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National Agriculture Project of Turkey: Roots and Functions

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National Agriculture Project of Turkey: Roots and Functions¹

Umut Kocagöz²

1 Introduction

Turkey has been considered as one of the last agriculture counties, especially for its peasant based culture and economy. Though, in years, this characteristics of the country has been changing rapidly, agriculture is still occupying a special role and position in the Turkish economy and politics. This was affirmed by a proposed political project, namely National Agricultural Project (NAP), which has been designed, proposed, promoted and implemented by the most neoliberal government of all the Turkish history, Justice and Development Party – AKP.

In this paper, I will try to analyze and understand the roots and functions of NAP. NAP was proposed by AKP in such a conjuncture where Turkey has lost all of its directions within and outside the country regarding social and economical policies. In this sense, NAP seems to be, rather, a founding policy in order to consolidate the power and political position of the government, rather than a consequence of the economical-social program proposed in the elections. Indeed, the name chosen for the project as “national” brings into mind that this is an ideological choice that will serve to the needs of nationalist/conservative sentiments of peasantry though the model in general will serve to the needs of agribusiness, as Turkey has lost its sovereignty over food in the past years (Özkaya 2017).

NAP was announced to be implemented from the beginning of 2017. At the center of the project is a “new subsidy allocation system for agricultural products”, which aims to diversify agricultural production, increase the productivity, by dividing the country into 941 agricultural basins, regarding the regional climate regimes as well soil categories. This project takes its basis as the old subsidy system for different products, expanding the scope of some products while limiting some others. At first sight, NAP seems to be a new subsidy program, aiming to re-organize Turkish agriculture regarding the contemporary needs and demands of the global agri-food system. This approach was the shared by all AKP governments from 2002. However, it is the first time that we see a nationalist discourse regarding this kind of project, in terms of scope and affect, connecting itself with the new proposed regime. In other words, NAP as a “national” project is not only an “agricultural” project. It has a function serving for the populist discourse of AKP, promoting the nationalist roots of Turkish peasantry.

Moreover, I will propose that, what has been happening in the name of “nationalization” over agriculture is letting agribusiness take over the agricultural sector through state intervention (Kocagöz 2016). With the regime that has been in construction for the recent years, which can be now called as “authoritarian populism” (Scoones et. al. 2017), the state forces are grabbing what can be called as the commonwealth of the people, in the name of people, with popular support to authoritarian ways of governing.

In order to analyze and understand this process, I will start with the conjuncture that made NAP possible. First, I will go with the political conditions of the time that NAP was announced and proposed, and try to discuss how these conditions made NAP as a possible and necessary project for ideological purposes. Then, I will describe the general characteristics of NAP to see what kind of an agricultural project it offers for Turkish society. Finally, I will discuss how peasant organizations reacted to this project and what may be the future implications.

¹ This is the very first draft of a recently started research project. I will be glad to hear of your comments. ukocagoz@hotmail.com

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2 The conjuncture

While the Turkish warplanes were hitting the Turkish parliament at midnight of 15 July 2016, non of the Turkish citizens who knew the history of Turkish military coups would imagine that this time the bells will not ring for the ones who are attempting to overthrow the current regime. This was a bloody military coup attempt, supposed to be organized by a religious community that has members in each sector of the state, once an alliance of Erdoğan's government and now to be accused as being a terrorist organization (formerly, known as Fettullah Gülen community). In other words, Erdoğan's best political alliance, the Gülen community, turned to be a terrorist organization over a night as being accused of organizing the failed military coup.

Very soon after the military coup attempt, the government declared "state of emergency". One of the consequences of the state of emergency was to constitute a *regime of governance* where the parliamentary had no function but to support the "Delegated Legislations" (Kanun Hükümünde Kararname -KHK). In this sense, the "defense" against the military coup attempt revealed that the parliament *lost* its ability to govern the society, while other forces start to take place in the political sphere. Thus, the government could only consolidate its power by tools of compulsion, such as military forces, accusation of terrorist activities, and reasonless prison sentences for the ones that are seem to opposing the regime.

As being in power from 2002 up to today, Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) has accumulated so much power that let Turkey to become under the leadership of a single party and president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's one-man rule. As AKP was before a coalition of between different forces (İnsel 2008), one man's rule turned to be the key problem within the different sects of the party. As the interest in power to maximize the economic, social and political profit turned to be a fight in order to conquer the power between the different sects, who were once alliances, the fight became brutal day by day. It can be said that the military coup attempt in 15th July 2016 was a result of this fight between different sects within the government, in order to control the accumulation of economical, social, cultural and political power.

Indeed, after the Gezi revolt in 2013, Erdoğan's party lost its legitimacy for the half of the country. Erdoğan himself declared that he was the leader of the "%50" of the country and the other half was supposed to respect his policies and visions of his party. In time, this turned to be a form of an authoritarian regime, which tries to consolidate its power through popular policies, and the military power as well. Transformation in the juridical system, constituency and military has been in a way forward in order to constitute a regime that would consolidate power in Erdoğan's hands while mobilizing thousands of people as a popular force supporting Erdoğan.

However, the military coup attempt had happened in a conjuncture where Erdoğan had already lost his power over the half of the country, loosing votes to different oppositional parties. In 7 June 2015, there had been general election where the pro-Kurdish party namely People's Democracy Party (Halkların Demokrasi parties - HDP) gained a success that had the potential to change the faith of millions of people, mostly which the oppressed would be the beneficiary. In 7 July elections, HDP got %13 of the votes while AKP lost its power down to %43. This can be taken as a real crack in the legitimacy, as AKP first time lost its votes this much and could not be able to govern as a single party anymore. This was supposed to be a turn point for Erdoğan's faith, as rather than following the democratic process and giving way for a coalition government, Erdoğan grabbing the people's power, organized new elections, turning the country into a bloody hell, as bombs have exploded in different parts of the country hitting different sectors of the society and different political fractions, turning the country into a "regime of horror". Erdoğan won the November 2015 elections with a %49 of the votes, while new cracks have appeared in the legitimacy of its government. The clearest example of this crack was the 15 July 2016 military coup attempt.

Though the military coup had failed with the help of thousands of people taking up the streets fighting against the military forces with different means, a big crack in the legitimacy of Erdoğan's government had appeared. This was not only in the other half %50 of the society, but within

Erdoğan's own %50 as well. This was due to the economical and political crisis affecting daily life of Turkish society. On the one hand, Erdoğan's neoliberal policies has been continued in different sectors such as accommodation, health, agriculture, education, and social services. On the other hand, a kind of Islamisation of the country and sectors has been appeared as a threat to the secular sectors of the society. Proposed laws limiting the freedom of women and youth, reforms in the primary and secondary education systems are clear examples of what has been done so far in order to consolidate the %50 while loosing AKP's own %50 as the policies got reaction from its own base as well.

Turkey has always been a country where there are different kinds of alliances, cross cutting class, gender, nation, religion and religious sects. Although the alliance between the Gülen Community and AKP was a kind of religious one, their political and economic interest was corresponding so that they had a long-term alliance with similar interests. The main policy towards their economical-political interest is neoliberalism.

AKP is the main neoliberal party with a popular base, gaining consent of millions of people in order to govern the country with privatizations, corporatizations, etc. In other words, the political correspondence of the alliance between AKP and Gülen community was not only religious but in terms of neoliberalism. This was because Gülen community has been organizing itself as a corporation for years, and AKP has been main proponent of the neoliberal policies while consolidating its popular base.

3 The Agricultural Sector

One of the main sectors that neoliberalism showed itself is the agriculture. The Turkish agriculture has been in neoliberal transformation since the 1980s (Keyder and Yenal 2010; Aydın 2010). In 2001, with the Agriculture Structural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP) prepared by the World Bank and IMF, the transformation process has deepened. The ARIP was to be implemented from 2001, and the main agent implementing the project was AKP, as AKP has been at power alone since 2002.

While the Turkish agriculture has always been organized in order to support the farmers with different means, one of the main objectives of ARIP was to transform the subsidy form in the Turkish agriculture. According to the ARIP, the subsidy form had to be transformed into what then was called as "direct income subsidy (DIS). DIS was a form of support that would transform the peasantry with different means: promoting agribusiness; expelling farmers from their lands; supporting rich farmers who had more acres of land; supporting farmers for not producing but for owning the land (keeping the land in their ownership). Thus, the farmers had been supported directly by the governments for a long time, but the form of support has been changing in time regarding the policies of the governments (Aydın 2010; Karapınar, Adaman and Özertan 2010).

The post-ARIP period (2008 and after) has been a period that the AKP governments tried to restructure the agricultural sector which was damaged (transformed) a lot by the ARIP. The main idea was to implement policies so as to integrate the Turkish agriculture into the global market. In order to do this, market stabilization, standardization, certification, subsidy structuring has been tried to be reorganized. To implement restructuring, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Livestock organized little plot projects to see how Turkish agriculture can be reorganized in regard to the new governmental structuring. The main result was to divide Turkey into areas based on the products that a region does or can produce historically and efficiently so that the government would support the production of that product in that specific region. "The Plain Based Agricultural Model" was the name for this new agricultural support system. With this system, the main idea was to organize the Turkish agriculture regarding the local and global markets, and forcing peasants to engage with the markets with regards to the needs of the local-global food chains.

4 The NAP as an “Agricultural Project”

The former Minister of Agriculture, Food and Livestock, Faruk Çelik, published a document on the agricultural budget for 2016, which also covers the scopes and functions of NAP that was to start from 2017.³ Regarding this document, NAP divides Turkey into 941 production basins, and supports 19 products based on the production basin of each product (Çelik 2016). With this model of production, the government targets to transmit the current agricultural system into a more planned and organized one.

NAP has been described as a project that is based on “food security”. The main purposes of the project is to overcome structural problems of Turkish agriculture; transmit the Turkish agriculture into a planned, conscious, and adequate production; regulate the market in order to stabilize the difference between production and price; support the producers and their income; decrease the agricultural import and expand the agricultural income. The support for the products that are supposed to be supported based on each region would be declared for the next 3 years instead of a year so that farmers would have a kind of *guarantee* for selling their products. This will also allow farmers to continue producing those products rather than changing the products each year based on the price in the market.

Regarding the above targets, NAP will provide these differences from the current model: a) the subsidy model will be changed from 17 product in terms of kg to 19 products in terms of harvest region; b) the division of all the land into 30 region will be changed; NAP will be based on 941 basin, and the products would be supported regarding the appropriate products that are more efficient to produce; c) the water scarcity will be taken into consideration; d) alternation will be taken into consideration; d) the subsidy will be paid at most 2 times in a year considering the most needed seasons; e) there will be only one application so that the process will be less bureaucratic; f) the product that will be supported will be planned for three years, but not only one (Çelik 2016).

According to Çelik (2016), The Ministry wants to have the following consequences from the planned, organized, farmer-supportive National project: a) “local” production will be satisfied the need to strategical products and products that are supply deficit b) so as to decrease the demand for import; c) increase the export; d) promote healthy nutrition; e) develop livestock production f) regulate the gap between producers and consumers. Based on this predictions, it is considered that the producers will take into consideration what they will produce regarding the subsidies. As it will be 3 years of support, the farmers will decide with a warrant what they would produce. As it will be a planned production, supply demand equilibrium would be satisfied, and producers will gain more money. Lastly, it is foreseen that the production will increase.

However, it can be considered that NAP is promoting new set of regulations that will integrate the Turkish agriculture into the global market, most famously over the seeds production, distribution and use. One of the first outcomes of NAP was to limit use of traditional/local seeds which are not certificated. Thus, certification of seeds invites the certification process with seed grabbing and leaving small-traditional farmers in the hands of certification companies / agribusiness (Özkaya 2016)

All in all, NAP can be seen as a project that will regulate the market with a *controlled state intervention* while *assisting* farmers to become integrated to the global market; promoting entrepreneur tendencies so that farmers become actors in the market, while promoting local production in the brand of “nationalism” while having peace with agribusiness and globalization of the production regarding the needs of the global-industrial market.

3 In July 2017, AKP revised the old cabinet, and Faruk Çelik was dismissed from his role as the minister. From this time, Ahmet Eşref Fakıbaba is the minister.

5 Ideological Function

It can be said that the economical and social restructuring of the Turkish agriculture aims to solve some of the problems of the agricultural sector such as depeasantization (Araghi 1995), corporation, agribusiness takeover, expel of small farmers from the land, dispossession, and destabilization in production because of the policies that enforce liberalization of the market. Although these problems were consequences of AKP's neoliberal policies over agriculture and agrarian world in general, especially minister Faruk Çelik's taking initiative over "solving" some of these problems were affective in restructuring the agricultural policies as a new "paradigm".

In this sense, it can be said that NAP fits well with AKP's general policies in all sectors including agriculture, namely, "neoliberalistaion" (Adaman Akbulut, Arsel 2017). In general, AKP can be described as a party supported mostly by the urban poor. A significant part of this poor population are workers who were expelled from their farms during the neoliberal transition described above as the ARIP period (Karapınar, Adaman and Özertan 2010). On the other hand, AKP's discourse is mostly based on a conservative-nationalist roots which can be associated with the imagined "Turkish peasant identity" (Karaömerlioğlu 1998). Indeed, AKP gains most of the votes and support of the countryside.

NAP is supposed to have the name of Plain Based Model (PBM). In some places of the main document on NAP (Çelik 2016, 22) the project is referred as PBM and the difference between the current model and the proposed NAP is discussed as the difference between the current model and the PBM. In this sense, it can be said that, for consolidating the popular base of the party and continuing the successful vote rates in the countryside, government needed to offer a social-political project that would target especially the countryside. Indeed, the need to integrate to the global market and reorganize the agricultural production considering the contemporary needs of the sector had already forced the Ministry to take initiative over the sector and design a new agricultural plan. Thus, NAP was already there, before taking the name of NAP, but it was a very good opportunity for the AKP government to reclaim the project and promote it as a project for the sake of all nation.

In November 2016, The National Agriculture Project (NAP) was launched with a big "event", organized by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, with the participation of Erdoğan and a crowded group of deputies of AKP, including the prime minister. Farmers around Turkey were invited to join the event, with their joy and Turkish flags, supporting both NAP, as if it was their own interest as well as it was an overlapping interest of all the nation.

As being left in the power alone, Erdoğan was (and still) could constitute a *new regime* that he can control and govern the society with authoritarian tools and implementations. *Presidency Regime*, as being constructed for some years, forces a new governmental restructuring of the Turkish Republic, changing the function of the president, the government, and so the governmental unites and functions that each sector has. The presidency regime has direct effects on the peasantry in terms of legal measures. One of the main consequences is the transformation of the legal status of the villages. The law named "Mega City Law" changed the status of villages into district over a night. Thus, the legal status of a "peasant" turned to a citizen over a night, losing the "privileges" that being a peasant would allow him to have: especially, losing the access to the commons is one of the most important ones.

The access matter is important in the sense that, the fight between the different sects of bourgeoisie to control and govern the country not only takes places in financial terms but it is also a matter of access and control of the land. It is a common sense that almost all the farmers are indebted; the mortgage is the land. This implies that the Turkish peasantry is overall indebted to the financial capital and the capital can make a move to control the lands that are now seems to belong to the farmers. Moreover, the common resources such as rivers, forests or plateaus that farmers use are transformed into "state land". In other words, they are titled and nationalized. This opens a space for the state to privatize these areas, mostly for the sake of energy production such as hydroelectric power plants, geothermal power plants, or coal plants. While farmers are losing their right and access to commons, the background idea is to turn the commons into private property.

These fragments of transformation imply a broader change that has been put on since the 1980s: neoliberalization of life through reforms and projects; construction of a legal system that is appropriate with the new neoliberal logic; the rise of a more powerful and Islamic capitalism. As this process does not take place in a smooth plain, as Turkish society is very much fragmented and there are conflicts and oppositions against this transformation process, Erdoğan needed to legitimize his project in the name of “Powerful Turkey, Target 2023”. *Target 2023*, with its symbolic meaning (the 100th year of the foundation of the Turkish Republic) referring to a construction of a new regime, with its neo- and post-Ottoman motives. This project has taken its legislative name as “presidency”. The presidency regime restricts the participation of the parliament in the legislation and decision-making processes while giving the authority to the president. Thus, the regime is itself, in definition, *authoritative*. Moreover, the regime had to take consent from the people. In this regard, a referendum has been organized in April 2017, where “Yes” or “No” was asked to people for change in the constitution. The results were %51 - YES in favor of the change in the constitution, which meant to be approving Erdoğan’s proposal of presidency for the Turkish Republic. Thus, Erdoğan take the *popular consent* for this *authoritarian regime*.

The 15 July military coup attempt was also an attempt to stop the accumulation of power in Erdoğan’s single hands. Different sect within and outside the state was in an alliance in order to overthrow Erdoğan’s party. The reasons why this attempt didn’t succeed is outside the scope of this work. However, it can be claimed that there opened a huge legitimacy problem for Erdoğan and his proposed regime, and this could be resolved not only by more authoritarianization of society but as well promoting some social-political policies that would favor the historical-social popular base of Erdoğan’s party.

In consequence, it can be said that the NAP has a twofold target: first, to restructure the Turkish agriculture regarding to the needs of the global market, privileging the interest of agribusiness while restructuring the subsidy system. Second, through the “nationalist” motives of the NAP are not at the front, the discourse of nationalism functions to consolidate the popular base of AKP, which is the foundation of Erdoğan’s authoritarian populist regime.

6 The Peasant Response

In order to understand and discuss the outcomes of NAP regarding its features of supporting Erdoğan’s regime, “Referendum” that was held in 16 April 2017 is an important source. In this referendum, it is seen that AKP has consolidated its power in the traditional Turkish peasant region, the central Anatolia, getting most of the votes, while losing votes in different regions such as Black Sea, Trakya, Egean and Marmara regions where agricultural production is still occupies important roles.

In a general overview, the results show that the Turkish peasantry has some hesitation or different tendencies regarding Erdoğan’s project, though Erdoğan got %51 of all the votes and used this for the legitimization of his project. It is also claimed that peasants, especially in some regions, obviously rejected the regime by voting highly for NO (Çobanoğlu 2017a, b). In these regions, it can be said that the proposed NAP could not change the general tendency and attitude of farmers, as these regions were also known as regions supporting the main oppositional party, Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi -CHP). In other words, the traditional CHP votes from peasants did not change because of the hegemony of NAP.

In order to see the organized peasant response to the Presidency Regime, we can investigate the discourse of two peasant organizations, namely, *Turkish Union of Agricultural Chambers* (Türkiye Ziraat Odaları Birliği -TZOB) and *Confederation of Small Farmers Unions* (Çiftçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu - Çiftçi-SEN). While the former is a technical organisation of the farmers, the latter has social-political claims.

TZOB is the main organization in Turkey, representing farmers in all regions and cities, organized almost in all the provinces where there is agricultural production. TZOB is based on a law defined

explicitly in the constitution, where all the farmers need to be registered and organized accordingly. Regarding this, it can be said that TZOB has a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure, consisting of all size of farmers, small, medium and big, and the current leadership is supportive of the government. On the contrary, Çiftçi-SEN is a small-farmers based, non-governmental organization that is the only member organization of Via Campesina in Turkey⁴. Despite the scope and organization capacity of Çiftçi-SEN, it is one of the most influential peasant organization that is based on its self-organization, trying to gather peasants in order to defend the rights of small farmers as well as organize the peasants from below.

The discourse of TZOB can be considered as a repetitive version of AKP Ministry, supporting especially the “nationalist” roots of NAP. On the contrary, Çiftçi-SEN was underlining the neoliberal roots of NAP, as considering NAP as a project supporting agribusiness while destroying the small peasantry (Çiftçi-SEN 2017). In this regard, NAP was criticized as deceiving people for its non-nationalist roots, while accusing NAP as “the confession of bankruptcy in agriculture” (Çiftçi-SEN 2017).

While these two important peasant organizations have taken their position on NAP, replacement in the Ministry has brought back another question: who is behind the replacement? Which are the forces that are in favor of NAP? Who benefits more from NAP? Although there was clear signs of global corporations taking over some of the sectors (such as seed production, corn, grain) it has been considered that, especially in the husbandry sector, the “nationalization” might work in favor of the Turkish agribusiness. As a result, this created a conflict between the different agribusiness shareholders who has conflicting interests, especially those export-oriented ones and the ones who have much tendencies for national production. Of course, it is impossible to decide on why this has happened today, but this replacement should be considered as an important fact regarding analyzing the affects of NAP in the Turkish agriculture.⁵

7 Conclusion: an overview of the year so far and new directions

The summer has just finished with 2 important peasant activities, following the “Justice” action of the main opposition party, namely, Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi -CHP). CHP leadership had organized a march from the capital Ankara to largest city, Istanbul, while masses of people joining to demand justice. This was a counter attack to the AKP’s dubious win in the Presidency Referendum, demanding justice for the different sectors of society, while consolidating popular support for the 2019 general elections.

This big march was followed by “Justice for Hazelnut” march, which took 3 days (18-20 September, 2017), taking place in two most important hazelnut production cities of Turkey (Ordu and Giresun, located in the Eastern Black Sea Region). The aim of this march was to oppose the prices determined by the government, and oppose to the general perspective of the government over hazelnut production. The other event was “Justice for Grape” (28 September 2017) resulted in a one-day workshop and demonstration, where the leader of CHP himself joined both events. Producers have articulated their own proposals and demanded justice and democratization in both of the sectors.

Laslty, in 2 October 2017, tobacco producers rise up against a legislation that would limit their production while giving control to global corporations. Almost all citizens of Adıyaman gathered in the center, overcoming police barricades and protesting the parliamentaries demanding justice for their production. This may be a sign for other protests coming in the future. In the end, this shows us that the NAP as a project for sake of hegemony is not working well for all sectors of agriculture. The conflicts within the sector will be revealed more in the close future and determine the destiny of the “nationalization” of Turkish agriculture.

⁴ For a more focused discussion on Çiftçi-SEN, see Doğançayır and Kocagöz (2017).

⁵ While this draft was almost complete, regulations on meat import has been discussed in the parliament.

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