
Editorial: agriculture in Turkey – structural change, sustainability and EU-compatibility

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Abstract: Rural Turkey is dominated by a large agricultural sector that still relies on extensive state support and policy intervention. There is a general agreement that structural change is needed to make its rural economy more innovative and competitive. Yet, as long as the main architects of Turkish agricultural reform are primarily concerned with mitigating the impact of trade liberalisation through social policy rather than innovation policy, the Turkish countryside will remain an economic and political liability due to its rampant underemployment problem. Social policy is not in a position to create employment through new markets. In this context, Turkey's current efforts to make its agriculture more compatible with the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is unlikely to induce important policy changes because CAP's underlying concept of agricultural sustainability is still focused on preservation and safety rather than entrepreneurship and innovation. The papers in this guest-edition provide new ways of looking at sustainable agriculture in Turkey and propose a new domestic policy approach to rural development that is focused on facilitating change on the countryside through more investment in human capital and entrepreneurial infrastructure.

Keywords: sustainable development; agricultural reform; innovation; entrepreneurship; trade; next generation.

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1 Introduction

Agricultural activities in Turkey are hard to define. They range from the highly competitive and capital-intensive cultivation of export crops in Western and Southern Turkey to heavily subsidised and trade-protected cereal and livestock production in Northern and Northeastern Turkey. On an aggregated level, the agrarian structure does not look very healthy with an average farm-size of less than 6 ha. It indicates that the majority of farm households in Turkey is still based on low-input semi-subsistence agriculture. The generally low productivity of agriculture does not pose an immediate threat in terms of hunger or malnutrition. Turkey's agricultural support policies as well as the local safety nets ensure that most people enjoy minimal standards of living even if they are very poor. Yet, these traditional rural structures combined with poor access to education and few off-farm employment opportunities produce a serious underemployment problem that is socially unsustainable. The combination of having plenty of time for social interaction but being increasingly frustrated with economic stagnation and low future prospects is a breeding ground for social and political conflicts that are based ethnicity, political ideology or religion. Such identity conflicts foster in-group trust in the informal institutions of the community at the expense of out-group trust in the formal institutions of democracy and the market economy (Aerni and Bernauer 2006). This makes it more likely for reactionary forces to gain ground at the expense of those who would prefer cultural change and economic development. Public policy can counteract this trend by investing in human capital and technological development. This facilitates more exchange among groups that do not share the same values but have a common interest in learning by doing. It ensures peaceful interaction and tolerance not just among different value communities within Turkey but also between different global cultures. As pointed out by the philosopher Appiah (2006), civilisation is always a product of cross-fertilisation and exchange. This insight is currently not very appreciated, neither in Europe nor in Turkey.

2 Shaky EU-Turkey talks

Turkey undertook serious efforts to reform its institutions and make them more compatible with the EU's Copenhagen criteria.¹ The EU acknowledged this by initiating membership negotiations with Turkey in October 2005. Even though this event just represented the final step of the process towards EU membership as it was outlined in the EEG-Turkey Ankara Agreement of 1963, it was nevertheless a bold step: Turkey is by far the largest country in terms of size and population that was ever accepted for membership negotiations in the history of the enlargement process, and it would be the first Islamic country. On the other hand, the EU has greatly benefited from previous enlargements, culturally, economically and politically. In fact, the process of enlargement can be called the boldest and most successful project of the EU since it strengthened political stability at its southern and eastern borders and increased economic opportunities. It converted countries that previously had little experience with democracy and the market economy into politically stable and economically successful democracies. At the same time it facilitated cultural and economic exchange between countries that previously had rather hostile relationships. Turkey's accession to the EU would just be the logical consequence of this success story.

2.1 EU inconsistency

The eventual membership of Turkey would make the EU a truly global player, admired for its religious tolerance and economic prosperity. Yet, the political courage and leadership among the leading European decision-makers appears to be waning in view of growing public fears about Turkey's accession to the EU – largely fuelled by populist politicians and media coverage that highlights cultural differences rather than similarities. The intransigence of some of the more turkophobic member states already forced the EU to increasingly move away from its own formal rules of accession and moral principles when it comes to Turkey-membership negotiations.²

2.2 Turkey's backlash and how to get back on track

In response to the EU's inconsistent messages, public support for EU accession slumped significantly in Turkey while anti-EU factions such as the Turkish nationalists and radical Islamists gained political ground. As a consequence, Turkey's will to reform its political institutions has decreased significantly, and this is also noticeable in agricultural policy. The Turkish reform process may only be revived if the EU is able to return to more consistency. This would again increase the predictability of the reform process and give renewed public support to the moderate forces in Turkey. Yet, a return to consistency would require a different public debate in Europe that is less driven by fear and ignorance. This however cannot be achieved by just saying more positive things about Turkey but would require a thorough updating of the way history and religion is taught in Europe's education system.

The watertight separation and supposedly permanent confrontation of Western and Oriental culture, as still taught in many European high schools, may pander to prior beliefs and a constructed cultural identity; but such a portrayal contradicts not just the present reality of a multicultural Europe but also the basic facts of historical research (Burkert, 2004; Fleet, 1999; Fletcher, 2003). Facts are also missing when it comes to Turkish agriculture. Although a comprehensive book about the current state Turkish agriculture was published in 2005 (Burrell and Oskam, 2005), it is unlikely to affect the European public debate on Turkey. This debate is currently mainly concerned with the fact that Turkey is an Islamic country and tends to omit that it is still a staunchly secular state.

2.3 Is the EU enlargement policy still adequate?

Burrell and Oskam (2005) discuss in their book 'Turkey and the European Union: implications for agriculture, food and structural policy' the potential implications of EU-Turkey integration and thereby focus on the issue of agriculture. In this context, they review existing research and highlight potential problems that would result from an integration of Turkish and EU agriculture. The book starts from the assumption that the adoption of the EU *acquis* in return for financial support is still the right approach to integration. However, the unintended side effects of this approach become increasingly obvious in the new member countries of Eastern Europe: after having finally collected the award of EU membership, cynicism about reform has become widespread in these countries and political leadership run out of steam (The Economist, 2006a). It shows that

economic growth cannot just rely on EU transfers and foreign direct investment but needs to come from effective domestic policies that promote endogenous growth by investing in the quality and quantity of the countries' own human capital and knowledge production. Yet, universities in Eastern Europe remain overcrowded, the quality of research is still low and endogenous development through improved university-private sector links lags behind (The Economist, 2006a).

3 Structural change in Turkey

As it is the case in many Eastern European countries, the pressure for reform in Turkey comes mostly from foreign institutions, be it the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO or the EU. So far, the EU had the biggest impact on Turkish reform policies.

3.1 *The EU's influence on Turkish agricultural reform policy*

The EU is having a significant influence on Turkish agricultural reform policy due to the big incentives for Turkey to eventually become an EU member state and benefit from EU direct payments (the first pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)), support for rural development (the second pillar of CAP) and the funds available for structural and cohesion policies. In recent years, the CAP reform is shifting more support from direct payments (pillar 1) to rural development (pillar 2) and the structural and cohesion funds have become more straightforward in their priorities. Nevertheless the overall bargain of adopting the extensive legal body of the *acquis communautaire* with all its uniform standards and procedures in return for getting generous financial support that is mainly designed to make the *acquis* implementable and compensate for potential adjustment problems, did not change significantly.

3.1.1 *Compensating Turkey for expected value losses in agricultural production*

Harald Grethe argues in his paper, that if Turkey would eventually join the EU, the production value of Turkish agriculture will decrease significantly due to the higher agricultural prices in Turkey, especially in livestock and cereal production. The subsequent increase in food import from the European Union will be mitigated by more financial support for Turkish farmers. With the CAP reform, the EU would hand out the compensation in form of direct payments that are increasingly attached to compliance requirements with regards to food safety and environmental standards.

3.1.2 *Does a loss in agricultural production value mean market failure?*

The CAP approach reflects the general assumption in the EU that agriculture is a typical example of market failure in which the state is obliged to intervene to preserve its presumed multifunctional nature. However, many of the multiple functions attributed to sustainable agriculture in Europe are not really improving sustainability but rather addressing the nostalgic urban projections of traditional farming as well as consumer fears about food contamination that are largely the result of home-made food safety policy scandals. Apart from the fact that the effectiveness of this European approach

towards sustainable agriculture and food safety is increasingly questioned due to the lack of proof of effectiveness (Ansell and Vogel, 2006; Kleijn et al., 2006), this sort of social policy approach to agriculture may be inadequate for Turkey. Agriculture in Turkey is already treated as a social policy patient (income/price support policies) and there is widespread evidence that it created more problems than it solved – of which the underemployment problem in rural areas is probably the most important.

3.1.3 A call for integrating rural Turkey into the knowledge economy and the Lisbon Agenda

What Turkey needs is to activate the creative minds in rural regions through investments in human capital and improved access to business-relevant knowledge, capital and technology. This long-term innovation policy approach would generate off-farm employment and improve agricultural diversification and competitiveness. It would allow rural areas in Turkey to take advantage of the new opportunities offered by the cheaper and more accessible technologies of the knowledge-economy (IT and biotech) and use them as tools of social empowerment.

In spite of the lack of data and the uncertainty of Turkey's path of economic development ten years from now (when full membership might become reality). Burrell and Oskam (2005) conclude that its accession would make the EU less competitive because Turkey would not be able to contribute significantly to EU growth, while the budget transfers to Turkey would negatively affect 20 regions in the EU-27 that would, as a consequence, cease to be eligible for these funds. They argue that preaccession funding for Turkey would make it less probable that the EU can achieve its Lisbon agenda (the goal to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010') due to budget constraints. But this argument assumes that a competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy is only worth pursuing in the EU-15 member states whereas the new member states must first reach a stage of 'harmonious development' that is largely defined as the use of structural and cohesion policies to ensure the successful adoption of the EU acquis. In view of the fact that many newly industrialised countries seemed to be more effective than the EU in taking full advantage of the knowledge economy (considering the much tighter budgets available in these countries) and the EU's propensity for big high-tech projects that never really translate into new companies and economically viable products (The Economist, 2006b), it is a little-bit far-fetched to make such a trade-off assumption that implies more support for Turkey means less support for a European knowledge economy. In fact, it would be far more reasonable to reform the financial support schemes for new member states in a way that would better prepare them for the knowledge economy. This trade-off assumption, which says more about the evolution of EU bureaucracy than the economic reality, may also explain why it is assumed that Turkey is expected to contribute little to EU economic growth (allegedly due to the lack of maturity to participate in the knowledge economy).

3.2 Agricultural trade liberalisation in Turkey

Turkey's accession to the World Trade Organisation in 1995 obliged the country to implement its commitments to agricultural trade liberalisation as outlined in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA). As the paper by David Vanizetti et al. indicates,

Turkey's market access commitments still permit flexibility in setting tariffs to protect farmers from unwelcome trade competition (the exception is livestock where bound and applied rates are very close). During the Doha Round Turkey tended to align itself with the group 33 that took a rather defensive stance on further agricultural trade liberalisation. This is understandable in the view of the fact that Turkey's agriculture still enjoys rather strong protection and profits from preferential market access to the EU. However, Turkey committed itself to reshuffle its agricultural support from amber box measures (trade-distorting subsidies that are subject to reduction commitments) to green box measures (subsidies that are still considered to be legitimate in the AoA). This commitment implies the phasing out of most input and price subsidies and their replacement by Direct Income Support (DIS) measures.

3.3 *The World Bank and the Agricultural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP)*

It was only in response to the financial crisis and the subsequent budget constraints in 2001 when Turkey felt forced to deal with the new reality of gradual agricultural trade liberalisation. In this context, the World Bank conducted extensive analysis of the past system of agricultural support and put forward recommendations on how to reform it. The Bank eventually became the main architect and an important financial supporter of Agricultural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP). The main policy instrument of ARIP was the creation of a DIS system. DIS payments were designed to partly compensate farmers for potential losses that occur in the course of phasing out the trade-distorting subsidies. The DIS system is expected to eventually being harmonised with the EU's CAP support measures.

3.3.1 *Why not use direct payments to encourage better education and entrepreneurship?*

ARIP also plans to reduce state intervention in agriculture by converting agricultural parastatals and sales cooperative unions into farm-oriented business companies. Moreover it provides farmer incentives to shift production away from subsidised crops. Yet, at the same time, the direct payments might undermine entrepreneurship and structural change (e.g. direct payments raise the value of land and make it more unlikely that more competitive farmers can expand by buying land from less competitive ones).

Why not use a cross-compliance scheme that links direct payments to the condition that farmers send their children to school (especially the daughters)? Special awards would be given for every child that completes secondary education. The highest award could be reserved for families whose offspring managed to become self-employed and generate new jobs. Such a policy might be difficult to harmonise with the CAP direct payments but they would at least address the alarming underemployment problem in Turkey that is well-addressed in the village case studies of Baris Karapinar's paper. It would generate the necessary human capital that would eventually be able to make use of the new technologies of the knowledge economy. Such a cross-compliance scheme would also chime well with other big World Bank projects in Turkey such as the *Secondary Education Project*, *Access to Finance for SMEs Project* and the *Renewable Energy Project*.

3.3.2 Converting idle teahouses into busy information hubs

The World Bank is investing over US\$400 million annually in agricultural education. However, no matter whether this money is spent for extension services or the Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (AKIS), the focus is always on issues such as external advice for food safety issues, complying with regulation, environmental assessments, etc. There is hardly any mention of setting up information hubs in villages and train the locals how to make use of new information and communication technologies to set up local business networks, create a market place for their own low-tech innovations and get access to relevant information to make the right business decisions. Why not start an experiment in Turkey to convert idle teahouses in rural areas into busy local centres of prime access to business information that is relevant to local entrepreneurs? A financial award for the best business idea (also posted in the teahouse) plus the offer of pro-bono coaching from experienced entrepreneurs to convert the business idea later into a successful local company could further encourage innovative locals to make use of new opportunities. Moreover favourable regional tax and investment policies could be designed to attract firms that would bring in new goods, services and business know-how. Such a policy might be much more adequate to mitigate the impact of structural change since the local people would learn to see the opportunities rather than the problems and they would generate their own revenues, which would make them more independent from outside support and more self-confident.

3.3.3 The fatal consequences of flawed policy interventions

Unfortunately, the bureaucrats involved in agricultural development schemes whether they work for the EU, the World Bank or the Turkish government may simply not be trained to do these things. Since they still seem to be rather unfamiliar with the new rules of the knowledge economy, their policy interventions to promote economic development in marginal areas may fail on the long run. As the economist Romer (1994, p.25) points out

“badly designed policy interventions come not from their effects on the static allocation of resources between the activities in an economy that already exist. Rather, they come from the stifling effect that the distortions have on the adoption of new technologies, the provision of new types of services, the exploitation of new productive activities, and on imports of new types of capital goods and produced inputs”.

Effective public policy should therefore primarily be concerned with the facilitation of technology and knowledge transfer as well as local entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, this type of public policy still plays a marginal role in Turkish politics.

3.4 The Turkish Government's commitment to agricultural reform

Halis Akder points out in his paper that agricultural policy in Turkey may be better explained by public choice theory than welfare economics. He clearly shows that the Turkish Government's commitment to agricultural reform is not as strong as its desire to please all kind of rural constituencies and farm lobbies by raising the amount of subsidies (and not just incentive-neutral subsidies) whenever there are important upcoming elections.

It indicates that the political culture and institutions in Turkey are more likely to result in pork-barrel legislation ('*avanta dagitma yasasi*') than responsible policy reform projects. The lack of political will to resist special interests may also explain why Turkey still boasts one of the highest Producer Subsidies Equivalent (PSE)/GDP in the OECD.

Reforms in Turkey proved to be feasible if there was outside pressure or a severe economic crisis. Yet, the will to reform always seems to vanish once this pressure is gone. This lack of strength and leadership in domestic policymaking may prove fatal for Turkey on the long run since it is slowly losing the race with many Asian economies that are in a similar stage of development. The lack of will or ability to address the problems of rural development through innovation policy rather than social policy may result in more local political activism of radical groups that express the growing frustration with the lack of economic opportunities.

3.4.1 Policy lessons to be learned from Asian countries

One lesson that can be learned from China is the way it addressed the growing violent resistance of large ethnic and religious minorities in its most remote province Xingijang. Rather than crushing the movement violently the Chinese government heavily invested in the local infrastructure and the creation of economic opportunities. This undermined the lure to join the various radical movements in favour of participating in the growing economy (The Economist, 2005). Today this region even has a net immigration from poorer neighbouring states such as Kasachstan, Kirgizistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan. Another example is Malaysia. The Malaysian government recognised early that the country needs to invest in its people and create an infrastructure that is conducive to entrepreneurship and technological innovation. Today, Malaysia could be called a knowledge-based economy that relies on human rather than natural capital in its efforts to boost economic growth. Not by coincidence, Malaysia did not prove to be an effective breeding ground for radical Muslim fundamentalists.

A basic insight of these experiences is that the concept of sustainable agricultural development is too narrow when just referring to the farmer's compliance with environmental and food safety standards in return for DIS. Sustainable development needs to include the creation of new economic opportunities through innovative farm and off-farm activities.

4 Sustainable development

4.1 Problems of sustainable development in Turkey

The paper of Fikret Adaman and Gokhan Ozertan highlights some of the sustainability challenges in the newly irrigated cultivation areas in the Harran region of Southeastern Anatolia. The creeping salinity problem in this region is hardly addressed because the current institutional setting is not conducive to collective action and farmer initiatives. They argue that if policymakers want to improve environmental sustainability in the region, they first of all need to support the empowerment of the local farmers through better and locally relevant education and training and provide adequate incentives for farmers to adopt more sustainable practices and technologies. The paper of Ozertan and Aerni discusses the important contribution of organic cotton to sustainable agriculture in

Turkey but also points out that organic cotton is a niche market that may slowly reach a mature stage. They also look at the potential of transgenic cotton in Turkey and conclude that its adoption might improve sustainability and profitability in those regions of Turkey that face a serious problem of pest and weed infestation. However, transgenic cotton is unlikely to become an issue in Turkey any time soon, since the government has not approved any type of genetically modified crops for commercial use and its interest in making use of this new technology seems to be still very limited.

4.2 Political support for sustainable development and technological innovation

According to Dilek Cetindamar's paper, none of the political parties in Turkey has ever put the promotion of science, technology and innovation on the party agenda. The new law on biosafety that is currently debated in parliament is likely to become a blueprint of the highly preventive agbiotech regulations in European countries and correspondingly mirrors Europe's tendency to equal the precautionary principle with sustainable development. This emphasis on the risks of the introduction of new biotechnology applications and the disinterest in making use of its opportunities may well affect sustainable development in Turkey in a negative way. This is because the new possibilities created by the biotechnology revolution may eventually result in more clean and less wasteful products that are able to replace the more polluting existing products of the agro- and petrochemical industry. The potential to make biofuel out of organic waste may only be the beginning. The prevailing political indifference in Turkey to promote homegrown efforts to advance the science and business of biotechnology, may prove to be fatal on the long run because the country will miss once again the opportunity to develop its own homegrown versions of the technology and thus become an exporter rather than an importer of technological innovation.

4.3 The Rio Declaration and how it really defines sustainable development

So why is it that the general concept of sustainable development today hardly ever mentions the role of new technologies, the private sector and local entrepreneurship in improving sustainability? After all, Principle 9 of the Rio Declaration 1992 maintains that

“states should cooperate to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge, and by enhancing the development, adaptation, diffusion and transfer of technologies, including new and innovative technologies”.

Moreover, Principle 12 in the same declaration declares that states should cooperate to promote a supportive and open international economic system and Principle 21 emphasises the role of entrepreneurship by pointing out that the creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilised in order to achieve a sustainable future.

These basic ingredients for ensuring a sustainable future, as entrenched in the Rio Declaration, may have been hijacked by vested interest groups that do not welcome change. Another reason may be the Green Parties and environmental organisations of Europe that generally resent new technologies and the private sector and consequently

see them as the problem rather than part of the solution. For them sustainable development means avoiding potential risks by invoking the strong version of the Precautionary Principle that is associated with the very defensive and fearful slogan of 'better safe than sorry'. It results in regulation that comes close to the reversal the burden of proof of no harm (which can never be met anyway because there is no 'zero risk'). Such regulation discourages the private sector to invest in new technologies that would significantly reduce existing environmental pollution and improve sustainability.

5 Turkey's best possible policy paradigm: investing in people

The contributions to this guest-edition directly or indirectly conclude that the best way to promote sustainability as well as competitiveness of Turkish agriculture is to invest in the local people through improved education in general and effective agricultural training programmes in particular. More investment in human capital leads to more entrepreneurship and innovation and eventually results in more employment opportunities and social empowerment. This basic insight stands in conflict with today's concept of sustainable development that tends to value preservation more than innovation and, as a consequence, has tilted the balance that the Rio Declaration tried to achieve in 1992. However, the recent World Development Report 2007 on 'development and the next generation' (World Bank, 2006) may be a new attempt to restore this balance. It reintroduces Principle 21 of the Rio Declaration into the sustainability debate by maintaining that the "failure to seize the opportunity to train the next generation more effectively for the workplace, and to be active citizens, could lead to widespread disillusionment and social tensions". No other remark could better summarise the challenge Turkey faces in ensuring sustainable development in rural areas. It can only address its economic, social and environmental problems by investing in the local people. The long-term result would be an agricultural sector that is more competitive, diversified and sustainable, as well as a countryside that offers more off-farm employment opportunities thanks to economic and human development.

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Notes

- ¹The Copenhagen criteria require that institutions that ensure democratic governance and human rights, a functioning market economy and the general acceptance of the obligations and intent of the EU.
- ²After the Greek Cypriots rejected the UN referendum in 2004 that would have facilitated reunification with the Turkish Cypriots, the EU officially stated that it would not forget this rather selfish behaviour of the Greek Cypriots. It also promised to eventually reward the Turkish Cypriots who voted in favour of political reconciliation. Yet, Greek Cyprus is now a member of the EU and many EU member countries are happy to allow the Greek-Cypriot government to hijack EU-Turkey talks and make sure that Turkish Cyprus remains politically and economically isolated. This moral and logical inconsistency of the EU is not just visible with regard to Cyprus but with many other topics that are on the political agenda of EU-Turkey accession talks. For example, the Council's emphasis on an open-ended process, long transition periods, derogations, specific arrangements or permanent safeguard clauses, in addition to new interventions by member countries, such as the sudden decision to hold a national referendum about Turkey's accession to the EU (France) and the proposal for privileged partnership instead of membership (Germany/Austria).