

Globalization, establishing a tendency toward a worldwide investment environment, has been imposing upon its rules, understanding and values on countries. The impact is so overemphasized mainly by media and international organizations that the economic and social habits are forced to be adjusted -clearly, with those of the developed nations- in order to survive and remain in the game. Such an enormous psychological and political threat is overshadowing the fears, hopes, and norms of people, particularly for the last three decades in an accelerating speed. This paper aims to critically analyze the perception of globalization by the political leadership and society in Turkey and the incoherent stance of policy-makers, who act as international figures with broad perspectives in some -mainly economic- issues and who mostly persist in old-fashion "small town politician" thinking in organizing the internal political, social, and public institutions.

Turkey has been reshaping most of its economic perceptions and understanding particularly in the last decade following its increasing willingness to become a full member to the European Union (EU) coupled with its nonending economic hardship started in the 1950s with deterioration of national currency, high inflation, and low-productivity. Resulting from intense interference of political actors in economical issues and lobby-influenced policy production, the country paid and is still paying huge bills in not being able to embrace the economical, educational, and social needs of the society. The deep hypocrisy of rhetoric -in the form of claims of becoming a world power- vs. lack of acting in truthful manner, consumed all possible breakaways of policy-makers considering even too little personal gains and ended up with an undeserved collapse of a very sacrificing nation following a number of economic crises.

In this period, mainly within the past five years, the country started a heroic turnaround not even supposed or believed by many. The notorious IMF prescription was applied which

was tough but no magic, like -but not limited to- strict monetary policies, private and public lay-offs, removing public impact on economical issues and giving autonomy to a number of institutions starting from the Central Bank. Moreover, banking system was completely renewed and the state seized more than a dozen private banks lacking adequate capital. Only the banking operation has cost more than \$47 billion. By the time, one after another, state enterprises have been privatized followed by the takeovers of private national champions in banking, energy, and telecommunications. Needless to say, the rules of globalization were put in place and the prevailing so-called maladaptive economic practices were replaced with the dominant -yet, cruel and locally disliked- international rules.

Why the recent leaders have given up an important part of their initiatives in economic governance arises from the demands of globalization. Globalization has an ambitious and irresistible agenda pressed by the leading powers of the world -starting from international organizations such as IMF, World Bank, and multinational corporations- and leaves almost no space for transitional economies to be obstinate in sticking with their economical behaviors. Free market, dating back to the 1950s and 1960s in Turkey, and the forces of globalization have had dramatic impacts in this new era of rational economic thinking. The biggest impact, while still under way, is the persuasion of the masses that the state is not a guarantor of finding jobs for the lower-and middle-class. This is a major change from the many decades long repeated policies of providing jobs in public sector even if the state enterprises would not need any additional labor. It had been certainly a maladaptive practice for the society and from the point of view of the previous governments as if finding jobs for the unemployed should be the social responsibility of the state. Nevertheless, this maladaptive practice also has a piece in the cultural narrative in that the state has been treated by the citizens for many years in a blessed or holy way. Therefore, such a spiritual relationship was expected also to help those in return for

their unconditional obedience and sympathy. As such, the farmers whose crops -even the valueless- had been bought by the state for long years faced a new era when the government reduced the subsidies in remarkable amounts. The *Father State*, as called by many in Turkey arising from the belief that the father of the house takes care of his children, is now changing his old dress and becoming a different figure in embracing his citizens. As for the opportunist business owners and executives, in the new period of banking system, the state banks would no longer serve to give competitive bank loans since the method of using political means to reach economical gains is -in general- excluded from the context of business-government relations. All reflects a recent motto which can be heard repeatedly from the policy-makers: “Do not expect everything from the state.”

The change in the economic behavior affected the values and the habits of the society in a broad perspective. The former memorized realities, such as finding the right person with a business card and passing it to another public figure to get a job or a bank loan, are being mostly replaced with rational decision-making. The hardest challenge facing the elected leaders is the persuasion of the citizens that such changes are needed for the goodness of the country and the future of coming generations, as opposed to the general belief that they are put in place solely because of the demands of international financial organizations. What is needed desperately is acting in a transparent way and telling the millions that the country has missed dozens of opportunities in the past only because of refusing to change, and such changes can and will serve in catching numerous trains should the society leave the maladaptive practice of utilizing the so-called holy state. It is now time for the state to take care of health, education, social justice, and to scrutinize the players and the institutions of the market.

While the prompt and submissive responsiveness of political leadership in economical issues was courageous, it still lacks a great deal in understanding the new era of the supremacy

of the individual, in some instances even vis-à-vis the state. That is exactly, I argue, where the current leadership challenge starts. In discussing the role of the individual and the state, the question of where the power belongs or who owns the power deserves consideration and should not be bypassed. Whereas it is hard to define one single cultural narrative within the Turkish context as this society has various backgrounds and cultures, I believe that the widely accepted generic cultural narrative has an explanatory power in examining the role of power distribution and the symbolic role of the “citizen” in the eyes of political executives.

Modern Turkey has been founded in first quarter of the 20th century by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk following a legendary Independence War against an imperial western alliance of UK, France, and Italy which also included Greece. The young republic, established in 1923, brought a new social and civilian climate to the country where the citizens had been called *teba* for long years during the times of Ottoman Empire, meaning “being submissive to someone”. Such “*Padişah* (Sultan) and his subjects” relationship which continued nearly 600 years has still been a part of cultural norms of many people in the country especially in the traditional subgroups. The authority figures, hence, are somewhat fed by the power of past cultural habits which call and press for absolute loyalty. After the proclamation of the republic after 83 years, including political parties and NGOs, today’s leaders are still seen as indispensable, and even a minor opposition or a suggestion may be perceived as questioning the authority. Within such context, this narrative glorifies the “authority” and the “state” with assuming the citizen as a secondary player.

Looking at my cultural narrative, my patriotic views also fully support the idea of protecting the state, its representatives and its institutions in order to keep the nation alive. In Turkish schools, one aspect of civic education is to focus on the values of the republic, which was founded in very unfavorable conditions and in great sacrifice of the whole nation.

Educational practices regularly emphasize the importance of the state and describe the roles of citizens in defending the country. Turkish family structure and child-rearing philosophy strongly favor the vitality of the state, in general on a unity basis. However, such collectivist thinking, from time to time, could lack the appreciation of the importance of individual in increasing the wealth, delegating power and elevating social progress. Indeed, there have been times that populist policy-making did not miss the chance of exploiting the loyalty of the ordinary citizen to his country; using strong and meaningful slogans to unify people frequently worked in justifying the lack of wealth creation and social progress. I suggest that progress, occasionally described in technical and numerical performance criteria, needs to be taken as the aggregated physical and social capital of a nation coupled with the democratic institutions which can only be designed thanks to the order of law. Nevertheless, the idea of the supremacy of law which has accelerated in the western world particularly following the World War Two, could easily be overlooked when the so-called (sometimes undefined and vague) interests of the state are at stake.

The forces of globalization which leave no chance for the national leaders to take brave economical actions in order to follow the path of economical progress may not be adequate in helping to create social and democratic progress. Therefore, the leadership in such traditional value systems becomes even more challenging in transforming the society from a submissive manner to a new citizenship format which encourages the individual to have full confidence in himself/herself and defend his/her constitutional rights, if any, in the case that the person would not be treated as a “first-class” citizen. This period, I argue, represents a serious transition challenge in Turkey while the country has been experiencing a transitional era and the society is moving from one system of values to another. The social institutions are getting stronger, NGOs are taken more seriously by the policy-makers, the voice of the ordinary

citizen can be heard louder, there is a tremendous amount of democratization -notwithstanding all the deficiencies- in the freedom of speech, and the importance of the individual has been on the rise. In short, it is all about being a civilian society from a traditionalist, conformist and obedient group of people. I think this is the biggest challenge facing the Turkish leadership mainly in the last two decades.

However, this transitional period also accommodates a consequential threat which surrounds the society; that is the belief that reforming the economic, social and democratic institutions means as if reforming every single set of values. I find this age similar in some points with the transition of Japan in the second half of the 19th century when the country decided to shift from an isolated feudal kingdom to an internationally open and connected society. When Japan decided to become an industrial democracy following a national isolation of more than two centuries, it faced a challenge in 1876 from the samurai traditionalists, known as *Shinpuren*, that the so-called democratization period was full of giving up the national values and that economic and political reforms were getting too far. The fact that the powerful national identity of Japanese was seen in danger and modernization was perceived as no different from westernization.

Today's major changes within the Turkish context demand a strong leadership which requires an orienting purpose that can encourage people to buy into it. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether such a common purpose has been presented by the leaders as the majority of the society is aware that many democratic and social reforms are done only because of the outside demand -mainly from Brussels during EU accession process-, but not as a result of the will of the society. The lack of owning this era of being a civilian and more democratized society creates a question mark in the minds of the masses whether the national identity is going to change in order to belong to the club of the wealthy nations. The values are

under question and this process is unfortunately perceived in the way that as if the changes are only owned by a small group of bureaucratic and political elites.

Indeed, the author of this paper is also skeptical to the management of this process in two ways. The first one is that, similar to the question marks in the minds of the Japanese starting through the end of the 19th century which certainly deserve credit, a transition has brought the society to a point without almost any questioning what must be preserved as a part of the values and culture of the society. As given above, while it is hard to define one single culture in a country, there is a generally accepted definition of Turkish culture which would not be opposed by many, and that is mostly based on collectivist thinking (from the stand point of social view and collective benefits which is somewhat different from a collectivism of economic system) and sacrifice. In the era of this transitional period, many -including the author- fear similar to the Japanese that the nation is changing the whole set of values and a new mindset of daily thinking is being imported from individual societies. Moreover, while the legislative changes are put in effect almost on a daily basis, the leaders of this transition seriously lack of becoming visible symbols of the transition ideal. It would be adequate only to look at either the highly paternalistic structure in political parties where the delegates are passionately tied to the leadership without any skepticism or the legal immunity of the senior bureaucrats and the MPs even beyond the political context. The way the leaders are using their authority to assure their status is an impediment in encouraging the transition process as the ordinary citizen reasonably assumes that the changes do not belong to the society; if they would be, things should have started with the leaders and the policy-makers themselves.

From my personal point of view as to what I might personally do to provide leadership on this adaptive challenge, my current life is in fact allocated to educate many promising boys and girls in the K-12 school I manage, and bright young men and women in the universities I

teach at undergraduate and graduate level in Turkey. I am unable to recall how many meetings, conferences, and panels I took part of in trying to communicate with the people around me about the current and future political and social context. I have been also asked to participate in a number of TV programs and to write columns in local and national newspapers in order to disseminate my views, all of which have encouraged the expansion of social and democratic changes in the country while strictly criticizing a total change by getting rid of nearly all cultural virtues surrounding the daily norms and attitudes of Turkish people. I have to acknowledge that such advocacy lacking an authoritative power, which is countlessly meaningful in Turkey, has become challenging -but not discouraging- for me. I discuss that as the society becomes more civilian and the democratic institutions get stronger, people who lack the power of political authority could be increasingly influential as the society will discover the power and importance of ideas, apart from the power of authority particularly gained in elective politics. What I have found during such formal and informal communications is that even such a traditional society which is proud of its values and cultural institutions is ready to embrace the changing social and political realm as long as they witness role model leaders to follow and are given a strong and common vision. Recently, I talked to a Turkish ambassador to an EU country who was thinking similar to me in that in the last couple of decades the country put too much emphasis on economic development and wealth creation. When I asked her about my sense of seeing the society in concentrating too much in materialistic gains and lacking a common national dream, she expressed almost an identical view in defining our people as socially fragmented arising from a lack of leadership and vision -sad to admit that- since the 1930s after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who managed to turn a very traditionalist and obedient nation into a self-governing society who happily bought into an incredible change following a number of major reforms despite the lack of a civilian and democratic background.