

The Case of Local Administration in Turkey Within the Perspective of Participatory Democracy

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Abstract:

Today, democracy and local governments are emerging as concepts that are handled together. There is widespread belief that local governments, which meet the socioeconomic and cultural needs of the individuals in the local community and provide public goods and services at the local level, are the basic institutions of democratic organization.

With Turkey becoming the candidate country of the European Union in 1999 and the beginning of full membership negotiations in 2005, legal changes that will strengthen the local autonomy have accelerated. Local democracy does not even settle in Turkey, apart from the weakness of local governments and local autonomy. Although Turkey has signed the 'European Charter of Local Self-Government' in the EU harmonization process, it is clear that local democracy and local autonomy can not develop at the point where local awareness does not exist, although various policies are under the local government reform.

Keywords: *Local Administration, participatory democracy, European Union Membership of Turkey*

Introduction

The concepts most commonly spoken in today's information age, where the classical nation-state form has undergone great change, are 'globalization' and 'localization'. In the age of globalization, the forms of nation-state undergo a great transformation, while the irony of localization, which seems like an anti-globalization concept, is gaining strength.

Localization means that the elements that play a role in the development of a country are carried out by a large extent of local power and dynamics. So at this point, it can be argued that the development dynamics of the country are largely dependent on local forces (Eryılmaz, 1995: 90).

In general, decentralization is used for the definition of localization. In a modern sense, decentralization refers to the transfer of some of the authorities in the monopoly of the central government – fields of security, justice, cultural services, education, healthcare - to local governments. (Çelik et al., 2008: 87). While decentralization has reduced the burden on the central government, local authorities have been strengthened in order to provide much more efficient service from the other side. In today's democracies, it is important that the central state power is transferred to the local governments and that civil society organizations take much more initiative in matters related to local government.

Concepts of Local Democracy and Local Autonomy

Along with globalization, the strictly decentralized nation-state structure is weakening while trying to create a new source of legitimacy through the means of participatory democracy at the local level. In today's world, "participatory democratic understanding" is more accepted, as non-governmental organizations and individuals are more active in the decision-making process and they take more initiative in the political arena.

In this new understanding, local governments are regarded not only as effective service producing units but also as political and democratic governing bodies (Eryilmaz, 1995: 90). In this context, local governments can be redefined as public institutions, where citizens' relations with public authorities are carried out directly and citizens take initiative in the decision-making process.

In today's globalizing world, two points of presence of local governments come to the forefront. The first is the effective provision of local public services in the context of local autonomy. In other words, public services should be delivered to the citizen from the first hand and local governments should be equipped with certain authorities for this purpose.

The second is to encourage people to actively participate in the management of public affairs in the context of local democracy and to promote a democratic understanding that promotes participation.

Two important parts of the locality, 'local Democracy' and 'local Autonomy' are often confused. Although these two terms are closely related to each other, they express different concepts. 'Local Autonomy' separates 'local Democracy' from the point of independence from the central government, freedom to perform certain acts, and reflection of local identity in the official domain. (Pratchett, 2004: 358). In order for this difference to be better understood, it would be useful to examine the concepts of 'local Democracy' and 'local Autonomy' in detail.

Localization and Local Democracy

It is difficult to talk about a definite content and clear definition of the concept of democracy. However, with its classical meaning, democracy is expressed as the rule of the people. Today, democracy and local governments are emerging as concepts that are handled together. There is widespread belief that local governments, which meet the socioeconomic and cultural needs of the individuals in the local community and provide public goods and services at the local level, are the basic institutions of democratic organization (Pustu, 2005: 121).

According to J.S.Mill, a prominent advocate of representative democracy, one of the indispensable institutions of a democratic state system is local governments. According to Mill; Local administrations provide citizens with the opportunity to participate in the administration while at the same time functioning as a school of politics and educating the people in the context of democratic rights struggle (Mill, 2000: 178). J. S. Mill put forward the idea of democracy as a result of the investigation of American administrative system. One of the most important advantages of the American political system, according to him, is that the political will is not concentrated in one center. In this way, the strong structure of local governments gives self-confidence to the citizens and enables them to reach a political dimension that can manage themselves by resolving the common problems at the local level (Yayla, 1998: 53-64). According to Mill, the less information, and experience in politics, the more difficult it is to reconcile. The resulting solutions are also so sharp that it creates an unhealthy model for both individuals and society. According to him, citizens' participation in governance allows them to better understand the political decisions and the political decision-making process, making it easier to settle their obligation to law. Because, if concepts that are not meaningful in the mind have no function in the life of the individual, it is difficult to find the application field (Mill, 2000: 178).

Local governments are the administrative units in which the closest relationship with the citizen is established. The principle of self-governance in local governments is accompanied by the principle of participation. It is possible that democracy can become operative and sustain its existence in a stable manner by increasing public participation in the political process. For this reason, it is important to remember the democratic and participatory understanding of local government for the development and consolidation of democracy. To be expressed in a short way, it can be said that "local governments are institutions that allow democracy to spread from the public base to the management summit".

D. M. Hill argues that democracy is about tools, not goals. According to Hill, local democracy requires democratization of the local government system. Local democracy; The adoption of democratic values by local

governments, and the participation of people in decision-making processes either directly or through their representatives. Another essential element of local democracy is the necessity of processing the political processes in the local area in a way that everyone can see, not hidden (Pustu, 2005: 128). The recent dynamics of globalization and regionalization have weakened the means of representative democracy that J.S. Mill and D.M. Hill have expressed in defining local democracy. The negativities created by the concept of representative democracy at national and local levels have brought the concept of participatory democracy to the forefront.

It can be said that the understanding of participatory democracy is a reformist quality rather than revolutionary. Participatory democracy, in practice, has largely assumed the role of creating a more democratic society in its functioning and filling the gaps in the political arena which are created by the representative democratic approach. One of the main criticisms of the liberal representative democracy is concerned with its form. Politics through political parties led to the existence of a group of elites who functioned politically professional politicians. This leads to an inadequate representation of masses or no representation at all. Preventing the participation of individuals into the political and administrative sphere leads to the birth of a typology of a passive citizen. Another criticism of the representative democracy is the neglect of democratic building and practices in economic, social and cultural spheres, focusing only on the administrative and political spheres (Yilmaz, 2008: 43).

The incuriousness of the people to the political process has an effect of reducing the legitimacy of political decisions and political institutions. As a matter of fact, 43% of the electoral participation rate in the European Parliament elections held in June 2009 and 2014 is a sign that the representative democracy has weakened (Kaymaz, 2014: 2). Just as Rousseau, the creator of the concept of participatory democracy, advocates the direct involvement of the people in the decision-making process, as well as raising public awareness (Rousseau, 1987: 109), it also serves as a political school for the people. This democracy model actively participated by the people at the local level will contribute to the consolidation of democracy at the national level as long as it can be implemented. In the context of the relationship between democracy and local government, democracy can be considered as a process in which conflicting interests are reconciled. So that, elected local governments require special importance and emphasis as the most important democratic institution at the local level (Pratchett, 2004: 361).

The concept of local democracy, which is shaped in the direction of globalization and regionalization trends, takes place in international documents and contracts. There are three important documents about local democratic rights:

1-) The first of these is the 1985- European Charter of Local Self-government. The main theme of the Charter is the strengthening and dissemination of the understanding of autonomous local government by ensuring the participation of all citizens in the process of submitting local public services.

2-) Another important document is the European Union agreement signed in 1992 in Maastricht. In this document, the principle of better representation of local communities in decision-making processes, as well as the provision of public services at the closest level to the public, has come to the forefront.

3-) Another important document is the European Urban Charter. This declaration covers the following; Increasing the quality and effectiveness of local services, creating economic and socio-cultural opportunities for the local people, increasing the political consciousness of the local people and ensuring active citizen participation in the political process (Yıldırım,1994:153-154)

Local Autonomy

The concepts of local democracy and local autonomy are often perceived as the same thing. However, local democracy is a broader concept that also includes local autonomy. The prerequisite for local democracy is the existence of an autonomous local government structure. It is a necessity in terms of democracy that local governments must have autonomous governance as a place where politics occurs and where various interests conflict and reconcile (Pratchett, 2004: 162). Therefore, 'local autonomy' should include the right of sovereignty on certain issues, even if not all of the administrative activities at the local level. During the use of this sovereignty, it is important for the local governments to carry out their activities independently from the central government in order to carry out democracy in a healthy way (Practhett, 2004: 362).

However, the concept of local autonomy should not be confused with concepts such as political independence and sovereignty. The rights and authorities of local governments are different from the rights and authorities that federated states have in a federal state structure. Local governments are not partners in the sovereign right of the state. Their lack of legislative and judicial power is also the leading evidence of their lack of sovereignty (Keleş, 1982: 412).

A summary of Pratchett's various definitions and concepts of local autonomy will be useful as to what should be understood from local autonomy. Pratchett summarized the views on local autonomy in three articles.

a) According to the first view, 'local autonomy' can be defined and analyzed as independence from the central government. This approach refers to the sharing of legal and constitutional power between the center and the local government. At this point, local autonomy is primarily conceptualized as independence from the central government. According to G.L. Clark, who

advocated this view (1994); Local autonomy is basically based on two principles; taking initiative and immunity (p.195-200). 'Taking initiative' is the power to perform; 'Immunity' includes that actions can be made independently of the pressures and oversight of the central government (Pratchett, 2004: 363).

b) This view is important in that it shows that there may be various 'local autonomy' degrees within certain government models. According to this view, local governments, even if they are included in extended constitutional, legal, political and economic constraints, can effectively perform actions in their own regions. This view refers to the power of the local governments to influence the policies of the central government rather than the independence of the local governments from the central government. Given this emphasis, it may be called an incomplete understanding because it discounts the central government's oversight and pressure on local governments (Pratchett,2004:366).

c) The third opinion recognizes the formation and development of local consciousness through political and social interaction as local autonomy. According to this understanding, local autonomy does not strengthen or weaken according to the influence and pressure of the central government. However, they are strengthened or weakened according to the interactions in social life. At this point, much importance is attached to social activities and social awareness. The main idea of this view is as follows; 'Local autonomy' is strengthened when the local people who are aware of their autonomy defend their self-management right. This understanding of local autonomy combines 'local autonomy' with 'participatory democracy'. Local autonomy emphasizes not only the elected local government and its policies but also sociocultural and sociopolitical connections (Pratchett,2004:366).

Regarding the third view, a survey of local governments in Turkey has found supportive findings. In this research, it is determined that the local consciousness of the people in Turkey is very low and the reasons for this have been revealed. One of the most interesting findings of the research is that although people are not satisfied with the local government services, they do not react to this situation and should not be present in the public authorities. The main cause of this unresponsiveness is the belief that something will not change as a result of the complaint to be made. In addition, elements such as low public involvement and interest in the local government policies, lack of open channels to participate, and lack of representation of local people precisely in local elections are preventing the formation of local awareness in Turkey (Koseck and Sagbas, 2004: 379).

These findings show that local democracy does not even settle in Turkey, apart from the weakness of local governments and local autonomy. Although Turkey has signed the 'European Charter of Local Self-Government'

in the EU harmonization process, it is clear that local democracy and local autonomy can not develop at the point where local awareness does not exist, although various policies are under the local government reform.

Conclusion

Local governments are seen as the most appropriate institutions for democratic understanding in the 21st century. In order to transform local governments into effective and efficient service-producing governance institutions, the importance of basing democratic values on the structure of local governments is constantly emphasized. The modern local government structure, which enables local people to participate in the decision-making process, is clear that it will be able to carry out public services effectively and efficiently. In addition, it reinforces democracy by making a significant contribution to the development of democracy at the national level. For this reason, there is a tendency for local governments in Western countries to increase participation in the decision-making process and to strengthen local autonomy.

In parallel to European democracies, Turkey began to issue new laws in order to improve local autonomy just after signing European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1988. With Turkey becoming the candidate country of the European Union in 1999, and the beginning of full membership negotiations in 2005, legal changes that would strengthen the local autonomy have accelerated. However, the main problem in Turkey at the point of 'local autonomy', which is an integral part of local democracy, is the weakness of the local consciousness.

The main obstacles to the formation of locality consciousness in Turkey are; the channels of entry of the local people into the political decision-making process are closed, the representation in the local assemblies does not overlap with the expectations of the people, the local assemblies are weaker than the mayor, the local people do not trust the local administrations (Koseck and Sagbas, 2004).

These shortcomings also appear in the national context as obstacles to the development and consolidation of democracy. Indeed, in many types of research conducted at the national scale, the fact that the political institutions are in the lowest rank in the order of the most reliable institutions in Turkey shows that participatory democracy does not develop in Turkey. In other words, citizens are alienated from the political system in which they are not actively involved and do not know how to operate.

In order to develop democratic consciousness and locality awareness, it is necessary to develop local democracy at first hand and ensure active participation of the local people in decision-making process. With such operation of participatory democracy, it is clear that the democratic

consciousness of the citizens will increase. The fact that the citizens have the power to make decisions about their own issues with the opening of the channels of participation in the local policy process will contribute to the solution of social polarization and tensions in Turkey.

As a result, awareness of the local people and the provision of local political participation through democratic means will contribute to the development of democracy at the national level. At the point of increasing the awareness of locality in Turkey and consolidation of democracy with the facilitation of participation, the following suggestions can be passed:

a-) Citizens' interest can be increased by the active use of social media, especially regarding the activities of local governments.

b-) Non-governmental organizations, universities, city councils, associations should be actively involved in municipal assemblies. Even if these institutions are not given the right to vote, they should be able to monitor and present their opinions in parliamentary sessions.

c-) Communication channels should be established for ordinary citizens who are not members of any civil society organization so that their views and wishes can be communicated to the local authorities. In this context, it is important to organize regular meetings where the local government administrators can communicate the requests of the residents of the neighborhood.

d-) Urban transformation projects must be passed on in order to avoid the slum dwelling that may be an obstacle to local consciousness. Social and health benefits should also be provided to low-income citizens who need assistance in the context of social policies.

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