

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

# Türkiye's Diaspora Engagement Policy: Change in Perspective Since 2010\*

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the diaspora engagement policy of Türkiye, which affects the lives of more than 6.5 million Turkish citizens and their descendants. The main research question raised in this paper is “What has changed in the Turkish diaspora engagement policy since 2010 with the establishment of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)?” Following an analysis of the diaspora engagement policy of Türkiye in the socio-economic, political-legal and socio-cultural spheres, it is concluded that since 2010, in order to maintain a connection with the transnational diaspora, long-distance nationalism has emerged as a prominent factor. The novelty of the policy lies in its redefinition of the target groups, the features of the diaspora, and the policy goals, actors, tools and stakeholders. Türkiye has begun to target the reintegration of post-migrant generations with Türkiye in the socio-cultural sphere through new policy tools, and the long-distance nationalist perspective of its diaspora engagement policy has thus led to the transformation of Türkiye into a “transnational nation-state”.

## Keywords

Turkish diaspora, Diaspora engagement policy, long-distance nationalism, transnationalism, Türkiye, International migration.

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## Introduction

With the growing interest in international migration, a considerable shift has been seen toward studies of citizenship, immigrant integration and immigrant networks from the perspective of the host country. The consequences of international migration started to be discussed from the perspective of the countries of origin in the 1990s, leading to a rise in the attention paid to diaspora engagement policies by academia, as well as scholarly interest in the institutions and policies established in the countries of origin aimed at accessing their migrant populations.

As Mügge (23) argues, migrant transnationalism and homeland involvement are both dynamic concepts. The policy responses of homelands aim primarily to capture the dynamic nature of their diaspora and fulfill their needs and expectations while pursuing their own policy agenda. In this regard, in diaspora engagement policies, the perspective of “transnationalism from above” is generally preferred, and among the varied policy tools, a prioritization of the target groups within the diaspora has become evident.

In the present study, the engagement policy of Türkiye towards its emigrant diaspora (Turks abroad – Yurtdışı Türkler) will be investigated, with particular focus on the perspective of the YTB – the government institution overseeing issues related to the diaspora of the Republic of Türkiye. The study will investigate the change in the perspective of the Turkish diaspora engagement policy since 2010, when the YTB was established, based on such open sources as legislation, policy documents, reports, plans, publications, the YTB website, development plans, government programs and the 2019 annual plan of the Presidential Office.

In order to avoid anachronistic misunderstandings, it is important to note that even before accepting the diaspora concept, the Republic of Türkiye had maintained a diaspora policy since its establishment (Aksel 205-208).<sup>1</sup> Turks abroad were considered separate from “External Turks”, as while the former refers to emigrants and their descendants, the latter are “co-ethnics” – being the kin and relative communities. The scope of this study is limited to Turks abroad, being the emigrant-origin diaspora of Türkiye.

Turks living abroad first entered the policy agenda with the migration of labor from Türkiye, mainly to Europe, as a result of labor recruitment

agreements struck in the 1960s. Family reunifications were the main drivers of migration between the 1970s and 1980s, while the Turkish diaspora started to become more heterogenous with the departure of ethnic and religious minorities and leftist groups with appeals for asylum during the 1980s and 1990s. Different institutions were given responsibility for Turkish emigrants following the onset of labor migrations from Türkiye in the 1960s, including the Ministry of Labor and Social Security - Foreign Relations and Abroad Worker Services General Directorate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Bilgili and Siegel 281-283).

The initial policies identified the target groups as workers abroad and overseas workers at the outset. With the realization of the permanency of Turkish workers with emigrations from Türkiye for family reunification during the 1970s and 1980s, the target group started to be defined in policies as “expatriates (*gurbetçi*)” between the 1980s and 1990s, and as “citizens living/working abroad” starting from the 1980s.

Türkiye refrained from referring to the diaspora concept, declining to use the term either for the kin or its citizens not only in its institutional frameworks, but also in policy documents and related discourse (Yaldız 62). This could be attributed to the negative connotations of the term in Turkish, given its common usage to refer to such ethnic and religious groups as Armenians, Greek and Jews in the Ottoman era whose members left the Ottoman territories for Europe and the United States (Tölölyan 4; Köşer-Akçapar and Bayraktar-Aksel 135-136). Furthermore, the political engagement of the Armenian diaspora related to the allegations of genocide against Türkiye have also contributed to the negative perceptions on the concept in Türkiye.

The term diaspora started to be used to refer to Turkish emigrants and their descendants following the establishment of the YTB and introduction of institutionalized policies. The term first appeared in an official document under the title of “Our Citizens Living Abroad and Related Communities” in the 64th Governmental Plan of the Prime Ministry of Türkiye (154-155), although no explanation was provided. The YTB, as the body in Türkiye with responsibility for the diaspora, used the term “diaspora” first in its 2017 Annual Activity Report. Then in 2019, the Strategic Plan of the YTB

became the first document to provide a definition of the Turkish diaspora, using the term to refer not only to Turkish citizens abroad, but also kin and related communities with a historical perspective, and international students receiving education in Türkiye under Turkish scholarships with the proximity perspective.

There is an emerging body of literature on the Turkish diaspora(s) and the related engagement policies that defines the diaspora either in a broad sense by including kin and related communities (Yaldız; for details see Öktem 12), or in a narrow sense, referring only to Turkish emigrants (Şahin-Mençütek and Baser 2018; Adamson 2019; Aydın, *The New* 2014). In the present article, the narrower understanding of the term is embraced that defines Turkish emigrants and their descendants living abroad (Turks abroad)<sup>2</sup> as the Turkish diaspora.

The body of existing literature on Türkiye's engagement with its diaspora is focused mainly on the chronology of its policies in this area, and beginning of 2000s is generally underlined as the beginning of the reorientation of Turkish foreign policy with the entry into power of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government following the 2002 general elections (Aydın and Ostergaard-Nielsen 403). Among the previous studies, there have been those that interpret the engagement with the diaspora as foreign policy tool (Köşer-Akçapar and Bayraktar-Aksel 138; İçduygu and Bayraktar-Aksel 183; Adamson 224; Ünver 188; Aydın, *Turkish Diaspora Policy* 175), while others highlight the institutional structure and the policies of different stakeholders. The present study marks 2010, as the year of the establishment of the YTB under the Prime Ministry of the Republic of Türkiye, as a turning point. Although Türkiye ceased referring to Turks abroad as the emigrant community, referring to them rather as the transnational community at the beginning of 2000s, it intervened in this transformation in 2010 through the institutionalization of the diaspora engagement policy and the adoption of a long-distance nationalist perspective.

This article is presented in two main parts. The first part presents the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study, while the second part presents an analysis of the shift in the diaspora engagement policies of Türkiye in three distinct areas: political-legal, socio-economic and socio-cultural.

## **Diaspora Engagement: Transnationalism and Long-Distance Nationalism**

Although there is a lack of consensus on the definition of the diaspora concept, diaspora engagement policies refer mainly to those governing the relationships of diasporas residing outside of their home country of origin with their homeland. In this context, while trying to understand diaspora-related issues, there are two concerns: (1) The relationship between the diaspora and the nation-state, and (2) the new form of nationalism in both the diaspora and the home country perspective (Braziel and Mannur 7). While the former concern relates to transnationalism, the latter focuses mainly on long-distance nationalism. Prior to opening a discussion on transnationalism and long-distance nationalism, the diaspora concept is discussed in the following section.

### **Old Definition to New Phenomenon: Emigrant Diaspora**

The term “diaspora” means, etymologically, “scattering the seeds” and refers historically to those who were ejected involuntarily from their homeland (Anthias 560). For a long time, the term was used in reference to those exiled from their homelands and dispersed across many lands, and was associated with oppression and moral degradation, with references made to the Greek, Jewish and Armenian groups. As Safran highlights, literature on immigrant ethnic communities paid “little if any attention ... to diasporas” (83), just as studies of nationalism and ethnonationalism declined to discuss the concept. Since then, however, diaspora studies within the context of immigrant communities have gradually attracted the attention of the academy (Brubaker 1; Sheffer 16-17; Cohen 17-18).

Sheffer (16) posed an important question, inquiring “why and when migrants form a diaspora or join an already existing one” to highlight the features of diaspora, while other studies have identified four characteristics of the recent understanding of the concept: (1) the voluntary or involuntary dispersion of a group of people to more than one location, (2) sharing myths about their homeland, (3), having a commitment to their homeland and (4) sharing a group identity and a sense of belonging (Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism* 11; Gamlen 6). Safran (83–4) added two more characteristics to this diaspora concept when referring to immigrant communities, being the preservation of a return perspective, and feelings

of alienation and exclusion based on the belief that they have not been fully accepted by the host society. The International Organization for Migration (IOM 304) has underlined the importance of maintaining links with one's homelands and with each other based on the shared sense of history, identity or mutual experiences in the destination country in the formation of a diaspora. After conducting an analysis of the most common definitions and features of the diaspora in academic literature, Grossman proposed a decontested definition of the concept: "a transnational community whose members (or their ancestors) emigrated or were dispersed from their original homeland but remain oriented to it, and that preserve a group identity" (1267). In the rest of this article, Grossman's definition of the diaspora concept is employed, with the main features of diaspora being considered as their sharing of myths about their homeland, their commitment to their homeland and the preservation of their group identity.

### **Transnationalism from Above: Policies across Borders**

Within the context of diaspora studies, the terms "diaspora" and "transnational communities" are often used interchangeably, leading to some confusion. Despite the fact that all diaspora communities have a transnational character, not all transnational populations are considered diaspora (Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism* 21).

The technological advances in communication and transportation and the increasing impact of globalization that arose with the end of Cold War eased the interactions between communities residing in different countries. The subsequent new realities resulted in the rise of transnationalism and different uses of the term, one of which related to interactions with the diaspora (Vertovec 449-450). This new situation led to the introduction of a transnational perspective in studies of both migration and the diaspora in which the aim was to understand the multi-located immigrants who had established multi-stranded social groups beyond the borders of their nation-states and societies of origin and residence (Levitt and Glick Schiller 1006; Portes et al. 219; Faist, *The Volume* 207-209; Basch et al. 8).

While studies of "transnationalism from below" primarily take the form of micro level analyses and studies of immigrants, families and immigrant communities, the "transnationalism from above" perspective takes macro

level analyses of nation-states and international organizations as the unit of analysis (Smith and Guarnizo 25-9). Despite taking all five actors (the immigrant group, and the states and societies of the countries of origin and residence) as the subjects of research into transnationalism, it is the country of origin and “transnationalism from above” that are the main focus of the present study.

In summary, since the 1990s, the policy goals ensuring the Turkish diaspora's ties with Türkiye, their sense of belonging, and their integration into the civil and political life of the countries in which they reside are transnational in nature. The atmosphere in their countries of residence (in terms of xenophobia, racism, discrimination) since the 1990s has motivated the Turkish diaspora to strengthen their transnational activities and identities. Although Türkiye has recognized the transnational ways of being and living of Turks abroad since the 2000s, it wasn't until 2010 that a new policy perspective was introduced to respond their newly emerging needs, and can be considered a result of the long-distance nationalist shift in diaspora policies. This new perspective is discussed in the following section.

### **Nationalism without Borders: Long-Distance Nationalism**

In referring to long-distance nationalism at the beginning of 1990s, Benedict Anderson brought a new understanding to the concept of nationalism that was not territorially bounded. “The concept of a territorial homeland governed by a state that represents the nation” is important for long-distance nationalism and is similar to the classical understanding of nationalism (Glick Schiller and Fouron 20). Long-distance nationalism broadens the understanding of one's membership of a nation across borders, providing a link between people who live in various locations under different states who share a common identification with a territorial homeland and government. In line with long-distance nationalist perspective, the Turkish diaspora is considered within the context of the Turkish nation, and in this way, the national policies of Türkiye or national understandings are able to extend beyond the Turkish territory.

Both long-distance nationalism and diaspora refer to a sense of collective belonging and identification. While the former associates this sense with a nation-state, the later relates it to other forms of cross-border memberships

(Glick Schiller and Fouron 23). This article adopts the long-distance nationalist perspective in its definition of diaspora. In this way, other transborder linkages that are based on religion and shared history and proximity through transnational activities such as education networks are excluded from the scope of the study. Furthermore, the negative connotations of both diaspora and long-distance nationalism are not covered under this research, since the main aim is to discuss Türkiye's policies related to its engagement with its diaspora.

Long-distance nationalism has two aspects: sentimental and practical. While the sentimental side is related with feelings, the practical side covers the involvement of migrants and their descendants in the political, economic, legal, social and cultural life of their home country. First, in the context of the sentimental aspect, the diaspora engagement policies of Türkiye aim to foster feelings of belonging to Türkiye as a home country, and the Turkish community as a nation in which the Turkish culture forms the basis of its identity. The policies make use of the culturally loaded understanding of citizenship in this sense.

Second, participation in elections in Türkiye, organizing demonstrations related to national issues (Armenian allegations), sending remittances to Türkiye, making investments in their hometowns, participating in social and cultural activities, undergoing education in Türkiye, fulfilling one's military service obligation, and joining mother-tongue courses for the post-migrant generations are some of the expectations of the Turkish diaspora with a long-distance nationalist perspective.

This perspective led to the formation of a "transnational nation-state", according to which "both the nation and the authority of the government it represents extend beyond the state's territorial boundaries and incorporate dispersed populations" (Glick Schiller and Fouron 20-1), and brings responsibilities to Türkiye beyond its borders. The Turkish government makes the claim that it represents Turkish citizens abroad, extending the scope of its provided services to those residing in other nations, leading to both the government and nation taking on a transnational character. Although the transnational character of Türkiye's policies towards its diaspora started to be established in the 1990s, it was through the establishment of the YTB in 2010 that it gained a long-distance nationalist perspective. The



policy goal of reintegrating post-migrant generations into Türkiye and the Turkish nation, mainly in the socio-cultural sphere, is a clear reflection of this perspective.

### **Diaspora Engagement Policy of Türkiye: The Recreation of a Nation across Borders**

There is an emerging body of literature with focus on the diaspora engagement policies. Ragazzi (77-8) put forward an approach for the comparative analysis of diaspora policies that involved the definition of active and supplementary variables. In his classification of state typologies, Ragazzi employs active variables under the headings of state and bureaucratic control and policies, distinguishing between those that are: (1) symbolic, (2) religious and cultural, (3) social and economic and (4) related to citizenship. He assesses the relationship between four state typologies (expatriate, closed, global-nation and managed labor) and explanatory models with supplementary variables under three hypotheses, being structural-instrumental, ethnic affiliation and political-economic. Köşer-Akçapar and Bayraktar-Aksel (141-52) discuss the diaspora engagement policies of Türkiye and state-led transnationalism from four perspectives, being institutional, ideological, political and relational. In their comparison of diaspora policies, Pedroza and Palop Garcia (168-70), on the other hand, propose the use of an Emigrant Policies Index (EMIX) that incorporates policy and administration components. While the focus of the administration component is only the institutional setting at home and abroad, the policy component has 10 subcomponents, referring to the policies related to citizenship, suffrage, political competition, institutional participation, economy, obligations, culture, exit and transit, social affairs and symbolic aspects.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have also focused on the motivation of states in their engagement with their diasporas. Delano and Gamlen (44-6) in this regard explain the policies under the titles of tapping (utilitarian- and development-based), embracing (identity-based) and governing (international cooperation-based), while in Arkılıç's analysis of the diaspora policies of Türkiye, the explanatory factors are discussed at three levels, being domestic, transnational and international (7-14).

Immigrant integration literature tends to draw upon the sphere/dimension approach when assessing the integration of immigrants into their country

of residence (Lacroix 12; Entzinger and Biezeveld 10-30; Heckmann 15-8), with emphasis particularly on the socio-economic, political-legal and socio-cultural aspects of immigrant integration. The present study adopts the sphere approach that puts forward in immigrant integration literature for the assessment of Türkiye's diaspora engagement policies. This is a conscious preference, based on the similarities between Türkiye's diaspora engagement policies<sup>4</sup> and the immigrant integration perspective of European countries. This sphere approach also allows reflection on the long-distance nationalist shift in Türkiye's diaspora engagement policies since 2010 aimed at associating the Turkish diaspora – and more specifically, the post-migrant generations – with Türkiye and the Turkish nation. To highlight the novelty of the diaspora engagement policy perspective, the applied policies are analyzed chronologically, starting with the mass labor migration from Türkiye in the 1960s, in the socio-economic, political-legal and socio-cultural spheres.

### **Socio-Economic Sphere: Shift from an Expectation- to a Responsibility-Based Perspective**

In the 1960s and the early 1970s, labor migration was employed as a policy tool to reduce unemployment and to increase the influx of foreign currency through remittances. This contributed also to the industrialization of Türkiye by reducing the deficit in the balance of the payments and easing the lack of foreign currency (Sayari 92). Remittance inflows accounted for 109 percent of the foreign trade deficit in the balance of payment in 1972, and 154 percent in 1973, and an average of 30 percent a year between 1974 and 1978 (Artukoğlu 22). Despite the later increase in the the role of remittance inflows in the balance of payments, it has never returned to the 1972 levels.

A shift in the governmental perspective of remittances can be noted that started in 2004, when the expenditures made by Turkish citizens residing abroad during their stays in Türkiye started to be classified as “tourism revenue” rather than “labor revenue” (Artukoğlu 25). Tourism revenues are divided into two separate categories, being those from foreign sources and those of Turkish citizens residing abroad.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, remittances have lost their significance for the Turkish economy over time.

In the field of social security and retirement, since the 1960s, bilateral social security agreements have been signed with many countries in which Turkish citizens reside,<sup>6</sup> and the social security of Turkish citizens working abroad is ensured by Article 62 of 1982 constitution. Furthermore, in 1978, Türkiye gave the right to Turks abroad to retire also in Türkiye under certain conditions with the introduction of Law No. 2147. However, in 1985, Law No. 3201 applied restrictions on the pension conditions for Turks abroad who continued to work abroad or to receive social security benefits from abroad. With an amendment in 2019, the conditions for retirement were further tightened by raising the social security contribution for the days borrowed in the calculation of retirement.

Conscription was an important issue for Turks abroad, especially for the post-migrant generations, although the conditions have been made more flexible in time in response to transnational agendas and needs. Compulsory military service could be postponed until the age of 29 in 1979,<sup>7</sup> and in 1980, those obliged to complete their military service were given the option to pay a fee of 20,000 DM and do just 2 months of military service. Both the age limit and the cost of reducing one's military service obligation for Turkish citizens residing abroad have increased and reduced time to time depending on the defense needs of the country and the state of the economy (Bayraktar-Aksel 136). For example, the duration of military service was reduced to one month in 1992, and it was abolished in 2018 under the condition that the person would undergo distance education provided by the Ministry of National Defense.<sup>8</sup>

In 2011, in order to inform the Turkish diaspora about their rights and duties in Türkiye in such matters as customs, traffic, health, social security, retirement, education, military service and taxes, the "Pocket Guide for Turkish Citizens Abroad" was issued, and in 2015 it was transformed into a smartphone and tablet application that is updated regularly (YTB, 2015 *Faaliyet Raporu*).

The YTB has also sought to maintain a broader connection with the Turkish diaspora in the countries in which they reside by providing administrative and financial support to local NGOs since 2011. The name of the program has changed over time, being known as the İMECE<sup>9</sup> program at the time of its inception in 2013 (İ. Yıldız 62), transforming into the YTB Financial

Assistance Program in 2015. The financial assistance programs have become the main tool for the initiation of activities, with specific programs launched reflecting the policy priorities in the political-legal and socio-cultural spheres (YTB, *Mali Destek Programları*). Under such financial assistance programs, the YTB has provided approximately 100 million TL of funding to more than 1,000 projects in 70 countries since 2011 (YTB, *Sivil Toplum Destekleri*).

There are also policy goals targeting the regulation of the reverse brain drain of leading scientists (Presidency of Strategy and Budget -PSB-, *11. Developmental Plan* 144). Considering the scope of the programs (TÜBİTAK Support Program for the International Leader Researcher) and policy goals (PSB, *11. Developmental Plan* 106), this could also be referred to as the employment of the science diaspora for the transfer of know-how rather than reverse brain drain, and as such, a “Database of Researchers Abroad” (ARBIS-Y) was launched in 2014 (TÜBİTAK 2014). For a limited period, TÜBİTAK also ran a program entitled the “2232 Return to Homeland Research Scholarship Program” aiming to attract the attention of Turkish scientists and convince them to return in 2017. The program gained an international character in 2018, and shifted its goal from the reversal of brain drain to brain gain.

In summary, there has been a clear shift in diaspora engagement policies, from expectations of socio-economic contributions to the development of Türkiye through remittance inflows and investments from the Turkish diaspora, to a sense of responsibility of the government for the well-being of Turks abroad. While they were referred to as workers abroad in the 1960s, they started to be defined as expatriates and citizens living abroad in the 1980s, as Euro-Turks in the 2000s and as the diaspora since 2010 (Bayraktar-Aksel 210). With the acceptance of the transnational character of the Turkish diaspora and the change in the characteristics of the diaspora members, some revisions have been made to the policy tools since 2010, bringing changes to the conscription rules, tightening the conditions of retirement of Turks abroad in Türkiye by increasing social security contributions and implementing brain gain programs. Since 2010, in line with the long-distance nationalist policy perspective, Türkiye has started to apply a responsibility-based approach, contributing to the institutionalization of

the diaspora through financial assistance programs in support of NGOs in their countries of residence.

### **Political-Legal Sphere: Acceptance of the Transnational Character of the Turkish Diaspora**

The policies applied at the time of the initial migrations (in the 1960s and 1970s) were aimed mainly at regulation the migration of labor in line with socio-economic concerns. At this time, the State Planning Organization<sup>10</sup> and the Turkish Employment Service were the main administrative institutions overseeing the regulation of labor migration (Akgündüz 4-5). Political considerations started to emerge in the 1980s with the recognition of the permanency of Turkish immigrants, and two important legislative initiatives were launched to maintain Türkiye's ties with its citizens abroad aimed at ensuring their continued interest in Turkish political life. The first of these was the Amendment to the 1964 Citizenship Law in 1981<sup>11</sup> that legalized dual citizenship (Kadirbeyoğlu 4; İçduygu and Bayraktar-Aksel 177). The second initiative was detailed in Article 62 of the 1982 Constitution, and highlighted the policy priorities for Turkish citizens working abroad as being to safeguard their ties with Türkiye and ensure family unity, the education of the children, and the satisfaction of cultural needs and social security. These legislative changes aimed at regulating Türkiye's relations with its citizens abroad could be considered the first steps toward a long-distance nationalist perspective, the Turkish Constitution having previously limited the notions of nation and membership of the nation to citizens living in Türkiye.

The recognizing membership of the Turkish nation both within and outside Türkiye led to some paradoxical situations in the era following the 1980 coup d'état. On the one hand, dual citizenship led to the reintroduction of Turkish emigrants to the nation, and responded to their transnational needs, while on the other hand, the emphasis on "Turkish historical and moral values" stated in the preamble to the 1982 Constitution marked a divergence from the Kemalist ideology in the understanding of constitutional citizenship (İçduygu et al. 196-7), and Islam started to be injected as a core element of the Turkish identity and unity, together with Turkish ethnicity (Bayraktar-Aksel 114-5; Heper 49-50). This, however, has led to the exclusion of some groups (Kurds, Alevis etc.) from the Turkish identity and unity, and has emerged as a hurdle in the way of the inclusivity policy of Türkiye when

it comes to its emigrants (Bayraktar-Aksel 114-5). As a result, the excluded groups started to demand recognition from abroad with a long-distance nationalist perspective, which led to the further heterogenization of the Turkish diaspora and export of political disputes in the homeland.

Legislative changes were introduced in the political-legal sphere aimed at sustaining the legal ties of Turks abroad with Türkiye and facilitating their active political participation in both their countries of residence and origin, starting from the end of the 1980s. First, the participation of Turkish citizens living abroad in Turkish elections was permitted through votes cast at the custom gates, beginning 75 days prior to the elections, with an amendment to the Election Law in 1987 (Article 94 of Law No. 3377). Second, with an amendment to the Turkish Citizenship Law in 1995, Türkiye established a privileged non-citizen category (quasi citizenship) for Turkish emigrants and their descendants through the introduction of the “Pink Card” (replaced by the “Blue Card” in 2009) (Kadirbeyoğlu 9; Çağlar 273-9).<sup>12</sup> Although holders of a Pink Card, and later a Blue Card, had in principle almost the same rights as Turkish citizens,<sup>13</sup> they did not give a privileged position to their holders in practice due to the bureaucratic hurdles at the time of implementation that remained until 2012.

Third, a 1995 amendment to the Turkish Constitution (Law No. 4121) cleared the way for Turkish political parties to set up branches outside Türkiye. Attempts were also made to sustain the political participation and representation of Turks abroad, and the monitoring of the problems faced by Turks abroad through different mechanisms. Fourth, the Parliamentary Investigation Committee for the Scrutiny of the Administrative, Financial, Economic, Social and Cultural Problems faced by Workers Employed and Residing Abroad was established in 1993, followed in 1998 by the Advisory Committee for Turkish Citizens Living Abroad and the High Committee for Turkish Citizens Living Abroad, operating under the Prime Ministry (Bayraktar-Aksel 137), with responsibilities that included following the agenda of Turks residing abroad and developing better transnational policies.

Fourth, as a result of the work of these committees, the ability of Turkish citizens abroad to take part in elections without having to return to Türkiye entered the legislative agenda, although despite the 1995 amendments facilitating external voting (amendment No. 4121 to Article 67 of the

Constitution, and amendment No. 4125 to the Election Law), the Supreme Election Council (YSK), which is responsible for organizing and managing elections abroad, failed to implement the amendments until 2008 due to practical and legal concerns. In 2008, a bill detailing the methods to be employed as regards to external voting was introduced but could not be implemented until 2012.<sup>14</sup>

The long-distance nationalist perspective was accommodated in the legislative changes made related to citizenship and the political participation of the Turkish diaspora in the 1980s, but despite the policy incentives stated in the legislation, the implementation was limited, either due to the inefficiency of the policy tools, or the absence of a responsible institutional organization. With the establishment of the YTB, the implementation of this long-distance nationalist policy perspective has been sustained through the application of policy tools that respond to the transnational needs of the Turkish diaspora.

First, to facilitate external voting, amendments to the Electoral Law entered into force in May 2012 (No. 6304) detailing the methods of external voting, and an overseas voters' registry has subsequently been created, while the roles of the Supreme Election Council (YSK) and the diplomatic missions in the organization and management of elections abroad have been defined (Okçay; Abadan Unat et al. 3-4). In the 2014 presidential elections, the Turkish diaspora was for the first time able to cast their vote in a Turkish election in the countries in which they reside. Second, the problems encountered in the implementation of the rights of Blue Card holders have gradually been resolved since 2012 through legislative initiatives and bureaucratic efforts (Can and Tuna 28-31).

In 2012, in order to facilitate the participation of Turkish diaspora in the processes that have a direct effect on them, the Advisory Committee on Turkish Citizens Abroad was established on 28 December, 2012, involving 78 representatives from the countries in which Turkish citizens are concentrated. The main responsibility of the Advisory Committee has been to assist in the drawing up of the policy agenda related to the Turkish diaspora. Although the Committee was active in its initial year, the fierce conflict between the AKP government and the Fethullah Gülen movement (referred to later as FETO – the Fethullah Gülen terrorist organization) had

both a direct and indirect effect on the efficiency of the committee after 2013, and the Committee gradually became inactive (Yanaşmayan et al. 28; Bayraktar-Aksel 235).

Türkiye has handled the citizenship issue and the rights-based understanding based not only on the country of origin (Türkiye) but also the country of residence, since 2010, and the importance of acquiring citizenship of one's country of residence started to be stressed at all levels. In 2011, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan underlined the importance of acquiring citizenship, integration and active participation in the political and social lives of the countries of residence of Turkish citizens while preserving their culture in his speeches in Strasbourg and Dusseldorf (Cumhuriyet; Deutsche Welle). In this context, the YTB launched financial assistance programs with NGOs supporting the Turkish diaspora in their fight against discrimination and in their participation in the social and political lives of the countries in which they reside, while supporting participation and justice for all in the national and international sphere (YTB, *Mali Destek Programları*). The YTB also organizes International Legal Training Seminars and Regular Turkish Jurists Meetings to discuss the legal concerns of the Turkish diaspora, and to facilitate the setting of an agenda, dealing with such issues as violations of human rights, discrimination and islamophobia, and the rights of Turkish citizens derived from the EU-Türkiye association law (YTB, *2015 Faaliyet Raporu* 31). Attacks targeting the Turkish diaspora are recorded and annual figures are published in an attempt to ensure the maintenance of their rights (YTB, *Yurtdışı Vatandaşlara Yönelik Saldırıları*).

Following this analysis of the engagement policies of Türkiye in regards to its diaspora in the political and legal sphere, it can be concluded that Türkiye has maintained a long-distance nationalist perspective in its legislation since the 1980s, and this perspective which already existed in theory, was actually put into practice in 2010. This implementation has been sustained with the introduction of policy tools that recognize the transnational character of the Turkish diaspora. In this regard, Türkiye seeks to facilitate the access of the Turkish diaspora to their rights derived both from Türkiye and their countries of residence, and has since 2010 been fielding solutions that reflect the long-distance nationalist perspective in regards to the transnational concerns and problems of its diaspora in the political-legal sphere.



## **Socio-Cultural Sphere: Post-Migrant Generations as the New Target Group**

Within the socio-cultural sphere, the diaspora engagement policy of Türkiye focuses mainly on ensuring family unity and mother tongue education, responding to the cultural needs and protecting the social ties of the diaspora with Türkiye. Although these issues entered the agenda as part of the family reunification efforts and due to religious concerns in 1970s, they have were first referred to the 1982 Constitution, in which the government was charged with taking the necessary measures. Therefore, as an outcome of this long-distance nationalist perspective in the Constitution and Citizenship Law, starting in the 1980s, transnational policy tools started to be implemented in the socio-cultural sphere to communicate with Turkish citizens working abroad and their families. During the first Turgut Özal government (1983-1987), Turkish teachers and imams started to be appointed by the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Religious Affairs, respectively (Ostergaard-Nielsen 108).

The legislation facilitating the appointment of Turkish teachers and imams (priest) was put into practice with the cooperation of the countries of residence, although since the 2000s, the countries of residence have changed their perspective on the appointment of civil servants, especially imams, from the homeland (Y. Yıldız; Gündoğdu), being concerned mainly by Türkiye's transnational policies. This reversal may be attributed to four issues: (1) The existence of post-migrant generations who were born and raised in the countries of residence; (2) the shift in integration policies in the countries of residence, problematizing the immigrants' transnational lives (Kolbaşı-Muyan, *Avrupa'da Göçmen Politikaları*); (3) the shift in social policies from a liberal perspective to a neo-liberal one (Kolbaşı-Muyan, *Hollanda Göçmen Entegrasyonu Politikaları* 178-84); and (4) the rise of the far right discourse in the public and political sphere, which gives impetus to the Islamophobic and xenophobic atmosphere.

Against such a backdrop, the diaspora engagement policy since 2010 has mainly targeted the socio-cultural sphere and the post-migrant generations.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, while mother tongue education and the recognition of Turkish culture by Turkish children abroad have been determined as key policy goals, with young Turkish people residing abroad identified as the main

target group (PSB, 11. *Developmental Plan* 169; 2020 *Presidential Annual Programme* 183). Creative diaspora engagement policy tools in the socio-cultural sphere have been implemented to address the negative atmosphere in the countries of residence. In order to reintegrate the post-migrant generations with Türkiye in the socio-cultural sphere, the YTB has devised policy tools in four specific areas: mother tongue, cultural mobility,<sup>16</sup> education and family-related issues.

First, in order to increase the mother tongue language skills of post-migrant generations, the YTB has launched a number of different programs, such as the Turkish Hour Program (previously called the Anatolia Weekend School), Anatolia Reading Houses, the Bilingual preschool education program and the M.A. Program for Teaching Turkish to Turkish Children Living Abroad (with a dissertation) (YTB, *Turkish and Education*). Second, as a diaspora engagement policy tool targeting post-migrant generations, *cultural mobility programs* have been launched, including the Evliya Çelebi Anatolia Cultural Tours, Turks Abroad Youth Camps, Summer Camps, Türkiye Internships, the Diaspora Youth Academy, Young Leaders and Technofest. All of these have facilitated the visit of post-migrant generations to Türkiye, thus enhancing their knowledge of the country, its culture, society and life in Türkiye, improving their transnational network. Third, in order to support education and the success of Turkish students abroad, the YTB has launched *award and scholarship programs*, such as the High School Graduation Exams Success Awards, the Fuat Sezgin Outstanding Success Award and a Thesis Research Scholarship (YTB, 2020 *İdare Faaliyet Raporu*). As there having been no programs involving the mobility of the diaspora members organized since March 2020 due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the YTB transferred its activities to virtual platforms, with the Media Academy, Self-Development Academy, Kids Academy, Media Awards and Play Certificate Program being just some of the examples of the virtual meetings being held to reach out to the young children within the Turkish diaspora during the pandemic (YTB, 2020 *İdare Faaliyet Raporu*).

Fourth, since family is the most important means of cultural transmission, family matters and the raising of children are main areas of interest of Türkiye's engagement policies related to its diaspora. In the early years following the establishment of the YTB, issues related to the State Youth

Welfare Office (*Jugendamt* in Germany and *Jeugdazorg* in the Netherlands) came to the agenda as part of the assimilation concerns of Turkish children who were taken from their parents for their wellbeing, and placed under the protection of native families (YTB, 2012 *Faaliyet Raporu* 26). Recently, modular training programs on family concerns targeting the Turkish diaspora have been presented as a policy goal in response to similar concerns (PSB 11. *Developmental Plan* 149).

In addition to these four priorities of the YTB in its diaspora engagement policies in the socio-cultural sphere, it is also seeking to strengthen transnational ties with welcome programs for the Turkish diaspora upon their return to Türkiye and magazines targeting the Turkish diaspora. First, with the “Homeward Bound” (*Memleket Yolunda*) program, the YTB welcomes and sees off the Turkish diaspora who are visiting their home country at the border gates. Help and welcome desks can be found at the border gates of not only Türkiye, but also Serbia, thus ensuring their safe and comfortable travel (YTB, *YTB Memleket Yoluna*). Second, the YTB published “Artı 90” four times a year between 2012 and 2016, and more recently introduced two magazines, “Memleketim” and “Telve”, to the interest of the diaspora, disseminating its perspective and strengthening relations within the Turkish diaspora, but mainly among the post-migrant generations.<sup>17</sup>

In the socio-cultural sphere of diaspora engagement policy of Türkiye it is also important to refer the programs in the religious domain. In addition to appointing imams from Türkiye, the Presidency of Religious Affairs introduced an International Islamic Theology program in 2006, in which members of the diaspora, and more specifically the post-migrant-generations, take religion classes on Islam and religious social work in order to work in their countries of residence (Erşahin 130-1).

In conclusion, since 2010 the changes in the socio-cultural sphere of diaspora engagement policy have led to a change of the target group and features of the diaspora. Türkiye started to focus on the reintegration of its post-migrant generations within Türkiye in the socio-cultural sphere. In order to sustain the success of the policies, it responds to the transnational character of the diaspora in policy implementation by organizing mother tongue classes under diaspora NGOs, as well as visits to Türkiye for the the promotion of historical, moral, national and cultural values; training and

educations in sustaining the interaction between post-migrant generations in different countries in transnational social spaces. Thus 2010, exercises a long-distance nationalist shift in the transnational diaspora-engagement policy perspective.

## **Conclusion**

The intention of this paper is to contribute to the body of literature on the growth of state diasporic engagement policies and policy tools, questioning the shift in the diaspora policies of Türkiye since 2010 in this regard with the establishment of the YTB. It can be concluded that the transnational shift, aiming to reach out to Turkish citizens living abroad, started with the introduction of long-distance nationalist perspective in the legal sphere in the 1980s. Türkiye began to understand the inefficiency of the old policy tools in reaching out to Turks abroad in practice in the mid-2000s. With the establishment of the YTB in 2010, Türkiye introduced a more comprehensive diaspora policy that had a long-distance nationalist perspective, with the uniqueness of the policy being notable in its redefinition of its target group, the features of its diaspora, and the policy goals, actors, tools and stakeholders in diaspora engagement, along with its more institutionalized stance. To begin with, the post-migrant generations are defined as one of the core target groups in Turkey's diaspora engagement policy. Second, the transnational ways of being and living of the Turkish diaspora, and especially the post-migrant generations, have been accepted, with both the "neither from here nor from there" and the "from both here and there" perspectives being welcomed. Third, the goal of Turkey's diaspora policy has been redefined, and the reintegration of the Turkish diaspora into Türkiye more in the socio-cultural sphere has been added. Fourth, countries of residence have been added as actors in Türkiye's diaspora engagement policies, in addition to the Turkish diaspora and Türkiye as a home country. Fifth, policy tools have changed and diverged according to the needs of the different target groups within the Turkish diaspora. In addition to the introduction of new policy tools, existing policy tools have also been adopted to respond the transnational needs of the Turkish diaspora. In this regard, religious and Turkish mother tongue training programs have been introduced in Türkiye for members of the Turkish diaspora to aid recruitment in their countries of residence. The sixth and final novelty

in Türkiye's diaspora policy has been the redefinition of stakeholders in the implementation of diaspora engagement policies. In this regard in addition to governmental institutions, Turkish diaspora NGOs have been considered as primary stakeholders in diaspora policies. Through financial assistance programs, Turkish diaspora NGOs have played a vital role in the implementation of the policy. It has been concluded after an analysis of its diaspora policy perspective that Türkiye is a "transnational nation-state" that pursues long-distance nationalist policies to reach its diaspora.

As a concluding remark, the diaspora community is turning into an independent social phenomenon with its own unique dynamics. For an analysis of the diaspora engagement policies and/or the dynamics of the diaspora, it is important to also include the perspectives and policies of the countries of residence in future studies. Studies of the activities of the diaspora in transnational social spaces would also contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of the diaspora.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

### **Notes**

- 1 Türkiye had targeted the settlement of immigrants (*muhacir*) until the 1940s, after which co-ethnic policies targeted the citizens of the country of Turkish origin, as well as their kin and relatives, Turkish factors and external Turks (Aksel 210). During the 1990s, policies targeting Turkish Republics and Communities Meskhetian Turks (Ahıska Türkleri) were followed by the state minister responsible for "External Turks" (Dış Türkler) and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) (Öge 50-58).
- 2 The terms "Turkish diaspora" and "Turks abroad" synchronously, meaning without any ethnic connotation, in the present study, referring to the emigrant origin Turks abroad. In this sense, the Turkish diaspora comprises not only Turkish citizens living abroad (including those who hold also other nationalities)

but also blue card holders who have Turkish citizenship by birth, and who have renounced their citizenship after obtaining the necessary permissions, as well as other people of other nationalities with the right to Turkish citizenship and/or a blue card.

- 3 Government awards recognizing the achievements of members of the diaspora community serve to motivate them in their respective fields, and in communication campaigns, emigrant conferences and national days for the diaspora. These and similar activities can be considered outcomes of symbolic policies.
- 4 The aims of the Turkish diaspora engagement policy are stated on the website of the YTB: (1) preserving their sense of belonging to Türkiye, (2) retention of their mother tongue, culture and identity, and (3) strengthening the social rank of the Turkish diaspora in the countries in which they reside.
- 5 In 2018, the average expenditures of foreigners in Türkiye throughout their stay was 601 US dollars per person, compared to 801 US dollars for Turkish citizens residing abroad (PSB, *2020 Presidential Annual Programme* 183)
- 6 Until July 2021, Türkiye has signed Bilateral Social Security Agreements with 35 countries (for more information see <https://www.csgeb.gov.tr/digm/contents/dis-iliskiler/ikili-anlasmalar/sosyalguvenlikanlasmalari>). Although the European countries with which Türkiye had signed labour recruitment agreements were the main partners during the initial years, later their geographical scope has broadened with the increase in the migration routes
- 7 The possibility of postponement of the compulsory military service for diaspora members further extended to the age of 32 in 1984.
- 8 Amendment No. 7146 to the Military Service Law, introduced on 26.07.2018
- 9 “İmce” is a Turkish word that is used in rural areas to refer to cooperation and collective work for the benefit of the community and/or members of the community.
- 10 The State Planning Organization was replaced by the Ministry of Development in 2011. Since the closure of the Ministry of Development after 2018 elections, Presidency of Strategy and Budget (PSB) has been officially in charge.
- 11 Amendment to the 1964 Citizenship Law (1981). Enter into force on 17.02.1981, No: 17254 [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc064/kanunmgkc064/kanunmgkc06402383.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc064/kanunmgkc064/kanunmgkc06402383.pdf) (Accessed on 24.06.2021)
- 12 Law No. 4112/1995 amending Law No. 403/1964 on Turkish Citizenship
- 13 Aside from certain rights that are strongly associated with citizenship, such as voting and being elected, the fulfillment of military service and engagement as

- a public servant, Pink Card holders could theoretically enjoy all of the rights enjoyed by Türkiye's citizens.
- 14 The methods of external voting were first defined in a 2008 bill that introduced voting by mail, electronic voting, and voting in diplomatic representations and at border stations, as alternative voting methods. The Constitutional Court, however, revoked the clause on postal voting, claiming it to be unconstitutional (Decision no.2008/113). With the decision of the YSK in February 2011 (no.120) the possible implementation of absentee voting by allowing voting at the diplomatic representations in Germany for the 2011 general elections were ruled out due to the limited time for implementation.
  - 15 YTB president Abdullah Eren spoke about the importance of the socio-cultural sphere, and underlined the benefits of transnational ways of being and living in his welcome message entitled "Powerful Diaspora Powerful Türkiye in the 10<sup>th</sup> Year of the YTB", highlighting the three principals of the YTB related to the Turkish diaspora: (1) the retention of the identity and culture of Turks abroad, (2) preserving their sense of belonging with the homeland in liberal and unique ways, and (3) enhancing their social, political and economic status in their country of residence (Eren 2-3).
  - 16 Cultural mobility is used in this article to refer to the mobility programmes of the YTB and other institutions targeting the Turkish diaspora.
  - 17 While "Artı 90" refers to the area code of Türkiye in phone calls, "Memleketim" can be translated as "my homeland" while "Telve" refers to coffee grounds in reference to Turkish.

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# Türkiye'nin Diaspora Politikası: 2010'dan Bu Yana Bakış Açısında Değişim\*

Gizem Kolbaşı-Muyan\*\*

## Öz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin altı buçuk milyonun üzerinde vatandaşı ve onların soylarını ilgilendiren diaspora politikasına odaklanmaktadır. Makalede 2010 yılında Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı'nın kurulması ile Türkiye'nin diaspora politikasında ne değiştiği sorusuna yanıt aranmaktadır. Türkiye'nin diaspora politikası sosyoekonomik, siyasi-hukuki ve sosyokültürel alanlarda incelendiğinde, 2010'dan itibaren ulusötesi Türk diasporasına ulaşmak için uzak mesafe milliyetçiliği yaklaşımının öne çıktığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu çerçevede, hedef kitle, diasporanın temel özellikleri, politika hedefleri, aktörleri, araçları ve paydaşları uzak mesafe milliyetçiliği bakış açısı ile yeniden tanımlanmıştır. Türkiye, bu dönemde göç sonrası nesillerin yeni ulusötesi politika araçları ile Türkiye'ye özellikle sosyokültürel alanda yeniden entegrasyonunu sağlamayı hedeflemektedir. Bu haliyle diaspora politikalarında Türkiye'nin uzak mesafe milliyetçi bakış açısı onu "ulus-ötesi ulus-devlet"e dönüştürmektedir.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Türk diasporası, Diaspora politikası, ulusötesicilik, uzak mesafe milliyetçiliği, Türkiye, uluslararası göç.

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# Политика Турции по взаимодействию с диаспорой: изменение точки зрения с 2010 года\*

Гизем Колбаши-Муян\*\*

## Аннотация

Эта статья посвящена политике Турции по взаимодействию с диаспорой, которая затрагивает жизни более 6,5 миллионов турецких граждан и их потомков. Основной исследовательский вопрос, поднятый в этой статье, звучит так: «Что изменилось в политике взаимодействия с турецкой диаспорой с 2010 года, когда было создано Управление по делам турок за рубежом и связанных с ними общин (УТВ)?». После анализа политики вовлечения диаспоры Турции в социально-экономической, политико-правовой и социокультурной сферах делается вывод, что с 2010 г. для поддержания связи с транснациональной диаспорой национализм на расстоянии как фактор выдвинулся на передний план. Новизна политики заключается в переопределении целевых групп, особенностей диаспоры, а также целей политики, ее инструментов и стейкхолдеров. Турция начала ориентироваться на реинтеграцию поколений постмигрантов с Турцией в социально-культурную сферу с помощью новых инструментов политики, и долгосрочная националистическая перспектива ее политики взаимодействия с диаспорой, таким образом, привела к трансформации Турции в состояние «транснациональной нации».

## Ключевые слова

турецкая диаспора, политика привлечения диаспоры, дистанционный национализм, транснационализм, Турция, международная миграция

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