

**MUNICIPAL POLITICS AT A
CROSSROADS IN TURKEY:**
OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND
LIMITS TO ENGAGEMENT



Report — January, 2021

Title

Municipal Politics at a Crossroads in Turkey:
Opportunities for Civil Society and Limits to Engagement

Supported by

The European Endowment of Democracy (EED)

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EUROPEAN
ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

This publication has been produced with the support of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of EED. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in this publication lies entirely with the author(s).

Executive Summary

Despite the democratic backsliding and the dramatic deterioration in the rule of law in Turkey in the last years, the March 2019 local elections opened **a new opportunity window** for democratization in Turkey. Backed by other oppositional forces, The Republican People's Party (CHP) won the election in most populous cities, including 11 metropolitan municipalities like Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya, Adana, and Mersin with the support of the opposition parties. Besides, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) regained the main municipalities in Kurdish-majority cities which had been occupied by government-appointed trustees.

The changes in balance of power in multiple localities does not simply indicate an electoral success. While the the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) managed to retain its dominant position as the party with most votes nationwide, the fall of the major metropolises was an **unprecedented upset** for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, suggesting than his grip over the country is more vulnerable than it seems.

In contrast with the heavy handed centralized state tradition, **metropolitan mayoral seats are unique in Turkey** in their ability to reach the electorate thanks to the scope of their mandate, sizable financial means and everyday visibility. The local election results thus

not only **boosted the morale and motivation** of the opposition but also provided the much needed political stage and access to crucial resources necessary to adopt and implement a new set of policies. The electoral victory also **raised hopes of the civil society actors** which have been silenced and sidelined given the increasingly authoritarian character of the political atmosphere.

Roughly 18 months after the election, this report aims to evaluate the performance of the opposition in the municipal offices and question whether the expectations from the new local administrations are being materialized, with a specific focus on the extent to which the change in the balance of power created opportunities for the civil society. Undertaken by five researchers, the report is based on key informant interviews and media research across four metropolitan cities that the government lost in March 2019, namely Istanbul, Ankara, Mersin, and Diyarbakır.

In terms of the contemporary performance of the metropolitan mayoral seats won by the opposition, **there exist two Turkeys**: the ones in the west and south of the country that were won by the CHP candidates backed by other parties in opposition (in this report represented by Istanbul, Ankara, and Mersin), and the ones in the Kurdish-majority cities in the East

(in this report represented by Istanbul, Ankara, and Mersin) which were won by the HDP only to be soon replaced by government-appointed trustees. The report examines them separately although we strongly argue that the trustee model in the East has an often overlooked yet undeniable impact over politics in the West.

One of the first features new municipalities that the report underlines is the challenge that they face to **mark themselves different** from their predecessors. In the attempt, the new local administrations find themselves juggling between bright though untested policy ideas, motivated but yet-not-unorganized cadres and massive institutions that they were not a part of for a long time. Part of the challenge is the **municipal councils**, which are still controlled by the AKP and its ally, the Nationalist People's Party (MHP), two parties that are determined to minimize the new mayor's ability to govern. The municipal councils, which rarely made the news as institutions of political competition until the March 2019 elections, now regularly challenge the mayoral decisions, cancel policies and overturn appointments.

Restrained by the municipal councils, old municipal cadres and the clumsy municipal bureaucracy, the new mayors try to find outlets in **participatory practices**. To this end, existing yet forgotten institutions of participation (such as the citizens' assemblies) are being revitalized and new spaces and practices (such as participatory strategic planning and participatory budgeting) are being introduced. While the very invitation to govern together has a powerful appeal in stark contrast to the one-man-rule at the national level, implementing participation effectively is not a process the new administrations have mastered yet. On the one hand, it should be acknowledged that the municipal **doors are open to civil society** to an extent that has never been before. Chambers, associations, universities, and initiatives are regularly invited to workshops and consultation meetings and acknowledge that their access to municipal authorities has significantly improved. It is, however, sometimes unclear how the improved channels of com-

munication and mechanisms of participation inform decision making. While participation as an ideal and seems to be implemented when convenient, further institutionalization is needed.

The balance change in metropolitan municipalities has attracted new cadres from the ranks of the urban opposition, some of which have been excluded from decision making for so long, to the local government. While this development can be very well considered as a form of participation, the possibility of **co-optation** should also be noted as a possible **risk** (especially in smaller cities) as leading members of civil society migrate to new municipal administrations.

Another strategy that the new mayors pursue to distinguish themselves from Ankara and alleviate the pressure of the municipal council has been a new **emphasis on transparency**. The most crucial component of this move is the live broadcasting of municipal tenders and municipal council meetings, which receive quite a significant following. Coupled with effective **use of social media** as the main communication channel, the new mayors also seem to overcome the disadvantage of being ignored by the mainstream media, which is mostly controlled by Ankara.

A major development that shaped and sped up the new municipal administrations' orientation period has been the **Covid-19 pandemic**. While the pandemic caught local governments off-guard, it brought both **advantages and disadvantages** to the new municipal administrations. The pandemic certainly disrupted the short term plans and projections by creating obstacles specifically to new possibilities of participation and outreach. It also bestowed new roles and responsibilities to the local governments as the central government failed to respond to the dual crisis of healthcare and economy/unemployment. Better positioned to reach the distressed citizens, the new municipal administrations have rebranded themselves as **first responders and solidarity networks** during the pandemic by building field hospitals, putting together mobile healthcare

units, and most importantly, providing in-kind and cash assistance to the needy. They have also played a crucial role in the pandemic response by sharing the reliable flow of data which revealed the untrustworthiness of the numbers shared by the Central Government.

The central government in Ankara, deeply disturbed by the loss valuable seats and resources in the metropolises, was further infuriated with the new mayors' growing influence during the pandemic. In desperation, Ankara launched a **counter-attack** aiming to curtail the municipal mandates and responsibilities. These attempts included a wide array of legal and executive measures ranging from slashing municipal budgets to threatening mayors with legal investigations, from outlawing local administrations' fundraising ability to preventing their aid provision services. The counter-attack has managed to limit some of the policies of the new municipalities. However, it inadvertently polished their image as a viable alternative and brought them even closer to civil society.

While the opposition enjoys a municipal spring in the West, tests the limits of local democracy and experimentation with new municipal models, Kurdish majority cities in the East lack elected mayors and are governed by Ankara through government-appointed trustees. **The trustee model**, which was first introduced in fall 2016, was defeated in the March 2019 local elections as the HDP-backed candidates regained 65 seats in the region. Yet, the majority of these elected mayors, including those of the metropolitan municipalities, such as Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Van were removed from their office, imprisoned and replaced by government-appointed trustees, also known as *kayyums*. Our research suggests that the

trustee model rendered local politics and administration further dependent on Ankara, pushed Diyarbakır's vibrant civil society outside the municipal realm and failed to fill the void it left behind. It also has had a destructive impact on the existing institutional set-ups and processes for democratic participation as not only were the mayors dismissed, but also the municipal councils (*Belediye Meclisi*) were *de facto* dissolved.

The report illustrates that the **politics of trustees** has not only undermined the foundations of local politics in Diyarbakır (and in other Kurdish-majority cities) but also normalized a troubling sentiment that electoral politics has nothing to offer the region. While the trustee model seems to be an exceptional measure and at odds with the excitement the new municipal administration has created in the West, this report contends that criminalization of the HDP municipalities is in fact **integral to what local politics can and cannot do** in Turkey.

After the March 2019 local elections, municipal politics is at a crossway in Turkey. On the one hand, the political party shift in metropolitan cities' governance came with great expectations and offered numerous possibilities for civil society - municipality cooperation, hence provided a window of opportunity for the democratization of the country. On the other hand, the central government's increased tutelage over municipalities hints further centralization and carries the risk of deepening authoritarianism in Turkey. The final part of the report, keeping these opportunities and threats in mind, offers recommendations to the central government, municipalities, civil society, and the European Union, to strengthen civil society - municipality cooperation in order to reopen the democratization path in Turkey.

Contents of the Report

1 Introduction: Context and Background	2
2 Research Questions and Methodology	5
3 Findings	7
A New Mayors, New Promises	7
B Impact on Existing Institutional Set-ups	9
C New Spaces for Participation	17
D The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic	23
E The Counter Attack: The Curtailment of the Municipal Rights and Services	25
F The Sword of Damocles: Diyarbakır and the Era of <i>Kayyums</i> (Government-Appointed Trustees)	27
4 Limitations and Caveats of the Research	24
5 Recommendations	35
To Central Government	35
To Municipalities	36
To Civil Society	36
To the EU	37
6 Annex	38
1 Detailed Research Design	38
2 Researchers	40

1 Introduction: Context and Background

It is common sense today that Turkey has been in a regime crisis for the last few years. Since the constitutional referendum in April 2017, which gave way to Turkey's current presidential system, the *ancien régime* has mostly been undermined. Yet, a new stable effective political system could not be established despite Ankara's efforts and immense resources. With the new regime, called "The Presidential Government System," the limited democratic legacy existing in the country has been largely eliminated. Turkey had always been a state where "rule of law" had flaws and shortcomings. Yet, it had been a state "ruled by the law" at least. Turkey is no longer a state ruled by a set of laws that are knowable, predictable and transparent. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2019, Turkey is no longer a democracy but a hybrid regime ranked between the authoritarian regime and the flawed democracy. Turkey has ranked 110th among 165 countries in the global democracy index with an overall score of 4.09 (out of 10), which was based on 60 indicators across five broad categories: (1) electoral process and pluralism, (2) the functioning of government, (3) political participation, (4) democratic political culture, and (5) civil liberties.¹ Likewise, Turkey was classified as a "moderate autocracy" with an overall score of 4.92 (out of 10) and ranked 77th among 137 countries in the Bestelmann Stiftung Transformation

¹ For more detail see: <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>.

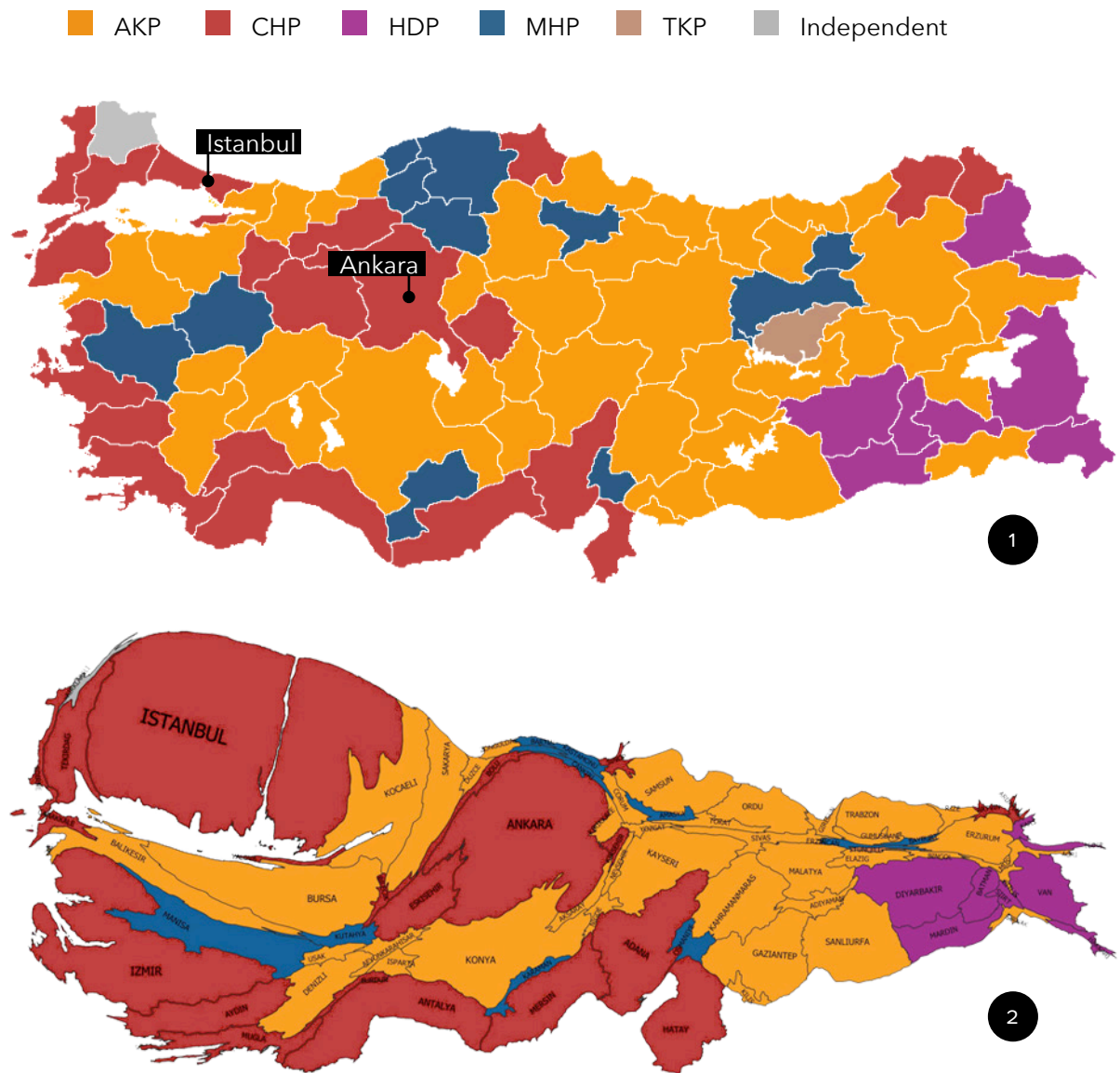


Image 1: Map of party landscape after election (1) and cartogram of party landscape based on population of provinces (2). Sources: (1) Turkish Local Election District Map, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=77851449> and (2) @atacpacal @mevzubilim.

2 BTI classifies countries in five groups: (1) democratic consolidation, (2) defective democracy, (3) highly defective democracy, (4) moderate autocracy, and (5) hard-line autocracy. For more detail, see: <https://www.bti-project.org/en/index/political-transformation.html>, date of access: 22.08.2020.

Index (BTI 2020). Accordingly, Turkey's scores were calculated as 7.0 for stateness, 5.8 for political participation, 3.5 for rule of law, 3.0 for stability of democratic institutions, and 5.3 for political and social integration.²

Held against this background on March 31st, 2019, the local election has shaken the political scene in Turkey as the ruling People's Alliance lost control of major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Mersin, Adana and Antalya

³ Enacted by the 2017 Referendum, the new presidential system in Turkey facilitates election alliances among political parties. The People's Alliance is led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP and supported by, among others, the far-right MHP. The Nation Alliance, on the other hand, is led by the center-left CHP and the Good Party (İYİP), a split from the MHP now claiming the center-right. While the alliances were formed around presidential and general elections, they also entered the municipal races with common candidates in most cities. Nation Alliance's candidates in big cities in the West were also supported by the HDP, making the party an unofficial, unspoken partner of the Nation Alliance.

to the opposing Nation Alliance.³ The same election also resulted in the repudiation of the government in the South East, as most of the municipal seats in Kurdish-majority cities occupied by government-appointed trustees were regained by the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP).

The election was local; its repercussions, however, were inevitably nationwide. The electoral losses in big cities proved the vulnerability of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for the first time in almost two decades. After all, his (and his movement's) ascend to power had begun with a municipal election victory some 25 years ago when the Virtue Party (RP) won a number of metropolitan municipalities in 1994 including that of Istanbul, bestowing Erdoğan his first political post. Therefore the electoral upset was not only a personal blow to President Erdoğan but also reminiscent of 1994 in which the voters pointed to the crisis of political establishment by giving the metropolises to the underdog. Moreover, the loss was not simply a political loss for the governing alliance, but also an economic one given the immense financial and redistribution resources metropolitan municipalities control. Paving the way to the emergence of new actors, ideas and practices, the municipal gains have boosted the morale of the opposition and, once again, sparked hopes that the populist authoritarianism holding the country hostage for a while is actually beatable and even reversable.

2 Research Questions and Methodology

This report, commissioned by the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), aims to evaluate the social and political potential of this critical moment by examining the limits as well as potentials of new municipal administrations in Turkey. Curious about the new social, economic and political possibilities that new municipalities provide (or fail to do so) for their citizens, our report particularly focuses on the interface between local governance and broader civil society. We tried to draw lessons from existing good practices on civil society - municipality cooperation in Turkey and find out how international organisations can support such cooperations with an emphasis on democratization.

Written by five researchers, the report is based on a multi-sided qualitative research including over 50 key-informant interviews with municipal officials, academics, civil society actors and representatives from professional chambers. The interviews are triangulated with a number of secondary resources such as newspaper archives, official reports, municipal social media accounts and speeches by, and interviews conducted with government representatives and mayors.

The report focuses on Istanbul, Ankara, Mersin and Diyarbakır, four metropolises won by the opposition forces.⁴ The former three are currently run by mayors supported by the oppo-

⁴ Izmir, Turkey's third biggest city, is in fact yet another noteworthy case experimenting with a new

line of local governance with its new and dynamic mayor Tunç Soyer. Yet, the city had to remain outside the scope of this study as İzmir Metropolitan Municipality has already been run by the opposing Republican People's Party for quite a long time.

sitional Nation Alliance. Diyarbakır's elected mayor, however, was removed from the office six months after the election and replaced by a government-appointed trustee. Therefore, while the former three cities share much in common and are quintessential of new municipal politics in Turkey, the current case of Diyarbakır offers a completely different picture and signifies despair and indifference rather than hope and excitement. We nevertheless included the city to our sample believing what Kurdish majority city municipalities have been going through has significant repercussions on the trajectory of the new local administrations in Western cities, how municipalities are run by the opposition, what they can and cannot do. Our analysis below first focuses on the new municipal experience in Istanbul, Ankara and Mersin, and later complicates the picture by including the experience in Diyarbakır and its shadow over the first three.

The questions that guide the research are organized across four thematic areas, (A) the impact of newly elected municipal cadres on the existing institutional set-ups, (B) new spaces of participation they have managed or strived to create, (c) the impact of this political shift across scales as well as opportunities for inter-scalar cooperation, and (D) the overall challenges new local governments are facing.

3 A

Findings New Mayors, New Promises

Throughout the election campaign and following their success, the mayors of Ankara, İstanbul and Mersin have all shared a new political discourse emphasizing “being different” from their predecessors. By heavily referring to keywords from the good governance glossary such as being transparent, open, inclusive, participative, accountable and by using normative terms believed to be highlighting the norms that the previous mayors are criticized the most for such as being just, green, democratic, the new municipal politics came with a clear discursive shift. The political strategy underlying the election victory of Nation Alliance, namely “radical love” also played a significant role in paving the way to the administrative change. Developed against the polarizing populist stance of the AKP, which simply others its dissenters and the opposition through a logic of us-and-them divide, the radical love strategy emphasized being responsive and inclusive to all irrespective of their support for the AKP and consciously avoided confrontation with Erdoğan and the political leaders of the AKP by focusing on the needs and concerns of all voters.

For instance, in Mersin, the preceding mandate of the nationalist mayor was a period full of conflict and tension between the municipality and the relatively secular and democratic civil society. Therefore, civic actors indicated a

general relief with the return of the social democrats to the local government. This local relief was further significant with the electoral victory of social democrats especially in İstanbul and Ankara. Therefore, civil society was excited and eager to take part in the governance of cities, and there was a promising political environment to such cooperation for three reasons.

First, the end of the People’s Alliance brought back autonomy to local governments as in the former period the mayors were under the strict tutelage of their party leaders. For the AKP mayors, the pressures had reached such a level that the prominent mayors of the party had to resign shortly before the local elections. This centralist tutelage over municipalities left a very small space for any cooperation between the municipalities and the civil society as the former remained reluctant fearing the reactions of the central government, namely of the president. Social democrats’ arrival to power in some cities thus promised a relative gain of political autonomy, which would improve relations with the local civil society.

Second, social democrats’ success in local elections offered another window of opportunity for the civil society as there were a lot active and influential actors who had personal experiences in NGOs or professional chambers and who could thus mediate between

local governments and civil society. The recruitment of many other actors from the civil sector increased the number of such contacts as we will discuss below.

Finally, as the election of social democrat metropolitan mayors was not paired with a majority in the municipal councils, they needed to counterbalance this weakness with the support of the civil society that would be secured by the introduction of new participation mechanisms. We will discuss below to what extent this quest for civil society inclusion in municipal affairs has been achieved.

Hence, the change of power at the local level has already had some consequential outcomes. Groups, communities and individuals who had been completely excluded from local governance, dialogue and consultation

have now been heard by local authorities and invited to municipal facilities. Non-governmental organizations, actors and platforms are eager to collaborate with the newly elected local governments and are willing to assist them in their effort to incur change through good practices. Although their input does not necessarily turn into policy (which is a topic we revisit below), the sheer possibility of access is truly empowering for many.

Participation is a principle that the new municipal administrations cherish. To advance broad-based citizen involvement in decision-making, local governments resorted to a number of permanent or ad-hoc institutions such as consultative meetings, policy-focused workshops, and revitalized existing means such as the help desks and the Citizens' Assembly (not to be confused with the Municipal Council).



Image 2: "We succeeded together: Just, Green, Creative Istanbul"
(Photo credit: Medyascope).

They opened the strategic planning processes to the broader public (legal necessity yet often evaded by municipalities) and collected suggestions from groups as well as individuals. Most recently, to the surprise of many, Ankara Metropolitan Municipality (AMM) announced its intention to experiment with participatory budgeting processes. However, our findings suggest that despite the best intentions, the participation buzz does not necessarily produce processes in which civilian actors, groups and communities become subjects of decision making and implementation (some even verges on tokenism). Almost all civil society members we interviewed praised the record number of consultative meetings and workshops they have been invited to by the new municipalities, yet also complained that many of them are leading to nowhere. Municipalities either fail to follow up the conversation they themselves started or somehow prefer not to keep the partners in the loop for the entire duration of the policy processes.

According to a key informant, who is very active in Istanbul's environmental move-

ments and civil society institutions, one of the challenges of moving into a full-fledged participatory governance is the unwillingness of the Istanbul Municipality to get loose on the bureaucratic mindset whilst trying to open a space for information sharing and consultation. Even though we observe tremendous progress for consultative processes, they are not able to move to the level of co-production participatory urban governance. Hence, the image of "being open and democratic" is prevailing over actually becoming open and democratic.

Despite a variety of shortcomings and disappointments (some of which are obstacles caused by the central government, the others are self-induced), the new municipal governments still enjoy significant credibility in the eyes of the civil society and continue to motivate broader oppositional politics. Even those who are relatively hesitant to celebrate the achievements of the new municipal administrations acknowledge the obstacles laid out in front of them, recognize that they all need more time to make real change and accept that the early efforts are in good faith.

B Impact on existing institutional set-ups

Local governance system in Turkey had already certain institutions and mechanisms in place for democratic participation of citizens and civil society organisations. Municipal Councils act as legislative branch of municipalities; Citizens' Assemblies, albeit their opinions are legally non-binding, exist to provide a platform for civil society participation and deliberation; Strategic Planning processes, which has to be completed during the first 6 months after the election, ensure democratic and transparent objective setting and budgeting; virtual and on-site Information Desks and call

centers actively operate for citizens' inquiries and complaints. These existing institutional set-ups and processes have all been affected by the election results.

Municipal Councils

In Ankara, Istanbul and Mersin, the metropolitan mayors must govern without a majority in the municipal council. Consequently, negotiations between party groups have become sine qua non for decision-making in the council, and they quite often end with no agree-

ment. As a matter of fact, the councils have rejected the mayors' proposals on several occasions. In exchange, the elected mayors used the strategy of being transparent, and they broadcasted live the council meetings to denounce the non constructive opposition of the councillors from People's Alliance and hence to build legitimacy.

For instance, in Mersin in December 2019, the council rejected a free health screening proposal; Mayor Seer's borrowing authority request was rejected twice in May and July 2020; he was not granted the right to sign a protocol with the university in August 2020. In response to these vetoes in the metropolitan council, CHP followed the same strategy in the municipal council of Akdeniz where the Nation Alliance had the majority against the AKP mayor. However, this balance of power in the Akdeniz council ended after the CHP councillor switched to the AKP.

After this political blow on his negotiation capacity, Seer changed direction to push the legal limits of decision making. In the last municipal session, he remanded the council's rejection of his borrowing authority request like it was an adopted decision. According to the municipal law, if the council insists on its decision with the absolute majority of councillors, the president has to promulgate the decision. But the council did not reach the absolute majority although most of the councillors present at the meeting voted against the proposal. Mayor Seer interpreted the lack of absolute majority as a failure of the council's insistence on the decision. He declared that the previously adopted decision of refusal was no longer valid and thus he was authorized to borrow. Although the process has yet to be concluded, this strategy will most probably fail. However, the important point is that it demonstrates the kind of legal manoeuvres that mayors carry out without a council majority.

Likewise in Ankara, the transparent actions that allow public monitoring have served as a balancing force against the opposition from the municipal council, of which the majority consists of the members of the AKP and MHP. For instance, it took Mansur Yavaş almost 2 months

(May–July 2020) to retrieve consent from the AKP and MHP members of the Council to repair the asbestos leaking water pipers in one of the districts of Ankara. The social media campaign and the live broadcasting of municipal councils meetings have played a significant role in opposition members' change of direction.

Citizen's Assemblies

Citizens' Assemblies exist to facilitate civic actors' participation in the governance of municipalities. In theory, the Citizens' Assemblies is a mechanism to facilitate civil society engagement. However, in practice, they have been very ineffective at best. At worst, the municipalities often manipulate them by blocking independent civic actors from participating and prefer to work with GONGOs (government oriented non-governmental organisations) as a means to validate municipal policies and practices.

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) did not even have a Citizens' Assembly prior to the current municipal administration. The assembly, chaired by a respectable female architect, brought together well known public figures such as academics, journalists, activists, celebrity actors and representatives of respectable institutions. The selection of the invited members of the assembly, albeit respecting gender balance and meritocracy, was not an open process in which civil society actors could take part and nominate their own representatives. As stated by one assembly member, they are highly aware individuals, knowing well that the assembly shall be fully independent from municipal politics to be able to play a watchdog function.. However, according to the same interviewee, the very fact of such a composition in the assembly and the municipal departments' indifference to the works of the assembly show that the municipality established the assembly as a means to legitimise its policies.

Likewise in Ankara, the Citizens' Assembly was established for the first time with a general assembly meeting held in June 2020. The CHP, the MHP and the İYİP representatives along with the ones from the AKP including politically powerful district mayor of Altındağ and the AKP's Ankara Metropolitan Municipality Council

(AMM) Deputy Chairman Mümin Altunışık were present at the General Assembly. Halil İbrahim Yılmaz, the Vice President of the Ankara Chamber of Commerce, was elected as the president of the assembly. Ankara Citizens' Assembly started to work actively, channels have been opened to improve the relations between the relevant units of the municipality and the working groups formed to support municipal planning, service delivery and Municipal Council decisions. Thus, the assembly is considered as a consensus-building platform, where all mainstream political parties are represented. Accordingly, the assembly makes suggestions for the AMM Council, upon which, oftentimes conflicting representatives from opposing parties can agree. The assembly is considered to be the major tool to achieve public participation in municipal policy-making, decision-making and implementation. However, it is not at all conflict free.

The active members of the assembly are mostly from already active neighbourhood organizations or NGOs and individuals with close relationship to the municipal administration or the executive board of the assembly. Thus, participation oftentimes takes place at an unorganized, voluntary and individual level, instead of an organizational/institutional one. Also, the election of the Vice President of the Ankara Chamber of Commerce as the president of the assembly sent mixed signals in terms of the representation of interests at the assembly. Furthermore, by law, the Citizens' Assemblies are voluntary organizations with no budget and formed upon the mayor's call within the 3 months following the election. Thus, the establishment of the assemblies are directly related to the will of the mayors and their durability - especially in case of an administrative change - is questionable.

Despite the ongoing concerns and conflicts, Ankara Citizens' Assembly achieved bringing influential individuals together, and introduced AMM to innovative ideas such as participatory budgeting at the neighbourhood level. Expectedly, Çiğdem Neighbourhood, supported by the Çiğdemim Neighbourhood Association - an active member of the Assembly-, will be the first pilot study for implementation in 2021. In

addition, over 20 working groups are developing ideas on urban development, architecture and e-governance. As such, the Citizens' Assembly acted as an idea-generator and partnership-builder for implementation during the Covid-19 emergency response.

In Mersin, the Citizens' Assembly has been ineffective since its foundation in the early 2000s. However, during the rule of the previous nationalist Mayor Burhanettin Kocamaz, Yasmina Lokmanoğlu, a catholic community member and an ex-municipal councillor from the CHP, was surprisingly endorsed to be the president of the assembly. She mobilised the assembly and the municipality for a number of social projects targeting disadvantaged groups including Syrian refugees and disabled individuals. She convinced the assembly to take a clear stance against the Nuclear Plant Project. Such positions which can hardly be associated with a nationalist municipality were seen as the municipality's effort to reconcile with the liberal political actors of the city. When the social democrats won the election, nobody would think that Lokmanoğlu would leave the presidency as she seemed to get along well with Mayor Seğer. Yet, the latter wanted some specific actors on the board of the assembly. That became a source of tension as Lokmanoğlu perceived this as an interference to her leadership and autonomy. Indeed, she did not run for the office and left the council. A new executive committee was thus assembled under the supervision of several municipal bureaucrats. Yet, since the election in November 2019, the council remained inactive even during the pandemic lockdown, a period of time that they could have played important roles in mobilising civil society and facilitating solidarity. Also, this was probably because Mayor Seğer preferred to have direct contact with the public and civil organisations without the mediation of any intermediary platform.

Information Desks and Call Centers

On-site/online help desks and call centers of municipalities had already been in place in Ankara, İstanbul and Mersin. These communication services, on the one hand, boost popularity of the elected mayors by increasing their

visibility across various platforms; on the other hand, they serve as a complaint and feedback mechanism by enabling citizens to access their local authorities.

The call centre of Mersin Metropolitan Municipality (MMM) was re-structured in July 2020 with the establishment of a single hub that collects all demands from direct calls, WhatsApp messages, web pages and personal contacts. With the new system, 85% of the calls can be recorded whereas only 38% of daily 3000 calls could be responded to in the former system. This effective channel of participation improved public relations of the municipality as problems and demands can now be easily transmitted to the related departments. Craftsmen, councillors, and *muhtars* enjoyed priority in this hotline thanks to which their communication has been much more facilitated.

The help desk of AMM, namely the Blue Desk (Mavi Masa), was redesigned and renamed as the Başkent 153 Hotline. The notifications received by the Başkent 153 are followed up by three different municipal teams, focusing on responding; auditing the quality, sufficiency and effectiveness of the response, and an internal monitoring body reviewing the overall performance. In addition, mobile teams work on solving problems at the earliest convenience. The citizens can also add photos to document the service performance. The renewed

hotline also allows using digitized tools for conducting public opinion polls. AMM Presidency Press Coordinator (Personal Communication, July, 29 2020) acknowledges that the Mayor spares time to read and respond to the notifications himself. Thus, this hotline appears as a means to constitute a populist politics and put forward how effectively the Mayor and the Municipality can respond to the needs of Ankara's citizens.

In Istanbul, IMM started to use public relations teams and on-site information booths to raise awareness and to receive opinions and concerns of citizens on major public issues such as the environmental and social impact of Canal Istanbul Project. With Canal Istanbul, the biggest mega project of President Erdogan so far, the city will continue to expand towards the North; valuable water resources, massive agricultural land, natural heritage sites and forest areas will be destroyed. Moreover, thousands of people will face the threat of displacement. Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu openly opposes the project and campaigns against its development. The municipality has actively involved its communication team and deployed mobile information vans across Istanbul to inform citizens. The clear stance of the IMM has empowered numerous civic actors also campaigning against the project including environmental organisations, academics, professional chambers, etc.

Example 1

The Canal Istanbul Controversy and the Will of the Local

The biggest investment item on Istanbul's urban development agenda is undoubtedly Canal İstanbul, a 45 km long artificial waterway connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara planned to be located some 30 km west of the Bosphorus, the natural strait that performs the very same duty. Speculated over since 2014, the multi-billion-dollar project is promoted by the central government (embraced vocally by the Presidency) for reasons of maritime security given the business flow of the Bosphorus strait. However, the project apparently is not viable unless it opens up Istanbul's periphery for further development, which it unapologetically does. That is why the project, which lacks any participatory component whatsoever, is heavily criticized by experts and ordinary Istanbulites alike as it is perceived as a project prioritizing urban speculation over urban health and equity. The concerns include that the project would destroy wetlands, and freshwater resources, swallow agricultural land, harm natural heritage sites and urban forest and cause displacement of thousands of people living in the last remaining rural landscapes of the megacity.

Canal Istanbul was an important policy item of the political rivalry leading up to the local election of March 2019. The AKP embraced it as a major promise, while mayor Imamoğlu was vehemently opposed to it. The government sped up the process after the elections, as the Istanbulites' support for the opposition candidate showed their discontent with the project. In response, Mayor Imamoğlu, who has proven to pursue a non-confrontational tone in many matters, chose to amplify his oppositional stance and mobilize IMM resources to stand against the project. IMM held a high-profile workshop on Kanal İstanbul and quickly turned the proceedings into a book. It also started to use public relations teams and on-site information booths to raise awareness and receive citizens' opinions and concerns on

major public issues such as the environmental and social impact of the Canal Istanbul Project. Mayor Ekrem Imamoğlu openly opposes the project and campaigns against its development. The municipality has actively involved its communication team and deployed mobile information vans across Istanbul to inform citizens. IMM's clear stance has empowered numerous civic actors campaigning against the project, including environmental organisations, academics, professional chambers, etc.⁵

IMM's open rebellion to the Canal Istanbul project did not go unnoticed; in fact, it infuriated Ankara. The Governorship of Istanbul took down the anti-Canal Istanbul ads put up by IMM In November 2019, it was revealed that Mayor Ekrem Imamoğlu was facing an investigation.⁶ The investigation was launched by the Ministry of Interior Civil Inspectorship over the banners of "Either Canal or Istanbul" and "Who Needs Kanal İstanbul." The government later defended the investigation decision on the grounds of "a state decision cannot be opposed by public funds," pointing to the anti-Canal information campaign run on municipal funds. The investigation is the clear manifestation of the central government's attempt to control local politics tightly. Indeed, it did not even hesitate to threaten elected officials with persecution.

⁵ Kalın: Kanal İstanbul devlet projesidir, belediyesi projesi değil [Kalın: Canal Istanbul is a public project, not a municipal one]. (2019, December 24). DW. <https://www.dw.com/tr/kal%C4%B1n-kanal-istanbul-devlet-projesidir-belediye-projesi-de%C4%9Fil/a-51788674>

⁶ "Canal Istanbul" investigation against Istanbul Mayor Imamoglu. (2020, Nov 16). Bianet. <https://bianet.org/english/politics/234478-canal-istanbul-investigation-against-istanbul-mayor-imamoglu>



Image 4: IMM's anti-Canal Istanbul Campaign that triggered Ankara to launch an investigation against Mayor Imamoğlu. Billboards read "Either Kanal or İstanbul."

Strategic Planning

Strategic Planning is a key mechanism for setting the newly elected municipal governments' vision, objectives and strategic areas for budget allocation. It is a mandatory process aiming to produce a legally binding document with the participation of civil society in general.

In Ankara, during the strategic plan preparation period, the involvement of the Citizens' Assembly and certain NGOs were ensured. This was a new process for Ankara as the former administration had no interest whatsoever in conducting participatory planning processes or releasing the outputs (plans, activity reports etc.alike) online. Nonetheless,

their contributions were not sufficiently reflected in the plan due to limited preparation by the mMunicipality. For instance, one of the NGOs that we had interviewed extended an official written inquiry concerning their participation in the strategic planning process and did not get any response from the mMunicipality. Another association stated that they heard about the planning process from social media and took initiative to join. Considering, most of the NGOs do not hold the capacities to follow such participatory consultation processes, the ones with experience and/or connections to the mMunicipality were better represented. This clearly indicates to the fact that the municipality needs to increase capacities regarding the design and conduct of participatory planning processes.

Example 2

Lessons Learned From Mersin's Participatory Strategic Planning Process

Mersin has never witnessed a more participatory period than the preparation of the strategic plan of the metropolitan municipality. All through the summer 2019, MMM has organized eighteen workshops with the participation of 2198 related stakeholders. Most of the NGOs and chambers were associated with the process based on their domain of activity. At first sight, such planning with so many workshops may seem indeed participatory, but a closer lookregard makes us think of its tokenistic character.

All started with a workshop organized by the social services department's recently appointed head, who wanted to learn aboutdiscover

the local situation and get to know the related actors. The mayor who was quite impressed by the idea and its realisation ordered all departments to organise their own workshops. Yet, time was so limited that there were one or two workshops every week between June and August 2019 organised by bureaucrats who neither actually understood the logic of workshops nor could have an adequate preparation.

Unpreparedness and rush for workshops were best visible in the organisation of several meetings on the same domains. For instance, after the workshop on social services, departments of social and cultural services, of services for the disabled, of women and family and of health issues held their own meetings inviting more or less the same actors and deliberation mainly common issues.

NGOs in Mersin were never so sought after by public institutions as they were invited to one or two workshops every week. Yet, they did not seem to be prepared for such a planning process, either. Without any prior significant experience in strategic planning and in the absence of orientation by the organisers, NGOs had seen the workshops to share their activities and/or seek support from the municipality for them. Consequently, the workshops took place more like the presentation of past activities and the brainstorming on future one without quite proposing long-term strategic orientations.

Finally, the bureaucracy was caught quite unprepared for such a process. With an unexpected order from the very top of the municipal hierarchy, they found themselves organising workshops with actors with whom they had not cooperated before. For appearances' sake, they held the meetings and reported the conclusions (mostly in the form of lists of proposed activities), however the actual planning process was on its way in the traditional way in offices, behind closed doors. The insincerity was sometimes so obvious that some departments were still organising workshops on strategic planning when the draft-plan was already in deliberation by the municipal council.

In short, the preparation of MMM's strategic plan was perhaps the most participatory decision-making process that the city has witnessed so far. Yet, all these efforts did not appear to have been translated into actual policies or strategies, as they were launched in a top-down fashion -without allowing preparation for neither the municipal bureaucracy nor the local civil society. The experience illustrates quite well that a more democratic decision-making process and planning requires a long-term, gradual transition rather than dictated changes in institutional routines which only leads to taking tokenistic actions.

c New spaces for democratic participation

In addition to their attempt to restructure the existing institutional set-ups (which met with varying degrees of success), the newly elected mayors have tried to establish new spaces for civil society participation not only to bypass the past obstacles but also to underline the democratic claims of the new era. Hence, we have been observing new institutional arrangements, new modes of collaboration between municipalities and civil society actors, mayors' active engagement with citizens, an increase in the number of consultative meetings with civil society actors and academics who were ignored in the past, and new employment policy based on meritocracy and aggressive transfers from civil society and academia.

Consultative Meetings

It is remarkable to observe and attend an increasing number of consultative meetings with various municipal departments that were previously closed to civil society actors, activists or independent academics not organically affiliated with the governing party. In Istanbul, almost all of the municipal departments hold numerous meetings with civil society actors for various purposes. Ranging from one-off events to a series of workshops, these meetings bring together individuals and institutions that used to come together only in civil society meetings or academic events.

Members of our research team, as NGO representatives or independent researchers, were invited to a number of consultative meetings with various themes and different projects such as the environmental policy of Istanbul, the impact of Canal Istanbul Project, urban design of public spaces like Taksim

Square, child-friendly urban furnitures, mainstreaming disability rights, the strengths and weaknesses of Istanbul during the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change adaptation, and cultural heritage conservation. These meetings have been a part of IMM's overall strategy to open up its departments to civil society actors. Participation is monitored on the basis of the number of interactions among various municipal departments and civil society actors. Not surprisingly, there are familiar faces representing the municipality at these meetings. Recently recruited from the critical urban community of activists and experts, they now work as municipal officials and mid-/high level bureaucrats.

In Ankara, the municipality has held a series of consultative expert meetings with professional chambers involved in key decision-making processes regarding the city's future, such as strategic planning and urban development (specifically on urban transport-related issues such as building bicycle lanes). However, these meetings are mostly organized on a voluntary-individual basis without prioritizing institutional representation of relevant universities, chambers, NGOs, CSOs, etc. The basis of volunteering is unclear and mostly shaped by the personal capacities and/or interests of those attending these meetings.

These meetings clearly open up new spaces of democratic participation for civil society in general. However, it is difficult to follow up the outcomes of such meetings. Since the current procedures lack such a follow-up mechanism, it is a wonder whether feedback from civil society is actually translated into municipal policies.

New Communication Strategy

A significant component of the new municipal communication strategy has been the live broadcast of municipal tenders, municipal council meetings, and city-level committee meetings such as the Transport Committee, where most seats are occupied by central government-appointed members. The new municipal broadcast immediately became popular, as the broadcasting of the national assembly was heavily censored and subsequent sessions were not open to the public. For example, the first two meetings of IMM's Municipal Council were watched by 3.5 Million people online.⁷

⁷ IPA News. (2019). New mayor takes Istanbul council meetings live on air <https://ipa.news/2019/04/27/new-mayor-takes-istanbul-council-meetings-live-on-air/>

Through these live streams, new mayors not only render decision making accessible to all and hold the municipality and council members accountable, but also make a strong statement for transparency. The move has helped the new municipalities distinguish themselves from the former administrations (and the ruling People's Alliance for

⁸ Transparency International Turkey Branch reports that in 2019, Turkey dropped 13 places and ranks 91 out of 180 countries in the corruption perception Index. See, <http://en.seffaflik.org/cpi2019/>

that matter) whose record on corruption and transparency is in steady decline.⁸ To further foster the cause, some mayors has even investigated the dubious spendings made in the past terms and broadcasted their findings online.

Proactive Mayors

In Mersin, the mayor himself has shown a great effort to build a democratic image for the municipality. Although known as an aggressive and strict manager, the mayor has managed to develop a warmer relationship with the public thanks to his frequent appearance in social events and field visits. He has particularly established very close relationships with the peripheric rural areas of the city that had been mainly ignored due to their relatively insignificant electoral weight. The mayor has also improved his relationship with civil society by developing better communication with professional chambers. During the pandemic, his

cooperation with the chamber of physicians has been very valuable. All needs and demands of the chamber were met. In the early summer of 2020, the mayor held a series of meetings with the labour unions, professional chambers, and the business representatives to deliberate on municipal policies, which were new in the local politics. The mayor also tried to improve communication channels of the political figures like the councillors and the neighbourhood heads by personally welcoming them and reserving specific hotlines for them to facilitate their communication.

New Organizational Capacities

In Istanbul, the metropolitan municipality realized early on the need for a new strategic planning capacity and well-trained personnel to fulfill its vision. Hence, the new administration established a new organizational unit called **Istanbul Planning Agency** (IPA) responsible for long term strategic planning as per the municipal mandate and responsibilities. While the existing organizational branches of the metropolitan municipality remain intact and govern the day-to-day activities, IMM designs its long term strategic vision and develops new policies through the new IPA with its expert personnel hired by the new administration. Designed with the purpose to act as an interface between the municipality and Istanbul's academic and civil society, IPA has four branches: Vision 2050 Office (strategic planning), Institute Istanbul (urban research and development), Istanbul Statistics Office (data analysis and communication) and Public Design Office (spatial design and architectural competitions). Thanks to its well-trained and well-connected expert personnel, IPA can **by-pass** the cumbersome and old-fashioned organizational structure of IMM and more eagerly reach out to civil society and research communities across the city. Despite being governed by the opposition for several election cycles, the model has been so appealing that Izmir Metropolitan Municipality is said to launch a similar organizational structure in the near future.

IMM's ability to attract new, well-educated personnel sends a great message for merit-based hiring. Still, it raises concerns regarding the

danger of co-optation of civil society. Through IPA and other high-level personnel hirings, the new IMM administration employed a large number of people such as activists, leaders of professional organizations and associations, and faculty members who were key figures in the critical urban community until recently. Would these new hirings cause a brain drain in the urban opposition and impact its organizational capacity? With too many of its previous

members currently employed by IMM, will Istanbul's civil society be able to maintain its critical look and at the same time meaningfully contribute to urban policy making? While we have not yet observed any major concrete issues regarding both questions and Istanbul's multi-faceted and extensive urban civil society seems to critically engage with the new IMM administration, it is worthwhile to keep the issue of co-optation in mind.

Example 3

Urban Design Competitions in İstanbul



Image 5: "Reunion Stop", Taksim Square-Istanbul. (Credit: IMM)

During the rule of the previous local government, almost all the major decisions regarding the design of public spaces, including the renowned Taksim Square, were made behind closed doors and via top-down processes often involving the mayor/president himself. A few preferred design offices received most of the contracts without a transparent and participatory process. lack of transparency and participation. After the 2019 election, the new Istanbul Mayor of Istanbul addressed this problem and made the design of quality public spaces through open and participatory processes it one of his most visible promises with a clear political stance.; designing quality public spaces with open and participatory processes. Hence, the Public Design Office was set up under the IPA, and Konkur İstanbul was founded to facilitate urban design competitions in Istanbul. Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu made an open call to the design community of Istanbul and elsewhere to join these efforts:

Dear architects, urban planners, urban designers and project managers,

We are taking action to transform all the public spaces where the heart of Istanbul beats. The goal we have in mind for our 16-million-strong city is to equip its renowned public spaces with aesthetics and functionality, and give Istanbulites the chance to start enjoying these spaces. In this journey, we need your bright ideas. Come and share with us any creative projects you may have for Istanbul's focal points, and help us ensure that the people of Istanbul are in direct contact with their city. The projects will be evaluated by a jury, using different methodologies according to the content of each competition. The selected projects will come to life and become a part of Istanbul. This new process begins with the International Taksim Urban Design Competition, which will give the iconic Taksim Square a landscape design worthy of Taksim's history and reputation. Alongside the 16 million people of Istanbul, you will have the chance to decide the future of this city through various competitions which will spread across all of Istanbul's public spaces.

Apply now with your project, and put your mark in the future of Istanbul.

(www.konkur.istanbul)

Taksim Urban Design Competition was organized in parallel with a public engagement program called "Istanbul Reuniting with its Squares," aiming to involve citizens in the debates around public spaces. A temporary pavilion, named "Reunion Stop," was designed and built in Taksim Square around February 2020. Istanbul Citizens' Assembly organized a public consultation meeting at the pavilion in line with the purpose of the structure. However, this experience was extremely short-lived as the Conservation Board of Istanbul ordered IMM to take the pavilion down. This decision was clearly a top-down intervention of the central government since a much larger Presidential exhibition tent was already on the square for almost a year. After a

couple of weeks, IMM removed the structure from the site. The participatory process ended to a great extent in March as the world went into the pandemic lockdown.

Nevertheless, two-staged international competitions received hundreds of applications, and 20 of them were qualified for developing second stage detailed designs. Out of the 20 projects, an independent jury selected 3 to be further discussed in the public and voted by Istanbul citizens on an online platform named "Istanbul is Yours". The winner was determined based on the decision of the jury, the votes of Istanbulites, and the preference of IMM.

This experience clearly opened the urban design and decision-making processes on public spaces in Istanbul to a much larger public.



Image 6: Three projects selected to be voted on "Istanbul is Yours" platform run by the IPA

Nevertheless, it received criticisms both from the design community and civic actors. Some critics stated that the central government would never allow IMM to design Taksim Square, therefore all this fuss will eventually cause a bigger disappointment in the design community of Turkey.. Some civic actors were not happy with the competition methodology as they expected to see a more direct participatory design process in Taksim. Some found the selected projects too fancy, demeaning the political values of the square.

Now, the IMM aims to continue the participatory design process to make necessary amendments to the selected project before it is finalized. The Istanbul Citizens' Assembly stated that they are aware of all these criticisms and shortcomings and that the assembly is tasked with facilitating this process.

Merit-based, gender-sensitive employment policy

With the exception of key management cadre assisting the mayor, new local administrations, work with the previous administrations' personnel. Most municipal employees have strong job security. Dismissal of the existing employees is a bad political move, particularly considering that new mayors operate on a platform that promises inclusiveness, and emphasises merit-based employment rather than partisanship. However, working with key personnel hired by another administration to perform a different set of policies and priorities is a challenge to say the least. Moreover, metropolitan municipalities are massive organizations in Turkey. IMM, for example, employs 45 thousand people, has 25 companies and controls a budget

⁹ BBC Türkçe. (2019, May 8). İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi: Türkiye'nin en büyük yerel yönetimi. [İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality: Turkey's biggest local government] <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-48180564>

close to 7 Billion dollars.⁹ One should also consider that İstanbul and Ankara Metropolitan Municipalities have been governed by the same political tradition for 25 years until last year, making them almost inseparable from the party. Some of their units have been stubbornly insular, others have been notoriously partisan and hostile to civil society, let alone the willingness to work with them. While the most partisan employers left and a majority of the remaining staff seem to comply with the new administrations, they are mostly hesitant towards new approaches, and some even work to undermine them. Therefore, despite their expertise in local government, it is a challenge for the new administrations to gain complete control of the municipal organism, let alone give it a particular direction.

Hence, we observed a very aggressive hiring strategy that opened up important posts and formed new ones for respected civil society actors, activists and influential academics. Some of these recruits expressed their positive attitude, while others got disappointed and either lost their motivation or broke their ties at an early stage. There had been quite a number of transfers from urban and environmental opposition. In the case of İstanbul, high-level

municipal bureaucrats working closely with the mayor facilitate the recruitment process of these experts by offering the positions directly, not through job applications. The legitimacy of proposed names often grows out of their publicly known works and previously held positions. Especially in the case of İstanbul and Mersin, key figures from the chambers of architects and engineers, the semi-public bodies representing professionals, were hired by the newly elected mayors and assigned to important positions. These bodies are the ones that are frequently targeted by President Erdoğan for their open opposition towards certain development projects with high environmental and social impacts. Some of these new municipal recruits continue their leadership roles in the professional chambers. This jeopardizes one's independence and creates the risk of a conflict of interest.

In terms of the recruitment policy for ordinary workers, the issue is more complicated. After a law amendment, subcontracted workers became permanent municipal workers covered under social security. With no more contracts to be renewed for outsourced jobs, the newly elected mayors missed the chance to offer new positions to their electorates. The only option is to recruit extra personnel, but the process is heavily restrained due to budget constrictions and financial bottlenecks. For instance, in the case of Mersin, the limited resources were allocated in favour of women workers, and a significant number of female personnel were hired especially for publicly visible and previously male-dominated services such as street cleaning, parks and recreation, bus driving and parking. Public's perception towards gendered roles in certain sectors was positively affected by this policy. İstanbul and Ankara Municipalities have also followed a similar policy.

Peripheral municipalities, like that of Mersin, do not have the chance to offer personal benefits attractive enough to recruit qualified personnel outside the city. Thus, they suffer from a lack of qualified personnel in key managerial and technical positions and have to rely on the local civil society. In such conditions, recruitments from professional chambers indeed pose a threat of co-optation of civil society.

D The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 Pandemic has been experienced in Turkey not only as a public health crisis but it also deepened the existing economic and political crises. It directly impacted the municipalities' performance, and it was a litmus test to reveal the increasing tensions between central and local governments. The success of AKP's municipalism and consolidation of its political power had heavily relied on social aids extended to the urban poor. The newly-elected social democratic municipalities, caught by the pandemic in their first year in office, have found a niche to challenge the AKP's superiority in "effective" reach-out to the urban poor. Through the municipal pandemic responses, they have been successful in reaching out to the poor. The municipalities of Ankara, Istanbul, Adana and Mersin have developed successful measures to support citizens during the difficult times.

In addition to the mainstream measures to ensure public health and hygiene in public spaces, AMM's effective Covid-19 response encompassed extensive consideration of citizens' needs and inclusive service delivery. For instance, the municipality collaborated with supermarkets and motorcycle couriers to ensure food provision for the 65+ years old citizens and people with chronic diseases. A temporary website listing the contact information of related supermarkets in Ankara was established. In addition, the municipal police also provided 65+ years old citizens with free masks and hand-sanitizers. Low-income families and occupational groups that have lost jobs due to the pandemic such as musicians, tailors and informal waste pickers were provided with food packages. Street pickers were also provided with shelter, when needed. Food and hygiene products were provided to

refugee groups. Bread production provision, public transport, and work hours were rearranged accordingly. Dry food was provided for stray animals. Postponement of bills for infrastructure services (e.g., water) and rental payments was another measure taken by the municipality to support the poor. For the provision of such services, the municipality also launched a crowdsourcing campaign.

The AKP's response to the successful Covid-19 response by the newly elected metropolitan municipalities included: 1) centralization of services such as free mask delivery, 2) confiscation of bank accounts and donations, 3) the prohibition of collecting donations and fundraising activities by the local governments, 4) investigation of Istanbul and Ankara mayors on the fundraising campaigns, and 5) budget cuts which were only applied to oppositional municipalities although it was publicly announced by the State Treasury that all the municipal revenue cuts were to be postponed for three months. Therefore, a disciplinary mechanism, which entailed further centralization, has been put into practice.

Despite the interruptions and the conflict with the central government, AMM displayed an exemplary case of inclusive emergency service provision during the pandemic. This successful performance was achieved through the effective use of newly established participatory mechanisms such as Bařkent 153 and the Citizens' Assembly. A Health Coordination Board along with Crisis Management Center and Crisis Support Desks were established. Bařkent 153 hotline was one of the access points to the Center. Therefore, Bařkent 153 citizen notifications helped the municipality better reach the vulnerable. In addition, through the Citizens'

Assembly, the municipality managed to build effective collaboration and cooperation with civil society. First of all, the Citizens' Assembly, with access to more than 500 NGOs, helped to list the vulnerable groups and their needs. For instance, in order to provide the 65+ years old citizens with the supermarket delivery service, the municipality collaborated with the local association of markets and ensured the logistics with the Federation of Motor Couriers (with over 5000 members) through the Citi-

zens' Assembly's network. The assembly also released a document in support of neighbourhood collective action, titled "10 Golden Rules of Solidarity in the Pandemic," explaining ways to contact and help those who might be in need. In addition, in line with action ideas developed at the assembly meetings, active members such as Çiğdemim Neighbourhood Association, Ankara Chamber of Grocery, and Chamber of Commerce paid off the debts of low-income citizens.

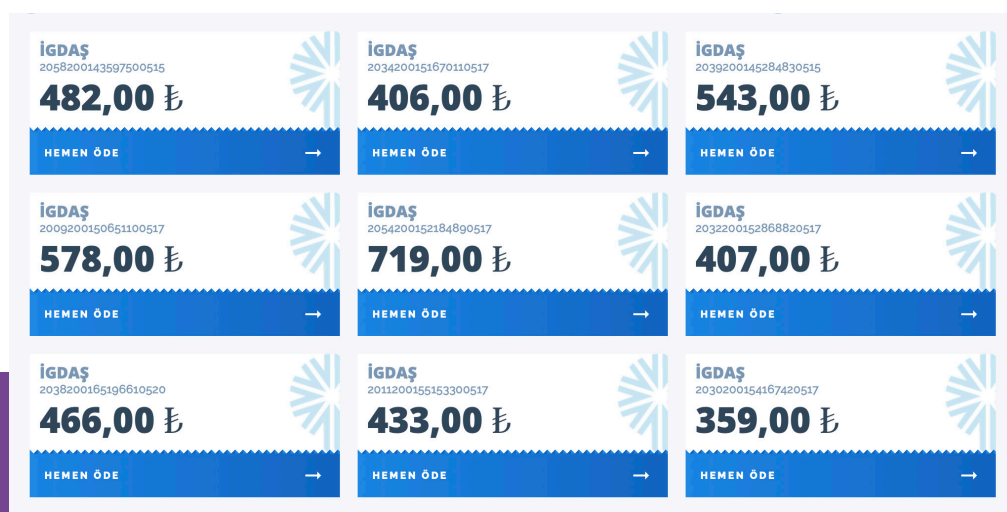


Image 7: Bill on the Hook Project of IMM (<https://askidafatura.ibb.gov.tr/invoice-list>)

Example 4

Bill on the Hook Project of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

In order to bypass the fundraising ban on the municipalities, IMM initiated a solidarity campaign among citizens on the payment of utility bills. 'Bill on the Hook' project initially brought together those who have difficulty in paying their gas and water bills and benefactors on an online platform. As of January 18, 2020 approximately 26 million TL worth bills were paid through this crowdfunding mechanism. The project was extended with "Family Support" and "Baby Support" branches, which aim to support families in need and mothers with babies. The benefactors can support a family or a mother with a baby monthly by directly transferring credit to the municipal smart (transport / service) card of an individual.

E The Counter Attack: The Curtailment of the Municipal Rights and Services

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was never shy about revealing his intentions regarding a possible loss in the 2019 local elections. He claimed (some may prefer “threatened”) that even if his party’s candidates lose the elections, the opposition won’t be able to run the municipalities. Mostly, he highlighted the terrible economic situation (though debt-burden municipalities were products of his party’s reign) they would have to face. But there was also a political angle that could not be underestimated. Based on 18 years of experience, people were rightly suspecting that the central government would do its best to make the newly elected mayors’ life difficult. And they were proven right.

Of course, these interferences and restraints had different faces in different cities. For example, the largest city in Turkey’s southeastern, Diyarbakır, where HDP enjoys a huge support, the central government basically removed the elected mayors from office, jailed them and appointed trustees known as “kayyum.” On the other hand, the tactics in big cities like Istanbul and Ankara were more complex and included both financial (e.g., Public banks were not allowed to loan money or restructure the existing debts) and political measures (e.g., AKP-MHP majority in the Municipal Councils functioned to paralyze the president and the opposition).

Losing elections in major metropolitan cities meant not only the loss of political control but also a significant level of economic control for the ruling party. Zoning decisions, permits, urban development and infrastructure investments at multiple scales in these areas constitute a significant portion of Turkey’s economy. Just recently, the 2019 budget of AMM, which

owns 15 municipal companies, and the General Directorate of Ankara Water and Sewage Administration and the General Directorate of Public Transportation was declared as 14 billion TL. IMM’s budget was almost 24 billion TL in 2019. Therefore, the AKP developed a number of immediate and long-term strategies to regain and consolidate power in the metropolitan areas. Following the election, the central government announced its long-term plans to “reform” public administration which included further centralization of the local government system in Turkey. Centralization of municipal data collection and storage systems within the Ministry of Interior and even the transfer of urban planning and municipal service provision authorities to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization are the changes expected in the near future. More immediate changes included various financial and legal-political pressure mechanisms towards regaining power in large metropolitan areas. Right after the election, a series of legal actions were taken to control the internal (financial) organization and earnings, and to restrict revenues from the State Treasury by changing debt collection regulations.

For instance, in Ankara, the appointment of managerial personnel to two municipal companies shortly after the election created a dispute. On May 15, 2019, the Ministry of Commerce issued a circular to restrict the powers of mayors and extend the authority of the municipal council to appoint personnel to municipal companies. This is a clear attempt by the AKP to control the internal finances of metropolitan areas through the municipal council, which consists mostly of AKP and allied MHP. The circular was followed by a

supportive official statement released by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization on May 20, 2019. Therefore, in violation of 25 years of conduct and Article 37 of the Municipal Law No:5393, the Mayor of AMM could not appoint managers to municipal companies, which delayed the takeover of the management and the finances of the municipal companies. AMM appealed to the 10th Commercial Court of First Instance to suspend the execution of the circular (Decision Date: June 14, 2019, Decision No: 2019-499). The court ruled that the authority to appoint managerial personnel belongs to the municipality. The Metropolitan Municipality then filed a lawsuit in the Council of State for the suspension and cancellation of the circular. However, on July 28, 2020, the Council of State took its first decision, though not final, against the municipality. This decision sets an example and is binding not only for Ankara but also for other cases.

The Presidential Decree released on April 30, 2020 (Official Gazette No: 31114, Decision No: 2484) regarding the transfer of urban rail transportation systems, subways and related facilities built by the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure to local governments is yet another striking example. In the past, municipalities were expected to pay the 15% of the turnover revenue they earned from the trans-

port systems to the Treasury upon completion of the project. However, the new regulation obliges municipalities to transfer 5% of their actual budget to the Treasury, and subject them to penalty in case of delay in payment. As a result, metropolitan areas, including Ankara, have lost a significant portion of their income from the Treasury. Considering that approximately 120 million TL debts were transferred from the previous administration to the current administration, debt control becomes a significant tool for central tutelage.

The central government's pressures exerted from above and the previous municipal bureaucracy's resistance from below placed the newly elected mayors in a position to have a direct impact on civil society-municipality cooperation and their actual participation in municipal governance. There is a pressure to do as much as possible in the shortest possible time. There is a time pressure on the new municipal administrations because many of them don't think they have much time in office. At the root of this perception is the shared hunch that Erdoğan regime either removes the new mayors from the office (i.e., through methods enforced on the mayors of Kurdish-majority cities) or calls for an early election before the new municipal policies come to fruition. Therefore, while new local elections

are not expected to be held before March 2024, the new local administrations have been operating as if they have only six months to prove themselves. The rush sometimes results in the prioritization of short-term goals with highly visibility over longer term plans and subtle structural change. Perhaps this is why genuine participation commitments are often abridged into a consultation meeting here and a workshop there.



Image 8: Office furniture of the newly elected mayor of Adana was confiscated due to the debts of the previous mayor (Source: Adana Metropolitan Municipality)

F The Sword of Damocles: Diyarbakır and the Era of *Kayyum*s (Government-Appointed Trustees)

Despite Ankara's attempts to curtail the rights and services of local governments, the municipal gains of March 2019 provide immense opportunities for the opposition. However, this extremely structured window of opportunity is not for all to enjoy. Not all municipalities are run by their elected representatives. This is perhaps the greatest irony of Turkey's municipal spring. While the major metropolitan cities in the West and the South celebrate an unexpected shift in power, democratic means of local participation in predominantly Kurdish cities in the East are being restricted as HDP's electoral victories have been overturned by various executive and judicial interventions in Ankara. This typically occurs when elected local representatives face indictment (and imprisonment) on terrorism-related charges. After they are removed from office and taken into custody, the Ministry of Interior appoints government trustees (often public employees such as vice-governors) to the very municipal positions that were subject to local elections a few months ago. As of November 2019, 60 municipalities in the region, including metropolitan municipalities such as Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van are run by government-appointed trustees.¹⁰ This number is only 5 less than the

10 HDP recently published an annual report on the impact of the trustees appointed after the March 2019 local election. See, Halkların Demokratik Partisi [The Peoples' Democratic Party], (August 18, 2020). *Kayyım Raporu: Ağustos 2019 - Ağustos 2020 -1- Yıllık Panorama* [Trustee Report: August 2019 - August 2020 - 1-year Panorama]. <https://www.hdp.org.tr/Images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/2020/1-yillik-kayyim-raporu-2020.pdf>

How should one interpret the suspension of local democracy in Kurdish majority cities, or what have come to be called "the *kayyum* regime", vis a vis the

number of municipalities the HDP won in March 2019, indicating that the local elections, and hence the local will, were almost completely undermined.

revitalized expectations from local governance in opposition-led municipalities of Istanbul, Ankara, Adana and Mersin? Rather than turning a blind eye to the former, or treating it as an exception to the rule, this report prefers to treat them as two interrelated components of a single body politics. Although we discuss an example of a *kayyum*-run municipality under a separate section from Istanbul, Ankara and Mersin experiences, this is a decision taken strictly for practical and narrative purposes. The case of Diyarbakır seems distinct and the *kayyum* procedure is implemented exclusively to the HDP municipalities. Nevertheless, Ankara's ability and willingness to override and eliminate municipal leaders cast a shadow over all political actors and diminish the opposition's possibilities for collaboration. We will revisit this discussion below following the examination of Diyarbakır's *kayyum*-run metropolitan municipality.

Banishment of Civil Society from the Municipal Realm

Kayyum is not an entirely new institution for Diyarbakır as its practice precedes the March 2019 elections and is rooted in the state of emergency declared following the failed coup attempt in July 2016. Since Fall 2016, Diyarbakır and other major Kurdish majority cities in the region were governed by trustees until the March 2019 local elections. The election was a resounding "no" to the *kayyum* regime as the HDP candidates regained local power in most municipalities. This rejection was perhaps most pronounced in Diyarbakır where the AKP picked Cumali Atilla, the sitting *kayyum*, as its candidate. He was beaten by the HDP candidate Selçuk Mızraklı who received 62.9 % of all votes. In the following months, however, most

of the newly elected HDP mayors, including Mayor Mızraklı, were again swiftly replaced by the AKP government's re-appointed trustees. The evaluations and analysis in this report pertain to both the first and the second *kayyum* phases.

Diyarbakır, the heartland of Kurdish politics and intellectual life, had a vibrant civil society actively engaged with the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality and district municipalities before 2016. Despite the criticisms of the limited influence of the NGOs on municipalities, all interviewees agreed that there was a constant dialogue between the majority of NGOs and the municipalities, especially the metropolitan municipality. Indeed, mechanisms such as the municipal council were working relatively well. However, the relations between the majority of NGOs and the municipalities in Diyarbakır came to an abrupt end with the appointment of trustees. On the one hand, since the politics of trustees has violated the fundamental democratic right to vote and to be elected, most NGOs, including those with a critical view towards the HDP or Islamic and conservative NGOs, refused to develop relationships and establish partnerships with the appointed trustees due to concerns for democratic legitimacy. On the other hand, the trustees have perceived the NGOs as extensions of the pro-Kurdish politics

in the sphere of civil society. Some interviewees argued that the trustees have acted with a sense of conquest and changed all the institutional relations within the municipalities. Many had predicted that trustees might replace the oppositional NGOs with Islamic and conservative NGOs. However, most participants confirmed that this prediction has never been fully realized, except for some symbolic meetings with the NGO representatives.

The withering away of the role of civil society in local politics has been consequential in Diyarbakır. The role of the municipalities in the city has traditionally been far beyond being solely a local government. They have been the primary space to oppose the central government, open up and build up a civil democratic space for political groups, social movements and civil society actors at the local level. One can argue that there had been a balance of power at the local level between the central government and its affiliated public institutions on the one hand; and the municipalities, NGOs, local political groups and social movements on the other. The appointed trustees have radically disrupted this balance, and led to the deconcentration of the state power at the local level in parallel with the central government's efforts to re-centralize the state power in Ankara.

Example 5

Diyarbakır's Growing Distrust in Electoral Democracy and the Diminishing Weight of Local Politics

One of the most troubling findings of the Diyarbakır leg of our research is the disappearance of local means to access, let alone participate in, politics. At one extreme is the growing pessimism shared by many interviewees regarding the prospects and meaning of elections in the region. While the perception "the AKP government will not hold an election in this city again" shared widely by the people of Diyarbakır, many openly state that the HDP should withdraw from both central and local parliaments and not run for the elections.

However, the undermining of local politics is not limited to the imprisoned elected mayors and their appointed replacements. It also includes reducing the roles and capacities of other high-level public appointees, such as governors or provincial police chiefs, who are no longer performing their duties without checking with Ankara. An interviewee reported from a local appointed administrator as the following:

We all turned our eyes towards Ankara. We were looking at what they were going to say. The bureaucrat had never looked to Ankara that much. The bureaucrat used to be an official who applied the rules and laws in their province. There is no such thing anymore. The state had never been ruled by such a small group of people. This state was a state of law, a state governed by laws. We all used to exercise our own powers and do our jobs in our place. Now there is no authority, no law. In other words, we do not act according to the laws.

Undermining the Institutional Set-up

Most interviewees underlined that the politics of trustees had a destructive impact on the existing institutional set-ups and processes for democratic participation. As almost all interviewees emphasized, after the appointment of the trustees, not only were the mayors dismissed and arrested but also the municipal councils were de facto dissolved. Indeed, the trustee-led municipal committees (Belediye Encümeni) have governed the municipalities. According to the law, half of the municipal committee members are elected from among the municipal council members and the remaining half from the municipal bureaucracy. Yet, after the appointed trustee, the municipal committee was formed only from the municipal bureaucracy. Therefore, the politics of trustees points to an exclusive administration by the appointed officials in Diyarbakir. A participant went one step further and argued that the trustee policy had an impact beyond dismissing the elected mayor and weakening the municipal council. It also shows the central state's distrust of the entire city and the people. The second mechanism of the democratic participation that collapsed after the politics of trustees is the municipal committee, which consisted of representatives of the municipi-

palities, NGOs, and local public institutions. In Diyarbakir, there was an active municipal committee before the trustees. The public institutions affiliated with the governorship and most of the Islamic and conservative NGOs did not participate actively in the municipal committee. Besides, the HDP-led municipalities were not inclusive enough despite their radical discourse regarding the participatory government. However, there was still an active dialogue and cooperation between the municipalities and most NGOs in the municipal committee. Like municipal councils, the municipal council was de facto dissolved in Diyarbakir with the appointment of trustees. Trustees have never convened the municipal committee since then. Besides, they did not meet with the public institutions or NGOs that were Islamic, conservative, or distant from the HDP within the municipal committee. As some of the interviewees maintained, Selçuk Mızraklı, the mayor of Diyarbakir elected in the March 2019 local elections and dismissed in August 2019, convened the municipal committee again after the elections and prepared a city constitution for the 2020-2024 strategic planning process. Yet, after the appointment of Hasan Basri Adıgüzel, the governor of Diyarbakir, as the new trustee, the municipal committee was disbanded and did not meet again.

Example 6

Strategic Plan and Diyarbakır's Changing Municipal Discourse

After the first trustee was appointed in November 2016, he first prepared a new strategic plan by repealing the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan. The Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality 2017-2021 Strategic Plan was essentially prepared by narrowing down the previous strategic plan and rearranging its contents by the municipal bureaucracy. For instance, none of the interviewees were invited to any meeting for the 2017-2021 strategic planning, and most of them were not aware of the 2017-2021 strategic planning process.

The appointed administration reduced 13 strategic areas to 7 with some changes in names. The eliminated strategic areas were (1) democratic self-governance, (2) Diyarbakır's plural identity: languages, cultures, and beliefs, (3) women's policies and gender equality, (4) strengthening the local economy, and (5) rural development. The remaining 8 strategic areas were re-organized under the 7 titles: (1) transportation services, (2) environmental services, (3) reconstruction and urbanism, (4) health and social services, (5) culture and tourism, (6) disaster management and urban control, and (7) strengthening the institutional structure.

Selçuk Mızraklı, who was elected in the March 2019 local elections, was dismissed before completing the new strategic planning process. The second trustee appointed in August 2019 did not prepare a new strategic plan but continued to implement the 2017-2021 strategic plan prepared by the first trustee.

Looking West and Forward

The victory of the main opposition party CHP in many metropolitan cities, with the support of other opposition parties, in the March 2019 local elections created relative hope in the NGO community in Diyarbakir. According to some interviewees, the CHP municipalities have achieved significant success in two areas. First, they employed a populist approach and achieved relative success in municipal services.. During the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the CHP municipalities, the AMM in particular, have been remarkably successful. We also witnessed significant cooperation and solidarity networks among the 11 metropolitan municipalities of the CHP during the pandemic. This solidarity and cooperation produced notable hope for future partnerships and political alliances. Considering that mayors and local politicians are closer to the public and more closely intertwined with real problems, they may be expected to be less ideological and more pragmatic. In this sense, it is easier to cooperate at the local scale than at the central one.

These successful experiences in the local government can open up the path of political power at the centre, on the one hand, expand the scope and responsibilities of the local governments and pave the way for a decentralization reform on the other. The discourse which underlines the needs for effective, quick, relevant, and low-cost solutions to the local issues may expand, and the political demands for local governments' further empowerment can find more popular support. At this point, some interviewees pointed out the role of the metropolitan municipalities, the IMM in particular. An interviewee stated that empowering Istanbul, where IMM offers successful local policies and services, means empowering all other cities. However, some interviewees emphasized that local governments alone cannot provide normalization and democratization in Turkey. As local governments did, the opposition also needs to strengthen the political struggle at the central scale. When local governments are left alone in this mission, their burden and the risk of an intervention by the central government increases further. Alongside the success

achieved in municipal services, the CHP municipalities took the initiative to mobilize the masses. As an interviewee emphasized, this especially contributed to the strengthening of both municipalities and civil society actors. Concerns about election security among the masses have grown considerably over the past few years. Thus, improving municipal services and organizing mass support will not suffice. The mobilization of the broad masses and civil society actors is of particular importance in this sense.

These achievements notwithstanding, most interviewees agreed that the municipalities in these provinces mostly failed to include Kurds. Accordingly, although municipalities were won with the Kurdish voters' support in most of these provinces, Kurds, the pro-Kurdish politics in particular were largely excluded in the post-election period. CHP's lack of an alternative to the existing local government policy in Turkey was another notable criticism. The recent successful experiences in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir are not the results of the CHP's local government policy, but rather the products of mayors, who have experience in the local government and have their own vision about the municipal policies and services. Most of these mayors are not local politicians from the CHP tradition. Therefore, it is doubtful whether the successful political experimentation at the local level would significantly impact the CHP.

Despite the general positive sentiments towards the municipal spring in the West, the politics of trustees is hanging over the Turkish and Kurdish oppositional forces, like the sword of Damocles. The institutionalization and normalization of trustees in the East render the new municipalities in the West vulnerable to political and judicial intervention from Ankara. It is not a coincidence that both Mayor Imamoğlu and Mayor Yavaş have investigation files under their names perhaps waiting to be turned into full-fledged indictments when the time is ripe. Or perhaps, more probably, the rumor of a possible indictment is supposed to keep them in line. Thus, the trustee model may not be exclusive to the HDP and could be enforced on the rest

of the opposition if deemed necessary. In fact, the removal of a small CHP district mayor from office and his replacement with a trustee further fueled this concern. An interviewee recalled the 1990s under Tansu Çiller's political leadership when the state of emergency rule in the Kurdish region facilitated the construction of a police state in Turkey, and i argued that the politics of trustees and the authoritarian administration will spread throughout the country:

The fact that politics kept silent or made no clamor about the second term of the trustee appointments will gradually bring this about this is the biggest danger: The trustee has turned from being a security issue to an administration issue. It resulted in the following perception: The politics of trustees can be applied not only in the Kurdish provinces but in every province in Turkey. Now, it is the time to say, "Trustee model is wrong regardless of whether it is imposed on Kurds or Turks". We will have another trustee period from now on. I think this one will go further. Trusteeship practices against the opposition will begin in the Western provinces. Turkey managed this process incorrectly. The opposition es-

pecially mismanaged it. The opposition acted as if Kurdish local governments were responsible for all of those ditches. They knew very well that they were not.

Regardless of whether the trustee model is a viable option for the new municipal administrations in the West, criminalization of the HDP and Kurdish political actors seems to be Ankara's main strategy to destabilize the fragile composition of the oppositional forces. It should not be forgotten that the opposition's municipal victories (except the AMM) were only possible thanks to an unofficial coalition of unlikely oppositional parties, namely the social democratic / secular CHP, nationalist-cum-center-right İYİP, and pro-Kurdish socialist HDP. Neither the İYİP nor HDP ran candidates in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Mersin and Adana. While the İYİP openly supported the CHP candidates as part of the Nation Alliance, the HDP tacitly encouraged its constituency in the metropolises to vote for the CHP candidates. Given the undeniable role of the Kurdish / HDP vote in their victory, the imprisonment of the local HDP politicians forces the CHP mayors to take a stance on the issue. A weak stance risks alienating the Kurdish vote; a strong one infuriates not only Ankara but also fuels the nationalist tendencies of the İYİP.

4 Limitations and Caveats

¹¹ It is 15 months in the case of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality as the transfer of power took place after the re-run election held on June 27, 2019.

Like any research, our report has certain limitations. First of all, the new municipal governments have spent only 18 months in office.¹¹ This is a relatively short period of time to provide a fair overall assessment regarding the accomplishments and shortcomings of the new municipal administrations. This is particularly a challenge given that most new cadres are new to the institutions that they have been away from for a long while. Second, our data is based on four cities. While their cultural, political, and demographic representation is significant, a more comprehensive report that examines other cities (including Izmir and Antalya) that were won by the opposition in March 2019 could yield many other interesting results. Third, there are currently a plethora of new laws, regulations, de facto implementations, and draft laws aiming to minimize the authorities and responsibilities of municipal administrations. We were only able to mention a number of them, at times without providing a comprehensive description. Finally, our coverage of civil society actors and institutions to a large extent includes a wide spectrum of oppositional forces. The report does not provide much data on how GONGO's and Islamic NGOs fare under the new administrations (except for the Diyarbakır section).

5

Recommendations

Based on our research in four different metropolitan cities, we propose the following recommendations to the Central Government, Local Authorities, Civil Society Actors and the EU for Turkey to get back on the democratization path and strengthen local democracy via municipal - civil society cooperation. We recommend the

Central Government to

- Respect the March 2019 election results, acknowledge the legitimacy of the elected mayors and local politicians, and permanently abandon the trustee model that cripples local democracy and participation.
- Refrain from pursuing politically motivated investigations targeting municipal leaders.
- Treat all elected mayors, including the ones from the CHP, İYİP and HDP, in a nonpartisan manner. The financial and administrative tutelages introduced since the last local election have to be retracted.
- Stop instrumentalizing the majority seats of People's Alliance in the municipal councils to block policies proposed by the elected mayors of the Nation Alliance. The municipal councils can act as a means to enhance the quality of local democracy in Turkey only if constructive dialogue and deliberative processes are taken seriously.
- Replace antagonistic tactics towards the elected mayors with an enabling political environment, especially under the extraordinary pandemic conditions.

- Develop policies to encourage cooperation between civil society actors and local governments.
- Follow the principle of subsidiarity, taking only those decisions that cannot be taken at a more local level.

Municipalities to

- Strengthen their organizational capacities by developing internal mechanisms for process-based monitoring and evaluation, covering projects and plans inherited from the former period, and developing a roadmap for strategic action prioritization.
- Train their personnel for mainstreaming the principles championed at the leadership level, such as just, ecological, participatory, transparent urban governance, across departments as a cross-cutting priority.
- Institutionalize participation within municipal decision-making processes, shifting the selective approach to a holistic one in deciding on what themes to focus and which civic actors to take part in the participatory processes.
- Establish or designate a specific unit to ensure the adoption of participatory decision making across all departments and service areas.
- Carry out stakeholders mapping to ensure the inclusion of all relevant civil society actors in the decision making processes, with a specific focus on right-based organizations and those representing disadvantaged and under-represented groups.
- Improve interdepartmental relations within the municipal organizational structure, especially between the existing departments and bureaucrats and the newly formed agencies and recruited experts.

Civil Society Actors to

- Build their capacities on the right to the city, participation and municipal decision-making processes.
- Build thematic coalitions with other civic actors working in similar areas to effectively participate in relevant municipal policies.
- Go beyond mere criticism; advocate for policy changes and have constructive dialogue with the municipalities.
- Preserve their independence and agency when getting into cooperation with local authorities.
- Take initiatives to develop cooperation with municipalities, develop projects to enhance the quality of urban governance, specifically focusing on differently abled groups, gender mainstreaming, LGBTQ+ rights, refugees and environmental-ecological concerns.
- Voice their concerns regarding the central government's tute-

large targeting not only the elected local governments but also civil society actors.

- Develop an urban policy monitoring mechanism to regularly document and report the progress of municipality - civil society and central government - municipality relations.

The European Union to

- Offer a clear perspective to Turkey on the membership since there is a direct correlation between Turkey's distancing from the EU and the establishment of authoritarianism in the last years.
- Take an active stance against the authoritarian tendencies and support the efforts for democratization in Turkey, including the ones pursued by civil society actors as well as the local governments.
- Not limit contacts in Turkey with the Central Government and develop direct relations with the opposition parties and civil society actors.
- Focus on micro/meso level projects at local/city scales more so than macro/structural transformations at the central scale.
- Support comprehensive deliberations on democratic local governments both at the local and central scales in Turkey.
- Provide increased financial resources to the municipalities in Turkey since the central government is limiting municipalities' access to financial resources internally.
- Allocate resources directly to municipalities and NGOs developing programs aiming to bring together civil society actors and municipalities to enhance local democracy.
- Support projects developed by municipalities with a clear vision of participatory governance and provide core funding to those civil society actors willing to take an active role in urban governance.
- Give priority to those NGOs that are independent, rights-based and not only focusing on service delivery but also on the quality of local democracy.
- Increase accessibility of the EU Delegation to Turkey for the local NGOs by opening regional offices and decentralizing the program and project management processes.
- Work with those funding agencies such as the EED, which have a clear vision of the political landscape of Turkish civil society and needs of formal and informal changemakers on the ground, to reach out to high impact civil society actors including citizen initiatives and individual activists.
- Provide institutional support for the NGOs alongside the project-based supports, taking into account the major destructive effects of the state of emergency.

6

Annex 1 Detailed Research Questions

Objective of the Report

1

To analyse the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the changing dynamics of civil society - municipality and local - central government relations in Turkey.

2

To learn lessons from the existing good practices on civil society - municipality cooperation in Turkey.

3

To find out how international organizations can support cooperations between civil society and municipalities with an emphasis on democratization.

Overall changes

1– What is the impact of political party shifts in metropolitan cities' governance in Turkey on the civil society - municipality relations?

2– Have discursive shifts (e.g., being more transparent, open, democratic, etc.) reflected upon actual policies so far?

Impact on existing institutional set-ups

3– How has the existing institutional set-ups and processes for democratic participation, such as municipal councils , urban civil society councils , information desks , and strategic planning, transformed in the post-election period?

