



## A Decade of AKP Power in Turkey

Elise Massicard

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**A Decade of AKP Power in Turkey :  
Towards a Reconfiguration  
of Modes of Government ?**

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## **A Decade of AKP Power in Turkey: Towards a Reconfiguration of Modes of Government?**

Abstract

The AKP (Justice and Development Party) has been in power in Turkey since 2002, consolidating its electoral support among an array of social groups ranging from broad appeal among the popular classes to business leaders and a growing middle class. The success of the AKP is a consequence of the manner in which the party has inserted itself into certain economic and social sectors. While the party has internalized the principles of reducing the public sphere and outsourcing to the private sector, it has not restricted the reach of government intervention. On the contrary, it has become increasingly involved in certain sectors, including social policy and housing. It has managed this through an indirect approach that relies on intermediaries and private allies such as the businesses and associations that it has encouraged. In this way, the AKP has developed and systematized modes of redistribution that involve the participation of conservative businessmen who benefit from their proximity to decision-makers, charitable organizations, and underprivileged social groups. These public policies have reconfigured different social sectors in a way that has strengthened the Party's influence.

## **Une décennie de pouvoir AKP en Turquie : vers une reconfiguration des modes de gouvernement ?**

Résumé

L'AKP, Parti de la Justice et du Développement, s'est maintenu au pouvoir en Turquie depuis 2002. Loin d'une usure du pouvoir, il a consolidé le soutien électoral de couches sociales diversifiées, réunissant une large partie des milieux populaires et de la classe moyenne en pleine expansion, mais aussi des milieux d'affaires. L'implantation de l'AKP tient à la manière dont ce parti s'est inséré au cœur de nombreux secteurs économiques et sociaux : bien qu'acquis aux principes de diminution de la sphère publique et de la délégation au privé, l'AKP n'a pas restreint le périmètre d'intervention de l'État. Au contraire, il est intervenu de manière accrue dans certains secteurs (politique sociale, logement). Il l'a fait de manière indirecte, en prenant appui sur des intermédiaires et alliés privés (entreprises, associations) qu'il a favorisés. Ainsi, l'AKP a mis en place et systématisé des modes de redistribution faisant intervenir des hommes d'affaires conservateurs bénéficiant de proximités avec les décideurs, milieu associatif charitable et couches sociales défavorisées. Ces politiques publiques ont reconfiguré différents secteurs sociaux dans un sens favorable à l'emprise du parti.

## A Decade of AKP Power in Turkey: Towards a Reconfiguration of Modes of Government?

Elise Massicard *Institut français d'études anatoliennes, Istanbul*

At the end of 2012, the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party) celebrated ten years in power in Turkey. The import of this event extends beyond the country's boundaries. It marked the longest experience in government of a party with Islamist origins that arrived at the helm of the state via the democratic process. In this regard it serves as a textbook case, even a source of inspiration, for outside observers. But it is also an important experiment for Turkish domestic politics, as the AKP's long reign put an end to nearly a dozen years of instability and a series of coalition governments. Since its victory in the November 2002 legislative elections, the AKP has ruled virtually unchallenged. It has enjoyed broad majorities at both the national level—ensuring it of twelve years of government without requiring a coalition—and the various echelons of local government, such that it truly qualifies as a party of power, even a party of government. In these twelve years, it has also gradually taken control of the various state institutions, including those which initially put up the greatest resistance.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout its time in government, the AKP's popularity has remained intact. Far from showing signs of growing power-weariness, it has managed to strengthen, even expand, its electoral support: from 34.4 % of the vote in 2002, in the 2011 legislative elections it garnered nearly 50 % of the ballots cast. Although the spring 2013 protest movement that began in Gezi Park seemed to reflect growing discontent, and the corruption scandals that broke in late 2013 appeared to announce an erosion of its credibility, it took 44.19 % of the vote in the March 2014 local elections, a significant performance even in a context of high economic growth. How has the AKP managed to maintain and even strengthen its base?

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<sup>1</sup> Even if the definitive rift with the social-religious Fethullah Gülen movement, a major component of the AKP's support base, in late 2013, raises new questions (see Balci 2013).

Diversity characterizes its social base: the AKP has secured support from a variety of social strata, bringing together a large swath of the working classes and the expanding middle class as well as the business community, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs (known as the “Anatolian tigers”) that played an important role in its ascent. But if the AKP is as liberal and business-friendly as is claimed, if it has sacrificed the social dimension of its housing policy among others on the altar of profit, why has its popularity among the poor and destitute, which make up its true electoral strength, not waned? Election analyses show that the AKP electorate is far more modest than that of the main opposition parties—the Kemalist CHP (People’s Republican Party) and the Turkish nationalist MHP. Only the Kurdish nationalist BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) seems to have a poorer electorate, but its stronghold is mainly in the southeastern part of Turkey, the country’s poorest area.<sup>2</sup> The makeup of the AKP’s social base has been studied mostly using election studies and questionnaire surveys.<sup>3</sup> The present study, noting the originality of the modes of redistribution the AKP has set up, will approach it instead from the perspective of its points of insertion in society, better to shed light on how the party in office maintains ties with the population through public institutions.

This study aims to show that the AKP’s extensive presence stems from the way the party has inserted itself into the very heart of certain economic and social sectors and in particular the way it has positioned itself at the center of an array of economic and social networks and arrangements that the public policies conducted have gradually transformed in such a way as to enhance its ascendancy. While representing a shift in perspective, this approach thus takes up a now common research question with respect to the AKP’s modes of exercising power: to what degree has the party “renewed” modes of government in Turkey? To date the focus has primarily been on whether or not the AKP is “Islamist” in nature following its *aggiornamento* with respect to Turkish political Islam,<sup>4</sup> the effects of its rule on the democratization process, or the specificity and region-wide exportability of this experience (sometimes qualified as a “model”).<sup>5</sup> Inquiry into its practices of power was revived—and took a new twist—after two significant episodes in recent Turkish politics: the Gezi protests in spring 2013 and revelations about misuse of funds in winter 2013-2014. The repressive measures taken by the government—crackdowns on demonstrations, restricted access to social media, etc.—have fueled investigations into the authoritarian nature or “drift” of the AKP government. Such analyses in terms of authoritarianism and its opposition to democracy seem too reductive and general.<sup>6</sup> The other main inquiry developed recently has been into the accusation of the AKP’s being a lackey of “neoliberalism,” this latter term often used in an undifferentiated although generally negative sense. While the AKP’s exercise of power indeed has many neoliberal aspects, here

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<sup>2</sup> KONDA 2014: 20.

<sup>3</sup> Dalmış, Aydın 2008; Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu 2007.

<sup>4</sup> The AKP, founded in 2001, has maintained some distance from the Turkish political Islam it stemmed from and that was best represented by the Prosperity Party (*Refah Partisi*) in the 1990s. The AKP took a less anti-system and more economically liberal stance than traditional Turkish political Islam. Since its inception, the AKP has stacked up electoral victories, whereas the party closest to the Islamist legacy has been marginalized at the polls.

<sup>5</sup> Cizre 2008; Yavuz 2006, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Dabène, Geisser, Massardier 2008.

again it seems an oversimplification to reduce them to neoliberalism, or even a cross between neoliberalism and Islamism. Such a description does little to help grasp the originality of often-complex modes of exercising power.

This study aims to suggest an interpretation of the modes of government put in place by the AKP. Considerable changes have in fact come about in the means of exercising power under the party's rule. As it will be recalled, the AKP took the reins of government in a very specific context: the 2001 economic crisis, the worst the Turkish republic had ever seen, brought to an end many prior arrangements and paved the way for radical transformations in all sectors of the economy.<sup>7</sup>

The AKP came to power with a promise to renew "governance" and an agenda for economic liberalization and decentralization. It quickly undertook a wholesale reform of the relations between the central and local governments, which in particular involved delegating powers to local authorities. But the concrete effects of these reforms are more complex than what their declared intentions might suppose. Tendencies toward the centralization of a number of decisions were soon apparent. For while the AKP seemed to favor restricting the attributes of the public sphere, privatizing state-owned enterprises and devolving many tasks, the scope of state intervention has not been diminished under its rule but has instead been redefined. It has even expanded in some sectors, such as in housing policy and social policy, both of which will be discussed at length below. Certain modes of action have been set up, or rather strengthened: new modes of intervention have been developed by *sui generis* administrations such as TOKİ, the "revamped" Housing Development Administration; public-private sector relationships have been altered through numerous institutionalized partnerships; new power networks and channels for the flow of resources have emerged or been reinforced, and so on. The AKP has inserted itself into Turkish society and its economy and has transformed both through the public policies it has implemented.

In so doing, the party has established and systematized new modes of redistribution. Considerable resources now flow between the party in power, conservative businessmen benefitting from their proximity to policymakers, the voluntary sector and underprivileged social groups that are recipients of organized charity, especially at the local level. A rigorous analysis of the close but differentiated relations that connect entrepreneurs, the party and the government will help to understand the new configurations of actors, power networks and channels of resource flows that are indissociable from the development of relations between the state authorities and the private sector, including at the local level. Turkey in recent years has undergone a wave of privatization, devolution of powers and delegation to the private sector (enterprises as well as the voluntary sector). A detailed examination of the precise ways in which public-private partnerships operate will help to grasp how state intervention has been reconfigured at the edge of public institutions. As opposed to a viewpoint that emphasizes the public-private sector dichotomy, an interpretation in terms of delegation, intermediaries, exchanges and interconnections seems more apt to shed light on the emergence of new configurations of interests as well as the modification of relations between the political and the economic spheres.

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<sup>7</sup> Massicard 2003.

This research draws on both the existing literature and original research involving analysis of existing source material (election results, databases on privatizations and public tenders, legislative documents for the reform of local governments, texts framing public-private cooperation, grey literature produced by institutions such as TOKİ and municipalities), as well as on interviews, observations and news articles retracing the trajectories of individuals, institutions, NGOs and enterprises chosen for their significant or illustrative nature.

It was conducted primarily in Istanbul, which in many regards is the crucible of AKP power, various experiments undertaken in this city since the 1990s having served as a source of inspiration for other municipalities as well as for the government—it should be remembered that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, before becoming prime minister, was mayor of Istanbul from 1994 to 1998. The choice of Istanbul moreover makes it possible to broach the decisive question of tiers of power. Istanbul is at once a metropolitan municipality that embraces several district municipalities, a “metropolized” province and a region. Where possible, analyses pertaining to other localities have been included.

This study is organized in two parts. The first will strive to move beyond the idea that the AKP’s rule is characterized by a retreat of the state, economic liberalization and decentralization, but will show on the contrary that it is distinguished by a redeployment of the state and its modes of intervention:<sup>8</sup> starting with the emblematic reform of local government, it will examine the concomitant trends toward centralization and growing interventionism in certain sectors such as housing. The second part will analyze the AKP’s various modes of insertion into society, focusing on two aspects: the state’s increased involvement in the economy through reconfigurations of public-private sector relations and its growing interventionism in social policy in conjunction with religious NGOs. An examination of these two types of insertion will help to understand the flow of resources, shed light on how the party’s social base is reproduced and also reveal the considerable configurational power the AKP has acquired in various sectors.

## **THE AKP IN POWER: REDEPLOYMENT RATHER THAN RETREAT OF THE STATE**

Has the AKP’s rule resulted in economic liberalization or a retreat of the state? The answer to this question requires qualification. As a proponent of less government involvement, the AKP indeed set up reforms to devolve powers to the local authorities and delegate to the private sphere. But at the same time, it established control over virtually all the institutional machinery and has shown tendencies toward centralization as well as increased interventionism in several sectors.

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<sup>8</sup> Hibou 1999.



## Beyond Decentralization, Redefining the Hierarchy of Political-Administrative Divisions

In power at all levels of government, the AKP has managed to insinuate itself into the various decision-making mechanisms. The spoils system being pervasive,<sup>9</sup> there was a major change in bureaucratic personnel, especially in key positions. Much has been written about the AKP's presence in the public administration, especially its gradual takeover of certain institutions. The last "pockets of resistance" were broken down after Abdullah Gül was elected president in summer 2007. Overcoming this last hurdle not only put an end to the boycott that his predecessor, President Sezer, had exercised over a series of reforms championed by the AKP, but also enabled it to nominate its own people in strategic positions in several institutions, especially the judiciary. Thus, in December 2007, Gül appointed Yusuf Ziya Özcan, reputed to be pro-AKP, chairman of the Higher Education Board (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu, YÖK). In turn, when it came time to renew board members (who serve a four-year term), he nominated his close associates:<sup>10</sup> in 2011, only one member appointed by Sezer remained. In a number of areas, overwhelming AKP presence in state organs has since enabled it to make use of government resources.

Less is known, however, about how the AKP has come to control key jobs in local and regional administrations: prefects (*vali*), subprefects (*kaymakam*), directors of central administrations detached to the provinces, as many civil service corps that were once spearheads of the secular state. The AKP quickly proceeded to overhaul the prefectural corps. Prefects hold a crucial position in that they can be considered—more or less—as the functional equivalent of the French prefects prior to decentralization: they are appointed on nomination by the interior minister, by decision of the Council of Ministers and approval by the President of the Republic. Out of a sample of 67 prefects in office in late 2008, only 18 had been prefects under other parties; five had already been prefects but were without assignment at the time the AKP came to power; 44 of them were appointed for the first time by the AKP. Not only was there a renewal of prefects in office, but of the corps itself. It should be noted that the choice of a prefect is not subject to any educational or career prerequisites, making nomination particularly simple compared to other posts, for instance sub-prefect, which must meet stricter career requirements and presupposes having completed a curriculum spanning several years of education. Thus, the AKP seems to have completely renewed the local and regional administration as much in terms of its personnel as the division of powers.

In its initial platform, the AKP claimed to support decentralization. Yet, instead of truly decentralizing, it rather redefined the hierarchy of political-administrative divisions, with a marked trend toward metropolization. Already in 2004-2005, the AKP undertook reforms at the local government level, promulgating laws for each tier of administrative division (municipality, metropolitan municipality, provincial administration).<sup>11</sup> Taken altogether, these laws granted local government bodies greater autonomy, especially in financial matters, partly releasing them from central state oversight. They also granted them expanded powers, in particular

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<sup>9</sup> Gourisse 2014.

<sup>10</sup> "YÖK başkanı Özcan, ekibini kurmaya devam ediyor" ("YÖK chairman continues to form his own team"), *Hürriyet*, February 20, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Bayraktar, Massicard 2001; Joppien 2012.



in economic matters: municipalities could now devise investment plans, and metropolitan municipalities could go into debt. The municipal and provincial elected councils came out strengthened overall. The AKP's dominant position at all levels (including in most municipalities and metropolitan municipalities) enabled it to accomplish these changes in the power structure without this leading to transfers of power into the hands of rival parties. Those who mainly won out in these changes were mayors, who now concentrated powers in the cities, particularly the metropolises.<sup>12</sup> It is hard not to see a connection with the fact that Erdoğan is the first Turkish prime minister to have previously held the office of mayor; it was in Istanbul city hall, which he occupied from 1994 to 1998, that he forged ties with many of his future associates: Mehmet Ali Şahin (mayor of the Istanbul district of Fatih prior to becoming minister of justice), Binali Yıldırım (director-general of Istanbul's maritime transport company İDO before becoming minister of transport), Erdoğan Bayraktar (CEO of KİPTAŞ, private contractor for the city of Istanbul, then president of TOKİ, the Housing Development Administration, member of parliament and then minister). Some claim that Erdoğan built his mode of government on his experience as mayor and perceives Istanbul as a miniature Turkey, making infrastructure a priority issue for him.<sup>13</sup>

The creation in late 2012 of fourteen new metropolitan municipalities can be interpreted in this light. This move suddenly doubled their number. The status now applies to all of the thirty provinces having a metropolitan municipality within their borders (30 out of 81, but the most populated), absorbing sparsely populated rural areas. In these *metropolized* provinces, villages have lost their legal personality and are now urban districts. After the administrative divisions were first tightened up in May 2008 (doing away with municipalities having a population of fewer than 5,000), the municipal layout was further contracted, in particular with the disappearance of the administrative body equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon county council, the province from then on being nothing more than a decentralized state administration:<sup>14</sup> 56 million Turkish citizens—or about 77 % of the country's voters—now depend on a metropolitan municipality, even if they live in remote villages. Such abolition of local management levels may seem surprising in an age of administrative decentralization. While electioneering probably motivated this move—the redrawing of certain election districts eliminating opposition municipalities in advance of the March 2014 local elections was instantly criticized by the opposition—, it above all fit within a plan to structure the country by its cities, with Istanbul first and foremost. Rural areas previously shielded from predacious urban policy, often defined in the short term, now fell within its grasp. Large urban centers thus came out as stronger actors with a pivotal role in regional development. This tendency was already apparent in the June 2011 legislative election campaign: in its program for Turkey's future, the AKP had stressed metropolises, running counter to slogans in the first elections focused on local development. Despite the election's national dimension, it did not hesitate to promote the pharaonic “wild projects” (*çılgın projeler*) under study, especially for Istanbul—the redevelopment of Taksim Square, which sparked the wave of protest in Gezi Park, but also

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<sup>12</sup> Açıkel, Balci 2009; Joppien 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Açıkel, Balci 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Pérouse 2012.

many other gigantic and equally contested projects: a third bridge over the Bosphorus, Kanal Istanbul, a third airport, Galataport, and many others.<sup>15</sup> The state's highest officials moreover systematically attend cornerstone-laying and inauguration ceremonies.

Growing central government intervention in local politics has in some cases counteracted the heightened powers of city councils. The handling of the Gezi Park crisis in June 2013 is significant in this regard: the mayor of Istanbul remained in the background, eclipsed by the prefect as well as by other major players, starting with the prime minister. The past years have been marked by an increase in the relative power of the Minister of Environment and Urban Planning to the detriment of the municipalities. Similarly, on a number of occasions, the government, and in particular the prime minister, has intervened directly in matters of local government. The growing interventionism of the local authorities in urban management also leaves considerable room for central actors.

### Increasing Urban Interventionism

In addition to redefining the hierarchy of the country's political-administrative division, there was a clear tendency toward interventionism in local land use policy, in particular in the cities. Although the "wild projects" mentioned above have recently drawn considerable attention abroad, the entire country has been affected by urban renewal policies (*kentsel dönüşüm*) since 2004. Until then, urbanization in Turkey had largely occurred through illegal migrant settlements on public land and their subsequent appropriation, the public authorities tolerating, then accommodating and even legalizing this de facto situation, which had long been used as a bargaining chip in clientelistic arrangements. It was via this route that the poor gained access to housing, through an implicit form of social redistribution and management of poverty.<sup>16</sup> The public authorities had little initiative and even less control over the dynamics of urbanization and land use.

The AKP, eager to "take things in hand," was to put an end to several decades of a city governance through tolerance and accommodation of chaotic developments. The new penal code of 2004 for the first time made construction of *gecekondu*<sup>17</sup> a crime, and demolitions have increased. More generally speaking, the public authorities have declared war on informal settlements, declared unhygienic, antiquated and unfit for habitation. The law on urban renewal passed in 2005 enables district municipalities to identify areas slated for "urban renewal" in four types of situations, the criteria for which remain vague: informal peripheral constructions (*gecekondu*, *apartkondu*, a sort of several-storey *gecekondu* still built without a permit), to legalize them and renovate them; historic and natural protection areas, to de-densify and preserve them; areas to be de-industrialized; and lastly, areas of seismic risk, to build more resistant structures.

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<sup>15</sup> For an idea of the number and scale of these gigantic projects, see <http://www.megaprojeleristanbul.com/#> (accessed July 16, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Eder 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Self-built housing, generally without a building permit. An overwhelming portion of Turkey's cities have developed on this mode with the flow of migrants from rural areas.

This urban renewal policy was strengthened and extended to all cities in the country through the May 2012 law on natural disaster risks. These projects aim to renew the stock of housing units (the government has promised to modernize two-thirds of the housing stock) by demolition and reconstruction, transferring legal homeowners to new housing developments. The purpose is to revitalize entire neighborhoods, but also to transfer property and more generally speaking, implement new modes of managing the real estate market and land use.

Some consider that the interventionism underlying this urban renewal policy imposes a capitalist logic on sectors that until now were partly shielded from it either by their status or by their informal or dilapidated aspect.<sup>18</sup> These critics see in it the sign of both the neoliberalization of regional management—through formalization, marketization and increasing intervention of private-sector partnerships and the logics of profit—and the affirmation of regional marketing, the stated aim of the local authorities being to promote their city on the international market. This reorientation was perceptible in the AKP's manifesto for the June 2011 legislative elections, particularly in the recurrent use of the expression “brand-city” (*marka şehir*), especially for Istanbul.<sup>19</sup>

The “wild projects” can also be viewed from this perspective, in that they also often imply suspending city plans and redefining huge tracts of land surrounding them. Thus, a large economic development zone is included in the plan for the third airport, and changes to the city master plan are increasingly frequent (950 between 1983 and 2003; 1,383 between 2003 and 2008). But the tendency toward centralist regional interventionism also appears in “urban transformation projects.” Thus, designation of the areas to be renovated, traditionally a decision made by municipalities, increasingly befalls the government, particularly when it involves risk areas and resettlement areas. And the main actor in urban renewal projects is a central institution, the Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ, *Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı*). This institution so epitomizes new forms of exercising power, characterized by strong ties to the ruling party and interventionist ambitions in sectors once neglected by state institutions, that it warrants a section in itself.

### **The Recentralization of Local Policies via Housing: The Example of TOKİ<sup>20</sup>**

Established in 1984, TOKİ's scope and means of action have been considerably strengthened since 2001, to the extent that under AKP authority it conducts a far-reaching housing policy that virtually amounts to urban policy.<sup>21</sup> Until the early 2000s, this administration's action focused on financing the construction of mass housing via building cooperatives for housing units designed for the middle classes. After the banking crisis of 2001 and the collapse of the Housing Bank,

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<sup>18</sup> Kuyucu, Ünsal 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Pérouse 2013: 176.

<sup>20</sup> This section is based, in addition to cited sources, on two study days held at the Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes in Istanbul, early 2012.

<sup>21</sup> See Pérouse 2013.

most of the assets and real estate of which was transferred to TOKİ, this institution wound up possessing considerable real estate assets. In 2004, it absorbed the directorate-general of the Land Office, which was in charge of purchasing, managing and developing real estate for public use. From 2003 to 2008, some 65,808,239 m<sup>2</sup> of land were thus transferred free of charge to TOKİ,<sup>22</sup> which now regulates the development of all public real estate (with the exception of land belonging to the army). In the space of a few years, TOKİ was to become an institution given exceptional powers and means: it is the country's largest landowner and real estate developer.

The reasons for TOKİ's emergence as an inescapable, even hegemonic actor in the urban landscape are manifold. First of all, it produced over 620,000 housing units between early 2003 and early 2014, only a small portion of which qualifies as social housing. This has given rise to a spate of criticism, much of it denouncing the institution's orientation toward the free market, particularly its upper segment.<sup>23</sup> Its changes in status have enabled it to build housing units on public land and generate profits so as to finance the construction of public housing—in that regard reminiscent of KİPTAŞ, mentioned above. But the construction of housing units is only one aspect of TOKİ's activities: various reforms have broadened its scope and led it to manage many other types of realizations, luxury residences, stadiums, sports centers, schools, health care units, police stations, prisons, private hospitals and shopping centers. Thus, in early 2014, TOKİ could boast having produced 623,369 housing units, 957 schools, 982 sports centers, 496 mosques, 255 hospitals, 94 private health care units, 41 libraries and 19 stadiums.<sup>24</sup> Above all, its remit now encompasses urban planning. Since 2011, a new modification to the basic law entitles it to develop the land it owns, plan urban renewal areas and “mass housing areas,” and initiate expropriation proceedings.

TOKİ's ties with the executive branch became closer in the course of the decade. In early 2004, this administration, initially placed under the authority of the Ministry of Public Works, now reports directly to the prime minister's office. In summer 2011, it subsumed a ministry ideally suited to it, the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning, the first head of which was none other than Erdoğan Bayraktar, president of TOKİ from 2003 to 2010, in the meantime elected to parliament for the AKP.<sup>25</sup> TOKİ is generally identified as being close to the AKP, in particular to the prime minister, who often attends ceremonies in person to hand over housing units to the beneficiaries. It also figures in pride of place in the discourse promoting the AKP's record. For instance, the 2011 election brochure presented its results, supported by figures, as proof of the government's achievements. Ironically, one of the “compromising” recordings that leaked out early 2014 relates a conversation in which the prime minister took the president of TOKİ to task, accusing him of having sold land in Istanbul without informing him.<sup>26</sup> The TOKİ *modus operandi*

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<sup>22</sup> *Radikal*, May 27, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Only solvable groups and legal beneficiaries, hence mainly titled owners, are eligible to participate in TOKİ operations. Thus, Jean-François Pérouse estimates that in all of Turkey, the percentage of “true social housing” represented no more than 15 % of the housing stock TOKİ put on the market in 2011 (Pérouse 2013: 182). Moreover, truly poor beneficiaries of housing, unable to meet monthly payments, often abandon them to resell them. The report published by İmece, an urban grassroots organization, estimates that 52 % of the housing units built by TOKİ in Istanbul are profit-seeking (İmece 2009).

<sup>24</sup> See its official website: [www.toki.gov.tr](http://www.toki.gov.tr).

<sup>25</sup> He was forced to resign following a corruption scandal that tarnished the government in December 2013.

<sup>26</sup> K. Tekin, “Başbakan Erdoğan'dan TOKİ başkanına kupon arazi fırçası,” *Zaman*, March 21, 2014.

functions uniformly from the center outward and from the top down, without consultation with the local governments, which find themselves reduced to the role of carrying out orders at the local level. It maintains a hierarchical relationship with local authorities over which it always has the upper and the final word, and hardly ever seeks their participation or consults with them, even as a matter of course. Nor does its bookkeeping or relations with citizens meet the principles of transparency and accountability nevertheless profusely advertised by the AKP.<sup>27</sup>

Another dimension of TOKİ's action is worth pointing out: its insertion into the market economy owing in particular to extensive partnerships with the private sector. The changes in legislation carried out in July 2003 and May 2004 enable it, even encourage it, to enter into contracts with the private sector. They also entitle it to set up companies related to the building sector and form partnerships with existing financial institutions and construction companies, or buy shares in them. TOKİ can thus build via its own subsidiaries or in conjunction with other private enterprises. It can also transfer ownership of public real estate to private construction companies, in particular through "income sharing" mechanisms—a prerogative that is copiously criticized, as the agreed price is often substantially lower than market price, giving rise to suspicions of deal-making, and even corruption. TOKİ is involved in a considerable number of public-private partnerships totaling an impressive sum. In this way, it enjoys special status: in addition to its vast property holdings, since March 2012 it has been exempt from the legal provisions governing public tenders for all its activities not related to housing. The real estate investment company Emlak Konut GYO A. Ş., of which it is the main shareholder, is one of the largest in Turkey; it is moreover the main winner of TOKİ contracts, thus enjoying a privileged position on the market. This has prompted the CEO of one real estate investment company to point out that by dominating the sector in this way, TOKİ violates the principles of free enterprise and works against the interests of private companies.<sup>28</sup> Enjoying an exceptional status in the public sector but also in the private sector, TOKİ is thus in one of those hybrid situations characteristic of privatized states.<sup>29</sup>

TOKİ has gained real power over the construction sector—a sector known to have considerable opportunities to accumulate wealth. Far from settling for simply being part of it, it has contributed to reconfiguring it in depth. Through its pivotal role, but also by awarding project management contracts or parcels of land and the rights to develop them, TOKİ has surrounded itself with partners that are dependent on it.<sup>30</sup> The unequal distribution of these partnerships has awakened suspicions of favoritism: in the 2002-2007 period, out of 70,000 construction firms eligible to bid for public works contracts, only 700 have been awarded TOKİ contracts, some sixty firms monopolizing 60 % of the overall contract value.<sup>31</sup> The leading companies in the association of real estate developers and investors—such as Sinpaş, İhlas and Torunlar—are its main partners. But TOKİ's configuring of the sector does not only involve granting land and contracts to its key

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<sup>27</sup> Pérouse 2013: 187.

<sup>28</sup> Kuyucu, Ünsal 2010: 1496, note 17.

<sup>29</sup> Hibou 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Pérouse 2013: 191.

<sup>31</sup> D. Gökçe, "TOKİ'den hangi şirket ne kadarlık ihale aldı" ("Which firms won how many TOKİ calls for bids"), <http://dincergokce.blogcu.com/toki-den-hangi-sirket-ne-kadarlik-ihale-aldi/7241702>, accessed July 16, 2014.

partners. TOKİ has greatly contributed to the emergence of a new group of entrepreneurs: over 50 % of the construction and civil engineering firms that win most of the sizeable contracts offered by TOKİ are companies that have been active in the sector for less than ten years.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, the agency has assumed the role of arbiter, even censor: every year, it publishes a brochure listing the construction companies it works with and judges the quality of their work according to criteria such as meeting deadlines, the quality of the finished product, solvability and so on.<sup>33</sup> Some companies are classified as “risky,” others are blacklisted, depending on whether the agreements made were canceled or transferred or if lawsuits are underway. Publication of these evaluations naturally puts these companies in a dire situation.

This institution’s activities tend to duplicate the strength of the central government at the local level.<sup>34</sup> Through it, major investments in urban infrastructure are made under state control, the government thus remaining a major actor in processes of accumulation. The example of TOKİ shows how the state—not to say the executive—has redeployed in certain sectors and exercises configurational power, despite its stated decentralization and economic liberalization policies.

The AKP government has resulted in the political reconfiguration of regional administration that cannot be summed up in terms of centralization or decentralization. As the emblematic case of TOKİ shows, this reconfiguration has been accompanied by new modes of government of the territory, but also of the people. The AKP’s strength lies in its strong presence in the structures of the bureaucracy, the interventionist policies it applies in various sectors and its ability to shape them.

## REDEPLOYMENT, ASSOCIATION, CONFORMATION

The following section will analyze the AKP’s modes of insertion into society and show that its institutional redeployment proceeds by indirect governing, cooptation and encouragement of a number of closely associated actors in a variety of domains. The aim here is to retrace at once the new forms of exercising power and the way in which various groups are associated with it. Pursuing the inquiry undertaken with regard to TOKİ, the reformatting of relations between public sector and industry under the AKP will be illustrated in the description of a trend of increasing state insertion into the economy at both the national and local level. Institutional involvement in social policy increasingly relies on intermediaries (entrepreneurs and faith-based NGOs), particularly within local governments. An analysis of the flow of resources will at once shed light on how the AKP’s social base is reproduced and consolidated, and also reveal the considerable configurational power the AKP has acquired in various sectors.

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<sup>32</sup> Pérouse 2013: 176.

<sup>33</sup> “44 firma TOKİ’nin kara listesinde” (“44 companies on TOKİ’s blacklist”), *Dünya Bülten*, February 22, 2011, <http://www.dunyabulteni.net/haber/148469/44-firma-tokinin-kara-listesinde>, accessed July 16, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2013.



## The Reformatting of State-Enterprise Relations: The Example of Municipalities

The AKP's rule has been marked by changes in the mode of relations between the state and the economy. Although on several occasions the party has reiterated its commitment to economic liberalism, the new forms of state intervention that it has encouraged have deeply altered relations between public authorities and entrepreneurs, and the opportunities for capital accumulation offered by the state remain considerable.<sup>35</sup> The rate of privatizations, in particular, accelerated at a vertiginous pace:<sup>36</sup> ongoing since the 1980s, the amounts involved rose from 8.2 billion dollars between 1985 and 2003 to 50.3 billion dollars between 2004 and 2013.<sup>37</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to believe that relations between the state and the economy boil down to that. This period also saw a development of various forms of partnership with the private sector. There was for instance a significant increase in calls for public tenders—between 1998 and mid-January 2012, some 904,471 public tenders were issued, over one-third of them after 2009.<sup>38</sup> According to Buğra and Savaşkan, despite the opening up and liberalization of the economy, capital accumulation and business growth still essentially depend on relations with the government in sectors such as large-scale infrastructure as well as energy, but also the metallurgical industry, construction and health services (especially owing to the health care reform undertaken in 2003).<sup>39</sup>

According to several observers, the privatization of public infrastructure and the awarding of public procurement contracts mainly benefits AKP partners. Various legislative and administrative mechanisms permit public institutions to intervene in the contract award process: since it was passed in 2002, the law on public procurement had been modified 21 times by the year 2012, with over one hundred amendments including exception clauses that have often expanded the public authorities' discretionary power in the contract award process, and which have been pinpointed in the successive European Commission progress reports on Turkey.<sup>40</sup> The 2010 report, in particular, drew attention to the rise in the number of contracts (approximately 28 %) that were not signed in accordance with procedure.<sup>41</sup> On the basis of official sources published by the Public Procurement Institute, Gürek reveals that nearly half the bidding results are not made public, contrary to the legal obligation of public disclosure.<sup>42</sup> The political authorities are given considerable leeway in choosing contractors. Who benefits from these practices? Drawing on a quantitative analysis of public tenders, Gürek has brought to light the special

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<sup>35</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Öniş 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Official figures can be consulted on the Privatization Administration website: <http://www.oib.gov.tr/>

<sup>38</sup> See the official website: <http://www.ihale.gen.tr/>, accessed July 16, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Among the tenders issued, the following categories are the best represented: construction (17.3 %); construction materials (4.8 %)—the sum of these two categories shows that the construction and civil engineering sector is dominant; vehicles, equipment and services to the health care sector (9.6 %); fuel, oil and coal (7.5 %); sanitation vehicles, equipment and services (6.1 %); food (5.9 %); transportation (5 %). See Buğra, Savaşkan 2012.

<sup>40</sup> European Commission 2012: 48-49; European Commission 2013: 34.

<sup>41</sup> European Commission 2010: 50.

<sup>42</sup> Gürek 2008.



relationships that several companies regularly awarded contracts appear to maintain with AKP circles.<sup>43</sup> The party seems to grant privileges to businessmen with close ties in terms of political and religious affiliations.<sup>44</sup>

While it is difficult to form a clear picture on the subject, the government cannot be said to treat the various business organizations with equal distance. Its relations with the largest and oldest organization of major industrialists, economically liberal and long close to the government, TÜSİAD (*Türkiye Sanayıcı ve İşadamları Derneği*, Turkish Industry and Business Association), have been mercurial and sometimes strained—for instance at the time of the 2010 constitutional reform that TÜSİAD harshly criticized. On the other hand, its ties with MÜSİAD (*Müstakil Sanayıcı ve İşadamları Derneği*, Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, in other words "Muslim"), founded in 1990 to compete with the former, as well as until recently with TÜSKON (*Türkiye İş Adamları ve Sanayiciler Konfederasyonu*, Turkish Confederation of Industrialists and Businessmen), founded in 2005 by members of the Fethullah Gülen movement, have been much closer. Dilek Yankaya's study of MÜSİAD helps to form a better idea of these convergences. Although the organization has sometimes demonstrated pragmatism in its search for political allies, its links with the AKP in power are tangible and multidimensional—in terms of socialization, political orientation and personal networks (Erdoğan and Gül were both members). Under the AKP's rule, the association has strengthened its status as prime beneficiary of the government, having acquired economic privileges and political influence in the first decade of the 2000s. The AKP's rise to power, in particular by opening clientelistic opportunities in the award of public contracts, encouraged entrepreneurs to join MÜSİAD. In the course of the 2000s, membership emerged as a path to management positions and positions of authority, or even as a factor of economic performance,<sup>45</sup> new members joining more out of interest than affinity. To what degree is this phenomenon specific to the AKP? Business association membership and closeness to power circles have always played a decisive role in the distribution of privileges and contract awards.<sup>46</sup> While not new, the phenomenon seems to have grown more preponderant or taken on specific forms under the AKP for three reasons: the growing number of public offers to tender and public procurement; the stability of AKP power at all levels; and the extension of these practices of favoritism to the local level. This particular point will now be examined in greater detail.

Buğra and Savaşkan consider that the remarkable growth of these new conservative entrepreneurs is also and perhaps especially explained by their participation in a state-supported wave of capital accumulation.<sup>47</sup> The rise of these entrepreneurs in the first decade of the 2000s is astounding, particularly as some of them had been excluded from public tenders during the "post-modern coup d'état" of 1997, in other words the army memorandum that intended to put a halt to Islamist activities in various sectors, including the economy. Just looking at MÜSİAD, this rise is perceptible in terms of membership, the number of companies represented

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Yankaya 2013: 127, 146.

<sup>46</sup> Yankaya 2013 for the 1990s; Buğra 1994.

<sup>47</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2012: 38.

among the country's five hundred largest companies or again, in the positions attained by the organization's members in major city chambers of commerce and industry (starting with Istanbul) or elected seats on the boards of administration of the development agencies set up as of 2006 at the regional level.<sup>48</sup> It should be remembered that these new entrepreneurs are nicknamed "Anatolian Tigers," by analogy to the emerging economies in South East Asia, but also because several of them hail from Anatolian provinces once marginalized by Mustafa Kemal's secular modernization strategy. The variable here is company size: MÜSİAD rivals with TÜSİAD less along ideological criteria than by the size of its member companies, attracting those that did not have the turnover figures required to join TÜSİAD. What is specific about the economic environment created by the AKP is that companies of various sizes can benefit from the opportunities created by the public authorities. The Public Procurement Law of 2002 indeed allows the administration that awards the contract to ask the contractor to change subcontractors, thereby entitling the public authority to intervene even in the choice of subcontractors. This provision is particularly significant for new entrepreneurs that do not necessarily have the size, experience, resources or know-how to bid in public tenders, but can gain access to them via subcontracting.<sup>49</sup> By the same token, not only can nationally known or big city entrepreneurs be awarded TOKİ contracts, but also smaller, more local entrepreneurs.

This phenomenon—and this is new as well—also applies to the municipal sector, now in full expansion: for instance, local administrations represented 40 % of public fixed capital investment in 2010 and 26 % in 2012.<sup>50</sup> The 2004-2005 reforms not only strengthened municipalities' powers and broadened their fields of activity, they also increased their financial independence and paved the way for partnerships with the private sector. These partnerships are no longer limited to the funding of large infrastructure, but also affect the production, exploitation and management of many services. Due to growing restrictions on municipal employment, which has been tightly controlled since the mid-2000s, the municipalities have outsourced a large number of tasks, gradually turning them into service managers.<sup>51</sup> In Kayseri, the share of the municipal budget allocated to subcontracting has for instance undergone a marked rise since the 1990s, to the point of exceeding personnel expenditure in the 2000s.<sup>52</sup> While within the municipalities, privatization remains very rare, cooperation with the private sector has become the rule and takes different forms: subcontracting, establishment of mixed capital enterprises, municipal government acquisition of stakes in private enterprises, devolution of public services and so on.<sup>53</sup>

Such partnerships have been diversified and expanded to a wide variety of sectors, not only large-scale infrastructure or construction and civil engineering, but also the provision

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<sup>48</sup> Yankaya 2013. The fact that among the three representatives of "civil society" elected to Istanbul's development agency board of administration representatives from MÜSİAD and TÜSKON were elected but none from TÜSİAD caused an uproar. See S. Özdemir, "İstanbul'u kalkındırarak ekipte, TÜSİAD yok" ("TÜSİAD is absent from the team that will develop Istanbul"), *Hürriyet*, January 5, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Kadirbeyoğlu, Sümer 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Doğan 2007: 216ss, 224, 242.

<sup>53</sup> Massicard, Pérouse 2012.

of services such as street cleaning, public transportation and health care. Its annual reports show that the calls for tender issued by the Avclar district municipality in Istanbul in the 1990s were limited to construction and landscaping. Ten years later, tenders had become common in sectors as diverse as education, printing, nursing care, construction of housing units and demolition of illegal constructions.

At the municipal level as well, political decision-making processes and private sector relations with institutional decision-makers are crucial to a company's success.<sup>54</sup> Gürek has shown that calls for tender issued by municipalities were open to potentially corrupt practices,<sup>55</sup> given that contactors having signed long-term contracts with certain municipalities had a tendency to win the bidding process in others. This could be seen as a sign of company professionalization in a given sector, but the observation applies only to municipalities of the same political hue.<sup>56</sup> To cite one example among others, Özkartallar, formed in 1986, became involved in the cleaning and refuse collection business in 1994, the year in which the Prosperity Party (Refah Partisi) won the mayorship of Istanbul. On the strength of its special relations with mayors belonging to the future AKP, it soon emerged as a leading enterprise in the sector, initially working mainly for the metropolitan municipality of Istanbul, then, in 2011, with several district municipalities in Istanbul: Ümraniye, Sultanbeyli, Çekmeköy and Sancaktepe, all of them governed by the AKP. Conversely, calls for tender issued by opposition municipalities, such as Izmir (CHP), are very frequently cancelled or taken to court by the central authorities on the pretense of irregularities. Buğra and Savaşkan interpret the paths of economic growth followed by these new entrepreneurs as the sign of the ascendancy of political relations forged at the national level over local achievements, despite a trend toward decentralization and industrial relocation.<sup>57</sup> While it remains difficult to measure the respective share of these two dynamics, suffice it to point out that within AKP municipalities, they are coherent and may mutually strengthen one another.

Political connections—which have always been important for business—thus have taken on a more marked local dimension, a consequence of the municipalities' growing role as well as that of subcontracting, which is now highly developed and benefits from practices of favoritism. Buğra and Savaşkan refute the usual interpretation that the AKP was brought to power by the economic-social dynamics created by provincial SMEs, arguing on the contrary that the state under AKP rule has contributed to the emergence of a new bourgeoisie, that the new means of capital accumulation put in place have made a new group of entrepreneurs the party's base, and that the business associations that got their start with the rise of political Islam have contributed significantly to shaping this support group.<sup>58</sup> They put forth two central ideas: the importance of the shaping power of the state on the creation of a social group and the configuration of economic interests, which there is no reason to believe has diminished under the AKP, and the fact that political polarization of the economy has been produced and continues to be reproduced.

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<sup>54</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Gürek 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Kadirbeyoğlu, Sümer 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2012.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

Are these entrepreneurs' ties with the AKP limited to a concurrence of opinion? Everything suggests that in exchange, beneficiary companies hire party sympathizers or supporters, precisely those who can no longer easily be employed in the public sector due to stringent new employment standards that have done away with previously widespread forms of clientelistic redistribution—which persist nevertheless, but henceforth go through the private sector.<sup>59</sup> Companies may also support party sections or, more often, participate in the funding of municipal activities or those organized by charitable organizations.

## Involvement in Social Welfare

If the AKP merely pursued a neoliberal policy benefitting solely a coalition of real estate developers, conservative entrepreneurs, local elected officials and relatively well-off citizens, what would explain its repeated success at the polls, given that these groups are important to the economy but they do not carry decisive political weight? Such policies are known to generate strong dynamics of social exclusion. The redistributive state remains, however, very limited in Turkey. How, then, can the AKP's popularity in underprivileged urban areas be explained, particularly in districts affected by urban renewal projects?<sup>60</sup>

This question requires revisiting a central aspect of AKP policy since its arrival in power: its social policy. Far from withdrawing from the social sphere as one might expect of “unbridled” neoliberalism, the AKP has set up and systematized certain types of aid, but this has been done not from a standpoint of rights, but rather one of charity and beneficence. To do so, it has relied on businesses (for donations) and NGOs (for targeting), introducing often limited forms of distribution of divisible goods, in particular in the municipalities. It is important to understand these mechanisms, as even “the most ordinary economic arrangements and the most routine economic transactions simultaneously partake of domination mechanisms.”<sup>61</sup>

### • The Overhaul of Welfare Policy in Turkey

The first two AKP governments (2002-2007) undertook major social welfare reforms, an area that until then had suffered neglect from Turkey's institutions. It was not until 1986, when the Social Solidarity and Assistance Fund (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışmayı Teşvik Fonu*, or SYDTF) was established, that social aid came within the purview of the state, even if it has long remained erratic, *ad hoc* and in kind. This fund came into being following the emergence of new forms of poverty and social exclusion during the 1980s generated by the

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<sup>59</sup> Massicard, Pérouse 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Differences exist, naturally, between neighborhoods. For instance, in the 2009 local elections, some districts in Istanbul that the AKP “lost”—such as Maltepe and Sarıyer—were lost largely because of discontent aroused by urban renewal projects. This sort of phenomenon, however, is far from being the rule.

<sup>61</sup> Hibou 2011: 14-15.

opening up and deregulation of the Turkish economy and the ensuing shortage of stable and secure jobs.<sup>62</sup> Up until the economic crisis of 2001 however, poverty was hardly considered to be a problem requiring state action. It was only after this crisis—and hence when the AKP came to power—that the fight against poverty and social exclusion was tackled by public policy.<sup>63</sup> From 2001 to 2004, social aid expenditure rose in absolute value, and the budget and purview of SYDTF were considerably expanded, the amount of aid it distributed going so far as to triple. Even if these figures remain marginal in terms of share of GDP, and this increase remains limited, it nevertheless indicates a notable change in awareness of the need for a policy to combat poverty.<sup>64</sup>

The AKP government placed overhauling the system of social protection on its agenda. In 2004, it modified the Fund's structure, turning it into the Directorate General of Social Assistance and Solidarity (SYDGM). It then expanded coverage of the green card—introduced in 1992 to ensure access to health care for individuals who had no coverage—to over 14 million holders in 2007 and improved access to health care services. Conditional Cash Transfers were introduced for the first time (paid to mothers), in conjunction with a World Bank project launched in the wake of the 2001 economic crisis, aid that soon became more regular and plentiful. A few years later, the health insurance and social security systems were harmonized and expanded. Prior to that, only three population categories were covered (government employees; farmers and the self-employed; private sector employees, who received specific benefits), to the exclusion of the entire inactive population as well as workers in the informal sector, despite their large numbers.<sup>65</sup> In 2006, the government created a Social Security Institute that unified these three systems; in 2007, it introduced health coverage for all, financed by an insurance fund that made basic health care available to all citizens. Today an estimated 90 % or more of the population is covered. It is likely that these measures have had an impact on AKP election scores in the poorest regions of the country: Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia as well as large city suburbs.<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, two different, even contrasting approaches seem to have guided the AKP's social reforms. One emphasized the introduction of redistributive social policy based on established rights: the institutional organization has been rationalized—the “integrated system” set up draws on a database that centralizes data from fourteen different institutions—the application process has been simplified and systematized—a supposedly rational method for calculating poverty was gradually introduced—the circulation of information regarding eligibility characteristics and criteria for various types of aid has been standardized. The other approach highlighted the more traditional notion that social assistance is more a question of charity than a matter of legal right: the central role of the family and social environment is evident in the conception of

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<sup>62</sup> Buğra, Keyder 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Buğra, Adar 2008.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> The exclusion produced by this highly corporatist system was however mitigated by the fact that a large segment of the population was covered by the health insurance of an officially active spouse.

<sup>66</sup> Buğra, Candaş 2011.

welfare that emerges from AKP and government programs and the prime minister's speeches. Similarly, the role of the family has been strengthened in programs to rehabilitate street children and in the care for the elderly and the disabled. Buğra and Keyder thus view the AKP's social orientation as "a mixture of neoliberalism and social conservatism."<sup>67</sup>

#### • Devolution: The Role of Municipalities

In fact, even though state institutions have become involved in the social policy sector, to do so they have relied on other bodies, especially family solidarity and charity from philanthropic organizations. In the same way, the AKP government expects local initiatives and governments to shoulder much of the burden in caring for the destitute.<sup>68</sup> The restructuring of the SYDTF in the early days of AKP's rule thus reflects a decline in state participation in soup kitchens and transfers to the poor during Ramadan and religious celebrations,<sup>69</sup> activities that have increased significantly at the municipal level.

Social welfare action by municipalities falls in line with a trend that began in the mid-1990s, especially in Islamist city governments.<sup>70</sup> The success of the Islamist Prosperity Party Refah, at the polls in many cities in 1994, including Istanbul and Ankara, was a turning point.<sup>71</sup> The Refah took office in cities pledging equality and social justice, "the just order" (*adil düzen*). Its municipalities became known for specific charity activities: handling and helping bear the cost of circumcision ceremonies and group weddings; setting up soup kitchens and activities during Ramadan; aid to the most destitute, such as study grants, contributions towards medical or housing expenses, handouts of food, public transport tickets, clothing, coal and basic necessities at low prices and even free of charge;<sup>72</sup> appointments for the poor in hospitals and other public services.<sup>73</sup> Distribution of aid by Islamist municipalities was far more consequential than by competing parties, and not only prior to elections.<sup>74</sup> Between 1994 and 2007, in Kayseri, the number of families receiving daily donations of food, coal and medicine multiplied sevenfold; during Ramadan, 16,500 people were served in soup kitchens; the city government distributed school supplies to the neediest.<sup>75</sup> The Islamists considered as "needy" not only the elderly, isolated, disabled and people with no income, but also those with unstable, temporary, minimum wage or jobs with no social coverage.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Buğra, Keyder 2005: 32.

<sup>68</sup> Buğra, Keyder 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti 2004: 50.

<sup>70</sup> Buğra, Keyder 2005.

<sup>71</sup> Akıncı 1999; Doğan 2007: 18-19, 219; Eligür 2010: 172ss.

<sup>72</sup> White 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Heper 1997: 36.

<sup>74</sup> Akıncı 1999: 76-77.

<sup>75</sup> Doğan 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Doğan 2007: 217, 234, 248, 255, 260.



This social activism reflects the party's organization. Before even taking office, it had become heavily involved in social aid and charity. The Refah not only functioned as a political party but also as a social welfare agency for the needy.<sup>77</sup> It was by providing services that it managed to harness the support of the underprivileged classes and rise to power—from this standpoint, parallels with other Islamist parties throughout the world are justified. In so doing, it made personal contacts with as many people as possible so as to marshal support and identify the needy.<sup>78</sup> This illustrates how methods of activism that helped the Islamists win elections have been transposed to the institutional sphere.

Municipal social activism would take a more systematic turn under the AKP, encouraged by recent reforms granting local governments extensive responsibility in the area of social assistance, as well as the possibility of working with the private sector (commercial or volunteer), be it for the provision of services or for financing them. Articles 75 and 77 of the 2005 law on municipalities, in particular, place social assistance in the sphere of private charity.<sup>79</sup> No precise figures are available to measure the financial resources mobilized by the various social assistance programs,<sup>80</sup> but the growing presence of municipalities in this sector is evident in job creation efforts (mainly training programs) and in the distribution of aid in the form of food, coal, clothing, etc.<sup>81</sup> A mere glance at municipal annual reports or their websites is instructive. The municipality of Beyoğlu, for instance, offers a wide variety of aid: distribution of coal, clothing, food, gift in kind, study grants, soup kitchens, showers, aid for the disabled... In the first decade of the 2000s, alongside local facilities (*mahalle muhtarlığı*) it also set up eleven *semt konakları* (neighborhood halls) which house kindergartens and public dispensaries (where family doctors see patients free of charge), a variety of cultural activities (lectures, concerts) and educational activities: literacy classes for women, computer and English classes; daily aid for the poor (permanent soup kitchens, free laundry, showers) as well as social service offices.<sup>82</sup> These halls, often adjacent to a park and/or a café, are entrenched in neighborhood social life and produce multidimensional forms of management of the population. Some, such as the one in Dolapdere, house a social welfare store where the needy can procure basic consumer goods for free. Other municipalities, such as the district municipalities of Başakşehir and Beyoğlu in Istanbul, have set up a system of prepaid cards (Beyoğlukart, Destekkart) enabling the holders—they are granted solely to

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<sup>77</sup> Heper 1997: 36.

<sup>78</sup> White 2002; Eligür 2010.

<sup>79</sup> Thus, article 77 stipulates that "In order to enable public participation in the services and to increase the efficiency and to carry out the activities in the most economic manner, the Municipality shall prepare programs for the volunteers who are willing to contribute to health, training, sports, environmental, cultural and social services, formation of libraries, parks etc. and other services rendered to the old people, women and children, disabled, poor people and to those in destitute [sic]." [http://www.migm.gov.tr/en/Laws/Law5393\\_Municipality\\_2010-12-31\\_EN\\_rev01.pdf](http://www.migm.gov.tr/en/Laws/Law5393_Municipality_2010-12-31_EN_rev01.pdf), accessed December 2, 2014.

<sup>80</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti 2004: 45.

<sup>81</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Interview, Tophane neighborhood hall, May 4, 2013.



women<sup>83</sup>—to purchase food, clothing and school supplies in some stores. The municipalities publicize this charity, giving them an image of concerned and socially responsible teams, and there is good reason to believe that their social expenditure has risen since the 2000s, even though it is impossible to document.<sup>84</sup> They have, moreover, set up social funds with contributions in cash or kind collected from local companies—a gesture likely to be rewarded in the form of privileges granted in the business relations of these companies with the local political authorities.<sup>85</sup> As municipalities can take donations from private individuals, it is not easy to monitor their resources and social welfare expenditures.<sup>86</sup>

#### • NGO Involvement

Municipal social aid, mostly financed by charity, also often relies on NGOs. The charitable activities of Refah municipalities already appealed invariably to norms and institutions of Islamic solidarity through which they generated private donations from pious Muslims.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the municipalities controlled by the AKP—as well as, and sometimes together with Islamic organizations—solicit charity donations and direct them toward the needy. NGOs stand among the main purveyors of social assistance and provide various forms of aid: donations in kind (food, coal and clothing) or in cash (study grants and contribution to rent payments).

Here again, this is not a new phenomenon. A look back at the social policy conducted under the Ottoman Empire and the republic shows that the state has never considered social assistance as coming under its purview: poverty has always been perceived as a problem that should be dealt with by charitable persons,<sup>88</sup> and civic organizations have always played a central role in the fight to eradicate it. This was the case of religious endowments (*vakıf*) in the Ottoman Empire, which relied on both public and private funds to provide social aid.<sup>89</sup> It continued under the republic, even during the single party period.<sup>90</sup> SYDTE, the first state institution in charge of social aid, established in 1986, was nonetheless based on the same principle: to alleviate the burden of social aid on the state budget, donations were solicited on the initiative and under the supervision of the government, resulting in a mix of public and private funds with no clear distinction between the two. Assistance to the poor thus remained in the realm of beneficence. Revealingly, this extrabudgetary fund was financed, like its

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<sup>83</sup> Housewives make up a significant portion of the AKP electorate. According to a recent study, 48 % of housewives reported their intention to vote for the AKP in the 2014 local elections; 40 % of AKP voters are housewives, compared to 29 % of CHP voters and 24 % of MHP voters (KONDA 2014: 21-22).

<sup>84</sup> Buğra, Adar 2008.

<sup>85</sup> Buğra, Candaş 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>87</sup> White 2002.

<sup>88</sup> Buğra, Adar 2008.

<sup>89</sup> On beneficence under the Ottoman Empire, see Özbek 1999; Singer 2002; Bonner, Eder, Singer 2003.

<sup>90</sup> Buğra, Candaş 2011.

counterparts, by both tax revenues and traffic fines and by voluntary donations, particularly Muslim almsgiving, or *zekat fitre*.<sup>91</sup> SYDTF was designed as an umbrella organization bringing together local foundations (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Vakıfları*, Assistance and Social Solidarity Foundations, or SYDV). These foundations, numbering 973 to date,<sup>92</sup> although linked to the central government, are managed in each district by a board of directors made up of the sub-prefect as well as local philanthropists. Some of their characteristics—references to Islam and to the Ottoman Empire, collection of voluntary contributions, absence of means-testing mechanisms and precise targeting criteria—likened them to Islamic NGOs.<sup>93</sup> The Fund nevertheless plays an important role in combating poverty by mobilizing public resources.<sup>94</sup>

While social activism on the part of NGOs and encouragement of this practice by public institutions is not new or specific to the AKP, its scale and form as well as its ties to public institutions have evolved under its rule. A large majority of NGOs active in social aid are religious in their motivations:<sup>95</sup> the total budget of thirteen major Muslim NGOs (far from covering the entire sector, which includes several dozen organizations whose budgets are not public) was 66 million dollars in 2009, compared to SYDGM's 395-million-dollar budget.<sup>96</sup>

The genealogy of Islamic charitable NGOs again dates back to the 1990s. Over half of the charitable organizations in existence today were founded after the AKP took office. The others were established in the 1990s, a time when faith-based NGOs multiplied in Turkey—as they did elsewhere in Europe.<sup>97</sup> This is the case in particular of İHH (*İnsani Yardım Vakfı*, Foundation for Humanitarian Relief), founded in 1995, which made news on the occasion of the attack against the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla in 2010. This “first generation” of Islamic charitable organizations came about in the context of the rise of political Islam which was accompanied, for one, by the creation of solidarity and reciprocity networks that united in adversity due to the lack of institutional support, and secondly, by the rise of a conservative bourgeoisie that became involved in financing them.<sup>98</sup> The growth of the Islamic charitable sector in the 1990s fed at once on the growing problems of poverty and the powerlessness of national institutions.<sup>99</sup> The Refah's “just order” advocated social justice, but did not intend to achieve it by state redistribution or by expanding the purview of the welfare state, instead counting on voluntary redistribution and assistance.<sup>100</sup> It came from private beneficence and volunteer initiatives organized around forms of community membership and solidarity based on the Islamic moral duty of charity.

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<sup>91</sup> For an analysis of extrabudgetary funds, see Corte-Real Pinto 2013: 300ss.

<sup>92</sup> See the institution's website: <http://www.sosyalyardimlar.gov.tr/tr/11859/Sosyal-Yardimlasma-ve-Dayanismayi-Tesvik-Fonu>, accessed July 16, 2014.

<sup>93</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>94</sup> Buğra, Keyder 2005.

<sup>95</sup> Buğra, Candaş 2011.

<sup>96</sup> Göçmen 2014: 93.

<sup>97</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Regarding the role of foundations in the Islamist movement, see Bilici 1993.

<sup>99</sup> Göçmen 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Pérouse 1999: 280.

The expansion of these networks relied on a sense of intracommunity trust and solidarity based on Islam. Political Islam in fact enabled NGOs, enterprises and the media to form networks. Thus, several organizations grew out of the institutionalization of Islamist television programs organized around visits to a destitute family and appeals for donations from individuals, such as *Deniz Feneri* (the Lighthouse), one of the main Islamic charitable organizations, which arose out of the *Milli Görüş* movement founded in 1996 in the wake of the success of the program by the same name broadcast on Islamist channel Kanal 7.<sup>101</sup> Some of these NGOs have been suspected of having, and sometimes proven to have, direct or indirect ties with political parties: a scandal broke out surrounding *Deniz Feneri* after Germany initiated legal proceedings against several organization directors accused of transferring donations collected from migrants from Turkey in Germany to business concerns in Turkey, and revealing ties with the AKP.<sup>102</sup> In some cases, such as with Cansuyu, an organization with ties to the Islamist party Saadet, people who seek aid from the party are referred to the association.<sup>103</sup> These first-generation Islamic NGOs, originally involved mainly in education, started making considerable inroads in the field of social aid in the first decade of the 2000s.<sup>104</sup> The AKP thus resorted to an existing Islamic charitable sector which it subsequently helped to develop and reformat.

The existence of a well-structured and enterprising faith-based organization sector is an undeniable comparative advantage for Islamist parties—extensively exploited by the AKP—over their competitors. From this standpoint, opposition parties have indeed remained well inferior, if not non-existent. Furthermore, the Islamic aspects of AKP's ideological orientation have proven useful to motivate and mobilize civic initiatives in the provision of social assistance. The AKP can more easily mobilize the rhetoric of Muslim philanthropy than the other parties. In other words, the strength of the AKP's Islamic roots lies at once in the tradition of Islamic charity and the party's ability to frame a conservative social policy orientation in familiar terms.<sup>105</sup>

The AKP reinforced this tradition in two ways: by encouraging the work of charitable organizations and by formalizing their cooperation with state institutions. Prime Minister Erdoğan has expressed his support for the charity work of Islamic organizations on a number of occasions,<sup>106</sup> and the AKP introduced a number of legislative arrangements to simplify their work. Association Law no. 5253 passed in 2004 created a Department of Associations within the interior ministry in charge of supervising the establishment and operation of organizations. It also facilitated the founding and operation of them, in particular by allowing them to receive donations from abroad or cooperate with associations abroad without prior authorization. Tax circular no. 251/2004 also introduced a food bank system in income tax legislation that offers tax exemptions to companies that make food donations to NGOs. A further revision of law no.

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<sup>101</sup> The Gulenist *Kimse Yok Mu* association also grew out of a television program.

<sup>102</sup> Göçmen 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Buğra, Candaş 2011.

<sup>106</sup> For instance he praised the work of the Gulenist association *Kimse Yok Mu* in fighting poverty during the Feast of Sacrifice. "Erdoğan'dan 'Kimse Yok Mu'ya büyük övgü" ("Erdoğan offers *Kimse Yok Mu* great praise"), *Zaman*, December 22, 2007.

5281 extended this provision to clothing, heating fuel and home cleaning products. Lastly, the 2004 Association Law changed the procedure for awarding “public interest” status to voluntary associations—a status that carries significant privileges, particularly tax exemptions. This status is now granted by the Council of Ministers alone. Prior to then, the Council of Ministers made the recommendation to the Council of State, which ultimately made the decision. The effects of this change in procedure were soon felt: the Council of Ministers had recommended public interest status for *Deniz Feneri* in December 2002, in other words one month after the AKP took office, but the proposal was rejected by the Council of State. As soon as the law was amended in 2004, the Council of Ministers granted public interest status and the following year, *Deniz Feneri* was honored with the National Assembly Award for “eminent services” and its “leadership in social responsibility.” Kimse Yok Mu, linked with the Gulen Movement, was awarded this title in 2006. The authorities have also backed Islamic charitable foundations (which have a different legal status). *Suffa vakfı*, a charitable foundation with links to a branch of the Nurcu brotherhood, thus won tax-exempt status in 2010.

The growing institutionalization of cooperation with these religious organizations is clear, even if official joint projects remain rare.<sup>107</sup> At the national level, the Rainbow Project can be mentioned, sponsored by the Administration for Disabled People and the Ministry of National Education. It appeals to philanthropic sentiment to finance the provision of rehabilitation services for the disabled and help them join the work force.<sup>108</sup> As for the “100 % Support for Education” project, donations to it are entirely tax deductible.<sup>109</sup> But at the local level, the most common type of interaction, and the most informal, remains the exchange of information and the sharing of lists of charity beneficiaries.

In this context, the channels of beneficence set up by Refah municipalities should be evoked. These involved the party, religious foundations, certain organizations as well as private donors primarily in the business community—a system that still seems to be in current use under the AKP. Most Refah municipalities maintained close relations with charitable foundations, making infrastructure and staff available to them. Such foundations, having little means of their own, had to rely on donations.<sup>110</sup> Today’s Islamic organizations are also based on volunteering and charity.<sup>111</sup> The foundation with which the Kayseri municipality worked relied exclusively on donations from businessmen, who moreover ran the organization.<sup>112</sup> Charity being considered religious in essence, donors’ acts in return were valued in the conservative circles that supported them. This appreciation made it easier for Refah municipalities to call for donations to carry out certain projects and thus to count on outside financing. Foundations could in return place jobseekers in their donors’ companies or firms associated with them *via* personal networks. Despite their formal autonomy, the municipality, the party and the foundation partly shared the same staff and

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<sup>107</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>108</sup> Buğra, Adar 2008.

<sup>109</sup> “Belediye-Milli Eğitim işbirliği ile okullar onarılacak,” *Zaman*, September 12, 2013.

<sup>110</sup> White 2002.

<sup>111</sup> Göçmen 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Doğan 2007.

together identified the recipients of their benevolence.<sup>113</sup> Islamic NGOs in the Refah period were characterized by their decentralized structure and the importance they gave the locality: local authorities were responsible for management and fund-raising, the underlying idea being that maintaining strong ties with communities attracted donations. “Local knowledge” was prized, and it was considered important to be familiar with both the needy and potential donors. Such knowledge was based on a strong local grounding and the use of personal networks.<sup>114</sup> The boundaries between politics, religion and social welfare action were vague.

The same could be said today, given the frequency, even the institutionalization, of exchanges between institutions, the party, businessmen, NGOs and the Islamic-leaning media. Thus, TGTV (*Türkiye Gönüllü Teşekkülleri Vakfı*, the Turkish Foundation of Voluntary Organizations), which grew out of the Milli Görüş movement, founded in 1994 and the largest grouping of Islamist NGOs (128 to date), strives to bring together various sectors of Islamic civil society—philanthropic organizations, educational, human rights and cultural organizations as well as think tanks.<sup>115</sup> Among its members are business associations such as MÜSİAD and ASKON (*Anadolu Aslanları İşadamları Derneği*, Anatolian Lions Businessmen’s Association, founded in 1998 by members of MÜSİAD to represent SMEs), and believers devoted to just causes beyond their purely economic interests. It is likely that companies linked to these organizations finance the activities of charitable organizations. According to the president of TGTV, the transfer of resources is much easier in such a network of NGOs.<sup>116</sup> By the same token, television fund-raising drives are peppered with commercials for the big holding companies and enterprises that sponsor the organizations in question.<sup>117</sup>

Ayşe Buğra thus refers to a “political economy of charity”<sup>118</sup> and draws attention to the construction of a moral economy bringing into play informal and personalized methods linking the state, society and other actors to offset the lack of formal social policy institutions.<sup>119</sup> These networks for circulating charity resources bring into play various institutional or private actors, from businessmen to housewives in underprivileged neighborhoods. The program of prepaid debit cards instituted by the district municipality of Başakşehir in Istanbul is a case in point: it operates in shops that have a modest but fairly large and captive clientele, making these shops if not dependent, at least indebted to the municipality.<sup>120</sup> This same municipality mobilizes several types of intermediaries—Muslim charitable organizations, local AKP headquarters, district municipal offices, as well as directors of hometown (*hemşehri*) organizations—, in order to collect information on needy persons or jobseekers and target aid. Thus, directors of hometown organizations—especially strong in neighborhoods of recent migration—identify

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<sup>113</sup> White 2002: 178.

<sup>114</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>115</sup> Buğra, Candaş 2011.

<sup>116</sup> Göçmen 2014.

<sup>117</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>118</sup> Buğra 2009.

<sup>119</sup> Buğra, Adar 2008: 157-158.

<sup>120</sup> Ark 2014.

people in need for the AKP, through their members who work in the party's local branch. Such collaboration enables these associations to "tap into" a number of resources and insert themselves into redistributive channels.<sup>121</sup> There again, the parallels with the Refah period are striking.<sup>122</sup> These channels link the city government at once to donors—for whom this euergetism is an important commitment from which they can expect a "return on investment"—, beneficiaries and intermediaries who identify beneficiaries (charitable organizations, but also hometown associations). By using various types of intermediaries to target and even to hand out aid, municipalities create ties with various circles and thus increase their penetration of society.

The Turkish state thus seems to encourage philanthropic civil society initiatives more than the logic of taxation and redistribution.<sup>123</sup> For many observers, the choice role granted to NGOs in its treatment of poverty, as well as the blurring of boundaries between the activities of volunteer associations, central government agencies and the party, fall in line with current trends worldwide.<sup>124</sup> Public-private partnerships as well as the development of non-state actors such as religious associations and business partnerships for the provision of social aid are widely shared features of the contemporary government of welfare.<sup>125</sup> It would nevertheless be misleading to claim that in Turkey, civil society has taken over activities that were previously ensured by the state, as it has in several Western countries. Turkey's state institutions have taken charge of this field recently, relying, encouraging and collaborating with civil society initiatives, particularly those from the Islamic sector.

#### • From Targeting to Clientelism?

What effects have such practices had? Buğra and Keyder describe the role played by municipal governments or NGOs between donors and beneficiaries as charity brokerage.<sup>126</sup> This brokerage is not without its problems. The negotiations that take place, of dubious legality and legitimacy, are carried out with individuals who contribute to municipal charity funds and can therefore be construed as a form of bribery. The lack of transparency in municipal accounting makes it impossible to know exactly where these donations go. Such discretion can easily be justified as complying with Islamic norms of charity, forbidding any public show of generosity.

For the beneficiaries, aside from certain regular services such as soup kitchens, which are public services open to all, there is no dependability or guarantee of municipal aid. The fact that it comes very often in the form of divisible goods targeting specific individuals for a limited amount of time creates ties between individuals and the institutions that designate

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Massicard 2009.

<sup>123</sup> Buğra, Candaş 2011.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Jessop 1999.

<sup>126</sup> Buğra, Keyder 2005.



them as beneficiaries. In turn, this raises the stakes of targeting.<sup>127</sup> Assistance-targeting by municipalities as well as by local branches of the central administration lacks transparency and turns out to be largely discretionary, all the more as there are no systematic mechanisms for verifying income. Although Islamic charitable organizations target primarily indigent citizens who are ineligible for state services such as social security and social assistance, identification is based on different criteria and the decision whether or not to help a given household is often delegated to volunteers lacking professionalism, likely to base their decision on personal experience and judgment.<sup>128</sup> Some NGOs rely on strict social criteria and give priority to people who are not eligible for state social aid; others are more flexible in their targeting; still others orient aid in priority to the most religious circles, even to certain religious brotherhoods or communities.<sup>129</sup> The lack of similar charitable organizations in other circles—especially Alevi or secular—disadvantages certain groups as regards the distribution of social aid. Thus, although it cannot be asserted that they are systematically excluded, the Alevis feel they are neglected by these organizations.<sup>130</sup>

Even in the absence of corruption, the way in which municipal social assistance is distributed can maximize chances of the party in power being reelected. This is in any case a widespread belief,<sup>131</sup> and many attribute certain inequalities noted in access to aid primarily to political interests. The amount of in-kind aid dispensed by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SYDV) for instance multiplied threefold before the 2009 local elections,<sup>132</sup> giving credence to suspicions of vote buying. In Tunceli—a province inhabited by a majority of Kurdish-speaking Alevis disinclined to vote for the AKP—, local administrators of social aid distributed household appliances (refrigerators, washing machines, etc.). The Supreme Elections Council had to step in to put a stop to the practice.<sup>133</sup> The prefect disregarded its decision, however, and he was backed up by the prime minister, who publically declared, “charity is legitimate in our culture.”<sup>134</sup>

Considerable criticism has been voiced over the biased targeting of social aid. Some officials in CHP municipal governments in particular view the increase in assistance from municipal governments as a sign of clientelism and the politicization of social aid. They believe aid should be a matter of right and not entrusted to local governments and civil society initiatives.<sup>135</sup> Others maintain it should be the responsibility of sub-prefectures, deemed more neutral because they represent the state.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Doğan 2007: 234, 247, 249, 272.

<sup>128</sup> Göçmen 2014.

<sup>129</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Buğra, Keyder 2003; personal observations, local municipal officials, March 2014.

<sup>132</sup> Buğra, Candaş 2011.

<sup>133</sup> “Buzdolabı yardımı alan nine’nin ‘bakıma muhtacım’ gözyaşları,” *Milliyet*, February 24, 2009.

<sup>134</sup> “Erdogan: Sadaka kültürümüizde meşrudur,” *Milliyet*, January 2, 2009, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/default.aspx?aType=HaberDetay&ArticleID=1041815>, accessed July 16, 2014.

<sup>135</sup> Göçmen 2011.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with a neighborhood headman and AKP opponent, Başakşehir, Istanbul, November 23, 2013.



Alongside this criticism of the politicization of social aid,<sup>137</sup> there has also been a confusion as to “who gives what,” in a context where several actors (municipalities, sub-prefectures, political parties, NGOs, donors) provide aid and where the channels for collecting, distributing and targeting often involve several of these actors. Political parties supply goods and aid primarily before elections, along with municipal governments and sub-prefectures.<sup>138</sup> In Başakşehir, during the run-up to elections, AKP activists often grant aid from private sources (charitable organizations, entrepreneurs).<sup>139</sup> But some people mistakenly believe this aid comes from the municipalities. For instance, the sub-prefecture handles the distribution of coal, but it is largely perceived by the population as being handed out by the AKP. The municipality sometimes encourages this confusion: in Bağcılar district, coal, although provided by the sub-prefecture, is transported in municipal vehicles (perhaps with the sub-prefecture’s consent).<sup>140</sup>

Aid distributed by the municipalities is closely associated by citizens with the party in power in local government, and is widely considered as discretionary, non-transparent, subject to clientelism and patronage.<sup>141</sup> Various studies show that many believe the aid supplied by the municipality comes from the AKP.<sup>142</sup> This confusion is sustained, even encouraged, by the party. For instance, even though the prepaid debit card program was set up by the Başakşehir municipality, applications can be made at party headquarters just before elections: local activists use the opportunity to ask applicants to join the party (as they do at all of the party’s stands and campaign offices). They gather economic information about the household and offer to visit the home to assess the family’s eligibility for aid. This is a common electoral practice that consequently sustains the idea that there is a link between holding a party meeting at home and processing an application for municipal aid. This begs the question of the sub-prefects’ dependence on the AKP (a party from which they can reasonably hope for their promotion); and, to refer back to the beginning of the present study, whether they represent the state or the party. The AKP is consequently often identified as the gatekeeper of the most useful and valued public services.<sup>143</sup>

In Başakşehir, the AKP is largely perceived as the only entity capable of distributing resources and achieving results. When directors of hometown organizations—involved in the circulation of municipal resources as explained above—, need something, such as aid or institutional authorization, they may not go to the sub-prefecture but to the AKP. Access to public infrastructure in certain neighborhoods increasingly requires going through the party.<sup>144</sup> In this configuration, the AKP not only appears as the party in power, but as a problem-solving network.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Göçmen 2014.

<sup>138</sup> Ark 2014; Tafolar 2014.

<sup>139</sup> Targeting practices seem to differ from one party to another—some targeting loyal voters, others attempting to target new groups—and from one place to another.

<sup>140</sup> Tafolar 2014.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> See Ark 2014 regarding Başakşehir in particular.

<sup>143</sup> Ark 2014.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Auyero 2000.

The AKP's involvement in the social aid sector is indirect, relying on and bringing into play several intermediaries: Islamic NGOs, entrepreneurs, hometown organizations, etc. Alongside attempts to systematize eligibility for aid and introduce objective rules and criteria for granting social assistance, targeting and award practices have become more complex and political. The mechanisms of social assistance, very imperfectly codified in terms of rights, tend to reinforce forms of clientelistic patronage in the relationship between institutions and citizens. In that even the distribution of public funds obeys the logic of charity, there is no clear delineation between public assistance and voluntary beneficence. While it would be exaggerated to claim that individuals vote for the AKP due to the aid they receive from it or attribute to it, the fear of seeing this aid disappear if the current team in office would happen to change is palpable.<sup>146</sup> Of all the reasons for the AKP's popularity among the electorate, the strongest seems to be the promise of a stable government that achieves ambitious change and has demonstrated its economic strength, a guarantee of its ability to ensure access to goods and services and instill belief in the betterment of living conditions.

## CONCLUSION

In the course of its twelve years in power, the AKP has inserted itself into all the state's institutions. It has amply taken advantage of its positions in the state to make changes in various domains, but also to use public resources to party ends. The AKP is thus indeed a party of government, not to say a state party. But while the omnipresence of the Turkish executive has recently been denounced, the penetration of institutions by the party in power is not specific to the AKP.<sup>147</sup> If there is anything specific about it, it is rather in terms of scale, on account of the party's longevity in power and the fact that it dominates all levels of government, which has enabled it to overcome resistance within the state apparatus.

More remarkable still is the fact that the AKP has managed to win a large number of social groups and categories over to its program. The AKP only partly mobilized a preexisting group around it, united by a particular ideology. When it was elected in 2002, it had channeled much of the discontent from different political orientations and circles (Islamists, liberals, Turkish nationalists, Kurdish nationalists, etc.). In the course of its rule, it has forged and consolidated various support groups and sympathizers.<sup>148</sup> Once in power, the AKP has enabled many groups to take part in the country's economic growth, as entrepreneurs (with the repercussions that implies in terms of jobs), as recipients of social aid, but also as moral entrepreneurs. According to a recent study, 81 % of the voters who feel their economic situation has significantly improved

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<sup>146</sup> Ark 2014.

<sup>147</sup> See Gourisse 2014.

<sup>148</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2012.

voted for the AKP in the 2014 local elections, compared to 4 % for the CHP.<sup>149</sup> It is clear to what extent the AKP's economic performance is tied to economic growth and the sharing of it, but it is also obvious to what point growth seems unequally distributed according to political group.

If the fruits of economic growth have been shared, this has occurred in particular ways that have to do with the AKP's preferred mode of government and the importance it gives to support from its private allies. In various spheres it has set up resource channels that go beyond the public-private divide and integrate various social milieus, thus ensuring broad support within not only the business community (down to subcontractors), but also humbler, even underprivileged circles. A Gramsci-inspired analysis on the production of hegemony and the way it has been extended to Turkey under the AKP is highly applicable to this case.<sup>150</sup>

The AKP has forged or largely produced its own intermediaries and allies—to the detriment of other actors in each sector, without there always being a clear delineation—, reconfiguring entire aspects of society. This has been the case, as we have seen, in the construction and civil engineering sector, but other areas can be cited as well, such as the media.<sup>151</sup> In twelve years of AKP rule, many social sectors have been transformed considerably and are now dominated by the AKP and its backers.

This government through intermediaries, like the blurring of boundaries between state, private sector and NGOs, evokes the literature on the regulatory state, but with a substantial difference. The regulatory state denotes a new vision of the state that is a consequence of the declining welfare state. But the AKP government, far from being characterized by a retreat of the state, on the contrary has penetrated certain spheres of public action that institutions heretofore were not involved in, or very little. In examining the AKP's modes of local power, the cases of housing policy and social policy have served to analyze the concrete ties formed with various social groups. But many more examples could be given. It is through this indirect government, relying on intermediaries and private allies, that the AKP has penetrated these new areas. As a large body of literature has already shown, resorting to the private sphere does not indicate the demise of public institutions, but instead a redeployment of them.<sup>152</sup>

Does that mean that it is appropriate to speak of neoliberal “normalization”? The AKP's arrival in power in the aftermath of the 2001 crisis and the ensuing World Bank intervention undeniably played a role, and there are striking resemblances between the modes of power exercised by the AKP and neoliberalism. This single interpretation, however, is far from sufficient to describe the AKP's modes of power. The “hybrid” provision of social assistance, far from being a neoliberal novelty, fits in with a long history. To understand the specificities of Turkey's historical trajectory in this area requires going back to the Ottoman Empire. But the

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<sup>149</sup> KONDA 2014: 31.

<sup>150</sup> Tuğal 2009.

<sup>151</sup> The AKP, using legal means, thus made possible the transfer of the Sabah-ATV media group (the country's second largest media group) to a company with ties to the AKP, the Çalık group – the prime minister's son-in-law was its CEO . In 2007, dubious practices caused a national regulator to take control of Sabah-ATV and auction it off. Çalık was the only group to participate in the auction, owing to very attractive/advantageous loans it got from two state banks (Eligür 2010: 262).

<sup>152</sup> Hibou 1999.

role of the political sphere must also be reintroduced. Political parties contribute to reshaping institutions and ideologically framing market reforms.<sup>153</sup> As the expression of social cleavages, they also play an important part in shaping welfare states and redistributive policies.<sup>154</sup> From this standpoint, the AKP's modes of power fit within a genealogy that dates to the rise of political Islam and its first experience in government, in particular at the municipal level, in the 1990s.

This mode of indirect government—which contrasts with the centralist and personal management of its leader—has enabled the AKP to diversify its penetration of society and ensure the support of various social groups. It nevertheless alienates others, for, despite the numerous and diverse intermediaries—neither the coherence or the stability of these alliances should be overestimated—, some remain excluded from these channels. In fact, this type of configuration contributes to fueling the polarization that is becoming clear in Turkish society today. AKP's power moreover remains dependent on intermediaries that it only partly controls. This was illustrated by its recent “break” with the Gulenist movement, one of the AKP's strong social bases in recent years in various domains, and it will be interesting to see its effects on the ground. Its multiple allies and points of insertion ensure that it does not have to depend on each one of them.

Translated from the French by **Cynthia Schoch** on December 2014

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<sup>153</sup> Buğra, Savaşkan 2012.

<sup>154</sup> Manow, Van Kersbergen 2009.

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