

Efficiency Of Think-Tank’s Policy Recommendations In Turkey: Case Of Kurdish Issue

Tanzer Celikturk

Pamukkale University, Turkey

Abstract

A think-tank can be defined as "governments in the waiting". These organizations have interest in many different areas of public problems and employ a variety of expertise to comprehend problems in all perspectives. The aim of a think-tank is to create trustworthy knowledge and alternative solutions about social problems depending on empirical data. But there is a problem about measuring the effectiveness of policy recommendations. One of the measures is watching over the effect on policy outputs. In this work, I try to put forward the effectiveness of policy recommendations which were formulated by prominent think-tank and non-governmental organizations in Turkey within the case of Kurdish Issue. I will handle and analyse the policy outputs to measure the effectiveness of policy recommendations within the scope of laws, enactments and regulations in relation to Kurdish Issue.

Keywords: Think-tank organizations, Kurdish issue, Think-tank reports, Effectiveness of recommendations

Introduction

According to Howlett and Ramesh (1995), a think-tank can be defined as an independent organization engaged in multidisciplinary research intended to influence public policy. These organizations have interest in many different areas of public problems and employ a variety of expertise to comprehend problems in all perspectives. Think tanks have a duty to create policy options in variety of policy areas are not only effective in developed countries but also in developing countries they have contributions for public policy process (Özgür and Kulaç, 2015: 74). These institutions aim to create practical solutions to public problems. For his reason they can be seen as the supporters of ideology-driven positions (p.58-59). They try to shape public perception about a particular social problem and mostly they are the advocates of their solutions within the context of their own ideological stand. For his reason McGann describes them as "*governments in the waiting*" (McGann, 2008: 5).

Peters (2012) emphasizes the strong bond between the government agencies and think-tank organizations. According to him Professional analysts and policy formulators in these organizations usually work on a contract for a client in government (p.61). One of the prominent think-tank organizations RAND corporation in USA was founded by Aif Forces of US in 1946. According to Peters (2012), universities also serve as a think-tank for governments. It can be seen that many public policy schools and programs were founded in universities aiming to create future practitioners of the art of government. These programs provide a basis to scholars formulating new solutions for public problems (p.62). University based think-tanks are more objective and scholarly rather than the other think-tank organizations because they don't have ideological position (Birkland, 1997:88). For that reason state and local governments mostly rely upon them for expert advice. Indeed one of the missions of universities is to provide a qualitative information to government politically and socially relevant problems (Birkland, 1997: 89).

Even the presence of a close link between a think-tank and government, it is mostly organized as a non-governmental organization. In this case, the difference between think-tank and the other pressure groups are not clear. The difference lies in the aims and the degree of knowledge and highly specialised personnel. In non-governmental organisations or pressure groups there is no need to employ highly specialised personnel. Their aims are to create an influence on public policies in the sake of their interests. But the aim of a think-tank is to create trustworthy knowledge depending on empirical data. For that reason a think-tank should employ highly specialised personnel. On the other hand, there is another problematic area about the think-tank organisations; How can be measured their policy recommendations' effectiveness on social problems?

One of the measures is watching over the effect on policy outputs. In this work, it will be put forward the effects of Think Tank organizations' policy recommendations on the most prominent problem of Turkey for nearly 30 years: Kurdish issue.

The emergence and the effectiveness of a think-tank is mainly based on important social, political and economic changes in society (Yıldız and others, 2013: 194). Within this context, the emergence and effectiveness of think-tank organizations in Turkey can be seen after 1990's. Initiation of democratization and liberalization process by Özal after 1980 military coup, gave birth to think-tank organizations. Before the emergence of effective think-tank organizations, TOBB-Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges and TUSIAD- Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association have been playing an important role for

influencing policymaking process. These giant business organizations try to influence public policies in two ways:

1-) Influencing special economic policies for their own interests.

2-) Creating an effective alternative or solution to sociopolitic problems which hurt the whole society. In order to create solution, they seek a professional advise mostly from academic world. In this case, these non-governmental organizations behave as a Think Tank as regard to great sociopolitic problems.

Consequent reformist era began in 2000's paralel to gain acceptance for European Union Membership. In this era, many reforms embodied rapidly by Ak Party governments especially in human rights and economic spheres. With the adoption of liberal and more democratic approach, non-governmental organizations and think- tank organizations began to more active in respect to critical public problems. Also their professional works and recommendations have been influenced government actions and created effective alternatives.

In this work, i try to put forward the effectiveness of policy recommendations which were formulated by prominent think-tank and non-governmental organizations in Turkey within the case of Kurdish Issue. I will handle and analyse the policy outputs to measure the effectiveness of policy recommendations within the scope of laws, enactments and regulations in relation to Kurdish Issue.

At first, i will handle the Prof. Doğu Ergil's "*1995- East Problem: Identifications and Detections Report*" which was supported by TOBB. Secondly, it will be analysed the Prof. Bülent Tanör's "*1997- Perspectives on Democratization in Turkey Report*" which was supported by TÜSİAD. Thirdly, it will be analysed the report named "*2008- Roadmap for Settlement of Kurdish Issue: Suggestions from East Region to Government*". This report was created by one of the most effective and biggest think-tank organizations in Turkey; TESEV- Turkey Economic and Social Studies Foundation. At last i will handle the report "*2009- Turkey's Kurdish Issue Perception*" which was prepared by the other great think-tank organization; SETA- Research Foundation of Society, Politics and Economics and Pollmark- Public Opinion Research Company.

Prof. Doğu Ergil's "1995- East Problem: Identifications and Detections Report" supported by TOBB

Prof. Doğu Ergil and his team had been analysed the sociocultural roots of Kurdish Issue for one and a half year on behalf of TOBB. The aim of this research was enlightening the causes of the problem and creating an effective solution based on democratic and cultural rights. They started their research project in southeastern regions of Turkey depending on field survey.

In 1995 reserach project was accomplished and submitted to TOBB administration board.

Findings of the field survey are listed below:

a.) Answers to the question of "*what kind of policy should be implemented by government to southeastern region?*", %61 were about recognition of cultural rights and ethnocultural identities and also regional economic betterment. The other question was about the solution of the problem that "*for the solution, should the government negotiate with the PKK¹²?*". Only %4 of participators answered "*yes, government shoud negotiate with PKK for the solution*". This result shows us that in the way of solution negotiating with PKK and the Kurdish political elites isn't important. Way of solution lays in constitution of democratic system with ordinary Kurdish people which depends on respecting ethnocultural rights (Ergil, 2009: 52-53).

b.) The other question was that "*do u consent any actions of PKK?*". %64 of participators didn't want to answer this question. Just only %18 answered that "*yes we support PKK because PKK is fighting againts discrimination of Kurds, pressures, inequity*". Most of these %18 were the Kurdish immigrants who lives in Adana and Mersin -out of southeastern region-. This stutiation shows us that impulsory immigration and unsuccessful integration causes growth of radicalism. The counter question was that "*which actions of PKK that u dont consent?*". %67 of participants didn't want to answer this question because of PKK's horror. %47 of answering participants said that PKK used severe oppression and terror againts opposition side. In this case, carefully formulated integration strategies, recognition of ethnocultural rights, respecting to ethnocultural identities, diminishing unemployment policies would marginalise the PKK and decrease its social support (Ergil, 2009: 54-55).

c.) The other part of field survey was in-depth interviews with Kurdish opinion leaders in southeastern region. Their suggestions for the solutions were; everyone should have a right to promote its own culture and expressing his identity freely without any discrimination and recognition of ethnocultural rights. By this way, everyone would share the identity of common citizenship which provide the successful integration to whole society. In this case, free use of Kurdish language in sociocultural sphere would help to integrate Kurdish people to Turkey citizenship. Also feeling of discrimination could be abolished. The other suggestion of opininon leaders was supporting educational efforts in region. Parallel with the educated

¹² PKK- Workers' Party of Kurdistan is the terrorist organisation which has been aiming to intersect Turkey.

society, unguided free politicians would participate in political system and they would try to solve the real problems of Kurdish society without terror.

Within the scope of these findings, Ergil and his friends put forward their suggestions for the solution of the problem. These suggestions were:

1.) Terror isn't only the public order problem. It has sociocultural and economic roots. For that reason the causes of terrorism should be analysed based on empirical data. At first, it should be accepted that Turkey is the shared mothercountry of different ethnocultural groups. Even if there is no discrimination in laws and constitution, it would be discrimination in practise whether in social life or official actions of the state. Initially, these potential or real discriminations should be demolished by central authority and local governments. .

2.) In order to satisfy local, historical and cultural needs of ethnocultural groups decentralization of the central authority is a necessity (Ergil, 2009: 180-214).

3.) Central authority should avoid undemocratic attitudes and actions even for struggling with terror. Creating a democratic weather and giving a chance to speak out every different opinion would soften radical attitudes and weaken radical groups in time.

4.) Government should formulate new policies about the social fusion. Because terror and deaths could harm the social unity and would cause social conflicts. In this case the reality of multicultural character of Turkey would be emphasised in every level of education. The whole society should be convinced that cultural differences are the treasures of the country not a thread (Ergil, 2009: 181-215).

Prof. Bülent Tanör's "1997- Perspectives on Democratization in Turkey Report" supported by TÜSIAD.

This report aimed to list judicial barriers for developing democratic standarts in Turkey. When the report was announced to public, it received great attention in Turkey and western world. Also it was announced that this report was created within the scope liberal principles which were adopted by TÜSIAD. This report mainly contained the constraints of democratization; laws, enactments, rules and legislations and the suggestions for developing democtaric standarts. Although this report's main concern wasn't Kurdish issue, rather than promoting democratic standards contains possible suggestions for solution of Kurdish issue.

Firstly, for developing democratic standarts constitutional changes were suggested. At first, 5. article at the beginning of Constitution should be revoked. In this article the statement: "*any thought and statement cannot be supported or protected which violates the Turkish national interests, undividable characteristic of the Turkish state and motherland, historical*

and moral values and Atatürk's nationalism and principles" was evaluated as undemocratic and an obstacle against latitude of thoughts. This article wasn't revoked but in 2001 the government changed "*any thought and statement....*" phrase as "*any action...*" in accordance with the Tanör's suggestion.

After suggestions about constitutional changes, Tanör put forward his opinions about the Kurdish Issue. In this case, he suggested a change about the "*Register of Birth Regulation*". According to Tanör, the rule; "*names of children should be in accordance with Turkish national culture and surnames should be in Turkish language...*" is undemocratic and violates the individual rights and freedoms. In accordance with the "*2003 Structural Adjustment Program of European Union*", the statement of "*names of children should be appropriate to Turkish national culture....*" was revoked.

Thirdly, it was suggested that the 26. and 28. provisions of the Constitution which contained a statement that "*a language prohibited by law cannot be used for disclosure or dissemination of ideas*" should be revoked and prohibitionist attitudes and conventions in administrative and judicial practices should be changed (Tanör, 1999: 141). As a result of Tanör's recommendations, the 26. and 28. provisions of the Constitution has been revoked with constitutional changes in 2001. On January 1 of 2009, with the start of broadcasting TRT-6 in Kurdish language, administrative practices of language prohibitions has been largely disappeared.

Forthly, 42. provision of the Constitution was discussed with respect to the legislation containing discrimination. In his Report in 1997, Tanör suggested that the statement of "*No language other than Turkish shall be assigned to the Turkish Citizens as a mother tongue in education and training institutions*" should be removed and everyone should have the opportunity of learning their mother tongue at school or outside of school by making a conceptual distinction between mother tongue and official language (Tanör, 1999: 142). Within the recommendations of Tanör, there has not been any constitutional change and education and training in any other language than Turkish remained forbidden within the changes in 2923 numbered law in 2003, yet it was allowed to teach different languages and dialects.

Fifthly, it was suggested that the statement about punishing the propaganda against the indivisible integrity of the state should be removed. Likewise the crime of praising terrorism which was located in Article 312 was criticized due to its vagueness of definition and elements of crime and its creation of crime of thoughts in the initiative of judge (Tanör, 1999: 142). In parallel with the recommendation of Tanör, Article 8 of "*Anti-Terrorism Act*" was repealed.

Sixthly, the statements in "*Associations Law*" about prohibition of forming associations based on racial, religious and sectarian differences, and

associations based on aiming at improving languages and cultures other than Turkish language and culture were criticized (Tanör, 1999: 143). In 2004, as Tanör suggested, Associations Law has been changed and in the new law, maintaining cultural activities of associations has been secured only for the purposes not prohibited by the Constitution. Today, establishing associations and foundations with a purpose of operating in fields such as Kurdish language, history and culture is allowed.

Seventhly, it was suggested that the statement: “*No language other than Turkish can be used in demonstratims*” in Article 81 of Political Parties Law should be revoked. It was argued that the closure of political parties by using this statement would lead to make Kurdish problem even worse. Although there were not extensive changes made within the recommendations of Tanör, making propaganda in languages other than Turkish was decriminalized within changes in “*the Law on Fundamental Principles of Elections and Voter Registers*”, and the “*Law on Parliamentary Elections*” in 2010.

2008- Roadmap for Settlement of Kurdish Issue: Suggestions from East Region to Government” TESEV- Turkey Economic and Social Studies Foundation

In 2008, TESEV conducted a workshop in order to contribute to finding a peaceful, democratic and permanent solution to the Kurdish issue which has long been the most important issue of Turkey and could not be solved yet. In this report, with the participation of various non-governmental and professional organizations, the proposals for the solution of the Kurdish issue were compiled and organized by TESEV.

The first of these proposals; the acceptance of Kurdish identity, which has been ignored with the influence of repressive policy of denial, by the state would contribute to the process of eliminating the distrust of the Kurds to the government. In parallel to this opinion, the Kurdish identity has often been expressed by both President Erdogan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and also the other ministers.

Secondly, it was listed as call of government to PKK to leave weapons by using non-governmental organizations as intermediary, making legislations which encourage leaving the weapons and does not carry the prerequisite of remorse, ensuring the social adaptation of PKK members who left weapons (Kurban and Ensaroğlu, 2008: 17). In fact, a legislation which provides that any member of the terrorist organization who has not participated in a criminal case is able to utilise from effective remorse law was made in the Article 221 of “*Turkish Penal Law*” on June 2005.

The third one was to establish a healthy dialogue with Kurdish political parties. At this point, the pluralization of the political life of Kurdish

people must be provided by developing the dialogue with "*BDP-Peace and Democracy Party*"¹³ which would help to express at least a part of Kurdish people's political demands and opinions in the Parliament (Kurban and Ensaroğlu, 2008: 17). With "*Democratic Initiative Process*" which was initiated by the government in 2009, some negotiations were conducted with BDP, yet BDP could not get rid of PKK's influence and activated the language of violence. As a result, the dialogue between the government and BDP was cut. Additionally, violence by the PKK against other Kurdish opposition has prevented the pluralism of political life of Kurdish people.

Forthly, the proposals related to constitutional amendments were expressed; the Constitution should have a spirit aiming protection of individuals and not based on any ideology or ethnic/religious/linguistic identity. Everybody should have equal opportunity to be educated in their mother tongue. Kurds should have the opportunity of benefiting public services in their own mother language in densely inhabited areas of Kurdish people (Kurban and Ensaroğlu, 2008:17-18). Within these suggestions, Kurdish institutes were opened at universities and Kurdish language became available for students to choose as an elective course. In respect of being able benefiting public services in Kurdish, the public service in municipalities in southeastern area has started to be given in Kurdish.

Fifthly, it was suggested to overturn the ban on Kurdish propaganda. It was allowed to make Kurdish propaganda with the change in the Elections Law in 2010.

Sixthly, it was requested to eliminate the legal basis of party closure. In this context, the constitutional change which removed the statement of permanent closure of political parties was accepted by the parliament in 2015.

Seventhly, an independent ombudsman institution was suggested to be formed to monitor human rights violations. In this context, an Ombudsman which is dependant on Parliament and has a special budget was established as a public entity in order to examine all kinds of attitudes, behaviors, acts and actions of administration based on human rights and in the concept of justice, and make recommendations.

Lastly, it was suggested to delegate authority and transfer resources to local governments, and to grant autonomy. '*District Councils*' which consisted of deputies elected based on the proportion of population of the cities in the region. Local governments should have an administrative and financial autonomy. Education, health and local security services should be carried out by local governments. Legal arrangements should be made for the

¹³ At 2014, BDP abolished itself and integrated to HDP- People's Democratic Party which was founded in 2013.

establishment of neighborhood and city councils (Kurban ve Ensaroğlu, 2008: 38-39). As a result of these recommendations, city councils were established with 5393 numbered "*Municipality Law*" and 26313 numbered "*City Councils Regulation*". However, it is understood that local autonomy demands are not related to use democratic rights and this situation leads to municipalities of BDP to support PKK Terrorism.

2009- Turkey's Kurdish Issue Perception" SETA- Research Foundation of Society, Politics and Economics and Pollmark-Public Opinion Research Company.

Just after one week from declaration of "*Democratic Initiative process*", SETA and POLLMARK conducted a public opinion survey in order to reveal the perception of society about Kurdish issue and "*Democratic Initiative Process*". "*Turkey's Kurdish Issue Perception*" survey was conducted with the 10577 participants in which face-to-face technique was used.

In order to detect the roots of Kurdish Issue the question "*according to you, what is the most important source of Kurdish Issue?*" was asked to participants. %52 of Turkish originated participants answered this question as; *PKK*, foreign states and socioeconomic factors. %46 of Kurdish originated participants who were answered this question as discriminatory policies of the state (Aras and others, 2009: 39-41).

In order to detect the perception about the role of the actors in the way of solution "*according to you which one would play most important role for solution of Kurdish issue?*" was asked. In this question participants could choose more than one choises. The answers of both Kurdish and Turkish participants indicated great importance of political actors. "*TBMM- Turkey's Great Parliament*" received %45, "*government*" received %42, "*President*" received %24, "*ally of political parties*" received %24. "*PKK*" choise received only %18 among Kurdish participants, and %5 among Turkish participants. This data shows us groundlessness of arguments about the accpetion of *PKK* as an important actor in the way solution (Aras and others, 2009: 61-62).

In order to detect the common social ground between Turks and Kurds in the way of solution the question "*is shared religion important for living together in peace?*" was asked. %76 Turkish participants and the %79 Kurdish participants answered "*yes, it is important*". This data shows us the role of shared values especially the role religion in the way solution. In addition, this result reveals us the shared perception of common fate and brotherhood which has been constructed for centruies is an important factor extend beyond the political differences between Kurds and Turks. (Aras and others, 2009: 37-39).

One of the important findings of survey is that even though there is shared values in social life, in contrary a deep disparity exists in political arena between Turks and Kurds. This inverse correlation between social life and political arena creates the basis for possible civic turmoil. Fort that reason, government should formulate efficient policies in the way of Kurdish issue solution (Aras and others, 2009: 108-109).

Conclusion

A new era was began for Turkey in 1999 with the gaining position as candidate country for EU membership. Adoption of "*Copenhagen Criteria*" as a result of "*EU-European Union*" membership created a new scope for democratization, human rights, individual rights and the recognition of cultural rights in Turkey. In the way EU membership Ak Party governments have been taken serious steps and embodied socioeconomic and political reforms. In this reformist era, State's perspective of Kurdish issue changed dramatically and non governmental organizations and think tank organizations began to play important role in solution of Kurdish issue. Within the EU harmonization process between 2002 and 2009, many reports about the "Kurdish issue" have been prepared by particularly non-governmental organizations and public opinion research companies.

In these reports, the first of the solutions highlighted in common is the acceptance of a constitution which contains fully recognition of social, cultural and political rights taking place international conventions related to fundamental human rights.

Secondly; proposed solutions such as allowance of using Kurdish in public services in Southeastern region in order to provide equal cultural rights, allowance of using Kurdish language in the propagandas of political parties, allowance of Kurdish language to be chosen at least as an elective course in education, supporting the alternative Kurdish political movements by eliminating the obstacles to freedom of association, the creation of a healthy dialogue environment with Kurdish non-governmental organizations and opinion leaders, stand out in the reports as common recommendations.

The willpower of Ak Party governments, who take initiative in solution of Kurdish issue which is shown as the most important problem of Turkey in its membership process to EU, has led to give opportunity to non-governmental organizations and think-tank organizations to play a vital role in this subject. As a matter of fact, most proposed solutions, which were expressed in "*Democratic Initiative process*" began in 2009, were taken into consideration and it was tried to take steps towards a solution by making legislative and regulatory changes.

References:

- Aras Bülent, Aydın Ertan, Özhan Taha, Dağı İhsan, Dalmış İbrahim, Hatem Ete, Ensaroğlu Yılmaz, Küçükcan Talip, Yayman Hüseyin, Bölme Selin M. (2009). *Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu Algısı*, Seta Yayınları, Ankara
- Kurban, Dilek ve Ensaroğlu Yılmaz. (2008). *Kürt Sorunu'nun Çözümüne Dair Bir Yol Haritası: Bölgeden Hükümete Öneriler*, (Hazırlayan: D.Kurban ve S. Yolaçan), TESEV Yayınları, İstanbul
- Tanör, Bülent. (1999). *Türkiye'de Demokratik Standartların Yükseltilmesi: Tartışmalar ve Son Gelişmeler*, TÜSİAD
- Özgür, H. and Kulaç, O. (2015). "An Analysis of the Studies on Think Tanks Success and Ranking", *European Scientific Journal*, Special Edition, Vol.2, 73-90.