

REEVALUATING CONTEMPORARY “DIASPORA POLICY” OF TURKEY*

ÇAĞDAŞ TÜRK DİASPORA POLİTİKASININ ANALİZİ

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the diaspora policy of Turkish Republic. The country has an important number of its citizens living out of its borders. Our paper reconsiders diaspora policies in contemporary politics and international relations and compares to Turkish position regarding Turks abroad. We remark that, Turkish stance to diaspora is much different from classical diaspora approach both theoretically and practically including a complex organizational structure. Turkish diaspora policy nevertheless is the policy towards Turks living in Western countries and in Europe in particular. Therefore, we make several proposals regarding policy and future projects concerning Turks living abroad.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin diaspora politikasını analiz etmeye yöneliktir. Türkiye, nüfusunun önemli bir kısmı yurt dışında yaşayan bir ülkedir. Bu itibarla makalede Türkiye'nin, yurtdışında yaşayan Türklere ilişkin politik konumlanması, tarihsel gelişimi içinde ele alınmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, Türkiye'nin diaspora yaklaşımı, uluslararası ilişkilerdeki günümüz diaspora uygulamalarından hareketle, mukayeseli olarak yeniden değerlendirilmektedir. Belirtmek gerekir ki, Türkiye'nin diaspora konusuna ilişkin tutumu, klasik diaspora yaklaşımından hem teorik hem de pratik olarak farklıdır ve çoklu bir organizasyonel yapıyı içermektedir. Odak noktasında daha ziyade Batı ülkelerinde ve bilhassa Avrupa'da yaşayan Türklerin bulunduğu Türk diaspora politikası, dış politikada kazanılan ivmeye paralel olarak son dönemde yeni bir gelişim seyrine erişmiştir. Bu kapsamda makalede, Türk diaspora politikası için daha kapsamlı bir çerçeve sunulmakta ve bu doğrultuda atılabilecek bazı somut adımlar ile gelecek projeleri üzerinde odaklanılmaktadır.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: *Diaspora, Diaspora Politikası, Avrupa, Türkiye, Yurtdışı Türkler*

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's Turkey is among the 20 largest economies in the world, the growth of its GDP remains stable and higher than its almost all European neighbors. Politically, the country develops very active international policies and tries to find out its new place in the surrounding geography and international arena. These multidimensional booms, of course, provide new opportunities for Turkish diplomats and decision makers to act in a larger area where Turkey's political stance gets more efficiency. This situation brings a new discourse to Turkish policy, not only in economic aspect but also in terms of Turkish community who lives abroad. Giving a clear clue on the contemporary Turkey's approach, the words¹ of Vice Prime Minister Bozdağ (YTB, 2012), in this respect, reflect the nowadays Turkish overall position in international politics; "Today's Turkey is stronger Turkey. We state that: wherever is our relative, wherever is our citizen Turkey will stay aside, together with them. We are working for that, we make our efforts to support them. This meeting is organized in that sense by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. This presidency is, in fact, the Ministry of Diaspora. Wherever our citizen there is our flag."

However, for the decades the position of Turkish state regarding its citizens abroad was unclear. Turkey was in fact dependent on its workers living outside the territories and unable to propose more attractive positions for them. The growing number of Turkish workers in western countries helped temporarily Turkey, and it seems that today tries to reorganize and include these people to common political project. Our aim is to understand the main lines of Turkish diaspora policy and outlining different experiences to propose several guidelines for the future steps of such policy.

As the migration theories are important to understand the contemporary human movements among the states or continents theoretical background is introduced at the paper. However, it is also important to realize that the theories also evaluate with the new practices and methods. Thereafter, we explain methodological approach with the problems that we encounter during the research. We try to understand the terms such as *diaspora* or *diaspora politics* within Turkish context by comparing to other countries that possess an important number of their citizens staying or working abroad. The comparison is useful for understanding the way how the

¹ "Artık Türkiye daha güçlü bir Türkiye. Biz diyoruz ki; nerede bir soydaşımız, nerede bir akrabamız varsa, nerede bir vatandaşımız varsa Türkiye orada olacaktır, yanında olacaktır, beraber olacaktır. Bunun için çalışıyoruz, bunun için gayret ediyoruz. İşte bu toplantı da bu amaçla Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığımız tarafından tertip edilmiştir. Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı aslında Diaspora Bakanlığı'dır. Nerede bir vatandaşımız varsa orada dalgalanan bir ay-yıldızlı bayrağımız var demektir."

governments’ approach to diaspora is, or how they diasporize the citizens living outside the country. The limits between ‘in’ and ‘out’ are necessarily political in some cases, but it is also important to understand how the limits are established by politicians and how they affect the citizens and minorities.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Theoretical Approach

Migration can be broadly defined as ‘the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a state... encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and *causes*...’. Although the definition is quite technical; its theoretical perspective is mainly hidden behind the *causes* of this movement.

In the case of Turkish migrants, the reasons to leave their territories are predominantly concerned to economic (Yalçın, 2004) factors. It can firstly be explained via the theory of intervening opportunities (Stouffer, 1940) which emphasizes that “the number of persons going a given distance is directly proportional to the number of opportunities at that distance and inversely proportional to the number of intervening opportunities”. Taking into consideration the economically disadvantaged years as of 1960s, Turkish migration towards European countries in general and Germany in particular is also based on mutual interests of the parties. This is of course closely related to the changeover point from rural life to the capitalist way of living. As Marx underlined in his *Das Kapital*, transition from feudal to capitalist model of production forced the people to discover new opportunities.

Theoretical explanations pertaining to migration is of course not only fed up by ‘causes’ but also consequences of the movement. That is why the migration phenomenon initially caused to discuss over multicultural approach in migrant receiving countries. History indicates that as minorities bring in their own cultural characteristics through migratory wherever, it causes to diversified cultural structure therein. The term “multiculturalism” was firstly used (Heywood, 2012:311) in 1965 to describe the issue of cultural diversity in Canada. Then multicultural aspect interacted with mainly the liberalist and pluralist perspectives.

When it comes to Turkish experience; the acquaintance with the multicultural characteristic dates back to Ottoman State. Modern Turkey, as a successor, inherited the multicultural contexture of Ottoman society. Beginning from the conquest of Constantinople till the late 18th century, it was the active period that Ottoman territories in general and particularly today’s Turkey’s territorial part let in immigrants from the surrounding geographies. Having such ethnic, religious and even racial diversities Turkish society has become familiar with the “foreign” cultures and gained co-existence culture. This unique imperial pattern somehow gave the idea (and self-confidence) to the Turks of late-Ottoman and modern Turkey that they could live together with the “other” societies abroad. Of course it was not the

only factor leading Turks to migrate; however, it was very important socio-cultural base to be able to act so. Nevertheless, Turkish immigrants stayed loyal to their own traditional dynamics which made the integration with “foreign” societies hard.

Once the international migratory got upward trend just after the World War II by recruiting workers, the link (Heywood, 2012:312) between receiving and sending countries was mainly past colonial relations. In this respect Turkish case, which has nothing to do with colonial effect, was rather based on bread and butter and the migrant workers were so-called “gurbetçi” literally meaning homesick. However, Germany was preferred by Turkish decision-makers (and workers) by virtue of historical ties and good image.

Liberals see “culture” important in case it can promote intellectual development. With respect to cultural impact, Turkish migrants seemingly have made limited contribution to the societies they live in together. Where Turks were ordinary workers, it was out of possibility to reflect a dominant culture. The cultural outcomes at first were inside the Turkish community. At this point, the network theory, which successfully worked among Turkish individuals, became the picture of a closed/conserved system for Turks abroad. For instance, majority of Turks gathered in three neighborhood units in London and settled depending on their Turkish city origins. This mechanism quickly let them keep Anatolian identity and culture. However it took longer time to be able to promote an intellectual development to the societies where they live in.

2.2. The Diaspora: The *Problematic* of the Term

The use of the term diaspora is a turning point in governments approach toward. However, we should note, diaspora carries nowadays mainly political rather than academic meaning. The use of the term is becoming very much popular and Brubaker states the followings related to the use of the term. “*There has been a veritable explosion of interest in Diasporas since the late 1980s. ‘Diaspora’ and its cognates appear as keywords only once or twice a year in dissertations from the 1970s, about thirteen times a year in the late 1980s, and nearly 130 times in 2001 alone*”. The more wide use of the term diaspora is also linked to the involvement in home politics firstly and included working migrant groups thereafter (Brubaker 2005). We consider that, in our case this third group would be more appropriate.

Turkish governments use traditionally the word ‘*gurbetçi*’ regarding Turkish workers in Europe. While the word literally means homesick on one hand, it also carries negative meaning on the other hand, literally vis-a-vis the migrant as a poor, homeless. This word should be reconsidered as it possesses negative approach regarding the migrants. In our case we focus on political aspect of the word as we try to analyze its use from governmental point of view. How ‘*gurbetçi*’ becomes diaspora for Turkey? Is it a simple word or beyond?

From the other side, the use of the term diaspora has a dubious meaning in Turkish context. The use of this word therefore has a particular pattern in different languages. Diaspora in Turkish language was mainly used by Turks for foreigners living in Turkey (Celikpala 2006). Diaspora is the word that has been identified by firstly Jewish and later classical (Brubaker 2005) Diasporas such as Armenian and Greek. Therefore, the use of the same term for Turks was initially unavailable due to the terminology that had contradictory meaning in Turkish political life along with other terms such as *laicite*, leftists, etc.

Another aspect is linked to complex *diaporama* of Turkish minority and terms that has inclusive meaning of Turkish policy. Turkish diaspora may include *de facto* people from Balkans to Europe, and from Russia to Central Asia. Therefore the term Turkish diaspora has a very unclear meaning that is difficult to be defined. Instead Turkish politicians use the term *Akraba Toplulukları (related communities)* including a large part of Turkish speaking people.

Surprisingly, there is a unique tendency in academic literature regarding the use of the term diaspora by Turkish academicians themselves. It includes only Turkish minorities living and working in Western countries (Akgün 2000; Küçükcan2004; Sirkeci 2001). Therefore, in reality the term diaspora for Turkey is reduced to those staying in Western countries rather than those in Central Asia or Balkans. Some (SETAV, 2012) of them even include the religious belonging while speaking about Turkish diaspora as it is stated; "Turkish Muslim community in Britain is part of the World Muslim diaspora communities with its own diversity accommodating different Islamic trends. Turkish Muslim diaspora in Europe is now a permanent social and cultural reality. They should not be viewed as immigrants anymore because they are citizens of European countries".

2.3. Diaspora Option or "Diasporization" with Examples

'Diaspora option' according to an approach (Pellerin and Mullings, 2012) is "an emerging policy orientation aimed at utilizing the human, economic and social capital of migrant populations in order to revitalize levels of investment, skill and development in the places with which they maintain ancestral ties".

Diaspora option is the process when the country of origin starts to use the word diaspora regarding its former or contemporary citizens that stay abroad. The linkages between the countries of origin may be strong or weak, but the use of the term implies that the group is implicated in political project guided by the state. Therefore, even though the term Chechen diaspora (Koinova, 2011) is used we cannot consider it as a diaspora since it is not recognized by the Russian state. In our article we will take into account only diasporas that are officially recognized by the state due to the objective of our research. Therefore, we use here the word *diasporization* in order to identify the process of notification of already existing group. *Diasporization* is the

process of recognition and use of the minority group by the home country within another country where the authority of the sending country is absent.

Migration process put the new aspects regarding the relationship between the state and the citizen. State becomes in some cases very dependent on migrants who work in other countries. Financial dependence creates also political one. The election process is the crucial moment in several countries where the vote of citizens residing abroad is highly considered. The so-called formula regarding emigrants depends usually on several aspects including political, economic situation. However, we assume that the political recognition of emigrants is easier in migrant sending countries rather than migrants receiving one. The question remaining here is what form of recognition? We try to explain different approaches taken by different countries and show the possible options for Turkish diaspora formula.

Russia is one of the main receiving countries and still has the high rate of emigrants. Therefore, the government decided to create two programs regulated by the Ministry of Interior. One of them is the Federal Service of Migration (FMS-RU, 2012) which has an objective to control immigration processes within Russia, and another one is the program called *Sootechestvenniki* (UFMS-RU, 2012) that is dedicated to ethnic Russian living abroad. However, the program *Sootechestvenniki* is mainly focused on ethnic Russians living in post-soviet countries that show the political aspects of the recognition. Even though Russia has demographic negative trend line, it keeps supporting Russians living in CIS countries as a tool of foreign policy. It also enlarged its activities towards European countries (Byford, 2012). Another example can be given as Kazakhstan that has taken similar position to Russia. It created in 1997 the Agency of Migration and Demographics (Demo, 2012) which has an objective to administer the program *Oralman*, which focuses on the immigration of ethnic Kazakhs from China, Mongolia and other countries to Kazakhstan. It also has both political and demographic aspects. Russia and Kazakhstan are among the most important sending and receiving countries in international migration. However, a closer look into the formulas give us the opportunity to learn that both avoid to be considered as emigration countries, and try to promote their immigration policies. The case is much more difficult when the country remains heavily emigration country. For example, Moldova (ANOFM, 2012) recognizes the status of migrant only via National Agency for Employment under the auspices of the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family. However, the migrant is reduced to the figure who is trafficked (Migratie-MD, 2012) rather than who bring the money. That inactivity of the state explains also the fact that many non-governmental organizations became more active in this sphere rather than inactive government, according to the list of private agencies on migration. The recognition seems to be inevitable when it comes to the countries that have undeniable financial impact of migrants such as Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan. Kyrgyz Republic introduced for example, the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration which implicates that migration is within employment and Kyrgyz workers abroad

are seen firstly as Kyrgyz that contribute to their home country. In contrary, Tajikistan that has the highest dependence via-a-vis migrants does not recognize symbolically as the term migration does not exist at any ministry.

An interesting formula is proposed by Azerbaijan. The questions related to migration are studied by two separate organisms (Diaspora-AZ, 2012) rather one: State Service of Migration and the State Committee of Relations with Diaspora. Both of them are officially independent structures and do not belong to executive branch. The first one is dedicated to the foreigners working or staying in Azerbaijan. The President Aliyev states (Migration-AZ, 2012) that "Number of foreigners intending to visit the Republic of Azerbaijan will increase while Azerbaijan is developing. This can be considered as a positive factor for our country. However in any case we must prefer the interests of our State, people, citizens and this must be the priority direction of our migration policy". However, the government sees millions of Azeri workers as diaspora among other historical diaspora located in foreign countries. According to State Committee of Relations with Diaspora about 30 Mln of Azeri stay in Iran and only 10 Mln of Azeri out of 50 million stay in today's Azerbaijan. However, it is difficult to find the reasons of diasporization to the other countries such as Europe, USA and particularly Russia. The Azeri staying in Europe is named as *Turkish Azeri* and those who stay in USA as *Iranian Azeri*, according to the aforementioned committee. However, millions of Azeri in Russia are absent from governmental vocabulary. Starting from the 24 of June 2009 all the terms used for Azeri that are not in Azerbaijan is replaced by the term diaspora. The very active diasporization organized by the state is explained by the presence of Armenian diaspora that played an important role within the conflict between two South Caucasian states. That activity is very seen in the countries of strategic importance. For example given by State Committee of Relations with Diaspora, in France the number of Azeri diaspora organization is about 13 which are important for such a state like Azerbaijan.

Georgia represents the same type of approach where the term diaspora covers very well all types of migration; state created the Ministry of State of Diaspora Issues (Diaspora-GE, 2012). But the most advanced in terms of recognition remains Armenia (Mindiaspora-AM, 2012) that created the Ministry of Diaspora in 2008. The objective of the Ministry is to develop the links between diaspora and Armenia which is considered as Motherland and gives an opportunity to every Armenian to gain the nationality if the candidates visit once the country. Armenian case also like Georgian or Azeri case is under the pressure of emigration, many Armenians leave the country and diasporization when explaining this phenomenon seems to be a copy paste system among the countries that are dependent on the migrants. Armenia, to the diaspora ministry, in its turn recognizes the departure of many Armenians to foreign countries by linking it to the different economical evolution and also to the 'exchange of knowledge and technology'.

3. UNDERSTANDING TURKISH DIASPORA POLICY

3.1. Institutions

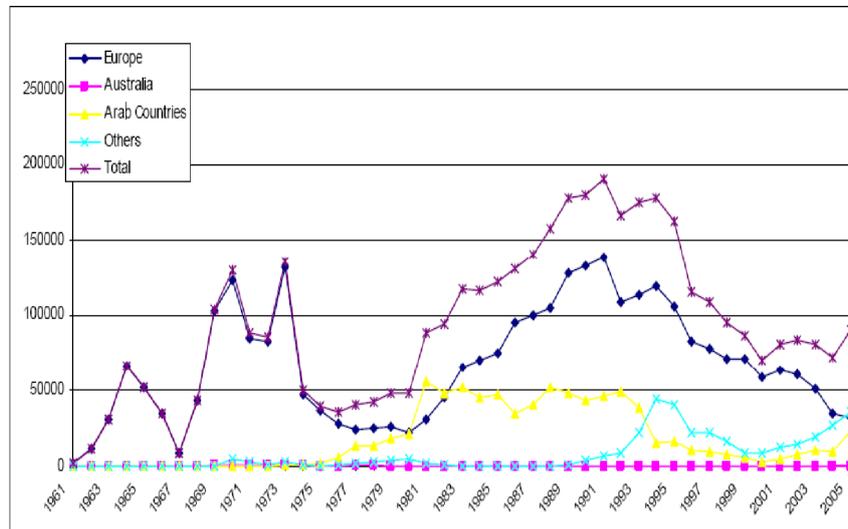
According to Turkish constitution, article 62, “the state shall take the necessary measures to ensure family unity, the education of the children, the cultural needs, and the social security of Turkish nationals working abroad, and shall take the necessary measures to safeguard their ties with the home country and to help them on their return home”. Turkey possesses a multi institutional approach regarding Turkish migrants that any other country implements. For example, Bilgili and Siegei (2010) stated several institutions such as Foreign Relations and Abroad Worker Services General Directorate (Dış İlişkiler ve Yurtdışı İşçi Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü), Turks Abroad and Relative Communities Presidency (Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Toplulukları Başkanlığı), Consultancy Board for Citizens living Abroad (Yurtdışında Yaşayan Vatandaşlar Danışma Kurulu), The Promotion Fund of the Office of the Turkish Prime Minister (Tanıtma Fonu Kurulu Başbakanlık Merkez Teşkilatı) and The Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı). Besides that we can also note the presence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that has very close relationship with Turks living abroad (Yurtdışında Yaşayan Vatandaşlar ve Emlak Genel Müdür Yardımcılığı).

These all institutions participate in different ways in forming and conducting already existing Turkish minorities in Europe. That multi institutional approach shows that Turkey unlike other countries can make a better influence on Turks living in European countries. The scope of the influence however cannot be measured. However, some institutions play much more important role in influencing rather others. Among them, it is necessary to state the influence of The Directorate of Religious Affairs which plays a key role in managing not only religious but also social and political affairs (Bruce, 2012). But today, Turks Abroad and Relative Communities Department seems to develop and increase its impact among other institutions.

3.2. Turkish Diaspora Paradoxes

Turkish workers as other migrants have heavily financed Turkish economy for the years and for almost five decades. It is still one of the top ten emigration countries in the world; however, it does not enter to top thirty countries that get remittances from migrants (WB, 2010:12-13). It has much lesser economic impact today when compared to other Diasporas such as Moroccan, Romanian, Bulgarian or even Jordanian. Besides that in economic terms, they have lesser impact to Turkish economy and remittance share is steadily decreasing as a part of importation. Figures show that remittances were highest in 1998 and are lesser thereafter. That is also true related to migration tendencies, migration to Western countries decrease, and it increase to other countries.

Figure 1: Turkish Emigration by Destination



Source: Bilgili, Siegel (2010)

Turkish government recognizes diaspora when it has lesser impact to Turkish economy which is totally different from other countries. That is according to us a Turkish paradox of managing of diaspora. The remittances are steadily going downwards since 1998 (Bilgili and Siegel, 2010) and are just about 1 Bln annually which makes it five times lesser than 1998. Some research even show that the growing tendency of return migration from Europe (Kaya 2011).

As a matter of fact, it can be stated that Turkey's contemporary diaspora policy much different from other ones. Turkey is not dependent on remittances. The share of remittances has almost no impact on Turkish economy. The very simple question may be asked, why does Turkey need to implement diaspora policy?

The need for diaspora seems to be rather political than economic. The examples of the countries such as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia showed very well that diaspora is firstly political and then economic option. The country such as Tajikistan which is among top five countries dependent on remittances does not use the term diaspora. Therefore, we can state that Turkish diaspora policy does have non-economic objectives, but the issue is what the objectives are and why they became of a great importance now?

3.3. Scrutinizing Today's Turkish Diaspora

Our research shows that diaspora policy of Turkey should be well explained. Research institutes and academicians should take part in it in order to develop the idea of diaspora and find out common lines and border of diaspora. For example, ORSAM (2012) has an area of research dedicated to Diasporas only in Turkish version of its page, but there is no research on

Turkish diaspora.² Few of the research institutes conduct the research on so-called Turkish diaspora, and still the word diaspora is linked to Armenia and sometimes to France and USA. Only SETA has a research on Turkish diaspora and that could be developed. Therefore, we consider that the terms as Turkey and diaspora are still disconnected in Turkish academic literature. Moreover, an interesting issue is encountered while surfing TÜRKSAM: the institute has the area of research on migration which in reality covers Armenian diaspora, and besides it has a research area on Turkic world which is about so-called Turkish minorities in other countries.

The main issue is to define why Turkish government seeks for the ‘Diaspora policy’. Does it seek for a lobby group such as Armenian or Jewish, or is it looking for Chinese or Indian type of Diaspora? In any case, we argue that it should be not only governmental, but national policy being inherited from one government to another and becoming a state issue. Only being a state issue may unite all the compounds of Turkish presence in Europe making it as powerful as more than 5 Mln population state, which means, Turkey without being in EU may have popular impact than 10 EU countries³.

4. CONCLUSION

Turkey's approach towards diaspora in Europe could be analyzed in several ways. We stated that Turkey has no need of remittances, but political aid, but do Turks abroad need Turkish aid? And what kind of aid? The active presence of Diyanet since the decades shows well the very importance of religious institutions for Turks living in Europe.

- Turkey's desire to join European Union seems to be one of the reasons of Turkey's active diaspora policy. Besides that, already the term diaspora implicates the creation of power to encounter Armenian or other lobby groups that already influenced several European countries decisions. However, we make some hypothesis related to other factors.
- Firstly, Turkish ‘community’ abroad is one of the well-organized communities that rapidly establishes non official groups. However, the problem of Turks living abroad is the strong division and even opposition among the migrant groups. The division within home society is directly imported among Turks living abroad. Diaspora option could be a very useful mean of uniting rivaling groups at least abroad
- The massive participation of the diaspora in internal politics is remarkable. Surprisingly, Turks living in France are more linked to political issues in Turkey rather than in France. That is also reflected by citizen voting where they decided to travel to Turkey to vote and did not

² Following research institutes were studied: AGAM, Ankara Strateji, ASAM, AREM, BILGESAM, DPE, GSE, TESEV, TASAM, TÜRKSAM, USAK, USTAD, SDE.

³ The following EU member countries possess less than 6 Mln population: Ireland, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia and Slovakia.

vote in France just in their subscriptions. That shows the rising interest in Turkish politics and ruling party benefited of that support. Diaspora policy could also be recognition of that support.

- Turkey still considers that Turks in Europe could be more influential by the time period. Unlike Turks in other continents the position of Turks in Europe is less influential. Therefore, fostering economic, but also academic performance could be a necessary tool for young Turks in Old Europe in order to overcome the difficulties. The examples of deputies and political figures show that nothing is impossible.
- Diaspora policy may be one of the tools of Turkish foreign policy similar to China's exporting Chinese all over the world. That could be a logical continuity of Turkey's rising influence in world politics.
- To be able to unite the politically and/or ideologically diverse Turkish diaspora a common set of ideals should be determined.
- Turkish and relative NGOs are needed to transform their reactionary characteristic to proactive ability.
- Turkish diplomatic missions may carry out more functional communication with the 'larger' diaspora.
- Intellectual capacity can be considered as part of Turkish diaspora policy. By doing so, its academic dimension can be empowered.
- Turkish diaspora policy should not be changed depending on the party politics and concern. But it should be in harmony with Turkish foreign policy.
- Last but not least, we consider that an effective Diaspora policy which takes an example of Armenian one should include Turkey's minorities living abroad such as Cypriots or Greeks living in Europe. Many of these people still love Turkey and have tremendous possibilities in participating in social and political life.

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