

ROUNDTABLE

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Climate change policy in Turkey: current opportunities, persistent problems

Introduction

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Turkey went through a turbulent year in 2016, with major political, economic, and social unrest occurring at a time when the global order itself faced dire challenges from an increasingly populist turn. Climate change is but one of these challenges, presenting severe socioecological and economic consequences not only globally, but also on the national and local scales. Turkey is a laggard in the international climate regime embodied in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as being hesitant in moving domestically. However, this position is no longer tenable following the early implementation in late 2016 of the much lauded Paris Agreement, which set a global target to limit global warming to significantly below 2° C, and if possible to 1.5° C by the end of this century. This global target will require immediate and unprecedented collective action across the world, calling for major transformations in the political economy and governance of modern-day capitalism. As such, a key prerequisite for Turkey in both joining the new climate deal and meeting the needs of a transition to a low-carbon economy is political will. Moreover, the progressively more vocal and visible ecological conflicts over energy, mining, urban infrastructure, and agriculture projects in Turkey are already starting to link up local grievances with global environmental justice concerns and movements.¹ Nonetheless, a progressive political will on climate change not only calls for a commitment to sound, relevant,

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- 1 Fikret Adaman, Bengi Akbulut, and Murat Arsel, eds. *Neoliberal Turkey and Its Discontents: Economic Policy and the Environment Under Erdogan* (London: I.B. Tauris [forthcoming]).

and rigorous academic work, but also requires informed advocacy for public awareness driven by civil society.

This roundtable evaluating the current opportunities and persistent threats for climate change policy in Turkey aims to contribute to a small but rapidly expanding scholarly literature on social science perspectives on climate change. The contributions in this section are largely based on a roundtable debate held on October 20, 2016 in Ankara during the *Sivil Düşün Climate Action Fair (Sivil Düşün İklim Eylem Fuarı)*, a meeting of diplomatic missions, academics, and civil society activists. This meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the ramifications of the new climate regime heralded by the Paris Agreement.² Hence, the tone and style of these contributions remain loyal to the spirit of an oral roundtable session. At the session and here as well, the contributing authors—active in different disciplines ranging from climate science to economics and from international relations to urban studies and political ecology—have provided their take on the challenges and opportunities facing Turkey in this new era in which low-carbon transitions and related social and economic transformations are imperative. The key issues raised in the roundtable included, but were not limited to, questions such as whether or not the “special circumstances”³ of Turkey under the international climate regime remain valid; what climate justice may mean for Turkey on local, national, and international levels; which bottlenecks and opportunities exist to advance the social science agenda

2 The Paris Agreement is the international agreement resulting from COP 21 (the Twenty-first Conference of the Parties), held on December 12, 2015 as part of the ongoing UNFCCC negotiations. The agreement was opened to signature on Earth Day (April 22, 2016) and entered into force as international law on November 4, 2016, thus making it one of the fastest multilateral agreements to enter into force. The Paris Agreement calls the parties to limit humanmade climate change “well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius” by the end of the twenty-first century; see the text of the agreement at http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php. As of January 30, 2017, 127 countries had ratified the Paris Agreement, out of 197 parties to the UNFCCC. Turkey has signed the agreement but not yet ratified it.

3 “Special circumstances” refers to Turkey’s *sui generis* position under the UNFCCC. As far as international law is concerned, Turkey is the only party to this convention that is not an economy in transition but has had its “special circumstances” formally recognized. This is mainly because of Turkey’s status, when the UNFCCC was signed, as a founding member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). OECD countries were regarded as developed countries with historical responsibility for the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to their carbon-intensive industrialization at an early date. Turkey only became a party to the UNFCCC in 2004, after its differences from industrialized countries and economies in transition (i.e., the former Soviet bloc) were recognized. In fact, Turkey’s development indicators and greenhouse gas emissions profile over the past 20 years have inclined toward those of industrialized countries. Still, these attributes differ both from emerging economies (i.e., BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa]), which are regarded as developing countries and hence have access to climate finance, and from the industrialized countries listed in Annex I and II of the UNFCCC, in effect making Turkey a “developing country” that is listed among “developed countries”; see Murat Türkeş’ contribution below as well as Ethemcan Turhan, Semra Cerit Mazlum et al., “Beyond Special Circumstances: Climate Change Policy in Turkey 1992–2015,” *WIREs Climate Change* 7, no. 3 (2016): 448–460.

on climate change in Turkey; what the possibilities and roles for non-state actors in climate policy may be; and how Turkey's foreign policy isolation—often dubbed a “precious loneliness”—can be overcome at international climate negotiations.

Despite its gains being threatened by growing strands of populism and neoliberal developmentalism across the world—most recently with the inauguration of Donald Trump as President of the United States—international climate change policy still needs further attention from social sciences⁴—and to level up its ambition. We sincerely hope that readers of *New Perspectives on Turkey* will enjoy this scholarly correspondence and begin to pay further attention to the human dimensions of climate change in their own academic engagement.

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Climate change policy and the cost of inaction: an institutional account from Turkey

Murat Türkeş

Are Turkey's “special circumstances” still valid in the new climate regime after the Paris Agreement? I would like to start to answer this question by walking you through the historical context of Turkey's involvement in climate

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4 See Castree, Noel, William M. Adams, John Barry et al., “Changing the Intellectual Climate,” *Nature Climate Change* 4, no. 9 (2014): 763–768 and David G. Victor, “Embed the Social Sciences in Climate Policy,” *Nature* 520, no. 7545 (April 2015): 27–29.