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Koşar Altınyelken, H.

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CHAPTER: 5

National context

Turkey is a geographically vast country with an area of 780,580 square kilometres (larger than the United Kingdom and France combined). Dominated by the Turkish element, its population of 72 million (2009) (TURKSTAT) is a combination of groups with different ethnicities, languages and cultural traditions, including Kurds, Laz, Georgians, Jews, Armenians, Zaza and Arabs. Turkish, which is the most widely-spoken language, is the official language. Additionally, between 12 to 16 percent of the population is estimated to have Kurdish as mother tongue (Gündüz-Hosgör & Smits, 2002). Turkey has a predominantly Muslim population (99.8 percent) with major subdivisions with regard to schools of Islam. There are also Christians, Jews and other minorities. The country is the 16th biggest economy in the world, considered a regional power in the Middle East, and constitutes an economic and geopolitical bridge between the West and the East.

1. Political history

The Turks originate from central Asia. They migrated from their ancestral homeland to Anatolia in the 11th century, and established two powerful empires, the Seljuk and the Ottoman Empires. The Ottoman Empire was established in 1299 and lasted for six centuries. At the height of its power, it spanned three continents, controlling much of south-eastern Europe, western Asia and northern Africa. Having lost the First World War, the Ottoman Empire collapsed and parts of mainland Turkey were eventually briefly occupied by the Allies. In 1923, Turkey was founded as a Republic after the independence war against Britain, France, Italy and Greece, which was the first successful war of independence against Western imperial powers.

The primary goal of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic, and the ruling elite was to create an independent, modern, democratic and secular country, which would reach the contemporary level of (Western) civilisation. Republicanism, nationalism, statism, secularism, populism and revolutionism-reformism were the main defining and constituting principles by which the Turkish state was supposed to operate to make the new Republic an advanced modern society (Keyman, 2007). Once

independence was restored, Mustafa Kemal swiftly proceeded with the abolishment of the sultanate, the foundation of the republic and the abolishment of the caliphate within a couple of years. Fundamental changes were also initiated in virtually all spheres of Turkish social life, collectively referred to as the Atatürk Revolution. These reforms aimed at changing the basis of the social life from religion and tradition to a positivist and secular understanding, heavily influenced by Western models (Kongar, 1999).

Following Atatürk's death in 1938, his long-time ally Ismet Inonu skilfully kept the country out of the Second World War and ensured transition to a multi-party democracy in 1950. The centre-right Democratic Party (DP) came to power after first elections. The DP presented itself as constituting the true representatives of the nation as opposed to the bureaucrats and appealed to broad sections of the population, including the religious conservatives who had never been able to digest the secular changes of the previous three decades. The DP period coincided with the deteriorating international relations of the early Cold War years. Faced with the hostile intentions of the Soviet Union, Turkey started to align its foreign policy interests with the West, through the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan and NATO membership in 1952. In the second part of the 1950s, the DP failed to meet the expectations of the nation, lost its patience with the opposition of Inonu's Republican People's Party (CHP in Turkish initials) and increasingly assumed an authoritarian stance. It was removed from power by modern Turkey's first coup in 1960, and democratic rule was resumed within a year (see Aksin, 2004; Karpat, 1996).

The 1960s witnessed the rise of one of Turkey's most popular politicians, Suleyman Demirel. Demirel's Justice Party (AP in Turkish) came to power in the 1965 elections. In this period, continuing agricultural and industrial modernisation, the benefits of increasing welfare in Western Europe and the inflow of remittances from Turkish workers who had recently started working in Western Europe led to an improvement in economic conditions. This paralleled the early 1950s when the recovery from the WWII years and the inflow of Marshall Aid had led to a quick improvement of welfare. This resulted in welfare being connected with liberal-conservative governments by the public (Kongar, 1999). DP/AP propaganda of associating anything resembling socialist ideas with outright communism appealed to conservative masses in rural Anatolia. As a result of these factors, social-democratic parties until today have almost never had a chance to govern, except for a few brief periods. This explains the lopsided nature of Turkish

politics in the post-WWII period as well as the continuing weakness of civil society institutions and insufficient pluralist discussion of major social issues.

In the 1960s, in the favourable framework provided by the 1961 constitution and with the influence of global political trends, students and workers became increasingly active in the political life of Turkey. The DP and CHP, representing liberal conservatism and social democracy, had defined the political scene in the previous decade. Now socialists, as well as the nationalist and religious right claimed their place in the political spectrum with their own political parties. Towards the end of the decade, students from all camps became increasingly radicalised. The AP government silently encouraged the right-wing militias and failed to prevent their attacks on leftist students and workers. This contributed to the further radicalisation of some leftist students who formed Marxist-Leninist groups favouring armed conflict with the right. The armed forces responded with a memorandum in 1971, known as the second military intervention of the modern Turkish republic. As a result, Demirel and the AP fell from power (see Albayrak, 2004; Yerasimos, 1977; Zurcher, 2004).

After the resumption of elections in 1973, the AP and CHP took turns in forming governments, sometimes in coalitions. But the pressure on the social-democratic and socialist groups never abated, CHP did not have the chance of implementing its programmes and Turkish democracy ended up down another dead-end street. Ideological violence started to claim lives on a daily basis and the military once again intervened, this time with a full-scale coup in September 1980, the third military intervention in the history of the Republic. The coup was met with widespread relief as rampant violence immediately came to an end. However the most liberal and pluralist period in Turkish democratic history also came to an end. The military regime was short-lived but its programmes and actions left a long-lasting and damaging legacy in the country's political and social life (Aksin, 2004). The society was depoliticised, the political left was all but wiped out, and a whole generation grew up with no ideal other than to become rich in one way or another.

Similar to the earlier interventions of the army, the officers behind the 1980 coup did not intend to stay in power for an extended period of time. A new constitution was prepared and elections were held in 1983. Since all political parties and politicians who were active before 1980 were banned from political activities (the ban was lifted in 1986), new parties and politicians competed. Turgut Özal, a former World Bank executive who had been brought in to oversee the economy after the 1980 coup, won the election with his Motherland Party (ANAP in Turkish). ANAP was a centre-right

party, and could be considered a continuation of the DP/AP tradition. In alignment with the Reaganite and Thatcherite trends of the 1980s, Özal led a widespread liberalisation of the Turkish economy and implementation of neoliberal policies. Exports were encouraged, foreign exchange controls were lifted, the import regime was liberalised, and the Istanbul Stock Exchange was established. These measures provided the basis for the Turkish economy's strong growth and integration within the global economy in subsequent years. Communication and energy infrastructure was also modernised. However, ANAP continued the populist tradition of its predecessors; inflation and budget deficits spun out of control, state economic institutions ran enormous deficits and income distribution rapidly deteriorated. These trends led to numerous economic crises in subsequent years. The ANAP period came to an end in 1991 and a decade of unstable coalitions followed in the ensuing period (see Tanor, 2000).

In February 2001, Turkey experienced a major setback because of a financial crisis (whereby the Turkish lira lost more than half of its value in a single day), resulting in a major output collapse and dramatic increases in unemployment, affecting all sections of the society to varying degrees (Onis & Bakir, 2007; Keyman & Koyuncu, 2005). Following the devastating crisis, Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP in Turkish) won the 2002 elections. Erdogan was previously a member of the religious Welfare Party and had made statements indicating his preference for a social order partially based on religious principles. After coming to power, on numerous occasions he denied that he had a hidden agenda aiming at the Islamisation of Turkish society. However, various actions of his governments since 2002 appeared to justify the fears of the majority of the population which strongly reject any change in the secular foundations of the society. Many proposals of the AKP government, such as the lifting of the headscarf ban in universities and for public employees, criminalisation of adultery and the inclusion of technical secondary schools that educate imams in the mainstream education system have met strong public resistance and some were overturned by the Constitutional Court (Grigoriadis, 2009). The very recent years of AKP rule have been marked by an increasing impatience toward any form of opposition, as evidenced by the tensions between AKP and the universities, high courts, trade unions, press, left-leaning intellectuals, and last but not the least, the armed forces.

After this brief introduction to the contemporary Turkish history, some major issues/themes that appear to define Turkish modernity will be further elaborated below. These include, the tension between the 'statist-

elitist' and 'traditional movements', Europeanization, the Kurdish question, and the Islamisation of the public sphere.

1.1. The tension between 'the statist-elitist' and 'traditional-liberal' movements

The age-old division between the 'statist-elitist' and 'traditional-liberal' movements in Turkey is rather crucial in understanding the Turkish political and economic developments in the past decades. The 'statist-elitist' movement originated in the nineteenth century around the idea of 'Westernisation'. In the absence of powerful economic classes that could pioneer change in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres, bureaucrats believed in the necessity of state intervention to realise such change. Unrivalled by any other group, bureaucrats did not require support from the wider population and considered themselves revolutionaries. The 'traditional-liberal' group emerged as a reaction to the former. They were liberal in the sense that they opposed the idea of heavy state influence on political and economic life. Traditionalism was counterforce to the top-down Westernisation as imposed by the bureaucrats. They have made heavy use of and have misused religion in their opposition and portrayed themselves as the guardians of Islam and the Ottoman tradition, constantly chipping away at the fundamental principles of the republic, one of the most important of which is secularism.

All mainstream political parties, including the Republican Party (CHP), made compromises, as it is considered rather difficult to be successful politically with a party being regarded as an enemy of religious values. Another factor that contributed to this regressive movement was the staunchly anti-communist atmosphere, especially in the early years of the Cold War. As one of the two NATO members bordering the former USSR directly, Turkey proved very unfertile ground for any political movement that remotely resembled anything left-wing. Combined with the failure of the main left-of-centre political party CHP to abolish its statist-elitist credentials, this has led to a lopsided democratic experience in Turkey up until the present day, with the right-wing parties, with varying degrees of traditionalist elements, almost always having the upper hand in parliamentary elections (Kongar, 1999).

The Turkish political/economic scene since the initiation of the multiparty democracy in 1950 is characterised by the tension between these two movements. In the 1930s and 1940s, the state encouraged and granted protection to private capital in order to kick-start industrialisation after the

Great Depression. Such protection was swiftly turned by Menderes' DP into political patronage, a tradition maintained by its successor parties – Demirel's DP and DYP and Özal's ANAP (Heper & Keyman, 1998). As the 'political elite' replaced 'state elite' as the centre of public decision-making after 1950, political parties came to represent the economic interests of their members (İnan, 1995). Key elements of a healthy democratic exchange such as consultations with and responsiveness to organised interests and careful preparation, deliberation and debating of party programmes were lacking. Such patronage occasionally led to serious tension between the state elite – intellectuals, civil/military bureaucracy, senior academic and judicial figures – and the political elite. However, such tensions did not per se lead to breaks in the democratic process. These breaks came in the form of the coups d'état and memoranda following serious polarisation in the society along these ideological lines. Here, it is evident that the state elite could tolerate the political patronage, but not the polarisation which it perceived as a clear threat to the unity of the country or the principle of secularism. The quick returns to democratic rule indicate the elite's – including the armed forces' – commitment to democracy (Heper & Keyman, 1998). The tension between the state and political elites, on the other hand, remains a fact of Turkish social and political life to this very day.

1.2. Europeanisation

Europe has had a strong impact on Turkey for many centuries, and Turkey has responded and adapted to changes in Europe. Factors that conditioned the European influence on Turkey included geographical proximity, historical sensitivity, and legal and institutional ties (Ulusoy, 2009). In Turkish intellectual life, Europeanisation or 'Westernisation' can be traced back to 1699, when the Ottoman army besieging Vienna was defeated by Western powers. This was the first serious defeat suffered by Ottomans and marked the beginning of the period when Turks would be pushed back eastwards. In the ensuing centuries, Westernisation was regarded as a means to go back to the former glorious days of the empire or to catch up with the Western powers. It was first motivated by the desire to gain back the military superiority against the West; however, in due time the sultans aimed at modernising the whole Ottoman legal, administrative, financial and education systems.

While these efforts have led to partial successes in terms of the setting up of modern institutions, the decline of the Ottoman Empire could

not be reversed and its eventual collapse after the WWI could not be prevented. Nevertheless the accumulation of modernist ideas and the formation of a revolutionary class of young army officers and bureaucrats at the beginning of the twentieth century helped the founding of the new Turkish Republic in 1923 (Kongar, 1999). Westernisation was strong in the early republican years as well, since Atatürk carried out a sweeping set of reforms in every aspect of Turkish social and economic life after the founding of the new Turkish state. For instance, the tax system was overhauled, Arabic script was replaced by the Latin alphabet, and the metric system and Western calendar were introduced.

Throughout modern Turkish history, Europeanisation has remained a major goal for the elite in Turkey (Onis, 2004). The Europeanisation process was institutionally manifested in the Ankara Agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1963 which made Turkey an associate member, and the customs union agreement in 1995. Later, in 1999, Turkey was accepted as a formal candidate at the Helsinki Summit, and full membership negotiations started in 2005. Since the Helsinki Summit, the EU's influence has increased considerably as it has become an important catalyst for change in the political and economic realms. For instance, following the Summit, political reforms for meeting the 1993 Copenhagen criteria for accession gained momentum (Ulusoy, 2007).

Such momentum cannot be only explained by EU conditionality, since the role of domestic actors and their ability to engineer political change have also been significant (Ulusoy, 2007; 2009). In the past decade, the key political and economic actors have faced powerful incentives for change and for implementing a series of deep-seated institutional reforms (Onis & Bakir, 2007). The February 2001 financial crisis has also helped to break down resistance to reform and the key external actors, including the IMF, the World Bank and the EU, have been able to intensify the momentum for structural reforms (Onis & Bakir, 2007). In the post-1999 period, Turkey introduced a series of reforms involving the abolition of the death penalty and extension of cultural rights for ethnic and religious groups (Onis, 2004). The reform process has provided new opportunities for non-Turkish and non-Muslim groups to make democratic demands (Cayir, 2009a).

The prospect of Turkey's full membership to the EU generates scepticism among its members due to Turkey's large population (second largest after Germany), its distinct cultural and religious character, the size of its agricultural sector, fears of mass labour migration to the EU, and concerns related to its political system (e.g. the involvement of military in politics) and

human rights violations. Furthermore, support for Turkey's membership among the public has remained low in the EU countries, at around 30 percent in the last decade – the lowest approval rating for all candidate countries. Therefore, Turkey's possible membership generated popular scepticism and strong divisions among the member states (Schimmelfennig, 2009).

Likewise, the EU membership process generated controversies within Turkey and led to the emergence of pro-EU and anti-EU coalitions. Business interests have clearly favoured closer integration with Europe, and the big business has emerged as a key element of the pro-EU coalition through its major interest association – Turkish Industrialists' and Businessman' Association (TÜSİAD). In addition, a range of civil society organisations, which joined forces under an umbrella organisation 'The Movement for Europe 2002', has become a decisive element of the pro-reform coalition in Turkey. The ruling party AKP has assumed an explicitly pro-EU stance, because the Islamists believe that the EU membership would help to consolidate their position in Turkish politics and extend religious freedoms. Other political parties have also been broadly supportive of integration with the EU; however, they have expressed deep reservations concerning the specific conditions that needed to be satisfied for full membership. In this respect, CHP (the leftist party) has increasingly become critical of the EU, and their uneven mix of conditions and incentives.

Key elements of the military-security establishment are the main actors within the anti-EU coalition. They are suspicious of EU demands for democratisation and reform because of concerns that such reforms might undermine the unitary and secular character of the Turkish state. It is important to clarify that the groups that are part of anti-EU coalition are not against EU membership but oppose the kind of membership conditions that are likely to undermine their power and status in society (Onis, 2004; Ulusoy, 2009). Public support for EU membership has also declined in the past decade in Turkey, although it recovered slightly in recent years. According to the latest report of Eurobarometer, 48 percent of Turkish people support EU membership, and 57 percent believe that Turkey would benefit from EU membership (Eurobarometer, 2009).

Turkey's full membership in the EU appears to be a distant possibility at the moment. Analysts suggest that the disappointments with the EU membership negotiations and lack of commitment and enthusiasm on the part of the EU members might result in Turkey's rapprochement with Russia and Arabic countries. Indeed, Turkey has increasingly turned its face from the West in recent years towards the East, and has assumed new economic and

political roles in the Middle East. For instance, Turkey has recently signed economic and trade agreements with Syria, Lebanon and Jordan aiming at long-term strategic development and economic integration (Bila, 2010). Such developments suggest new policy orientations in the coming years, and appear to defy century old 'Westernisation' goals.

1.3. The Kurdish question

The Kurdish question is arguably the most important internal problem of modern Turkey (see Cemal, 2008; Ergil, 2000; Heper, 2007). The Turks and Kurds living together for hundreds of years and their common effort in the establishment of the republic have led to an important difference between the Kurdish issue in Turkey and other ethnic conflicts elsewhere in the world. The Kurds have been an integral part of the Turkish society, and have played a very important role in the country's social and economic life (Cornell, 2001).

Estimates as to the percentage of ethnic Kurds in Turkey vary. A recent estimate, based on a representative survey in 2006, suggested that some 10 percent of the population in Turkey defined themselves as ethnically Kurd (Somer, 2009), yet other sources indicate that one fifth of Turkey's population speaks Kurdish as their mother tongue (Ergil, 2000). About half of the Kurdish population of Turkey is still concentrated in the Kurdish ancestral region in the southeast, the rest live in other parts of the country (Ergil, 2000). Being Muslim, Kurds enjoyed the same status with Turks under the Ottoman Empire and fought alongside Turkish nationalists against the occupation by the Allies after the First World War. The abolishment of the Sultanate and the Caliphate in the early 1920s meant the end of these important symbols of unity between the Turks and the Kurds (Cornell, 2001). Furthermore, the separation of the former Mosul province of the Ottoman Empire from the rest of Turkey and its inclusion in Iraq, in line with British demands, led to a significant Kurdish population in Iraq which would be a source of irredentism. The emphasis on Turkishness in the early years of the Republic as well as the secular reforms created resentment among the Kurds (Somer, 2009).

A series of rebellions in the 1920s and 1930s were suppressed with harsh military measures. Signs of Kurdish identity were met with increasing suspicion by the state, and pressure on the Kurdish language and culture increased in the following decades (Somer, 2009). Another important factor in the development of the problem has been the tribal nature of Kurdish

society. There is a fundamental incompatibility between the modern nation state and the tribal hierarchy and this leads to the tribal chiefs' perceiving the central government to be a threat. This has prevented the rapid modernisation of south-eastern Turkey, since such development would contribute to the erosion of the power exercised by tribal leaders, and the region still lags behind other parts of Turkey in terms of development (Cornell, 2001).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Kurdish nationalism developed, influenced by Marxism-Leninism, and in 1984 the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK in Kurdish) started its attacks on the Turkish state and on moderate Kurds that did not support its separatist agenda. The conflict between the PKK (which is recognised as a terrorist organisation by the governments of Turkey, the US and the European Union) and the Turkish army has led to over 30,000 deaths (Ergil, 2000). In addition to the soldiers and police officers, the victims include civilians living in the villages in the region, public employees (teachers, doctors) and victims of suicide attacks in major cities. Violence has led to massive migration (both voluntary and forced migration) from the region to the western parts of Turkey. In 1999, the leader of PKK was captured and imprisoned. Throughout the years, PKK has gradually curbed back its ultimate aim of independence and now strives towards a –poorly defined – autonomy in the region and constitutional recognition (Somer, 2009). The attacks on the government security forces in the eastern part of Turkey have continued until today.

1.4. Islamization of the public sphere

A very delicate and conflict-ridden balance between politics and religion has been one of the defining characteristics of Turkish modern history. Since Turkey is a predominantly Muslim society and a strictly secular nation-state, its modernisation and democratisation processes have continuously encountered the problem of establishing a balance between politics and religion. The political elite used secularism in order to control religion. However, increasing recourse to secularism for such purposes has rendered the state less pluralistic and democratic in governing Turkish society. Since the 1990s, the interconnections between religion and politics have become much more complex and delicate because of the rise of Islam politically, economically and culturally (Haynes, 2010; Keyman, 2007).

Indeed, the formation of Turkish modernity has radically changed as the Islamic identity claims became more politicised, economically grounded and culturally loaded in the past two decades. Such claims have become more

pronounced with the AKP's coming to power in 2002. The party has Islamic roots as the founders have an Islamic background and the party incorporates some extremist factions. Turkey has also witnessed the rise of what is called 'Islamic capital' in the 1990s as a powerful economic actor. Islam began to operate as an economic code open to free market ideology and created its own economic organisation. Consequently, Islam started to function as a powerful network based upon trust relations among small and medium-size economic enterprises. These enterprises established the Independent Business and Industrialist Organization, which has become a powerful economic actor. The organisation aims to promote a morally loaded economic modernisation, and seeks to combine free market principles with traditional religious values (Keyman & Koyuncu, 2005). Moreover, in the cultural realm, recognition demands have increased as in the case of the 'headscarf affair' and religious sects (Keyman, 2007).

1.5. Identity claims

Another important development that has characterised Turkish modernity in the past decade was the emergence of recognition demands and identity claims by a variety of groups, including those who spoke a language other than Turkish and those who adhere to a religion other than Islam or to the Sunni school of Islam. In other words, non-Turkish, non-Muslim and non-Sunni ethnic and religious minorities, which were submerged during the nation-building process initiated during the Republican years, have started to gain public visibility and claim their right to recognition. Due their increasing wealth in recent years, some religious, conservative groups have achieved upward mobility and attained new public and political roles with their Islamic identities. Moreover, approximately 2 million ethnic Kurds have migrated (both voluntary and forced migration) from south-east Turkey to the major cities in the western part of the country since the 1990s due to terrorist activities and insecurity in the region. These developments have created new visibility and possibilities for more intense inter-group contact between secular and conservative segments of the society as well as between ethnically Turkish and ethnically Kurdish citizens. Furthermore, as explained above, Turkey has started accession negotiations with the EU in 2005. All these developments have initiated a process of defining the borders of 'us' and facing the past with an aim to devise a new social and political framework that would include newly emerging diverse groups and interests (Cayir, 2009b).

2. Economic and demographic background

Turkey is classified as an upper middle-income country by the World Bank (World Bank, 2009), and listed under the countries 'high human development' by UNDP (rated as 79th) (UNDP, 2009). Its GDP was USD 794 billion in 2008, and the average annual growth between 2000 and 2008 was recorded as 5.9 percent (World Bank, 2010). Helped by the extremely favourable global economic conditions, the Turkish economy showed strong growth particularly between 2003 and 2007. Due to the improved financial and banking system in the aftermath of the 2001 crisis, the Turkish economy has suffered to a smaller extent from the global economic downturn since 2007 than many developed and emerging economies (FitchRatings, 2009).

Turkey is characterised by large income differences, as the share of income of poorest ten percent was 1.9 percent, whereas the share of income of richest ten percent was 33.2 percent in 2007 (UNDP, 2009). Furthermore, the share of disposable income held by the richest 20 percent quantile was approximately 9.5 times more than that received by the poorest 20 percent quantile in 2002. It declined to 8.1 in 2003 and to 7.7 in 2004. The same ratio for the EU-25 average was approximately 4.6 in 2003 (Republic of Turkey, 2006). The ratio of population below the poverty line (including food expenditures) to total population was 1.35 percent in 2002, and it declined slightly to 1.29 percent in 2004. The food and non-food poverty rate, which is also defined as the poverty rate, was 26.9 percent in 2002 and decreased to 25.6 percent in 2004 (Republic of Turkey, 2006).

According to international poverty benchmarks, population below USD 1.25 a day was 2 percent in 2002 and 2.7 percent in 2005. Population below USD 2 a day was 9.6 percent in 2002 and 9 percent in 2005 (World Bank, 2010). Moreover, there are significant regional disparities in the country: the most economically developed regions are Marmara, Aegean, Central Anatolia and Mediterranean, while the economically most underdeveloped regions are South-East and East Anatolia. The underdeveloped regions are characterised by low GDP per capita, a higher share of the agricultural sector, high unemployment and out-migration rates (Republic of Turkey, 2006).

Turkey has a young population, as 28.1 percent of the population is aged between 0 and 14, 66 percent was aged between 15 and 64, and only 6 percent was above 65 years old in 2004 (Republic of Turkey, 2005). The rate of population growth slowed down from 2.5 percent in the 1980s to 1.5 percent in the 1990s. It is expected to decline further in the coming years, as

estimates suggest an average of 1.1 percent until 2020. The projections on the major population changes in the next decade estimate a decrease in the relative share of population in the younger age group, an increase in the working-age population and continuing urbanisation (Republic of Turkey, 2001). According to these projections, the demand for primary education will decrease, will remain stable at secondary level, and will significantly increase at tertiary level.

As a result of the accelerated migration movements, the share of urban population increased from 28.8 percent in 1955 to 70.5 percent in 2007 (State Institute of Statistics). People migrate from the poorest agricultural Anatolian regions in the east to the richest manufacturing regions in the west, such as the Marmara, the Aegean and the Mediterranean, in search of livelihoods, better living conditions, as well as better educational opportunities for their children. In addition to trends of high rural-to-urban migration, a considerable number of Turkish citizens have also migrated to various European countries since the 1960s. The largest number of Turkish immigrants lives and works in Germany, followed by the Benelux countries, France, Austria and Switzerland. Recent estimates of the number of Turkish immigrants in Europe put this at approximately four million (Crul & Vermeulen, 2003).

3. Education system

3.1. Historical overview

During the Ottoman period, schools were organised into three separate groups, each operating independently. The first and most widespread type comprised the district schools and madrasas which were based on teaching of the Koran and Islamic traditions. The second group included reformed schools and high schools, while the third group included colleges and schools teaching in foreign languages. According to the founders of the Turkish Republic, these three different types of schools were raising individuals with very different views, lifestyles, values and visions, as well as with little commitment to Atatürk's aim of making a modern Turkish nation (OECD, 2007). Consequently, in 1924, the Law on the Unity of Education was introduced, stipulating the abolishment of the madrasas and the district schools, and placing all education, teaching and scientific institutions (including colleges, foreign language schools and private schools) under the control of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry also assumed

responsibility for and control of religious education. The Law determined the general organisation and administration of the education system, and laid the basis for a highly centralised national education system (Eurydice, 2009). This centralised governance structure continues to define the contemporary Turkish education system. A firm commitment to secularism has been also central to the education system since the early years of the Republic (OECD, 2007).

The role of education in modernisation, development, and nation building was deemed critical in those years (Simsek & Yildirim, 2004). In his various speeches, Atatürk referred to education as one of the most important factors in national independence and development. According to him, failure to provide good quality education to all citizens would eventually result in poverty and subordination to other nations. In that period, the ‘nation schools’ were founded and literacy campaigns were initiated. These campaigns particularly targeted rural population, which comprised the majority of general population. The main objective was to improve the level of literacy and modernise the countryside (Eurydice, 2009). Teachers were assigned a crucial role in developing modern values among the new generation of Turkish citizens. They were perceived as ‘intellectuals’ who would disseminate the knowledge and values to masses with the goal of promoting modernisation. After the 1980s, however, with the advance of globalisation and neoliberal tendencies in Turkey, the teacher’s role and image has been transformed, as teachers have been largely redefined as professionals or technicians who are tasked with contributing to economic development by raising competent and able individuals in accordance with market demands (Unal, 2005). The role of education has also been redefined with increasing emphasis on economic development, competitiveness and integration into global economy.

Since Turkey’s educational policy was strongly shaped by nation-building concerns and efforts to sustain a homogeneous national identity around Turkish culture, it largely excludes cultures, languages and identities of other ethnic groups (Timmerman, 1999). Except in specially-licensed institutions, Turkish is the only language of instruction. The uniform curriculum for primary schools emphasizes Turkish language and culture. Some argue that by ignoring the historical existence of subcultures, their norms, values, and ways of life, the formal education system functions as a powerful tool of assimilation for ethnically diverse groups (Sahin & Gulmez, 2000).

3.2. Structure of the education system

Education is provided at pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Pre-primary education is not compulsory and it is provided by public and private institutions to children between three and six years old. Primary education, on the other hand, is compulsory for all children (ages six to 14, grades one to eight) and is 'free' in state schools. Secondary education includes all general, vocational and technical education institutions offering a minimum four-year education for students aged 14 and 17. The institutions offering secondary education have names indicating the branch of education, such as high school, technical school and vocational school. There are also theology high schools aimed at educating staff commissioned with functions concerned with fulfilling religious services, such as in the imamate, preaching, and as instructor in Koran courses. However, some graduates from such schools also attend higher education institutions and specialise in other fields. Tertiary education is provided at public and foundation (non-profit) tertiary education institutions, offering two-year and four-year degree programmes (see Eurydice, 2009).

Transitions between primary and secondary education, and between secondary and tertiary education, are governed through centralised nationwide exams. All primary school graduates are entitled to benefit from secondary education. Admission to general high schools and vocational high schools does not require passing any examinations, and, in principle, students must apply to the high schools located in their vicinity. However, admission to the Anatolian high schools, social science high schools, science high schools, and Anatolian teacher high schools is governed through centralised examinations. Competition is intense for these schools because of their reputation for offering high quality education. The quality of education at secondary level is considered critical since these schools prepare students for higher education, which are viewed as crucial for securing access to decent jobs, well-being and social status.

Students are placed centrally into secondary education institutions according to their secondary education placement grade. It is calculated by considering the nationwide exam score (conducted at the end of 6th, 7th and 8th grades), behaviour score and class score. The Ministry, however, recently announced that they are planning to dismiss the centralised exams at grades 6 and 7 and will only retain the exam at grade 8. This decision was taken after the public debate and reaction to the three-tier exam system of recent years. The Ministry has acknowledged that such an exam structure has increased the

demand for private tutoring and the cost of education, has undermined the centrality and the credibility of mainstream schools, and has generated an inordinate amount of stress and anxiety among students, negatively affecting their socio-psychological development (Habertürk, 2010).

Tertiary education institutions also admit students by means of a centralised examination system. The placement in tertiary education programmes is done in accordance with candidates' secondary education achievement grades, the performance in the university entrance examination, and preferences of the candidates. Admission to such programmes is even more competitive than admission to secondary education. For instance, in 2008, around 1.6 million students registered for the university entrance exam, and only about 265,000 of them were placed at higher education institutions that offered bachelor degree programmes (OSYM, 2008). Because of the highly competitive nature of the education system, Turkish students experience some of the world's worst exam anxiety (Simsek & Yildirim, 2004).

Since transition to higher levels of education is governed through highly competitive, centralised examinations, private tutoring has flourished in Turkey, echoing similar experiences and trends in several East Asian countries (Bray, 2007; Dang & Rogers, 2008). Private tutoring takes mainly three forms: the first type is one-to-one instruction by a teacher either at the teacher's house or at the student's house. The second type is provided at primary schools by teachers after standard lesson hours. The third type of private tutoring is undertaken by profit-oriented, school-like organisations, where teachers with professional teacher training teach students in classroom settings. This type of private tutoring is known as 'dersane', and it is the most widespread form of private tutoring in Turkey. Students attend these centres outside formal education hours. Class sizes in these centres are much smaller (up to 20 students), and depending on the quality of the centres, they are often equipped with better educational materials (Tansel & Bircan, 2006). According to the statistics of the Private Tutoring Centres Association, there were 4,222 private tutoring centres in May 2009. The number of students attending these centres was 1.2 million, and the number of teachers working in these centres was around 51,000 in the same year (OZDEBIR, 2009).

The majority of education services are provided by public sector institutions and financial resources of these institutions are also mainly funded from public funds. At pre-primary and primary levels, School-Parents Associations exist at every school, and they contribute to expenditures related to some of the current operation and to supportive educational activities. Due

to the centralised structure of the education system, the schools affiliated with the Ministry have limited autonomy with respect to financing (Eurydice, 2009). Turkey also funds its education system through a number of loans from the World Bank and grants from the European Union. However, the share of such external funding within the Ministry budget is marginal. At the same time, Turkey is a donor itself. In 2008, total net ODA disbursement was USD 735 million, and aid to education totalled USD 188 million (OECD STAT).

3.3. Patterns of participation

According to the recent official statistics, the total net enrolment rate was 98.1 percent at primary level in 2009/10 academic year and there were 10 million pupils enrolled at primary schools, only 251,000 of them being enrolled at private schools. In the same year, the net enrolment ratio was 64.9 percent at secondary level, and 4.7 million students were studying at this level (State Institute of Statistics, 2009). There were no significant gender differences at primary level; however, the gender gap increases at secondary level (67.5 percent for boys and 62.2 for girls). The number of teachers was 485,677 at primary level and 240,831 at secondary level in the same academic year. At tertiary level, the participation level was 27.6 percent (29.4 for boys and 25.9 for girls) in the 2008/09 academic year (MONE, 2010).

Educational inequality has been a persistent concern in Turkey, as there are significant disparities in educational opportunity between socio-economic groups and between regions (OECD, 2007). A combination of factors, mainly gender, poverty, language and culture, leads to educational marginalisation. Some gender differences, even at primary level, continue to exist in less developed regions of Turkey (namely the Black Sea region, East Anatolia and South-East Anatolia) and in rural areas. A study conducted by Aytac & Rankin (2004) revealed that girls who have less-educated parents and girls with working mothers and younger siblings have less chance to study. Additionally, education of girls is contested by fathers who maintain fundamentalist Muslim beliefs and favour traditional gender roles. In addition, in rural areas the availability of schools and trained personnel is restricted.

Since 1997, to improve access to education, the government has been offering free transportation to children who have no school in their home town. Boarding schools were also opened. To keep girls longer at school, compulsory education was extended from five to eight years. Nevertheless, in

the eastern parts of the country, there are still restrictions for girls because of the social norms regarding the ‘purity’ of women and the ‘honour’ of the family. Furthermore, language poses an important challenge for children from households in which Turkish is not spoken. For instance, 43 percent of Kurdish-speaking girls from the poorest households have fewer than two years of education, while the national average is 6 percent (UNESCO, 2010). Some other studies have shown that internal migrant girls are among the most disadvantaged and at-risk population of children, as not only the migration experience places them at risk of educational underachievement, but also the low socio-economic position of their parents, and gender bias (Altinyelken, 2009a; Altinyelken, 2009b).

3.4. Major issues at primary level

Turkey has a highly centralised education system. Therefore, the majority of reforms and change proposals originate at the national level. The decisions of policymakers have often been influenced by global trends, particularly by the developments in Western societies. Since the 1980s, neoliberal policies have been increasingly embraced in the Turkish education system, transforming the system in important ways. The outcomes of the neoliberal trend, such as privatisation and increases in parental contributions, have been subject to heightened debates and substantial criticism. The neoliberal trend has been supported by global institutions such as the World Bank and the European Council, and has been further enhanced by Turkey’s EU membership process. The EU policies appear to support commercialisation of public education and encouragement of private enterprise (Sayılan, 2006).

An important aspect of this neoliberal trend is the ‘monetisation’ of education by an increasing amount of spending by parents. Although public primary education is ‘free’ in Turkey, parents are asked to pay registration fees and make ‘voluntary’ donations to schools under the name of ‘parental contributions’ (Simsek, 2006). These contributions are requested for financing more than 40 different items, such as report cards, learning materials, heating, cleaning and maintenance of school buildings (Egitim Sen, 2005). Parental contributions amount to substantial sums. For instance, in 2003, such parental contributions in primary and secondary education amounted to TRL 17,200 trillion, compared with a government education budget of TRL 7,000 trillion (Keskin & Demir, 2003). Moreover, the AKP government aims to increase the share of private schools in the primary education system from 1.9 percent to 10 percent. For this purpose, they have

proposed a number of measures to promote the establishment of private schools with the help of public funds. Such support by public resources seems contradictory when many public schools report serious financial difficulties (Aydoğan, 2008). The commercialisation trends have been observed in higher education as well; the government supports private enterprise through tax breaks and land grants (Sayılan, 2006).

The declining public resources and lower quality education at public schools have led to an explosive increase in the numbers of private tutoring institutions, as indicated above. This trend has intensified the educational gaps between students coming from different socio-economic levels of the society (Aydoğan, 2008). This whole process of commercialisation threatens to reverse previous gains in terms of providing free education to all (Sayılan, 2006). According to critics, inequalities in education have increased and the advantage has shifted towards the more affluent parts of the population, further limiting the chances of social mobility for students from the lower socio-economic strata. Besides, differences among individual schools have also increased since financing of schooling is left largely to parents through parental contributions (Karapehlivan, 2010; Sayılan, 2006).

Another concern is that learning, rather than education, has been gaining prominence, and the emphasis has shifted to providing the basic competencies required by the market economy. According to some critics, instead of educating conscious citizens with humanist values, the schools are aiming at producing conservative entrepreneurs (Sayılan, 2006). Public education has increasingly become to be seen as an old and outdated concept in the past decades in Turkey, and the notion that education is a service which should be bought by the consumers has become prevalent. Moreover, technology has been perceived to be an important pedagogical tool, and education quality has been increasingly associated with the availability and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in learning settings. Education has been marketised gradually and has become an ordinary commercial activity. The neoliberal policies in the 1980s have also affected teachers; their income has decreased and their status has also suffered (Unal, 2005).

Furthermore, the growing influence of religion within the education system during the AKP governments since 2002 has been a serious cause for concern (Ince & Kaymak, 2009). The issue has generated forceful debates among the public which has been increasingly polarised along the secular versus conservative/religious lines. Although the government fervently refutes such claims, several official policies and practices are brought as

evidence by the critics. These include: replacing staff working at the Ministry with persons with a religious worldview; appointment of more than 7,000 religious education teachers, while far fewer teachers are deployed for chemistry (231), biology (993) or physics (230) in schools that were in need of them; sanctioning a number of teachers who taught the evolution theory in biology courses; distribution of religious books for free to students; an increasing number of appointments of teachers with a religious education background to school management positions; and increasing presence of religion in textbooks (Okcabol, 2009; Ozmen, 2009). Media news headlines reported such practices, generating many reactions from the segments of society which favour secularism. They also appear to contribute to the Constitutional Court's decision in 2008 that 'AKP has become the focal point of activities opposing secularism' (Okcabol, 2009).

Furthermore, the Koranic schools, which are part of non-formal education, have been subject to intense discussion, particularly since the AKP's coming to power. These schools are established by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA) and mosques. Although forbidden by law, many others are opened illegally by a number of organisations and persons. The number of Koranic schools affiliated with PRA has increased by 75 percent during the AKP period, exceeding 7,000 schools across the country. Additionally, summer courses offered by mosques increased to 58,000 in the same period (Okcabol, 2009). Such expansion in Koranic schools is viewed with growing concern since they are seen as part of the strategy to promote the Islamisation of Turkish political, social and cultural life.

At the turn of the century, the need for reforming the education system was widely acknowledged by scholars, politicians and the general public in Turkey. Reforms are deemed particularly urgent in a number of areas, such as equity, resource distribution, access to higher and vocational education, bureaucratic structure, and curriculum (including pedagogy and student assessment) (Simsek & Yildirim, 2004). Since the 1990s, various reform packages have been in place in teacher training, primary and secondary education, and international actors such as the World Bank and the EU have been influential in these processes. The World Bank financed the restructuring of the teacher education programme, while the EU has been influential in reforming primary education. Currently, reforms are continuing in secondary education and lifelong learning with the strong involvement of the EU. Some consider such outside involvement as a serious cause for concern (Okcabol, 2009).

4. Concluding remarks

As this chapter attempts to illustrate, the last two decades have brought fundamental changes in Turkish modernity, including the simultaneous development of the increasing dominance of economic liberalisation (which has been to a great extent dictated by economic globalisation and the EU integration) and the emergence of the politics of identity/recognition that has taken a number of forms (such as the resurgence of Islam, the Kurdish question, and liberal claims to rights and freedoms). Therefore, since the 1980s, the formation of Turkish modernity has been increasingly marked by the co-existence of economic liberalisation and the resurgence of traditionalism (Keyman & Koyuncu, 2005). Turkey's attempt to integrate itself into the EU as a full member has particularly created a new political divide in the country between pro and anti-European integration forces, and has given rise to both nationalism and liberalism as political ideologies in Turkish politics. Moreover, 'political Islam' (Güven, 2005) has made its mark on Turkish modernity with the victory of the AKP in the 2002 elections. Turkey has also witnessed the rise of 'economic Islam' in the past decade, as 'Islamic capital' has become a powerful economic actor (Keyman & Koyuncu, 2005). These developments have influenced educational policies and the recent educational reform proposals. The following three chapters will analyse the primary school curriculum reform – particularly the introduction of SCP – and examine how the reform has changed schools, and how the schools have changed the reform.