

### Introduction (Coordinators: Esra Başak, Begüm Özkaynak, Zeynep Kadirbeyoğlu)

Neither East nor West... This stereotypical assessment of where Turkey stands geographically and geopolitically plays an important role in both its ecological composition, and concerns related to its environment and ecology. As a land of transition between three continents, Turkey is a country that has critical natural and biological reserves at the global level (see the below map for its biodiversity hotspots) and diverse species and agro-environmental landscapes.



(Map: Conservation International)

According to Conservation International, there are thirty-four global high diversity “hotspots”, three of which are located in Turkey: the Mediterranean, the Caucasus and the Irano-Anatolian. Altogether, Turkey hosts a large array of fragile natural assets and is witness to a unique merging of diversity on the entire Eurasian continent.

With a total area of about 778,000 square kilometres, Turkey is often considered a small continent linking Europe (Thrace) and Asia (Anatolia). Due to the remarkable variation in its geographic features—such as an extensive system of mountains and closed water basins as well as climatic conditions—Turkey is home to 305 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA), equivalent to a quarter of the country’s surface area. Anatolia demonstrates a significant plant endemism rate (30%) and includes eight recognised Centres of Plant Diversity. Out of a total of 236 species, there are 70 endemic species of inland fish; an important fact unknown to many.

Two major bird migration routes pass through Turkey, implying the presence of key feeding and breeding sites for over 460 species. Forests cover some 20.5 million hectares of the country and include some of the oldest old-growth forests in the temperate zone. The natural steppes in the Irano-Anatolian floristic zone host nearly half of the endemic species that are of conservation concern. Marine and coastal biodiversity along Turkey's 8,300-kilometres-long coastline is likewise worth mentioning, which is home to key species such as the Mediterranean monk seal, two out of eight global sea turtle species, and Posidonia sea grasses. An overview on Turkey's taxonomic groups, their endemism and threat categories can be found at European Environment Agency's 2010 SOER report.

Unfortunately, an equally remarkable spectrum of environmental conflicts directly threatens the integrity of nature in Turkey. Today, there is an urgent need for knowledge, awareness, and appropriate action to halt irreversible loss of the unique natural capital in the global hotspots that Turkey is home to. Below, the environmental framework in Turkey and several pressing ecological problems are presented.

### **The Turkish State and the Environment (by Fikret Adaman and Murat Arsel)**

The intensification of Turkey's environmental woes is not merely a result of its developmental ambitions. While very real tension exists between environmental and developmental priorities, a variety of forces kept the latter in check prior to the 1980s. The most important player in this regard was the 'father state' and its patriarchal stance vis-à-vis the state-society relationship, which was also reflected in the environmental sphere. Not surprisingly, Turkey possesses rather well-developed environmental legislation and is signatory to numerous international agreements.

It was the neo-liberal turn that has been decisive in bringing Turkey to its current state, where the nation's environmental integrity is rapidly and irrevocably compromised. In addition, the 'father state' has withered away from its central position in society, liberating Turkey's economic potential—at least to the extent this potential is understood within the context of global capitalism. These twin processes—the state's withdrawal from its previous duties and the continuous encroachment of the commercialising forces of capitalist development—have created conditions where the quest for sustainability cannot be conducted effectively. While it is not surprising that society demands increased well-being through further economic development, it is also necessary to develop a new system of checks-and-balances to determine which types of environmental sacrifice are absolutely necessary and unavoidable. Turkey's engagement with the European Union could form part of this solution. Yet, although

externally imposed measures have historically made considerable impact on the environmental agenda, they cannot be adequate solutions. Many EU nations attained 'development' long before the true magnitude of the environmental crisis became evident, whereas Turkey currently faces the task of creating rapid economic growth while maintaining ecological integrity. Even though administrative reforms, better environmental education and compliance with existing legislation are all required to achieve improved sustainable development performance, an in-depth and more critical commitment to sustainability, as epitomised by the European Union, is also necessary.

While Turkey has never really had a movement or a credible intellectual agenda that resisted the developmentalism that defined the modern republic, it has had an active political arena where at least the 'how' of development was hotly contested amongst parties and movements of different ideological stripes. With the hegemony of neo-liberalism in place and largely undisputed, this 'how' component of the debate has also largely withered away. In this climate, prospects of achieving sustainable development at the societal level and protecting sensitive ecosystems at the local level remain challenging. What seems more certain, however, is the occurrence of environmental conflicts involving the state, civil society and (multinational) corporations, in increased frequency and intensity.

Excerpted from F. Adaman and M. Arsel, "Political Economy of the Environment in Turkey", in M. Heper and S. Sayari (eds.), *Handbook of Modern Turkey*, London: Routledge, forthcoming.

### **Legal Aspects of Nature Conservation in Turkey in the Period of EU Accession Negotiations (by Alper Akyüz)**

Several issues around ecology and economics in Turkey fall within the EU Accession negotiations framework, during which Turkey has to adapt its laws and practices to European law in respective policy areas. Compared to the experience of new member states in Central and Eastern Europe, Turkey and the EU opened the Environment chapter of negotiations in a relatively early phase of the accession talks.

Nature conservation in EU law requires the alignment of national laws with principles in EU regulations, and the identification and establishment of special protection areas for habitats (Natura 2000) and species (particularly for birds). The government and ruling party in Turkey has been following a dual path; while Regulatory Impact Assessments are carried out in the implementation of relevant regulations, the draft nature conservation law in parliament has received negative reactions both from conservation NGOs and locals, who protest the extensive

energy investments—particularly hydroelectric and coal-fired thermal power plants, extractive industries and mines that completely destroy surrounding habitats. Local groups and NGOs have been effective and successful in stopping and cancelling some of these investments through court decisions and 'natural site' declarations via local conservation committees.

The draft law is based on the concept of 'sustainable use' of protected areas rather than conservation. Present conservation statuses are subject to the re-evaluation of the Ministry of Environment and Forest. In November 2010, the European Commission joined the critics in its latest Progress Report, stating that the current draft has nothing to do with EU law and that the Turkish government should collaborate with both civil society and the Commission during its preparation. The draft law is now at the general assembly, waiting to be negotiated by the new parliament that will be formed after the general elections in June 2011.

Turkey has not fully aligned its Environmental Impact Assessment regulations with EU directives and has not signed the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention). Moreover, the EU Commission's Strategic Environmental Assessment directive has not come into effect, and the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment has yet to be ratified. As a result, public consultation and participation mechanisms are failing and information about projects is not being properly disseminated. Locals become aware of such projects only when their property is about to be acquired or constructions are about to start. There have been many clashes, protests and law suits between locals and NGOs, and companies and security forces.

### **Public Participation and the Environment: Legal Frameworks and Practices (by Melike Yalçın)**

Although participatory mechanisms such as local environment committees, environmental impact assessment procedures, and Councils for the Environment and Forestry exist, public participation is a relatively new process in Turkey.

The Turkish Constitution and the 1983 Environmental Law outline citizens' duty to protect the environment and prevent environmental pollution. In addition to these constitutional and legislative provisions and in response to international developments and particularly Turkey's EU membership aspirations, important steps have recently been taken to open the policy sphere to participation. The Law on the Right of Access to Information was adopted in 2003, for instance, although Turkey has yet to become a party to the Aarhus Convention. The 2006

amendments to the 1983 Law on the Environment stipulates that public participation is a fundamental principle of environmental policymaking, and requires the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry and the local authorities to create a participatory environment for the chambers of professions, trade unions, NGOs and citizens. The 2005 Municipal Law also created mechanisms for participation, such as city councils and participatory strategic plans.

However, Turkish legislation still lags behind that of most developed countries. Moreover, participation remains a challenge because of a longstanding tradition of top-down management, state bureaucracy and a significant remainder of central government influence in local issues. Additionally, Turkish NGOs face considerable legal limitations and most lack sufficient knowledge, experience and means to participate in decision-making processes. Often, citizens and NGOs have only succeeded in making themselves heard by mobilising local protests or appealing to the courts to challenge environmentally harmful activities, especially where environmental impact assessment processes are contested.

### **Biodiversity and Habitat Loss (by Esra Başak)**

Today over 90 percent of Turkey's Key Biodiversity Areas are subject to at least one and in many cases more than one threat. The main pressure on Turkey's natural and semi-natural ecosystems is land conversion, which often has irreversible effects. Development projects such as roads, dams and irrigation schemes are the main driving forces behind this practice, which takes place at the expense of the health of the ecosystem.

Pressures on terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity concern not only natural habitats, but also formally protected areas corresponding to six percent of Turkey's surface area. Lake Tuz, which is a closed basin situated in Central Anatolia, comprised of an ecological network of wetlands where highly endemic hypersaline plant species occur in the surrounding natural steppe habitats—and a Special Protection Area—is a case in point. Since the 1920s, Lake Tuz, Turkey's second largest body of water has shrunk by about 85 percent due to the over-extraction of groundwater for irrigated agriculture. Additionally, the pollutants discharged into the lake have severely affected the breeding flamingo populations there.

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