



Workshop on Local Politics and Governance in Turkey

-January 23 & 24th, 2014 at CERI-Sciences Po (Paris)-

Ersin Kalaycıoğlu (Sabanci University – Istanbul)
Riva Kastoryano (CERI – Sciences Po – CNRS- Paris)

From the nineteenth century onwards the Ottoman Empire and from the 1930s onward the Turkish Republic have been deeply impressed by the conduct of governance of French public administration in the making and execution of Turkish public policy. In fact, most of Turkish public administration reforms have been influenced by the earlier experiences of France. Some of the laws in Turkey, such as the Municipal Administration Act 1580 of 1930, were almost literal translations of the corresponding French laws of the time. However, Turkey failed to move with decentralization reform at par with France after World War II. As the French public administration became more decentralized the Turkish political establishment continued with its practice of centralism. Domestic concerns over challenges of the Kurdish nationalist claims had played a major role in being cool to decentralization in Turkey. There also seems to be a well-entrenched culture of centralism that pervades not only the political elites but masses also. It is small exaggeration to argue that all politics is national politics in Turkey.

In spite of that fact, some audacious steps toward decentralization have been taken in the last five decades. Village administrations have always been determined by popular elections since the 1920s, however it was in the 1960s that the mayors began to be popularly elected to office. Municipal Councils (*Belediye Meclisi*) also began to have elected incumbents. Then, in the 1980s metropolitan city administrations were erected and eventually provincial metropolitan municipalities (PMM) were erected in 30 out of 81 provinces by 2013. Currently metropolitan mayors, metropolitan city councils, mayors of metropolitan districts (towns), and small town city councils are being determined by popular elections. Provincial General Councils (*İl Genel Meclisleri*) are also determined by popular elections in 51 provinces. However, such a laborious process of election of several thousand offices at the village, small town, city, metropolitan city and provincial levels of government should not deceive us to conclude that local politics constitutes an environment of people power or self-government. In fact, in every province it is the appointed governor, who represents the collective interests of the state in a province, but also is a career bureaucrat from the Ministry of Interior Affairs most of the time, decides on most issues of the province on his / her own, and usually in line with governmental policies and / or dictum. Mayors have also been under the jurisdiction of the governor on several local domains, especially those that pertain to security and there is hardly anything that does not relate to security. Even at the level of the municipality most decision – making tend to be made at the Municipal Board (*Belediye Encümeni*) where appointed bureaucrats of the municipality serve under the jurisdiction of the mayor. Finally, there are hardly enough financial resources at the disposal of the municipalities.

All tax levies are made centrally by the National Assembly and the government decides on how much and when each municipality gets some transfer payments from the state budget. It is impossible to substantiate the claim that such decisions and practices are insulated from partisan considerations. Between the eighty-one provinces and the central state at the national level are the twenty-six regions of Turkey, where regional development agencies are organized to draw up the development plans of those regions. Those regional development agencies are connected to the State Planning Organization and the Ministry of State in charge of Development and operate under boards which are formed by the participation of the provincial governors

that constitute each region. Hence, all politics gets to be controlled at the local level by the central government and bureaucracy, and especially the Ministries of Interior Affairs and Finance, in Turkey. It seems as if interest of the central administration in the local governance seem to be continuing, though it is uncertain whether any determined move toward devolution of power from the center to the local administrations will ever be on the agenda in the foreseeable future. How is this process best to be defined and explained?

It is a matter of fact that there has been excessive horizontal and vertical social mobility and rapid social mobilization in Turkey. Millions have changed places and very few still live or die in places where they were born. Coastal city populations mushroomed in a short period of time. Istanbul's population has now reached 14 million as roughly 18 percent of the population of the country lives in that city. In sixty years since 1950 the population of the country almost quadrupled from twenty to seventy-five million. Such major dislocation of population is also married with rapid industrialization of the economy. Literacy rates, media exposure, transportation and communication also increased in tandem with urbanization of the population. Rapid urbanization and social mobilization also created several socio-economic, cultural and ecological problems, issues, and concerns. All of this has also happened on the background of increased conservatism, religiosity and ethnic awareness of the masses. Country faced with terror attacks by several religious groups, such as the al-Qaida, and secular groups such as the PKK and DHKP-C in more recent times. Placed in the middle of huge rents, exploited labor, homeless, discriminated and ill - treated women and children, mounting ecological problems of air, land, water pollution and the like the local politics of the metropolitan cities began to be faced with critical questions: Do they have the economic and human resources to deal with such issues? Does the central government have the incentive to empower the local authorities enough to deal with such problems and issues? What does de-centralization require under these circumstances? Does it require devolution of all decisions including the power to levy local taxes? Does fiscal decentralism require a similar or parallel administrative / legal infrastructure necessary for it? Do people have the mental readiness to adapt to such change? Is it possible to empower the people of local units from villages to metropolitan cities and beyond, without endangering local interest groups (patrons) from hijacking such powers and effectively use them to empower themselves instead of the (wo)man in the streets? What does local democracy mean in such a disparate environment which includes a behemoth as the city of Istanbul with its approximately 14 million inhabitants versus the city of Çanakkale with its 135 thousand inhabitants?

Much can also be learned from comparisons from several European examples of de-centralization of public administration in unitary states. France provides for an excellent example and so does Italy, Greece, and Britain, all of which have unitary states and their own imbalances and unevenness of distribution of people and resources. Their efforts at de-centralization have created several challenges in dealing with questions of similar nature, which provide opportunities for understanding complexities and difficulties in de-centralization for Turkey as well.





Program of the workshop

Organisers:

Ersin Kalaycıoğlu (Sabancı University – Istanbul)
Riva Kastoryano (CERI – Sciences Po – CNRS- Paris)

Thursday, January 23th

9:30 – 10:00: Welcome address by Riva Kastoryano – CERI Sciences Po, Paris
Introduction by Ersin Kalaycıoğlu- Sabancı University, Istanbul

Session I (10:00-13:30): Decentralization and Democracy

- *The transformation of the field of local politics in Turkey*
Ulaş Bayraktar – Mersin University, Mersin
- *Changes in Administrative Law – Towards a Re-Centralization?*
Muhittin Acar – Hacettepe University, Ankara

11:30-11:45: Coffee break

- *Regional Autonomy and Turkey*
Fikret Toksöz – TESEV, Istanbul
Ferhan Gezici Korten – Istanbul Technic University, Istanbul
- *Discussion : Turkish – European Performances*
Jean Dussourd – Prefet, French Ministry of Interior Affairs

13:30-14:30: Lunch

Session II (14:30-18:00): Politics of Local Governance - New Challenges

- *Governing from below? Reassessing the role of neighborhood headmen in governing the city*
Elise Massicard – IFEA, Istanbul
- *A Place for Gender in Local Politics*
Nihal İncioğlu – Bilgi University, Istanbul

- *Discussion : Local Governance Turkey – EU*
Tommaso Vitale – CEE-Sciences Po, Paris
- General Discussion

Friday, January 24th

Session III (9:30-11:45): Decentralization and Popular Participation

- *Popular Participation*
Ayşen Uysal – Dokuz Eylül University, Izmir
- *Political Economy of Regional Development: A Perspective*
Merve Özdemirkıran- CERI-Sciences Po, Paris & Bağışehir University, Istanbul
- *Discussion: Decentralization and Regionalization*
Patrick Le Galès – CEE-Sciences Po, Paris

12 :00-13 :00 : Lunch Break

Session IV (13:00 - 15:00): EU Perspectives

- *Turkey and the EU*
Can Baydarol – BILGESAM, Istanbul
- *The future of European regions: perspectives of subsidiarity*
Engin Soysal - Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- **General Discussion: What is next in the lights of Gezi events?**
Ersin Kalaycıoğlu – Sabancı University and Riva Kastoryano CERI-Sciences Po