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Book Review

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Mehmet Köse (Ed.), **Türk Diasporasının Siyasal Katılım Gündemi 2023 Seçimleri ve Diaspora** (Political Participation Agenda of the Turkish Diaspora 2023 Elections and Diaspora); GAV Perspektif Yayınları, Ankara, 2023, pp. 188, 149.50₺, ISBN 978-605-71985-6-3

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For more than 60 years, Turkish citizens have been emigrating from Türkiye to different parts of the world. These people have resided in these locations for a long time, becoming permanent residents, reaching the third and even fourth generations. Today, this community abroad is called the Turkish diaspora. The participation of this growing number of Turkish diaspora in Turkish elections and their political participation agenda are an issue that has been analyzed more and more over time. There are various examples of political participation abroad throughout the world. For example, in many countries, such as Italy, Mexico, and Bolivia, the overseas vote influences the fate of elections. In Türkiye, participation has increased in every election since the first overseas election in 2014, reaching 56 percent in the last election. In particular, it should be noted that in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2023, 3 percent of the total number of valid votes were cast from abroad. Moreover, in the parliamentary elections, 3 parliamentary seats were transferred to different parties with the addition of overseas votes. In light of this information, voting and political participation abroad is a very important issue both in academic studies and in politics itself. In this context, the book entitled “Political Participation Agenda of the Turkish Diaspora”, prepared with the contributions of researchers from the Migration Research Foundation, and edited by Mehmet Köse, and published in 2023 is noteworthy. Köse and his team of researchers, through surveys and in-depth interview studies, reveal in a simple way the interest of the Turkish diaspora in Turkish politics, the participation process, and the participation agenda.

The book consists of 3 main chapters. These are Political Participation and the Turkish Diaspora; Expectations of the Turkish Diaspora from Political Participation; and Conclusion and Evaluation. In the book, the term “Turkish Diaspora” is used to refer to citizens living abroad and individuals of Turkish origin. The purpose is to express a national connection and to prevent any conceptual misunderstandings. (p. 26) At the end of the first part of the study, the policies towards the diaspora in the election manifestos, development plans and government programs of the political parties are examined. The second

part of the study focuses on the expectations of the Turkish diaspora. The study, which uses a mixed research method, includes both a survey of 1349 people and in-depth interviews with members of the Turkish diaspora. It is stated that 74 people were interviewed individually (p. 62).

The significant results and findings of this research permit notable assessments regarding the motivation of voters living abroad to participate in elections. Based on the responses of the survey participants, the most prominent reason for voting abroad is to fulfill their civic duty. The subsequent answers were being a part of political decision-making processes and having hope that problems would be resolved. The answers reveal that citizens of the Republic of Türkiye residing outside the country possess a strong sense of citizenship. However, it is important to note that only half of the total number of voters turn out to vote. Despite this, we can infer that the Turkish Diaspora has high political consciousness considering their enthusiasm for political participation in decision-making and awareness of the rights and responsibilities conferred by their citizenship. Furthermore, the study uncovered that the sense of belonging to their homeland was high among respondents aged 50 and above. This sentiment diminished for respondents in their thirties and forties but was subsequently on an upward trend among younger participants (Pg.93). The growth of the sense of belonging among younger participants could be seen as a reflection of the rising nationalism in Türkiye and its effect on voters abroad in recent years. Moreover, it can be inferred that the younger overseas generations have begun to identify more closely with their ancestral homeland due to rising xenophobia in Europe. The book highlights that most overseas voters agree that the right to vote should be accompanied by the right to run for election (p.102). In Türkiye, votes cast by overseas voters are allocated to all of Türkiye and these voters do not have their own candidate, thus, their eligibility to stand for election is not acknowledged. This situation is a topic of concern within the Turkish diaspora. Nevertheless, reducing the current environment of division and polarization within the diaspora is essential if the Turkish diaspora is to have candidates who can genuinely represent them. According to the book, some of the participants also raised concerns regarding this matter.

The research also shows that diaspora members in Western European countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands, who were born and raised in their country of residence and whose diaspora history goes back further, are much more interested in the political agenda of their country of residence than diaspora members in other countries. The reason behind this interest could be attributed to the policies of these countries, where diaspora members born and raised up to third and fourth generations have been influenced more by their place of residence than by Türkiye. The research aims to reveal the effectiveness of policies created by Türkiye for the Turkish diaspora and measure the extent to which these policies meet their expectations. The book states that even citizens of non-dual citizenship countries, blue card holders, and autochthonous diasporas who

lack the right to vote are considered beneficiaries of diaspora policies due to their national bond (p. 27). Here is a contradiction between the study's definition of population and the study's definition of concepts. The population of the study is limited to 3,044,835 people who were registered as voters on the website of the YSK in 2018. But the Turkish Diasporas are not only citizens of the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, all members of the Turkish Diaspora, and not just citizens of Turkey, are targeted by the process of political participation and diaspora policies. The potential for confusion regarding the scope of the study is indicated by the lack of Turkish citizenship among the survey participants (p. 99).

A further criticism of the book is that the diversity of the respondents does not reflect the demographic structure of the Turkish diaspora. For instance, the distribution of participants by country is not proportional to their population. The views of only one person from the United Kingdom, which has the third-highest number of Turkish diaspora members, were taken into account (p. 62), which is not a representative way to reflect the opinions of the entire diaspora. Upon analysis of the section entitled "EK-3: Çalışma Grubunun Demografik Özellikleri" at the end of the book, it can be observed that the interviews regarding the autochthonous members of the diaspora in the former Ottoman Empire were conducted with people who migrated to the region later, rather than autochthonous diaspora members themselves. Interviewing only one person from Romania and Bulgaria is a case in point. A noteworthy point is the high educational attainment of the interviewees. The 74 interviewees' occupational groups are not representative of the Turkish diaspora's demographics. It is worth noting that the study only focuses on a small subset of the Turkish diaspora with higher levels of education (p. 63), as some of the respondents have undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Around 60% of the participants, who took part in both in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys, have completed undergraduate and graduate studies. (p. 65). In the demographic analysis, it is important to examine the gender imbalance in in-depth interviews. This will help to highlight any existing inequalities. Of the 74 respondents, 54 were men and only 20 were women (p. 63). Due to the low survey participation rate, the research lacks diversity and fails to reflect the demographics of the Turkish diaspora.

The book "Political Participation Agenda of the Turkish Diaspora" presents a unique viewpoint on the Turkish Diaspora, at a time when interest in this group is on the rise after the 2023 elections. The study features the opinions of diaspora members and highlights their wants and expectations. The growing interest of the Turkish diaspora in political participation and its increasing impact on electoral outcomes in Türkiye demonstrate the need for further research in this area. Although some limitations have been noted, the book fills a vital gap in the literature and paves the way for fresh research.

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