

Civil Society, the State, and Foreign Pressure

An Analysis of Environmentalism in Turkey

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The Southeastern Anatolia Development Project (GAP in Turkish) is among the world's largest and most ambitious regional development projects.¹ Currently, the GAP is comprised of 13 projects for irrigation, 19 hydropower plants and 22 dams, including the sixth largest of its kind in the world, the Atatürk Dam. Originally conceived as a hydroelectric project in the 1950s, GAP has since evolved into an economic development strategy encompassing a wide-range of sectors including transportation, agriculture, energy, telecommunications, health care and education. The project is meant to enhance the social and economic fabric of Turkey's poorest regions. While the project has fulfilled some of its stated objectives, including providing a solution to Turkey's energy crisis, several unintended consequences have detracted from the project's success. Since the 1970s, the Atatürk Dam's reduction of the Euphrates River's discharge into Syria and Iraq has exacerbated border tensions and the Kurdish issue.² In turn, Syria has responded by purportedly assisting Kurdish nationalists in Anatolia³, led by Abdullah Öcalan's Worker's Party of Kurdistan (PKK).⁴ The conflict

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has proven very costly in terms of the loss of human life, environmental degradation and the overall decline in economic growth.⁵ The statist top-down implementation of the project has also been predictably plagued by a lack of consultation with the local populations which are purportedly the project's intended beneficiaries. As a result, the persistence of poverty issues and regional discrepancies between Anatolia and the rest of Turkey raises questions about the effectiveness of the GAP and the role of the state in its implementation.

In compliance with the EU's Copenhagen Political Criteria for commencing EU accession negotiations, a number of state policies were enacted to demonstrate progress on the Kurdish issue, including compensation for those who suffered during the conflict, liberal modifications to the Turkish Penal Code and perhaps most importantly the extension of education and broadcasting rights for the Kurdish populations. While these measures initiated by foreign pressures have eased tensions and facilitated an atmosphere of cooperation with and public participation in the GAP, the reforms have been closely focused on civil rights and liberties with little concern for environmental issues.⁶

These events highlight the complex relationship between state and society, the role of foreign actors, and the difficult nature of development and environmental regulation in Turkey. The process of democratization and modernization is occurring within the context of significant external pressures and ethno-religious tensions. This paper will argue that the rise of Turkish environmentalism has proceeded with varying levels of success.⁷ There has been considerable suprastate influence resulting in the rapid generation of environmental legislation. Turkey's aspiration for accession to the EU has involved the approximation of EU legislation in compliance with the Copenhagen Criteria and the *acquis communautaire*.⁸ An emerging civil society has been heavily dependent on foreign actors and their expertise in the agenda setting, policy making and decision making process. In turn, Turkey has initiated considerable administrative and institutional assimilation in the area of environmental protection. It should be recognized, however, that suprastate influence while extremely important does not account entirely for incipient civil societies that are more eager than ever to speak out on environmental disasters and hold their government accountable.

The role of environmental NGOs in the democratization process is of greatest salience. Recognizing that the inclusion of NGOs is an important element in the democratizing transformation that is underway in Turkey, where this process has been well underway for decades, it cannot be overstated that the capacity of an emerging civil society to

affect large scale change remains contingent on their resources and their non-threatening relationship with the state. I will begin by charting the historical context in which the environmental movement has emerged in Turkey, followed by an outline of the relationship between state and civil society with regards to environmental matters. Subsequently, I will discuss the internal and external influences that shape environmentalism in both states. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion on the future of environmentalism in Turkey and the prospects for democratization.

Historical Context: Turkey

Consideration of the issue of environmental degradation in Turkey and the creation of institutional structures to deal with their existence has only occurred over the past few decades.⁹ The explanation for this lack of salience is threefold. First, industrialization and commercialization had not reached the level of environmental degradation that threatened to create the conditions that would impede economic growth, nor had there been sufficient opposition from the public to threaten state legitimacy.¹⁰ Second, rapid industrialization throughout the 1990s led to the advancement of environmental problems which could hardly be ignored and required immediate state action. For instance, in an extraordinary case of community cohesiveness, the community of Bergama mounted in the early 1990s the largest environmental protests in Turkish history in opposition to the use of cyanide in the mining practices of Australian multinational, Eurogold.¹¹

Finally, increasing international pressures have encouraged the state to create laws, regulations and standards for environmental protection. Efforts by the Turkish state to create an institutionalized environmental regime stem largely from the 1972 United Nation Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. The country's membership in the OECD, the Council of Europe, the World Bank, the IMF and especially the European Union, would provide Turkey with the necessary expertise and funding for the institutional reforms. However, that the 1982 constitution entrenched environmental rights and responsibilities was seen by many as merely a symbolic gesture given the state's incapacity and unwillingness to integrate environmental concerns into development plans and its relaxed attitude towards implementation and enforcement of existing environmental laws.¹² The political influence of dominant classes and the state's lack of funding and technical capacity have both crippled progress in environmental regulation. Following the release of the 1987 Brundtland Report, and coincidental-

ly Turkey's application for full-membership to the EU, sustainable development rhetoric began to appear increasingly in official government policy reports.¹⁵

State and civil society relations

Representing a clear break with the Ottoman past, the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his followers emerged triumphant in 1923. As a project aimed at creating a secular and modern Turkish national identity, Kemalism replaced the personal rule of the Sultan with a state-centric model, governing society from above and assuming national interest and state interest to be the same.¹⁴ *National developmentalism*, an ideology premised on rapid modernization and industrialization as well as a top-down transformation of society, would become the basis of state legitimacy in the new Turkey. From the perspective of civil society¹⁵, this approach to governance left much to be desired in the way of democratic rights and a meaningful relationship between civil society and state. This does not imply that associational life did not exist; however, the mandate of professional organizations, foundations, cooperatives and associations was heavily constrained by state tutelage and a duty-based understanding of citizenship over principles of individual rights and freedoms. It was not until the emergence of radical economic, religious and cultural transformations during the 1980s, that civil rights and freedoms were entered into state discourse, instigating increased state repression in the 1990s and later a process of democratization beginning in 2000.¹⁶

In Turkey since the 1980s there has existed a consensus under the banner of economic liberalization, that there should be a strengthening of civil society as a catalyst for spreading democratic values of openness, accountability, and transparency of the state.¹⁷ International financial institutions, governments, and donor institutions have emphasized this need for the emergence of a strong civil society.¹⁸ These pressures, however, have assumed a pluralist model of civil society presuming the independence of non-state actors from the state and ignoring the potentially abusive nature of the relationship that exists between state and civil society. For this reason, it is important to take a careful look at the interaction between state and society and at the disadvantage of environmental groups in the emerging civil society.

Traditional pluralism, a notion that has received much criticism since the 1960s,¹⁹ perceives the system of interest group politics as fair, open and competitive. This openness is justified by the perception of a plurality of groups, representing an assortment of interests, and the

ability that individuals have to form a group if they feel that change is needed.²⁰ This theory also assumes that votes are the ultimate political resource, and, therefore, much of the policy-making influence of interest groups lies in their ability to attract members and convince the public that government policies are unacceptable.²¹

Assumptions made by pluralism are problematic in the Turkey for three reasons. First, in Turkey state legitimacy is inseparable from economic growth, and the issue of environmental degradation does not hold the same symbolic value for the general public as in the West. Unless environmental degradation is causing economic loss or large scale health risks, arguments related to biodiversity and the inherent value of the natural environment are unlikely to galvanize support. In addition, groups that cannot afford to lobby state executives or to attend environmental conferences in five star hotels cease to exist.²² Finally, the strong statist character of state-society relations and the limited tolerance for contentious political mobilization by civil society groups also puts environmental groups at a disadvantage.

In the case of Egypt, the state has been careful to allow only certain types of civil society organizations to exist and thrive, persecuting ideologically orientated NGOs while at the same time allowing issue-oriented NGOs to flourish. The state recognizes that NGOs have the potential to play a complementary role in areas where social services are lacking— in the environmental sector for example; however, the state is also very well aware that NGOs have the capacity to inflict damage to state legitimacy by generating opposition to aspects of state policy.²³ Ray Bush in her assessment of Egyptian land reform astutely recognizes that this is problematic given that,

civil society was [sic] only meaningful as a political concept or political reality if it was [sic] part of a relationship with the state. Thus while contemporary donors and mainstream academic commentators have tended to talk about civil society in opposition to the state or as a substitute for it... civil society could not exist without the state.²⁴

On the one hand, the scope of activities, strategies and tactics used by environmental NGOs is heavily constrained by their relationship or lack thereof to the government apparatus. On the other hand, NGOs are faced with the challenge of remaining effective without relying on charismatic leaders to attract funding, registering and renewing registration while distancing themselves from hostile government officials; and attracting reputable sources of funding, as well as skilled human capital.²⁵

Internal Pressures

Environmental movements in industrialized societies have historically appeared as a result of social movements that find their origins in unstructured civil societies composed of institutionalized NGOs, public interest groups and small-scale grassroots organizations.²⁶ Explanations for the increased salience of environmental issues in industrialized countries have focused on one dominant theory: Post-materialism. This theory, developed by Abramson and Inglehart, maintains that as basic needs of safety and security are met, citizens begin to direct their attention to more noble causes such as a sense of belonging, and quality of life.²⁷ In brief, Materialist concerns with income, job security and the role of the state in the economy are replaced with Post-materialist concerns with the environment and human rights. The proportionate decline of Materialists in relation to Post-materialists in the vast majority of Western countries between the period from 1970 to 1988 led Abramson and Inglehart to the conclusion that this trend was universal.²⁸ In the mid-1990s they proposed that this phenomenon should occur in “any country that moves from conditions of economic insecurity to relative security.”²⁹ The surfacing of an environmental movement in Turkey, however, does not follow the same logic.

A 1995 survey of 126 Turkish undergraduate students concluded that the “lack of a strong political dimension in the Turkish perception of an environmentalist is likely related to the fact that environmentalism in Turkey exists almost exclusively in the form of a social movement,” one that has never transformed into an integrated political movement.³⁰ It could be hypothesized that the long history of state control over the social sphere, the suppression of individual liberties prior to and following the coup attempt in 1980, and the government emphasis on growth and development are all contributing factors.³¹ As discussed below, much of the impetus for environmental policy making in Turkey originates from the influence of foreign actors.

External Pressures

A large part of the existing literature on public policy originates from the US, where there exists a Tocquevillean focus on domestic institutions that ignores the role of suprastate actors.³² Burgeoning literature originating from studies of the European Union (EU) and the process of Europeanization have acted to fill this void.³³ Europeanization, for our purposes, is primarily concerned with how the EU has shaped environmental policy and practices in the domestic arena. To explain domestic

change in response to this conception of Europeanization, Risse and Börzel use dominant attributes of sociological and rational choice institutionalism.³⁴ Their analytical framework suggests that domestic change will not occur without the existence of a “misfit” between European-level practices, policies and institutions and the domestic-level practices, policies and institutions. The extent to which domestic and European-levels clash constitutes the degree of adaptational pressures which is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for expecting change at the domestic level.³⁵ Risse and Borzel also emphasize the importance of facilitating factors such as domestic actors and formal institutions that ultimately induce change.³⁶ For instance, in the absence of veto players, the high adaptational pressure created by the ‘misfit’ of the environmental *acquis* with Turkey’s existing environmental structures, (or lack thereof) would translate to a high degree of domestic change.³⁷

Because the EU currently leads the industrialized world on key issues related to climate change, ozone-depleting chemicals and biotechnology, accession to the EU requires that member-states harmonize national legislation with the environmental *acquis communautaire*. Attempts to quantify the number of ‘major’ environmental legislation incorporated into the environmental *acquis* have reached 500 items or more. Transposing these items and modifying accession states’ administrative structures to adapt to a body of law created by the EU and its existing member-states, has been and continues to be an extremely burdensome and challenging undertaking. The prospect of union with Western Europe is seen by the Turkish state as an opportunity for economic growth and development, and, as such, bearing the costs to satisfy requirements under the environmental *acquis* was not an option, but rather a calculated cost-benefit analysis.

If external forces from the EU and foreign NGOs remain the sole source of adaptational pressure, there may be reason for concern. The 80,000 pages of the *acquis communautaire* have taken over 40 years to produce, and, as such, it would be categorically absurd to think that these reforms should be adopted in their entirety overnight. However, rather than adapting domestic structures to external pressures, Turkey is in fact creating new institutions to cope with the intense adaptational pressures of the environmental *acquis*. Granted that this type of modernization is not new to Turkey, one could posit that it represents another step in the modernization and democratization reforms of the 1920s. We must keep in mind though that the level of genuine commitment of Turkey, both in complying with EU standards but and implementing them, rests on their ability to build support from the grass-roots-upwards rather than relying on the current top-down approach.³⁸

The future of environmentalism & the prospects for democratization

As the seriousness and urgency of environmental problems confronted the Turkish government, there seems to be little initiative without foreign pressure. The relationship between state and society has evolved over the past decade. In promoting their brand of environmentalism and opening up to societal actors, the Turkish government has been able to bridge the gap between the need to address environmental degradation and their limited capacity and willingness to do so. By no means has this opening up taken on the confrontational nature of environmental movements in the West. It has, however, initiated a process of democratization.

In Turkey, the formulation of an institutionalized environmental mandate made use of expert activists from civil society, foreign donors and state actors. This statist relationship between the state and civil society in Turkey represents a barrier to the development of a strong environmentalism. As an issue that transcends gender, ethnicity, religious and language cleavages, environmentalism has the potential to resolve disputes relating to social problems, to air and water pollution, to resource distribution and to issues of sustainable development. Optimism lies in the growing trend towards allowing greater openness and meaningful negotiations between government and civil society as witnessed in recent developments in the GAP, the Bergama protests, and the environmental policy making process in Turkey in general. EU accession negotiations will likely bring in more funds to foster increased environmental policy making and proper enforcement mechanisms which are likely to have a strong positive impact on civil society organizations and the state of the natural environment.

The specter of political instability caused by the disastrous consequences of pollution on public health and the migration of environmental refugees is perhaps most worrisome for the ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) in Turkey. The government of Turkey is therefore faced with the dilemma of ensuring stable socio-economic growth and attempting to address environmental concerns while drawing on resources from, and thus contributing to the growth of what they perceive to be potentially volatile social organizations. The government is also well aware of any political instability that could result from the indiscriminate emergence and disorganized development of highly politicized social organizations. To varying degrees these threats constrain the confrontational activism traditionally associated with environmental movements in the West.

It would be ideal if Turkey's environmental movement could focus their efforts on transforming traditional values that fuel con-

sumerism and the culture of developmentalism. However, this may be an unrealistic hope granted that these are questions that are still often ignored in the highly "modern" environmentalism of the West. For the time being, there is clear evidence that there is a transformation in state-society relations. International and domestic environmental organizations have successfully galvanized support for environmental issues, and environmental rhetoric is at an all time high; however, it remains to be seen if meaningful environmental action will occur in a Turkey where the state accommodates Post-modern values of environmental protection and quality of life premised on the condition that these bring in foreign aid and investment and do not conflict with priorities that have prevailed in the past: *national developmentalism* and political stability. Perhaps modest changes are all that can be expected, for now.

Notes

¹ Ali Çarkoglu and Mine Eder, "Developmentalism *alla turca*: The Southeastern Anatolia Development Project (GAP)," in *Environmentalism in Turkey*, ed. Fikret Adaman and Murat Arsel (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 168.

² Mohamed Ali Kazem and Khali Osman, "Conflicting claims to Euphrates water muddy Syrian-Turkish relations," *Muslimedia* 16 July 1998. <<http://www.muslimedia.com/archives/world98/euphrate.htm>> (1 December 2005).

³ This region is referred to by the PKK as northern Kurdistan.

⁴ Öcalan was captured in 1999 by the Turkish military. In the years since the security problems have been gradually eased. See Çarkoglu, 180.

⁵ See Çarkoglu, 168-190.

⁶ See Çarkoglu, 182.

⁷ As a concept that encompasses a multiplicity of definitions, environmentalism, for our purposes, is primarily concerned with how state, civil society and private actors and institutions have shaped environmental policy and practices in the domestic arena.

⁸ The *acquis communautaire* represents the body of EU law thus far created. For instance, the environmental *acquis* relates to all EU environmental legislation which must be transposed at the member-state level into national and sub-national legislation.

⁹ Zülküf Aydın, "The State, Civil Society, and Environmentalism," in *Environmentalism in Turkey*, ed. Fikret Adman and Murat Arsel, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 63.

[?] Aydın, 63.

[?] See Aykut Coban, "Community-based Ecological Resistance: The Bergama Movement in Turkey," *Environmental Politics* 13:2 (2004): 444.

[?] Aydın, 64.

² Algan Nesrin, "Turkey's Sustainable Development Policies in the EU Accession Process," *European Environmental Law Review*, April 2005, 97.

⁷ E. Keyman, "Modernity, Democracy and Society," in *Environmentalism in Turkey*, ed. Fikrit Adman and Murat Arsel, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 40.

⁷ We borrow Zülküf Aydin's definition of a civil society as "the sum total of all voluntary institutions involved in activities outside the domain of the state, yet who exert pressure on the state." Aydin, 54.

⁷ Essentially, I am referring to the decline in state power and legitimacy following economic globalization, the resurgence of Islam, the Kurdish question, the 2001 economic crisis, and resulting pressures for democratization. Due to the brevity of this article, this issue will not be discussed at length. A prolonged discussion can found in Keyman, 43-46.

¹⁷ Ray Bush, "Civil society and the uncivil state," *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development*, (2004): 57.

¹⁸ Aydin, 55.

¹⁹ A. Paul Pross, *Group Politics & Public Policy* (Don Mills ON: Oxford University Press, 1992), 230.

²⁰ Jeremy Wilson, "Participating through interest (pressure) groups and movements," (a) (Lecture Notes, Political Science 101, 10 October 2002).

²¹ Pluralism tends to overlook the underlying inequities that "post-pluralism" points out. Models of post-pluralism are adaptations of pluralism that account for social and economic factors (such as wealth, gender, and race) that create "structural barriers" for marginalized groups. They recognize that, on the surface, the interest group system does seem fair and competitive, but the "existence of structural obstacles means that the system is stacked in favor of groups with money, and economic power, (often industry) and those otherwise favored by underlying power structures." See Wilson, 2002). Thus, this offers some explanation as to why business groups such as Eurogold and development projects such as GAP would have an upper hand against environmental NGOs in Turkey. See Pross, *Group politics and public policy*.

²² Sharawi Salwa Gomaa, *Environmental policy making in Egypt*. (Gainesville, FL.: University Press of Florida, 1997), 29.

²³ Bush, 5.

²⁴ Bush, 6.

²⁵ Gomaa, 26-28.

²⁶ Peter Ho, "Greening Without Conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and Civil Society in China." *Development and Change* 32 (2001): 894.

²⁷ See Oliver Hansen and Richard Tol, "A Refined Inglehart Index of Materialism and Postmaterialism," 21 October 2003. <<http://www.uni-hamburg.de/Wiss/FB/15/Sustainability/inglehart.pdf>> (14 November 2004).

²⁸ The results were calculated using a standardized survey developed by Inglehart to distinguish between members of the public with a Materialist or Post-materialist values. See Oliver Hansen and Richard Tol, "A Refined Inglehart Index of Materialism and Postmaterialism," 21 October 2003. <<http://www.uni-hamburg.de/Wiss/FB/15/Sustainability/inglehart.pdf>> (3 December 2005).

²⁹ J. Butovsky and John Simpson, "Postmaterialism in unresponsive political systems: The Canadian case." *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 41 (2004): 294.

³⁰ Adrzej Furman and Oguz Erdur, "Are Good Citizens Environmentalists," *Human Ecology*, 27:1 (1999), 187.

³¹ Furman and Erdur, 187.

³² See Pross, *Group Politics and Public policy*.

³³ Much of this research has been done in the area of environmental regulation.

³⁴ Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, "Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe," in *The Politics of Europeanization*. ed. Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 59.

³⁵ Börzel, 58.

³⁶ Due to the brevity of this document an in-depth discussion will not be possible.

³⁷ One could theorize that pro-environment NGOs, polluter industry interests and environmental technology interests could act as veto players.

³⁸ Martin Ferry, "The Polish Green Movement Ten Years after the Fall of Communism." *Environmental Politics*. 11:1 (2002): 736.

