

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **The Decision-making Process the 4+4+4 Reform Law**

The objective of this chapter is to describe and explain the process of law making in education reform in Turkey. In order to explain the law making process, it is important to elaborate several factors that led to decision-making such as interest articulation and interest aggregation, which are the main focus of this chapter. For further understanding, the expectation from the public as well as socio-economic benefits that might be gained from the policy will also be explored throughout this chapter. Thus, the reason of AKP in proposing the education reform bill can be identified.

#### **A. Decision Making Process of the 4+4+4 Reforms Law on Education**

Democracy provides more spaces for political party than any other governmental systems. Political party can be a strategic tool for interest articulation and interest aggregation. Political parties provide the vehicle for the electorate to express itself by accomodating diverse interest groups and offering voters different political options. Representative democracy cannot function properly without the effective practice of political parties. Besides, the AKP has strategic position (benefit) as the ruling party in the government

since ruling parties have far greater resources than opposition parties

The problems surround the education system in Turkey remain persist amidst development that had been made these last decades. As the years gone by, people came to realize that the past educational policies left quite incompatible system with today's Turkey, as the interests of human keep growing. The pressure has become stronger for Turkey that aims to catch up and compete with its European neighbours. Since a change in the system is needed, new policy needs to be implemented.

The AKP put education as its first priority on the vision towards Turkey's centennial in 2023, and has managed to put some efforts for reaching the goal. These efforts have so far been in accordance to its party's programme. A lot has improved since the AKP began to play key role within the government, but there are still many problems left unsolved.

### **A.1. Interest Articulation**

Interest articulation is a process in which people and groups express their needs and demands to the government. It is a process to input various needs, demands and interests through group representatives that are parts of legislative institutions, to be made into government policy. In this case, the ruling party AKP submitted a draft law entitled "Bill on Amending the Primary Education Law and Other Laws" to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT) on February 21, 2012.

The main purpose of the bill was to disqualify primary education from being an uninterrupted basic education program and to establish schools

where different programs could be implemented after the 5th grade. The bill also made it possible to establish secondary schools attached to high schools, there students, after finishing the 5th grade could continue their education in schools that are affiliated with vocational high schools including imam hatip schools (vocational schools to train Islamic clergy). Distance learning and apprenticeship training were also included in these different programs in the first draft of the bill.

The bill, in general, and the possibility to implement distance learning and apprenticeship training at the primary education stage (children between 10-13) stirred controversies among the NGOs that have been working for many years on issues related to the schooling of girls and the prevention of child labor. Organizations such as the Education Reform Initiative (ERI) have issued statements pointing out that the bill is far from capable of introducing regulations that will help the advancement of the educational system in Turkey. Due to the reactions, the National Education Committee of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which met on February 23, 2012 to discuss the bill, decided to establish a sub-committee to rewrite it. The establishment of a sub-committee and signal coming from the ruling party between 23 and 26 February 2012.

The most important reasons put forward by the government were that the eight-year uninterrupted schooling was a monster created by the 28 February 1997 military memorandum regime, it was harmful for 6 year-olds and 12 year olds to attend the same school. International surveys have shown

that the primary education in Turkey lacked the capacity to give students basic life skills. Several NGOs argued it was important to strengthen the primary education and emphasize basic skills to overcome this problem.

The rationale of the bill was suggesting to start vocational education at an early age, as a measure to promote vocational education. While doing so, the text of the rationale defined vocational education as constituting 60 per cent of the secondary education in the EU. Germany was known as a country that owed its success to an early start of vocational education.

The last point put forward in the rationale of the bill was related to the recommendation issued by the National Education Council in November 2010 to divide the education system into different stages. The recommendation was issued on the last day of the Council meeting. Prior to that, the regulations related to the convention and decision making process of the National Education Council had been amended in May 2010 and the proportion of Council members appointed by the Ministry of Education to the total number of members was increased from 60 to 75 per cent.

## **A.2. Interest Aggregation**

Interest Aggregation is a process or activity by which the demands of individuals or groups combined into policy programs. In the case of democratic system, two parties compete to gain support for their alternative policy programs. February 28th saw the parliamentary hearing taken place in

the halls of Parliament. All that criticism was raised by NGO representatives and university deans who attended the meeting of the sub-committee on 28 February argued that the preparations were not mature to divide the educational system into stages and, even if staging were to happen, it should not be to the detriment of the integrity of the program. They also stated that the eight-year uninterrupted basic education had important benefits that should not be given up, for instance, increase in the schooling rate, extension of basic education, and students' confrontation with competitive central examinations at a later age.<sup>67</sup>

The deputies of the ruling party pointed out the possible risks of staging primary education, such as possible reduction of the schooling rate for girls, detachment of children with disabilities from school and increase in discipline related problems. They argued that staging the system did not have anything to do with the quality of education. However, the real development happened in the AKP Group. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, embraced the bill that was proposed as a political party group bill rather than a government draft, and cited the NGOs, especially TUSIAD, which were against the bill, for protecting the heritage of the 1997 military memorandum.

The draft of the sub-committee removed the possibility of distance learning and apprenticeship training in grades 5 to 8 and took the judgment related to compulsory secondary education back from the Council of Ministers. However, the clauses related to the provision of elective courses

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<sup>67</sup> G. S. (11/1/14) 'Turning the education system upside down?' Heinrich Bell Stiftung, pp. 43-45.

based on the skills, interests and capabilities of students in grades 5 to 8, as well as the clauses allowing for different programs and types of schools were made even stronger. Another provision was added to the draft, which would make children start primary education one year earlier.

Meanwhile, the opposition parties in Parliament began to make efforts for a more effective opposition against the bill. The first round of the committee discussions was marked by the 12-hour speech of Engin Özkoç, deputy of the Republican People's Party (CHP). However, the opposition failed to effectively refute the justifications of the bill and to convince different segments of society. When around 100 deputies from AKP wanted to attend the second and last round of meetings, discussions became impossible and probably the fiercest fight in the history of Turkey's Parliament broke out. The chairman of the committee, Nabi Avcı, had the draft read and declared that it would be transferred to the General Assembly.

### **A.3. Decision making**

The parliamentary hearing ended with some 295 of 550 MPs voted for the bill on Friday and 91 opposed it.<sup>68</sup> The bill passed the General Assembly after the addition of several other provisions stipulating that primary education consists of primary school and middle school, each lasting four years; and middle schools can be established together with high schools and as imam hatip middle schools. Another addition was related to the

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<sup>68</sup>'Turkish MPs fight as controversial schools bill passed', *BBC*, 31 March 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-12571121>, consulted 23 November 2013.

introduction of two elective courses – “Koran” and “The Life of Mohammed, the Prophet”- to the middle school curriculum. Following its adoption by Parliament, the bill was also approved by the President of the Republic and entered into force on 11 April 2012.

#### **B. 4+4+4: the Future of Turkey and the Advantages for the AKP**

A survey indicated that more than 70 percent of all high school students in Turkey want their religious education to bring them closer to their own beliefs. Turkish teenagers also want to receive both traditional and modern religious education. The survey on "Religion and Life Perspectives among Adolescents" polling approximately 10,000 high school students from 10 countries and conducted by Germany's Wuerzburg University, reveals teenage expectations of religious education. The teenagers were from Turkey, Germany, the UK, Finland, Sweden, Ireland, Holland, Poland, Croatia and Israel.

The survey provided clues to opinions on religious classes in Turkey, where a debate on compulsory or optional religious education is taking place. More than 70 percent of all high school students in Turkey want their religious education to bring them closer to their own beliefs. Turkish teenagers also want to receive both traditional and modern religious education.

Assistant Professor Recep Kaymakcan of Sakarya University's

the survey was conducted in Turkey. Just over 900

adolescents were chosen from successful high schools in middle-sized cities all over Turkey to answer questions on the approach to traditional and modern religious education. Just over 50 percent of Turkish students said "religious education should help us be religious" while 74.3 percent expressed their expectation that religious education should help in seeking answers to their "quest for the meaning of life."<sup>69</sup>

A majority of Turks support elective lessons on the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's life in the country's secondary schools, according to a survey by Turkey's Imam Hatip Graduates Foundation (TİMAV). The results of the report, "The Perception of Islamic divinity high schools (İmam Hatip) in Turkey," showed that 76 percent of Turkish society was in favor of the elective classes, whose forthcoming introduction has recently stirred debate.<sup>70</sup>

The legislation of the 4+4+4 law is just one of many steps to actualize AKP's vision in bringing Turkey to the peak in the Republic's Centennial in 2023. More options on education are expected to increase students enrollment in school, as well as to improve skills and boost students performance. The more specified and focused education system is expected to bring the students' best performance to compete not only in national scale, but also in international stage.

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<sup>69</sup> 'Turkish students prefer modern blend in religious education', *Today's Zaman*, 8 February 2007, <<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-102318-turkish-students-prefer-modern-blend-in-religious-education.html>>, consulted 3 March 2014.

<sup>70</sup> 'Turkish society supports religious courses', *Hurriyet Daily News*, 14 June 2012, <<http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/turkish-society-supports-religious-courses->



One of the laws within the 4+4+4 reform is to add elective courses on native languages including Kurdish, Abkhazian and Laz. Kurdish, the largest ethnic minority in Turkey, had previously expressed demands to allow the using of native languages for instruction. By granting their demand with the legislation, the AKP-led government has shown their seriousness towards the peace process between the Turkish government and the Kurds. This is expected to smooth Turkey's path into joining the EU, in which the issue of human rights in Turkey-Kurds conflict has been one of the obstacle. In the end, the AKP might be credited as the one that contributes a lot to the EU accession process.

Elective courses on religion will benefit the Turkish people who wish to fulfill their religious needs without feeling any intervention, given the security it is now legally provided by the state. Turkey will also improve the religious freedom in the country as it is a basic human right, religion should be free of the monopoly of the state. This will create environment of freedom for religion instead of freedom from religion. However, it is undeniable that the AKP whose majority members have close affiliation with Islam will get direct benefits to access to such religious needs by the legislation of the law.

An April decision by the Constitutional Court concerning the constitutionality of the 4+4+4 law reinterprets *laiklik* (Turkish secularism) in the educational context. The court found the law to be constitutional and allows the government a role in providing Islamic religious instruction in the

The decision states that preferential treatment of Islam in public

schools is not discriminatory because no rule prevents the Ministry of Education from also providing religion lessons for members of other religions, and because the protections given minority religions in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty are satisfactory. According to the court, the principle of secularism “has not excluded the institutional relationship between the state and the Islamic religion”.<sup>71</sup>

However, these advantages for the AKP are also seen as benefits for the future Turkey and its people. The legislation of the 4+4+4 reform law is to serve majority of the people, which is important for the future Turkey and its people. For the party itself, they can maintain their existence only through fulfilling the demands that the people need and gain support for feedback.