The Europeanization of Sub-National Administrations in Turkey: Towards a Multi Level Polity?

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Abstract

Territorial governance in Turkey has seemed to shift towards a more regionalized model in the course of the accession process with the European Union (EU). Within this context, the behaviour and mobilization of sub-national administrations (SNAs)\(^1\) in the political process has become a significant issue in Turkey. Studies illustrate that the Europeanization process not only affects intra-state relations, but also promotes subnational mobilization and territorial representation in member (and applicant) states. In the broader context of the role of regions in the European governance structure, this paper analyses the situation for Turkish SNAs. Based on the original findings from semi-structured interviews with civil servants and on a cross-sectional survey of 85 SNAs in Turkey, the research utilises the subnational mobilization literature. It also incorporates the analytical concepts of Europeanization and multi level governance to explore the awareness and the attitude of SNAs in Turkey towards the issue of sub-national mobilization.

The aim of this paper

\(^1\) It seems important to clarify some concepts. First of all, SNAs here refers to a generic definition which covers sub-national self governments, trade unions, regional development agencies or municipalities. Although my focus is on the regional development agencies (RDAs), as a unit of analysis for my cross-sectional survey, this paper also includes city municipalities and metropolitan municipalities. However, these three units have different characteristics in terms of legislation, organizational structure, economic and human sources. In terms of mobilization, it does not refer to any ethnic regionalist movement. I rather talk about instrumental way of mobilization towards the European arena in terms of getting fund, liaising, networking, lobbying, through creating offices, participating inter-regional organizations or interacting with the EU’s formal and informal institutions.
This paper seeks to analyze the impact of Europeanization on territorial relations in applicant states with specific reference to Turkey. The main concern here is to investigate the extent to which Europeanization has changed the behaviour of Turkish Subnational Administrations (SNAs, hereafter) and mobilized functional territorial interests within a broader political game across EU arena. This paper is not interested in ‘why’ Europeanization matters but instead ‘how’ it matters, focusing on the impact of Europeanization on the issue of sub-national mobilization from applicant states. Within this context, the aims of this paper are three-fold.

- Identifying the EU’s role in the changing dynamics of Turkish governance structure
- Finding out possible obstacles for Turkish SNAs’ engagement with the EU arena
- Exploring the level of Turkish SNAs’ engagement with the EU arena

Methodology

This paper is a part of ongoing research that is comparative across institutions, regions, and temporality. Overall, it investigates Turkish-EU relations in terms of regional policy in three different territorial levels, the European, National, and Subnational levels. The analysis draws on four main bodies of evidence. Firstly, the cross-sectional survey conducted through three-defined subnational administrations: Metropolitan Municipalities, City Municipalities, and Regional Development Agencies. Then, semi-structured interviews with a total 25 national elites, experts, and professionals in Ankara and Istanbul were conducted. These interviews were supplemented by 65 semi-structured interviews in selected provinces in Turkey such as Samsun, Konya, Diyarbakir, Gaziantep, Adana, Izmir, and Eskisehir. As for the third territorial level, semi-structured interviews will be taken place in Brussels with key actors working in the official and unofficial EU institutions. Next to survey analysis and interviews, a systematic study of the EU’s own documentary record of the enlargement process, primarily through its opinions and progress reports on Turkey were examined.

Europeanization and Multi Level Governance

The EU’s regional policy is one of those areas where Europeanization does not just affect domestic system of intergovernmental relations (Jeffrey, 1997; 2000; Bulmann, 1997; Börzel, 2002; Bursens, 2007; Page and Goldsmith, 2010) and promote particularly unitary states to shift towards more compound polities by promoting multi-level governance (Bache 2008; Bache et al 2011). It also has consequences for domestic process of societal interest formation, aggregation and representation, and also impact on how SNAs strive to channel their interests into the European policy-making process (Marks and McAdam, 1996; Eising, 2009). For the former case, the EU norms and conditionality played a significant role in the very emergence of regions as functional units of territorial self-governance within applicant states, in some instances acting as a catalyst of domestic reform process (Brusis, 2002: 553). As for the latter, beyond the
conditionality, the pressure to establish effective institutional frameworks and strategic objectives that facilitate engagement in the EU has shaped SNAs’ behaviour both during the accession process and since their respective nation states have become members of the EU (Moore, 2008b: 213). This change among national, subnational, and supranational has been analyzed within the creation of MLG in member (and candidate) states.

MLG here refers to a multi-level and multi-actor paradigm includes both vertical and horizontal dimensions. While the vertical dimension highlights the importance of interactions across different level of actors or institutions, the horizontal dimension refers to participation of public authorities, private actors, and third sectors to problem-solving mechanism. While the recent agenda of reforms in Turkish governance includes horizontal change in administrative space as well as vertical change, this paper is less concerned with the change in horizontal dimension than it is in explaining the change in vertical dimension. Regarding the vertical dimension of MLG, this research suggests a distinction between ‘a vertical change within the national jurisdiction’ and ‘a vertical change beyond the national jurisdiction’.

In the former case, funds, a new set of rules, and procedures for the formulation and implementation of regional policies are redistributed through the lower territorial level by the central government. By this change, public, private, and third sectors involved in the process tend to be invited to participate in the decision-making process by national authorities. The traditional hierarchical model with the governmental institutions the top and local authorities on at the bottom of decision-making process seem to be in retreat (Sobzcak, 2007). Hence, one can observe a shift from the top-down hierarchical model to a mode of interactive decision-making process involving different actors from the horizontal and vertical levels, including non-state actors.

Relatedly, if one considers the multi-level governance, a vertical change beyond the national jurisdictions should be analyzed too. This leads one to examine second variation in the vertical dimension of MLG, which might be called as ‘bottom up and ad hoc mobilization’ (Sobzcak, 2007). A bottom up and ad hoc mobilization shapes intra-regional interactions and therefore promotes local institutional capacity through the creation of intra-, inter- and trans- regional networks that support local development initiatives (Paraskevopoulos and Leonardi, 2004). Within this context, the Europeanization of regional policy may be considered as almost synonymous to ‘subnational mobilization’ at the European level (Hooghe, 1996). Yet, it is worth noting here that while the vertical change within the national jurisdiction necessitates certain national conditions, for the second case, there must be some region specific conditions such as the quality of leadership, economic resources, associational culture for the region etc.

Empirical Rationale and Gap in the Literature
Turkey has been going through a dynamic transformation process in its public policy in general and regional policy in particular over the last decade due to the heavy internal and external pressures. The adoption of territorial statistical system (i.e. NUTS classification) in 2002, the comprehensive public policy and local reform packages (consisting of a Law on Metropolitan Municipalities; a Law on Municipalities; a Law on the Special Provincial Administration; and a Bill on Public Administration) in 2005, the creation of 26 regional development agencies (two of which were established in 2006, 16 in 2008 and the rest in 2009) as well as the participation of Turkish SNAs to the regional plans and the allocation of national funds for the first time in 2010 are the most concrete examples of these restructuring processes in Turkish governance. These changes can be analyzed as an example of the vertical change within the national jurisdiction. One can find number of studies which observed the changing dynamics of intergovernmental relations in Turkey (inter alia, see Dulupçu, 2005; Koçak, 2007; Ertugal, 2010; 2011).

On the other hand, regarding a vertical change beyond the national jurisdiction, a great deal of studies analyzed EU 15 (Keating and Jones, 1995; Hooghe, 1996; Jeffrey, 1997a; 2001; Le Gales and Lequense, 1998; Borzel, 2002; Adshead, 2002; Weatherill and Bernitz, 2005) as well as CEEC (Keating and Hughes, 2003; Martin, 2004; Bruzst 2005; 2007; Ferry and McMaster, 2005; Kettunen and Kungla, 2005; Sobczak, 2007; Sapala, 2008; Tatar, 2009). However, no work has been done for accession states. This paper targets at filling the gap in the extant literature.

**Identifying the EU’s role in the changing dynamics of Turkish governance structure**

The EU conditionality was an important motivation in the very emergence of regional tier in Turkey and progress report explicitly mentioned that Turkey should increase the regional capacity in terms of human and financial sources through the creation of regional arrangements and ensure effective involvement of all relevant stakeholders (See progress reports since 2001). Even if the applicant status of Turkey allows us to focus on the downward causation primarily due to the asymmetric nature of conditionality, it is argued in this paper that the phenomenon of conditionality is insufficiently understood within a narrowly positivist framework whereby EU conditionality is seen as a formal instrument for the transposition of the EU’s rules, norms and institutional templates to the candidate states (Hughes et al 2004). This paper therefore embraces the idea of EU conditionality includes not only the formal technical requirements on candidates but also the informal pressures arising from the behaviour and perceptions of actors engaged in the political process, offers a deeper understanding of the enlargement process as a dynamic interaction between international incentives and rules and domestic transition factors (Hughes et al 2004).

In the lights of above considerations, this paper does not only situate the Europeanization approach in the top-down (coercive manner) where domestic change is traced back to the EU sources but also evaluate the indirect and horizontal effects of
Europeanization where one can also observe the volunteer mechanisms such as lesson-drawing or policy transfer. Yet, in considering formal (technical) and informal (cognitive) effects of Europeanization in isolation from domestic dynamics (national and regional level) also misses the empirical reality in any attempt to generalize. Consequently, focusing on EU’s cohesion policy and its financial instruments (structural funds), the approach taken in this research is an alternative integrated approach suggesting a new research agenda in Turkish-EU relation, which combines the institutional variants of Europeanization (such as opportunity structures and learning) with domestic mediating factors (such as the legacy of history; institutional capacity, legitimacy) set by subnational mobilization literature. Consequently, Europeanization of SNAs could be defined as redirection and reorientation of their activities not only towards national institutions but also towards supranational institutions; politics and/or policy-making (see similar definition, McCauley, 2010:2).

**The level and scope of vertical change beyond the national jurisdiction**

According to survey analysis, one can find that there are a number of Turkish SNAs which have already established some form of mobilization and territorial representation through the participation of the inter-regional organizations and/or the creation of regional office in Brussels. Today certain Turkish SNAs are actively engaging with the facilities of Brussels-based inter-regional organizations, i.e., Assembly of European Regions (AER), Eurocities, and European Association of Regional Development Agencies (EURADA). The striking point is that RDAs in Turkey created as a result of the accession process has brought dynamism to Turkish SNAs’ engagement to the inter-regional organizations. It is also seen that many Turkish SNAs have shown the initial steps of subnational mobilization such as creating a special post for EU affairs in their internal organization structures; training and educating staff regarding the EU-related issues; applying EU funds with their equivalent in other EU countries; circulating EU directives and/or procedures inside the organization and engaging some horizontal activities in terms of sister city agreements and fairs/conferences participation.

**Devil is in the Domestic Detail**

As explained, for the mobilization of Turkish SNAs, there is no specific reference in any part of EU conditionality regarding their direct engagement with the EU institutions. Furthermore, derogation on Chapter 22 (setting the regional policy and structural funds), less amount of structural funds available to Turkish SNAs, centralization of fund allocation (IPA), and no clear membership prospect are the main EU level obstacles for the mobilization of Turkish SNAs. Consequently, as Moore (2008b) put it for the case of CEECs, beyond the conditionality there must be some bottom up dynamics coming from the region itself. This is the only link that we can create between the Europeanization literature and subnational mobilization literature.
Findings suggest that the legacy of history and constitutional problems as a national conditions, and legitimacy, institutional capacity and associational culture in which regions/cities embedded as regional conditions are the strongest factors that determine the mobilization of Turkish SNAs across the EU arena.

**Initial Findings and Concluding Remarks**

This paper argues that there is a link between the EU’s active (formal sphere of conditionality) and passive (indirect effects) leverage and their impact on Turkish domestic reform process, which could be captured by the concept of Europeanization. The adaptation of EU’s regional policy has had consequences for intergovernmental relations, and played an important role in administrative reform in Turkey. As for the mobilization of SNAs, Turkey represents a complicated case for assessing the degree and scope of mobilization across the European arena as the subnational tier throughout its history has been remained weak up until the recent development during the EU accession process. There is also no specific reference in any part of EU conditionality regarding the SNAs’ direct engagement with the EU institutions. Furthermore, Turkey’s EU membership is not on the immediate horizon. Such difficulties may reduce Turkish SNAs engagement with the EU institutions. Rather than the EU’s leverage, national context and to a great extent particular structural characteristics of a region can reinforce Turkish SNAs active mobilization towards the EU arena, which is generally accepted within subnational mobilization literature.

The legacy of statism together with the fear of separatism leads state bureaucrats in Turkey have become more cautious about SNAs’ mobilization across the European arena. Yet, illustrative examples show that some SNAs have already established relations with the EU institutions through different channels, which could be seen as the trend towards multi-level polity. One can argue that RDAs could bring dynamism for Turkish presence in Brussels in order to gain funds, network, and lobby on the European arena. Those institutions have more experts and financial sources than some other city municipals and metropolitan areas; yet, they are now on the way for institutionalization and learning process. Today, the main priority of all Turkish RDAs is to understand the potentials of actors and institutions in their region and collaborate with them to envisage regional plans or goals. With regard to the situation for municipalities, there are some metropolitan municipalities and, to a lesser extent, city municipals have started mobilizing across the European arena. This has so far been restricted to the richer and stronger municipalities, though visionary mayors and/or regional elites have also established relations with some inter-regional networks.

More importantly, horizontal networks such as sister city agreements, reciprocal visits or partnership agreements are prominent among Turkish SNAs. These kinds of horizontal and vertical mobilizations across the EU arena not only teach Turkish SNAs how to lobby the EU institutions, but also accelerate other Turkish SNAs’ engagement with the EU institutions as many SNAs are still in the learning process. By having a presence in Brussels or being an active member of interregional networks, Turkish
SNAs will be able to exchange information and expertise with other regions that have already gone through this process. As far as the negotiations proceed, one can assume that mobilization across the European arena will correspondingly increase in the end, which may also reinvigorate the Turkey’s EU candidacy.

In summary, it is too early to predict that the outcomes of this radical restructuring within the Turkish administrative system will lead to a full-fledged regionalization giving spaces to SNAs to aggregate their interests in the European arena. It can be argued that the issue of sub-national mobilization is still a new phenomenon in the Turkish context. There is a need for further studies to delve deeper into this subject in order to analyse the behaviour and attitudes of Turkish SNAs’ in terms of mobilization and their foreign activities in order to examine what Turkish SNAs want from these engagements; what causes variation in their level of mobilization or which factors are prominent for an effective mobilization.

References

I can provide the full lists of the references upon request. Because of the limitation, I did not include the list here.