



سياسة تركيا تجاه اقلياتها الاثنية

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المستخلص

تعكس سياسة أي دولة تجاه اقلياتها مدى استقرار تلك الدولة وتقدمها، كما تعكس تلك السياسة القوانين المطبقة على هذه الاقليات ومدى تحقيق حقوق هذه الاقليات من عدمها. ويتناول هذا البحث سياسة تركيا اتجاه اقلياتها الاثنية او العرقية، اذ تختلف هذه السياسة عن مثيلاتها اتجاه الاقليات الدينية، وقد ظهر ذلك جليا من خلال القوانين والدساتير التركية منذ تاسيس الدولة التركية الحديثة حتى عام ٢٠٠٢، وسنحاول ان نجيب على بعض التساؤلات التي تخص هذه السياسة وعن اهم الاقليات الاثنية التي تتواجد في المجتمع التركي. ومن هذه الاسئلة ما هي طبيعة السياسة التركية تجاه الاقليات الاثنية؟ وهل هناك فرق في سياستها عن بقية الاقليات الدينية؟ وما هي اهم هذه الاقليات؟. الكلمات المفتاحية: تركيا، الاقليات، السياسة.

Turkey's policy towards ethnic minorities

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Abstract

The policy of any country towards its minorities reflects the stability and progress of that state. It also reflects the enforced laws on these minorities and the extent to which these rights are fulfilled. This paper examines Turkey's policy towards its ethnic or racial minorities, as this policy differs from that of the others towards religious minorities. This has been evidently clear through Turkish laws and constitutions since the founding of the modern Turkish state until 2002, we will try to answer some questions about this policy and the most important ethnic minorities that existed in Turkish society. Among these questions are: what is the nature of Turkish politics towards minorities? Is there a difference in policy from other religious minorities? What are the most important minorities?

Key words: Turkey, minorities, politics.



Turkey's policy towards ethnic minorities

Turks can be divided into 2 parts depending on Ethnicity and language, the first part consists of people who has the Turkish identity which includes origin, language, history and culture. Those people make the vast majority and they are 85% of the population. The second part depends on the political, legal and social identity. These ethnic minorities belong to different lineages, languages, sects and cultures, and they exist all over Turkey. They also belong to the Turkish identity, and their common relations to the second part are citizenship, geography, mutual history and the Turkish language. The mother language, Turkish, is widely spread in Turkey, same as other countries, as well as other languages and dialects, most of which refer to the second part that we talked about earlier, i.e. The ethnic minorities who speak both Turkish and the language that refers to the individual's origin and ethnicity. Kurdish, Arabic, Bosnian, Adyghe, Abkhazian, Armenian, Georgian, Roman, Greek and Syriac are some of the most important languages that are widely spread among ethnic minorities, as well as other languages and dialects.

Ethnic minorities in Turkey suffered more than religious minorities, because the first was referred to by the Treaty of Lausanne, despite limiting it to 3 religions. The ethnic minorities, on the other hand, didn't find any legal support to refer back to against the Turkish state policy. This issue remained under the sympathy of the central and local governments as well as the variation of circumstances that required gaining the sympathy of some ethnic minorities in the election seasons, this was practiced by approaching them through false promises which can insure strengthening the chances of candidates in hopes to gain the votes of these minorities.

Before going into Turkey's policy towards its ethnic minorities, it is essentially necessary to know the circumstances of these minorities (The Kurds will be taken as a model to know the conditions of these minorities). After the end of World War I and the developments that took place and conferences and treaties that dealt with minorities. In the peace conference in Paris held in a 1919, the Kurds (forming the second nationality after the Turks in the modern Turkish state) sent an unofficial delegation to the conference based on the promises of Britain and what was stated in the principles of the American President



Woodrow Wilson (The sovereignty of the Turkish parts and the right giving of self-determination to non-Turkish peoples and the freedom passaging in the straits for all ships with international warranty)⁽¹⁾.

The delegation was headed by General Sharif Pasha, who was elected by (Association of the almighty and promotion of Kurdistan, the Kurdish Independence Party, the Kurdish Assembly, and the Democratic Party Kurd) to represent the Kurds in the conference also included in his membership of (Fakhri Adel Bey, Adel Bey Mardini, Saleh Bey Hosni, director of Sherif Pasha's affairs, Ghaleb Ali Bey, secretary of Sherif Pasha). Sheikh Mahmoud Alhafeed tried to send a special delegation to Paris to join Sharif Pasha, but the English prevented him from arriving⁽²⁾.

The head of the Kurdish delegation Sharif Pasha contacted the British representative at the conference and offered him the independence of Kurdistan and subjecting it under the British Mandate. He also coordinated with the Armenians, who were represented at the conference with two delegations. The first was headed by Ouadis Ohanisian, head of the delegation of the Republic of Armenia, and the second headed by Minister Bogus Nubar Pasha, the former Egyptian minister who represented Armenian provinces in Turkish territory⁽³⁾.

The Ottoman delegation represented Balddam Farid Pasha wanted to prevent the Kurdish issue from being discussed at the conference, which led to the coordination between Kurdish and the Armenian delegations headed by Minister Bogus Nupar Pasha who represented the Armenian provinces in the Turkish territory issued a joint statement to miss the opportunity on the Ottoman delegation which stated:

(...In full agreement, we appeal to the Peace Conference to grant us the legitimate authority in accordance with the principles of nationalities, for both United and independent Armenia, and independent Kurdistan, with the help of a major country, we affirm our full agreement of respect for the legitimate rights of minorities in both countries)⁽⁴⁾

The Paris Peace Conference ended on January 21st, 1920 issuing five treaties Upon completion of the issues discussed. The Treaty of Sèvres was concluded between the victorious states in the World War I and the Ottoman State. ⁽⁵⁾ It discussed the latter's private affairs, including addressing the problem of Kurdish and Armenian minorities. The Ottoman State agreed to the Treaty of Sèvres on August 10th, 1920



which consisted of 13 chapters and 433 items. The sixty-second, sixty-third and Sixty-fourth items confirmed on the independence of Kurdistan and Armenia from the Ottoman State⁽⁶⁾.

However, the Turks represented by Mustafa Kemal rejected the provisions of the Treaty of Sevres and treated as a humiliating treaty for Turkish. The Turks said that the Kurds' problem is an internal problem that can be solved without the intervention of foreign countries. The Treaty of Sèvre has been replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne, which concluded its session on July 24th, 1924 and discussed and amended the Treaty of Lausanne including the problem of minorities⁽⁷⁾.

The Treaty defined these minorities as the "Religious minorities," and to accept all minorities as being of Turkish origin, and not granted any minority privileges on account of other minorities. According to article 40 of the treaty, non-Muslim Turkish minorities will enjoy the same Rights and guarantees granted to Turkish Muslim citizens⁽⁸⁾. They are allowed to establish and manage educational institutions Social, religious and charitable of all kinds. Minorities are allowed to use their own language and to practice their religion freely. Turks residing in western Thrace, located within the Greek border, are replaced by Roma citizens living in Istanbul⁽⁹⁾.

It is noticeable that the Treaty of Lausanne did not refer to the ethnic minorities, but only religious minorities it described them as non-Muslim, which further complicated the situation for ethnic minorities despite that the latter constituted the large population of Kurds, causing a deep suffering to these minorities and vanished the hope they were aspiring, which was supported at some extent in the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres.

The Treaty of Lausanne constituted the cornerstone of Turkey's policy of religious minorities, and deliberately overlooked the status of ethnic minorities when it ignored what occurred in the Sèvres Treaty of the state's policy towards minorities, since they ignored ethnic groups (except the Armenians who were approved to establish their republic)⁽¹⁰⁾.

Thus, the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne gave legitimacy to the successive Turkish governments in forgetting national minorities and treating them as it sees fit without considering the rights of these minorities or their requirements.



After confirming that the government of Kemal Atatürk does not recognize the provisions of the Treaty of Sevres, and refuses to give them any of their rights, there was the movement of Kurdish leaders. Khalid Bey Jabri collaborated with Abdul Qadir Al Nahri and Abdul Rahman Hakkari and Yusuf Zia are actively involved in the implementation of the Sèvres Treaty. The Kurdistan resurgence society sent several memorandums to The League of Nations to implement what occurred in the Sèvres Treaty⁽¹¹⁾. A telegram was sent to the Turkish national assembly to demand a Kurdish state in the states of (Diyarbakir, Aziz, Wan and Batlis) otherwise the Kurds will have to fight over their right by the force of arms, but a government of Mustafa Kamal eluded and tried to circumvent the Kurds by claiming that the government was considering their demands and that they would take decisions in favor of the Kurds, but the Turkish government sought to split the Kurdish row by trying to bring some Kurdish elements by tempting them with positions and money or sometimes threatening, as a response a Kurdish revolution in 1921 (Küçükçeri's revolt) encompassed large areas of Turkey, then brutally suppressed it⁽¹²⁾.

Successive Turkish constitutions came as the constitutions of 1924, 1961, and 1982. They were supplements to the Treaty of Lausanne concerning minorities in general and ethnic minorities in particular. These minorities objected to these policies by making demands for the revival of their own languages through establishing schools to teach their children; and centers which take care of their customs and traditions, but it was refused by the Turkish governments.

Speaking of Turkish politics towards ethnic minorities, Abdullah Ogelan the leader and founder of a Kurdish workers party in Turkey, who led a military insurgency in 1984 in Turkey, is describing Turkey's policy towards ethnic minorities: (Whoever destabilizes this small republic of Turkey, which defined its status, role, and function in the Middle East has been framed on the basis of strict anti - Islamism and the Kurds, and communism and anyone who distracts itself from its course will be considered an enemy submitted to extermination and elimination)⁽¹³⁾.

In order to know Turkey's policy towards ethnic minorities, the Turks can be divided according to ethnicity and language. The first section consists of the Turkish identity which includes origin, language,



history, culture constituting the overwhelming majority of 85% of the total population. The second section relies on political, law, and social identity, where these ethnic minorities belong to different genealogies, languages, sects and cultures. They exist throughout Turkey, and they, in turn, belong to the Turkish identity. The first and second sections share in geography, common history, and Turkish language. The first language (Turkish) is spread in Turkey, and other languages and dialects mostly refer to the second section shown above by ethnic minorities, which speaks Turkish and the language that shows the first of this individual and to which race belongs. One of the most important languages Spread among the Turkish ethnic minorities are Kurdish Arab, Bosnian, Circassian, Abkhaz, Armenian Georgian, Romanian, Greek, Syrian and other languages and dialects⁽¹⁴⁾.

Ethnic minorities in Turkey suffered more than religious minorities because the former was referred to in a treaty, although Lausanne is defined by three religions, ethnic minorities have found no legal basis for invoking it, however, this remains subject to the sympathy of the central and local governments and the variation the conditions for earning some ethnic minorities in election seasons by getting closer to them by releasing promises that will ensure that the candidates' chances are lifted so that they may win the votes of one minority or another Following are the most important ethnic minorities in Turkey.

The following are the most important ethnic minorities in Turkey:

1- Kurds

Kurds are the second largest ethnic group after Turks. According to 2005 statistics, the population of Turkey is more than 73 million. Kurds are 14 million or 20% of the population, even though the semi-official estimations states that it's 5 – 7 million Kurds. With reference to the fact that official statistics don't include ethnic discrimination, and didn't acknowledge the presence of ethnic minorities⁽¹⁵⁾. The geographic presence of Kurds in Turkey is centered in the southeastern areas, adjacent to Syria, Iraq and Iran. The place where Kurds exist is called (Kurdistan), meaning the country of Kurds, it's divided into northern Kurdistan, referring to the Kurds of Turkey, southern Kurdistan, referring to the Kurds of Iraq, Eastern Kurdistan, referring



to the Kurds of Iran, and western Kurdistan, referring to the Kurds of Syria, the Kurds in these countries aspire to establish the (Great Kurdistan) state.

The Kurds of Turkey are centered in the following provinces: Hakkâri, Van, Ağrı, Bitlis, Muş, Diyarbakır, Ova, Kars, Mardin, Bingöl, Elazığ, Tunceli, Adıyaman, Arzabkhan, Gaziantep and Malatya. Kurds in Turkey are distributed, depending on sects, to Sunnis (70%), Alawites (30%), with a minority of 10 – 20 thousand Yazidis or (Yezidis). They all speak Kurmanji (which means the known Kurdish). Traditional religious methods are active in their ranks, with the Naqshbandi and Qadiriya methods being the most prominent, while the tribal organization dominates their community⁽¹⁶⁾. The Kurdish presence in Turkey doesn't stop at the places that we have mentioned, because the economic backwardness in these places in addition to the constant security disturbances between Kurdish fighters and the government forces, has encouraged a large number of them, through decades, to emigrate to safer places, both Istanbul and Ankara were each a separate target, which resulted in creating neighborhoods in both cities, inhabited by Kurds only, as they are estimated to 3 – 4 million in Istanbul. In addition, large numbers of the Kurds of Turkey immigrated directly to Western Europe countries where they are estimated to be around 1 million, half of them are in Germany⁽¹⁷⁾.

The main problem which the Kurds of Turkey were facing was that the Turkish government didn't acknowledge them as an ethnic group different from the Turkish ethnicity, thus refusing to grant them what can give them the ability to embody their independent identity, culturally and politically, such as the right to be educated in Kurdish in schools, or establishing associations that enhances the Kurdish culture in its different manifestations, or opening radio and TV stations in Kurdish, and so forth of what expresses the privacy of a distinctive culture. Depending on this, the perfectionist ideology and subsequently the policy of the Turkish state towards minorities, didn't acknowledge Kurds as an ethnic group different from the Turkish ethnicity ever, but considered them Turks, and they used to call them "the Turks of the mountains". The Kurds direct response was to carry out uprisings and disobedience movements in the 20's and 30's of the 20th century, the most important of which was ShiekhSa'd Al- Kurdi uprising in 1925,



Agri uprising between 1928 and 1930, and Dersim uprising in 1937⁽¹⁸⁾. These uprisings were faced by bloody repression by the Turkish army.

That was followed by the state prohibiting, in the constitution and laws, the establishment of any ethnic and religious organization, or association, or party, thus preventing the Kurds from establishing parties that show their political aspirations in independency or autonomy, for example, when the Kurds established parties that implied a Kurdish identity, they were banned and their leaders were imprisoned or exiled. These bans were increased in the first half of the 90s of the last century⁽¹⁹⁾.

This official view, which viewed Kurds as Turks, remained until late 1991, because in this year the Turkish government issued a law that allows using Kurdish language, article number 140, 141 and 163 were also removed from the Turkish punishments law, which resulted in the release of 30000 Kurdish prisoner out of 43000⁽²⁰⁾. Establishing the labor party in Kurdistan in 1978 was the most important turning point in the history of Kurds facing the official Turkish policy towards them, the party started an armed guerilla war under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan in 1984, various peace and truce attempts with the Turkish government permeated it, one of them was in August 1998. In the same period, under the pressure of the party and the Turkish government, Öcalan moved from his exile in Syria to Russia then Italy then Greek, then he arrived at the Greek embassy in Nairobi in Kenya, where he was arrested and sent to Turkey in February 1999 in an operation that provoked the outrage of Kurds around the world and ended the last truce, Öcalan was put under trial in Turkey in the 28th of April 1999, accused of great treason to Turkey according to article number 125 of the Turkish punishments law. He was sentenced to death in the 29th of June 1999 for establishing and managing an armed terrorist organization. His party announced a new truce in the 1st of September 1999 and his forces retreated from Turkey to the north of Iraq, and the party went through political changes which included declaring the end of war, and moving to political action. Turkey changed the death sentence of Öcalan to lifetime prison in 2002, as a part of the series of removing the death punishment in Turkey, and trying to adapt to the European Union law. Öcalan is still in İmralı prison until this day⁽²¹⁾.

2- Arabs



According to a statistic done by the Arab Council in Antalya in Mars 2011 depending on the students researches in the white Mediterranean Sea college, the Arab minority was distributed in all of the provinces of Turkey without any exceptions, Istanbul was the lead with 1.780.775 Arabs, which makes them 13.17% out of the population of the province that is 13.524.240, Şanlıurfacamein second with 780.030 Arabs, which makes them 45.45% of the population of the province, which is 1.716.254. Antakya came in 3rd with 690.850 Arabs which makes them 46.86% of the population of the province that is 1.474.223. The provinces with the least number of Arabs were: Tunceli with 3.540 Arabs, which makes them 4.16% of the population of the province, which is 85.962, Gümüşhane with 4.850 Arabs, which makes them 3.66% of the population of the province, which is 132.374, Bayburt with 4.870 Arabs, which makes them 6.35% of the population of the province, which is 76.724. In 2011 the population of Turkey was 74.724.269 citizens, Arabs were 8.309.540 in the same year, which makes them 11.12% of the total population⁽²²⁾.

Most Arabs in Turkey follow the Alawite sect, Sunni Muslims comes after, then Christians who were around 10000 citizens. Arabs were denied from using their language in education, radio and television broadcasting just like the other Turkish ethnic minorities, a thing that caused many Alawite Arabs to immigrate to Syria, because the latter encouraged the educated Alawites to immigrate to it⁽²³⁾.

3- Gypsies

Official statistics estimate Gypsies in Turkey to be 50.000 citizens, but civil society organizations estimate their numbers to be around 3 and 3.5 million citizens. Most Gypsies are Muslims, they are divided into Sunnis and Alawites despite the existence of an Orthodox Christian minorities and even less who are Protestants. Gypsies aren't organized in general, as they have no associations nor institution that mind their affairs, in addition, a lot of them don't even have an identity card, and due to that there hasn't been any remarkable official records of the Turkish governments transgressions towards them⁽²⁴⁾.

Most Gypsies live in western Thrace in the European portion of Istanbul, and all over Turkey. Gypsies are a closed society, and their allies are mostly crowded, also, they are viewed by Turks as a backward society, most Gypsies speak Turkish as well as their Gypsy language which belongs to the Indo-European languages⁽²⁵⁾.



4- Caucasians

Caucasians were mislabeled as Circassians, those Circassians are one out of 3 main Caucasian ethnic groups which originally goes back to the Caucasus Mountains or Caucasia. The number of Caucasians in Turkey is estimated to be 3 million citizens, and according the Federation of Caucasian Society, Circassians make 90% of the Caucasian groups while the other groups make the remaining 10%, the superiority of Circassians in numbers came as a result of opening borders with Georgia in 1988, because Georgia had a problem with the Soviet Union and it denied Circassians their identity, the thing that lead Circassians to immigrate to Turkey. Circassians follow Islam and they belong to the Sunni sect, they speak Adyghe language, which is one of many Circassian languages, this language has many dialects spoken by Adyghe people or Circassians such as: Azbakhs, Aljdog, Qbertaii, Shabsug, Jumkawi and others (the last one is a unified dialect that is used in writing the modern Circassian books)⁽²⁶⁾. Georgians comes after Circassians out of the Caucasian groups, their numbers are estimated to be between 70000 to 80000 citizens, who immigrated from Russia in the late 18th century and lived in Adana, most of them are Muslims who follow the Sunni sect. There is also a small percentage of them who are Orthodox Christians, Turkish is their language, and they also speak Georgian. Then comes the 3rd Caucasian group in Turkey who are Azerbaijanis. Their numbers are estimated to be 75000 citizen, most of them are Shia Muslims, they are centered in the eastern south of Turkey with the Kurds, and they speak Turkish and Azerbaijani. In addition to the Caucasian groups mentioned above, there are Caucasian minorities of Abkhazians, Dagestanis, Checnians and Ossetians who immigrated from Russian and settled in Turkey in mid-19th century. Each group has its own language in addition to Turkish. The Dagestani language belongs to the Caucasian Iberian languages, while the Ossetian language belongs to the Indo-European languages. All of these Caucasian groups follow Sunni Islam. The Federation of Caucasian Societies states that these groups settle in 15 provinces distributed in north, west, middle and south of Turkey⁽²⁷⁾.

5- The people of Laz

The people of Laz are originally Georgian, they were originally Christians but they converted to Islam after the ruled Caucasus in the 16th century. Their presence in Turkey is centered in two places, the



first one is located in the north east of Turkey, adjacent to the shores of the black sea in Ardeşen and Fındıklı of Rize province, and in Arhavi and Hoba of Artvin province. These two provinces used to be called (Lazistan). They live as minorities in the adjacent provinces such as Çamlıhemşin and Borska provinces. As for the second group, they left their places, due to the Russian expansion over the after the war between them in (1877 – 1878 A.D), and lived in the northwest of Anatolia in Izmit Kocaeli of Karaman province, Akasakusa of Düzce province, Sakarya province and Zenguldak of Bartın province, in addition, a lot of them lived in Ankara and Istanbul⁽²⁸⁾. Most statistics point out that their numbers reach 250000 citizen. The people of Laz speak Turkish and the language of Lazia which is close to Mangolian, Georgian and the Safani language (the languages of South Caucasus)⁽²⁹⁾.

Conclusions

The Turkish state has a religious and ethnic diversity in its human components, like most countries in the world. The policy of the Turkish state treated these minorities differently, although it was its policy to marginalize minorities of all kinds, yet minorities were the biggest losers of these policies. The Lausanne treaty drawn up the Internal and external policies of countries, as well as constitutions drawn up for minorities in general and ethnic in specific.

The treaty referred to religious minorities as non-Muslims, and ignored the other ethnics. These convictions seem to be a deliberate policy and as a result of prior planning, for example, The Kurds who are the second ethnic community after Turks, were called (Mountain Turks), reflecting the views of successive Turkish governments to the rest of the ethnic components. These minorities were prevented from most of their rights. They were even denied to use the languages that belong to them by the Turkish government. They rejected their applications of opening language schools, centers and neighborhood clubs of reviving their own customs and traditions.

The modern Turkish states throughout this study (except in 2008 where the Kurds were allowed to use their language) has encouraged to raise the Turkish ethnicity, and ignored the rest belonging to the state. It seems that this policy came from the legacy left by Atatürk's principles, which was followed by Turkey's nationalism, and the Turkish army worked to stabilize and protect them and punish any



government attempt to divert the course and principles of Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the Turkish Republic.

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²⁷ İrfan KALAYCI, Tarih, Kültür ve İktisat Açısından Çerkesya (Çerkesler), T.C. Türk Şişirliğı ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı Türk İnternational Cooperation and Koordination Agency, AVRASYA ETÜDLERİ 47/2015-1 (71-111), pp.74-76.

²⁸ BRAUND, D., Georgia in antiquity: a history of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 BC – AD 562, Oxford University Press, p. 93.

²⁹ <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lazlar>.