

11 YEARS OF JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY GOVERNMENT: FACTS AND PROSPECTS¹

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Abstract

This article analyzes the performance of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in areas of economy, politics, public administration and social policy since its introduction to the government in 2002. The research conducted for this purpose show that the JDP has been highly successful in all these areas. In economy, the JDP has recorded an economic growth rate over 5 % with a sizable increase in the GDP per capita from around 3000 USDs to over 11000 USDs. Successive reform packages brought fundamental changes in areas of human rights, Kurdish issue and civil-military relations. With all the legal changes introduced on political party closure; freedom of belief, conscience and thought; civil and criminal law; and social and cultural rights, the JDP has proved to be a party of human rights and democracy. Particularly the ability of the JDP to persuade the PKK to quit arms as part of a peace process negotiated has been appreciated by all domestic and international actors. In public administration, the JDP has made a strong commitment to change traditional ways in favor of governance model which incorporates the state, civil society and individuals to the processes of decision making and implementation. The JDP's record of performance in social policy was not less than any of these with the huge budget and new programs allocated for health, education, social security, employment and social benefits.

Keywords: Justice and Development Party, Turkish Politics, Turkish Economy, Democracy, Human Rights,

11 YILLIK AKP YÖNETİMİ: GERÇEKLER VE BEKLENTİLER

Özet

Bu makale 2002'de hükümete geldiğinden bu yana Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin (AK Parti) ekonomi, siyaset, kamu yönetimi ve sosyal politika sahalarında gösterdiği performansı incelemektedir. Yapılan araştırmalar AK Parti'nin bütün bu sahalarda çok başarılı olduğunu göstermektedir. AK Parti'nin 2002'den bu yana devam eden iktidarlar silsilesi döneminde ekonomide ortalama % 5 üzeri bir büyüme kaydedilmiş ve kişi başına düşen milli gelir 3000 USD civarından 11000 USD civarına yükselmiştir. Birbiri ardına meclisten geçirilen reform paketleri insan hakları, Kürt meselesi, ordu-siyaset ilişkisi vs gibi sahalarda çok önemli değişiklikleri hayata geçirmiştir. Parti kapatma; inanç, vicdan ve düşünce özgürlüğü; medeni hukuk ve ceza hukuku; sosyal ve kültürel haklar gibi konularda hayata geçirilen reformlarla AK Parti bir insan hakları ve demokrasi partisi olduğunu kanıtlamıştır. Ayrıca yürütülen barış süreci neticesinde PKK'nın silah bırakmayı kabul etmesiyle AK Parti ulusal ve uluslararası camianın beğeni ve takdirini kazanmıştır. Yerel yönetimler sahasında geleneksel yönetim anlayışından devlet, sivil toplum ve bireyleri yerel yönetimlerde karar alma ve uygulama süreçlerine dahil etme gayesini taşıyan yönetim anlayışına geçişe doğru ciddi başarılar kaydedilmiştir. AK Parti'nin sosyal politika sahasındaki performansıyla sağlık, eğitim, sosyal güvenlik, istihdam ve sosyal yardımlar için tahsis edilen devasa bütçe ve programlarla diğerlerinden geri kalmamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Türk Politikaları, Türkiye Ekonomisi, Demokrasi, İnsan Hakları

1. Introduction

This paper scrutinizes the performance of the JDP in economy, politics, public administration and social policy. The research conducted for this purpose shows that the JDP has displayed an outstanding performance to become one of the best parties in the history of Turkish Republic maybe. In economy, since taking the government office in 2002, an average 5.4 % growth rate is recorded despite the global economic crisis that hit the globe in 2008. In the same period, the GDP per capita rose from around 3000 USDs to over 11000 USDs bringing Turkey very close to the category of countries with high income level. In the same period, the inflation rate has always remained under 10 % as a phenomenon unprecedented in last 50 years in Turkey. And the national debts experienced a proportional decline from 38 to 23 % of the GDP in this period. The decline in the proportion of public debts was even more striking with a fall from 25 to 0.6 % of the GDP. In the political sphere, the JDP has introduced plenty of reforms by removing monetary fines in favor of prison sentences to acts of torture, requiring the presence of clear and imminent danger against public good for the denial the right to

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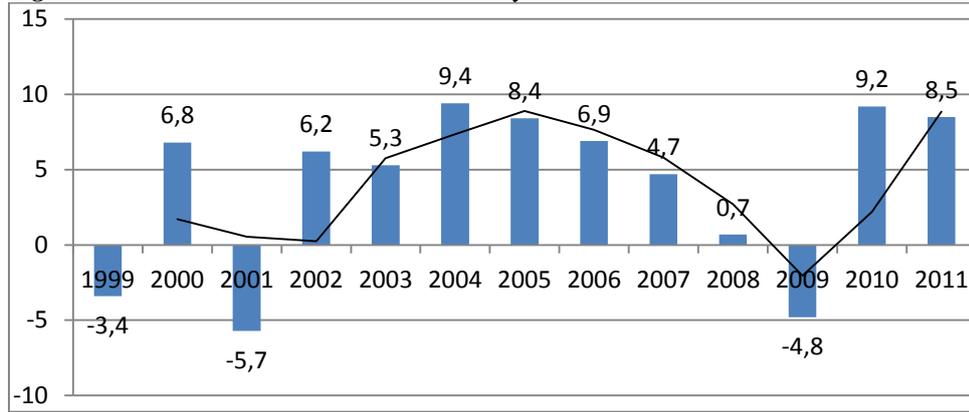
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assembly and protest, removing all prison sentences for crimes committed by the press in favor of monetary fines, abolishing the death penalty (in area of human rights); by persuading the PKK to stop armed assaults in return for the recognition of various linguistic, social and cultural rights (in the area of Kurdish issue); by breaking the authority of the military in politics through the changes made in the structure and powers of the National Security Council and military courts, and abolishing the state of emergency administration in the Southeast and the East (in the area of civil-military relations). In public administration, the JDP introduced a plenty of changes similarly towards the transformation of classical public administration approach with the contemporary governance approach that integrates the central government, municipal governments, civil society and the private sector into the processes of decision making in municipalities. JDP has endeavored to turn the municipal governments to more participatory, accountable and transparent administrative units. In social policy too, lastly, the JDP has made substantial improvements in the areas of health, education, social security, employment and disabled people to become one of the greatest source of its electoral appeal for many. With the reforms, the private hospitals are opened to public use with a small cost, all segments of the society are taken in the coverage of health insurance, the barrier against the vocational schools in university entrance exam is removed, the civil servants are given the rights for syndication among many other big and small changes.

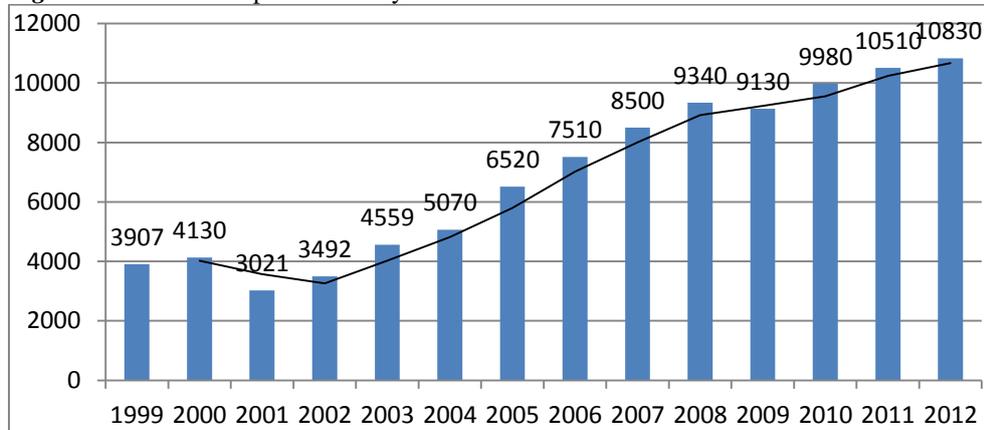
2. JDP Government in Economy

Between the years 1990 and 2002, Turkish economy was troubled with low levels of economic growth, high amount of national debts, income disparity and high inflation. Turkish economy did not promise much confidence and certainty to domestic and international investors (Şahin, 2011: 217-222, 233-238). Getting to the government in 2002 with a majority of seats in the parliament, the JDP declared its priority as the rescue and recovery of the Turkish economy as the most urgent perceived problem of the country. The JDP adopted neo-liberalism as its major economic policy line. While the party believed in the effectiveness and efficiency of economic liberalism to give desired results, the party has also been under pressures from the EU for the purpose before the start of the accession talks. The JDP thus initiated a massive privatization campaign starting first with the sale of those public enterprises which were not able to make profit for decades. The JDP had the motivation to minimize the role of the state in the economy. The most needed public investments were now to be given to the private sector with a build-operate-transfer system to keep the public expenditures at a low. While providing the Treasury with a sizable source of income and also saving the present reserves, the new economic campaign of the JDP contributed to a more rational functioning of the economy (Karluk, 2009: 293-295).

The government gave an even more serious attention to the problems of the banking system, which was the major cause of the 2001 economic crisis. The banking system is substantially restructured to prevent a potential financial collapse. The rehabilitation of the banking system served substantially to the prospects of investment in the country for the investors are now provided with a stable capital source (Turkish Ministry of Finance, 2010: 139-144). With Turkish economy gaining competitiveness this way, promising greater confidence and the interest rates gradually decreasing, the country started to attract greater amounts of foreign and domestic investment. The JDP government has achieved an average 5.4% growth rate per annum since its introduction to the government in 2002 (See Figure 1). Considering the successive economic crises hitting the country since 1990s and minus growth rates, that is a tremendous achievement. There is an even more remarkable rise in the income level at the same period. While the GDP per capita was 3021 USDs in 2001, it rose up to 10.830 USDs in 2012 to bring Turkey very close to the level of high income countries of the north (See Figure 2).

Figure 1: Growth Rate of the Turkish Economy: 2002-2012

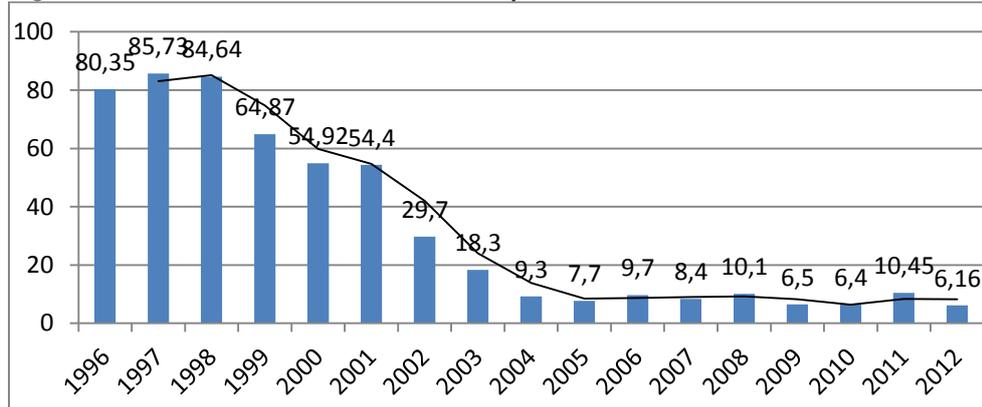
Source: Turkish Institute of Statistics (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu)

Figure 2: GDP Per Capita in Turkey: 1999-2011

Source: World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/country/turkey>); Turkish Institute of Statistics

The JDP's management of the economy reflected positively on the rates of inflation over the years. Turkey suffered high rates of inflation in 1990s for a number of reasons which include economic and political instability, high rates of interest, depreciation of the Turkish currency, high amounts of the public expenditures and debts rising particularly during the election periods. While the demand side of the economy remained high, the supply side was not able to meet up with it (Karluk, 2009: 402-403; Şahin, 2011: 212-222). The JDP's leading instrument of economic liberalization, privatization, contributed to the reasonable management of the economy by rationalizing its functions and minimizing the role of the state in the economy. The campaign contributed to the Treasury as well by providing it with a sizable revenue gate. But more importantly, it was the political and ensuing economic stability that the JDP achieved to make the greatest contribution to the reduction of the inflation. The JDP has also used the Central Bank very expediently to respond to the developments in the economy to support the goal to keep the commodity prices at a stably low level (Karagöl, 2013: 35-38). The result was a distinguishing success as far as the rate of inflation is concerned. First time in last 34 years, the rate of inflation was brought to a one-digit level in 2004 to remain almost so up until today (See Figure 3).

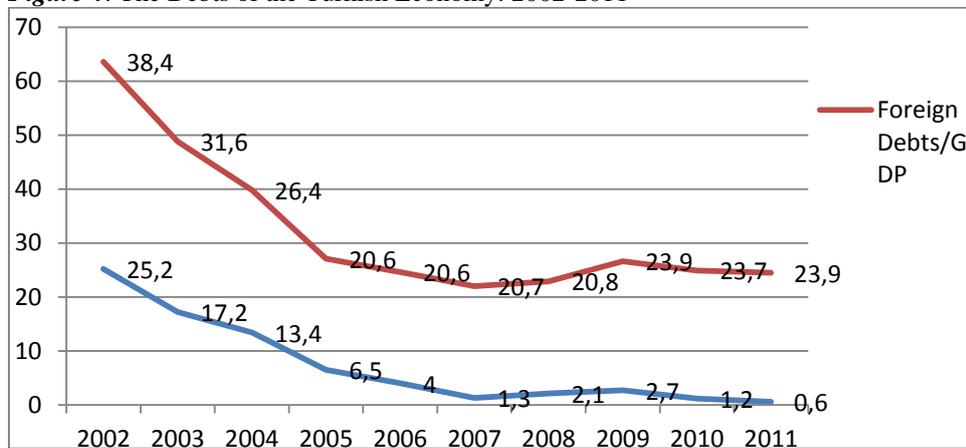
Figure 3: Rate of Inflation in Turkish Economy 1996-2012



Source: Turkish Institute of Statistics

The recovery of the economy contributed to the powers and capabilities of the Central Bank substantially. The Central Bank made use of the opportunity to increase its foreign currency and gold reserves to primarily employ it in the regulation of the economy again. In 2002 when the JDP was introduced to the government, the reserves of the Central Bank amounted to 28.2 billion USDs. But in 2012, the amount rose up to 122.1 billion USDs. The reserves of the Central Bank served as an instrument of certainty and confidence towards domestic and foreign investors to add further to the chances of the Turkish economy. The rise in the amount of reserves of the Central Bank has been of particular importance for the feeding of the national debts which appeared to be the most important problem of the Turkish economy for decades. The national debts of the country remained as a major impediment against the economic development of Turkey. It worked as a discouraging factor against the investors for the government was motivated to finance the debts with a rising rate of taxes on investment and exports (Yavuz, December 2009: 210-217). The debts were thus a major source of decline in the tax revenues of the country. The chances of the Central Bank to finance the debts were further exacerbated with the depreciation of the Turkish currency and the rise of the interests. But with its successful management of the economy, the JDP has boosted the reserves of the Central Bank since the first year of its presence in the government. By successfully employing the reserves in debt payment, the Central Bank scaled down the rate of national debts substantially. While the rate of foreign debts to the GDP was 38.4 % in 2002, it fell down to 23.9 % in 2011. The rate of the public foreign debts to GDP, on the other side, fell from 25.2 % to 0.6 % in the same period (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: The Debts of the Turkish Economy: 2002-2011



Source: Turkish Treasure Department. Foreign Debts Statistics

3. JDP Government in Political Sphere

3.1. Reforms in Areas of Human Rights

The JDP has set out to its political journey with an ambitious goal to develop Turkey's human rights records. Before the rise of the JDP to power, the weaknesses in human rights records were a major subject of critique and condemnation against Turkey to trouble its course of relations with regional and global actors. It was indicated very often by EU progress reports and leading US officials that Turkey had to pay greater respect for human rights as a precondition for genuine integration to the western community. The efforts paid by the JDP to improve Turkey's record of human rights have been beyond a couple of legal changes to improve the profile of the country in front of the international community substantially. The JDP has turned Turkey from a country of troubles to a model country for the Muslim world and developing countries. Since its introduction to the government, the JDP has introduced dozens of reforms in various areas of human rights including freedom from torture and maltreatment, right to meeting and demonstration, freedom of press, freedom of travel among many others all of which have been appreciated by the western community as it could be observed in the progress recorded in EU integration process

Weaknesses in prosecution and punishment of torture cases were one of the most serious concerns about the human rights records of the country before the JDP. A lot many cases were opened against Turkey in the European Court of Human Rights to impair the profile of the country among the international community. Cases were opened with accusations of torture and maltreatment in Turkey, but while some of them were closed down due to erosion of time, some others went unpunished for unknown reasons. With changes made by the JDP in articles 243 and 245 of the Turkish Criminal Code, which brought the torture cases into the category of urgent and priority cases, a major step is taken against their fall due to time erosion. With this change, the period of delay for the start of torture cases is reduced to 30 days to be proceeded during the period of judicial recess as well. The changes in the relevant articles has broadened the scope and definition of the torture too to cover some actions which were not previously considered in this category. And even more importantly, more severe punishments are brought to acts of torture once proved by the court. While some acts of torture were punished with monetary fines in the past, now all has been turned to prison sentences.

A category of freedom that the JDP is criticized a lot, the right to meeting and demonstration, has been substantially improved in legal and practical by the JDP Governments terms compared to the past. This particular right was suspended in an abrupt manner by the authorities very easily. With the changes introduced, however, the cancellation of this particular right is limited to cases of "clear" and "immanent" danger against public good and safety only. And also the period of cancellation of this particular right is shortened (Law No. 2911, Article 17).

Falling in the category of freedom of thought and expression, the right to meeting and demonstration is further improved by some parallel reforms in the area of freedom of press. The previous law on the freedom of press included such sanctions as the closure of the publisher companies, collection or appropriation of press machines, and prison sentences in case of the abuse of the right. The changes in the relevant law have removed all these sanctions, however. Now under no circumstances can the press be closed or deprived of its press machines or subjected to imprisonment as far as its staff is concerned. Now all these punishments are turned to monetary fines. The press has also been provided with a new right to hide the identities of the sources of news obtained.

A comparatively less important improvement has been introduced regarding the freedom of travel particularly in international travels. The previous law authorized some "administrative units" to stop exits from the country as it was seen necessary without any need for a verdict by a court. With the changes introduced, however, administrative units are no longer permitted to prevent exits from the country except with a verdict by a court. The changes narrowed the scope of the prohibition as well according to which only a criminal prosecution could provide an excuse for such an act.

Apart from those changes given above, the JDP has introduced some new rights and freedoms as well including the right to make direct application to the constitutional court for violations of human right, the right to join in syndicates and collective bargaining to civil servants; the abolition of death penalty from the Criminal Code, and continuation of the status of parliamentary representatives in cases of the closure of their parties.

3.2.Kurdish Opening

JDP's most praised contribution to Turkish sociopolitical and economic life is for many its achievement to persuade the PKK to cease its operations in Turkey in return for some rights and liberties given to the Kurdish citizens of the country. As a consequence of a process of dialogue and communication maintained through indirect channels, the PKK has agreed to leave out of Turkey and suspend its operations for an indefinite period of time. The opening has brought an end to the decades old state of terror which took more than thirty thousand lives by far not to mention the socioeconomic situation of Eastern and Southeastern Turkey competing with least developed countries in the world. The termination of the PKK problem promises development for the region as well as national economic growth as a major gate of public expenditure is in the process of major downsizing.

The long-wanted peace has been achieved only with superb values and principles adopted by the JDP as well as distinguished political skills and devotion of the party leadership. While assuming a tough posture on the non-negotiability of Turkish borders, the JDP has been in full support of the Kurds and other ethnic groups enjoying their social, cultural and political rights. The JDP's emphasis on the common religious and historical ties with the Kurds and its willingness to recognize the Kurds as a different nation has been well received by the Kurdish people of the country as could be observed in the high rates of votes JDP takes in the problematic region. The rights and liberties granted to the ethnicities living in the country as a reward for peace could be cited as follows.

According to the previous laws, all the names given to the villages, towns and such units were supposed to be in Turkish as well as the names given to children of Kurdish parents. This was a source of resentment for non-Turkish citizens of the region for all those historically used non-Turkish names had to be changed. For many people in the region, this was interpreted as an official campaign for Turkification with a denial of other cultures and languages in the region. With the democratization package introduced by the JDP, this limitation has been abandoned legalizing the employment of non-Turkish names for mentioned administrative units. The people are now free to name their children with names they historically used. It is also permitted to use non-Turkish names for such public institutions as schools, museums and similar centers.

Further to these, the democratization package has provided the Kurds and other non-Turkish speaking citizens with the opportunity to learn their language, culture and history through public and private schools opened. Some universities were already introduced with departments and graduate schools of Kurdish language and literature in 2009 before the democratization package and now certain famous pieces of Kurdish literature are taken to publication by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

An equally important change brought by the democratization package has been the removal of the ban on the use of non-Turkish languages in TV and Radio broadcasting. While permitting private companies to run TV channels in Kurdish and other languages, a number of channels are opened by the state-sponsored Turkish Radio and Television institution in Kurdish and Arabic with periodical use of some other languages too. The package removed the ban on the use of non-Turkish languages in election campaigns as well to provide regional parties with a greater political freedom in their political activities.

To wrap up the injuries of the years of terror, the JDP Government has introduced a new public fund to compensate the losses of the victims of terrorism from which more than 1 billion USDs is distributed by now. The funds are distributed for loss of life or property, injury and for economic losses caused by displacement. And as a material sign of the desire to normalize the atmosphere in the region, the JDP has urged the armed forces to decrease the number of checkpoints located in many places of eastern Turkey which has been accepted and applied.

3.3.Civil-Military Relations

The specialists of Turkish politics tend to identify Turkey as a democratic country but with some undemocratic powers enjoyed by the military in political life. Regime in Turkey has often been described as a tutelary military regime similar to many of its examples that exist in the Third World. While this was more so before the transfer of the JDP to power, the detection is still the case during the JDP period too to a lesser extent. The prime of the military in Turkish political life traces back to the introduction of the 1961 Constitution prepared under the guide of the junta regime established with the military intervention in 1960. The Constitution licensed the Turkish Armed Forces to protect the country against perceived internal and external threats and

established a National Security Council (NSC) as an office by which the military transmitted its recommended policy line on issues that it saw necessary. The major problem that this situation poses to democratic life in the country is that the military could intervene in politics without the invitation and approval of the public will expressed in the parliament and the government. The military generously enjoyed these rights until the 2000s indeed after which the JDP has started to take steps to minimize the influence of the military in politics. The process is led with the guidance of the EU but it must also be considered as part of the JDP goal to bring about a genuinely liberal democratic regime in Turkey.

After its introduction to the government, the JDP took some radical steps to minimize the powers and authority of the armed forces in civilian life. The leading gate of the armed forces into politics, the National Security Council (NSC), has been introduced with a set of changes for this purpose. The changes first extended the period of NSC meetings from one to two months. Secondly, the provision on the powers of the military members to make strong recommendations to the government is softened. Thirdly, the power of the chief of general staff to recommend the next secretary general of the NSC is transferred to the prime minister. This opened the way for the appointment of a civilian secretary general to the Council transferring the agenda setting power to the civilians in the Council. Fourthly, the number of civilian members to participate in NSC meetings is increased with the addition of deputy prime ministers and minister of justice. Finally, changes in relevant laws disempowered the NSC and the chief of general staff to appoint representatives to Turkish Council of Higher Education, Supreme Council of Radio and Television, and Supreme Board of Communication. This final change meant the occupation of these offices with civilians only without any responsibility to give account to the military for the policies adopted.

A parallel set of changes is introduced regarding the powers and authority of military courts. While the military courts were able to try military and civilian people for crimes of military kind in the past, the JDP Government has taken the civilians out of the judicial domain of military courts. And for crimes of non-military type, the members of the armed forces are now tried by civilian courts. And further to these, while the decisions ruled by the Supreme Military Council were final in the past, they are opened to judicial review.

The reregulation of the state of emergency administration ruling in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey since 1987 is certainly an important change brought by the JDP relating to democratic politics in many ways. The administration is totally abolished by the JDP in 2002 quickly after moving to the government. Before that, the administration was extended 46 times. Administration was a major source of criticism and condemnation against Turkey for many incidents of torture, murder and political mistreatment were left unprosecuted and unpunished in the East and Southeast of Turkey with the excuse of combating terrorism. Some members of the Turkish Armed Forces and the Police were accused of exploiting the excessive powers granted to them to act like a legal mafia organization. The administration had emptied many villages and towns with their dwellers forced to move to bigger and safer residence areas. Many newspapers, magazines and publishers were closed with alleged links with terrorist activities. Without knowing how well it helped combating terrorism, the state of emergency administration had turned the region into an uninhabitable place. The removal of the administration must be considered as a parallel development to the Kurdish opening of the JDP.

Last but not least, the JDP has removed legalized exit guarantees for the military in case of an armed intervention placed to constitution and relevant laws. With this change, the JDP has opened the way for the trial of the perpetrators of the 12th September 1980 military intervention for interrupting the democratic process as well as for hearing the accusations of the victims of the intervention.

4. JDP in Public Administration

4.1. Governance in Turkey

Neo-liberalism and information society have turned to be the major ideology and characteristic of the world societies particularly with the end of the 20th century. The domain of state activism has been minimized with the role of the state being redefined. This process has brought some changes in public administration as well by which the concept of classical public administration has left its place to a new one that prioritizes participation and partnership (Tutum, May-June 1995: 137-138; Köse, 2003: 32). This new concept of public administration is often called as “governance” meaning to govern together with the participation of the citizens, private sector and civil society to all processes of decision-making¹ The concept of “governance” means the transformation of classical ruler and subject relationship to a set of relations by which literally all joins in the process of public administration without leaving anybody in the state of subject (Saylan, 2003).

This process of change had its influence on Turkey as well since late 1980s yet to be interrupted after a period of time. Getting to the government in 2002, the JDP initiated a process of reform in public administration with the name “Restructuring in Public Administration” to speed up the transformation of the classical understanding in public administration to the new “governance” model (Saran, 2004: 212). The JDP has thus been the precursor of the transformation of traditional ways in Turkish public administration (Aslan, 2005).

The most important source of this change appears to be the EU Summit dating December 1999 producing the decision to accept Turkey’s membership application. This led to the introduction of reforms in public administration as well as in many other areas. The content of the reforms included components from governance like transparency, accountability and participation. The greatest role in the adoption of the reforms belongs to the political determination assumed by the JDP. Expectations of the business world, civil society and various other members of the society for quick, efficient and transparent public service have catalyzed the reforms.

4.1.1. Reforms and Regulations Towards Governance in Public Administration

Reforms introduced in the world to replace the traditional public administration with the governance model have been adopted in Turkey too since 1980s. Though interrupted periodically since then, these reforms are taken back to the agenda with the introduction of the JDP in government in 2002. The JDP governments have implemented plenty of reforms and projects in this context. The first step taken in the process was the attempt to bring about a new process of public administration that prioritizes transparency, participation and accountability with a parallel attempt to clean away secrecy and closeness. For this purpose, the government prepared the law numbered 5227 titled “Draft Law on the Reformation of the Major Principles in Public Administration” with an emphasis in its content for governance above all and everything. The draft is approved by the Turkish National Assembly in 2004, but it is returned back to the assembly by the President for revision. The draft didn’t unfortunately turn to law for the assembly did not take it back to its agenda.

Though not turning to law, the understanding of governance that the draft promoted is taken to implementation in different ways. In this context, among the developments achieved by the JDP, we can cite the recognition of the right to ask for information with the law no. 4982 on the Right to Information, the enlargement of the right to petition and complaint with the law no. 4709, the provision of fiscal transparency with the law no. 5018 on Public Financial Administration and Control, establishment of the office of ombudsman with the law no. 6328, establishment of the board of ethics for public personnel with the law no. 5176, and introduction of greater openness and transparency in administration with the draft law on General Administrative Procedures. In addition, with the changes brought with the “E-Transformation Project Turkey” introduced by the JDP in 2004, the reforms initiated by the JDP have been provided with technological support and power (State Planning Organization, 2003). By this way, many silent “e-state” projects started since 1980s have been reinvigorated. And in 2008, for the harmonious integration of all independent e-state projects, “e-State Gate Project” is launched operating from a single headquarter to work on a principle of partnership and cooperation with a national perspective².

The push for reform went on with the restructuring of the council of ministers. While the central government is designed with a more dynamic structure with the reduction of the number of ministries, the municipal governments are also strengthened to match up. Prepared according to the Law of Authority coming to force on 3rd May 2011, the decree-laws dating 8th June 2011 reduced the number of ministries from 37 to 23 by also restructuring the organization, duties and authorities of the ministries. All the state ministries suffering from inefficiency are replaced with more functional and effective ones. Many offices linked to the office of premiership previously are given to the ministries to leave the premiership as an office of coordination mostly.

In addition to these, a lot many other smaller regulations are introduced to eliminate delays in public service. The number and powers of regulatory and auditory offices are increased to strengthen the regulatory role of the state. The state personnel regime is introduced with significant rearrangements. Public Economic Enterprises are introduced with various changes to ensure efficiency and accountability. To promote openness and accessibility in government, the Prime Ministry Center for Communications (BIMER) is established.³ For the citizens to benefit more quickly from public services, the “Identity Number” application is introduced that identifies the citizens with a single number.⁴

The “survey on life satisfaction” is conducted regularly to ensure public satisfaction. Regulations are introduced to enhance service quality⁵. In short, in the EU integration process of JDP’s Turkey, a plenty of reforms are introduced towards the norms and principles of governance in public administration.

4.1.2. Reforms in Municipal Governments for Governance

One of the main purposes of the project “Municipal Agenda 21” prepared on the municipal governments with a global perspective is to materialize “municipal governance” by forming an atmosphere of cooperation among municipal governments, public offices and civil society organizations⁶. City Councils are considered as the most important base to serve this purpose to ensure governance. The city councils established as a product of Municipal Law no. 5393 have been a mechanism of governance that brings the central government, municipal government and civil society organizations together in cooperation (Balaman, January 2010).

In addition, though not falling to its domain of authority, the local governments are fulfilling some educational and health services as a necessity of circumstances which are normally supposed to be met by central administration. In order to formalize this practice, the JDP, in accordance with article 4 of European Charter of Local Self-Government, with an understanding that municipal governments are the major reference of authority in localities, has introduced new arrangements to strengthen the municipal governments in their powers and authority. All these are important developments for a country like Turkey which has a long political tradition of central government (Aslanoğlu, May 2013). The first draft law passing from the parliament in the context of this understanding is the Municipal Law numbering 5215. The purpose of the law is described as the creation of more democratic, participatory, autonomous, efficient and effective municipal governments which recognize greater activism to civil society organizations. But the draft did not turn to law for it is not approved by the president. The efforts for the institution of governance went on with the passing of the Municipal Law numbering 5393, Metropolitan Municipal Government Law no. 5216, Special Provincial Administration Law no. 5302, Municipal Government Unions Law numbering 5355. In addition, by employing the phrases of “produces and gets produced; operates and gets operated,” a special place is allocated for private sector in the provision of public services⁷.

An attempt is made with the Municipal Law Draft numbering 5215 to minimize the “administrative tutelary audition” on municipal governments in pursuit of the article 8 of European Charter of Local Self-Government to make the municipal governments more powerful and independent. But the attempts of the JDP have not been enough to materialize the purpose of reforms explained in Law no. 5215. But all these are normal for countries like Turkey which have long tradition of central government (Kaya, 2010).

4.1.3. Reforms on Civil Society Organizations Towards Governance

The participation and cooperation of civil society organizations in policies of governance is an important necessity. For this reason, the JDP has taken some steps for the strengthening of civil society in Turkey with the policies conditioned by the EU as well. The Draft Law no. 5227 on The Major Principles and Restructuring of Public Administration, which brings a plenty of reforms in the implementation of public administration, envisages the cooperation of the units of public administration with civil society organizations. But as the draft is returned by the president, the JDP has tried to introduce its desired policies by some other means. This has been the case with the process on the civil society organizations as well to lead to the production of various other regulations and policies to ensure the cooperation of civil society in the context of governance.

For instance, the number of representatives by the civil society organizations in Human Rights Boards – such an important set of institutions for rule of law – is increased; Regional Development Agencies are established facilitating civil society activism with the Law no. 5449 on Development Agencies to ensure cooperation among the public sector, private sector and civil society organizations; city councils are established with the Law no. 5393 on Municipal Governments with representatives incorporated from various civil society organizations

4.2. Performance of the Municipal Governments

There are some research activities conducted to test the municipal performance of provinces governed by the JDP. Two of these could be taken under scrutiny here to see how the JDP is doing in municipalities. First one

of these is conducted in 2005 on 41 provinces governed by the JDP to observe the performance of the municipalities for the year 2005. Accordingly, the point that the JDP municipalities receive on average is 64.1 over 100. Specific points are for honesty 65, for transparency 59.7, for closeness to the people 63. Personnel quality is the most successful area of the JDP municipalities with the point 67.5. In addition, the electorate finds the performance of their municipal governors much higher with the point 66.9. The point of honesty taken by the municipal governors is 68.6. This indicates that the average performance of the JDP municipalities is higher than the total average with the people calling for better performance in the middle term. While the electors are generally satisfied with the performance of the JDP, there are no areas that they are 100% satisfied. It is observed that they demand greater performance in each and every area. It is believed that with a more careful and intimate communication with the electors, the JDP municipalities could get even higher points. The JDP municipalities must thus pay more attention to express themselves and address to the perceptions of the people. Eventually, it is the view of the electors which is taken to attention (Uslu, 2010).

The other survey is conducted by Istanbul University named "Istanbul Citizen Report Project." The survey is conducted over 39 counties in Istanbul governed by different parties and it asked questions to the citizens on the services of municipalities. Carried out by an independent research council and funded by World Bank, the survey shows that JDP municipalities are more successful than those occupied by other parties. First 9 of the ten best municipal governments are occupied by the JDP while the Republican Peoples Party has one only in the best ten (Şeker and et. al, 2013). As a consequence, it could be said that especially in Istanbul the JDP has recorded a substantial development according to citizen views since 2005.

5. JDP in Social Policy

Though following a neoliberal political line, it is indicated in JDP party program that those political approaches which don't take the "human" to the center stage are doomed to catastrophe. As part of this thinking, the party program draws an economic program that goes together with a thick content of social policy. For this purpose, it is indicated in the party program that the party will introduce special programs for each and every disadvantaged segment of the society and will unite these programs under the umbrella of a single ministry to provide more efficient and qualified service. The party pledges to ensure the participation of municipal governments, private sector and the civil society to achieve this purpose. Though not reaching to an ideal point in providing the totality of social services maybe, it is possible to say that the party has recorded great achievements in the following areas.

5.1.Social Benefits

The most important problem waiting for the JDP when introduced to the government was the continuation of the effects of 2001 economic crisis (Boratav, 2009: 464). Getting to the government in such a state of affairs, the JDP adopted a comprehensive social policy program shaped on the base of citizenship first time in Turkish history though displaying a liberal outlook. The first step taken in this process was the constitution of a data base including the demographic information of the disadvantaged people (Buğra, 2008: 218). In its aftermath, the party introduced the Law numbering 3294 on the Promotion of Social Cooperation and Solidarity. The Law facilitated the establishment of Social Cooperation and Solidarity Promotion Fund in the body of the office of prime ministry. The fund in turn facilitated the establishment of a network of foundations in cities and counties. In this context, civil society organizations and municipal governments are also incorporated to a process of producing important social benefit programs. Especially the municipal governments held by the JDP have established social benefit funds similar to the one above.

Another social benefit policy is the introduction of "Green Kart" policy to provide health services to citizens who don't have social security in the process to transition to general public health insurance system. In this term, in the context of providing social benefits, the disadvantaged citizens are provided with various benefits with funds received from Social Cooperation and Solidarity Organization including fuel for heating, milk for primary school children, scholarship for children of poor families, martyrs, widows, disaster-hit people, daily food for people of poor regions and so on and so forth.

5.2.Disabled People

The JDP party program assigns a special importance to the education, rehabilitation and nursery of disabled people. It is described as one of the most important priorities of the party to make the disabled people able to

take care of themselves. To achieve this purpose, plans and projects are prepared to provide greater medical, psychological, vocational and social rehabilitation services to disabled people by the state; to encourage the private sector and the civil society organizations to present educational services to them; to promote greater consciousness on the part of the people towards these people, to provide support to those of them who would like to establish their own business; to open nursery houses for them providing services as needed; to improve the specialties of the tools and vehicles used by these people in social security institutions (Güzelgöz, 2011).

In order to attain the goals explained in the party program, the law no. 5378 is produced on 7th July 2005 for disabled people. The law invites the civil society organizations, the private sector and municipal governments to responsibility in addition to the central administration. The law brought criminal punishment to those who discriminate against the disabled people first time yet to be suspended in July 2013. In addition, during the implementation process of the law, educational and rehabilitation services are provided freely to the wealthy and poor disabled people at the same time with some supports received from the private sector as well. The law also provided many disabled people with employment opportunities in public sector. For the integration of the disabled people in the society, various urban transformation projects are initiated by the municipal governments especially. The families of the disabled people are also educated with the “Steps of Hope Project,” and such families are provided with sizable financial assistance if they agree to take care of their patients at home. With campaigns organized for disabled people, the level of social consciousness is enhanced substantially. In addition, regulations provided the disabled people working in private sector with the privilege to have their social security payments provided by the state by also exempting them from customs taxes for special devices they import and also from real estate taxes charged on each house bought.

5.3. Health

Drawing attention to the fact that health service is not a privilege presented by the state but rather a basic human right, the JDP party program indicates that health service is a responsibility that has to be provided by the state in cooperation with the private sector. This approach has produced the “Transformation Program in Health” which brought about revolutionary benefits in health sector. While eliminating the violations in health sector, the Program has introduced many other reforms in the sector. The JDP is thought to owe much of its electoral success to its performance in health sector. This has reflected in citizen satisfaction report with 80 % of the citizens being satisfied with the performance of the government in health sector while the ratio was 39.5 % in 2003 (TÜİK, 2011).

With the “Transformation Program in Health,” institutions of health are united under a single umbrella and such differences as public hospital and private hospital are eliminated. The citizens are now able to use any hospital and buy their medicines from any pharmacy. By introducing the private hospitals into a harmonization process with public hospitals, the government enabled the citizens with the opportunity to use private hospitals as well. The old queues in hospitals and pharmacies have disappeared. The new hospitals are built according to very modern models and all the hospitals are provided with the latest technology in their devices and accessories. In JDP’s tenure in government, 416 health facilities are opened 160 of them being new and the number of baby-friendly hospitals is increased to 513. With ALO 184 Health Ministry Communication Center, the citizens are permitted to reach the ministry of health directly. The Regulation on the Rights of Patients has been redesigned according to world standards and new units of patient rights are established in the hospitals. For the protection of the rights of the patients, there has been introduced a plenty of regulations from the right select the doctor to the right to demand better quality service. Again in line with the Transformation Program in Health and the principle of equanimity, the presentation and the pricing of the health services are differentiated to provide the citizens with the opportunity to benefit from the health services according to their needs but to pay according to their budget. A General Public Insurance System is established and the charges of those without any revenues are met by the state.

As it is introduced significant reforms in basic health services, directories of public and environmental health are established in all cities to promote protective medicine. A sophisticated health system is developed that integrates Family Health Centers with Social Health Centers to provide health services for the individuals and the society in an integrated way. By this way, all family members are assigned with a family doctor. A great progress is made in having the baby deliveries in the hospitals and getting the vaccinations done regularly and completely. All the vaccinations recommended by the World Health Organization are incorporated to the vaccination system and the rate of vaccination has reached over 90 %. In addition, by regulating the payments of the health personnel according to their performance, a great source of service motivation is provided.

There has been some new developments in emergency health care services as well. 112 Emergency Health service and mobile health service started to provide service in rural places. Such specially designed helicoptered emergency health service and snow tracked ambulance service are introduced for the citizens to benefit without paying any charge at harsh climatic and geographic conditions. A new age has started in health care where the patients are taken from their houses to be brought back after the treatment again without any charge. In regular mobile health services, the ratio of service provision has risen from 10 to 99 %.

In addition, by reorganizing the ministry of health, hospitals are provided with autonomy in administrative and financial terms. The long-maintained “Compulsory Service Policy” is abolished and with the new contracted health personnel policy those regions short of health personnel are provided with their personnel needs.

5.4. Education

Considering education as the solution of the problems faced, the JDP assigned a special place to education in its program. It is indicated in the program that the party aims to raise up generations who can think freely, open to change and self-confident. Looking at the performance of the JDP in this area, we can say the following:

With reforms intended to be introduced with Fundamental Law of Public Administration draft, the organizational structure of the Ministry of Education is scaled down by which the organization in back-country regions is transferred to special provincial administrations and the duties of back-country organizations are limited with such general things as the development of educational curriculum and target determination. But due to the reactions received, the government quitted this initiative. In addition to this, another reform is introduced to keep the curriculum of the ministry of education up to date in accordance with the necessities of the time. The government has achieved to allocate the greatest part of the budget for education. Intensive vocational educational programs are initiated for the teachers to rise their qualifications. The government supported private sector activism in all areas of education to increase their share of contribution to the education. With the “Campaign for Support for Computerized Education,” almost all the schools are provided with computers. Schools now accept registration by the internet. A parallel “Fatih Project” is introduced that supports computerized and electronic education by use of modern educational technologies.

First time in Turkish educational life, educational expenditures are exempted from taxation. The ratio of vocational schools is increased and the victimization that they suffer in university entrance exams is terminated. With the campaign named “Girls to School,” 180 thousand female children held away from education by their parents are schooled. The school books of primary and secondary school students are all provided by the state. In this context, the ratio of students in private schools has also increased. Necessary infrastructural designs are made to transform the universities to centers of education and research in a contemporary sense with the number of universities being increased in all Turkey. But the work on the new constitution envisaging fundamental changes in the structure of Council of Higher Education and the universities has unfortunately been abandoned.

Besides, the policy of continuous education is abandoned in favor of a 4+4+4 compulsory educational program to educate the children according to their talents. The ratio of schooling has thus also been increased. But despite the introduction of all those reforms, the major leap expected in education did not take place yet. The major reason for this is thought to be the huge scale of the educational community and non-reformist mentality of the non-elected policy-makers in education. In this context, according to the results of the TIMSS 2012 and PISA 2012 Educational Index, the performance in education is observed to be not so high compared to other countries. In addition, the JDP has come to the point of closing private university training centers with a belief in their damage to educational system. This in turn shows us that educational policies are not applied properly.

5.5. Social Security

Policies concerning the economic and the business world could not have the support from the public and could not be successful if they are not accompanied with relevant social security policies. For this reason, the JDP allocated a special space to save the by far neglected social security in its party program. Accepting social security as a constitutional right, the JDP has been in attempts to introduce a social security system that suits its concept of social state. The first policy adopted in this process was the separation of the social security program

from the provision of health services. In this context, with the Social Security Institutions Law produced in 2006, the Retirement Fund, Social Insurance Institution and the self-employment Retirement Fund are united under a single umbrella in accordance with international contracts and major principles of social security and thus a single Social Security Institution is established.

With the Law on Social Insurance and General Health Insurance produced in 2006, a General Health Insurance System is established and all segments of the society are taken to the coverage of social security. The health insurance payments of the citizens without any revenues are met by the state. In addition to these, private health insurance companies are promoted and they are provided with a rate of their funds by the state. For the improvement of working conditions and social security services of the citizens working abroad, social security agreements signed with these countries are revised. As an important development for the employees, the minimum period of work to be an employee with insurance is reduced from 30 to 17 days.

5.6. Employment Life

A tripartite structure of the workers, employers and the government must operate in social dialogue for the peaceful resolution of the problems faced in work life for its healthy continuation. It is indicated as one of the priorities of the JDP in its party program to contribute to the emergence of such a working life. In this context, for the renovation of the employment legislation according to the necessities of the time and the criteria of International Labor Organization and EU, the new labor legislation is adopted. With this legislation, the termination of the employment contract is conditioned to the presentation of a valid justification by the employer with proofs. In addition, regulations are introduced in employment life to minimize unrecorded employment and to increase the rate of employment. Employment guarantee is put into practice in a way not to frustrate the employees nor the employers, and an unemployment insurance is introduced.

With changes introduced in the law on civil service syndicalism, the civil servants are granted various favorable rights for collective bargaining and establishing syndicates (Law no. 6289). The Law on National Vocational Standards Institution, and National Vocational Standards and Documentation System is introduced to ensure the holders of professions to hold reliable vocational documents. The Employment Institution is redesigned for a more contemporary form. Employees are protected against sexism in their employment life and initiatives are taken to bring about an employment life with respect to the principles of equal pay for equal work and meritocracy.

Important reforms are introduced against the exploitation of child labor by adopting the standards of ILO on child labor. The Law on the Employment Permits of the Foreigners is introduced to regulate the employment permits of the foreigners working in Turkey in accordance with international law and EU policies. In this context, the issues of unrecorded employment and illegal foreign workers have been re-regulated to prevent unfair competition. Taxes applied on minimum wages are gradually reduced. And the employment life is turned more functional with changes brought to Economic and Social Council.

In sum, Günter Seifert, speaking at a talk titled "Elections and Aftermath in Turkey" organized at Hamburg University, argued that "JDP's success in increasing its ratio of votes is closely associated with its success about the middle class." By also saying that "The Turkish people have observed the potential to implement the reforms in JDP," Seifert underlines JDP's projects on health and other areas as the reason for the rise in its votes. With JDP's performance, Seifert maintained that Turkey has been a part of Europe (Seifert, 2011).

6. Conclusion

This paper has investigated the performance of the JDP in the areas of economy, politics, public administration and social policy. The research conducted for this purpose displays that the JDP governments have proven to be a very successful in all these areas to be modeled by many domestic and international parties also. In three terms of government tenure the JDP held since 2002, Turkish economy has witnessed a 5.4 % growth rate with the GDP per capita rising from around 3000 USDs to over 10000 USDs. The national debts fell rapidly in proportional terms to the GDP. In the political sphere, the JDP achieved to persuade the PKK stop its military operations in Turkey to bring an end to the most serious problem troubling the country for more than three decades. With its ambitious goal for Turkey's EU membership, the JDP introduced plenty of reforms in areas of human rights, rule of law, accountability by also cleaning the regime from military tutelage to a great extent. In municipal governments, the JDP launched an ambitious campaign to adopt the governance model with the participation of all possible actors to public administration. In order to minimize potential events of corruption in the municipalities, a plenty of reforms are introduced for transparency, accountability and

participation. In the area of social policy, lastly, reforms are introduced in sectors of health, education, social security, employment and disabled people. The JDP took the private hospitals to the coverage of public insurance, granted the civil servants the rights for membership to syndicates and collective bargaining, removed the legal handicaps against the vocational schools in entrance to universities among many small and big conveniences.

NOTES

¹ The concept of governance is defined by the UN Development Program as the organic integration of the rule of law, participation, pluralism, transparency, flexibility, openness, accountability, localism, effectiveness, efficiency, strategic vision in a single political system.

² <https://turkiye.gov.tr> (Date of Access: 20 January 014).

³ See <http://www.bimer.gov.tr/Forms/pgMain.aspx>

⁴ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kimlik Numarası uygulaması, 29 Nisan 2008 tarihinden itibaren zorunlu oldu.

⁵ The Regulation on Principles of Ethical Behaviors, and the Procedures and Essentials of Application dating 13th April 2005.

⁶ Municipal Agenda 21 is a project ran by the UN Development Program.

⁷ These expressions are for instance employed in articles 14/a and 18/c of the Municipal Law no. 5393.

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