

Chapter 63

Local and Urban Administrations, Politics, and Elections in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

As a result of comprehensive reforms since the late 1990s, the structures, powers, functions and relations of the central government and local administrations, and of the state, market and civil society have been reshaped in Turkey. Besides, Turkey's democratic and administrative system and the local, metropolitan and regional administrations have been strengthened. This study focuses on the local and urban politics and elections as well as the local administration structure in Turkey. Accordingly, first, this chapter aims to present a conceptual and theoretical background for the paper on local and urban politics. Second, the paper gives a short review of the local administrative system in Turkey. Third, the study focuses on the types and characteristics of the local and urban politics and elections, actors involved, participation patterns, etc. Finally, a short review of the issues discussed in the chapter along with some recommendations is presented.

INTRODUCTION

The world and Turkey have undergone important transformations with profound consequences for the way how democracy have been understood, structured and functioned. After the Second World War, the efforts had concentrated on improving democracy at the national level and The Council of Europe had played an important role in such efforts. Yet, The Council of Europe has concentrated its efforts on

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improving local and regional democratic structures and autonomy along with respect for local ethnic, cultural and social diversity since the 1980s. The collapse of Soviet Union, ethnic, racial and religious revival, improved international tools and mechanisms to protect human rights, new social movements, and increased and diversified citizen demands and expectations etc. all have had an impact on this shift of the focus on localities, local identities, decentralization and local democratic structures. Such developments have also been accompanied and shaped by the proliferation of neoliberalism both as a market ideology and as the dominant model of democratic paradigm, and “seen by some as an inevitable consequence of a marketized global system” (Aberbach & Christensen, 2003, p. 491). Since the 1990s and particularly the 2000s, the improvement of competitiveness in the market and the enhancement of the capacity of public administration as the facilitator of good governance have become important goals (Baimyrzaeva, 2012; Güler, 2004, p. 27).

In the Turkish case, the need for political stability, democratic governance, an efficient, flexible and decentralized public administration; the diversifying and increasing demands of the citizens; the increased global standards; revolutionary changes in ICTs and Turkey-EU relations are the main factors that have triggered the recent changes and reforms. In addition, shortcomings in the capacity and autonomy of the local administrations, strong administrative and fiscal control of the central government over the local and urban administrations, inadequate levels of local leadership, collaboration and self-initiative taking, and increased local ethnic and religious consciousness are some of the other reasons requiring change. All these factors and changes were considered as necessary to create synergy at the local level, to use local capacity more efficiently and to strengthen local autonomy (Dulupçu, Gül & Okçu, 2013; Gül, 2013; Çelenk, 2009, p. 50; Öniş, 2004, p. 114; Sezer, 2002).

Urbanization, immigration, globalization, democratization and changing characteristics and landscape of cities along with weakened nation states, among others, have all played a role in the increased focus on decentralization, regionalization, urban politics and local autonomy since the 1980s. For instance, in the mid-20th-century, “modern metropolis” featured a definitive center surrounded by a sprawling suburban periphery. Yet, in the late 20th century, the “modern metropolis” have been usurped by a “postmetropolis” whose landscapes have been stretched out to form a polycentric urban geography (Soja, 2000). As a result, cities have grown and the percentages of people living in urban areas now go well beyond the 80 percent threshold in not only the developed world but also the developing world. Besides, cities today have decentralized settlement and management structures. Bruegmann (2006, p. 10) argues that “urban areas today defy traditional notions of what a city is. Our old definitions of urban, suburban, and rural fail to capture the complexity of these vast regions with their superhighways, sub-divisions, industrial areas, office parks, and resorts pushing far out into the countryside.” Thus, the dichotomies such as center-periphery, urban core-urban fringe and city-countryside are increasingly at odds with the polycentric and dispersed forms and landscapes of most contemporary urban areas. This new urban settlement patterns, in turn, “challenges the modern tradition of urban planning and governance that tended to see cities effectively as unitary objects, coincident with specific administrative jurisdictions and amenable to physical intervention at the local level” (Vigar et al., 2005, p. 1393).

Accordingly we live in an increasingly glocalised, dispersed and diversified urban world today. In this new world, the role of the national or local administrative bodies, and their relations with the market and society have changed. In addition, an increase in the demand for participation, responsiveness, transparency, openness, autonomy, and accountability has also triggered a tendency towards democratization, decentralization and governance, paving the way for increased local autonomy and an improved role

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