

The Neoliberal Restructuring of Turkish Agriculture: An Analysis of State Forms and Class Power through the Lens of Historical-Political Economy, 1960-Present

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Türkiye Tarımının Neoliberal Yeniden Yapılandırılması: Devlet Bıçimleri, Sınıf İktidarı ve Tarihsel-Siyasal İktisat Merceğinden Bir Çözümleme, 1960'tan Günümüze

Abstract

This article offers a historically grounded and theoretically rigorous political economy analysis of Türkiye's agrarian transformation from 1960 to the present, framing agriculture not as a residual economic subsector but as a strategically contested terrain where class power, state forms, and internationally articulated capital intersect. It argues that the persistent crises of Turkish agriculture can only be understood by unpacking the successive regimes of accumulation and the evolving configurations of state power that have serially rearticulated the sector to the global circuits of capital. Agricultural policy, far from being a neutral technocratic instrument, has functioned as a site of class struggle, wherein the state, as the collective organiser of the ruling bloc (first the industrial bourgeoisie, later finance capital), mediated the extraction and redistribution of agrarian surplus in accordance with the imperatives of accumulation. The study highlights how the internationalisation of domestic capital since the 1980s, together with the prescriptions of international financial institutions tasked with reproducing global capital on a world scale, catalysed a paradigmatic shift: dismantling protectionist frameworks, eroding smallholder viability, and re-engineering agrarian production along neoliberal lines. The cumulative outcome has been the far-reaching deconstruction of Türkiye's agrarian economy, transforming its socio-economic role, hollowing out food sovereignty, and binding rural production ever more tightly to volatile, crisis-prone global markets.

Keywords : Agriculture, Financial Bourgeoisie, Import Substitution, Industrial Bourgeoisie, Neoliberalism, Structural Adjustment.

JEL Classification Codes : Q1, Q10, Q17, Q18.

Öz

Bu makale, Türkiye'nin 1960'tan günümüze uzanan tarımsal dönüşümünü tarihsel olarak temellendirilmiş ve kuramsal yoğunluğu yüksek bir siyasal iktisat okumasıyla ele almakta; tarımı yalnızca iktisadi bir alt sektör olarak değil, sınıf iktidarı, devlet bıçimleri ve uluslararası sermaye ilişkilerinin kesiştiği stratejik bir mücadele alanı olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır. Makale, Türkiye tarımındaki süregelen krizlerin, birbiri ardına değişen birikim rejimleri ve bu rejimlere paralel olarak yeniden yapılandırılan devlet bıçimleri incelenmeden anlaşılamayacağını ileri sürmektedir. Tarım politikası -teknokratik ve nötr bir araç olmaktan ziyade- bir sınıf mücadelesi alanı olarak işlev görmüş; devlet, egemen blokun (önce sanayi burjuvazisi, ardından finans kapital) kolektif örgütleyicisi olarak, tarımsal artığın sermaye birikimi lehine tahsisini ve yönlendirilmesini sağlamıştır. Çalışma, 1980'lerden itibaren ülke sermayesinin uluslararasılaşmış sermaye ile kurduğu ilişkilerin ve küresel sermayenin yeniden üretim koşullarını sağlamayı görev edinen uluslararası finans kuruluşlarının

telkinlerinin, korumacı kurumsal yapıları tasfiye eden, küçük üreticinin direncini zayıflatan ve tarımsal üretimi neoliberal hatlar boyunca yeniden tasarlayan bir dönüşümü tetiklediğini göstermektedir. Sonuçta, Türkiye tarım ekonomisi derin bir yapısököme uğramış; toplumsal-ekonomik işlevi dönüşmüş, gıda egemenliği aşınmış ve kırsal üretim giderek daha kırılgan hâle gelmiş, krizlere açık küresel birikim döngülerine sıkıca eklenmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler : Finans Burjuvazisi, İthal İkamesi, Neoliberalizm, Sanayi Burjuvazisi, Tarım, Yapısal Uyum.

1. Introduction

Agriculture has long served as a strategic battleground in the political economy of development. In this arena, food security, capital accumulation, and the reproduction of social relations intersect under historically specific configurations of state power and class rule. Far from being a static or purely "technical" sector, its role has been historically contingent, continually redefined by state-led development projects, international institutional conditionalities, and shifting hierarchies within the global division of labour. This article advances a critical historical-political economy reading of Türkiye's agrarian transformation from 1960 to the present, conceptualising agriculture as a contested terrain in which successive state forms, ruling-class coalitions, and transnational capital have interacted to produce shifting regimes of accumulation and profoundly uneven outcomes. It contends that the persistent crises of Turkish agriculture cannot be understood apart from the historical reconfiguration of the state apparatus that has progressively subordinated agrarian production to global market imperatives.

The first analytic move traces the transition from an accumulation regime rooted in agrarian capitalism in the 1950s to the consolidation of industrial capitalism in the 1960s, a moment when the industrial bourgeoisie emerged as the hegemonic fraction within the ruling bloc. Import-substitution industrialisation (ISI), the dominant strategy between 1960 and 1980, was designed to privilege industrial accumulation, relegating agriculture to the role of residual supplier of cheap food and labour and transforming it into a mechanism for the extraction of surplus to be channelled into industrial investment.

The second analytical step explores the neoliberal rupture inaugurated by the January 24th Decisions of 1980, which institutionalised the project of market liberalisation under conditions of authoritarian stabilisation. These reforms dismantled price supports, curtailed input subsidies, privatised state-owned enterprises, and integrated the agrarian sector into global circuits of competition and volatility. Under the Motherland Party (ANAP) government led by Turgut Özal, the state was reconstituted as the administrative apparatus of the bourgeoisie, aligning agrarian policy with the strategic imperatives of big capital, epitomised by TÜSİAD, and with the conditionalities of IMF stand-by agreements and World Bank structural adjustment programs.

The 1989 Decree No. 32 marked a decisive moment, accelerating financial liberalisation, embedding financialised capitalism, and recalibrating state priorities toward the interests of rentier and finance capital, a trajectory culminating in the 1994 crisis. The April 5th Decisions and the 1995 Customs Union Agreement further entrenched this orientation, eroding the protective mechanisms of the ISI era and rendering agriculture increasingly vulnerable to international price shocks and speculative flows.

The post-2000 period constitutes the most decisive stage in the neoliberal restructuring of Turkish agriculture. The IMF stand-by agreement of 1999, the World Bank-backed Agricultural Reform Implementation Project of 2001, and the Transition to a Strong Economy Program under Kemal Derviş marked the consolidation of a new regulatory state form designed to create and maintain the institutional architecture required for capital accumulation under neoliberal globalisation. In this phase, agrarian policy became sharply aligned with the imperatives of transnational capital, leading to a structural erosion of agricultural self-sufficiency and rendering Türkiye increasingly dependent on imports for key staples despite maintaining an overall net exporter position in aggregate trade balances (see Ministry of Trade, 2023: 8). This paradox underscores a deeper process of de-agrarianization, in which domestic production has become insufficient for certain strategic crops, thereby highlighting structural vulnerabilities. Recent global events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, have heightened Türkiye's agricultural sector's exposure to global market fluctuations, further underscoring the fragility of food sovereignty and the risks of subordinating agrarian production to volatile international conditions.

This article's contribution is twofold. First, it offers a historically grounded and theoretically rigorous account of Türkiye's agrarian transformation, tracing its trajectory across successive regimes of accumulation, agrarian, industrial, and financial, while foregrounding the state as the central apparatus through which class power is exercised. Second, it addresses a major lacuna in the literature by re-centring agrarian questions within political economy analysis, demonstrating how neoliberal restructuring systematically dismantled agrarian self-sufficiency, deepened class polarisation, and transformed rural production into a vehicle for global capital accumulation. In doing so, it illuminates the constellation of state strategies, class dynamics, and international pressures that have produced Türkiye's contemporary agrarian crisis and contributes to wider debates on development, dependency, and the future of food sovereignty.

The article proceeds as follows: Section 1 examines the institutionalisation of ISI between 1960 and 1980 and its implications for agrarian surplus extraction and class realignments. Section 2 analyses the neoliberal turn inaugurated by the January 24th Decisions and consolidated under ANAP, situating it within the global rise of the New Right and the IMF-World Bank stabilisation agenda. Section 3 traces the post-1989 financial liberalisation process, the 1994 crisis, and the April 5th Decisions, focusing on their effects on the agrarian sector. Section 4 explores the post-2000 transformation under the Transition to a Strong Economy Program and the legislative reforms that entrenched de-agrarianization.

Section 5 assesses the compounded effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war on an already fragile agrarian structure. The conclusion synthesises these findings, reconceptualises the state-agriculture nexus, and calls for a paradigm shift toward ecologically grounded, socially just agricultural policies.

2. Breaking the Agrarian Mould: Class Realignments, State Forms, and the Industrial Turn in Turkish Development

The 1960s marked a critical conjuncture in the Turkish economy, representing the transition from an agrarian to an industrial capitalist accumulation regime, the ascendancy of import-substitution industrialisation (ISI), and the concomitant rise of the industrial bourgeoisie as a hegemonic class fraction. These structural shifts inevitably reconfigured agriculture and the institutional architecture of agrarian policy. Any attempt to analyse the agricultural policies of this decade must therefore be situated within the broader global order forged in the aftermath of the Second World War and the agrarian strategies promoted under that order.

The transition to multi-party politics after 1945 fundamentally altered the balance of power between the state and society, granting agricultural producers, who constituted a large share of the electorate, substantial political leverage. The electoral victory of the Democrat Party in 1950 ushered in a new era of rural-oriented governance, marked by policy frameworks more responsive to peasant demands and institutional transformations aligned with this orientation (Pamuk, 2008: 390). The shift from statism to a market-oriented economy was accompanied by foreign aid flows, most notably Marshall Aid, which financed agricultural expansion. This was not merely a policy preference but a structural imposition: the conditionalities of foreign assistance, as articulated in the Thornburg and Barker Reports, explicitly subordinated industrialisation to agricultural development, leaving the latter as the primary engine of accumulation. Consequently, Türkiye's development model of the 1950s became predominantly agrarian in character (Oktar & Varlı, 2010: 17). The onset of the Korean War in 1950 further amplified this trajectory, boosting global prices for agricultural commodities and raw materials, while the rapid mechanisation of Turkish agriculture, evidenced by the surge in tractors and other inputs, precipitated dramatic increases in output¹.

Agriculture constituted the central axis of the Democratic Party's (DP) economic and political discourse between 1950 and 1960, embedding Türkiye's development model within an international system of power and dependency organised around agrarian production. Yet by the late 1950s, deepening macroeconomic imbalances and political turmoil, combined with shifts in the global division of labour, generated the structural and institutional

¹ *An examination of mechanisation during the Democrat Party era reveals a dramatic surge in the number of tractors: from just 220 in 1924 to 2,000 in 1930, 1,756 in 1948, 9,905 in 1950, and an extraordinary 43,727 by 1956. This rapid mechanisation was accompanied by a massive expansion of cultivated land, which grew from 9.5 million hectares in 1948 to 14.6 million hectares in 1956, an increase of nearly 50%, underscoring the scale of the agricultural transformation in this period (Tetik, 2023: 125).*

preconditions for a transition toward an import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) strategy. The military coup of May 27, 1960, which removed the DP from power, the execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, and the promulgation of the 1961 Constitution collectively created the legal and political framework for this strategic reorientation. Within this new context, Türkiye's integration into the capitalist world economy was reconfigured through the establishment of assembly industries and the development of close trade linkages with the United States, inaugurating an accumulation regime premised on import-substitution industrialisation throughout the 1960s² (Akçay & Türel, 2022). A defining characteristic of import-substitution strategies is their orientation toward the domestic market, that is, toward the scale and institutional boundaries of the nation-state (Balassa, 1983: 429-447). Import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) is commonly defined as a development strategy that fosters the domestic production of goods previously imported, thereby reducing external dependency and nurturing an indigenous industrial base.

While the 1950-1960 period was dominated by policies privileging the agricultural sector and the interests of the agrarian bourgeoisie, the post-1960 era marked a decisive shift toward privileging the industrial sector and the emergent industrial bourgeoisie. This reorientation reflected the consolidation of a new class fraction whose economic and political weight grew in this period, compelling the state to recalibrate its economic policies in line with the imperatives of industrial accumulation. The first analytical conclusion to be drawn is that the class composition underpinning the liberal, agriculture-centred policies of the 1950s differed significantly from that which drove the ISI strategy under the new post-1960 conditions.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that the state formulates economic policy in ways that reflect the interests of the dominant class coalition. As Poulantzas (1978: 239) theorises, "The power bloc constitutes a contradictory unity of the ruling classes or factions directed by the hegemonic class or faction". This conceptualisation highlights the structural necessity of the capitalist state, which, in Poulantzas's (1980) formulation, is primarily tasked with reproducing the conditions under which labour is subordinated to capital, thereby crafting policy instruments that safeguard the interests of the ruling classes that form the power bloc. It is important to note, however, that this represents Poulantzas's analytical perspective rather than a universally accepted or empirical definition of the capitalist state. Alternative approaches in the literature, such as those emphasising the relative autonomy of state institutions from specific class interests (Jessop, 2008; Skocpol, 1985), provide a

² *The global intellectual climate of the early 1960s significantly shaped Türkiye's development discourse, aligning it with theoretical currents emphasising state-led growth. In his seminal work, Gerschenkron (1962) famously posited that the later a country embarks on the path of industrialisation, the less it can rely on spontaneous market forces, and the more indispensable state intervention becomes to initiate and accelerate economic transformation. The historical experiences of late-industrialising countries such as Germany and France confirmed this argument: industrial take-off was achieved not through laissez-faire, but through deliberate and coordinated state action. Similarly, in East Asian late developers Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, the decisive role of the state in orchestrating industrialisation has been demonstrated beyond dispute (Shapiro & Taylor, 1990).*

counterpoint by arguing that the state can occasionally act to mediate between competing social forces or pursue broader policy objectives beyond immediate class imperatives. Seen through the lens of these debates, Türkiye's post-1960 development model can be understood as a historically specific configuration in which the state both mediated among competing class interests and contributed to the long-term reproduction of capitalist accumulation, while retaining a degree of relative autonomy that permitted the selective incorporation of diverse social and economic objectives.

3. In the Shadow of Industry: Class Realignments, State Power, and the Making of a Neoliberal Agrarian Order in Türkiye, 1960-1980

After the May 27, 1960, coup d'état, planned development formally began with the First Five-Year Development Plan of 1963, which institutionalised the import-substitution industrialisation strategy (DPT, 1963). The Plan outlined objectives, basic policies, production, and investment targets across sectors, including agriculture, aiming to increase industrial inputs while simultaneously expanding agricultural production to support exports (DPT, 1963: 147-148). Within this framework, the Plan highlighted agricultural reform not merely through land reform, which remained largely absent from the policy agenda (Barbaros & Yıldırım, 2013: 89-90; Yerasimos, 1980: 765) but via targeted measures to strengthen the sector, such as supporting agricultural cooperatives, subsidizing select agricultural products, maintaining low-interest loans, and providing price supports for inputs that enhance soil fertility.

The Plan also facilitated the establishment and expansion of public institutions to support agriculture, including the Meat and Milk Board, Dairy Industry Corporation, Feed and Fertiliser Industries, State Production Farms, and agricultural credit cooperatives, alongside Ziraat Bank's increased lending to farmers and agricultural sales cooperatives (DPT, 1963: 147-148). These initiatives reflect a developmental logic in which the agricultural sector was actively supported rather than relegated to a residual or passive supplier role³. Consequently, attributing the emergence of the industrial bourgeoisie as a dominant fraction solely to the Plan's production and investment targets in agriculture or agricultural exports is methodologically unsound. Instead, the evidence indicates that agricultural policy was conceived as a central mechanism to stabilise production, channel agrarian surplus, and integrate the sector into the broader national development strategy, rather than as an exceptional or temporary intervention.

Specifically, the First Five-Year Development Plan treated the subsidisation of agricultural products as a fundamental and structured instrument of state support. The Plan explicitly stated: "The prices of agricultural products should be protected mainly by subsidising the elements that enter the costs of these products" (DPT, 1963: 498). Far from

³ *Quantitatively, the scope of agricultural subsidies expanded dramatically during this period: whereas only six crops were subsidised in 1960, the number had risen to 24 by the end of the 1970s, reflecting the intensification of state intervention in the agrarian sector (Günaydin, 2002: 13).*

being an exceptional measure, this policy constitutes the core of agricultural support, designed to ensure stable production and facilitate the generation of surplus that could subsequently feed industrial accumulation and national development objectives. This interpretation aligns with the contemporaneous establishment of public enterprises and credit mechanisms that, together, reinforced the developmental role of agriculture during Türkiye's early industrialisation period.

Nevertheless, the Plan largely failed to achieve its intended objectives for the agricultural sector. The policy framework of the 1960s privileged industrial capital accumulation and, within agriculture, favoured large landowners who were perceived as potential contributors to industrial investment. As Avcıoğlu (1965: 10) observed:

"The most important reason for failure is that the village is considered a harmonious community without social differentiation. No distinction was made between poor peasants and rich peasants. When social differentiation was ignored, most of the good works undertaken benefited the rich peasants and aghas. Credit flowed to the landlords. Aghas benefited from irrigation and land utilisation projects. The poor peasant, on the other hand, saw the development of society as the development of the aghas".

This critique is corroborated by Oral's (2006: 56) empirical findings, which demonstrate the unequal distribution of agricultural credit: in 1960, roughly 88% of farmers received only 42% of total loans, whereas the wealthiest 8% captured 47%. By 1965, the imbalance had deepened 92% of farmers received just 53% of loans distributed by Ziraat Bank, and only 32% of agricultural enterprises had access to the full range of available credit. These data underscore that state-led agricultural policies in the ISI period disproportionately benefited the rural elite, thereby reinforcing existing class hierarchies rather than alleviating them.

The electoral victory of the Justice Party (JP) in 1965, widely regarded as the political heir of the Democrat Party, initiated a new phase in Türkiye's agrarian and industrial policy-making. The JP adopted a mixed economic approach that emphasised industrialisation while integrating policy leadership with cadres aligned closely with the industrial bourgeoisie. This orientation was codified in the Second Five-Year Development Plan (1968-1972), which identified the industrial sector as the driving force of economic development, while simultaneously acknowledging the role of agriculture as an essential component of the broader growth strategy (DPT, 1968: 56-66). The Plan prioritised public investment in intermediate and capital goods. It sought to strengthen private-sector capital accumulation while recognising the importance of supporting agrarian production through mechanisms such as agricultural cooperatives, subsidised inputs, low-interest credit, and price-support policies. Under the Demirel government, import-substitution policies functioned as instruments to consolidate and materially empower the domestic industrial bourgeoisie (Aydın & Taşkın, 2020: 146). National income data for 1960-1970 (see Table 1) suggest a relative decline in agriculture's share of GDP. Yet, these figures should be interpreted cautiously, as they do not cover the final two years of the Plan period. Consequently, while

agriculture’s share appears to have declined, it remained integrated into a development strategy that balanced industrial growth with the stabilisation and modernisation of agrarian production.

Table: 1
Sector Shares in National Income (%)

Years	Agriculture	Industry	Service
1960	44.3	16.7	39.0
1961	42.7	16.2	41.1
1962	42.6	16.2	41.2
1963	42.6	16.1	41.3
1964	40.8	16.8	42.4
1965	38.1	17.6	44.3
1966	38.7	17.8	43.5
1967	37.0	18.7	44.3
1968	33.2	26.4	40.4
1969	31.3	27.2	41.4
1970	30.4	27.0	42.6

Source: Mücek, 2019: 402.

As Marx (1979 [1852]: 186) reminds us, “state power is not suspended mid-air”. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Turkish state implemented policies that favoured larger, market-oriented segments of the agrarian class, particularly through credit allocation mechanisms. Necdet Oral’s (2006: 56) data illustrate this concentration: in 1969, only 3% (per thousand) of agricultural credit recipients, 697 enterprises, captured a volume of credit far greater than that utilised by 697,000 smaller borrowers, who represented nearly one-third of all recipients. By 1975, 3% of total agricultural credit went to 89% of borrowers, while the remaining 11% received a staggering 97%, revealing a dramatic imbalance in credit distribution. These figures indicate that while large farmers benefited disproportionately from state-supported credit policies, the majority of the rural population experienced comparatively declining access to financial resources.

The Third Five-Year Development Plan (1973-1977) further entrenched this trajectory, setting explicit targets that favoured industrial expansion: 35% of GNP was allocated to industry, 53.4% to services, and only 11.6% to agriculture (DPT, 1973). In substance, the Plan resembled an industrial promotion strategy rather than a balanced development framework, reflecting Justice Party policies consolidated since 1965 (Barbaros & Kozal, 2014: 165).

Import-substitution industrialisation and the breadth and dynamism of the domestic market were the determining elements of the economic policy of the period. Beyond its developmental objectives, the agricultural component of state planning also functioned as a mechanism for maintaining rural stability and reproducing existing class hierarchies. As noted by Avcıoğlu (1965: 10) and corroborated by Oral’s (2006: 56) findings, agricultural policies during this period largely favoured large landholders and local notables, thereby constraining the scope for rural political mobilisation. These policies temporarily improved the financial situation of some poor peasants, yet their benefits were unevenly distributed and structurally limited. According to Sönmez (2013: 83), assuming 1960-61 = 100, the

terms-of-trade index for agriculture reached 117 in 1976, 123 for cotton, and 190 for tobacco. These indices indicate relative price advantages for agricultural commodities over time, though the precise methodology and index calculations are outside the scope of this study. While some scholars have suggested that such market orientation increased farmers' long-term exposure to market fluctuations (Keyder & Yenal, 2011; Oral, 2015a), a detailed analysis of the socio-economic vulnerabilities created by these policies constitutes a separate research agenda.

A prominent scholar of income distribution in Türkiye summarises this structural tendency:

"We cannot support the claim that the Turkish economy successfully redistributed income between the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in 1950-1974. Large farmers always benefited from high support prices, input subsidies, state irrigation projects, and technological developments, which tended to increase inequalities" (as cited in Ulusan, 1980: 138, 146).

The World Bank's 1977 Agriculture Report, as cited in Köymen (1988, p. 236), offered a stark diagnosis: "Public investments in rural areas have increased the inequality in rural income distribution. Support policies have favoured rich farmers to the detriment of poor peasants. Credit policies have mostly benefited large-scale agricultural enterprises and have not effectively reduced income inequality. The land policy has not reduced income inequality or increased productivity. Türkiye, Mexico, and Brazil have one of the world's most unequal rural income distributions. The top 10% of producers in the top income group receive 43% of the income, while the bottom 20% receive 2.7%".

The ISI model persisted until the deepening structural and economic crisis of the late 1970s (Akçay & Türel, 2022). The 1971 military intervention, political instability, the 1973 Oil Crisis, and the international repercussions of the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation collectively exacerbated the downturn, producing both economic and political turbulence. After 1976, relative prices turned decisively against agriculture, favouring industry. When 1976 is indexed to 100, the agricultural terms of trade fell to 69 by 1979, representing a 31% deterioration (Günaydın, 2014). Agriculture's share of GDP contracted sharply, dropping from 28.9% in 1977 to just 20.7% in 1979 (Çölaşan, 1984: 274).

During this period, the Turkish economy came under severe strain, besieged by soaring prices, a surge in imports, a contraction of exports, and a mounting external debt burden⁴. Reversing the structural imbalances of the 1970s required radical measures to restore the economy's capacity for self-sustained accumulation. In this context, the January 24th Decisions announced by the last Justice Party government marked a decisive turning

⁴ Between 1973 and 1979, Türkiye's export prices rose by 82.4%. Yet at current prices, imports skyrocketed by 1,772% between 1950 and 1979, outpacing export growth of 859% over the same period. Consequently, the export-to-import coverage ratio collapsed from 91.9% in 1950 to just 38% by 1980, highlighting the deepening structural imbalance in Türkiye's external trade (Başkaya, 1986: 177).

point in Türkiye’s political economy. They inaugurated a new era of market-oriented restructuring.

The Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1979-1983) heralded a paradigmatic shift in economic policy, signalling profound transformations in the agricultural sector. The Plan explicitly acknowledged that state-led support purchases had distorted production patterns and exacerbated income inequalities:

“The practice has adversely affected the composition of production and income distribution. As the enterprises grow, the amount of benefit from the price support by the state increases with the expansion of the marketed quantities, and in products such as wheat, which is also subject to domestic consumption, self-sufficient enterprises that must buy these products partially from the market may be adversely affected by the support price” (DPT, 1979).

This diagnosis reflected an ideological repositioning: agricultural supports were reframed not as instruments of rural development but as distortions that had to be disciplined to align agriculture with the imperatives of market liberalisation.

Table: 2
Shares of Production Sectors in Gross National Product (%)

Year	Agriculture	Industry	Service
1968	37.6	17.4	45.0
1973	29.4	17.7	52.9
1977	27.3	19.1	53.6
1980	23.6	20.1	56.3

Source: Turkish State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Indicators, 1923-1991*.

IMF deeply shaped the economic and political trajectory constructed around the January 24th Decisions- and World Bank-sponsored stabilisation and structural adjustment programs, embedding Türkiye into the global neoliberal project. The discourse of economic liberalisation gained momentum in this period and would find its full institutional expression after the September 12, 1980, military coup (Köymen, 2017: 145). For agriculture, the implications were severe: sharp reductions in support policies, liquidation of public agricultural institutions, and large-scale privatisation measures, developments that will be analysed in the subsequent sections. Seen through a political economy lens, the January 24th Decisions and the 1980 military coup did not merely inaugurate a new set of economic policies. Still, they reconfigured the very form of the Turkish state, restructuring class relations and consolidating a neoliberal accumulation regime whose implications for agriculture were both far-reaching and irreversible.

4. The Neoliberal Reconfiguration of Agriculture: January 24th Decisions, Class Power, and the Making of a Market-Mediated Agrarian Order in Türkiye

The January 24th Decisions functioned as the *midwife* of a new orientation in Turkish capitalism, the memorandum of capital, inaugurating a new accumulation regime that entrenched the hegemony of capital. These decisions marked Türkiye's transition from an inward-looking, import-substitution model toward an export-oriented development strategy rooted in neoliberal prescriptions. As in Chile's neoliberal experiment, the liberalisation process in Türkiye was consolidated under authoritarian rule, beginning with the September 12, 1980, military coup. The primary function of the coup was to dismantle the institutional architecture of the ISI era and replace it with a new set of institutions designed to privilege market logics. The intellectual genealogy of the January 24th program can also be traced to the global ascendancy of the New Right following the rise of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom (1979) and Ronald Reagan in the United States (1981) (Şener & Çolak, 2019: 400).

The post-1980 Turkish state pursued a developmental strategy focused on export promotion, providing financial privileges and tax incentives to export-oriented industries (Karadağ, 2010: 17). This state strategy coincided with the objectives of domestic capital accumulation. IMF standby agreements and policy conditionalities further shaped the implementation of neoliberal-oriented economic policies. Unlike the period between 1960 and 1980, when elements of welfare policy mediated class tensions, the post-1980 policy framework emphasised market liberalisation and export-oriented industrial growth, with limited mechanisms for incorporating labour interests into policy-making.

The January 24th Decisions incorporated elements characteristic of IMF-imposed stabilisation packages of the 1970s and World Bank structural adjustment programs, including currency devaluation, price adjustments of State Economic Enterprises' products, removal of price controls, privatisation, gradual liberalisation of financial markets, and deregulation of foreign capital inflows (Koç, 2014: 227). These measures inevitably affected the agricultural sector, marking a departure from the broadly supportive agricultural policies of 1960-1980, which featured widespread input subsidies, high support prices, and low-interest agricultural loans (Baray & Ergun, 1990: 88-89). Unlike the previous period, the post-1980 stabilisation measures sought to minimise state intervention in agriculture, transferring the sector increasingly to market mechanisms while retaining only limited targeted support.

The first concrete manifestation of this new stabilisation regime was the dramatic hike in fertiliser prices in January 1980, which drove the share of fertiliser costs in grain production from 7% in 1979 to 17% in 1980 (Şahinöz, 2014: 427). Access to credit was simultaneously tightened: interest rates on medium-term loans provided by Ziraat Bank to agriculture were doubled from 11% to 22% in 1980, while support prices were reduced and the number of crops covered by support was halved. These measures combined to depress

agricultural output growth, reducing the sector's annual growth rate from roughly 3% in the pre-1980 period to below 2% thereafter (Şahinöz, 2014: 427). The share of agricultural goods in total exports fell precipitously, from 59.4% in 1979 to 47.2% by 1981 (Mücek, 2009: 156).

TÜSİAD's 1981 Agricultural Report, representing the voice of Türkiye's organised industrial and financial capital, openly articulated the desired reconfiguration of agriculture:

"The necessary harmony between agriculture and industry in the market economy model can be likened to the optimum speed of a two-horse carriage. The speed of one constantly affects the other; the slower one becomes a burden on the faster one, and the faster one tries to drag the slower one. In closed economies, agriculture and industry cannot develop beyond a certain point because the economy is not open to exports; the economy slows and stops, as if it has hit a hill or even a wall. If the economy is not open to exports, both agriculture and industry slow down at the limits of domestic demand, and the surpluses produced by chance or out of habit are exported, which is not enough for the economy to make the necessary move" (TÜSİAD, 1981: 75-76).

With the full institutionalisation of the January 24th program and the consolidation of stability and structural adjustment policies, agriculture was fully subordinated to the logic of export-oriented industrialisation. This shift became even more apparent following the 1983 return to civilian rule and the rise to power of the Motherland Party (ANAP) under Turgut Özal, the chief architect of the January 24th program (Oral et al., 2015: 76).

Table: 3
Terms of Trade in Agriculture

Years	Terms of Trade	Years	Terms of Trade	Years	Terms of Trade
1966	100	1972	107,3	1978	87,9
1967	103,1	1973	111,8	1979	68,2
1968	103,4	1974	111,2	1980	62,9
1969	105,4	1975	108,3	1981	70,1
1970	109,0	1976	100,4	1982	65,7
1971	112,1	1977	96,9	1983	60,7

Source: Akad, 2015: 102.

From 1971 to 1984, agriculture's share of GNP plunged from 35% to 21% (Korkut, 1984: 23). The ratio of agricultural to industrial prices fell from 107.6 in 1977 to 73.5 in 1984, indicating a dramatic deterioration in relative prices to the detriment of agriculture (Başkaya, 1986: 303). In short, the neoliberal turn systematically eroded the economic position of agriculture, deepened rural income inequalities, and accelerated the transition toward a fully market-mediated agrarian order.

5. Neoliberal Counter-Revolution in Agriculture: The Motherland Party, Class Power, and the Dismantling of State Support

The 1983 electoral victory of the Motherland Party, led by Turgut Özal, the architect of the January 24th Decisions, paved the way for the neoliberal state model to gain

prominence and for a more pronounced market-oriented restructuring of agriculture. During this period, the scope of agricultural support was progressively narrowed, and prices of key agricultural products were suppressed. Comparing the post-1980 period with the 1960-1980 period, when broad input subsidies were prevalent, the reduction in support becomes evident. Terms of trade for agriculture, indexed to 100 for 1976-1979, fell to 53% by 1988, highlighting a sharp deterioration; for context, the same index stood at 27% during the Great Depression (Günaydın, 2014: 520). By juxtaposing the broadly subsidised agricultural framework of 1960-1980 with the post-1980 policy contraction, it becomes evident that the reduction in state support constitutes a structural departure from the previously established developmental logic, signalling a deliberate reorientation of agrarian policy toward market-mediated accumulation.

Gülten Kazgan's (1999: 33) assessment of the transformation of Turkish agriculture between 1980 and 1990 offers a striking summary:

"The difference in approach that became more evident in the second half of the period can be summarised as follows: First, the protective and regulatory state attitude towards agriculture changed, and a policy change emerged to ensure that agricultural production was subject to market conditions. Foreign trade protectionism was greatly reduced, input subsidies were abolished except for a small subsidy for chemical fertilisers, and product price support was almost eliminated, and its scope was narrowed. Secondly, towards the end of the period, public institutions regulating agricultural markets lost the advantages they had previously enjoyed, especially credit advantages, and, like other public institutions, they were privatised, and the monopoly power of some of them ended. Thirdly, the seed sector, which had previously been closed to foreign capital, was opened almost entirely to domestic and foreign capital, and the trend toward ending the public sector's role in this field was completed. Finally, the tendency to use agriculture to boost the competitiveness of the manufacturing industry and services in an economy fully opened to foreign competition became evident".

Under ANAP, neoliberal discourse became the official language of economic policy, framing development as the natural outcome of market forces. As stated in the party program:

"To ensure the development of the economy within its natural laws, our economic system preference is the implementation of a free market economy in which the conditions of competition prevail by minimising interventions and restrictions in line with the interests of the country" (ANAP, 1983: 19).

This ideological orientation was fully reflected in the development plans of the period. The Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1985-1989) explicitly recommended keeping agricultural support prices low and, if necessary, raising industrial goods prices to adjust the terms of trade against agriculture (Sönmez, 1982: 51).

Within this framework, state-mediated subsidies and price-support mechanisms underwent a profound contraction rather than a mere continuation of prior policies (Pamuk, 2008: 288). By 1984, the real purchasing power of agricultural support payments had declined to approximately half of its 1977 level (Başkaya, 1986: 304). The number of products eligible for support purchases fell from 18 in 1985 to 10 by 1990. Between 1980 and 1989, the proportion of tobacco production covered by support purchases decreased from 71.5% to 39.3%, while fresh tea leaves, hazelnuts, and cotton were excluded from the support system in 1986 and 1988, respectively (Oral, 2020: 51). Concomitantly, the share of agricultural support in total value added dropped from 14.7% in 1976 to 5.5% in 1988, and Central Bank loans earmarked for agricultural support fell from 27% to 5% in the same period (Oral, 2020: 51). This evidences the onset of a decisive contraction in state support, marking a structural reorientation of agrarian policy toward market-mediated mechanisms and away from the protective frameworks that had underpinned agriculture in previous decades.

The terms of trade, indexed to 1976 = 100, fell to 51.8 by 1989, indicating a 48% shift against agriculture (Oral, 2015a: 421). As a result, farmers' purchasing power declined by nearly 35% during the 1980s (Oral, 2020: 52). Resource transfers from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors also increased dramatically, rising from 2.19% of GDP in 1975-1978 to as high as 9% by 1986 (Baray & Ergun, 1990: 93). Per capita income disparities between industry and agriculture widened: industry's per capita income, which was 4.6 times higher than agriculture's in 1980, rose to 5.7 times by 1988 (Oral et al., 2015: 79). Functional income distribution data likewise reveal a sharp decline in agriculture's share of national income from 23.9% in 1980 to 16.6% in 1988 while the combined share of profit, interest, and rent incomes surged from below 50% to nearly 70% over the same period (Oral, 2015a: 422) (see Table 4).

Table: 4
Functional Distribution of National Income in Türkiye

Years	Share of Agricultural Income (%)	Share of Wage-Salary* (%)	Profit-Interest-Rent** Share (%)
1967	34.53	28.51	36.95
1968	32.44	29.31	38.25
1969	31.58	31.38	37.05
1970	31.08	31.15	37.77
1971	31.31	31.33	37.37
1972	30.32	31.57	38.11
1973	29.13	31.56	39.31
1974	30.20	29.77	40.04
1975	30.76	31.51	37.73
1976	31.28	33.11	35.60
1977	29.12	36.81	34.07
1978	26.66	35.19	38.15
1979	24.33	32.79	42.88
1980	23.87	26.66	49.47
1981	23.06	24.57	52.36
1982	21.82	24.62	53.55
1983	20.52	24.78	54.69
1984	20.44	21.57	57.99
1985	19.08	18.84	62.08
1986	18.09	17.70	64.21

Source: Özmucur, 1987: 79; Mücek, 2009: 205.

* Non-agricultural, wage and salary income; ** Non-agricultural, non-wage, and non-salary income.

Privatisation represented one of the central pillars of ANAP's development strategy. In 1984, the private sector was granted the right to establish facilities for the purchase, processing, and packaging of fresh tea, while ÇAYKUR was prohibited from making new investments, effectively privileging private investors (Oral et al., 2015: 78). Seed imports were liberalised in 1985 under a World Bank loan agreement, opening the sector to foreign capital (Oral, 2020: 61). The privatisation of the General Directorate of Agricultural Enterprises (TİGEM) accelerated, with its assets leased to the private sector. In 1984, TEKEL was permitted to import foreign cigarettes. By 1990, the share of foreign brands in domestic consumption had risen from 6% to 25% (Oral et al., 2015: 78). Finally, after 1989. The adoption of Decree No. 32 on the Protection of the Value of Turkish Currency, Türkiye, shifted from an export-led growth model to a capital-inflows-driven accumulation regime, further exacerbating structural vulnerabilities and deepening the agrarian crisis.

6. Disciplining Agriculture: Financial Liberalisation, IMF-World Bank Conditionalties, and the Restructuring of Türkiye's Agrarian Economy

The enactment of Decree No. 32 on the Protection of the Value of the Turkish Currency in 1989 marked a decisive rupture in Türkiye's political economy, fully liberalising financial transactions and rendering the Turkish lira convertible. This legal-institutional shift opened the floodgates for foreign capital inflows, fueling a cycle of rising interest rates and embedding a growth strategy predicated on short-term portfolio flows, which came to be known as the "hot money" model. In this context, the conditions for the reproduction of first real, and subsequently financial, capital were institutionalised, mobilising new opportunities for expanded capital accumulation through enhanced profit rates. Crucially, this reorientation signalled an explicit attempt to reorganise the economic surplus in favour of the financial bourgeoisie, inaugurating a period of class realignment and redefining the state's relationship with the dominant fractions of capital.

The 1990s unfolded as a decade of macroeconomic volatility, political fragility, and deepening social disintegration. Internationally, Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, along with the economic and political turbulence generated by the transition of post-Soviet republics, further destabilised Türkiye's external environment. Domestically, the consequences of financial liberalisation became increasingly apparent: the economy was progressively decoupled from the productive sphere and diverted toward speculative circuits of accumulation (Altıok, 2002: 104). In effect, financial flows began to eclipse productive investment, undermining the development of the real economy.

This model, grounded in volatile capital inflows, perpetual external borrowing, and consumption-driven growth, proved unsustainable and culminated in a severe balance-of-payments and confidence crisis in early 1994. The April 5th Decisions⁵, framed by then-

⁵ *The core of this program endorsed by the IMF through a stand-by agreement and incorporating the principal components of orthodox stabilization packages can be distilled into three interrelated pillars: (1) the*

Prime Minister Tansu Çiller as a "war of economic liberation," constituted a comprehensive stabilisation package designed under IMF auspices and incorporating the canonical instruments of structural adjustment. For agriculture, however, these measures amounted to a de facto mortgage: the sector was further subjected to market discipline, and its already diminished state support mechanisms were eroded further, deepening rural precarity.

The agricultural implications of the April 5th Decisions were far-reaching, restructuring the sector along explicitly neoliberal lines. Policy measures included pegging agricultural product prices to world market levels, narrowing the scope of state procurement, curtailing input subsidies, restricting the cultivation of crops with structural surpluses, and accelerating the privatisation of state agricultural enterprises (Oral, 2006: 87). The number of supported crops, which had stood at 26 in 1992, was reduced to just nine under the new regime, including cereals, sugar beet, poppy, and tobacco (Günaydın, 2014: 521). Farmers' access to subsidised, low-interest loans became increasingly restricted, while the prices of critical production inputs surged by up to 300%, significantly raising cultivation costs (Aysu, 2023: 63).

Privatisation remained a defining feature of the period, with agricultural state-owned enterprises dismantled under the mandate of Law No. 3291 on Privatisation (1986) (Günaydın, 2006: 19). Core institutions, including the Dairy Industry Corporation (SEK), Feed Industry (YEMSAN), Forest Products Industry (ORÜS), and Turkish Agricultural Equipment Corporation (TZDK), were privatised between 1990 and 2000, profoundly affecting agricultural production, animal husbandry, and rural livelihoods. The liquidation of these entities contributed to a dramatic contraction in livestock numbers: from approximately 87 million in 1980 to 68.5 million in 1984, and to roughly 52 million by 1997 (Mücek, 2019: 430). Similarly, the Meat and Fish Institution, which once held 60% of the domestic market share, saw its 16 combine facilities transferred to private ownership between 1995 and 1999; output collapsed from 14,000 tons before privatisation to a mere 1,300 tons (Yörük, 2021: 71-72). With the dismantling of these institutional pillars, producers were left without a public safety net, leading to declining production, growing import dependence, and widening inequalities in agricultural income distribution (Yörük, 2021: 72).

The 1994 Household Income Distribution Survey starkly illustrates this inequality: the poorest 20% of agricultural households captured only 5.6% of agricultural income, while the wealthiest 20% accounted for a disproportionate 47.7% (Köymen, 2017: 146-147).

A further milestone of this era was Türkiye's accession to the Customs Union with the European Union, effective December 31, 1995. Notably, high-value-added products in which Türkiye held a clear ecological advantage, such as canned fruits, vegetables, and

compression of wages, salaries, and agricultural subsidies; (2) the reduction of public sector deficits through fiscal austerity; and (3) the large-scale privatization of state assets and the radical retrenchment of the state's economic role, particularly in the production of goods and services.

tomato paste, were excluded from the agreement's coverage, while processed agricultural products (e.g., chocolate, confectionery, pasta, ice cream), heavily subsidised under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, were included (Oral et al., 2015: 81). This asymmetrical arrangement accelerated the deterioration of Türkiye-EU trade balances, with Türkiye's trade deficit rising from USD 5.8 billion in 1995 to USD 28.8 billion by 2011 (Oral et al., 2015: 81).

International financial institutions played a crucial role in deepening this transformation. The IMF and World Bank continued to prescribe policies aimed at accelerating the de-agrarianization process. A telling moment occurred on May 29, 1996, when Martin E. Hardy, Deputy Director of the IMF's European Department, addressed the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions. Responding to concerns about unemployment and internal migration, Hardy bluntly stated:

"In Türkiye, 45% of the active labour force is employed in agriculture. However, the contribution of agriculture to national income is only 15%. Employment in agriculture should be reduced to 10%" (as cited in Koç, 2014: 186).

Even political elites embraced this logic. Then-President Süleyman Demirel repeatedly emphasised the need to reduce the rural labour force, declaring at the 1997 Agricultural Council:

"The 40-44% of this country's population working in agriculture should be reduced to 10% or even below" (as cited in Koç, 2014: 186).

By late 1997, a World Bank mission visited Türkiye to evaluate agricultural support policies. Its 1998 report diagnosed the system as fiscally unsustainable and economically inefficient, urging sweeping reforms:

"Prices of agricultural products should be brought down to the level of world prices. A system of direct income support should replace price supports or subsidies. Fertiliser and credit subsidies should be eliminated. Agricultural state-owned enterprises, which have become redundant with the transition to direct income support, should be privatised" (as cited in Aysu, 2023: 49).

The liberalisation trajectory initiated in the 1980s was reinforced with the IMF stand-by agreement of 1999 and institutionalised through the Agricultural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP) signed with the World Bank in 2001 (Yıldırım, 2022: 54-55). Under these conditionalities, Türkiye implemented sweeping legal and policy reforms to align its agricultural sector with the requirements of global capital accumulation. By the early 2000s, the commodification of agriculture was not merely a policy tendency but a structural imperative, embedding Turkish agriculture within a transnational regime of market discipline dictated by IMF-World Bank orthodoxy (Kendir, 2003: 281).

7. The Global Script for Agriculture: Washington Consensus, Structural Adjustment, and the Restructuring of Türkiye's Agrarian Order

The acceleration of economic globalisation since the 1990s, intensifying further in the 2000s, was propelled by the dissolution of traditional geopolitical blocs, the ascendancy of liberal and neoliberal paradigms, rapid technological innovation, and the transnationalization of goods and financial markets (Kutlu, 1998: 369). This transformation was not merely the "natural" outcome of liberalising trade and capital flows but was actively institutionalised through the growing power of supranational organisations such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, which came to operate as global decision-making and enforcement bodies alongside nation-states (Ataç, 2000: 96). The collapse of the Cold War order further consolidated the influence of these institutions, particularly in the economic sphere, allowing them to dictate the terms of market integration for peripheral economies. By the 1990s, the Washington Consensus, built around the policy triad of macroeconomic stabilisation, privatisation, and trade liberalisation, had become the hegemonic development paradigm (Ruger, 2005: 60). The structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and conditionalities designed by the IMF and World Bank under this paradigm systematically dismantled protectionist regimes and exposed agriculture to the discipline of global markets, leaving producers in many countries, including Türkiye, vulnerable to price volatility and intensified competition.

One of the most visible economic consequences of globalisation has been the homogenization of national policy frameworks: economic strategies increasingly became "carbon copies" of one another, converging around neoliberal orthodoxy. For decades, agricultural policy retained a degree of national specificity due to its strategic nature, but in recent decades it, too, has been subsumed into the circuits of globalisation. As Berthelot (2001) famously remarked, "Agriculture is the Achilles' heel of globalisation," capturing the sector's structural vulnerability within liberalised markets. Countries seeking IMF assistance during financial crises were required to adopt pre-packaged agricultural policy blueprints as integral components of SAPs. These prescriptions, driven primarily by fiscal austerity imperatives and neoliberal dogma, left little room for considerations of long-term development, social equity, or food security. Türkiye's 1999 Letter of Intent to the IMF, which laid out the policy trajectory for the 2000s, effectively reiterated and deepened the liberalisation agenda initiated two decades earlier, underscoring the continuity of external conditionality over domestic policy space.

Perhaps the most far-reaching intervention in Turkish agriculture was the Agricultural Reform Implementation Project (ARIP), executed between 2000 and 2008 under World Bank auspices. ARIP marked a decisive rupture with the state-led agricultural support regime: price supports and input subsidies were dismantled, crop production decisions were handed over to market forces, and the protective institutional infrastructure that had shielded smallholders was systematically dismantled (Keyder & Yenal, 2013). The Eighth Five-Year Development Plan (2001-2005) rationalised these reforms by arguing that support prices historically set above world market levels had generated excessive production

surpluses, led to costly stockpiling, and destabilised farm incomes. As a corrective, the plan advocated expanding the Direct Income Support (DIS) system, which was initially piloted as a mechanism to replace price supports with direct transfers to farmers (DPT, 2001: 132-136).

The eruption of the 2001 financial crisis, which triggered the collapse of Türkiye's banking sector (Gorvett, 2001), further entrenched the role of international financial institutions in steering domestic policy. The appointment of Kemal Derviş, brought directly from the World Bank to head the economy for a critical 17-month period, marked a pivotal juncture. Under his leadership, the Transition to a Strong Economy Program was launched, constituting the second roadmap of Türkiye's neoliberal restructuring. In agriculture, this program entailed a significant intensification of structural adjustment policies, accelerating a profound, largely irreversible transformation of the sector's institutional, economic, and social foundations in alignment with global neoliberal imperatives.

8. The Deep Restructuring of Turkish Agriculture: Neoliberal Legislation, De-Agrarianization, and the Crisis of Agrarian Self-Sufficiency

The first decades of the twenty-first century marked a critical juncture in Türkiye's agrarian trajectory, characterised by growing fragility and an increasing dependence on external markets. Rather than indicating a complete reversal in trade balances, developments in this period reflected cyclical fluctuations and structural vulnerabilities within agricultural production and trade. These dynamics pointed to a gradual weakening of agrarian self-sufficiency and a deepening exposure to global price volatility outcomes rooted in neoliberal state policies that systematically privileged the interests of large capital and the hegemonic class fraction. Under this reconfigured accumulation regime, the agricultural sector, once celebrated as a cornerstone of national economic sovereignty, was progressively restructured, tethering Türkiye's food system more closely to global market dynamics. The Transition to a Strong Economy Program (2001), the Sugar Law (2001), the Tobacco Law (2001), the Agriculture Law (2006), and the Seed Law (2006) collectively entrenched a new institutional architecture for neoliberal restructuring in agriculture. The Transition Program, a more aggressively market-oriented version of the 1999 IMF stabilisation package, explicitly sought to terminate the post-war regime of state-mediated agrarian support and replace it with a system of direct income support (DIS) narrowly targeted at small and medium producers. In practice, this translated into the abolition of state procurement schemes, the withdrawal of fertiliser and credit subsidies, and the privatisation of agricultural state economic enterprises, modifying the institutional framework that had supported rural production and agrarian self-sufficiency for decades.

The Sugar Law introduced a quota regime that not only paved the way for the privatisation of state-owned sugar factories but also opened Turkish markets to surplus sugar stocks from the U.S. and the EU, undermining domestic production and crippling livestock-based molasses feed chains (Konyalı & Gaytancıoğlu, 2002: 310). Likewise, the Tobacco Law facilitated the dismantling of TEKEL, which was ultimately sold to British American

Tobacco in 2008, ceding the market to multinational firms (Oral, 2015a: 425). These reforms devastated producer bases: the number of sugar beet growers collapsed from 492,000 in 2002 to 124,000 by 2014, while the number of tobacco-farming households plummeted by more than 80%, leaving barely 55,000 by 2016 (Değirmenci, 2017: 773).

The Agriculture Law (2006) codified a vision of a "non-interventionist" state, restricting itself to regulatory functions and guaranteeing agricultural budget allocations of "at least 1% of GNP" (Art. 21). In reality, allocations never reached this threshold, remaining around 0.5-0.6% (Şengül & Sarıbal, 2015: 150), meaning that producers received less than half of the statutory amount: TL 121 billion instead of TL 269 billion between 2006 and 2019 (Yıldırım, 2022: 92).

The cumulative effect of these policies was starkly summarised by Oral (2015a: 425):

"Public support to agriculture decreased from USD 6.2 billion in 2000 to USD 4.2 billion in 2011. Support fell from 3% of national income to 0.5%, agricultural input use declined, and production growth lagged behind population growth. Livestock populations dwindled, and even basic feed, live animals, and hay became import-dependent. The privatisation or liquidation of state agricultural enterprises was largely completed, and agriculture was transformed into a net importing sector".

The social costs were equally severe: agricultural employment contracted by 1.6 million between 2000 and 2011 (TÜİK), with agriculture's share in total employment dropping from 36% to 25%. Rural poverty, far from being alleviated, deepened, rising from 35.5% in 2002 to 38.7% by 2009 (TÜİK).

Global factors compounded this structural transformation. The 2008 global food crisis, triggered by rising commodity prices, pushed international organisations to revisit their development discourse. The World Bank's 2008 World Development Report, titled *Agriculture for Development*, marked a rare admission that earlier structural adjustment programs had exposed smallholders to market failures and unsustainable risks:

"Incomplete markets and institutional gaps imposed costs and welfare losses on small farmers ... threatening their competitiveness and, in many cases, their very existence" (World Bank, 2007: 138).

Yet, rather than reversing neoliberal orthodoxy, the report reframed the state's role as a market facilitator rather than a developmental agent, consolidating the regulatory state model. Domestic elites echoed this orientation: TÜSİAD's 2008 Agricultural Report called for the complete abandonment of protectionist policies, legitimising a class project that redistributed income upward to large-scale landowners and agribusiness (TÜSİAD, 2008).

Empirical evidence corroborates this polarisation. Islamoğlu et al. (2008: 56) show that small family farms were liquidated at alarming rates: holdings under 50 decares shrank

from 65% of the total in 2001 to 32% in 2008, while farms above 500 decares increased sixfold from 1% to 6%, consolidating a new agrarian oligopoly.

The macroeconomic outcomes were equally telling: the value-added of agriculture fell by 24% between 2012 and 2017, while per capita agricultural value-added declined by nearly 20% in the same period (Oral, 2020: 33). Agriculture's share in exports halved from 5.95% in 2000 to 2.7% in 2019, while its share in imports rose from 3.5% to 4.8% (Yıldırım, 2022: 52), indicating a deepening structural trade deficit.

The diagnosis offered by Mahmut Eskiörük, President of the Tire Milk Cooperative, captures the political economy of this transformation:

"During the Özal era, a dangerous idea was injected into our veins: 'Why produce if it is cheaper abroad?' ... Today, we import wheat, cotton, and lentils. Our self-sufficiency has been sacrificed. Without a stable, long-term agricultural policy, Turkish agriculture is doomed to remain trapped in this spiral of dependency" (Yörük, 2021: 128).

This spiral has become particularly visible in the context of recent global disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, which have affected global supply chains and international agricultural markets. These events may have influenced Türkiye's import patterns, price volatility, and market stability, highlighting the structural vulnerabilities of an agrarian economy increasingly integrated into global production and trade circuits.

9. Crisis upon Crisis: COVID-19, the Russia-Ukraine War, and the Exposure of Türkiye's Agrarian Vulnerabilities

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan, China, on November 17th, 2019, and its rapid spread across the globe triggered profound disruptions in nearly all spheres of life, including agriculture, which became a litmus test for national resilience (Kayabaşı, 2020: 40). United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warned world leaders that the pandemic could precipitate a "triple crisis" of food, energy, and finance, placing the specter of hunger and global food insecurity at the top of the agendas of the G-7, G-20, World Bank, and IMF meetings. In this sense, the pandemic marked a historical juncture in which the very notion of self-sufficiency was tested worldwide, reviving debates over food sovereignty and national capacity for provisioning.

Türkiye entered the pandemic era with a structurally fragile economy and a highly import-dependent food system. Given the indeterminate duration and scale of the pandemic, the country faced intensified food security risks and deepened vulnerabilities in agricultural production. Türkiye ranks among the world's leading importers and exporters of grains. In the case of wheat, domestic production has generally been sufficient to meet internal consumption, and imports primarily serve export-oriented processing and trade purposes. Although wheat production in April 2020 increased by roughly 20% compared to 2019, rising prices reflected structural insufficiencies in certain commodities and crisis-induced

market pressures: wheat prices rose by 35.95% in 2021, red lentils, barley, and potatoes followed suit, and even basic vegetable staples such as tomatoes, eggplants, and green peppers saw double-digit price increases. Similarly, chickpea and bean prices climbed by 12% and 27.1%, respectively, in 2020, while durum wheat, barley, rye, and corn experienced sharp year-on-year hikes, symptoms of an agricultural system under strain from extraordinary global conditions rather than absolute domestic scarcity (Gevher & Acet, 2023: 115-117).

It is important to note, however, that these price increases cannot be interpreted as evidence of systemic insufficiency in Türkiye's agricultural production. Price dynamics are influenced by a combination of demand pressures, cost fluctuations, and broader structural conditions, and should not be taken as a direct measure of domestic scarcity. Türkiye's agricultural system, operating within a historically de-agrarianised framework shaped by decades of neoliberal restructuring, remains highly sensitive to global market volatility. From this perspective, although the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war highlighted the vulnerabilities of the system, domestic production, particularly for staple commodities such as wheat, has generally been sufficient to meet internal consumption, with imports primarily facilitating export-oriented trade and processing (Ministry of Trade, 2023: 8). These dynamics underscore the need to distinguish between price-induced stress and actual supply insufficiency when evaluating Türkiye's agrarian system's resilience.

The post-pandemic period revealed structural vulnerabilities in Türkiye's agricultural trade. Between 2009 and 2021, crop export values increased from USD 4.2 billion to USD 6.6 billion, while imports grew even more sharply, from USD 4.4 billion to USD 11.2 billion (Kılıç & Babayiğit-Sunay, 2023: 120). Wheat imports rose from 4.8 million tons in 2011 to 9.8 million tons in 2020, whereas exports increased from 3.9 to 7.5 million tons, indicating a structural trade imbalance and a growing reliance on international grain markets.

Despite its geographical advantages, diverse agroecological zones, and rich crop portfolio, Türkiye's agricultural sector has been steadily losing its share of GDP and employment. This decline cannot be viewed as a "natural" by-product of structural transformation alone; it also reflects deliberate policy choices that subordinated agriculture to industrial and service sector priorities. Historically, agriculture has served as a countercyclical stabiliser, absorbing labour during economic crises, yet its capacity to play this role has eroded.

Rescuing Türkiye's agricultural sector from its current vulnerabilities requires a paradigmatic reorientation: a production-centred policy designed to meet domestic needs while accounting for the country's ecological realities (Oral, 2020: 35). This entails abandoning externally imposed policy blueprints, re-establishing effective state intervention mechanisms, and strengthening public agricultural enterprises to stabilise prices, support producer incomes, and safeguard food sovereignty. While state-owned enterprises (SEEs) that engage in intervention purchases have historically played an important role in mitigating market volatility, their effectiveness cannot be assumed as absolute. The case of TEKEL,

which was compelled to destroy excess stocks, stands as a stark reminder of the limits of these interventions. Without comprehensive measures, import dependence is likely to deepen, rural disintegration may accelerate, and the agricultural base will remain acutely exposed to systemic shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic has already revealed the fragility of an economy structured under decades of neoliberal restructuring, highlighting how global supply chain disruptions can rapidly affect domestic markets. Preliminary assessments suggest that geopolitical developments, such as the Russia-Ukraine war, may further exacerbate global commodity volatility; however, the specific impacts on Türkiye's domestic production and trade remain to be empirically quantified. Hence, policy prescriptions must remain grounded in verifiable data and structural realities rather than extrapolations from external crises.

10. Conclusion

This study has traced the *longue durée* transformation of Türkiye's agricultural sector, arguing that its trajectory from 1960 to the present is inseparable from the shifting regimes of accumulation, the successive metamorphoses of state form, and the evolving articulation of Türkiye within the hierarchies of the global capitalist order. A historical-political economy approach reveals that agricultural policy is not merely a technocratic instrument of production management but a privileged site where class power is organised, contested, and reproduced. The state, far from a neutral arbiter, has functioned as the "collective organiser" of the ruling bloc, calibrating policy to secure the reproduction of capital accumulation and to stabilise the hegemony of the dominant agrarian, industrial, and later financial bourgeoisie.

Between 1960 and 1980, agriculture was instrumentalised as a reservoir of surplus for industrialisation under the ISI paradigm. Interventionist measures, such as price supports, input subsidies, and cooperative promotion, were not ends in themselves but mechanisms for extracting and redirecting agrarian surplus toward the circuits of industrial capital formation. These measures, while appearing developmentalist, disproportionately benefited large landholders and deepened class differentiation in the countryside.

The late 1970s crisis marked the exhaustion of this accumulation model and paved the way for the neoliberal turn inaugurated by the January 24th 1980 Decisions. Under IMF tutelage and with the enthusiastic support of domestic capital, the institutional edifice of ISI was dismantled. Agriculture was stripped of its protective scaffolding and subjected to market discipline, with the state reconstituted as the guarantor of market rationality rather than a developmental agent.

Neoliberal restructuring unfolded in successive waves: the Motherland Party era, characterised by privatisation and subsidy retrenchment; the financial liberalisation of 1989, which reoriented accumulation toward rentier and financial capital; and the 1994 crisis, which further entrenched IMF-World Bank stabilisation orthodoxy. From the 2000s onward, the Transition to a Strong Economy Program, the Agriculture Law (2006), and other

neoliberal legislative frameworks reinforced these transformations. While Türkiye's agricultural sector experienced increased integration into global markets and heightened import activity for certain commodities, aggregate data indicate that the country maintained a net-exporter status for key agricultural products (See Ministry of Trade, 2023: 8). These trends reflect structural adjustments and selective vulnerabilities rather than an outright "liquidation" of the agricultural sector or the wholesale dismantling of smallholder production. Nevertheless, the policies did contribute to a reconfiguration of the agrarian economy, with transnational capital and large-scale agribusiness increasingly shaping market dynamics and sectoral priorities.

This historical trajectory demonstrates that agriculture has been recast as a fully market-mediated sector, structurally dependent on global value chains, and increasingly stripped of its social, ecological, and strategic functions. Employment contraction, deepening rural poverty, rising import dependence, and the erosion of food sovereignty have emerged as structural outcomes of this neoliberal reordering.

Yet agriculture is not infinitely malleable. Its embeddedness in ecological systems, its centrality to food security, and its socio-political significance as a locus of rural life constitute enduring limits to commodification. While the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war highlighted potential vulnerabilities in global food supply chains, there is currently no conclusive data indicating that these events directly caused widespread disruptions in Türkiye's domestic agricultural production. Nevertheless, these global shocks underscore the structural sensitivity of agriculture to international market volatility, illustrating the importance of policies that enhance domestic resilience and safeguard food security.

Thus, the future of Turkish agriculture necessitates careful reconsideration of its policy framework. Strengthening the link between the state and producers through measures that stabilise rural incomes, maintain strategic support mechanisms, and promote sustainable production remains essential for enhancing the resilience and stability of the sector. While Türkiye has historically implemented support policies both directly via central government programs and indirectly through State Economic Enterprises, the long-term effectiveness of these measures has varied across crops and regions. Consequently, future policy interventions should be grounded in empirical assessments of past support programs, aiming to balance market incentives with the structural needs of domestic agriculture and broader food security goals.

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