

Netzwerk Türkei Working Paper No 1:

**Social Security in Turkey.**

**An Example of the Southern Model?**

The Role of State, Market, and the Family in Welfare Provision

by Daniel Grütjen ([gruetjen@hotmail.com](mailto:gruetjen@hotmail.com))

**Abstract**

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At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Europe is actively discussing whether Turkey should become a full member of the European Union. While Turkish critics fear the threat of uncontrolled liberalization and the loss of national sovereignty from such membership, those in the EU member states argue that Turkey is politically and economically underdeveloped and emphasize the alleged cultural identity of the Occident. At the same time, those in favor of a full membership highlight the possible advantages for both sides. The heated debate is and remains highly polarized: while one side stresses the differences, the other side points at the similarities between Turkey and the EU.

This working paper aims to advance this ongoing debate by focusing on a highly neglected aspect of Turkey, namely, its welfare regime. Theoretically underpinned by the “regime approach”, it shows that Turkey resembles the key characteristics of the Southern Model of welfare as to be found in the Mediterranean welfare states.<sup>1</sup> While a number of scholars highlight the similarities between the Turkish and the Southern European welfare arrangements (Gough 1996; Saraceno 2003; Bugra/Keyder 2005), a comparative classification of Turkey has not been offered so far.

An adequate analysis of the current social policy reforms in Turkey and their possible outcomes must be based on comprehensive empirical knowledge of the Turkish welfare regime, its key characteristics, historical origins, and the main actors involved. Hence, this

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<sup>1</sup> The term “welfare state“ describes those institutionalized forms of social protection that secure its citizens from the risks of modern society on the basis of social rights. Furthermore, these rights granted on the basis of citizenship shape and determine the individual’s position within society. In cross-national comparisons, the activities of the welfare state, the policies embraced, its level of protection, as well as its linkage to the market’s and the family’s role in social provision vary significantly. In relation to this definition of the term “welfare state”, the term “welfare regime” denotes the fact that legal and organizational features of the welfare state, the family, and the economy are systematically interwoven. As a result, the term “welfare regime” stresses that cross-national clusters in welfare arrangements unveil not only regarding social policies but a variety of social structures (Esping-Andersen 1990).

paper consists of three empirical parts: first, an analysis of Turkey's economic and political development focusing on matters of class relationship, institutionalization, and gender; second, a case study of the contemporary Turkish welfare regime. It becomes apparent in the analysis how the activities of the various providers of welfare, the state, the market, and the family, are interdependent in the case of Turkey; third, grounded in the empirical findings of the historical analysis and the case study, I then investigate the question whether Turkey resembles the key characteristics of the Southern Model by international comparison. A key question addressed here is the role that the family plays in welfare provision.

The historical and comparative analysis of this paper proves that the Turkish welfare regime matches the key characteristics of the Southern European Model of welfare. Focusing on the historical legacy of the Turkish welfare regime, significant parallels to Southern Europe become apparent. In correspondence with the Mediterranean countries, class coalition in Turkey is characterized by a weakly organized labor movement. Additionally, Turkey shares with the Mediterranean countries an authoritarian path of nation building and an overpowering bureaucracy, which appear to be major obstacles for civil society participation and democratic representation. Despite these similarities, Turkey differs from the Southern European welfare states regarding its resistance to social reform. While in Southern Europe processes of decentralization and privatization and a strong impetus of civil society can be observed in the last decades, the central government in Turkey is only slowly adapting to the socio-economic changes. Not until recently did the Turkish government begin to place an emphasis on civil society and regional concepts of poverty alleviation.

The classification of the Turkish welfare regime via cross-national comparison made clear that Turkey also fits the key characteristics of the Southern Model of welfare. Focusing on the role of the state in welfare provision, the only difference is the lack of a universal health system in Turkey. Besides this, the similarities are remarkable. The Turkish social security system strongly protects an occupational core, the level of state penetration in the social realm is extremely low, and a safety net in form of a social assistance scheme is absent. The most significant common trait of the welfare regimes in Turkey and the rest of Southern Europe is the importance of the family as a main institution of welfare. For a significant part of the Turkish population the family is the main and often the only safety net and provider of social services. The most striking difference to the Southern Model is the low impact of civil society, the market, and regional authorities in Turkey. In this respect, Turkey clearly stands apart from the ideal type and the Mediterranean real types.

The paper argues that Turkey is an example of the Southern Model of welfare, the question that follows is whether Turkey will choose a similar path of welfare development in the future. The recent social policy reforms in Turkey suggest similar developments at least to a certain degree. Corresponding with Southern Europe, an upcoming reform is going to lead to the establishment of a universal health system. While the draft introduces a system based on contributions, all Turkish citizens under the age of 18 will be covered by the state. As a result, for the first time in Turkish history the state would grant benefits on the basis of social rights and independent of the capacity of the family to take responsibility. Turkey has also followed the path of the Mediterranean countries with recent reforms of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, according to which more responsibilities will be delegated to the market, regional authorities, and civil society.

Despite the similarities, there are significant differences between Turkey and Southern Europe. The main obstacle to social policy reform appears to be the predominant perception of statehood in Turkey which is deeply affected by the authoritarian character of nation building. The central state is still perceived as a paternalistic leader rather than a platform for political participation of different societal interest groups and classes. Accordingly, citizenship is still based on ethnic unity rather than civil and social rights.

In a nutshell, this perception of statehood and citizenship lies at the heart of most conflicts in Turkish society today. Questions of multiple identities in Turkey, such as the Kurdish, the Alevi, or the Christian; the low degree of civil society organization; the role of women in society; the political power of the military; the control of the state over matters of religion; all these cleavages and conflicts are related to questions of statehood and citizenship just described in the social realm. Ayse Bugra, an expert on social policy interviewed for this paper, argues that the recent social developments are part of a “cognitive change” in Turkey. To what extent this cognitive change will lead to a shift in the discourse of statehood and citizenship remains to be seen. Turkey certainly needs this cognitive change to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **References**

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