, field, cattle, or even mattresses and household belongings of the Armenian? If you have participated somehow in a crime, you choose silence and denial. Even if you had a very minor gain, it was nonetheless immoral; you feel shame and remain silent because you have somehow participated in this heinous crime. You go along with the state's policy of denial and silence; you approve it.

Is eternal oblivion possible?

History is filled with attempts to forget the heavy burden of the past, or making a fresh start by cleansing oneself from the horrific and painful events of history. In the aftermath of the Peloponnesian Wars, a law was issued banning the reminiscence of the bitter events and horrible circumstances of the past. After Caesar was killed, Cicero said in the Senate that "the murderous discord should be consigned to eternal oblivion."⁵ The politics of eternal oblivion also dominate the official Turkish discourse and historiography regarding 1915: A case in point is the following passage by Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, a historian of the epoch and a biographer of Mustafa Kemal:

"I believe that the hostilities and scuffle between Turks and Armenians is a part of history which is best forgotten. Which side was the first or original perpetrator? Who? Again, I believe

that it is best to not seek answers to these questions and to forget the whole story for good."⁶

However, despite the policy of eternal oblivion, despite bans on and laws against memorializing, eternal oblivion never takes place. Humans cannot forget something they have experienced or learned.

That is because, according to Nietzsche, humans just cannot learn to forget. They may run as fast as they like but their chains will simply drag along with them.

On the other hand, the policy of eternal oblivion can never be practiced by the victims of history. As the victims continue to demand truth and justice, the policy of oblivion, which might have temporarily accomplished something, starts to crack here and there; its plaster begins to come off. Even if it is reinforced as strongly as possible, the inevitable end arrives and taboos are eventually shattered.

In the last twenty years, Turkey has been going through a comprehensive process where a number of "taboos" are questioned at the same time. A national identity based on a specific ethnicity, religion and denomination (Turkish, Muslim and Sunnite), which delegates women to a secondary position and is heterosexist is no longer taken for granted by everyone.⁷

Pioneered by civil society, this process of questioning has led to significant ruptures in the official historical discourse. Identities are questioned, new stories are told eagerly about recent history and families' past, books are penned, documentaries and films are made. The Armenian Genocide commemorations on April 24, which had started in Istanbul, now spread to other cities.

The idea that coming to terms with the past is an integral part of the struggle for democracy is embraced by more and more people, and accordingly the crimes of the past are repeatedly placed on the public agenda. The role of the Kurds in the genocide is discussed and Kurdish politicians offer their apologies, which reinforce the culture of democracy and has repercussions among the Armenian community.

From denial to the "message of condolence"

While these developments were taking place in civil society, the then-Prime Minister Erdoğan issued an unusual statement, interpreted by some as a "message of condolence" to Armenians, a year before the centenary of the genocide, on April 23, 2014. The message, which included the words "It is a duty of humanity to acknowledge that Armenians remember the suffering experienced in that period, just like every other citizen of the Ottoman Empire," was interpreted in different ways in the Armenian community.

Certain circles considered it to be a different version of the policy of denial, some viewed it as a delaying tactic before the centenary of genocide, whereas others thought it to be a new and important step by Turkey to come to terms with its history and expressed their hopes for dialogue and settlement. Certain individuals even placed ads in newspapers to express their gratitude to Erdoğan, or nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. Still others considered it to be an insincere act, "a well-calculated tactic to prevent Obama from using the expression 'genocide.'"

The National Congress of Western Armenians issued the following statement: "The National Congress of Western Armenians considers this statement a first step, and as the Chinese philosopher Lao Tze says, 'A thousand-mile journey starts with a single step.' Mr. Erdogan's step naturally cannot and could not satisfy all the expectations of Western Armenians, who are descendants of the Armenian citizens of the former Ottoman Empire; nevertheless, we are hopeful that after this statement, the authorities in Turkey will join the constructive dialogue that has started between Turkish civil society and ourselves."

Those circles that claimed that the message simply served to normalize, instrumentalize and trivialize the genocide, expressed the following criticism:

"Suggesting that those who died in 1915 were not only Armenians and that sorrow should be expressed for all deceased Ottoman citizens, is tantamount to saying that nothing 'special' or different happened to Armenians. That is equal to saying 'the state did not take and implement a special resolution concerning Armenians, who were simply victims of the general havoc wreaked by the war,' which is a straightforward lie and denial."

US President Barack Obama's statement was not deemed to be satisfactory either.

In his statement issued on April 24, Obama used the expression "medz yeghern" rather than

"genocide."⁸ He was harshly criticized for not using the word genocide, although what he described was indeed a genocide. Armenian National Committee of America described the statement as "President Obama's disgraceful capitulation to Turkey's threats," full of rhetoric and vague wording.

Expectations, questions, hopes, concerns

We entered the year 2015 in an environment shaped by all these events. The centenary of the genocide fuels expectations, questions, hopes and concerns in the worldwide Armenian community and various circles in Turkey.

There are a number of questions which need to be answered: For instance, what will happen on April 24, 2015? Will there be a change in state policy or will the policy inherent in last year's statement continue? Will the US President use the expression genocide this year? What will civil society do? What is the Armenian community planning?

If we start with the last questions, the anti-racist and anti-nationalist platform Irkçılığa ve Milliyetçiliğe Dur-De and other NGOs are planning a number of events such as panel discussions, exhibitions and commemorations. The Human Rights Association of Turkey declared that it will commemorate the genocide in 23 cities across Turkey. Some of these events are organized jointly with certain organizations of the diaspora. Groups from the diaspora plan to commemorate April 24 in their ancestral lands and holy shrines, and announce their demands with resolve to their interlocutors and the world.

As for the question whether the US President will use the expression genocide this year, the US is caught between its moral responsibility regarding the genocide and Turkish threats of the withdrawal of the ambassador or the closure of US military bases in Turkey. Barack Obama was criticized for making an April 24 statement different than that of his predecessors, avoiding the word genocide despite describing it. It was stated that "This statement is a new compromise to the strategic partner."

In consideration of the recent developments in the Middle East and the world, the US is not expected to make a statement that goes against its own strategic interests. However, focusing on the words that come out of US President's mouth on April 24 as happens every year does not help resolve the issue and relegates the human suffering of 1915 to the back burner. As a result, the issue is reduced to an instrument of greedy lobbying and political haggling. The draft laws presented to the US Congress on this issue are voted on as if it were a football game.

Such an approach not only hurts the grandchildren of the victims deeply, but also instrumentalizes and trivializes the issue. The issue continues to top the agenda year after year.

Any draft law on the issue is inevitably an attempt to secure certain votes in the Congress, which in turn trivializes the plight of Ottoman Armenians by linking them to other issues on the Congress agenda. What results is an ordinary barter of the sort “You vote with me on the draft law on farming, and I will vote with you on the genocide law.”⁹

We need to put an end to initiatives which instrumentalize suffering and do not focus on humans and human pain, delivering justice or accepting a future-oriented historical responsibility to prevent the recurrence of such suffering.

Will Turkey’s stance change?

Most probably, there will not be a change in last year’s policy of “shared suffering” and “condolence.” Only unexpected international developments might force the government to take steps going beyond that line.

The thesis that no new steps are to be expected is justified with the fact that Turkey will be in an election atmosphere in 2015. Most likely, the government will take a step back while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Turkish Historical Society take the lead. This argument seems to be bolstered by Ambassador Altay Cengizer’s interesting book published last month, entitled *Adil Hafızanın Işığında* [In the Light of Fair Memory].

These are all possibilities. 2015 is also the centenary of the Dardanelles War, and certainly, Turkey will do its utmost to put war commemorations on top of the agenda and silence the commemorations of April 24. Turkey will also deploy all its means to prevent the US President from pronouncing the word genocide and make lobbying to argue that the issue must be left to historians.

As can be seen, none of the policies that Turkey will probably pursue in the centenary focus on the settlement of the issue. If the US President refrains from the word genocide—and he probably will—please answer me honestly, will the issue be resolved for good? Or if you suppress the voice of the Armenians with alternative propaganda on the Dardanelles War, will the matter be settled and fall from the agenda?

The issue is not a foreign matter, so it simply cannot be delegated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is a matter of redressing an act of immense injustice by the state towards its own citizens. So, solutions must be humane and focus on delivering justice.

At the latest conference of Turkish ambassa-

dors, the president of Turkey’s Commission on EU Affairs Mehmet Tekelioğlu said, “We will implement shock activities.”¹⁰ What does that mean? Whom will you shock, and with what? Against whom will you organize “shock activities”?

At the conference, Cemil Çiçek said “In 2015, some strangers will organize a campaign across the world about a so-called genocide.”¹¹ This kind of talk nullifies Erdoğan’s “message of condolence” in a clear expression that the state’s policy of denial is still going strong. First of all, those whom you call “some strangers” are the citizens of your country. Or if you are referring to the Armenians of the diaspora, their ancestors, who were the

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citizens of the same state with your ancestors and driven from their lands due to that the state’s policy of genocide, they have rights. Their rights were violated and they demand justice. How humane is your approach, your discourse; is it solution-oriented? Why do you view 2015 as a year of fighting, campaigns, and shock activities should reach their zenith, and not as an opportunity to settle the problem?

As Hannah Arendt maintained, if an evil act is committed once, there is no reason why it should not repeat itself; what is experienced is inscribed in memory and belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is, more than anything, a matter of healing ourselves together and creating a just future.

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1. Hannah Arendt, German political scientist.
 2. Raphael Lemkin, the Polish jurist who coined and defined the word genocide.
 3. Taner Akçam, *Ermenilerin Zorla Müslümanlaştırılması, İletişim*, p.81
 4. Mithat Sancar, “Büyük Yüzleşme Randevusu”, *Bas News, Bas Haber Gazetesi*, January 5, 2015.
 5. Mithat Sancar, *Geçmişle Hesaplaşma, İletişim*, p.37.
 6. Hülya Adak, *İmparatorluğun Çöküş Döneminde Osmanlı Ermenileri, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları*, p.317.
 7. Ayşe Gül Altınay, “Müslümanlaştırılmış Ermeni ‘kadin ve çocuklara’ feminist merakla yaklaşmak.”
 8. Armenian for “the great disaster.”
 9. Thomas De Waal, “The G-Word: Ermeni katliamı ve soykırım siyaseti”, *Agos*, January 2, 2015.
 10. *Agos*, January 7, 2015.
 11. *Agos*, January 7, 2015.

DEMOCRACY

Centenary of the Armenian genocide and the run-up to elections

Fatih Gökhan Diler

"This very much resembles a penalty kick. If I were an Armenian, I would simply go on saying the same thing. That is because the centenary is a penalty kick of sorts. We are objecting to the referee's decision. But the penalty will be taken. The Armenian views the centenary as a penalty kick in his favor, and will try to make the best of it. In the face of accusations that undermine its very identity, Turkey will do its utmost to explain its own version of events. However, only time will tell whether Turkey will succeed or not. In case we fail, we will have to devise a post-2015 strategy. There is no other option."

In an interview to the daily *Hürriyet*, the author of the book *Adil Hafızanın Işığında* (In the Light of Fair Memory), Ambassador Altay Cengizer expressed his opinion of the centenary of the Armenian genocide in these words.

The ambassador's book was in a way ground-breaking for the Turkish Foreign Service tradition. Although he suggested that his arguments should not be thought of as reflecting the official line of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cengizer is the General Director of Political Planning at the ministry and diplomats on duty very rarely express their personal opinions. Therefore, considering the place the year 2015 occupies in the minds of Turkish policymakers, we can draw a number of conclusions from his book.



Fatih Gökhan Diler

Born in 1984 in Mersin, he graduated from Kadıköy Anadolu High School and Galatasaray University Department of Economics. Since 2012, he works for the weekly newspaper AGOS.

As a journalist sensitive to the events of 1915, the *Hürriyet* correspondent Cansu Çamlıbel visited Armenia as part of Hrant Dink Foundation's Turkey-Armenia Journalists' Dialogue Programme, which keeps a close watch on global developments concerning this issue. Çamlıbel is in close contact with diplomatic circles and her observations in this context are noteworthy: "In the challenging period which awaits us, it is not difficult to surmise that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will make use of this book for which Cengizer has spent years studying hundreds of documents."

"The Armenian question" has always been a foreign policy war front for the Turkish Republic. In every country with Turkish representation, state officials have pursued a "policy of denial" regarding the events of 1915 in all platforms, whether social, cultural, artistic or political, and in every country. In line with the strategy it has set out for itself, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs carries out activities in Turkey and on the international arena via its overseas branches in collaboration with relevant individuals and institutions.

Except for one project initiated in 2009 in order to normalize Turkey-Armenia relations, there has been no significant deviation in the Turkish Republic's hundred-year-old position towards Armenians. As these protocols were signed in 2009, for the first time the Turkish state had taken a step outside the axis of animosity based on the denial of the genocide. However, due to its dependence on foreign energy and internal nationalist discourses, Turkey eventually went back to its traditional policy, toeing the political line of energy-rich Azerbaijan, the 'archenemy' of Armenia.



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Three main policies

Turkey can be said to have three main policies concerning the events of 1915. First, Turkey tries to influence foreign lawmakers, especially in the USA, through lobbying activities centered on denial, and utilizes its geopolitical importance to force foreign countries to block projects and legal initiatives regarding 2015 and the Armenian genocide. Secondly, through various channels, Turkey funds Western social scientists who produce custom-made studies that uphold Turkey's position on the events of 1915. Finally, Turkey plans to emphasize the centenary of its "victory" in the Dardanelles War so as to shadow the centenary of the Armenian genocide and to diminish the importance of the April 24th commemoration in the public agenda.

Denials continue but with a new twist: "condolences"

After the signing of the said protocols between Armenia and Turkey in 2009, the only similar step was taken on April 23, 2014, a day before the 99th anniversary of the genocide. In a statement described as historical by many, the then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan offered his condolences. In his message on the 99th anniversary of the Armenian

genocide, Erdoğan said "We wish that the Armenians who lost their lives in the context of the events of the early 20th century rest in peace, and we convey our condolences to their grandchildren."

This message by Erdoğan, the person with the highest influence on the Turkish public agenda, made the Armenian genocide and its commemoration on April 24th the top item of the agenda, turning an issue of foreign affairs into a topic of debate in domestic politics.

I would like to share an anecdote in this context. It was the night of April 23, and we were about to send the weekly newspaper *Agos* to press. We were holding a meeting to decide on the newspaper's headline, yet we felt gloomy due to the media's lack of attention towards the "genocide commemoration."

The rally held in Istanbul on 24 April 2014 to commemorate the 99th anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

"The Armenian question" has always been a foreign policy war front for the Turkish Republic. In every country with Turkish representation, state officials have pursued a "policy of denial" regarding the events of 1915 in all platforms, whether social, cultural, artistic or political, and in every country. In line with the strategy it has set out for itself, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs carries out activities in Turkey and on the international arena via its overseas branches in collaboration with relevant individuals and institutions.

Our colleagues working at other newspapers and televisions had lost their interest in next day's commemoration in Taksim Square, and the media was largely silent on the issue. So, no one expected this declaration by Erdoğan. Following his declaration, which would be remembered as a "message of condolence," the issue remained on the agenda for weeks and our phones never stopped ringing. Erdoğan's message, issued in nine languages including Western and Eastern Armenian, pointed to a new situation, although it was still one of denial. I would like to share a passage from our article entitled "May this condolence be a start, not the end," which was penned after the said meeting at the Agos office:

As a new message albeit a denialist one, this offering of condolence by Erdoğan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a combination of a partial improvement on the previous state discourse on the Armenian question with other tactical concerns. Although it comes from a naïve and optimistic approach, this may look like "the first step in a long process which will lead to the recognition of the Armenian genocide."

From a more realistic perspective, it resembles a tactical move to partially relieve Ankara of the increasing pressure developing in the centenary of the genocide.

"Not accepting the condolence offered for our deceased loved ones would go against our shared values. We accept these condolences with our right hand, and place it on our heart - with joy, but also much grief... Yet our words do not stop there. There are shortcomings, and points which we want to highlight or criticize. We would like these to be taken into account.

In Turkey, coming to terms with the past cannot be achieved through tactical moves motivated by national interests, but rather through earnest, well-planned steps with significant content.

If such a change does not come, the condolence will remain only a condolence, that is, an end... However, the condolence can also pave the ground for a true confrontation with the past in this land, for a true peace among the peoples. It is enough to truly want it."

As a new message albeit a denialist one, this offering of condolence by Erdoğan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a combination of a partial improvement on the previous state discourse on the Armenian question with other tactical concerns. Although it comes from a naïve and optimistic approach,

this may look like "the first step in a long process which will lead to the recognition of the Armenian genocide." From a more realistic perspective, it resembles a tactical move to partially relieve Ankara of the increasing pressure developing in the centenary of the genocide. Nonetheless, what is said cannot be taken back, and the Turkish state discourse cannot go back to what it was before the message of condolence.

A holistic strategy

On the other hand there is a question growing in the minds of the Armenian diaspora, Armenians of Armenia and certain circles in Turkey: What will happen in 2015, the centenary of the Armenian genocide, which will also witness general elections with huge importance for AKP, the ruling Justice and Development Party? How will this issue affect the political atmosphere and what will be the consequences? Another question concerns the position of the main opposition party CHP, the Republican People's Party.

Although the President Erdoğan is sure to deliver election speeches to huge crowds as if he were the prime minister and take his place in the propaganda scene, one needs to look at the discourse of Prime Minister Davutoğlu who will officially lead AKP in the run-up to the elections in order to understand how the Armenian genocide will affect the political atmosphere.

In the aftermath of the message of condolence, Davutoğlu said, "We hope that the hand we extend receives a response. Turkey does not make such declarations under pressure, and this is not a tactical declaration on our part." In response to a parliamentary question by the independent Istanbul MP İhsan Barutçu, he elaborated his position as follows: "The fight against Armenian claims about the events of 1915 necessitates a holistic strategy which will extend to diplomatic and legal fields, public diplomacy and academic studies, and the Turkish diaspora overseas. Indeed, the Prime Minister's message dated April 23 is a part of this strategy."

The aftermath of the condolence continued with the resignation of Metin Hülagü, the president of the Turkish Historical Society (TTK). It is the production center of the official historical discourse, and there is a search for "international academics who will uphold the new approach."

A few examples about the "holistic strategy" that Prime Minister Davutoğlu speaks



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of can give us an idea as to what we will encounter in the run-up to the elections and the centenary of the genocide. The conflicting and zigzag nature of steps taken in and outside Ankara naturally urges us to question the scope and impact of the condolences. As long as the overseas policy deploys every method to strengthen denialism and rejection, the other steps taken in this regard will inevitably appear as pragmatic moves.

Using the Dardanelles Campaign to change the agenda

In this respect, let us give two examples from Switzerland and Australia. It was revealed that, in Switzerland in 2008, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs negotiated and exerted pressure in order to postpone the installation of the art project entitled *The Streetlights of Memory* next to the United Nations Geneva Centre in memory of the victims of the Armenian genocide with the support of the Geneva City Council. To hinder the project, Turkey used the G-20 Summit to be held in 2015 in Antalya as a carrot because Switzerland wants to take part in it.

In a second example, Australia Turkey Defense Union (ATA-A) penned a protest letter to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs in reaction to the New South Wales Parliament's decision to recognize the Armenian genocide. In response, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop said that the

country did not view the Armenian question as a case of "genocide," a position in line with its general foreign policy. Ankara's interest towards Australia is not limited to blocking a possible law recognizing the Armenian genocide, however. The Turkish government has frequently stated that "For us, 1915 stands for the Dardanelles War" and it uses the pretext of the Dardanelles War to diminish the importance of the Armenian genocide on the agenda. 2015 has been declared the "Year of Australia" in Turkey and "Year of Turkey" in Australia. The Gallipoli Campaign is seen as a key event in shaping the Australian identity. The Dardanelles are naturally a "sacred" place for Australians since many Anzac soldiers lost their lives in that tragic war. Unfortunately, the Australian government does not criticize Turkey for fear of retaliation. According to the Turkish media, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has declared that those Australians linked to the abovementioned law will not be allowed to the town of Çanakkale.

We can also add to the picture the AKP's resistance to the restitution of the real estate known as Sansaryan Han to its true owners. The court's rejection of the return of this building to the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey seems to be politically rather than legally motivated, considering that Erdoğan gave a negative response in a meeting held just before offering condolences. This rejection

Banners reading "For Hrant, For Justice" at the rally commemorating the eight anniversary of Hrant Dink's assassination.

is very important, since a return would have initiated similar procedures concerning other unlawfully seized real estate belonging to the foundations of ethnic minorities.

As such, in view of these developments, it can be said that the impact of the centenary of the genocide on the Turkish political arena will remain limited to a message of condolence, which remains a cosmetic gesture whose sincerity is questionable, designed only to strengthen Turkey's hand in the international arena. However, it needs to be noted that the condolence message was nevertheless a surprise move.

Public Survey on the Armenian Question issued by EDAM (Center for Economics and Foreign Policy) in late December is helpful. According to the results, 24% consider that those killed in 1915 were not only Nine percent think that the "claims of genocide" should be accepted. Another nine percent state that Turkey should take steps towards making an apology, without accepting the claims of genocide. In other words, a total of 18% of participants think that Turkey should apologize to Armenians for 1915. Twenty-one percent of the respondents think that Turkey should not take any step regarding the "alleged Armenian genocide."

When I asked him his opinion on the matter, the journalist Yetvart Danzikyan said the following:

The fact that the centenary of the genocide coincides with elections of great importance to AKP creates a huge question mark. The elections are scheduled to be held in June, unless they are called earlier. On the other hand, last year's condolence message has created certain expectations, even though it sparked controversy. It might be expected that the AKP will not lower the bar, not in the centenary at least, but this is merely a presumption. Indeed, the AKP is a rather flexible party, just like its constituency. The AKP electorate, which—in the context of the Kurdish question—welcomes a decision of war and a decision of peace in much the same way, will likewise give a similar reaction to a dovish and a hawkish policy on 1915, I guess. What counts is what the AKP leaders are planning for 2015. Neither of two diametrically opposite declarations would come as a surprise to me.

Business as usual at CHP and MHP

How about the other actors in the political arena? The President of MHP (Nationalist Action Party) Devlet Bahçeli, reacted to Erdoğan's condolences for 1915 with the

statement, "There are no words to describe this; the [Turkish] nation has suffered enough already."

The CHP, on the other hand, gave its support to Erdoğan. CHP's Vice President Faruk Loğoğlu stated that the most noteworthy expression in Erdoğan's statement was the word "condolence" and added that "This is a sacred, respectable concept shared by all religions. There is nothing objectionable here. No need to feel offended. But what are the circumstances and occasions which led to this condolence? Why after such delay; why does a prime minister in power for so many years choose the year 2014? We need to question this..."

When discussing the discourses of political parties and how the centenary can impact the politics and elections, the constituencies of the parties naturally need to be taken into consideration. In the final instance, the parties follow policies approved by their constituencies or policies designed to extend their constituency. Nevertheless, interestingly enough, there is no satisfactory public survey or academic research on the Armenian question. Although not adequate, the Public Survey on the Armenian Question issued by EDAM (Center for Economics and Foreign Policy) in late December is helpful. According to this research, a large portion of the public supports the official political line embodied by Erdoğan's "message of condolence" of April 23, 2014.

In the survey, carried out from November 7 until December 7 2014, 1,508 respondents deemed to represent the Turkish electorate were asked which state policy they support in the context of the Armenian genocide. According to the results, 24% consider that those killed in 1915 were not only Armenians and that sorrow must be expressed for all the deceased, while 12% think that sorrow and not an apology should be expressed for the Armenians killed in 1915.

Nine percent think that the "claims of genocide" should be accepted. Another nine percent state that Turkey should take steps towards making an apology, without accepting the claims of genocide. In other words, a total of 18% of participants think that Turkey should apologize to Armenians for 1915.

Twenty-one percent of the respondents think that Turkey should not take any step regarding the "alleged Armenian genocide." Another noteworthy result is that 25% of participants refused to answer this particular question at all.

One important issue is the division among the CHP electorate over this question. The

CHP constituency does not think that “claims of genocide” should be accepted; however, has a more favorable stance than other parties’ supporters towards an apology. Twenty percent of all CHP electors think that “no step should be taken,” followed by a group of 17% who consider that sorrow should be expressed for all the losses of the era.

Although it harbors diverse tendencies, the CHP follows a rather nationalist line on the issue of the Armenian genocide. Here is what Ayşen Uysal, a faculty member at Dokuz Eylül University Department of Political Science known for her work on the CHP, thinks in this regard:

Although a few dissident voices are heard in the CHP, the party as a whole is not close to recognizing the genocide. In fact, even apologies offered on different questions immediately remind CHP members of the Armenian genocide. For instance, Vice President Sezgin Tanrikulu offered his apologies for the Dersim Massacre on a TV program. Although this declaration did not bind the party and was probably meant to test the reactions of the party apparatus and electorate, the battle lines were drawn immediately and the issue was linked to the Armenian genocide debate. As you remember, after Tanrikulu said these words, the party’s nationalist wing went on a rampage and insulted him.

The CHP’s most concrete suggestion regarding the Armenian genocide is “The establishment of a joint historical commission and the initiation of a dialogue between parties based on documented facts.” They also propose that all archives should be opened and a “dialogue group” should be set up. The party’s suggestions do not, or rather cannot, go further than that. When the issue is brought up, the President Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu says “Let us leave

historians to decide whether it was a genocide or not.” Clearly, this is an expression meant to avoid a serious discussion of the issue.

Ayşen Uysal thinks that the CHP should not be expected to take a favorable initiative in 2015. When I asked her, “Will the upcoming elections have an effect on the CHP’s stance on the Armenian genocide?” her response was as follows:

I don’t think that it will. On the one hand, the leaders are afraid of reactions from their nationalist base. It is very difficult for CHP to take a step forward in the Armenian, Kurdish or Dersim questions unless it radically changes its political composition. At most, they might test the waters with declarations by one

CHP electorate over this question. The CHP constituency does not think that “claims of genocide” should be accepted; however, has a more favorable stance than other parties’ supporters towards an apology. Twenty percent of all CHP electors think that “no step should be taken,” followed by a group of 17% who consider that sorrow should be expressed for all the losses of the era.

or two MPs and then immediately step back. Furthermore, CHP members outside the nationalist wing also know little on the issue and their perspective is based on stereotypes; as such, they have similar opinions on the Armenian genocide. Given this picture, the CHP should not be expected to go beyond a few shy remarks even though it is the year 2015. They will continue to delegate the question to historians, to future generations. That is, their lack of policy on the Armenian genocide seems set to remain unchanged.”

ECOLOGY

Shale gas in Turkey: An Equation with multiple variables

Özgür Gürbüz

As fossil fuel resources on earth (oil, coal and gas) are restricted in general but intensified in certain geographies, countries whose energy politics depend on these resources frequently complain about foreign-source dependency. Turkey is also dependent on foreign resources for 73% of its fossil fuels¹ and its energy imports are estimated to be at the level of 56 billion dollars by the end of 2014.²



Özgür Gürbüz

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Two products dominate the country's energy imports: 90.4% of consumed oil and 98.5% of natural gas is imported.³ Oil and natural gas are used more than coal. As the cost of importing oil is higher than that of natural gas, natural gas imports are more a subject of public debate. It is clear that both the transportation policy of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the correspondingly strong automotive lobby are responsible for making oil indispensable. It goes beyond the scope of this article, but it is nevertheless significant to mention this point in order to better grasp how the situation of shale or 'rock gas' (a popular but technically incorrect term), might be evaluated in Turkey. Although oil imports have a higher economical burden in Turkey than natural gas, it is significant to know that natural gas is what first comes to mind in discussions around foreign dependency in energy; foreign dependency is

associated with natural gas. Shale gas to be introduced as 'local gas' would certainly be an advantage in gaining public opinion. This would perhaps be the most critical point of the propaganda war.

The Lesser evil

That shale gas is 'local' is not the only argument in its favor. The gas has indeed many advantages when compared to other fossil fuels and nuclear energy, though this is not much discussed by the energy sector and environment movement. It emits almost half of greenhouse gases when compared to coal or oil. We might not call it environment-friendly, but we can say that it is better than coal and oil. Hence, many environmentalist groups consider shale gas a transitional technology. They do not consider shale gas amongst the larger evils in the war against global climate change. They consider keeping natural gas stations as a back-up until renewable energies expand and storing technologies and smart networks become more advanced. Although a cumbersome extraction process, the need for hundreds of tankers for transportation and methane leakages are potentially serious hazards to the environment, the discourse on "environment-friendly natural gas" has already been popularized with a public that is not very knowledgeable about the issue.

Another advantage of using this gas in Turkey is that necessary infrastructure for its transportation is already present in almost all cities. Non-isolated buildings in urban

sprawl not using energy efficiently are heated by natural gas. These giant cities, with their uncontrolled rate of growth, crave green spaces and air corridors. But they can simply turn into giant graveyards once coal is used for heating. There are also natural gas stations that have been or that will be licensed by the Ministry of Energy Monitoring Board. This is an advantage for natural gas for sure, while the only slogan of its opposers is “foreign dependency.” Considering the fact that “local” shale gas would disqualify this slogan, it seems that only environmentalists would be left to oppose this fossil fuel.

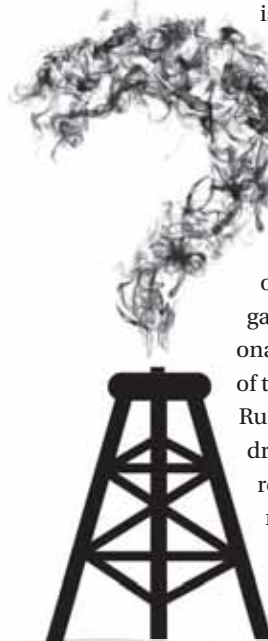
USA ranks first in gas production thanks to shale gas

Certainly the USA is one reason that we are talking so much about shale gas. Thanks to shale gas, USA ranked in 2009 as the biggest gas producer in the world, surpassing the gas production in Russia.⁴ The USA did not discover shale gas out of the blue. This resource has been known to exist for around a hundred years, but the cost of its extraction from within the rocks via hydraulic fracturing has been thus far higher than transporting the gas from the Middle East. The boom in gas prices and technological advances made it more appealing for fossil fuel companies to procure gas by adding hundreds of chemicals via water. Before the rise of the shale gas wave, its cost for 1 Bcf was over 10 dollars. Since 2009, there has been drop in prices below five or even four dollars. At the beginning of 2015, Henry Hub spot price dropped below three dollars or even less.⁵ Coming up with a local and economic alternative to imported natural gas changed the balances in US energy market in favor of natural gas.

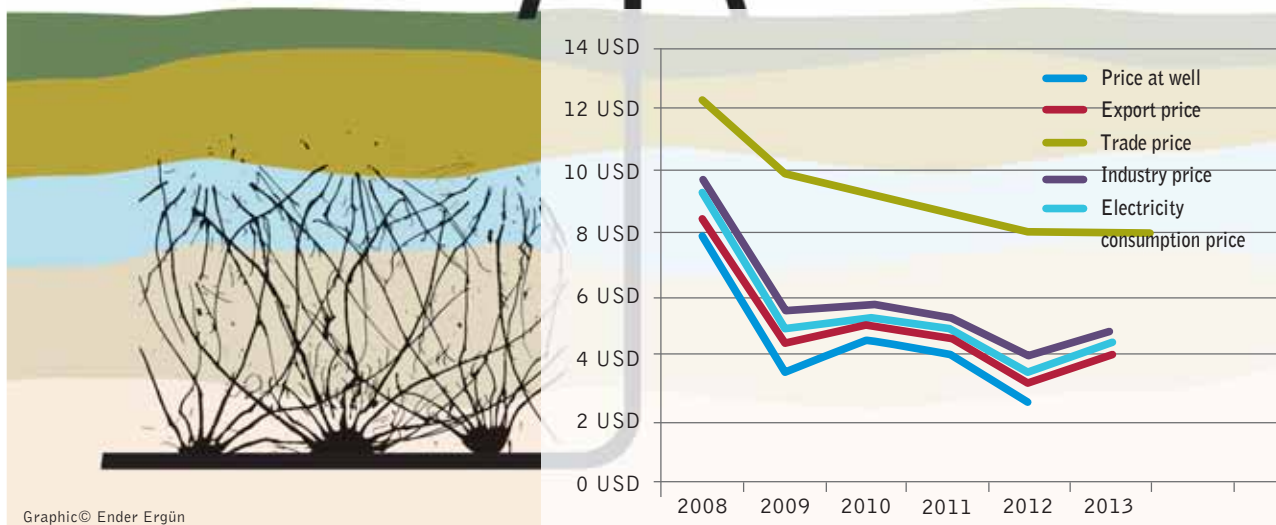
Shale Gas is increasingly attracting more attention in Europe, especially in Britain and Poland. Four factors contribute to this process: natural gas prices in international markets, the future of the crisis regarding Russia, the cost of gas withdrawal in Europe and the reaction of people in their respective countries. These four factors are also valid for Turkey.

We know that this shift in the USA has also affected Asia and Europe. Shale gas research in the USA also resulted in discussions in Europe. Shale gas has had a slower expansion in use in Europe due to different geographical conditions and political structures. The population density in regions where shale gas is abundant is higher in Europe. People are more concerned due to the proximity of reserves to living space and cultivated areas. Technically speaking, it proves to be a more costly process in Europe. However, shale gas

is attracting increasing attention in Europe, especially in Britain and Poland. It can briefly be summarized that four factors will have an impact on this process: natural gas prices in international markets, the future of the crisis regarding Russia, cost of gas withdrawal in Europe and the reaction of people with response to the attitude of their respective countries.



Graph: Natural gas prices in the USA per 1 Bcf
Resource: US Energy Information Administration



Graphic© Ender Ergün

Reserves in Turkey are unknown

We might say that these four factors are also valid for Turkey. The answer to the question, 'Is there shale gas in Turkey' is affirmative, but it does not mean that this shale gas can be extracted so as to have an economic value. Above all, we can begin with the question of how much shale gas does the country have. It is known that Turkey has at least five basins estimated to have unprecedented fossil fuels: Southeastern Anatolia, Thrace, Eastern Anatolia, the Black Sea Basin (high-sea) and the Central Anatolian Basin.⁶ We have more data on some of these regions, since natural gas (Thrace Basin) and oil (Southeastern Region) are already being extracted in these basins. We also have estimates regarding the magnitude of overall reserves of these two regions. According to the research conducted by Advanced Resources International consultancy company under the initiative of the US Energy Information Agency in 41 countries, the overall extractable shale gas reserves in Dadas and Hamitabat basins is around 650 billion square meters.⁷ Turkey's 2014 natural gas consumption is 48 billion square meters.⁸ Considering the fact that gas demand in Turkey will further increa-

Environmentalists in Turkey and Europe have a similar reaction to shale gas withdrawal. Although exact numbers vary, approximately 30 million liters of water consumption per well is an alert to environmentalists in a country like Turkey, which is not rich in water resources.

se, an optimistic estimate can put forward that the shale gas potential in these two reserves can cover 10 years of gas requirement of the country. This period might even be prolonged also keeping in mind non-shale gas reserves.

There are ongoing studies in these two regions. Three shale gas wells are being drilled at Diyarbakır border whose results are being awaited. Shell Upstream Turkey conducts the drilling activities in the region also called the Dadas Formation as a result of a contract signed in 2011 with Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO). Three wells around Diyarbakır are being drilled to reach the necessary parameters to determine the gas potential and its availability in DADAS Formation. The results have yet to be announced.⁹

Shale gas issue in Turkey is like an equation with multiple variables. Above all, we do not have exact information concerning

existing reserves. We have estimates relying on the data issued by the US Energy Information Agency. These estimates are based on the two regions having already been subjected to gas and oil withdrawal activities. More exact information on Turkish reserves can be attained through research on other regions having similar rock structures. This is the first variable of the equation.

The second variable is about the cost of the withdrawal of existing shale gas. Higher costs are one of the reasons why Europe lags significantly behind the USA in shale gas. Antoine Simon conducting the Mining and Industrial Campaign of Friends of the Earth Europe states that withdrawal from shale gas wells in Europe can by no means be realized with the prices in USA due to the complicated geological structure and the fact that reserves are located deeper down in the earth. Simon also adds that each drilling well in Pomerania, Poland, costs 30-35 million dollars. The cost of wells depends on the land structure and depth of reserves and varies accordingly from well to well. Ken Medlock, the senior director of Baker Institute Energy Research Center affiliated with Rice University states that the cost of a shale gas well in Poland having the same qualities of the ones in the USA (Haynesville) that cost 8 million dollars would cost 14 to 16 million dollars.¹⁰ According to Medlock, this gap in costs results from a lack of experience and the need to transport the necessary equipment from outside Poland. Considering the geographical structure and equipment requirements in Turkey, we might say that the cost would be closer to Europe. Once the wells are opened, the cost of fracturing is stated to be around 200,000 to 500,000 US dollars.¹¹

Objections to shale gas escalate

Environmentalists in Turkey and Europe have a similar reaction to shale gas withdrawal. Although exact numbers vary, the approximately 30 million liters of water consumption per well is an alert to environmentalists in a country like Turkey, which is not rich in water resources. The use of chemicals during the fracturing phase, though amounting to very little of the overall magnitude, and the risk of their leakage to natural resources will be hazardous especially for the farmers in the region using underground water resources. Water consumption further becomes an important issue considering that both potential shale gas withdrawal basins (Thrace and Southeastern Anatolia) are located on cultivated lands. It

would be untrue to say that there has never been an objection against shale gas in Turkey. Gültekin Aydeniz, from the Mesopotamian Ecology Movement, had expressed objections of locals against the shale gas drilling activities in Diyarbakir in the Shale Gas Conference held by Heinrich Böll Foundation. However, it cannot be said that in-depth discussions on the issue are covered by the media. The lack of sufficient public opinion on the ongoing activities also restricts public discussions on shale gas.

Although it complains about foreign dependency in natural gas, the current government of Turkey does not seem to be in hurry to extract shale gas. The results of the drilling activities in Dadas might change the pace of the process. Nevertheless, there is no comprehensive project or plan on the agenda. We might say that the road map of the government is determined by the initiatives of private companies just as with other energy investments. This is what we draw from the information available to the public.

It is indeed incomprehensible that Turkey insists on fossil fuels and nuclear energy to solve its foreign dependency in energy. Before the AKP came to power, the foreign dependency of Turkey in energy was 65.1 percent (2001).¹² Today, this amounts to 73 percent.

Although the use of a local resource instead of imported oil, natural gas and coal seems to be a logical solution to the foreign-dependency problem, it is obvious that we need a more holistic approach envisaging getting rid of fossil fuels and transferring to renewable energy. Another problem is how and where the energy can be the most efficiently used. There are many countries like Turkey which are highly dependent on foreign energy resources. For instance, countries like South Korea manufacturing products with high added-value are not as much troubled by the imported energy issue; the dependency of South Korea on foreign energy is even higher than Turkey.

Continuing to waste or use more imported energy than necessary due to lack of isolation techniques, transportation costs or inefficient

Water consumption further becomes an important issue considering that both potential shale gas withdrawal basins (Thrace and Southeastern Anatolia) are located on cultivated lands. It would be untrue to say that there has never been an objection against shale gas in Turkey. Gültekin Aydeniz, from the Mesopotamian Ecology Movement, had expressed objections of locals against the shale gas drilling activities in Diyarbakir in the Shale Gas Conference held by Heinrich Böll Foundaditon. However, it cannot be said that in-depth discussions on the issue are covered by the media. The lack of sufficient public opinion on the ongoing activities also restricts public discussions on shale gas.

equipment and trying to decrease foreign dependency by using local resources will simply defer the problem. In that case, even renewable energy will not be able to save Turkey.

1. Crude Oil and Natural Gas Report, TPAO, p.26, Figure 24.
2. Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Development , Medium Term Program, 2015-2017, p.22, Annex, Table 1.
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ECOLOGY

Land grabbing as a political act

Deniz Bayram, Olcay Bingöl

A few weeks ago, we came across a promotional text on a website that features fancy photos of detached houses surrounded by trees anyone living in a big city would dream of. The text illustrates a residential compound designed for high-end consumers in Büyükdere district of Istanbul.



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That text, which is nothing but an ordinary replicate of thousands of similar ones, caught our eye, because it is stated that 1200 olive trees will be replanted within the boundaries of the compound in accordance with its "Aegean Village" concept plan. Moreover, it is lyrically noted that a 400 years old olive tree to be replanted in the "village" square will say "hello" to us as a representative of thirty nine thousand years old cultural heritage. The following is an extract from the text:

"As soon as you come in the door, you will feel as if you are in an Aegean village where people grow olives. As you walk the fifty-meter-wide boulevard that leads to the village square, you will be surrounded by eighty years old olive trees. These olive trees stretching over the road to your front door bear fruits to be enjoyed by the residents of the compound. Every year during the festival days, olives will be harvested collectively. Residents would enjoy olive oil and olives to be produced from these orchards. Each dwelling unit within the compound was named after the historical names of sites where best-quality olives are cultivated in the Aegean region: Thera, Lagina, Claros, Larisa, Alinda and Trilye."

The text concludes with an invitation to those who "aspire to accommodate in this residential compound that accepts this cultural value inherited from the Anatolian land as its symbol, and that has integrated such values into its life cycle".

These lines that we read just after the murder of more than 6000 olive trees in Yırca portray the transformation that is taking place in both rural and urban areas in Turkey. Thousands of families in the Aegean, Thracian and Mediterranean regions of Turkey, who have managed to make their living, earn their bread and educate their children for centuries by olive cultivation, could no longer enjoy the happy, joyful and guaranteed life in an "Aegean village" depicted above. Rather, they struggle to survive, deprived of olives to be harvested at festivals, as waged workers in mines, industrial plants and tourism facilities built on orchards, forests, water basins and agricultural lands. In their villages stuck between the highways that brutally split fertile land and forest and they tell fairy tales to their grandchildren about this "cultural value inherited from the Anatolian land".

So, first of all we must ask the question of "what is land". What does it mean for those living on it? And, what does it mean for those who have the power of making decision regarding how land would be used? Would it be used in accordance what individuals and communities living on it desire and decide? Or, would it be considered as a site where the power exercises its sovereignty based on overarching factors such as industry, energy and settlement, omitting those desires and lives?

Since "making decisions" about land means exercising sovereignty, and then we might ask to what extent do land owners aspiring to



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reconfigure their lives on their land enjoy this sovereignty. In the following, we seek to explain what “being a decision maker” signifies, exploring “legal” tools on which decisions to land grabs are based.

At this point, basic definitions should be clarified to strengthen our further arguments.

Land grabbing might be defined as large-scale land acquisition without approval of local peoples who cultivate land, resulting in severe decrease in number of farmers and villagers and, thus, threats to food security and inaccessibility to food for general population.

What is “agricultural land”?

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), agricultural land is the sum of the following categories:

- a) “arable land - land under temporary agricultural crops, temporary meadows for mowing or pasture, land under market and kitchen gardens and land temporarily fallow (less than five years).”
- b) “permanent crops - land cultivated with long-term crops which do not have to be replanted for several years; land under trees and shrubs producing flowers, such as roses and jasmine; and nurseries (except those for forest trees, which should be classified under ‘forest’).”
- c) “permanent meadows and pastures - land used permanently (five years or more) to grow herbaceous forage crops, either cultivated or growing wild (wild prairie or grazing land).”

As the FAO’s definition suggests, the category of “agricultural land” does not only consist of land under agricultural crops to be consumed

by humans but also land that lie fallow for years, land that seem empty, land temporarily uncultivated, meadows, grazing land and pastures.

The above mentioned definition is the product of humanity’s knowledge of land. Thanks to that experience and knowledge of land that stem from enormous amount of past labor, we have a definition for and classification of agricultural land.

Land grabbing

On a global scale, attacks on agricultural land are not unknown to people. However, such attacks which have continued for centuries are recently accelerating. Farmers and villagers from all over the world that strive to defend their land under attack are being subjected to states’ and corporations’ violence, they are being forced to migrate, their lands are being acquired forcibly or under compulsory conditions, and consequently dispossessed are becoming wageworkers.

Although the current phase of land grabbing is different than the one that was undertaken by colonial powers in Africa in the second half of the 19th century, it is arguable that both processes have had interrelated repercussions: dispossession of villagers and farmers, displacement, eradication of subsistence farming, insufficient nutrition, ecological degradation that produces irreversible impacts, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, steady decrease in rural population, forced migration, dependency on imports for food and food insecurity.

An uncontested and internationally acknowledged definition of land grabbing does not exist. Yet, it might be described as large-scale land acquisition without approval of local peoples/communities who cultivate land, resulting in severe decrease in number of farmers and villagers and, thus, threats to food security and inaccessibility to food for general population.

Thousands of acres of fertile land, via mergers, are cultivated to produce large-scale agricultural food or agrofuels to be consumed in industry, hindering food security and the right to adequate and healthy food for large populations. It would not be wrong to suggest that this is an obvious violation of the 11th article of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations, which recognizes the right of everyone to adequate and secure food.

In what ways grabbing takes place?

Land grabbing occurs due to the facts such as increase in the level of urbanization, conversion of forest into agricultural land, increased need for highways and airports because of faulty transportation policies, and investments in extractive industries such as mining, oil and gas and in dirty energy resources such as fossil fuels around drainage basins, rivers, sea coasts, pastures, natural conservation zones, forests and arable lands.

Moreover, huge shopping malls, promenades and golf courses built on fertile agricultural lands and river/water basins accelerate land grabs. Thousands of acres of fertile land, via mergers, are cultivated to produce large-scale agricultural food or agrofuels to be consumed in industry, hindering food security and the right to adequate and healthy food for large populations. It would not be wrong to suggest

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Need for what? Whose need is it?

The notion of “need” deserves to be discussed in length at this point. Whose needs are we talking about here? Is it the needs of a person who would feel him/herself in an Aegean village as he/she comes in the door to his/her villa in Istanbul decorated with olive trees that were transported from the Aegean region? Or, are we talking of the needs of a company that would multiply its rate of profit every year thanks to its steady production? Or, are we talking of the needs of a government that would enjoy its power, authority and sovereignty extracted from full-blown growth policies fuelled with legal and financial incentives. “Needs” are so delicately defined and promoted by the sovereigns that you could believe the coal power plant to be built your next door is indispensable to charge your phone battery or to light your bedroom.

In this regard, we can grasp the reasons lying behind “grabs” via the term “increase” that we used several times in the previous paragraphs: destruction caused by the activities related to growth-oriented economy.

Destruction has occurred as a result of the decision in support of growth-oriented economy and the implementation of the associated strategies. Making decisions and formulating strategies are a matter of sovereignty. To put it briefly, breaching the privileges of “untouchable” areas such as agricultural land, forest and conservation zone can only occur as a result of a decision, and making such decisions is a crucial component of sovereignty. States’ attempts to curb the power of peoples that are sovereign to use, possess and decide about such untouchable areas are nothing but efforts to eliminate barriers.

Neoliberal law

At this point, we must consider the concepts of “public power” and “public interest” which have increasingly become the indispensable components of the state’s law-making process. In the case of Yırca, the state exercised its power to make law as a necessary condition for neoliberal policies, and has taken over the



sovereignty of villagers and farmers over their agricultural land in the name of public power and public interest. Thus, in practice, the notion of property has become a tool in the struggle of villagers against the state's grabs that favor companies.

Imagine for a moment that you are a villager in Yırca. By neglecting your labor, knowledge and experience of your olive orchards, your right to decide how you are going to use your land is being terminated, without any notification. It is the state that fulfills the deed of termination, and that which benefits from this deed is a company. What is the legal basis for the deed of termination? Obviously, the answer is once again "increasing need". If we have managed to manifest the actors and beneficiaries of this deed of termination which has direct implications on how a villager in Yırca would pursue his/her life, then we can consider the legal tools that make such a deed possible.

The notions such as law and justice do not denote anymore an ultimate goal to be reached but a battlefield where laws, that is tools of sovereignty over land, are constituted. Nowadays law is a tool for destruction and grabbing.

At this point, let us focus on these tools to concretize what we argue. In the following we list some of the recent amendments in key laws. Could you find the differences between them?

Imagine for a moment that you are a villager in Yırca. By neglecting your labor, knowledge and experience of your olive orchards, your right to decide how you are going to use your land is being terminated, without any notification. It is the state that fulfills the deed of termination, and that which benefits from this deed is a company.

The Forestry Law

In cases where the presence or construction of defense, transportation, energy, communication, water, oil, gas, infrastructure, solid waste disposal and regular storage facilities, dam, pond, and health, education and sport facilities belonging to the State, and all sorts of related buildings, on the State forest lands is in the public interest and mandatory (...) the Ministry of Environment and Urbanism grants permission.

The Law on Soil Preservation and Land Utilization

Absolute agricultural lands, special produce lands, planted agricultural lands and wet agricultural lands can only be used for the purpose of agricultural production. However, in cases where there is no alternative site and provi-

ded that approval of the authority is obtained, permission may be granted for investments in defense-related strategic needs, oil and gas exploration and drilling, and, in accordance with the decisions of Energy Market Regulation Authority, for investments related to the utilization of energy resource areas.

The Law on Renewable Energy

Permission may be granted for the establishment of electrical energy production facilities based on renewable energy resources in national parks, nature parks, nature monumental and nature preservation sites, preservation forests, wildlife promotion sites, and special environmental preservation site provided that an affirmative opinion of the Ministry, or of the regional conservatory board in the case of natural conservation areas, is obtained.

The Draft Law on Preservation of Nature and Biodiversity

Re-evaluation process may be commenced upon the recommendations of physical and juridical persons; and previously determined and announced boundaries of the preservation sites may be altered.

The draft law would facilitate the transfer of management of the preservation sites to public-private juridical persons, opening up space for arbitrary endorsements.

On the one hand, legal regulations facilitating land grabs privilege companies by the help of various exemption clauses some of which we noted above and with the purpose of “displacement”, on the other hand such legal regulations may be performed through quite sneaky techniques.

For instance, “the law on electricity market and the draft law on the inoculation of olive orchards and the reclamation of wild olives” does not consist of an exemption clause; rather it facilitates the de facto destruction of olive orchards by altering the definition of orchard sites that have been legally protected until this day.

It should be underlined that site-specific legal regulations are progressively becoming more generalized through such generally-implemented laws. Indeed, the urgent expropriation law, to which we are pretty familiar because of its implementation in Yırca, has become an indispensable component of energy projects, even though it is a legal rule which must be used under specific conditions such as war and natural disaster.

Law and state policies

At this point we should call attention to an important issue: the difference between “law” and “state policy”. And then, we should scrutinize how the latter has prevailed over the former. Despite the court rulings preventing the urgent expropriation in energy projects, the government systematically proceeds to take urgent expropriation decisions in energy projects. When such decisions are subject of the legal action, we are commonly faced with decisions of cancellation. Otherwise, such deeds of the government turn out to be “acquired” right, even though they are against the law. Obviously, the government engenders a de facto situation via its own decisions.

In addition to laws, secondary legislation such as regulations of public juridical persons –e.g. ministries– should also be taken into account. States under the rule of law must have a certain hierarchy of norms framing the law-making processes. However, under the present circumstances, the will of the legislative body is being overcome since the issues that should be regulated under laws are being regulated under by-laws. For investors cannot fiddle with law-making processes. Time is money, time is profit! Therefore, the related ministry must enact the related by-law as soon as possible, and serve all sorts of piquant conveniences to the law “market”.

The national parks by-law and the wet lands by-law, and some other regulations stated under the related laws, have been recently substituted with the clauses that restrict the boundaries of preservation zones so as to grant permission for particular investments.

The by-law on the amendments in the Law No. 5403 on Soil Preservation and Land Utilization grants permission for mining activities on agricultural land, in cases where the Ministry considers such activities in the public interest.

As it would be seen, laws and secondary regulations have certain commonalities in the sense that they serve to a common purpose and in favor of certain individuals. Such commonalities reflect a systematized technique in legal regulations that pave the way for land grabbing. If we consider these commonalities more closely, we see that all these regulations are justified by interests of a subject named “public”. Yet, the concrete beneficiary of the regulation is companies whose investments are permitted. Still, we must diligently ask:



Public interest. In whose interests?

The law-making state that paves the way for land grabbing by formulating clauses of these laws seeks to create legitimacy perception through such clauses. Examining the purpose, scope and basic principles of the legal regulations, we may think that sublime incentives such as soil preservation are maintained. At the very moment that you think “it is the law that rules”, the legitimacy perception occurs. However, the exemption clauses noted above signify grabbing. Even though land is legally protected, nonetheless the state may abolish the protection, violate any right of persons over land, and reestablishes this right in favor of a company, whenever it wishes and sees fit. The exemption clauses of laws are nothing but a somehow legalistic reformulation of “one morning you wake up and you may find wire fences around your land”.

Land grabbing is a matter of politics not law

The laws which are the apparent manifestations of the land grabbing policy and the administrative orders that are based on such laws could take many different shapes in different localities. The cutting down of the 6000 olive trees in Yırca, the prospective plans for port and waste storage zone in the bays of Karabiğa, the construction of wind power turbines on residential areas and agricultural lands in Karaburun, the completed transformation of the Çukurova basin into energy base, and the construction of thermal/coal fired power plants on the premium agricultural lands in

Amasya are examples of land grabbing. The plans to construct an organized industrial zone on premium agricultural lands in Kandıra or the almost total destruction of Ağaçlı village in Istanbul, where people make their living breeding water buffalos on dunes and meadows legally protected, due to the construction of the third Bosphorus bridge, are justified by the expression of “grants permission for investments in the public interest”.

Villagers in Yırca asked us the same question: how come the government can expropriate our lands without any notification? When one of the authorized representatives of the company told the villagers “this is my land, for the government expropriated it, and I can evict you in just ten minutes”, it became all clear that the sole beneficiary of this administrative operation which has been justified by the “public interest” is the company and the ultimate result is the displacement of the Yırca villagers. Villagers were rushing from one place to another having title deeds in their pockets, saying every person they came across that “it belongs to me not you, and this is my title deed”. However, the Ministry of Energy expropriated their lands on the basis of only one sentence, without any further notification:

“It was decided that the immovable, of which the locations and plot numbers are shown in the attached list, would be urgently expropriated by the Ministry of Finance to be registered in the name of the Treasury, for the purpose of the construction of Soma Kolin Coal Fired Power Plant.”

What about Sardes, Thera, Lagina, Claros, Larisa, Alinda and Trilye after all this destruction? Would the good old harvesting festivities come back, if we call them by their real names?

FOREIGN POLICY

The AKP's Foreign Policy: Rupture in continuity, continuity in rupture

Foti Benlisoy

The question of whether or not the foreign policy pursued during the AKP (Justice and Democracy Party) era signifies rupture has long been debated. Particularly in the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara incident, many have sought to give an answer to the question if there has been an 'axis shift' in Turkish foreign policy.

As a matter of fact, a certain reading of the AKP's foreign policy choices, which might be seen as idealist, has been predominant in this debate. From this point of view, the way the AKP has engaged with the political and social turbulence in the Middle East region is an indirect effect of its Islamist-conservative ideological-political agenda. Accordingly, it is contended that the AKP's foreign policy denotes a remarkable break both from the independent foreign policy approach of the Kemalists and the westernist approach of the liberals.

However, no matter what differences exist in terms of style, content and orientation, it can be argued that there is continuity between the AKP's foreign policy priorities and the basic pillars of Turkish foreign policy. At least since the Cold War, Turkish foreign policy has been based on two main columns: a) that Turkey is strategically indispensable for the Western alliance; and b) that Turkey should raise its status in the global hierarchy by the help of its strategic indispensability. The fact that the containment of the USSR has ceased to be a strategic priority for the USA in the

post-Cold War era has not nullified that dual-notion foreign policy conception. Turkey has managed to retain its strategic prominence within the international political system within the period that is commonly termed unipolar. As such, the claim to being a regional power is still a crucial component of Turkish foreign policy. The distance between the AKP's attempts to provide the Islamic countries with a model compatible with the priorities of the global system (moderate Islam) and an aggressive foreign policy is less than we generally think. This might be best summarized in former president Turgut Özal's laconic words, "I put in one and take out three," or Süleyman Demirel's vision of "the Turkic world from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China," or former minister of foreign affairs İsmail Cem's discourse that depicts Turkey as the "Bridge between Civilizations."

The true believer nation against the non-national elites' tutelage

However, while underlining the continuities in Turkish foreign policy, we must also highlight some important moments of rupture or discontinuity. The notion that the AKP's arguments and initiatives regarding foreign policy issues are interrelated to its orientation in the field of domestic politics and that its domestic and foreign policy choices are inextricably intertwined has been accurately emphasized by many commentators. In line with this argument, we have to point out the ties between current Turkish foreign policy and the AKP's hegemony project in order to grasp potential and constraints of the AKP's foreign policy.



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It is widely acknowledged that the AKP has managed to hold onto power while simultaneously representing itself as the genuine oppressed group of the Republican period, by redefining the main thrust of political polarization in Turkey as a longstanding conflict between the “true believer” nation and the AKP as its authentic representative on the one hand and the “non-national elites supporting the bureaucratic tutelage regime” on the other. Popularizing the argument that it struggles against the state elites’ tutelage that has restrained the nation and Turkey from fulfilling its potential during the modern times, the AKP has managed to mobilize large masses, and pacify or integrate prospective dissident discourses into its own hegemony project.

What might be regarded as an accomplishment of the AKP is that it has been able to present that old argument that has deep roots in the dark history of the Turkish nationalist conservatism in new democratic and civilian clothes, ornamented with discursive tools inherited from the left. Modernizing the discourse by suggesting that the non-national elites, the Unionist (İttihatçı) “infidels” or the “converts” have detached the state from the nation, the AKP has managed to reach out to larger masses. It has articulated its majoritarianist democracy discourse, which conceives the party as the genuine representative of the nation that is imagined as a classless and organic mass in accordance with the nationalist

conservative tradition, with some distorted popular-democratic demands. The AKP has been able to present its neoliberal-conservative authoritarian regime as a democratic revolution. Although it has politically dispossessed the lower classes by the help of market reforms, it has nonetheless managed to present itself as the sole perpetrator of the civilianizing or ‘democratization’ process that has finally attained the long-awaited goal of the nationalist conservative tradition: the incorporation of the nation and state.

From this point of view, it is possible to suggest that the AKP’s political stance towards the Arab uprisings is compatible with its analysis of social and political changes in Turkey. The AKP has transposed a particular analysis of historical and political conflicts in Turkey, upon which it has built its hegemony project, into the field of foreign policy. Accordingly, the notions of status quo and tutelage,

PM Ahmet Davutoglu has been behind Erdogan’s foreign policy since he was appointed as chief consultant on international affairs.

The AKP could have presented its neoliberal-conservative authoritarian regime as a democratic revolution. Although it has politically dispossessed the lower classes by the help of market reforms, it has nonetheless managed to present itself as the sole perpetrator of the civilianizing or democratization process that has finally attained the long-awaited goal of the nationalist conservative tradition: the incorporation of the nation and state.

which AKP has deployed abundantly in domestic politics, have become components of the dominant foreign policy analysis. According to this approach, which was formulated by Ahmet Davutoğlu in a very systematic way, since the political power is “in harmony with

Now that the political power is “in harmony with the national values,” Turkey can assume its “historic mission.” Turkey, as the sole successor of the Ottoman civilization, would now have free agency in a vast territory that stretches from Bosnia to Myanmar.

the national values,” Turkey can now assume its “historic mission.” With the overthrowing of the “non-national” tutelage regime by the AKP government, Turkey has eventually liberated itself from the long-time estrangement, and turned back to the realm of the true civilized world. Accordingly, as the sole successor of the Ottoman civilization, Turkey would now have free agency in a vast territory that stretches from Bosnia to Myanmar.

Closing a century-old parenthesis

In that regard, it is arguable that one of the main reasons lying behind the AKP’s political paralysis in the wake of the “Arab Spring” is the abovementioned ideational prism through which it evaluates the whole process — namely, its culturalist/essentialist analysis. From the very beginning, the AKP has made a generalization of its particular interpretation of modern Turkey by regarding the Arab Spring as the Muslim nation’s revolt against the westernist-secularist authoritarian regimes. From this point of view, the Arab uprisings denote the correction of a historic “deviance” that has occurred in the last century. In other words, AKP sees the Arab Spring as the collapse of the Arab variants of Kemalism. The disintegration of the Arab ‘Kemalisms’, that is, the westernist-secularist regimes, signifies the rise to power of the ‘authentic’ representatives of the Muslim Arab nations. A century-old “parenthesis” has finally been closed. The state which had been stolen from the nation long ago by the westernist elite is now being retur-

MEANWHILE IN IRAQ

The background of ISIL's ascent in the region

Fehim Işık



Fehim Işık

Started working as a journalist in 1989. He was arrested in 1990 for his articles, and spent nearly two years in prison. After being released, he worked as a journalist in Iraqi Kurdistan for over two years. He was a representative, editor and editor-in-chief in Turkish and Kurdish language newspapers and publishing houses. In addition to translated works in Turkish and Kurdish, he is among the authors of the Secondary Education Kurdish Language and Literature Textbook published by Tarih Vakfı. He is also a columnist for Evrensel daily newspaper.

Iraq has been at the top of the list of Middle Eastern nations torn apart by violent wars for many years. In 2014, the conflict engulfed Iraqi Kurdistan, one of the region’s more stable areas. The unremitting battles and conflicts in Iraq made headlines on the first day of 2014, when the police of the Shiite Maliki government organized a bloody raid to the home of the Sunnite MP Ahmed al-Alwani. Upon the arrest of Al-Alwani, known for his support to anti-government protests, and the ensuing clashes between security forces and Sunni protesters, the tension in the province of Anbar rapidly spilled over to other areas. The Sunnis claim that the Shiite government treats them as second-class citizens, while the Maliki government accuses the tribes in Anbar of supporting Al-Qaeda.

Another hot topic of debate, from the first to the last days of 2014, was the budget crisis. It was a major source of conflict between the central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, which attempted to

export regional oil to the world markets. International news agencies reported that the regional government started to make crude oil available to international markets by sending the oil through Turkey.

Throughout the year, the number of ISIL’s much-discussed attacks increased. In Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province in western Iraq, security forces intervened against anti-government protesters, playing into ISIL’s hands. Subsequently, armed groups took control of five police stations in the town, seized police guns, and then set police stations and armored vehicles on fire. In the first days of 2014, Fallujah also fell to ISIL, which had yet to cut its link with Al-Qaeda.

ISIL was also starting to expand its footprint in Syria. In clashes between ISIL and other opposition groups in the cities of Aleppo and Idlib, numerous militants were killed and wounded; and the militants were told to surrender in 24 hours. However, ISIL simply went on attacking every group to reinforce its

ned to its genuine owners, similar to what the AKP did in 2002. From this culturalist/essentialist point of view, the AKP's rise to power in 2002 is seen as Turkey's "spring." Accordingly, the goal of the Arab Spring was to "incorporate the state and the nation" by paving the way for Islamist currents (particularly those close to AKP) to take power in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria.

The opinion that international circumstances were very ripe for such an incorporation was widely shared by the AKP cadres and rank-and-file members. According to this view, the relative decline in the USA's global hegemony opened up space for Turkey, which has privileged relations with the Western alliance. As we noted above, Turkey has undertaken several attempts to raise its position in the regional power hierarchy since the Özal era. In other words, these attempts to move further along the 'imperialist chain' have been one of the main features of Turkish foreign policy. Indeed, the neo-Ottomanism debate commenced in the Özal era, and even İsmail Cem, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Left Party

government, complained about negligence of the common Ottoman past within the mainstream Turkish foreign policy discourse. The fact that the "unipolar moment" of the USA's hegemony has come to an end, and that the Obama administration has "withdrawn" from the Middle East are considered crucial factors that increase Turkey's ability to maneuver. Consequently, Turkey's role as a model country, which would have a leadership position and act in accordance with the priorities of the Western alliance in the Middle East that is in turmoil due to the Arab uprisings, is seen by the AKP strategists as a plausible and pleasing option.

Vulnerabilities in imperialist ambitions

Reading the turbulent events in the Middle East through that explanatory schema, the AKP cadres believed that they would be the big brother of the Arab Spring. However, the antagonisms and conflicts in the region are so complicated that they cannot be grasped with

dominance. From the beginning of the year, ISIL attacks increased in the Kurdish region. In the city of Kirkuk, officially outside of the Kurdistan region, a suicide attack with a bombed vehicle killed seven people.

Tension between the central and regional governments

Meanwhile, the USA stepped in to resolve the oil crisis between the central and regional governments. Vice President Joe Biden talked to Kurdistan Regional Government's President Masoud Barzani on the phone. The USA suggested that Barzani had to reach a consensus with Iraq and Turkey about the problems related to the transport of oil from the Kurdish region. Maliki opposed oil transports from the Kurdistan region to Turkey and stated that KRG will be denied its share from the federal budget in case it continues to transport oil via Turkey. The tension between Erbil and Baghdad about oil exports brought relations to the brink of collapse. The KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani issued warnings about civil servant salaries not being paid.

The United Nations also took action in order to resolve the problems in Iraq. The Secretary General Ban Ki Moon traveled to Baghdad to meet the then-Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and other officials, and discussed the Syrian crisis, violence in Iraq and the invasion of Fallujah and Ramadi by ISIL. ISIL, on the other hand, was rapidly expanding its clout by capitalizing on the weakness of the

Iraqi government that pursued anti-Sunni policies. Countless people had to flee from Fallujah and Anbar following the ISIL invasion.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees announced that 65,000 people abandoned Anbar province in two weeks; the number of those fleeing the area since December 2013 had already reached 140,000. The fleeing civilians took refuge in Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan.

While the number of refugees soared, the clashes between ISIL and the Iraqi army, which had started in January in Fallujah and Ramadi, spread to the north of Baghdad and towns around Kirkuk.

As violence escalated in Iraq, the media issued numerous reports that the KRG was getting ready to declare independence. Indeed it is still argued that Masoud Barzani is willing to declare the independence of Kurdistan. The Kurdistan parliament passed the Referendum Law and announced that it would put independence and the annexation of the controversial cities of Kirkuk, Xanekin, Mandali and Shengal by Kurdistan to popular vote. Masoud Barzani's words about independence triggered a prompt American response stating that US policy is still centered on the integrity of Iraq.

Another problem in 2014 for the Iraqi Kurdistan was the failure of attempts to establish a new government. After the Kurdish elections of September 21, 2013, it took political parties eight months to start negotiations about establishing a broad-based coalition government. The

the schema of the westernist-secularist elite versus the Muslim nation. Therefore, the AKP government could not see that Ikhwan (the Muslim Brotherhood), which it has regarded as “the authentic representative of the Egyptian nation,” swiftly lost its political momentum and social support. Presumably, the AKP strategists were not able to see what was coming,

more sectarian) analysis of Syria, the AKP has not managed to understand that the Assad regime has a certain social basis that makes it able to resist enormous social and political challenges it faces. On the contrary, the AKP formulated its strategy on the assumption that the regime would fall very soon, which proved to be incorrect.

The AKP has regarded the “Arab Spring” as the Muslim nation’s revolt against the westernist-secularist authoritarian regimes. In other words, the AKP considers the “Arab Spring” as the collapse of the Arab variants of Kemalism.

for they treated the Brotherhood not as one of the political currents in Egypt but the nation’s “true believer sons”. The Muslim Brotherhood embodies the will of the nation in Egypt, just like the AKP (and particularly its leader Erdoğan) represents the will of the nation in Turkey. Actually, democracy is conceived as the equivalent of this will. The same can be said for Syria as well. Due to its similar (in fact,

To briefly sum up, the AKP’s strategic defeats in Syria and Egypt are direct results of its ideological perspective and “analysis” of historic developments in the Middle East region. For the pro-government media and the AKP circles the Arab Spring can only be understood through the ideological prism described above. Thus, social and political dynamics in the Greater Middle East were translated into the terms of a certain polarization that is favorable for the AKP. Yet, it was already obvious that such an ideological –in the strict sense of the word– approach, which is obsessed with Kemalism, would result in errors in calculation. An analysis of the Arab uprisings on the basis of a particular reading of Turkish history is one of the major vulnerabilities in AKP’s imperialist ambitions.

two winners of the elections, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Gorran Movement announced that they reached an agreement, including a clause on which party the president of parliament would hail from. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and two Islamic parties joined the agreement, and a government was formed nine months after the elections with the participation of all parties. The cabinet consisted of five parties and Turkoman and Assyrian minorities.

In the run-up to the April 30 national elections in Iraq, attacks became more and more frequent. The challenges facing the central government were the tense relations with the Kurdistan region and attacks organized by ISIL and other groups. The Maliki government strived to eliminate ISIL and other Sunni groups which increased their power in the Sunni regions. The position of the once powerful Prime Minister of the Shiites was no longer so comfortable in the run-up to the April 30 elections. Sunni opposition groups as well as certain Shiite groups that had previously supported Maliki were waging fierce campaigns against him.

The April 30 elections were critical for the Kurds, too. For the first time, Kurds ran in the Iraqi parliament elections on separate lists. At the same time with these first general elections organized after the withdrawal of US troops, local elections were held in Iraqi Kurdistan for the first time in ten years. Kurds focused not on general but local elections, especially the elections in Kirkuk.

Despite the fierce opposition, Nuri Maliki’s party won

the elections under the banner of “a state of law.” The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, under the leadership of Ammar al-Hakim, came second, the radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and Usama al-Nujayfi, who leads the Muttahidoon alliance, finished third. Ex-Prime Ministers Ayad Allawi and Ibrahim al-Jaafari, and deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq’s al-Arabiya also entered the parliament. Kurds, on the other hand, maintained their force in the central parliament despite running on separate lists.

Increasing its power and reach, ISIL started to turn towards Iraqi Kurdistan. ISIL organized its first attack in May to the Yazidi people, killing around ten Yazidis and wounding many of them near the town of Shekhan. ISIL organized a suicide attack on the PUK bureau in Celawla, Xanekin, killing 18 people and wounding numerous peshmerga and civilians.

ISIL stepped up its attacks across Iraq. After Samara, Anbar and Fallujah, it shifted its focus to Salahaddin and Mosul. Yazidi Kurds and Shabeks living in Mosul started to flee towards Iraqi Kurdistan, and the Arbil government went on alarm. Mosul, with a population of three and a half million, came under complete ISIL control on June 10.

Maliki made appeals to the United Nations, the European Union and the Arab Union. Iraqi army troops abandoned their positions, stating that they could not hold against ISIL attacks. Civilians started to flee the city. Most of them took refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially Erbil and Duhok. Peshmerga forces took positions around the town, while YPG, which dominates the Rojava region of Syria,

The ally to be tolerated

Furthermore, the fact that the global jihadist movement proceeded from the periphery to the center of the 'territory of Islam' thanks to the turbulence of the Arab uprisings has caused a radical shift in the Western alliance's strategic priorities. For instance, the USA, which had had a positive attitude towards regime change in Syria, changed its position due to the ascent of ISIS, and began to consider the preservation of the current Syrian regime (at least partially) as a viable option. In the name of stability, it has preferred to cooperate with the military in Egypt, even though it gave the Muslim Brotherhood a chance in the very

beginning. Consequently, the disparity between the priorities of Turkey and those of the Western alliance has become even more apparent. No doubt, Turkey's inability to backtrack is related to the AKP's ideological prism we described above. Given the international political mood following the Charlie Hebdo attacks, the AKP government that hailed the ascendance of the ISIS ascendance in the region as a "Sunnite uprising" and favored ISIS over the Kurdish forces fighting in Rojava has come to a dead end.

In consequence, Turkey's capital proved inadequate to be a regional power. The recent regional developments have dislocated the AKP's claim of being model country. Turkey has shifted from being indispensable to being 'tolerated' in

From the rally in London voicing solidarity with the resistance in Kobanê



announced that it could send troops to Iraqi Kurdistan if need be.

Turkey's Mosul consulate was raided by ISIL just hours after the Turkish PM Ahmet Davutoğlu announced that the situation was calm. Forty-nine consulate personnel were taken hostage, including Turkish Consul General to Mosul Öztürk Yılmaz, who had previously served as foreign relations advisor to Erdoğan. ISIL issued a message stating that "The Turks have not been taken hostage, they have been taken to a safe location and will remain there until the inquisition procedure is complete." Later on, the Islamist militants took control of Tikrit, only 150 km from Baghdad, and a crucial oil refinery in Baiji.

After Mosul, the Iraqi army abandoned Kirkuk as well.

The control of the city passed to the Kurdish peshmerga forces. According to Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, a referendum had to be organized to determine the future of the city. The Maliki government had repeatedly postponed the referendum. When the control of the city passed de facto to Kurds, the peshmerga forces and HPG guerillas prevented ISIL from entering Kirkuk.

The relation between ISIL and the Baas Party

After the invasion of Mosul, ISIL had declared the establishment of the Islamic State and designated its leader al-Baghdadi as caliph. ISIL appointed a former Baas general

The disparity between the priorities of Turkey and those of the Western alliance has become even more apparent. Given the international political mood following the Charlie Hebdo attacks, the AKP government that hailed the ascendance of ISIS in the region as a "Sunnite uprising," and favored the ISIS over the Kurdish forces fighting in Rojava has come to a dead end.

the eyes of its Western allies. It is clear that the AKP government's strategy to promote itself as an actor of the enormous change in the region has come to an end. However, a crucial point deserves to be underlined at this point: the AKP government's imperialist ambitions cannot be explained merely by its ideological preferences and political orientation. The desire and aim of becoming regional power is also a strategic preference of the Turkish capital that has gained confidence and yearned for regional resources in the recent years. In that regard, the axis shift in Turkish politics towards the Middle East is related to the dynamics of capital accumulation in Turkey. With the integration into the global neo-

liberal capitalist system in the post-1980 period, an 'imperialist' political perspective towards the Middle East and the Turkic countries in the former Soviet territory has occurred in accordance with the Turkish capital's need for novel markets and capital export channels. As we noted above, this political perspective that was promoted most vehemently by Özal could not be implemented because of the acute hegemony crisis and the immaturity of such an option in terms of the depth and scale of intra-capital struggles.

However, circumstances have altered significantly in the 2000s with the flourishing of the small and medium-scale "pious" bourgeoisie, and with the ascendance of the AKP that aims for an effective hegemony project in favor of Turkish capital. In response to the recession in the European export markets after the 2008 global economic crisis, the AKP has headed to the Middle East and managed to reduce the crisis' possible negative impacts on its organic bourgeoisie. However, in the wake of the Arab uprisings, this line has become even more aggressive. The AKP government has opted to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood within the void occurred following the partial withdrawal of the Obama administration,

as the governor of the first city of the Islamic State. It was claimed that ISIL was trying to create a security corridor to bring Raghad Hussein, Saddam Hussein's daughter in exile in Jordan, back to Iraq. Raghad Hussein told the newspaper al-Arabi, "I am pleased to see my uncle Izzat Al-Douri liberate Iraq, together with my father's soldiers." Another statement came from Iraq's ex-Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, in exile in Turkey, who hailed ISIL's invasion of Mosul as a revolution on Twitter.

In his first statement on ISIL's progress in Iraq, US President Obama said that they were considering all opti-

ons to assist the Iraqi government.

Right after the then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan drew attention to Tal Afar, this largely Turkoman district fell to ISIL. Thousands of Turkomans fled to Shengal, which was controlled by the Kurds.

The President of the Iraqi Kurdistan, Masoud Barzani, indicated that Nouri al-Maliki was responsible for the developments in Iraq and made an appeal to United Nations. He informed the UN that they would start work on the referendum and asked for help. At the same time, Barzani issued a call to the Kurdistan Regional Parliament and instructed them to "make the necessary preparations for the referendum."

When the prospect of a referendum appeared, ISIL attacked the Kurdistan region even harder. It attacked with heavy weapons the Tilbenet village of Shengal, largely populated by the Yazidi. Eleven Shabek Kurdish settlements with an overall population of 400,000 fell to ISIL control.

Meanwhile, the tension between Erbil and Baghdad mounted further and the KRG decided not to participate in the cabinet meetings of the Baghdad government. The presidential elections, previously scheduled for July 23, were postponed upon the demand of the Kurdistan Alliance List. After an extraordinary meeting, the Kurdistan Alliance List nominated Fuad Masum as their candidate for Iraqi president. Aside from Fuad Masum, six candidates from Sunni and Shiite parties took part in the elections. Fuad Masum received 211 votes in the second tour and became Iraq's second Kurdish president after Jalal Talabani.

After the invasion of Mosul, ISIL declared the creation of the Islamic State and designated its leader al-Baghdadi as its caliph. ISIL also appointed a former Baas general as governor to rule the first city of the Islamic State. It has also been claimed that ISIL is trying to create a security corridor to bring Saddam Hussein's daughter Raghad Hussein, in exile in Jordan, back to Iraq. After ISIL entered Mosul, Iraq's ex-Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, in exile in Turkey, hailed ISIL's invasion of Mosul as a revolution on Twitter.

and pursue a more sectarian policy in the context of the new Arab Cold War. However, the AKP has swiftly lost its position as a model country, since Turkey does not possess the resources and credentials necessary to become regional power. Neither the Turkish capital nor the AKP government was capable of assuming such a mission.

The ambition of becoming regional power still persists

Nevertheless, the setbacks that the AKP has experienced perhaps due to its “impetuosity” and “doctrinal” deeds to implement that strategic orientation should not be interpreted as though these imperialist ambitions have entirely vanished. Although the recent venture of AKP has been a serious disappointment for the Turkish capital class, the desire and aim of becoming regional power and rising in the global hierarchy still persists. For, that orientation has material roots in the dynamics of the Turkish capitalism, as much as it is ideological. Therefore, Middle Eastern politics will continue to be important both for the Turkish capital class and for the Turkish

state in the next term.

Consequently, it is difficult to explain the relation between the AKP’s foreign policy choices and the historical trajectory of Turkish foreign policy as total rupture or continuity. The approach that highlights continuity might ignore the intrinsic bond between the foreign policy pursued in the AKP era and the AKP’s hegemony project. The second approach that prioritizes rupture might neglect the intrinsic ties between the AKP’s foreign policy and the dynamics of the Turkish capitalism and the intra-capital struggles. Therefore, we need a more nuanced perspective that emphasizes rupture in continuity and continuity in rupture.

1 The Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH) and the Free Gaza Movement organized a flotilla of six vessels in May 2010, in order to lift the Israel’s blockade on the Gaza Strip and to draw worldwide attention to the suffering of the people in Gaza. On 31 May 2010, the Israel Defense Forces intervened to stop the flotilla in the Mediterranean Sea. Although no serious incident happened on the other five ships, on the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara nine of the nearly 800 passengers were killed by Israeli commandos.

ISIL’s next target was Shengal, which had a large Yazidi population. Tragically, ISIL ran over Shengal in a short period of time. Meanwhile, Reuters news agency reported that ISIL invaded the oil refinery near Zumar after clashes with the peshmerga. ISIL also took control of Iraq’s largest dam; according to Reuters, ISIL had faced no resistance from peshmerga fighters while doing so.

ISIL massacred people in the areas it conquered in Iraq and moved as close as 40 km to Erbil, the capital of KRG. The peshmerga forces, which had to retreat before ISIL attacks on Zumar and Shengal, waged a counter-attack this time.

In this period, thousands of people fleeing to the mountains from ISIL had to struggle against famine. ISIL enslaved and killed thousands of Yazidi women, children and elderly, while tens of thousands of them were on mountain roads.

United Nations Security Council called on the international community to help the Iraqi people and government in their fight against ISIL.

Iraqi President Fuad Masum gave the mandate to form the new government not to Maliki, but to Haider al-Abadi from the same party. Maliki heavily criticized this choice and the US support for this decision. However, the Kurdish governments had decided to rejoin the central government. The parliament was able to approve the Shiite PM Haider al-Abadi’s cabinet only minutes before the legal deadline, and the new government took office.

After the invasion of Shengal, ISIL attacked Kobanê on

September 15. Four days after the attack started, Masoud Barzani called on the international community to defend Kobanê. About one month later, the Iraqi Kurdistan parliament convened to discuss Kobanê upon the demand of Masoud Barzani, and decided to send peshmerga forces to the besieged town.

The peshmerga forces who set off for Kobanê on October 29 reached Urfa by plane and then reached Mürşitpınar border gate. The group travelled on land, crossing the border in Habur and then arrived in Suruç. This helped alleviate the rising tension between the Rojava government and KRG, and drew Kurds closer.

Towards the end of 2014, the ice between KRG and the central Iraqi government also started to melt. At the end of a series of meetings held in Baghdad in December, the two sides declared that they had reached an agreement on many issues including the budget crisis and oil exports.

ISIL had occupied Shengal on August 3. The peshmerga forces and the PKK’s military wing HPG, the Rojava People’s Defense Units YPG and YPJ, and the Shengal Resistance Forces YBŞ started an operation in mid-December to break the siege of Shengal. After the onset of the operation, Masud Barzani held a press conference on Shengal Mountain, expressing his belief that the Kurdish people would eventually win this protracted war.

In a way, the year 2014 was an experiment for the erroneous policies implemented in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. These observations are important to understand which policies led to the ascent of ISIL in the Middle East.

CULTURE: THE FUTURE OF THEATER IN NEW TURKEY

Time to close the curtains for good?

Merve Erol

According to the results of a survey unveiled in the first days of the new year, 80% of the 15,000 respondents have never been to a theatrical performance in their lives. The survey by Ipsos KGM, entitled Türkiye'yi Anlama Kılavuzu (Guide to Understanding Turkey) also reveals that 96% of the participants have never gone to the opera or ballet, 73% have never watched a concert and 56% have never been to a movie theater.

As Turkey ushers in the year 2015, there is the risk of the complete eradication of state-owned yet autonomous arts institutions which, despite such dire conditions, strive to stage performances, go on tours, bring children's plays to the remotest corners of the country, and try to maintain an artistic heritage which has somehow muddled along this far. In 2014, Turkey's arts institutions found themselves in a life or death situation.

With reference to state and municipal Theaters, the state opera and ballet, symphonic orchestras, and the General Directorate of Fine Arts, the year 2014 was full of news about the closure or sale of theater buildings, cases of censorship and resignation, while the artistic preparations for the season left much to be desired. Most importantly, the draft law on TÜSAK (Turkish Arts Institution) hung above everyone like the sword of Damocles.

While these institutions were drifting with the current, the public got wind of the final version The Draft Law on the Establishment of the Turkish Arts Institution and the Revision of Certain Statutory Decrees, which proposed radical changes to the management of the said institutions, sparking

huge debate. In the light of this draft law, which is set to influence not only state-owned institutions but the entire arts scene in Turkey, let us take a look at how performing arts fared in the year 2014. Before taking up specific cases though, we need to first discuss the draft law on TÜSAK, which is the most concrete indication as to what kind of an arts scene the government plans to create.

The phantasm called the Turkish Arts Institution

Everyone seems to agree that state-owned autonomous arts institutions, especially State Theaters, have been condemned to inertia. Their cumbersome bureaucracies comply with reigning political and cultural codes and artistic concepts, and they need to be made more independent to ensure that their artistic and administrative criteria are reformulated with the contribution of artists. Maybe for this reason and because of the presence of favorable examples in other countries, some do not categorically refuse the idea of an umbrella organization such as TÜSAK and are content with criticizing the draft law. Nevertheless it would be misleading to think that the Turkish artistic tradition comes anywhere near Europe's historical opera or ballet heritage.

Furthermore, such a perspective tends to undervalue a rich historical tradition which includes the tradition of the Ottoman imperial theatre Darülbeydi, the memory of the orchestras, the know-how of set designers, as well as various crowning achievements. Taking into account the present political panorama in Turkey, various details in the draft law on TÜSAK point to a comprehensive plan that will reshape the arts world down to its smallest unit and penetrate the entire



Merve Erol

1975 yılında İzmit'te doğdu. 2000 yılında Marmara Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi'nden mezun oldu, yüksek lisansını aynı okulda, İletişim Bilimleri bölümünde yaptı. Express, Roll, Bir+Bir dergilerinde çalıştı, çeşitli dergi, gazete ve yayınevlerine telifli işler yaptı.



cultural code of the country.

Judging by the draft law, TÜSAK is set to make use of its administrative leverage and grant or support schemes to dominate the entire world of arts, from performing arts to literature, with the exception of independent initiatives that stand on their own feet. This umbrella organization will be run by the Turkish Arts Board, composed of eleven members to be appointed by the Council of Ministers from among candidates nominated by the Minister of Culture and Tourism. That is, the law will crush even the smallest pretense to artistic independence right from the start. TÜSAK will rise up as a headquarters under the complete control of the government, and eleven members handpicked by the government will sit atop the pyramid. Thankfully, at least six of these members will be required to be in some kind of a connection with the arts disciplines to be supported!

All the arts disciplines to be supported by TÜSAK will be managed by service departments, such as the Group Directorate for Supporting Theatre or the Group Directorate for Supporting Music. That is, all the current institutions will be dissolved and their real estate will be transferred to TÜSAK. For instance, it will not be possible to speak of “the artistic heritage of the Istanbul Municipal Theaters” anymore.

The selected few from among the current artists on the permanent staff will be transferred to the Ministry’s General Directorate of Performing Arts to be assigned to “the orchestras, choirs and companies, of each at least one will be established

in every arts discipline by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.” That is, if the Ministry decides to keep a symphonic orchestra within its organizational structure, it is not certain whether TÜSAK will keep the remaining staff in their previous position and function. Even though the permanent staff will retain their civil servant status (by being appointed to conservatories, for instance), numerous arts disciplines will be left to the mercy of private enterprise. It will probably become impossible to stage a play in numerous towns across Turkey, and certain disciplines may be wiped off the face of the entire country.

Since it risks utterly eradicating the already limited autonomy of arts institutions, the draft law unsurprisingly triggered a huge uproar, not to mention declarations and resignations in protest. The State Theaters, the State Opera and Ballet, the Presidential Symphony Orchestra and municipal symphonic orchestras issued statements signed by general directors and regional directors; pro-

Mem û Zin, a play inspired by the work of the famous Kurdish poet and mystic Ehmedê Xani, was Turkified as it was staged by state theaters.

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test rallies were organized and much ink was spilled. This autocratic and centralist draft law, which lays the ground for paralyzing and subduing the arts world, has been relegated to the back burner for the time being. Arts institutions now find themselves in an interim regime, where almost all of them are being managed by deputies.

The TÜSAK draft law may be placed back on the public agenda in a slightly more flexible and 'democratic' version; in the meantime, the interim period already offers us general and specific clues about the future.

The reign of "Macbeth" and State Theaters

In a statement against TÜSAK, Mustafa Kurt, the General Director of State Theaters writes, "In its current version the draft law is unacceptable. The draft dissolves all other arts institutions, including the General Directorate of State Theaters. We cannot approve of such a perspective and action." Kurt himself had been appointed as a deputy by the Ministry a short time ago; however, due to his opposition to TÜSAK he was forced to resign. He was replaced by another deputy, Nejat Birecik, an outsider to the institution, who had graduated

The newly appointed chief executive of State Theaters (below) and a scene from Macbeth, the primary target of censorship (next page).



from the conservatory before plying his trade at the Dormen Theater. He is well-known for his minor roles in various comedy series on TV, such as the psychologist in *Çocuklar Duymasın* (Don't Let the Kids Hear This).

The first action of the new general director of State Theaters was to start an investigation about one of the actors. An actor of the Ankara State Theater, Tuncer Yiğci had gone on a tour with the Ankara Ekin Theater Company to the town of Ordu, which also means 'army' in Turkish. In his personal Facebook page, he made a joke writing "Ordu... Göreve..." which could translate as both "traveling to Ordu on duty" or "calling the army to duty." In response, he was accused of "provoking the army to take action against Birecik and State Theaters."

Additionally, in the very first days in his new position, it was claimed that Birecik had sent a number of Ankara State Theater actors to a reception in Aksaray, where they were said to walk around dressed as Tolstoy, Pushkin, Rumi, etc., upon the request of the private company who organized the event.

The year 2014 had started out with a conviction against State Theaters. In 2009, State Theaters decided to include in its repertoire the play *Mem û Zîn* by Cuma Boynukara, who drew inspiration from the life and work of the Kurdish poet and mystic Ehmedê Xanî (1650-1707). In 2012, the Van State Theater staged the said play; however, its name was Turkified as *Mem ile Zin*, the Newroz festival was turned into the Turkish 'Nevruz', and a Turkoman wedding scene was added to the play. Boynukara filed a lawsuit and received material compensation in 2014.

In defense of the changes made to the text, the General Director of State Theaters Lemi Bilgin at the time said to Boynukara, "You call it Newroz, we call it Nevruz; is that such a big deal?" Bilgin was replaced by Mustafa Kurt, who was later forced to resign due to his opposition to TÜSAK; however, the apparent reason was yet another case of censorship.

In the play *Güneş Batarken Bile Büyük* (The Sun is Big Even As it Sets) written and directed by Kâzım Akşar, Goethe leaves the big city, settles in the countryside with his lover, and says to her "I want to sleep with you." Ministry officials considered that this expression was "erotic" and ordered that the premiere of the play be postponed. Refusing to abide by this decision, Kurt presented his resignation before the premiere.

This example shows that the State Theaters management very closely monitors plays for censorship purposes, indeed, rehearsal by rehearsal. The photos of each State Theaters actor are taken and sent to the ministry; furthermore, before the 2014 season began, it was demanded that for each

play, the rehearsal recordings, texts, and list of actors and extras be recorded on CD and sent to the ministry.

A few years ago, ministry officials had scrutinized the ten-year repertoire of the State Theaters and decided that there were far too many plays by Nazım Hikmet Ran and none by Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. Accordingly, after the appointment of Ömer Çelik to the position of Minister of Culture and Tourism, Kısakürek's play *Para* (Money - 1942) was staged last year, followed by this year's production of *Sabır Taşı* (Patience, 1940).

However, not content with monitoring the rehearsals, the ministry even intervenes with the performances. For instance last year, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* made its debut at Ankara State Theater last year, and was staged a few times this year. After Nejat Birecik was appointed as general director, even this great classic became the target of the wrath of ministry officials. Described in the program booklet with the words "While *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth* climb to the pinnacle of power with cruelty, they also lay the ground for their downfall," the play was taken out of the program with the pretext that there was urgent work on the set design of another play.

On the other hand, even when these plays are given the green light, they run into a serious shortage of available stages. Istanbul's AKM or Atatürk Cultural Center, has been long since turned into a giant police station, a ghost edifice; criticized by government officials for its modernist architectural style, it might be demolished, renovated, or used for any purpose. In the most populous city in Turkey, State Theaters now try to stage their plays in the basements of shopping malls, or in tiny, stuffy rooms.

A similar fate awaits the city of Ankara: It has been reported that Ankara's two most important theater stages, Akün and Şinasi were sold in secret tenders for 33 million Turkish Liras, and will be demolished to make room for a hotel construction. The İrfan Şahinbaş Stage, where all the set design activities of Ankara State Theater take place and whose workshop stage houses experimental theater plays, is also under attack. The theater is surrounded by a forest, whose saplings are cultivated and planted by the theater personnel. In March, construction crews cut down more than 100 trees inside the complex in a surprise raid; and in July, thugs hired by the owner of the neighboring shopping mall under construction shot a hail of bullets at the theater. The Ankara Operetta Stage has long since been closed for the activities of the choirs and companies of the State Opera and Ballet, and General Directorate of Fine Arts. This gorgeous building is now to be utilized exclusively for receptions held by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.



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The Centenary of the Municipal Theaters

All municipal and regional theaters are deeply worried about the future, but the Istanbul Municipal Theaters, which claims to continue the Darülbedayi tradition, seems to be in an especially dire situation in the hundredth anniversary of its establishment. Its new manager appointed in late 2014 by İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Şevket Demirkaya previously worked as a school manager, director of a seafood wholesale market, the chief of Ümraniye municipal police, and holds

an international wrestling referee license.

The recently appointed general arts director, Erhan Yazıcıoğlu, on the other hand, resembles Nejat Birecik in his defense of TÜSAK, but is an insider unlike the latter. Yazıcıoğlu is also known for his minor roles and dubbing work in various TV series, and the presenter of the quiz show Seç Bakalım (Make Your Choice).

In an interview he gave soon after taking office, Yazıcıoğlu said “I will file the sharp ends of some of my children, and teach them about self-control. Some lose their control especially in political issues.” Just like Nejat Birecik, one of his first actions was to commence lawsuits against his colleagues. Yazıcıoğlu filed a complaint against the actor and director Nedim Saban, who claimed that the plays Cibali Karakolu (Cibali Police Station) and Fareli

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Köyün Kavalcısı (Piper of Hamelin) were censored. According to Saban, the role of prostitute in the classical Turkish play Cibali Karakolu was entirely taken out. Yazıcıoğlu and the actor Zihni Göktaş had to cede to censorship, saying that the play was too long in its original. It has been also claimed that, the character Cafer’s pun to his lover undressing him, “I don’t want to be undressed (robbed) only by the government,” was taken out of the text. In Fareli Köyün Kavalcısı, on the other hand, there was a reference to stacks of money hidden inside shoe boxes.

From an open letter by the Municipal Theaters actor Hülya Karakaş, we learned that Yazıcıoğlu has taken Memet Baydur’s play Kadın İstasyonu (Women’s Station) out of the program, although the directing work was almost complete.

Like in all the other arts institutions, the management staff of the State Opera and Ballet underwent a complete overhaul. After seven years as the general director of State Opera and Ballet, Rengim Gökmen was dismissed from duty, to be replaced by the Mersin State Opera and Ballet director, Selman Ada. As soon as he came to office, Ada dismissed all the regional directors who had signed the anti-TÜSAK declaration along with Gökmen. Ada’s memorandum on the dress code of the personnel was covered by the media, with headlines reading “Ballerinas banned from wearing leggings.” Antalya State Opera and Ballet’s

deputy director Aslı Ayan was also dismissed, allegedly for posting on Facebook a photo taken with her friends on the beach.

“Public morality” and private theaters

Private theaters found themselves in the middle of this heated debate in 2014. From Genco Erkal’s theater company Dostlar Tiyatrosu to Ferhan Şensoy’s Ortaoyuncular, scores of private theaters were refused public grants, whereas Oyuncu Tayfası, which included in its repertoire plays on the last days of the Ottoman Sultan Vahdettin or the life of Alija İzzetbegović among others, received grants for six plays, in six applications made under the name of different companies. There is more to it: According to article 14 of the Protocol on Support Grants to Private Theaters, the plays must abide by “the principles of public morality”; otherwise, the theaters are obliged to pay back the ministry’s grant in fifteen days, complete with interest. Last but not least, unlike in previous years, the texts of plays which apply for grants need to be submitted to the ministry in advance.

It has been suggested that the ministry has discontinued its grants to certain private theater companies due to their support for the Gezi protests. For instance, it was claimed that Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality banned the performance of Emek Sahnesi’s play Kırmızı Yorgunları (Red Fatigue) due to the actor Barış Atay’s “long tirade against the government.” The Edirne Directorate of National Education shut the doors of the Halk Eğitim Merkezi (Public Education Center) to the play Diren (Resist) by Samsun Sanat Tiyatrosu (Samsun Arts Theater). The play Onca Yoksulluk Varken (La vie devant soi) by Nedim Saban’s company Tiyatrokaresi could find no available stage due to the municipality’s ban. The Kepez District Directorate of National Education banned the performance of the high school play Rumuz Goncağül, due to alleged disregard for public morality and the mention of a ‘pimp’ in the text. The teacher who directed the play was sent packing to another school, and was punished in the form of rank freeze. Istanbul University, on the other hand, demolished its Öğrenci Kültür Merkezi (Student Cultural Center) built back in 1990.

The government’s arts policy is felt everywhere from student drama clubs to well-established theater companies, putting pressure on performing arts under the pretext of upholding “public morality.” Naturally, there are independent initiatives which reject this pressure en bloc. A case in point is the Tiyatro Kumpanyası, which announced that it will return the grant it received in protest of the Article 14 of the abovementioned protocol. This illustrates the fact that the future of the support to



A scene from Cibali Police Station which is another target of censorship and Erhan Yazıcıoğlu (below), art director of Municipal Theaters.

private theaters is itself fairly uncertain. In a meeting in late 2014, the deputy undersecretary of the ministry allegedly insisted that private theaters should be given no grants in 2015.

The end of state-sponsored theater?

Appointed Minister of Culture and Tourism in early 2013, Ömer Çelik significantly resembled the ex-Prime Minister when he said: "It is too easy to accuse the ministry of censorship. I claim that the ministry upholds freedoms much more than the ideological captains of the culture and arts scene in Turkey!"

Ömer Çelik also files numerous lawsuits against cultural workers. For example, last year, he demanded compensation from Üstün Akmen, the president of Critics Association of Turkey.

While we wait for the final draft of the TÜSAK law, we could remember what today's president Tayyip Erdoğan said three years ago about theaters:

One cannot find state-sponsored theaters in almost any developed country. Our goal is not to create a private management, but to privatize theaters. Once privatized, they will be free to stage any play they like. When necessary, the government will provide sponsorship or support to a play we like. Here is freedom for you; stage the play you wish, whenever, however. No one will hold you back. But I am sorry, you just cannot receive a salary from municipal theaters and then put down the management. No way.

Let us go back to the beginning and lend an ear to the criticisms of Yücel Erten, an ex-general director of the State Theaters. In an interview, suggesting that the leaders of the ruling party who accuse the Turkish theatrical tradition of "intellectual despotism," "don't have the slightest concep-

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tion about what art is," Erten gives the following example from Erzurum: "TÜSAK is not designed to ameliorate or develop arts institutions. It is designed to destroy these institutions. One example will suffice to illustrate the importance of these institutions: A few years ago, Erzurum State Theater took the children's play *Bremen Müzıkçıları* (Town Musicians of Bremen) on a tour of 17 district centers. According to a survey by the governor's office, 10,000 -11,000 thousand kids watched the play in these 17 districts. 92% of the children saw a play for the first time in their lives. For the remaining 8%, it was only the second time after previous year's tour. Here is the problem: If you dissolve state theater, opera and ballet institutions and submit the sector to the whim of private enterprise, how will the private sector, driven only by profit, offer such services?"

The year 2015 is set to be a year of uncertainties for public arts institutions. If the draft law on TÜSAK is approved by the national assembly, the heritage of century-old institutions will be demolished and a central organ will take complete control of artistic activities. Even if the draft law is not approved as it is and the institutions survive, it is difficult to see how they can become autonomous under the present circumstances. It seems that in the year 2015 both public and private institutions will find themselves in a struggle of life and death, fiercer than in previous years.

HUMAN PLANET: OSMAN KÖKER

Understanding and narrating the suffering of the other

Interview: Ulrike Dufner

Once upon a time, though not long ago, there were Armenians in Thrace and Anatolia. Who were they, how they lived and what came upon them? Osman Köker has written books, curated numerous exhibitions dealing with these questions. Here is "why" and "how" in his own words.



Osman Köker

Born in 1957 in Maraş, Köker worked as a correspondent and editor for various daily newspapers and weekly magazines. He assumed editorial positions in a number of publishing houses, focusing on history publications.

In 2005, he established Birzamanlar Yayıncılık, which publishes books and organizes events as regards the now lost cultural diversity of Turkey and its disappearance.

He edited numerous books including the book and album "Armenians in Turkey 100 Years Ago" and curated scores of exhibitions such as "Sireli Yeghpays", some of which went on tours overseas.

How did you become interested in Armenians specifically or minority communities in Turkey more generally? As far as I know, you do not belong to a religious or ethnic minority yourself.

Osman Köker: My origins are Turkish, Muslim and Sunnite. I got drawn to these issues due to my interest in history, especially the history of Istanbul. When I began to study the history of Istanbul in detail, I came across the so-called "minorities" instead of the Turks under every stone I turned: architecture, commerce, culture... This prompted me to start a comprehensive literature survey.

When was that?

The beginning of the 1990s. In that period, as always, there were campaigns targeting Christians and Jews under various pretexts. People sent around fax messages that read "these companies belong to Jews; do not buy their products." As a result, I embraced the mission of monitoring minority rights and announcing any violations of their rights to the public. I was a journalist who wrote for various publications. At the Human Rights Association of Turkey a Minority Rights Monitoring Commission was set up. I joined the commission although I was not a member of the association. The commission became not only a platform for struggle, but also a school. It was the year 1993. At

that time the historical and contemporary aspects of minority rights and rights violations were not really known. Armenians, Greeks, Jews and other groups had not yet started expressing themselves publicly or were not able to make their voices heard. We published reports which denounced rights violations, issued declarations and did our utmost to access all information that concerned us. We broke our backs to unveil the truth. Starting from the 40th anniversary of the attacks of September 6-7, 1955, the commission tried to bring together everyone working on the subject, and opened the first exhibition ever on September 6-7. I was largely responsible for the research, penning the texts, finding the photos, and organizing - "curating" would sound too professional - the exhibition. There were almost no resources outside for a few studies published in the magazine Tarih ve Toplum, and a few of passages in two or three memoirs. I scanned the newspapers and parliament minutes of the period, as well as the documents of the Yassıada trials.

From 1994 onwards, I was part of the publications department of the history foundation Tarih Vakfı. I was the deputy editor-in-chief of the three-monthly magazine İstanbul, and then became the editor-in-chief of the foundation's monthly magazine Toplumsal Tarih. When I tried to get more articles about non-Turkish and non-Muslim groups published in these magazines, I once again realized that the issue was barely explored and that there were very few academics or researchers who studied it. Universities and newspaper showed no interest in the issue. The publishers Belge Yayınları had issued a few books, the publishers Aras Yayıncılık was only recently established, and the Armenian weekly magazine Agos had not yet been established - I was going to work at Agos for three months as a journalist during its foundation.



In other words, I had to try my hand at it. Most of the time, when I proposed that the magazine publish an article on the issue, I would have to do research and pen the article myself. As I wrote or edited articles on the matter, inevitably I became more and more knowledgeable on the issue. However, it was really with the book *Armenians in Turkey 100 Years Ago* that I could analyze the issue in detail and people heard of my name. What was the Armenian community in Turkey like in the beginning of the 20th century; how many Armenians lived in which city, town and village; where were their churches, monasteries and schools; which newspapers and magazines did they publish; what kind of a role did they play in the economic and cultural lives of their localities? The book I edited explored all of these issues. When I set off to find 15-20 photos for the book, I learned about a very important collection. A collector named Orlando Carlo Calumeno had thousands of postcards depicting the Ottoman cities in the beginning of the 20th century. When he allowed me to use those postcards about the Armenians, the publication turned into a “book-cum-album.” When I was wondering how I could inform people about the book and make it accessible to a wider public, I came up with the idea of organizing an exhibition. The Turkey Representation of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung gave its support to the project, making possible the creation of a truly professional exhibition, from graphic design to publicity. As a result, the exhibition “Sireli Yeghpayrs (My Dear Brother): Armenians in

Turkey 100 Years Ago, With Postcards from the Collection of Orlando Carlo Calumeno” opened its doors in early 2005. It created a huge impact. Some newspapers published full-page articles with numerous photographs, TVs interviewed us interviews. During the eleven days it remained open in Istanbul, around ten thousand people visited the exhibition and immediately afterwards, we received invitations from overseas. I had to set up a publishing house to publish the book. At first, I thought I would close it down after issuing the book, but I decided to keep it open. That’s how we founded *Birzamanlar Yayıncılık*, which now publishes volumes and organizes events about Turkey’s past cultural diversity and its disappearance. The exhibition “Sireli Yeghpayrs” played a pioneering role in 2005 by educating the general public on the matter... I joined the debate, not by asking whether it was a genocide or not, or who had killed whom, but

A postal card in English, Armenian and Ottoman Turkish displayed in the exhibition “Sireli Yeghpayrs”, shows the facilities of the American mission in the town of Harput in the beginning of 20th century. Armenians accounted for almost all of the students of the Euphrates College in the mission headquarters.

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Postal cards from the Orlando Carlo Calumeno Collection.

rather by discussing what the Armenian society was like historically and what its disappearance meant. This approach created empathy. Did you collaborate with Armenians in preparing the exhibition and book? Did they contribute in any way?

I did not receive any financial support from them, but many of my Armenian friends made suggestions and contributed to the publicity campaign. I make a point of using different resources together, in comparative fashion. Those who study this issue in Turkey or overseas refer to either only Turkish resources, or to only Armenian and Western resources. There never had been a project blending all of these three. I made use of both Turkish and Ottoman resources, and publications by Westerners and Armenian resources. My Armenian-speaking friends gave me professional or volunteer support in enabling my access to Armenian resources. I also learned very rudimentary level of Armenian, which allows me to understand lists in

Armenian about churches, monasteries and schools, read photo captions, and get a general idea about what a book or article is about. The thirteen-volume "Haygagan Sovedagan Hanrakidaran" (Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia) was published in Yerevan between 1974-1987, and each volume has about one thousand pages. I scanned the entire encyclopedia and found 1100 entries, mostly about a paragraph long, about Armenian settlements in Turkey, which were translated for me by a young Armenian friend. Another Armenian friend of mine collected from a number of sources Armenian newspapers and magazines published in early 20th century.

Comparing Turkish and Armenian sources, for instance finding the old and new Turkish names of villages cited in Armenian sources, is tough work. When I was not sure, I phoned the muhtars (village leader) of villages or researched the matter on site. For example, Armenian sources talk about a Medz Nor Küğ, or the new large village, in Bursa. It was very difficult, but in a way satisfying, to discover that this village was called the hamlet of Cedid in the district of Pazarköy in Ottoman times, and is now Yeniköy in the Orhangazi district. Say, if in a province, there are two villages which used to carry the same name in the past, you have to discover which of these two is the Armenian village cited in the sources and mention its new name in the book. As a last resort, you ask the muhtar of the village. It is not easy to get along with them.

The exhibition "Sireli Yeghpayrs (My Dear Brother): Armenians in Turkey 100 Years Ago, With Postcards from the Collection of Orlando Carlo Calumeno" opened its doors in early 2005. It created a huge impact. During the eleven days it remained open in Istanbul, around ten thousand people visited the exhibition.

You cannot simply ask them on the phone, “Did your village use to be an Armenian village?” You ask whether it is a village populated by Turkish migrants from the Balkans (the *muhacir*). If the answer is affirmative, the village is most probably an old Armenian or Greek village. After they were forced to flee, the *muhacir*, that is, Muslim immigrants were settled in their place. You can’t ask “Was there a church there?” but rather “Are there any historical buildings such as mosques and baths in the village?” If he says “When my ancestors arrived in the village, there were no mosques but a church, which is now destroyed,” you understand that you are on the right track. Were there any negative reactions to the exhibition and book?

A few, but nothing worth mentioning here. Most of the reactions were favorable. The exhibition featured convincing visual materials and objectively written texts: simple facts against which no one can file a lawsuit, or make a fuss about. Each display board focused on a city. In Turkey, people have strong ties to their cities of origin. As such, you would see Turks and Armenians from İzmit huddled in front of the display board about İzmit. One would say “I have heard about Greeks, but I did not know that Armenians lived in İzmit, too.” Another would say, “My parents used to live in İzmit, my father is from the neighborhood of Kozluk.” “When did they leave the town?” “We migrated to Istanbul in the 1950s, my uncle and his family lived there until 1974. In İzmit we still have relatives; they are Muslims now,” etc. They told each other numerous such stories, and shared their first hand experiences in a really intimate way.

Aside from the discourse of the exhibition and book, another reason for the lack of negative feedback was the period, I have to admit. Back then, the other side was not so organized. Aggression started especially after April 2005, when commemorations were held on the 90th anniversary of the genocide, such as the conference on the Armenian question, which was first scheduled for early summer at Boğaziçi University, but had to be postponed until the autumn at Bilgi University. The positive feedback encouraged me. I prepared an overseas version of the exhibition, which visited Germany, France, Switzerland, the UK and Armenia and still receives invitations. In many countries that the exhibition could not visit, I presented the same materials in slide shows. I guess I have made over 30 such presentations in Turkey and abroad. On the local level, too, I made presentations about how cities were one hundred years ago and opened exhibitions on their past cultural diversity.

Your latest stop was Antakya...

Antakya was one of these cities. General history



or political history does not influence people so much; and those who are influenced immediately choose a side and start acting in a partisan fashion. However, when you present them with very rich local information and visuals about a town or village they personally know, and build on that feeling of belonging to a locality, then they start feeling sympathy towards others which they might perceive as enemies in another context. They start to comprehend the suffering of others. Deep down inside, they feel that a better world has been lost, and that in a sense, they are also on the losing side.

When you use postal cards or other visual material to show that, say, a building used to belong to Armenians in the past, doesn't this cause an uproar on the part of its current owners?

That might have been the case had I used a discourse of direct accusation, but things are different when you use a tender tone. In the final instance, when you explain that those people were killed and their property was confiscated, people feel sorrow. They do not become defensive. On the contrary, they start to confess, saying “my ances-

A late 19th century postal card, displayed in the exhibition “Sireli Yeghpays”, which depicts the Yüksekaldırım Avenue that connects Galata (Karaköy) to Pera (Beyoğlu). The signboards are written in multiple languages. The sign in Ottoman Turkish, Armenian and Greek, seen on the left, belongs to the Eskişehir Hotel run by an Armenian named Gdavrıyan.

A postal card printed on the cover of the book "Armenians in Turkey 100 Years Ago", shows İzmit's Armenian neighborhood Kozluk. In the background, the hunting lodge of Sultan Abdülmecid can be seen. Its architect is Garabed Balyan, an Armenian architect of the Ottoman court. The architect of the clock tower on the right is another Armenian, Mihran Azaryan.



tors did such and such..."

A very common defensive argument is "Armenians killed Turks, too." Does that come up often on a more local scale?

The basis of history is chronology, that is, the sequence of events. In Turkey, a key method for adulterating history is mixing up the chronology. When you correct the chronology in a chat, the problem is largely settled. The picture changes entirely when you say, "Of course Armenians might have killed Turks, they would not stand their idly, would they? When Turks forced them to flee, some Armenians took to the mountains and later came back for revenge." On the other hand, you do not have to go the entire length of your argument anyhow. Most of the time, it is enough to arise certain emotions in your interlocutor. There is a saying which goes, "It is only to a fool that you have to tell everything." In my visits, I do not go the entire length. I narrate a number of things, people are influenced to varying degrees, and most of them understand my full argument.

There are other cities that you are studying. What is your purpose, your dream?

İstanbul is a very important hub, which in a way includes a piece of every region of Turkey. There are people from all over, and very few of them consider themselves as Istanbulites. Even among those born in Istanbul, very few declare themselves to be Istanbulites. Everyone refers to where their parents hail from. Everyone has a contact with their home town, and those in the home town are interested in what is happening in Istanbul. I have been thinking of creating a museum for some time. It might not be called a museum, since in Turkey you have to go through immense red tape to set up a museum. Rather, a center which functions like a museum: A vast edifice which includes a permanent exhibition featuring

objects and texts shedding light on the social life in towns across Turkey before the First World War, before the destruction of cultural diversity. How was Adana, Bursa, Trabzon or Mardin back then? Economic and social life, the material conditions, population statistics, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Assyrians... Aside from this permanent exhibition, there could be temporary exhibitions, conferences, film screenings to make sure that visitors come back again and again... I have ample information on how Turkey was like one hundred years ago, city by city. I also have the contacts with collectors, which could allow me to get together visual materials and other objects; I also believe that the publishing house can finance such a venue without problems. The problem is finding the right place.

Is it hard to find a place in Istanbul?

A very large building will be necessary, maybe a multi-storey edifice. After some initial research I discovered that it would not be easy to find sponsor for such a place, and decided to start out with a smaller target. Last year, it was a simple intention, this year it became reality: Gallery Birzamanlar. In Pangaltı, there's a bookstore called Nostalji Kültür, which sells exactly the kind of books that our publishing house releases. They allocated their vacant second floor to us. They do it out of solidarity, they do not demand any rent from us. We, in return, try to support the bookstore with our events. Our target is to inaugurate a new exhibition every two months, and hold a meeting every two months. The focus will not be on arts and culture in general; we limited our focus to the cultural diversity in Turkey's history and its disappearance. The first exhibition was about the region of Antakya and İskenderun. The exhibition was opened in Hatay's Arsuz district and the Armenian village of Vakıflı; probably, it will also be



A postal card displayed in the "Once Upon A Time in Antioch, Alexandretta and Mousaler" exhibition depicts Antioch in the beginning of the 20th century, Orontes which then was a large river, and the Christian neighborhood located on its left bank.

held in Antakya and İskenderun city centers in a couple of months.

From the exhibition "Sireli Yeghpayrs" in 2005 until today, there has indeed been a considerable change in the society. Do you think that the risk of aggression towards such projects has lessened or not in the last ten years?

The risk of aggression still exists. The real positive and permanent change is to be seen in the curiosity of the people. Compared to ten years ago, there today is much more interest and a readiness to learn towards the issues we are exploring. I believe that, for educational purposes too, it is important to create a large venue as I planned. For instance, for a high school history teacher, there is no such place that they can send their students to learn more about the culture and history of various regions in Turkey. Someone could establish an Armenian museum; indeed, such a place exists inside the Armenian patriarchate, although it cannot be visited by everyone all the time. The foundation called 500. Yıl Vakfı has established a Jewish Museum which is still active. Say, the Greeks might also create a similar museum in the future. Or 'urban museums' in various localities can play a similar role. However, people who share the same perspective with me should take the initiative to create a museum which will cover all the geographies and disappearing cultures of Turkey. Here, it might be an advantage that you do not belong to a minority, since you are not under the obligation of narrating your own community's experiences...

Indeed. I have to appeal to a more general public. One of my projects could draw more attention from one specific community, however, I always try to appeal to everyone, or to any average Turkish, Muslim and Sunnite person...

In Germany there are civil society initiatives for

General history or political history does not influence people so much; and those who are influenced immediately choose a side. However, when you present them with very rich local information and visuals about a town or village they personally know, and build on that feeling of belonging to a locality, and then they start feeling sympathy towards others which they might perceive as enemies in another context. They start to comprehend the suffering of others. Deep down inside, they feel that a better world has been lost, and that in a sense, they are also on the losing side.

exploring local history. Is there such an endeavor in Turkey? Do people get together and research the history of their districts of cities?

A few such initiatives did appear in Turkey. When I worked at Tarih Vakfı, the foundation made efforts to create local history research initiatives and to set up a coordinating mechanism among them. Our endeavors might liven up such efforts, too. We have accumulated a considerable amount of information and visual material. When I worked on the first book and exhibition, I had accumulated ample information about the Armenian communities in Turkey. A friend of mine did the same for the Greek communities, and his work will be published in a couple of months. The next year, we will publish a few other studies which provide data on cultural diversity across Turkey. Birzamanlar Yayıncılık now has remarkable know-how in swiftly collecting basic information and visual materials about the situation of any city in the country one hundred years ago. We can carry out very extensive studies in cooperation with local civil society groups or municipalities and other public agencies.

NEWS FROM hbs

From war to peace, from conflict to resolution

On the 13th and 14th December, 2014, the Diyarbakır Institute for Political and Social Research (DİSA), The İsmail Beşikçi Foundation and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Turkey Representative jointly held an international conference titled “From War to Peace, from Conflict to Resolution” with the support of the Open Society Foundation. At the conference, which was attended by numerous major figures, one of the most crucial questions considered in the light of international experiences was the question: “What role might international actors play in peace negotiations?”

The role of external actors

Both Alvaro de Soto, from the Global Leadership Foundation, who was entrusted with a task in various peace processes by the United Nations, and Francesc Vendrell, from Johns Hopkins University, brought up the benefits of external actors’ inclusion in peace processes. Yet, they also underlined that conflicting parties should have a consensus on the tasks to be fulfilled by external actors. These tasks might range from the position of mere “observer” to documentation of negotiations, from supervision to negotiation between conflicting parties. The presence of external actors has definite advantages: first of all, since they have not involved in the conflict, they take hands-off stance which might be extremely helpful. Yet, there are cases such as South Africa wherein peace negotiations were carried out without the intervention of external actors.

Dipuo Bertha Letsatsi, who took part in the negotiating committee as a representative of the African National Congress (ANC), explained how negotiations in South Africa were organized. Underlining the importance of the participation of the majority of society into negotiation process, he stated that each topic from disarmament to social, economic and legal matters was debated in length.

Informing the public

We have seen that in addition to reporting on the negotiations, reporting the gains guaranteed during the process is crucial for the peace negotiations to proceed, especially in the case of Turkey. Even at this stage, divided opinions occur frequently. The confidentiality of the negotiations is no doubt a prerequisite, however, informing the public regarding the negotiations is indispensable. Including international observers into the negotiations might prevent exploitation of negotiations due to political motives. Moreover, observers might induce conflicting parties to develop a “common language.”

Disarmament

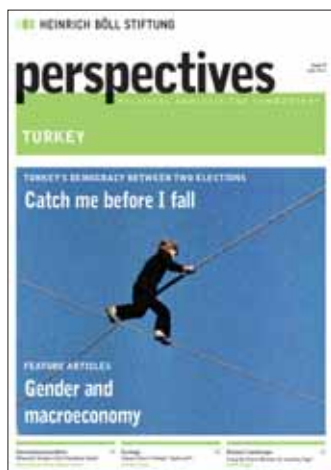
The panel on the issue of disarmament, which is considered by the Turkish government as a prerequisite for peace negotiations to continue, received a great deal of attention. In that matter international experts stated clear ideas: there has never been a peace negotiation which is not based on disarmament. However, governments occasionally would not go along with disarmament agreement until the ultimate stage of peace negotiations, for they want to hold onto to the option of military action against its opponents. Dipuo Bertha Letsatsi, an ex-ANC fighter, noted that the issue of disarmament comprises manifold questions to be agreed upon. For instance, what will happen to weapons? What about the armed forces? What social security will they have? There are many further details regarding the issue that must be deliberated.

Women’s inclusion in peace process

Nimet Tanrıku, a member of Amnesty International, the Justice Commission to Confront the Truth of Diyarbakır Prison and the Women’s Initiative for Peace, talked on the past peace negotiations within the framework of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. According to Tanrıku, despite the Resolution 1325, it is rare that women are included in peace processes and that gender dimensions are taken into account. Helen Scanlon, from Kaapstad (Cape Town), who is teaches gender studies at Cape Town University, brought up the probable consequences of a transitional justice blind to gender dynamics. Such dynamics were neglected by the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa, Scanlon stated. Women’s testimonies delivered to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission mostly related to violent practices (such as torture, homicide and other human rights violations) experienced by their husbands and sons, for the definition of crime accepted by the commission did not include sexual offences and rape in the beginning. Therefore, even though its constitution is one of the most developed ones in terms of women’s rights, South Africa still has very high rates of violence against women. Scanlon argued that confronting sexual violence in truth commissions twenty five years ago would have changed social consciousness, and prevented eventually the “banalization” of violence against women. Yüksel Genç, representative of the Women’s Initiative for Peace, talked about the impressive attempts by female members of the Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) to extend the boundaries of women’s rights in Turkey. She stressed that “bottom up” mobilization is crucial to popularizing such issues.

Nearly three hundred persons attended two sessions held in İstanbul and Diyarbakır. That debates in both cities were vivid confirmations that getting informed about the actual situation is a vital public need. It was not surprising that all these problems were considered to be a matter of “pressing urgency” in Diyarbakır. Similarly, many were skeptical about the government’s tenacity in the peace process. There seems to be a general consensus that demand for “demilitarization” is unrealistic due to security risks posed by ISIS.

Ulrike Dufner



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